

Information Disorders Applied to film Marketing: Promotion of *A Cure for Wellness* (Verbinski, 2016) based on Fake News

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Abstract

Despite the extensive attention that information disorders have received in the academic field, the intersections between this phenomenon and film marketing have not yet been examined. To fill this gap, this research analyzes the campaign based on five fake newspapers and fake news orchestrated by *20th Century Fox* and *Regency Enterprises* to promote *A Cure for Wellness* (Verbinski, 2016). Starting from this case, our main objective is to analyze the promotional campaign of a film based on information disorders. At a methodological level, initially, virtual archeology work was carried out using the *Wayback Machine* to recover the websites that constituted the fake media and identify all the fake news used in the aforementioned campaign. Thereupon, using the content analysis technique, we examined the 140 fake news identified by applying an analysis template designed specifically for this study. The results reveal that the fake news barely established connections with the film, although these were usually consistent with its subject matter. Likewise, the fake news, which were essentially cloned in the various fake media, are surrounded by advertising of the film and include images from *Shutterstock*, fake and real quotes and sources, as well as hashtags related to the film and politics. This unprecedented marketing application of information disorders generates a new type of reception that we have called "disruptive," which uses disinformation to replace the user's reality with a false reality that is largely disconnected from the cultural artifact to be promoted.

Keywords

Information Disorders, Disinformation, Misinformation, Fake News, Fake Newspaper, Marketing, Film Promotion, Film Websites, Tie-In Websites, Cinema, Transmedia, Virtual Archaeology, *Wayback Machine*.

1. Introduction

Information disorders, produced by fake news, disinformation, post-truth or alternative facts (Del-Fresno-García, 2019), although not a recent phenomenon, pose a significant challenge for contemporary societies. Alongside the development of social media, mobile technologies or artificial intelligence, the interconnections between different information disorders are extending the scope, impact and acceleration of this multidimensional threat (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Del-Fresno-García, 2019; Bontridder and Poulet, 2021). Such disorders, in turn, underpin three concepts that combine the falsehood–veracity binomial according to different degrees of intentionality (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017): a) disinformation, which is any fake information shared with the purpose of causing damage; b) misinformation, consisting of fake information disseminated without malicious intent because the person sharing it believes it is genuine; and c) malinformation, considered to be genuine information that is deliberately shared to cause harm.



During the last few years, given their rapid evolution and increasing complexity (Wardle, 2019), information disorders have aroused wide interest in the academic field (Broda and Strömbäck, 2024; Pérez-Escolar *et al.*, 2023; Salaverría and Cardoso, 2023; Aimeur *et al.*, 2023). Despite the abundant academic literature existing on this topic, little attention has been paid to the possible interconnections between this phenomenon and the film industry, in general, and its marketing strategies, in particular. Delving into these particular intersections, authors such as Geltzer (2018), Saltzman (2018), Fedorov and Levitskaya (2021) or Serrano-Martín *et al.* (2024) have analyzed the representation of fake news in the seventh art. From another angle, Babcock *et al.* (2018) and Deutsch (2017) have examined the use and impact of fake news during the premiere of *Black Panther* (by Coogler in 2018) or in the reception of *Rogue One* (by Edwards in 2016), respectively.

This lack of research, however, is not indicative of the film industry being impervious to this phenomenon, as intersections with information disorders have occurred since virtually its beginnings. In particular, worth noting is the audiovisual industry marketing exploitation of fake news, which has been defined as “the deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design” (Gelfert, 2018). The fake information that integrated fake news can adulterate opinion-forming (Galdámez-Morales, 2019) and mislead recipients (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017), which has historically been used to the benefit of some film promotional strategies to disguise fiction as reality or generate noise through word of mouth.

“The film industry is not impervious to information disorders, as there have been intersections with this phenomenon almost since its beginnings”

1.1. A Diachronic Look Into the use of Information Disorders in Film Marketing

The germ of the integration of information disorders in cinema is found in the so-called *fake films*, which can be compared to current fake news (Slugan, 2019) since these are publicized as recordings from real or sensationalist events that, although they never happened, managed to mislead the public. During the first decade of the twentieth century, fake news was integrated into film promotion, adopting alternative forms. An outstanding case was the fake news stories incorporated by the producer Carl Laemmle into several newspapers in St. Louis (USA) reporting the death of Florence Lawrence to attract the attention of the public and promote the actress's participation in the film *The Broken Oath* (by Solter in 1910). During the 1920s, ballyhoo campaigns appeared in the United States, gaining ground in the marketing instrumentalization of information disorders. As Lyczba (2016) points out, “all ballyhoos, to some level, are executions of media hoaxes” (p. 135). An illustrative example is the campaign carried out to promote the film *The Kaiser, Beast of Berlin* (by Julian in 1918), which distributed in New York a fake newspaper composed only with fake news related to the film.

