Fake news and storytelling: two sides of the same coin or two equal coins?

Mel Girão [1]
Hélio Arthur Reis Irigaray [2]
Fabricio Stocker [2]

[1] Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV EAESP) / Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo, São Paulo – SP, Brazil
[2] Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV EBAPE) / Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas, Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brazil

Abstract

Fake news and storytelling have been approached as completely different constructs. The former is intentionally and demonstrably false or misleading information, whereas storytelling produces a narrative with veracity and authenticity that are not easily verifiable. However, both can deceive readers and are inserted within a social and historical context that contributes to regulating discourse production, circulation, and reception. This essay advocates the idea that, in essence, fake news and storytelling narratives are two equal coins, similar in the processes of making and reproducing information and, mainly, in their goal of obtaining and maintaining economic, social, or political capital.

Keywords: Fake news. Storytelling. Social media.

Fake news e storytelling: dois lados da mesma moeda ou duas moedas com lados iguais?

Resumo

Fake news e *storytelling* têm sido abordados como constructos totalmente diferentes. As primeiras seriam intencionalmente e comprovadamente falsas; já o mesmo não se pode dizer do *storytelling*, cujas veracidade e autenticidade não são facilmente verificáveis. Todavia, tanto uma narrativa quanto a outra podem enganar os leitores e ambas estão inseridas em um contexto social e histórico que atua como fator regulador do processo de produção, circulação e recepção de discursos. Por isso, neste ensaio, defendemos a ideia de que, na sua essência, tanto as narrativas que compõem *as fake news* quanto as que formam o *storytelling* são duas moedas iguais, por guardarem similaridades nos processos de confecção e reprodução e, principalmente, nas suas motivações ulteriores, cujo objetivo final é a manutenção ou obtenção de capital econômico, social ou político.

Palavras-chave: *Fake news*. *Storytelling*. Redes sociais.

Fake news y storytelling: ¿dos caras de la misma moneda o dos monedas de igual cara?

Resumen

Las noticias falsas y la narración se han abordado como construcciones completamente diferentes. Las primeras serían intencional y demostrablemente falsas, no se puede decir lo mismo de la segunda, cuya veracidad y autenticidad no son fácilmente comprobables. Sin embargo, ambas narrativas pueden engañar a los lectores y ambas se insertan dentro de un contexto social e histórico, que actúa como factor regulador en el proceso de producción, circulación y recepción de discursos. Por ello, en este ensayo defendemos la idea de que, en esencia, tanto las narrativas que componen las *fake news* como las que componen el *storytelling* son dos monedas iguales, pues tienen similitudes en los procesos de elaboración, reproducción y, principalmente, en sus motivaciones ulteriores, cuyo fin último es mantener u obtener capital económico, social o político.

Palabras clave: *Fake news*. *Storytelling*. Redes sociales.

INTRODUCTION

Until the beginning of the 1990s, information sources were limited to traditional journalism, and the trust gained by journalists was sustained by the belief in objectivity (D'Ancona, 2018). Thus, readers considered newspapers vehicles to represent an unquestionable portrait of reality.

We are not saying that newspapers and magazines were neutral or even impartial. They have always had an editorial line and could have been co-opted by governments, the market, political parties, and even social movements. The news articles and reports portrayed a subjective choice, allowing us to question the extent to which journalists effectively described phenomena, facts, and events neutrally or impartially, given that objectivity is not always a path to truth and reality (Amaral, 1996).

We understand that news is a social construction resulting from subjective judgments about the type of information to include – or exclude – in a journalistic investigation (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Ultimately, the choice of facts and events, how they will be reported, and accompanying images are guided by the journalist's beliefs, preferences, and interests and also by institutional pressures exerted by funders, government, public opinion, advertisers, and sponsors (JØrgensen & Largacha-Martinez, 2014).

The popularization of social media put traditional media in check, as it changed how news and information are produced, consumed, and reproduced. Social media has ensured widespread access to the most diverse means of creating, editing, and publishing content, moving away from the traditional safeguards of journalistic integrity (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2017). Thus, the power of the mainstream media as a central source of information for the general public has weakened (Tandoc et al., 2017).

The intensive use of social media has forged an integrative and collaborative culture in which a greater plurality of opinions and manifestations gain space and an audience (Trittin-Ulbrich, Scherer, Munro, & Whelan, 2021). This has accentuated attacks on the reliability of mainstream media, broadcast channels, and traditional journalism by the population (D'Ancona, 2018).

On social media, the activity of searching for truth and objectivity in the news has changed as credibility lies in the participatory voice (Shirky, 2008), i.e., the veracity of information relies on those who witnessed and narrated a specific event. The relevance of this new configuration is evidenced by the fact that 60% of the world's population with internet access uses social media as their main source of information (Kemp, 2020). This suggests that a large part of society questions the need for mediation between facts, which challenges the paradigm of news production as exclusive to journalists and traditional media (Robinson & DeShano, 2011).

This new paradigm of news production, editing, and dissemination is called "citizen journalism," which, previously confined to blogs, was popularized and propagated by other digital platforms (Wakabayashi & Isaac, 2017).

