

The President versus the Press : Analyzing President Trump's Fake News Awards

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Abstract : This paper examines President Trump's Fake News Awards, which he released in January of 2018. The analysis presented here sets aside questions relating to the appropriateness of the President's comments about the press, and questions about whether or not his words and actions merit the amount of negative coverage he has been getting. The focus here is instead on the news stories he listed in his "Fake News Awards," and what the selection of these stories in particular for the awards list reveals about President Trump, and what the nature of the errors or distortions in these stories reveal about the press. To that end, this paper first presents a detailed look at President Trump's list and the news stories on it, which in this paper are categorized according to each news story's topic: stories featuring claims that, if true, would indicate the beginning of the downfall of the Trump presidency; stories featuring claims that, if true, would embarrass the President personally; and stories featuring claims that, if true, would contribute to negative perceptions about the President's ideological views. Each story is examined in order to clarify the mistake made, and the news agency's response to the mistake. The ensuing analysis then seeks to answer the following two questions. First, why did President Trump select these particular news stories? Second, what led journalists to make the mistakes they made in these stories? As this analysis ultimately shows, it appears that the answers to these two questions may vary according to the type of news story involved. This paper then concludes by considering broader issues of how mistakes in news reports impact audiences and how errors such as these can serve as substance for the President to use against the press, which can undermine its ability to serve as an effective check on government power.

Keywords : United States President Donald Trump, Fake News Awards, fake news, American politics, impeachment, journalism, the press, mainstream media, corrections, retractions, bias

1. Introduction

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election was a stunning upset against Hillary Clinton. It was essentially a forgone conclusion that Clinton would prevail over Trump, with most polls predicting such an outcome, and Clinton herself even seemingly taking victories for granted in democratic strongholds like Michigan and Wisconsin. Most pundits suggested that Trump would need to win all of the traditionally Republican states, every battleground state, or flip at least a few traditionally Democratic states to pull off a narrow victory—a prospect that appeared especially improbable given that candidate Trump was rocked by a

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seemingly endless stream of controversies. When results started coming in on election day and as the night wore on, it became clear to many observers that they were witnessing a historic political upset unfolding before their very eyes. Once the race was called for Donald Trump, it was surprising to find that he had not pulled off a narrow victory, which was previously seen as a best-case scenario for him, but had ended up winning by quite a comfortable margin. President Elect Trump's victory speech that night gave viewers a glimpse of a potentially more "presidential" Donald Trump, one who would now presumably pivot away from the theatrics and shock tactics that had served to keep him in the headlines nonstop throughout the entire election campaign. From the moment President Trump was sworn into office, however, it became clear that he was not pivoting toward a more traditional version of presidential behavior.

While comments about patriotism in his inaugural address indicated that he sought to achieve some form of national unity, he nonetheless stressed his vision of "America first," making clear that what some had assumed was mere campaign bluster was in fact a genuine reflection of President Trump's vision as head of state. Perhaps nothing highlighted his rejection of traditional presidential behavior more than his rapidly escalating conflict with the press. The President has called the press "Fake News Media" and "the true Enemy of the People,"¹ while coverage of the President has been overwhelmingly negative in comparison with the previous three presidents.² Though the President's claims about "fake news" stray from presidential norms, several mainstream press agencies have made notable mistakes while covering his administration. In unconventional fashion, the President decided at the end of his first year in office to announce what he called the "Fake News Awards," which featured what he presumably considered the most significant mistakes by journalists, ranging from mistakes about allegations that could have meant the beginning of impeachment proceedings, to trivial matters about supposedly embarrassing diplomatic incidents.

This paper examines what the President's Fake News Awards may reveal about him, insofar as he specifically selected these news stories for his list, and what they reveal about the press, in terms of potential explanations based on the type of mistakes made. To that end, Section 2 presents a detailed look at President Trump's list and the news stories on it, which are here categorized according to each news story's topic: stories featuring claims that, if true, would indicate the beginning of the downfall of the Trump presidency; stories featuring claims that, if true, would embarrass the President personally; and stories featuring claims that, if true, would contribute to negative perceptions about the President's ideological views. Each story is examined in order to clarify the mistake made, and the news agency's response to the mistake. Section 3 then presents an analysis that answers the following questions. First, why did President Trump select these particular news stories? Second, why did journalists make the mistakes they made in these stories? Section 4 then offers concluding remarks, and a brief statement about a forthcoming paper that builds on the analysis presented here.