Another intersection took place with the appearance of the Hollywood star system. As journalist Longworth (2019) pointed out, fake news and disinformation disseminated by the major studios were key in the construction and destruction of film stars from the second decade of the twentieth century until the 1960s. Later, information disorders linked to celebrities mutated with the appearance of counter-narratives such as *Hollywood Babylon* (1959), a work by Kenneth Anger (Longworth, 2019). In the 1970s, the revitalization of ballyhoo techniques in horror films (Kattelman, 2011) and the emergence of the snuff movie reformulated the marketing use of informational disorders to boost the word of mouth. A notorious case was the promotional campaign for *Cannibal Holocaust* (by Deodato in 1980), one of the most famous snuff films in the history of cinema. The events narrated in the work were announced by Deodato as real and some print media from that period believed him and spread the hoax (Gallio and Mendik, 2016).

The next critical juncture took place when the Internet reached people's homes in the 1990s, which favored the dilution of fiction in an emerging digital reality. This technological revolution gave rise to the strategy of *The Blair Witch Project* (by Sánchez & Myrick in 1999), a work that transformed film marketing in the field of the Internet (Herbera *et al.*, 2016) and, in turn, experimented with information disorders in this new environment to dress up an urban legend in realism. The dissemination over the Internet of different fake contents, such as newspapers, television news, police and journalistic reports or interviews, enabled the viralization of the story and the distortion of reality for many users (Augros, 2018).

Despite the great success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), as can be seen in the academic literature related to film marketing (London, 2024; García and Rodríguez, 2022; Herbera *et al.*, 2016; Kerrigan, 2017), the strategies and content linked to information disorders have not been addressed. However, given the current relevance of this phenomenon, this gap needs to be bridged, as there continue to emerge cases that not only reveal the persistence of this dark practice of film marketing, but also its adaptation to the evolution of information disorders. In this regard, in 2001 the case of David Manning came to light, a fake critic linked to the newspaper *The Ridgefield Press* who was made up by the marketing department of *Sony Picture Entertainment* to publish positive reviews of films produced by *Columbia Pictures* (Horn, 2001).

However, the turning point in this practice took place after the impact of information disorders during 2016 on important events such as the Brexit referendum or the US presidential election (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Bennett and Livingston, 2018). Taking advantage of these phenomena, *20th Century Fox* and *Regency Enterprises* hired a fake news creator to carry out the promotional strategy for the film *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016). This is a psychological thriller that tells

the story of a New York executive who travels to a Swiss wellness center to bring back a CEO from his company who had taken up residence there. However, after an accident, the executive is admitted to the center and discovers that the strange treatments that the patients receive, based on the natural water of the area, are part of a medical experiment.

The result was the creation and dissemination of five fake digital newspapers (*Sacramento Dispatch*, *Salt Lake City Guardian*, *Houston Leader*, *Indy Gazette* and *NY Morning Post*) shaping an elaborate network of fake news. After analyzing the style and code of these fake media, **Silverman** (2017a) identified strong evidence to attribute the authorship of these digital media to Jestin Coler, a prominent fake news editor in the US. Nevertheless, the viral marketing campaign was quickly interrupted by both companies after being detected and ethically questioned by **Silverman and Lytvynenko** (2017) in an article published in *BuzzFeed*. By integrating the same *Google Analytics* tracking ID into their source code they were able to reveal that these five fake media, as well as three tie-in websites, were interconnected. Following the media hype, the fake newspapers were quickly disabled, redirecting users to the film official website. Despite the accelerated closure, some fake news resulted in misinformation after being shared by users thousands of times on social networks or republished by certain media with a poor reputation (**Maheshwari**, 2017), which showed the potential of this campaign to distort the reality of users.

2. Objectives

Against this background, the main objective of this research is to analyze the contemporary promotional campaign of a cinematographic work based on informational disorder with the use of fake newspapers and fake news. Specifically, we are using as a case study the promotional actions of the film *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016). Based on this purpose, the following specific research objectives (SROs) are established:

SRO1. Identify the different sections comprising the fake newspapers.

SRO2. Investigate the subjects addressed by the fake news used in the promotional strategy, their geographic coverage and the existing diversity.

SRO3. Examine the possible connections between the fake news and the film they are promotionally linked to.

SRO4. Analyze the composition of the fake news used in that strategy.

SRO5: Explore the hyperlinks of the advertising spaces that appear together with the fake news.

3. Methodology

This research explores a paradigmatic case of information disorder use in film marketing based on fake news: The promotion of the film *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016). This case is not only paradigmatic for the dimension of the fake media and news network that was created, unparalleled to date, but also for having been designed by an expert in fake news, Jestin Coler. Despite the ephemeral existence of these five fake media, *Wayback Machine*, the biggest existing web archive (**Bowyer**, 2021) that offers the possibility of obtaining and studying the biography of a given website, recorded and archived a large proportion of its websites and content. Thanks to these files, a solid corpus of analysis was established, allowing for the identification, selection and critical analysis of the documentary materials found, which enabled the validation and evaluation of the extracted information. Thus, taking as a reference the “virtual archaeology” applied to the study of websites developed in the field of film promotion by **Walden** (2017; 2023), the reconstruction and analysis of the promotional campaign based on fake media and fake news linked to the aforementioned film has been carried out. At this point, it is necessary to specify that the analysis is limited to the first hours of the campaign's life, making it difficult to ask in this study whether the fake media were designed to be updated with new fake news, were conceived exclusively to promote Verbinski's film or if they were seeking to consolidate an alternative communication channel to promote future film releases.