This scenario, in which multiple and different simultaneous narratives gain more relevance than the facts, undermining the very concept of truth and objectivity – especially in the press – has been called "post-truth" (Keyes, 2004).

In the world of post-truths, objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Thus, individuals from different societies, ages, genders, social classes, and educational levels are likely to disqualify the knowledge and evidence constructed by scientific methods and validated by academia in favor of the very truths disseminated on social media by those who share the same worldview (Parker & Racz, 2020).

Amid this post-truth wave, we find two phenomena that have been treated as distinct: fake news and storytelling. But are they? Are they two sides of the same coin or two identical coins? That is the object of this essay.

PRESENTING ALTERNATIVE FACTS: DO SINCERE LIES MATTER? TO WHOM?

Scientific research often suggests that certain foods, alcoholic beverages, and cigarettes can be harmful to health (Harford, 2017); that native forests, such as the Amazon rainforest and the Brazilian Cerrado, are being devastated; that the planet is in an irreversible heating process due to the models of economic development in place. However, the responsibilities of industries and governments pointed out in these studies often lead these actors to work with public relations companies to sow doubts about the academic work, disqualifying the researchers instead of counterarguing scientifically (Rose, Barros, & Ahmadi, 2018).

The strategy consists of maintaining controversy. The common arguments are "there is no medical evidence," "the debate is not resolved," "nothing is statistically proven," (sic) or "the science [around an issue] was not definite."

Some of these arguments are built around conspiracy theories, from the Red Scare to Qanon (which advocates the existence of a satanic network of sexual abusers, traffickers, and cannibals of children operating globally). Other arguments are articulated logically based on facts. This is the main difference between fake news and storytelling.

Ultimately, both are lies. But why does one tend to be criminalized and the other morally accepted? To whom is this important? To answer these questions, we must detail the constructs around this issue.

Fake news: a fake diamond

In the lyrics of the song *Falso brilhante,* "fake diamond," by the Brazilian songwriter João Bosco, love is "nonsense in the peddler's suitcase," and so is fake news. Strictly speaking, this expression is limited to cases in which deliberately false or misleading posts are disseminated in a news format to manipulate public opinion (Gelfert, 2018).

Wouldn't it be nonsense to believe that the Earth is flat? Or that taking Lysoform is effective in eliminating Sars-CoV-2 from the human body? That Sars-CoV-2 is a "*communavirus*" (i.e., a virus produced by communists) created in a laboratory as a biological weapon for Communist China to dominate the world?

That "COVID-19 is just the little flu" that does not affect anyone with a "history of being an athlete"?

Nonsense or not, and despite being categorized as fake news, they spread on social media and were reproduced thousands of times by people who believed them. Such information spreads through viral posts that are usually generated by fake accounts and are designed to resemble journalistic stories (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Fake news can be subdivided into two dimensions of communication. The first refers to the news designed to misinform, intentionally creating and disseminating pseudo-journalistic articles. The other dimension refers to labeling, i.e., the intention is to delegitimize, undermine, or discredit traditional media.

For Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), the term fake news became trivial. They propose abandoning the term and using the expression "information pollution," observing that, when analyzing from the point of view of the purpose, such false narratives do not always intend to cause harm. The authors classify information pollution into mis-information, dis-information, and mal-information.

Mis-information is when the shared information is false but is not intended to cause harm. In our view, this argument is fallacious, and Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) only seek to mitigate the semantic load of these usual practices. First, there is no way to judge the intention of who sends the message. Moreover, there is at least, irresponsibility in producing and reproducing news without verifying whether it is true. Thus, whoever manufactured or led others into error committed an act analogous to wrongful homicide when there is no intention to kill.

Mal-information is essentially shared to cause harm. This category includes hate speech against minority groups or against those who do not share the same political views, leaks of confidential information, and breaches of equipment and systems. In this case, true facts and genuine information are shared or disclosed to cause harm – there is an intentional movement of transferring specific information from the private sphere to the public to scandalize, offend, and promote attacks on the honor of others.

Finally, dis-information includes manufacturing, manipulating, and disseminating false and inaccurate information to cause harm, confusion, or even panic.

The success of the spread of fake news occurs because the public can now consume and share news specifically designed to meet their rational and cognitive needs (Albright, 2017). In reality, consumers of fake news seek to satisfy their need for self-affirmation (owners of privileged knowledge or information), belonging to a group, the so-called "tribes," and, finally, an emotional connection with a specific subject or personality.

But how is false information created? In our view, there are three vectors in this process: a) disinformation created inadvertently and accidentally by citizen journalism – caused by amateurism in investigating facts and journalistic news (Mills, Pitt, & Fergurson, 2019), b) ideological disinformation, when people or interest groups create fake news to promote political ideals or agendas (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017), and c) opportunistic disinformation, with a mainly financial aim, i.e., when it is used to manipulate the stock market, generate discredit in a product or service, or manipulate consumer behavior (Mills et al., 2019).