2. Data

2.1: Fake News Awards Background

President Trump used social media to announce the release date for his "Fake News Awards," tweeting: "The Fake News Awards, those going to the most corrupt & biased of the Mainstream Media, will be presented to the losers on Wednesday, January 17th [2018]"³ When he released his list, it included ten stories attributed to specific news agencies. He also included an eleventh entry that criticizes claims about Russian collusion without mentioning any specific news story or news agency. The research presented here

focuses on nine of the eleven entries on this list, since two of the entries, the first and the eleventh, do not properly qualify as news stories. The first entry, “The New York Times’ Paul Krugman claimed on the day of President Trump’s historic, landslide victory that the economy would never recover,”⁴ is an opinion piece that makes a prediction about the economy. While this prediction indeed turned out to be wrong, so far, it was nonetheless a prediction. Therefore, it features no claims that can be called demonstrably true or false as with actual news reports.⁵ Krugman even issued a revision three days later, writing: “There’s a temptation to predict immediate economic or foreign-policy collapse; I gave in to that temptation Tuesday night ... I am retracting that call, right now.”⁶ The eleventh entry was about Russia collusion, stating: “And last, but not least: “RUSSIA COLLUSION!” Russian collusion is perhaps the greatest hoax perpetrated on the American people. THERE IS NO COLLUSION!” This presents no substantive comments about any specific news agency, and so even if indeed allegations of collusion with Russia during the campaign are false, as appears to be the case following the release of special counsel Robert Mueller’s report in 2019, there are no specific claims by anyone in particular that are refutable.

This section goes through each of the other nine entries on the President’s list one at a time. For each entry, a brief overview of the President’s claim is presented, followed by a detailed review of each news story as it first appeared. Subsequently, we examine the news agency’s response, when applicable, once it became clear that the news story contained demonstrably false information. As Section 3 will demonstrate, the types of stories selected for this list reveal elements of the President’s thinking about the press, and they also reveal different aspects of the way the press covers him. As such, though President Trump listed these news stories numerically, presumably in order of importance from his point of view, for the sake of clarity they have here been sorted into categories that match the analyses in Section 3.1 and Section 3.2.

2.2: Category A - Stories featuring claims that, if true, would indicate the beginning of the downfall of the Trump presidency.

Case Name	News Agency	Overview
A1	ABC News	Ranked second on the President’s list, story about Michael Flynn Testimony: “2. ABC News’ Brian Ross CHOKES and sends markets in a downward spiral with false report.”
A2	CNN	Ranked third on the President’s list, story about Trump Jr. e-mail: “3. CNN FALSELY reported that candidate Donald Trump and his son Donald J. Trump, Jr. had access to hacked documents from WikiLeaks.”
A3	CNN	Ranked seventh on the President’s list, story about Scaramucci meeting a Russian: “7. CNN FALSELY reported about Anthony Scaramucci’s meeting with a Russian, but retracted it due to a ‘significant breakdown in process.’”
A4	CNN	Ranked ninth on the President’s list, story about Comey Testimony: “9. CNN FALSELY reported that former FBI Director James Comey would dispute President Trump’s claim that he was told he is not under investigation.”

With regard to Case A1, the ABC News story in question from December 2, 2017, initially stated that Michael Flynn, who went on to serve briefly as National Security Advisor, was prepared to testify that Donald Trump had directed him to make contact with Russian officials during the campaign. This would have been a groundbreaking piece of news that would likely have served as a precursor to the beginning of impeachment proceedings and the downfall of the Trump presidency, for this would have been direct evidence that then-candidate Trump colluded with Russians to win the 2016 presidential election. This was

false, however, for he directed Flynn to make contact with Russian officials after the election, which is an unremarkable part of an incoming administration's transition preparations. This report thereby represents perhaps the most serious journalistic mistake on the President's list. It even appears to have caused markets to drop since investors surely expected President Trump's political downfall and an ensuing period of political instability. ABC News corrected the story hours later, and suspended the relevant journalist for four weeks without pay.⁷