For that purpose, first, the domains of these five fake media were collected from the hyperlinks available in the article by **Silverman and Lytvynenko** (2017). Thereupon, each of these web addresses was explored in the *Wayback Machine* search engine, finding

WayBack Machine allows access to the content of different versions of a website over time, even if they are no longer available online

archived versions of all of them on dates close to the publication of the aforementioned article (February 13, 2017). Once identified, all captured URLs containing their domains as a prefix were collected and inspected. In total, 1019 URLs were archived in this database, although the number stored for each fake media was different (Table 1).

Table 1: Fake media domains and URLs archived on the *Wayback Machine*.

Fake Newspaper	Coverage City	Fake Newspaper Domain	Archived URLs from the Domain
<i>Sacramento Dispatch</i>	Sacramento	http://sacramentodispatch.com	178
<i>Salt Lake City Guardian</i>	Salt Lake City	http://saltlakecityguardian.com	374
<i>Houston Leader</i>	Houston	http://houstonleader.com	233
<i>Indy Gazette</i>	Indianapolis	http://indygazette.com	103
<i>NY Morning Post</i>	Buffalo	http://nymorningpost.com	131
Total number of URLs archived in <i>Wayback Machine</i> from the five domains			1019

The next step in this digital excavation process was conducted by manually reviewing each one of the registered URLs in order to identify all those corresponding to fake news. Those URLs with no archived content in the *Wayback Machine* were categorized as fake news if the information available on the URL itself was similar to any fake news from another fake newspaper in the promotional strategy that did allow access.¹ Using this procedure, the total number of fake news originally hosted by each of the five fake local newspapers, as well as those that were archived in the *Wayback Machine* and can be recovered today, have been registered (Table 2).

Table 2: URLs to the Fake News Identified and Retrieved.

Media	Number of Fake News URLs Identified	Number of Fake News URLs Retrieved	% of Fake News URLs Retrieved from the Fake Media	% of Fake News URLs Retrieved from the Campaign
<i>Sacramento Dispatch</i>	34	31	91.17%	16.57%
<i>Salt Lake City Guardian</i>	41	30	73.17%	16.04%
<i>Houston Leader</i>	38	33	86.84%	17.64%
<i>Indy Gazette</i>	39	35	89.74%	18.71%
<i>NY Morning Post</i>	36	11	30.55%	5.88%
Total percentage of fake news URLs retrieved from the campaign			74.84%	

According to these data, of the 1019 URLs archived by the *Wayback Machine*, 187 correspond to fake news. The number of fake news found in each false media, but not identical, is somewhat similar. In terms of access, the contents of 140 fake news have been retrieved, representing 74.84% of the URLs associated with the promotional strategy of *20th Century Fox* and *Regency Enterprises*. Although this percentage implies a loss of information, it fits with the omissions, lacks, disappearances and gaps usual in media archaeology (Ernst, 2013) and the ephemeral nature of websites linked to film promotion and the loss of content that occurs when they are archived (Walden, 2017).

The methodology used in this research is quantitative and qualitative. Taking into account the different types of mixed research methods that exist (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Niglas, 2023), it should be noted that the quantitative approach will have more weight than the qualitative one (QUAN-qual) in the analysis process, while the weight of both approaches will be reversed when drawing conclusions from the results obtained. Likewise, the content analysis is used, allowing the formulation “from certain data, of reproducible and valid inferences that can be applied to their context” (Krippendorff, 1990). The content analysis follows the methodology of Ortega-Mohedano and Galhardi (2013) through the definition of the variables, the design of an analysis sheet, the analysis of the identified websites and the collection of data to finally end this process with the elaboration of the results, identifying patterns, concepts and meanings. Starting from this base, the variables examined in this study and the analysis sheet used for the collection and coding of the data are established below:

1. The sections composing the structure of fake newspapers.
2. The types of fake news according to their subject matter, considering the categories of culture and entertainment, health, economy, sports, police, society and politics. In addition, the possibility of classifying some fake news within several categories is contemplated.
3. The types of fake news according to their geographical coverage –that is, local, state-wide, national or international.
4. The diversity of fake news based on the uniqueness or symmetries between each fake newspaper's fake news.
5. The possible connections established by fake news with the film are based on four parameters: transmedia narrative; film-related topics; the configuration of a fake reception of the work; or the lack of a defined connection. Regarding the related themes, based on the story of Verbinski's film, fake news connected to the following points are considered: water pollution, mental health problems; public health problems; experimental treatments and drugs; and experimentation with humans.
6. The composition of fake news, based on:
 - Authorship: name of the journalist who signs each of the fake news. Subsequently, it will be examined whether they are real or fictitious journalists.
 - The number of visual media used in each fake news and their origin. Often, images on websites are not archived in the *Wayback Machine* (Bowyer, 2021). Rather, “it is the metadata describing the object that is archived, rather than the material object itself” (Walden, 2017). Thus, for objects not archived in the fake news analyzed, such as the images included, the existing metadata and information available in the source code of the websites are collected and analyzed to obtain the names of the images and, if available, their origin. Once this data has been collected, it will be compared to detect whether the images have been used in different fake news.
 - Sources used in the text: use of real sources or fake sources, which have similar names or appear to be genuine