Based on these three vectors, fake news can be categorized into seven types (Ordway, 2017): a) false connection, which occurs when the announcement of a piece of news (headline) does not reflect its real content; b) false context, when the situation in which the events and facts presented are true but their general context is intentionally distorted; c) manipulated content, when there is the intention to deceive the consumer or, even, the images or real events are altered; d) satire or parody, which is characterized by the reformulation of real situations and events using humor or exaggeration, which may result in a misunderstanding by the audience; e) biased content, which occurs when an event or fact is reported with bias, in order to generate a favorable public view in relation to an ideal, a public policy, or a celebrity; f) imposter content, where an untrue quote or false scenario is attributed to a person; and, finally, g) fabricated content, when all facts, records, dates, and sequences of events are entirely manipulated to confuse.

But who and what is gained from fake news?

Fake news: from the Amazon rainforest to Wall Street

In Brazil, the traditional media has been limited to a few groups that own a national television network (Rede Globo), some newspapers (O Globo, Folha de S. Paulo), and magazines (*Veja*, *Isto É*).

These groups have been systematically attacked by left-wing parties, which accuse them of being conservative and having plotted and supported the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff. However, they are also attacked by conservative and ultraconservative groups, former president Jair Bolsonaro supporters who see traditional media as "sold to the communist left" and "unpatriotic."

Both the left and the right have used social media platforms to deconstruct the "truths" proclaimed by the traditional media. They created fan pages, blogs, news outlets, and tweets to tell the nation "what's really going on."

We live in a world of multiple realities and explanations for the same fact. These explanations are considered fake news when they can be easily disqualified, denied, and proven as lies. This sort of news is systematically found on social media.

Many areas of knowledge, such as journalism, psychology, and political science, have studied fake news (Peterson, 2019; Talwan, Dihr, Kaur, Zafar, & Alrasheedy, 2019; Visentin, Pizzi, & Picchieri, 2019).

Empirical research has identified fabricated content and image tampering as the most common fake news (Irigaray & Girão, 2020). A recurring victim of fake news is Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro tweeted that she was George Soros' granddaughter and financed by the Hungarian tycoon. The former president's son, Federal Deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro, altered a photo of Thunberg having lunch on a train, placing images of hungry children at the window of her cabin. This photo has been shared over 1.8 million times on Twitter, 1.3 million on Facebook, and 2.2 million on Instagram.

The image was an obvious montage made over a photograph originally posted on social media by Thunberg herself. The deputy published the montage with a text quoting an excerpt from the activist's speech at the UN climate action summit, held in September 2019, when she criticized the world leaders' passivity toward global warming. In Eduardo Bolsonaro's tweet (Figure 1), the federal deputy mocks Thunberg: "'You stole my childhood…' said the girl financed by George Soros's Open Society."

Figure 1
Eduardo Bolsonaro's tweet

Source: Twitter.com[1]

The real photo, published on the activist's social media, portrays Thunberg having lunch on a train in Denmark (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Greta Thunberg's tweet

Source: Twitter.com[2]

---

[1] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/BolsonaroSP/status/1177039211121303552
[2] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/gretathunberg/status/1087688894706077697

In the text accompanying the montage, the deputy says, "Greta frequently appears with the German teenager activist Luisa Neubauer, 23, who is a spokeswoman for an NGO founded with money from the Open Society of billionaire George Soros."

Eduardo argues that the philanthropist promotes agendas of "interest from the international left" and "social movements in Brazil, such as the Marielle Franco Foundation," and that Thunberg is a communist.

In fact, Greta Thunberg has no known connection to George Soros, and she does not support any political party, as Thunberg herself tweeted (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Greta Thunberg's tweet

Source: Twitter.com[3]

Soros is known for investing in various projects in the third sector of communication, with progressive agendas, and is one of the main targets of the extreme right in the world. He is often the target of rumors about the nature of his investments, and several conspiracy theories point to him as an alleged influencer of international politics.

There were also posts made by personalities such as actor Leonardo Di Caprio and top model Gisele Bündchen (on Instagram) and French President Emmanuel Macron (on Twitter), in which they stated that the Amazon is "burning," with an attached image (Figure 4).

Figure 4
**French President Macron's tweet**

Source: Twitter.com[4]

---

[3] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1155181997876273153
[4] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/emmanuelmacron/status/1164617008962527232

However, this image is old. It was taken by photographer Loren McIntyre, who died in 2003. The photographer worked for National Geographic and had been making expeditions to the Amazon rainforest since the 1970s. McIntyre published a book in the 1990s about that region. The shared image is currently for sale on the Alamy image bank.

Another overly replicated tweet was of a rabbit with burnt fur, an animal running through a burning field, an armadillo with an oxygen mask, and an animal lying in a wasteland. Several messages similar to the images also alerted what was happening in the Amazon (Figure 5).