As for Case A2, CNN reported on December 8, 2017, that Donald Trump's son, Donald Trump, Jr., received an e-mail with information on how to access hacked e-mails from the Democratic National Committee on WikiLeaks. The story was significant, for it stated that the e-mail was sent on September 4, 2016, which was still before WikiLeaks had made these hacked documents publicly available. If true, this would have indicated that the Trump campaign had access to hacked documents from his opponent's political party before they were publicly available, and as such, this could have led to credible accusations of possible coordination between the Trump campaign and those responsible for hacking into the Democratic National Committee database. CNN did not have a copy of the actual e-mail, however, and it was The Washington Post that obtained a copy of the e-mail and reported that the date of the e-mail was actually September 14, one day after WikiLeaks made the documents publicly available.⁸ CNN did not suspend the reporters involved,⁹ but corrected the story, stating: "The new information indicates that the communication is less significant than CNN initially reported."¹⁰

Case A3 consists of another CNN story that made the President's list. This story was released on June 22, 2017, and involved alleged connections between Anthony Scaramucci, an ally of President Trump who later briefly served as his White House Communications Director, and investigations into the Russian Direct Investment Fund. If true, this could have added to the cloud of suspicion surrounding the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. CNN later retracted the story and put online a brief editor's note stating that the "story did not meet CNN's editorial standards and has been retracted," and further added that links "to the story have been disabled."¹¹ It is unclear precisely why the story was retracted¹² and it is unclear exactly how inaccurate the story was.¹³ However, according to a later CNN story on June 27, the story was not necessarily factually false, but rather, "the story wasn't solid enough to publish as-is."¹⁴ Either way, the fallout was severe, with three journalists being asked to resign.¹⁵

Finally, Case A4 consists of yet another CNN story on President Trump's list, which was corrected on June 7, 2017.¹⁶ The original story from the previous day stated that former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director James Comey was going to dispute a key claim by President Trump. The former director was set to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee on June 8, 2017, and according to CNN, he was going to dispute President Trump's claim that the former director had assured him that he was not under investigation. This would have been significant since it would have served as strong evidence that the President's decision to fire Comey constituted obstruction of justice, a charge serious enough that in itself could trigger impeachment proceedings. The former director's prepared remarks released shortly afterward contradicted this story, however, which led CNN to correct the story by stating that James Comey recalled three conversations during which he did in fact tell the President that he was not personally under investigation.¹⁷

2.3: Category B - Stories featuring claims that, if true, would embarrass the President personally.

Case Name	News Agency	Overview
B1	<i>Washington Post</i>	Ranked fifth on the President's list, photo about crowd size at Trump rally: "5. Washington Post FALSELY reported the President's massive sold-out rally in Pensacola, Florida was empty. Dishonest reporter showed picture of empty arena HOURS before crowd started pouring in."
B2	<i>CNN</i>	Ranked sixth on the President's list, story about Trump feeding fish in Japan: "6. CNN FALSELY edited a video to make it appear President Trump defiantly overfed fish during a visit with the Japanese prime minister. Japanese prime minister actually led the way with the feeding."
B3	<i>Newsweek</i>	Ranked eighth on the President's list, story about Polish first lady and Trump: "8. Newsweek FALSELY reported that Polish First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda did not shake President Trump's hand."

Case B1 highlights what the President claims was a Washington Post story about crowd size at his rally in Pensacola, Florida, in 2017. This was not actually an official news story, but instead a tweet sent by a Washington Post reporter on his own personal Twitter account.¹⁸ The reporter's initial tweet on December 9, 2017, featured a photo of the Trump rally venue with many empty seats, which gave the impression that the President had falsely claimed that the venue was "packed to the rafters."¹⁹ As it turns out, however, the photo that the reporter tweeted was taken earlier when the President had not yet come on stage. The reporter ended up deleting the tweet twenty minutes later, and even apologized after the President tweeted: "Demand apology & retraction from FAKE NEWS WaPo!"²⁰ It is nonetheless appropriate to include the reporter's tweet on this list here since it was a claim by a journalist about a factual matter that turned out to be demonstrably false. Despite the reporter's apology, the President proceeded to nonetheless call for the reporter to be fired, tweeting that The Washington Post reporter: "...just admitted that his picture was a FAKE (fraud?) showing an almost empty arena last night for my speech in Pensacola when, in fact, he knew the arena was packed (as shown also on T.V.). FAKE NEWS, he should be fired."²¹