¹ For example, although the contents of the registered URL could not be accessed <http://sacramentodispatch.com/bombshell-trump-and-putin-spotted-at-swiss-resort-prior-to-election>, this has been categorized as fake news thanks to the information provided by the URL, which is similar to that of other fake news published in other fake newspapers that have been retrieved (<https://web.archive.org/web/20170211030412/http://saltlakecityguardian.com/bombshell-trump-putin-spotted-swiss-resort-prior-election> <https://web.archive.org/web/20170211013840/http://houstonleader.com/bombshell-trump-and-putin-spotted-at-swiss-resort-prior-to-election>).

sources (Bauer and Clemm von Hohenberg, 2021).

- Quotations available in the text: use of real quotes or fake quotes, considered as those false, incorrect or incomplete references (Kirner-Ludwig, 2020).
- Hypertexts: hyperlinks included in the body of fake news redirecting the user to other digital spaces.
- Metatexts: links between the fake news and the social media discussion topics through the inclusion of hashtags, which are “a form of meta-text that makes it possible to cross-reference content” (Poon and Kohlberger, 2022).
- Textual extension: number of words used in the body of the fake news.

7. The hyperlinks inserted in the advertising spaces surrounding each fake news, which redirect to the film's official website or the tie-in websites of *Vitaacqua* and *Healthcuregov*.

Table 3: Analysis Sheet Used.

Analysis Categories	Analysis Parameters
Structure of fake newspapers	- Sections composing the fake newspapers
Fake news topics	- Culture and entertainment, health, economy, sports, police, society and politics
Geographical coverage of the fake news	- Local, state-wide, national and international
Diversity of fake news	- Uniqueness and symmetries between fake news
Fake news composition	- Authorship: name of the fake journalist - Visual: visual supports and their sources - Sources: real or fake sources - Quotations: real or fake quotes - Hypertexts: hyperlinks available in the fake news - Metatexts: hashtags used in the fake news - Textual extension: number of words
Hyperlinks in advertising	- Hyperlinks to the official website of the film or the tie-in websites of <i>Vitaacqua</i> and <i>Healthcuregov</i>

4. Results

Initially, it is found that the five fake newspapers analyzed share the same structure consisting of five sections: news; economy; sports; entertainment; and obituaries. Through this simple network, which reproduced the structures of some local digital newspapers that operated in the cities to which they were limited, the authors of this marketing strategy sought to project the image of emerging local newspapers or even masquerade as existing local media (Silverman, 2017b). With regard to the topics of the fake news retrieved (Figure 1), a predominance of news stories dealing with health-related topics (polluted waters, health problems, experimental treatments and drugs, and human experimentation) is detected in all the fake newspapers. This is a first indicator of the interest in generating a context of disinformation in which the story of *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016) would make sense. Other highlighted topics, although they vary depending on the fake media, are related to politics, society or police interventions, which, in turn, tend to be equally intertwined with health issues. On the other hand, the economy, sports, culture and entertainment are the least addressed topics by fake news. Despite having a lighter presence, these topics are crucial to simulate a credible information offer that provides a certain realism to the fake media.

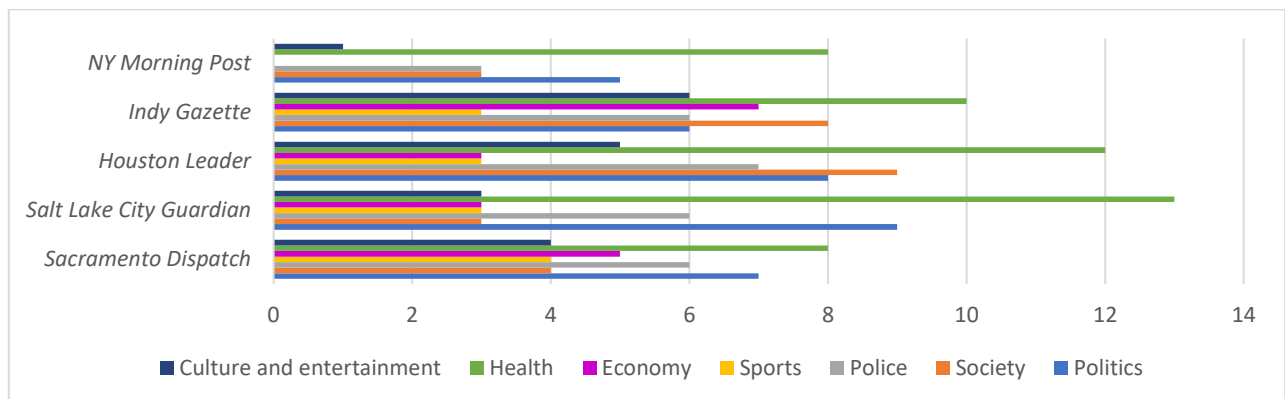


Figure 1: Topics of the Fake News Retrieved.