Figure 5
**Tweet about the Amazon raiforest**
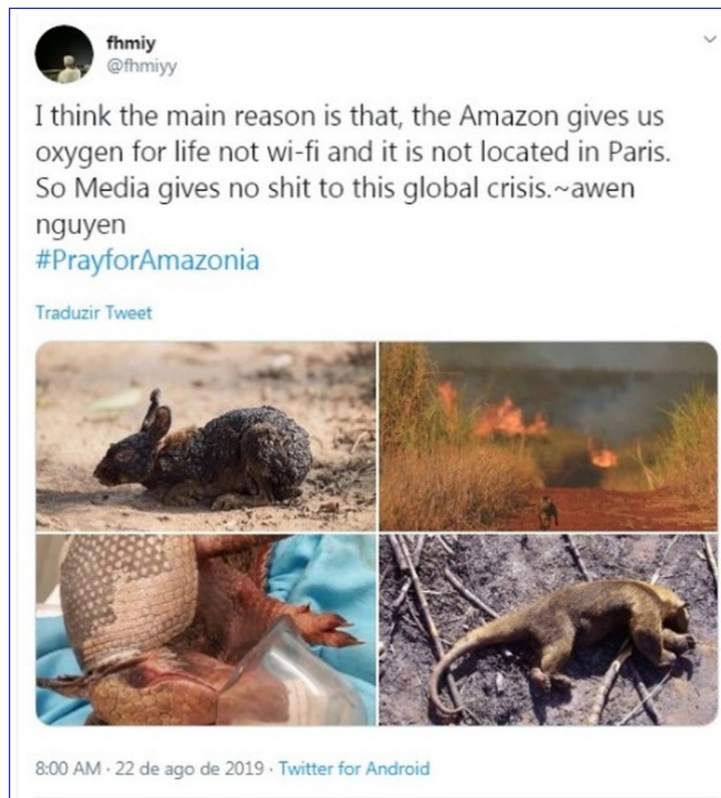
Source: Twitter.com

However, the image of the rabbit with the fur burned was made in California in 2018 and had no relation to Brazil. The photo of the animal running through a field on fire was taken during the burning of sugarcane fields in Sertãozinho, inner state of São Paulo, in 2011 and was published by the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo. The armadillo was found in a sugarcane field in Araras, also in São Paulo, in 2018. He was treated and admitted to a rehabilitation center. Finally, the image of the fallen animal was taken in Presidente Venceslau, São Paulo, in 2011 and originally illustrated a report on the burning of sugarcane straw.

Similarly, a video shared on Instagram by Hollywood celebrities shows an indigenous woman crying while pointing to the flames and vowing to protest against the criminals who burned down her village (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Actress Rosario Dawson's Instagram account
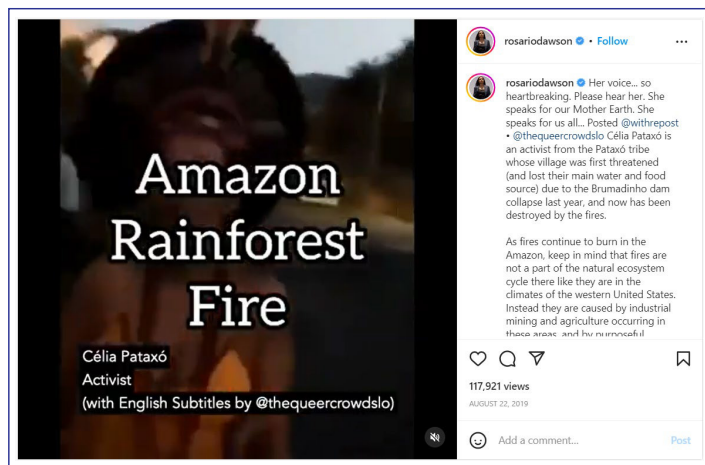
Source: Instagram.com[5]

Although this video does portray an indigenous woman, she has nothing to do with the Amazon. She is from the Naô Xohâ nation and lives in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, in Minas Gerais, more than 2 thousand kilometers away.

Cristiano Ronaldo, the famous soccer player, also did the same: he tweeted a photo (Figure 7) that shows an area of Rio Grande do Sul – a state more than 5 thousand kilometers from the Amazon.

Figure 7
Soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo's tweet

Source: Twitter.com[6]

---

[5] Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/B1eEHyeH9Jb/?hl=en
[6] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/cristiano/status/1164588606436106240

Social media has become a battleground for different and antagonistic versions of the fires in the Amazon rainforest, which is a natural phenomenon that happens every year. In fact, 2019 was far from being the year with the highest number of fires. The National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) recorded 56,131 fires in 2019, while 2004, for example, recorded 275,645 fires. Thus, more than a dispute of narratives, there is a fight for economic capital (agribusiness, mining companies), and political capital (support from different parts of the population).

Fake news has also been studied in administration, especially marketing (Chen & Cheng, 2019). Research on the impact of fake news on companies' financial performance and brand equity gained relevance around the 2016 US presidential elections. At that time, Pepsi Co shares fell 4% when fake news spread through social media: Pepsi CEO Indra Nooyi allegedly said that she did not respect Trump supporters and that they should "take their business elsewhere" (Obada, 2019, p. 151).

In the case of the company New Balance, the spokesperson was deliberately misquoted to say the company "offers a wholesale endorsement of the Trump revolution" (Obada, 2019, p. 153). Immediately, opposition groups, mostly Democrats, burned the brand's shoes and shared the videos on social media.

Fake news created based on reports by Greenpeace Italy about the harmful effects of palm oil, which is one of the main ingredients in Nutella, also initially harmed the brand's value, which was reversed by a marketing strategy that resulted in increased brand devotion (Cova & D'Antone, 2016).