Case B2 features a CNN story about President Trump feeding fish in Japan. The story was technically accurate in the most literal sense, but grossly misleading. The headline, "Trump feeds fish, winds up pouring entire box of food into koi pond," seems to indicate that the President began with a simple act that ended up being a blunder. For one thing the "entire box of food" was actually a small square container, but the expression likely conjures up the image of a large box of pet food for pets that is meant for multiple feedings. On the story's page, the reporter's own tweet is shown, which features a brief zoomed-in GIF clip that shows the President giving a few scoops of food and then dumping the remaining food into the pond. This zoomed in clip distorts the actual scene, since Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe actually tosses the remaining food in his container first, and President Trump then does the same. The CNN article only mildly indicates this fact, stating: "The move got Trump some laughs, and a smile from Abe, who actually appeared to dump out his box of food ahead of Trump."²² This line, however, comes at the end of the discussion on the President and Prime Minister feeding the fish, and even then by writing that Abe "actually appeared" to toss his food first gives the impression that there is room for interpretation as to who went first when in fact the video shows that the Prime Minister tossed his food first, and then the President followed suit about three to four seconds later.

Case B3 focuses on a Newsweek story posted on July 6, 2017, with the headline: "Watch Donald Trump

Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange.” The story includes a tweet of an edited three-second clip that shows the Polish first lady walk past President Trump to shake the American first lady Melania Trump’s hand. A full-length video clip shows, however, that as President Trump is shaking the Polish president’s hand, the Polish first lady appears to notice that she and Mrs. Trump are standing by as the two men are still shaking hands. She then begins to move toward the American first lady just as President Trump concludes his handshake with the Polish president and, unbeknownst to the Polish first lady, extends his hand toward her as she continues advancing toward Melania Trump.²³ Immediately after the Polish first lady shook Melania Trump’s hand, she shook hands with President Trump. The gap between the time the presidents finished shaking hands and the time the Polish first lady shook hands with President Trump is approximately three to four seconds, yet the Newsweek article claims: “Trump appears disgruntled immediately after being either ignored or unseen by Kornhauser-Duda, staring blankly past her and Melania and toward a camera observing the entire moment.”²⁴ Though impressions of facial expressions are obviously subject to interpretation and so it is not possible to declare that such comments are patently false, a closer look reveals that it appears as though President Trump simply waits casually for the first ladies to finish and then shakes hands with the Polish first lady without any additional delay. The story was updated a little under three hours later, stating that the extended version of the video clip shows the Polish first lady “eventually shaking the president’s hand.”²⁵

2.4: Category C - Stories featuring claims that, if true, would contribute to negative perceptions about the President’s ideological views.

Case Name	News Agency	Overview
C1	<i>Time</i>	Ranked fourth on the President’s list, story about President removing MLK bust: “4. TIME FALSELY reported that President Trump removed a bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. from the Oval Office.” ²⁶
C2	<i>New York Times</i>	Ranked tenth on the President’s list, story about climate change report: “10. The New York Times FALSELY claimed on the front page that the Trump administration had hidden a climate report.”

In Case C1, President Trump points to a story about the bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. having been removed from the oval office. In this instance, the reporter in question quickly corrected his mistake, and Time released “A Note to Our Readers” explaining how this mistake occurred. A Time White House correspondent told other reporters who were asking about the bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. that he had not seen it, which resulted in another reporter sending out a pool report on January 20, 2017, at 7:31 p.m., that included the following statement: “More decorating details: Apart from the return of the Churchill bust, the MLK bust was no longer on display.”²⁷ Within less than an hour, however, the Time White House correspondent sent multiple e-mails to reporters and sent out tweets, and at 8:41 p.m. tweeted: “Tweeting again: wh aide confirms the MLK bust is still there. I looked for it in the oval 2x & didn’t see it. My apologies to my colleagues.”²⁸

Finally, Case C2 features a story that The New York Times published on August 7, 2017, about the Trump administration hiding a climate change report. The story indicated that the Times had obtained a copy of a report that had not yet been made public, and that there were scientists who feared that the report would be suppressed. However, the Times corrected the story two days later on August 9: “While it was not widely publicized, the report was uploaded by the nonprofit Internet Archive in January; it was not

first made public by The New York Times.”²⁹ An opinion piece in The Washington Post on August 9, 2017, suggested that the correction was not sufficiently prominent, and that the article still contained statements that did not seem to fit with the correction.³⁰ For instance, the story still states that a scientist “involved in the process ... said he and others were concerned that it would be suppressed.”³¹ As the Post opinion piece notes, however, this seems difficult to maintain given that the report had been publicly available for seven months at the time of this news story’s publication and has obviously now been publicized by this Times story.³²