Conversely, the geographic coverage of fake news is mostly local (54.28%), followed by national (36.42%), state-wide (7.85%) and international (1.42%) proximity (Figure 2). In the case of the *NY Morning Post*, although the data obtained from the retrieved fake news indicate that it provides national coverage, the headlines inserted in the URLs of all the fake news² available in this fake media indicate that its field of action is also local. Additionally, there is a coincident fake news in the *Houston Leader* and *Salt Lake City Guardian* that is framed on an international level. Thus, the predominantly local orientation of this strategy, like the Russian disinformation campaign deployed to influence the

² Based on the headlines collected in the URLs, the geographic coverage of 72.22% of the fake news from the *NY Morning Post* is local.

2016 US presidential election, sought to exploit the trust that Americans had in local media (Mak and Berry, 2018).

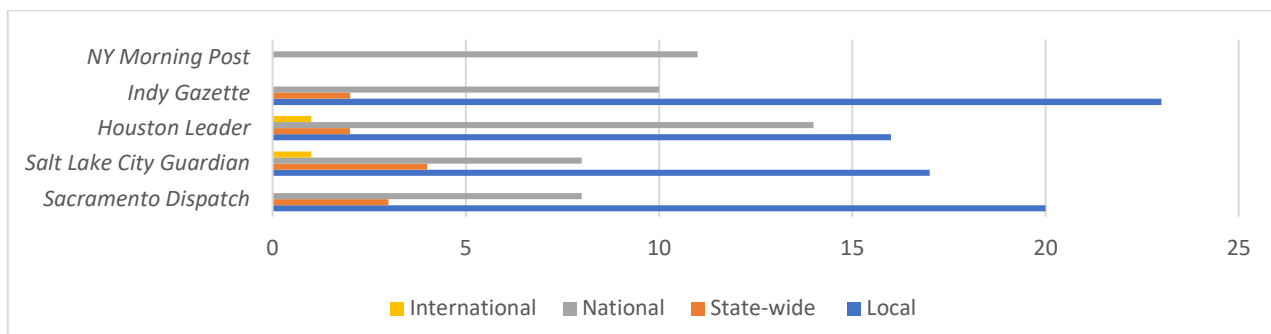


Figure 2: Geographical Coverage of the Fake News Retrieved.

In relation to their diversity, out of the 140 fake news retrieved, only 62 different ones have been identified, since the rest are exact clones or localized fake news that are repeated in the different fake media. Furthermore, since only 26 fake news are exclusively present in one of the five fake media, it has been noted that their construction responded to a system of cloning and localizing of fake news. Delving into this point, there are fake news that have been found to be repeated in five (10.71%) or four fake media (25.71%), these being structural; recycled fake news in three (27.85%) or two fake media (17.14%), which provide some variability into this cloning system; and, finally, exclusive fake news (18.57%) that give uniqueness to each fake newspaper.

Moving forward in the analysis, 60% of the fake news has no connection with the feature film, 34.28% revolves around themes related to its story, 2.85% reflects a fake reception of the film and another 2.85% is part of its transmedia storytelling (Figure 3). A general reading of these data reveals the extraordinary narrative disconnection existing between this fake news campaign and the film in question and, consequently, the distancing of this unusual marketing proposal from the transmedia practices that have been applied in the film industry in recent years. Instead, a deeper reading of these connections enables the identification of four points of interest, as well as the objectives that were sought:

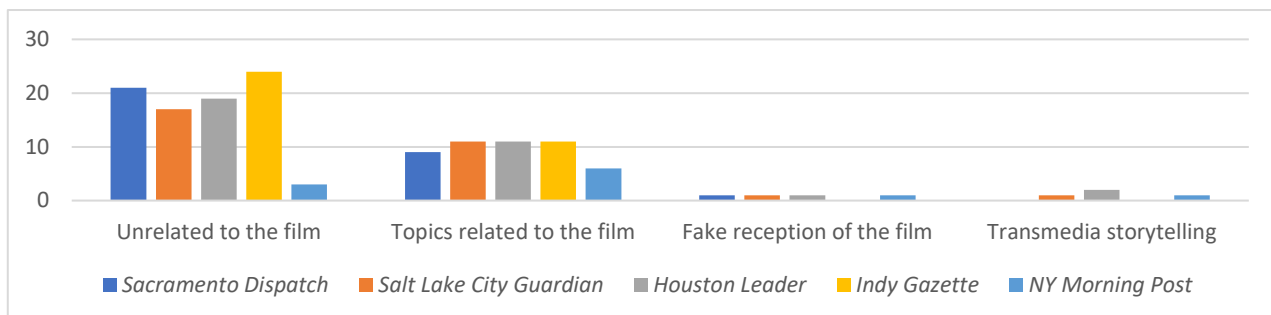


Figure 3: Connections between the Content of the Fake News Retrieved with the Film.

1. Fake news unrelated to the film can capture the attention of users and generate web traffic through headlines and fake information that operate mainly at local and national levels. They are primarily designed to shape fake newspapers and expand the spaces dedicated to advertising the film, although some can also function as clickbait to boost user traffic.
2. Fake news on related topics aims to distort the reality of users to build a context closer to the story of the film. In this regard, it is found that these fake news stories deal with mental health problems (9.28%), experimental treatments and drugs (8.57%), public health problems (7.85%), water pollution (7.14%) and human experimentation (1.42%). It should be noted that many of these fake news stories are also designed as clickbaits to attract users and be shared on social media or disseminated on other media with poor reputations.