These examples clearly show how misinformation can compromise brand equity (Berthon & Pitt, 2018), especially when consumers collectively exhibit dissociative brand behaviors after being exposed to fake news (Ferreira et al., 2019). However, they also suggest that this topic deserves attention. Companies can turn a possible threat into an advantage by maintaining primary control of their marketing agenda and avoiding giving it away to third parties (Domenico & Vicentin, 2020).

Indeed, this proposal of biased content as a type of fake news implies the explicit inclusion of advertising and public relations activities. However, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines publicity as "any paid form of non personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, services by an identified sponsor" (AMA, 2023). Public relations is understood as "a management function that establishes and maintains communication and mutual relationship between organizations, shareholders, and stakeholders" (AMA, 2023). In both activities, narratives are built based on the relationships between attributes of chance, effect, space, and time, generally recognized as storytelling techniques (Lugmayr et al., 2017).

This overlapping of definitions brings us back to the initial question, i.e., whether there is any conceptual difference between fake news and storytelling. Therefore, in the next section, we discuss this second construct.

Storytelling: if I tell you a beautiful story, will you marry me?

Shahryar, king of Persia, discovered that, during his travels, his wife was cheating on him with an enslaved person. Furious, he has them both executed and believes that no woman is worthy of his trust. He decides from that moment on that he will sleep with a different virgin each night and that, the next morning, the woman must be executed – that way, he will never be betrayed again. For three years, Shahryar sacrificed hundreds of girls. Until one day, when there were almost no virgins left in the kingdom, one of the vizier's daughters, Scheherazade, offered herself in marriage to the sovereign, as she had a plan to escape her tragic destiny.

After much insistence from the daughter, the vizier gives in to her request and takes her to the monarch. However, before leaving, she asks that her sister, Dunyazad, accompany her and that she, whenever she is called to the royal palace, ask Sharazade to tell her a story. Then, the heroine goes to the sovereign and asks him to allow Dunyazad to live with her in the same room, which she is allowed to do.

After the couple's first night, Dunyazad asks her sister to tell her a story to pass the time. Respectfully, once again, Scheherazade asks the monarch for permission, who nods. At that moment, Scheherazade begins to recount the adventures of a merchant and a genie, but at dawn, she interrupts the story, ensuring that the narrative continues the next night. The king, curious about Scheherazade's story, saves her from death so that he will know the end of the story the next night. This strategy is repeated night after night.

After 1,001 nights, Scheherazade had already fathered three royal heirs and begs the sovereign to spare her out of love for her children. The king, who long ago regretted his past actions and was convinced of Scheherazade's dignity, makes her his definitive queen. Dunyazad, in turn, marries the king's brother, Shah Zaman.

In this article, the book of one thousand and one nights is an allegory to contextualize the art of storytelling as an art of entertainment, an instrument to save someone's life, in addition to the functions already pointed out by Van Hulst and Ybema (2020): learning and transmitting the information. Strictly speaking, stories are excellent resources for relieving tension in the real world, as they are a playful way of organizing ideas and thoughts through an analogy with the fantasy of the unreal world (Wood & Paula, 2014).

When a story is told, the listener's brain projects what is being said in the form of images. Therefore, the more descriptive, without becoming tiring, the more the brain can understand the environment in the narrative and, consequently, project images more accurately (Stroud, 2015). In fact, projections activate the human imagination, becoming an effective instrument for transmitting information and stimulating learning, as the human brain tends to forget what is methodical (Nigam, 2012).

In societies with intense (re)production, circulation, and information consumption, individuals have difficulty assimilating all of them (Beverungen, Beyes, & Conrad, 2019). This is a challenge for companies, brands, people, and politicians.

How can something be remembered by consumers, directors, and voters? Like contemporary Scheherazades, involving them in stories may be the answer.

Storytelling refers to transmitting information in a pattern based on the elements of a story. Essentially, it aims to acquire, structure, and transmit knowledge (Browse, Gibbons, & Hatavara, 2019), but its narrator does not necessarily portray reality; this is (re)created in the story (Boje, 1991), a way of giving voice to an individual or organization (Czarniawska, 2011). It is the interaction of grand narratives (epistemic and empirical) with living stories; they are antenarrative processes that occur before narrative coherence and bets on the future are connected (Boje, 2014). In this essay, we understand antenarratives as pre-narrative speculations, which are understood as fragments of non-linear, incoherent, and collective discourses (Boje, 1995).

A story follows the pattern of exposition, complication, resolution, and conclusion, thus differing from a standard narrative (Czarniawska, 2011). Therefore, every story is a narrative, but not every narrative is a story, as a story has to present a complication (problem) and a solution or an outcome.

There are four types of characters in a story: the hero, the victim, the supporting characters, and the villain (Stroud, 2015).