3. Analysis

3.1 Potential Explanations for President Trump’s Choice for the Fake News Awards

President Trump has on many occasions claimed that a particular news report was fake news. He even appears to suggest that he started the trend of using the term “fake news,” stating in a New York Times interview: “I do notice that people are declaring more and more fake news ... I think I can attribute the term to me. I think I was the one that started using it, I would say.”³³ It is obvious why the President included the stories in Category A (Case A1, A2, A3, and A4). Case A1, A2, and A4 involved extremely serious allegations that were proven false, and in Case A1 the news agency involved suspended a journalist for four weeks. As for Case A3, it remains unclear precisely how accurate or inaccurate the story was,³⁴ but the fact that the news agency involved retracted the story and asked three journalists to resign in response makes it seem like this story had some serious flaws. As for the stories in Category C, Case C1 was clearly a potentially important story since it would have been damaging to the President’s relations with the African American community, and Case C2 would have furthered the view that the Trump administration has little regard for environmental concerns, and is abusing its power and hiding information that goes against the President’s interests. As for stories in Category B, Case B1 and Case B2 could have been significant, insofar as these could be seen to affect his legitimacy: a sitting President unable to draw a full crowd would be deeply damaging, and someone refusing to shake his hand at a diplomatic event would also be quite damaging. However, given that he restricted his Fake News Awards list to ten stories (plus one generic comment on the Russian investigations in general), however, it is worth questioning why Case B2 was included on this list. While there is no disputing that it grossly distorted the incident in question, it involved a trivial matter in comparison with some of the more serious issues that the President has claimed constituted fake news.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the President claiming Fake News and yet not including it on his list relates to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the rumors of his impending dismissal. The New York Times published a story on November 30, 2017, with the headline: “White House Plans Tillerson Ouster from State Dept., to be Replaced by Pompeo.”³⁵ On December 1, 2017, the President tweeted: “The media has been speculating that I fired Rex Tillerson or that he would be leaving soon – FAKE NEWS! He’s not leaving and while we disagree on certain subjects, (I call the final shots) we work together and America is highly respected again!”³⁶ As it turns out, The New York Times report was right about Mike Pompeo replacing Tillerson, but President Trump did not announce Tillerson’s departure until March of 2018, over three months after the Times report and the President’s tweet refuting the rumors. Given that President Trump called these rumors “fake news” six weeks before compiling his list for the Fake News Awards, and that Tillerson did not leave the administration until nearly two months after the Fake News Awards, it is worth questioning why the President did not include this story on his list. In fact the rumors about

Tillerson leaving the administration soon were fake news, as the President alleged, then the press discussing Tillerson's impending departure would represent far more serious false information than that found in Case B2. Speculation about the possible dismissal of cabinet members have the potential to sow discord in an administration, which is far more problematic than mild embarrassment that comes with edited videos that make it seem as though the President overfed fish in Japan.

Given that President Trump had already called rumors of Tillerson's exit fake news, this story should have ended up on the list. Why, then, did he not include it? Given that Pompeo ended up replacing Tillerson as the Times piece reported, it may well be that the sources the Times relied on were mostly accurate, with the only exception being that the timing for Tillerson's ouster was unclear. If in fact Tillerson's exit was already in the works, as the Times story alleged, the President likely did not want to double down on his claim that this was "fake news" by adding it to his awards list, knowing that he would have surely been called out for including a news story on his list that would end up being true in a matter of months. Such a situation would help support claims that he simply uses the term "fake news" to address news that he finds unfavorable or inconvenient. However, the President could have pointed to the fact that the Times piece claimed that Tillerson would be out "perhaps within the next several weeks,"³⁷ yet Tillerson was not ousted until mid-March. He could therefore have claimed that the Times piece was merely speculation that ended up being correct. Another explanation may simply be that even if reporting about Tillerson's exit in November of 2017 was inaccurate, adding it to the list would not embarrass reporters since they could later contend that their reporting was solid with the exception of the timing, and more importantly, the story did not reflect badly on the President personally.