“ Fake news disconnected from the film allows users to be attracted and generate traffic through headlines and fake news that operate mainly on a local and national scale ”
3. Fake news is also used in this campaign to alter the

“ Fake news on related topics aims to distort the reality of users to build a context closer to the story of the film ”

context of the film reception. In one fake news,³ repeated in four of the five fake newspapers, there appeared, in addition to various paratexts of the film (a frame and a trailer), fake information that suggested that test screenings of *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016) were generating anxiety and panic attacks in the public; a fake review of the movie soundtrack; fake statements by the director in charge of the test screening; and the comparison of the impact that the film was generating on the public with the one caused by works such as *The Devil's Rejects* (by Zombie, in 2005), *The Hills Have Eyes* (by Aja, in 2006) or *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (by Pasolini, in 1976). All this fake information was therefore intended to create excitement among the public and stimulate word of mouth.

4. Finally, the fake news correlated with the transmedia mechanism of the film is purposed to project reality into fiction by creating fake situations starring media figures, such as Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, which take place in locations of the film; and, in reverse, to simulate the transfer of a part of fiction to reality, in this case the sale of the fictitious product *Vita Acqua*. Although this blurring between fiction and reality is frequent in film marketing, these items of fake news present a novelty: they are susceptible to being decoded as truthful, as they are incorporated within a fake newspaper filled with an amalgam of fake news.

“ In this campaign, fake news is also used to alter the context of reception of the film ”

Drawing attention to the composition, we find that 90% of the fake news items are found to be signed by a total of 30 fake journalists, while the remaining 10% is attributed to the staff of the different fake newspapers. It is also noteworthy that nearly all the journalists are named as prominent figures from the world of sport (Patrick Barnes), cinema (Colleen Miller), radio and television (Jim Lange), politics (David Paterson), literature (Brian Sanders), music (Bill Nelson), crime (Emily Castro), business (Kari Taylor) and even company names (Kimberly Clark). These names are consequently integrated into the fake news as keywords intended to optimize their positioning and circulation in the digital sphere.

“ Some of the fake news detected are intended to project reality into fiction by creating false situations starring media characters ”

From a visual perspective, 92.85% of the fake news contained one image, 3.57% contained two, and the remaining 3.57% included three, although it should be noted that none of them were registered in *Internet Archive*. Regarding the sources of the 155 images identified, based on the metadata available and the name of the files inserted in the source code of the websites, it was found that 83.22% of these came from *Shutterstock*, one of the largest providers of licensed images. This percentage reveals that no specific iconography was conceptualized for the strategy analyzed, but rather one that was economic and quick to model. On the other hand, 8.38% are screenshots of Donald Trump's *Twitter* account and the *Yuba County Office of Emergency Services' Facebook* account; 3.87% are part of the film paratext; and 4.51% are of unknown origin. These results reveal a certain interest in visually interweaving the promotional strategy with images from current American political and social events. Lastly, 72.25% of the identified images appear repeated in two or more fake news stories, which reinforces the cloning system previously detected.

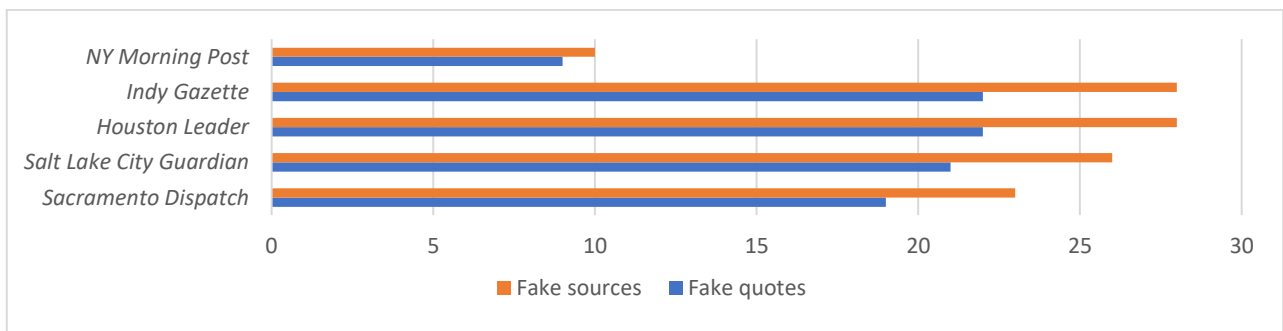


Figure 4: Inclusion of Fake Quotes and Fake Sources in the Recovered Fake News.