In the corporate and political worlds, storytelling has been used as a crisis management tool (Boudes & Laroche, 2009); construction or restoration of corporate image (Boje, 1995; Sims, 2005); corporate communication (Brummans, Hwang, & Cheong, 2019); commercial strategy and product sales (Palo, Mason, & Roscoe, 2020), in leadership and management (Borghoff, 2018), and training and motivation (Stroud, 2015). In all cases, recipients (customers, consumers, suppliers, employees, voters, supporters, and stakeholders) do not have an active role in creating and disseminating these stories, which does not make them victims.

In individual terms, personal narratives of injustice and collective-individual empowerment actions generate emotional dynamics that separate actors from their attachments and incorporate them into new social ties (Ruebottom & Auston, 2018).

Storytelling by individuals and companies is an accepted, valued, and often desired practice by the market and the business media, so it is a widespread and imitated practice.

The strategic use of storytelling: the case of the Amazon rainforest

There are three grand narratives about the Amazon rainforest and its geopolitical role on social media. The first is a process of neo-colonization – the more developed and industrialized countries do not want Brazil to develop because "we would be a great competitor for them." Therefore, one way to contain Brazil would be to create obstacles and constraints, and the Amazon rainforest is the perfect argument. Foreign governments, NGOs, and the Catholic Church demonstrate concern for the forest and indigenous peoples when, in fact, their main objective is to prevent Brazil from using the natural resources that belong to the country.

The second grand narrative is the internationalization of the Amazon "they want to make the Amazon region an international area and appropriate our wealth." This grand conspiracy theory, under which an organization like the UN tries to "internationalize" the Amazon, claiming it as a world domain, is not new – it was a common refrain during the Brazilian military dictatorship from 1964-1985, and it is still frequently used by opponents of Amazon conservation efforts. More recently, this has been proposed several times by French President Macron. In response, former president Bolsonaro stated that foreigners should not give an opinion on the fate of the Amazon, given that it is a matter of national sovereignty. His narrative follows the logic, widely reproduced by his supporters on social media, that the Brazilian Amazon is a sovereign territory of Brazil, which, therefore, has the right to do whatever it wants with it, be it deforestation for cattle pasture and soy fields or conserve it.

Finally, the third grand narrative is that Europe and the US destroyed their forests and now must pay for their mistakes.

These narratives rest on two arguments: that of victimization – Brazil has always been a rich country but never fully developed because of foreign powers such as Portugal, the UK, and the United States, and the whole world depends on mineral resources found in the country.

Likewise, companies build and strengthen their brands through stories (Denning, 2006). Some companies claim that their main product consistently follows the same recipe created in the company founders' country of origin. There is also the saga of young dreamers and entrepreneurs who sell 100% natural products.

But why do we understand these arguments as storytelling and not fake news? Because they are well structured and supported by a web of facts (despite not being well connected).

In the case of the Amazon rainforest, it is correct to say that this is the last natural frontier with high economic potential to be explored in the world. It is also true that biodiversity and the knowledge of native peoples about the pharmacological use of flora are assets of world interest and that there are extremely precious mineral reserves, a great strategic resource to be protected and duly exploited in favor of Brazil. This narrative also draws on historical facts, such as Robert Schomburg's declaration that the regions of Tacutu, Maú, and Surumu are independent territories, the French attempt to appropriate part of the Amapá area in 1885; the British invasion of the Pirara region, in the territory of Roraima, in 1904; and, more recently, President Macron's declaration that the Amazon should be internationalized.

In the case of companies, storytelling is used as an instrument to transmit content that has a basis in truth; it is plausible but not proven. An engaging narrative is built using words and terms valued in the market and audiovisual resources that get and retain attention.

As in the case of fake news, economic and political interests are at the heart of these narratives.

Discussion: two sides of the same coin or two identical coins?

We understand and defend the idea that, in essence, the narratives of fake news and the narratives of storytelling are two identical coins, as they keep similarities in the processes of making, reproduction, and, mainly, in their ulterior motivations.

Fake news is intentionally and demonstrably false (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). The same cannot be said about storytelling, the veracity and authenticity of which are not easily verifiable. However, both narratives can deceive readers and are inserted in a social and historical context that regulates the production, circulation, and reception of discourses. In social practices, such narratives are embedded in concrete material social structures in such a way that they directly influence the

discursive constitution of society, which "does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people's heads" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 93). This dimension reveals disputes of different economic perspectives and political interests. They are not limited to what is (obviously) true or false but seize and maintain power, seduce voters and consumers, obtain funding from (inter)national economic groups, or even maximize financial returns. Therefore, instrumental ethics prevail in both cases.

As for the discursive practice that aims to explain the dynamics of socio-practical processes, it is possible to observe how intertextual and interdiscursive regulation occurs and the constitution of discourses and narratives in specific communicative circumstances. Essentially, the ulterior motive of those who send these narratives is evident. Even the individuals who ignore the broader game of economic, social, political, and historical arenas in which they are inserted inevitably, even if involuntarily, participate by (re)producing a discourse, collaborating for the institutionalization, reproduction, and naturalization of economic, political, and social relations (Fairclough, 2013).

While grand narratives are crafted with a specific purpose – to control or influence social and political arenas – it is clear that many who reproduce fake news and stories are unaware of the wider game. They simply do it out of ignorance, political alignment, or a need for social belonging.