With regard to Case B2, on the other hand, it is a report that makes President Trump personally look bad. The information presented was undeniably misleading, and some may even argue that it constitutes something close to actual fake news insofar as it appears to have been based on deliberately misleading video footage. Even though there is no denying that a false story like this can influence how voters perceive a political figure's persona, and thus any false claims about gaffes are a concern for politicians, it seems that denouncing such trivial matters should lie outside the realm of importance for the President of the United States. This story was simply not particularly significant for someone of the President's stature, and in the age of memes and viral clips, many public figures end up being ridiculed for something online at one time or another. As such, if reports about Tillerson's ouster constituted fake news as the President claimed, then his Fake News Awards list reveals that he may consider false stories involving trivial issues about him personally more significant than false stories about serious issues in his administration in general.

3.2: Potential Explanations for Reporting Errors

It is obviously difficult to determine the reasons for a mistake in a specific news report, barring a full detailed explanation by the journalists involved. Figuring out what went wrong thus entails a certain degree of conjecture, but it seems reasonable to postulate that the type of news story in terms of content may have been a contributing factor in the reporting errors featured on the President's list based on the type of news story. First, the stories relating to potential collusion with Russian officials during the presidential campaign do not appear to indicate that the news agencies were deliberately reporting false information. The best indication of this is the fact is that in two instances there were severe repercussions. With regard to Case A1, the ABC News report was corrected and a journalist was suspended. Furthermore, according to a CNN report about this case, the president of ABC News, James Goldston, "excoriated" his staff for the mistake, saying: "I don't think ever in my career have I felt more rage and disappointment and frustration."³⁸ In Case

A3, the consequences were even harsher, for CNN retracted the story and three journalists were asked to resign. Additionally, another story (Case A2) was disproven by The Washington Post, a different news agency considered part of the mainstream press. While this story did not result in resignations or suspensions, it serves as a good example of how reputable news agencies would have a difficult time producing “fake news” without getting corrected by other news agencies, and so whatever the cause, it is doubtful that this could have been an attempt at deliberately reporting false information.

With regard, then, to the serious issue of possible malfeasance by the Trump campaign during the 2016 election, the instances of false information being reported appear to be genuine errors. It is unclear precisely how these mistakes were made in the case of these four news stories, but they were likely motivated by the prospect of being the first to break a major political story that could mark the beginning of the next Watergate-level political scandal. In Case A1, according to a CNN report, Goldston, while excoriating his staff, said: “I don’t even know how many times we have talked about the need to get it right we have to be right and not first.”³⁹ It thus appears that the pressure to be the first to break such a big story may have played a role here. With regard to Case A2, given that the network heavily promoted the story, it is worth questioning why a news agency would rely on sources to describe an e-mail, given that another news agency was able to obtain a copy of the e-mail itself.⁴⁰ It may also be that the magnitude of this story’s implications would have been so enormous if true that simply relying on descriptions of the e-mail rather than the e-mail itself was deemed adequate. The fourth story on this list (Case A4) was corrected once information that contradicted the initial report came to light. As with Case 2, this involved a situation based on “unnamed sources,”⁴¹ and CNN used four reporters to produce a news report about comments that would be made public the next day when the former FBI director released his prepared statement. It seems unlikely, however, that four journalists would tarnish their reputations by deliberately reporting false information that would end up being corrected so soon after releasing the news story. As one opinion piece in The Washington Post put it: “not fake news, just wrong news A better term for the story, however, would be stupid news.”⁴² It seems, then, that once again the pressure to produce breaking news first led to a mistake that would not have happened had those responsible simply waited to report the former director’s comments once his prepared statement was actually released.

With regard to Case B1, B2, and B3, it appears as though there may be a desire to embarrass the President. As previously noted, Case B1 was not a news story, but a personal tweet by a Washington Post reporter. It was a response to President Trump’s tweet touting the crowd size at his 2017 Pensacola, Florida, rally, which he described as “packed to the rafters.”⁴³ The reporter responded by tweeting a photo of the arena when many seats were still empty, with the seemingly sardonic comment “packed to the rafters.”⁴⁴ However, the photo he sent was apparently taken before the President went on stage, and once this mistake was pointed out, the reporter deleted the tweet and even apologized, but the tone of the tweet appears to show that there was a desire to embarrass or show up the President. As for Case B2, the headline, “Trump feeds fish, winds up pouring entire box of food into koi pond,”⁴⁵ appears to allude to a sort of clumsy calamity, even though the feeding session was simply routine. The “entire box of food” was actually a small square container, and given that Prime Minister Abe was the first to toss all of his remaining food into the pond, it is clear that both leaders were supposed to dispense the contents of the food containers in their entirety. This makes the “winds up” part of the title misleading, for that phrasing seemingly suggests that the President was only supposed to feed the fish a few spoonfuls and yet somehow clumsily ended up dumping too much food. The phrasing of the title thus seems crafted in a way that makes the President seem foolish. Case B3 likewise seems to belittle the President in certain parts of the short Newsweek article

“Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange.” The *Newsweek* article’s word selection at times seemingly belittles the President, stating that he “appears disgruntled immediately after” and that he was “staring blankly” past the two first ladies.⁴⁶ The story concludes by discussing what at the time was an upcoming meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and given what supposedly happened with the Polish first lady, “Trump may very well not receive a handshake And that would likely make Trump very angry.”⁴⁷ The simple wording of the final sentence again seemingly belittles the President by fancifully speculating about the President’s potentially oafish emotional response to a meeting that had not yet even happened.

With regard to Case C1 and C2, it appears that assumptions about the President’s beliefs may have affected these errors. In Case C1, Time quickly corrected this mistake and explained the mistake, but this incident reveals that assumptions about the president’s views on race may have been a factor. For instance, the very fact that reporters were even asking about the Martin Luther King, Jr. bust in particular is telling. This suggests that some reporters may have had preconceptions about the President’s views on race, namely that the President harbored latent racist sentiments that would lead him to remove this bust from the oval office immediately after being sworn in. With regard to Case C2, it is unclear how this mistake was made. Given that The New York Times reported that it was revealing findings from an environmental report and yet missed the fact that the report that was central to its story had already been publicly available for months, it seems reasonable to postulate that beliefs about the President’s attitude toward environmental issues and a belief that his administration has a propensity for abusing its power may have led to the assumption that the administration suppressing a climate change report sounded so right that additional verification processes were deemed unnecessary. The fact that, for instance, the story still states that a scientist “involved in the process ... said he and others were concerned that it would be suppressed,”⁴⁸ reinforces the notion that the Times may have been influenced by pre-judgments about the administration, for as the previously mentioned opinion piece in The Washington Post notes, this view seems difficult to maintain given that the Times story has clearly served to publicize this report and that the report had been publicly available for seven months at the time of publication.⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

The President’s “Fake News Awards” clearly did not have a lasting impact, a point best highlighted by the fact that the link is no longer active, and the President did not release another awards list the following year, despite having a number of erroneous and later corrected news stories from which to choose. Some news agencies even characterized the “Fake News Awards” as a flop.⁵⁰ Regardless of how successful or unsuccessful the “Fake News Awards” were, the fact that the President would release such a list illustrates just how bitter his feud with the press really is. Critics of the President point to his open hostility toward the press and how it is unprecedented for him to call the mainstream press the “enemy of the People.”⁵¹ The president’s supporters point to the fact that the press has been seemingly unceasing in its negative coverage of the President, and has had more negative and far less positive coverage of him and his policies in comparison with the last three presidents.⁵² Our analysis set aside questions about the President’s comments about the press, and questions about whether or not the President’s words and actions merit the amount of negative coverage he has been getting from the mainstream press. We instead focused on the fact that most of the stories he listed in his “Fake News Awards” were indeed factually inaccurate or gross distortions of actual events when first released, and examined what the “Fake News Awards” reveal about

President Trump and the press today by focusing on two questions.

First, why did President Trump select these particular news stories? We divided the stories he selected into three broad categories: stories that feature claims that if true would indicate the beginning of the downfall of the Trump presidency (Category A); stories featuring claims that if true would embarrass the President personally (Category B); and stories featuring claims that if true would contribute to negative perceptions about the President's ideological views (Category C). President Trump obviously included the stories in Category A (Case A1, A2, A3, and A4) due to the seriousness of the errors, both in terms of the potential political damage to his presidency, and in terms of the fallout for the news agencies involved. The stories in Category C were also important insofar as they could potentially further negative perceptions of the President's attitude toward race relations and environmental issues. While Case B1 and B3 in Category B involved serious matters that could have affected the President's perceived legitimacy, Case B2 involved a trivial matter. Although the story in Case B2 was grossly misleading, the fact that he included this relatively trivial matter on his list may demonstrate that the President may believe that his reputation cannot take trivial misrepresentations that are not necessarily all that uncommon for high-profile public figures in the social media age.