Focusing on the sources used, 82.14% of the fake news retrieved uses fake sources from multiple people, professionals, organizations or nonexistent institutions. Considering that fake sources can “manage to build up credibility through catering to readers’ world views” (Bauer and Clemm von Hohenberg, 2021), their widespread use in the strategy reveals a clear interest in accentuating the plausibility of fake news. To a lesser extent, 66.42% contains fake quotes from a wide spectrum of fake sources that range from the absurd and implausible to the possible and credible (Figure 4). In this regard, moreover, 10.71% of the fake news combine fake quotes and original direct quotes out of context from prominent figures such as Donald Trump or Lady Gaga, which increases the difficulty in detecting and interpreting the falseness of these marketing creations. Moving on to hypertexts, it can be appreciated that 35.71% of the fake news

³ Available on <https://web.archive.org/web/20170208182554/http://nymorningpost.com/screenings-for-upcoming-psychological-thriller-result-in-panic-attacks>

retrieved contains one or more hyperlinks. In total, 128 hyperlinks are recorded (Figure 5), which can be classified into four categories according to the redirection they offer:

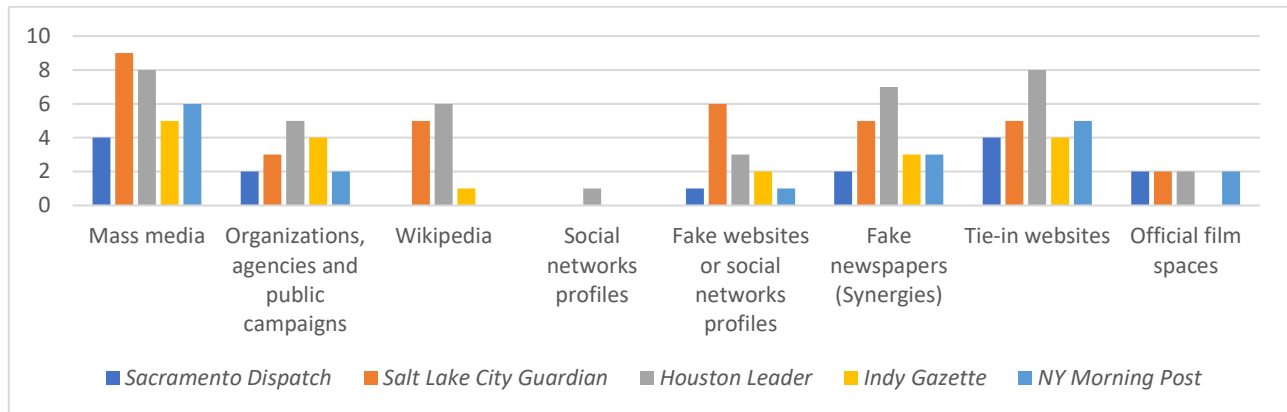


Figure 5: Destinations of the Hyperlinks Available in the Body of the Fake News.

1. Connectors with digital reality (47.65%): These are hyperlinks that redirect the user to real spaces as a mechanism to give greater credibility to the quoted sources or to expand knowledge about a certain person or term. Thus, 25% of the hyperlinks gives access to major media (*The New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *The Daily Beast*, *NBC News*, *ESPN* and *MSNBC*), specialized media (*People* and *Business Insider*) and local media (*KTVX*, *KTRK Houston* and *KCRA*); 12.5% establish some connection with American organizations and associations (*American Medical Association*, *Mayo Clinic* or *Media Research Center*), national or governmental agencies (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* and *Food and Drug Administration*) or a public health campaign led by Michelle Obama (*Let's Move!*); 9.37% redirect the user to *Wikipedia* entries; and 0.78% to company profiles on social networks (*Pepsi* on *Twitter*). Of particular note is the high number of hyperlinks redirecting users to content on health topics closely connected with the plot of the promoted film.
2. Fake tie-ins (10.15%): These include links to other fakes related to the marketing strategy. These fake tie-ins do not have a narrative connection with the film, but are designed to serve as fake sources. In light of this, 8.59% of the hyperlinks connect to the website of the fake US senator Bradley Kennedy (<http://www.bradleykennedy.com>) and 1.56% to his *Twitter* profile (<http://tinyurl.com/2s3zbowey>).
3. Synergistic (15.62%): This includes those hyperlinks allowing the interweaving of the five fake newspapers to act as fake sources as well as boost user flow and generate transfers.
4. Promotional (26.56%): This is comprised by hyperlinks associated with tie-in websites of the film (20.31%) or, directly, to its official website (6.25%). In more detail, it can be seen how these links are used in fake news as fake sources (<http://www.healthandwellness.co> and <http://www.healthcuregov.com>) or as reinforcement of the main topic being addressed (<http://www.vitaacqua.com> and <https://tinyurl.com/bdjczvmy>).

With regard to metatexts, this fake news campaign is also conceived as a support for the film's promotional strategy on *Twitter*. This interconnection is identified in 37.14% of the fake news retrieved (Figure 6), which invited users to support different fake causes mostly correlated with the film using the following hashtags: #cureforwellness (53.70%); #takethecure (27.77%); #sicknessinsideus (7.40%); #findthecure (7.40%), #MAGA (1.85%) and #StandWithPP (1.85%). This tactic, typical of the fake news creators during the 2016 US presidential election (**Maheshwari**, 2017), sought to create and promote parallel meanings around the main hashtags used to promote the film on *Twitter*, allowing the expansion of discourse, interactions and the reach of official publications on this social network.