At the limit, storytelling is the naturalization of lies and falsehoods, narrated romantically or epically by governments, companies, and individuals, and is perceived as morally acceptable by contemporary society, to the point that there are professional courses for this "art." Fake news is also lies, absurd, easily denied, slanderous and illogical.

Given the similarities, why is only fake news the subject of legal, ethical, and social criticism? What is the limit between a reprehensible lie and another that is socially accepted?

This is a new path for reflections and empirical research, no longer focusing on the instrumental use of these concepts but using them to get to know our society, organizations, and ourselves better.

REFERENCES

Albright, J. (2017). Welcome to the era of fake news. *Media and Communication*, *5*(2), 87-89. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v5i2.977

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211-236. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

American Marketing Association. (2023). *Definitions of Marketing*. Retrieved from https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/

Amaral, L. (1996). *A objetividade jornalística*. Porto Alegre, RS: Sagra.

Berthon, P. R., & Pitt, L. F. (2018). Brands, truthiness and post-fact: managing brands in a post-rational world. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *38*(2), 218-227. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146718755869

Beverungen, A., Beyes, T., & Conrad, L. (2019). The organizational powers of (digital) media. *Organization, 26*(5), 621-35. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419867206

Boje, D. M. (1991). The storytelling organization: a study of story performance in an office-supply firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *36*(1), 106-126. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2307/2393432

Boje, D. M. (1995). Stories of the storytelling organization: a postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-land". *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*(4), 997-1035. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2307/256618

Boje, D. M. (2014). *Storytelling Organizational Practices: Managing in the quantum age*. London, UK: Routledge.

Borghoff, B. (2018). Entrepreneurial storytelling as narrative practice in project and organizational development. In E. Innerhofer, H. Pechlaner, & E. Borin (Eds.), *Entrepreneurship in culture and creative industries* (pp. 63-83). Cham, UK: Springer.

Boudes, T., & Laroche, H. (2009). Taking off the heat: narrative sensemaking in post-crisis inquiry reports. *Organization Studies*, *30*(4), 377-396. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840608101141

Browse, S., Gibbons, A., & Hatavara, M. (2019). Real fictions: fictionality, factuality and narrative strategies in contemporary storytelling. *Narrative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 245-267. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.29.2

Brummans, B., Hwang, J., & Cheong, P. (2019). Recycling stories: mantras, communication, and organizational materialization. *Organization Studies*, *41*(1), 103-126. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618819033

Chen, Z. F., & Cheng, Y. (2019). Consumer response to fake news about brands on social media: the effects of self-efficiency, media trust, and persuasion knowledge on brand trust. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, *29*(2), 188-198. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2018-2145

Cova, B., & D'Antone, S. (2016). Brand iconicity versus anti-consumption well-being concerns: the Nutella palm-oil conflict. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *50*(1), 166-192. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12082

Czarniawska, B. (2011). Narrating organization studies. *Narrative Inquiry*, *21*(2), 337-344. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21.2.12cza

D'Ancona, M. (2018). *Pós-verdade: a nova guerra contra os fatos em tempo de fake news.* São Paulo, SP: Faro Editorial.

Denning, S. (2006). Effective storytelling: strategic business narrative techniques. *Strategy & leadership*, *34*(1), 42-48. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/10878570610637885

Domenico, G., & Visentin, M. (2020). Fake news or true lies? Reflections about problematic contents in marketing. *International Journal of Market Research*, *62*(4), 409-417. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785320934719

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis*: *The critical study of language*. London, UK: Routledge.

Ferreira, C. C., Robertson, J., & Kirsten, M. (2019). The truth (as I see it): philosophical considerations influencing a typology of fake news. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *29*(2), 150-158. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2018-2149

Gelfert, A. (2018). Fake news: a definition. *Informal Logic*, *38*(1), 84-117. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v38i1.5068

Harford, T. (2017, March 09). The problem with facts. *Financial Times.* Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/eef2e2f8-0383-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9

Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Irigaray, H., & Girão, M. (2020). Blazes in the Amazon: storytelling, fake news, and multiple realities battling for a sustainable future. In *Proceedings of the 36º EGOS Colloquium: organizing for a sustainable future: responsibility, renewal, resistance*, Hamburg, Germany.

JØrgensen, K., & Largacha-Martinez, C. (2014). *Critical narrative inquiry: storytelling, sustainability, and power*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.

Kemp, S. (2020, January 30). Digital 2020: 3,8 billion people use social media. *We Are Social*. Retrieved from https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media/

Keyes, R. (2004). *The post-truth era: dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Lugmayr, A., Sutinen, E., Suhonen, J., Sedano, C. I., Hlavacs, H., & Montero, C. S. (2017). Serious storytelling–a first definition and review. *Multimedia tools and applications*, *76*(14), 15707-15733. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-016-3865-5

Mills, A., Pitt, C., & Ferguson, S. (2019). The relationship between fake news and advertising brand management in the era of programmatic advertising and prolific falsehood. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *59*(1), 3-8. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2019-007

Nigam, S. (2012). The storytelling brain. *Sci Eng Ethics, 18*, 567-571. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-012-9378-3

Obada, R. (2019). Sharing fake news about brands on social media: a new conceptual model based on flow theory. *Journal of the Seminar Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric*, *17*(2), 144-166.