Second, how did journalists make the mistakes they made in these stories? Determining precisely why a journalist made a mistake in a specific news story is often by necessity a speculative enterprise. It appears, however, that explanations for the reporting errors featured on the President's list may vary based on the type of story. Erroneous stories relating to possible collusion with Russian officials during the presidential campaign may have resulted from the pressures of being first to break a major story that, if true, could have represented the first step to a potentially history-making political crisis. With regard to stories that, if true, would be embarrassing to the President personally, there appears to be a desire to embarrass him or show him up, as the tone used in each case indicates. With regard to Category C stories, the nature of the allegations indicates that there may have been predetermined conclusions influencing these stories that ended up being clearly incorrect.

Ultimately, the fact that there were enough erroneous news reports to make President Trump's Fake News Awards possible raises fundamental questions about the role of the press in politics today. For one thing, in a highly charged political environment, what is the impact of news reports with erroneous information, albeit often later corrected, on audiences? It is also worth questioning how much impact mistakes like these have on the feud between the President and the press: do mistakes like these only reinforce existing beliefs amongst those who already distrust the mainstream press, or are they slowly eroding trust in the media amongst a broader swath of the American public? Finally, as the boundaries between news, analysis, and opinion in the mainstream media seem to be increasingly blurring, what is the role of the press today in America? From the start of the Trump presidency there has been large-scale resistance, in the form of protests, marches, speeches, and even commentary in the entertainment world. The issues at the heart of this resistance relate to issues that are politically sensitive and polarizing, such as immigration policies and race relations, and in some cases, they touch on issues that many consider urgent human rights matters, like the travel ban and the now-rescinded child separation policy for those who had crossed the border illegally. Is the press right to take part in a form of resistance against the President, or should the press remain fact-based and neutral so that readers and viewers can make their own determinations? These are all vitally important questions, and these are the questions that we address in our forthcoming study that builds on the analysis presented in this article.

Notes

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- 3 Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter post: "The Fake News Awards, those going to the most corrupt & biased of the Mainstream Media, will be presented to the losers on Wednesday, January 17th, rather than this coming Monday. The interest in, and importance of, these awards is far greater than anyone could have anticipated!" January 7, 2018, 12:35 p.m., <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/950103659337134080>.
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トランプ大統領対マスコミ —フェイクニュース賞の分析から—

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本研究は、2018年1月にアメリカ合衆国のドナルド・トランプ大統領がツイッターで発表したフェイクニュース賞を分析したものである。ここでは、大統領のマスコミに対する発言が妥当であるかどうか、あるいは大統領の日ごろの発言や振る舞いが、これだけ多くの大統領に対する否定的な報道の正当な理由となるかどうかを論点にしているのではない。ここで焦点を当てているのは、1) トランプ大統領が「フェイクニュース賞」に挙げたニュース記事・報道そのものの内容とその検証、2) これらのニュースを大統領が選択したことで明らかになるトランプ大統領の側面、3) これらのニュースに見られた誤報や歪曲が示すマスコミのあり方の3つである。

トランプ大統領がフェイクニュース賞に挙げた11の項目は、実際にそのほとんどが事実誤認あるいは甚だしい歪曲を含む報道であった。本稿では11項目のうち、予測を示した意見記事である1つ目と、特定の報道機関を示さずにロシア疑惑について漠然とコメントした11個目の2つを除く9つのニュースを分析対象とした。その上で、これらのニュースを以下のカテゴリーに分類した。記事・報道の主張が事実であるならば、トランプ大統領の失墜の始まりを示す報道、大統領に個人的に恥をかかせる報道、大統領の思想的観点に対する否定的な見方の一因となる報道の3つである。各々のニュースの詳細を検討し、報道にどのような間違いがあったのか、そしてその誤報に対するマスコミの対応を明らかにした。

本稿の後半では、トランプ大統領はなぜこれらの報道をフェイクニュース賞に選んだのか、またジャーナリストはなぜこのような間違いを犯したのかという問いを検証している。その上で、ニュースにおけるこのような誤報や歪曲はオーディエンスにどのような影響を与えるのかを考察し、さらにこのような過ちをメディアが犯すことは大統領にマスコミを攻撃する格好の理由を与えることになり、それが第4の権力として政府を監視するメディアの役割を弱体化させることになりかねない点を指摘した。本稿の結論で示唆した事柄は、本論集に近刊予定の論文でさらに詳細を検討する。

キーワード：ドナルド・トランプ米大統領、フェイクニュース、フェイクニュース賞、アメリカ政治、ジャーナリズム、マスコミ、バイアス

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