Ordway, D. (2017, September 01). Fake news and the spread of misinformation. *Journalist's Resource.* Retrieved from https://

journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government/fake-news- conspiracy -theories-journalism-research/

Palo, T., Mason, K., & Roscoe, P. (2020). Performing a myth to make a market: the construction of the "magical world" of Santa. *Organization Studies*, *41*(1), 53-75. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618789192

Parker, S., & Racz, M. (2020). Affective and effective truths: rhetoric, normativity and critical management studies. *Organization*, *27*(3), 454-465. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419855

Peterson, M. (2019). A high-speed world with fake news: brand managers take warning. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, *29*(2), 234-245. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2018-2163

Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). Anyone can know: citizen journalism and the interpretive community of the mainstream press. *Journalism*, *12*(8), 963-982. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911415973

Rose J., Barros M., & Ahmadi S. (2018). The role of prefigurative events in agnotology framing contests: the case of Monsanto tribunal. In *Proceedings of the Conference Presentation at EGOS*, Tallinn, Estonia.

Ruebottom, T., & Auston, E. (2018). Reflexive dis/embedding: personal narratives, empowerment and the emotional dynamics of interstitial events. *Organization Studies*, *39*(4), 467-490. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617709308

Shirky, C. (2008). *Lá vem todo mundo: o poder de organizar sem organizações*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Zahar.

Sims, D. (2005). You bastard: a narrative exploration of the experience of indignation within organizations. *Organization Studies*, *26*(11), 1625-1640. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605054625

Stroud, K. (2015). Once upon a time at work: discovering the stories in workplace training. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, *47*(1), 31-35. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-09-2014-0064

Talwan, S., Dihr, A., Kaur, P., Zafar, N., & Alrasheedy, M. (2019, November). Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior.

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, *51*, 72-82. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.026

Tandoc, E. C., Jr., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2017). Defining "fake news": a typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(2), 137-153. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Tandoc, E. C., Jr., Ling, R., Westlund, O., Duffy, A., Goh, D., & Zheng Wei, L. (2018). (2018). Audiences' acts of authentication in the age of fake news: a conceptual framework. *New Media & Society*, *20*(8), 2745-2763. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817731756

Trittin-Ulbrich, H., Scherer, A. G., Munro, I., & Whelan, G. (2021). Exploring the dark and unexpected sides of digitalization: toward a critical agenda. *Organization*, *28*(1), 8-25. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420968184

Van Hulst, M., & Ybema, S. (2020). From what to where: a setting-sensitive approach to organizational storytelling. *Organization Studies*, *41*(3), 365-391. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618815523

Visentin, M., Pizzi, G., & Picchieri, M. (2019, February). Fake news, real problem for brand. The impact of content truthfulness and source credibility on consumers' behavioral intentions toward the advertised brands. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *45*, 99-112. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2018.09.001

Vosoughi S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science, 359*(6380), 1146-1151. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559

Wakabayashi, D., & Isaac, M. (2017, January 25). In race against fake news, good fake news and storytelling: two sides of the same coin or two coins with the same side? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/technology/google-facebook-fake-news.html

Wardle, C., & Derakshnan, H. (2017). Information disorder: toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making (Council of Europe Report, DGI 09). Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

Wood, T., Jr, & Paula, A. P. (2014). Pop-management: contos de paixão, lucro e poder. *Organizações & Sociedade*, 9(24), 39-51. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1590/S1984-92302002000200003

Mel Girão
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2511-6240

Ph.D. from the São Paulo School of Business Adminsitration of Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV EAESP); Master in business administration from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio); Invited Professor at the Education Development Institute of Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV IDE); Co-founder and CDO of the fintech Wallet. E-mail: mel.girão@fgvmail.br

Hélio Arthur Reis Irigaray
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9580-7859

Ph.D. in business administration from FGV EAESP and Master in business administration from PUC-Rio; Bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Northern Iowa, USA; Adjunct Professor of FGV EBAPE and the Corporate International Masters (CIM) of Georgetown University, Washington, USA; Leader of the theme Diversity and Labor Relation in the research line Labor Management (ANPAD). E-mail: helio.irigaray@fgv.br

Fabricio Stocker
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6340-9127

Ph.D. in administration from the School of Economics, Business, and Accounting of the University of São Paulo (FEA/USP); Ph.D. in management from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam; Master in administration from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR); Executive training from Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) and London Business School; Economist and administrator; Professor of the Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV). E-mail: fabricio.stocker@fgv.br

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Mel Girão: Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Lead); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Supporting); Project administration (Equal); Supervision (Supporting); Validation (Equal); Visualization (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Supporting).

Hélio Arthur Reis Irigaray: Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Supporting); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Lead); Project administration (Equal); Supervision (Lead); Validation (Equal); Visualization (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Supporting).

Fabricio Stocker: Conceptualization (Supporting); Data curation (Supporting); Formal Analysis (Supporting); Investigation (Supporting); Methodology (Supporting); Project administration (Equal); Supervision (Supporting); Validation (Equal); Visualization (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Lead).