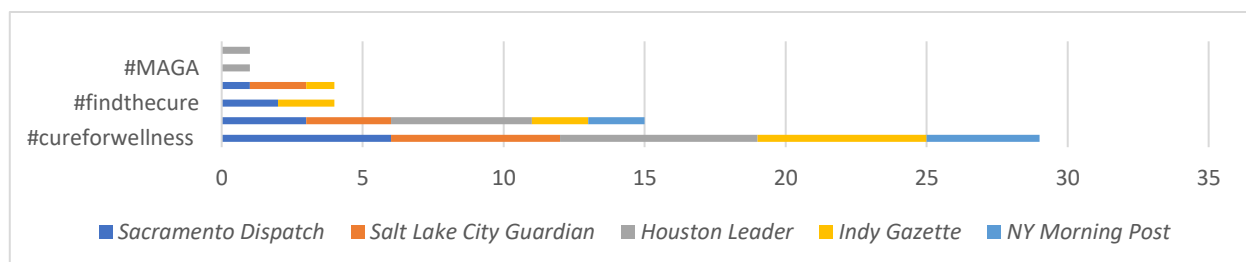


Figure 6: Hashtags Included in the Retrieved Fake News.

Also worthy of special attention is the only fake news story⁴ with more than one hashtag, including #MAGA,

⁴ Available on <https://web.archive.org/web/20170212083951/http://houstonleader.com/utah-senator-introduces-legislation-to-strip-protesters-of-government-benefits>

#takethecure, and #StandWithPP. The first one corresponds to the acronym of the popular slogan “Make American Great Again” popularized by Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign. The third one was created to support *Planned Parenthood*, an American NGO that offers abortion services and sexual education, among others, after being harassed by anti-abortion movements. The association of both hashtags with #takethecure, positioned in the fake news right between these two, denotes a strategic interest in linking these polarizing and hot topics at a sociopolitical level with the film communication campaign on social networks.

Concluding the composition section, it is found that the word length used in most of the fake news retrieved ranges of 101–250 (50.71%) and 251–500 (42.14%). Accordingly, these ranges differ from the usual extension of the digital news in 2017, which was around 800 words (Ferne, 2017). Finally, focusing the attention on the advertising spaces, it can be seen that all the fake news retrieved have advertisements related to the film and, in total, 249 hyperlinks are included in the ads available around these items of fake news (Figure 7). From this number, 69.87% of the advertisements redirected the user to the official website of the film, 16.86% connected to a tie-in website of the fictitious organization Healthcuregov and 13.25% to another tie-in website of the fictitious company Vitaacqua. These data, therefore, reveal that one of the functions of the fake news is to generate advertising spaces to introduce ads about the film and its transmedia creations.

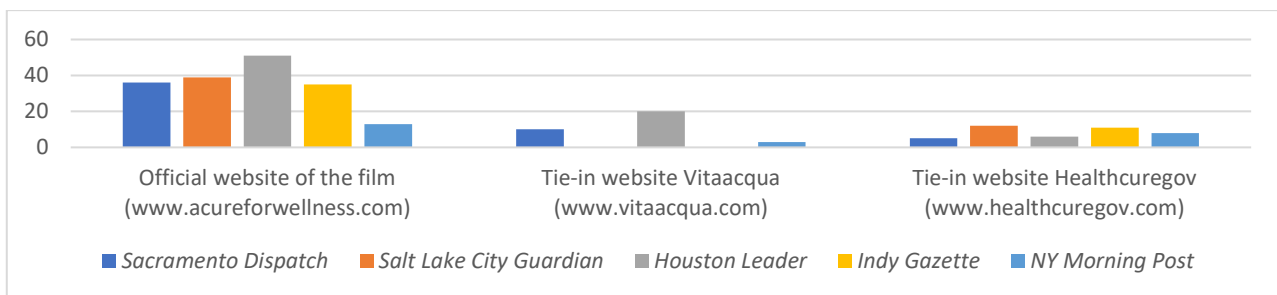


Figure 7: Hyperlinks Inserted in the Advertising Available Around Fake News.

5. Discussion

The strategy analyzed is a paradigmatic case that reflects a failed attempt to integrate and take advantage of the information disorders that emerged in 2016, especially fake news, in a sector as distant as film marketing. The case also shows how the strategy of *20th Century Fox* and *Regency Enterprises* was conceived without any intention of exploring the possible narrative itineraries of the film, outside the corporate social responsibility and without responding to any ethical filter, and hence operated in parallel with and in the shadow of the official promotional strategy of *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski in 2016). With this approach, they essentially sought to feed the traffic of the official websites, diversify the meanings associated with the hashtags of their promotional campaign on social networks and experiment with the darkest transfers between fiction and reality.

This unprecedented integration of information disorders, which pursue new commercial opportunities by distorting reality, enables a flow of relationships between the fictional world of a film and the reality of users that constitutes an alternative to the two modalities of reception that prevail in this industry: immersive and inclusive (Gauthier, 2018). While the first generates in the users “the feeling of being transported into another reality [...] by plunging them into a fictional world, the ‘inclusive’ mode of reception makes possible the co-existence of a fictional world with the interactor’s everyday reality” (Gauthier, 2018). In both modalities the user remains in any case aware of his or her own reality and at no time is it replaced by another.

However, the strategy analyzed does not fit into any of these modalities, as it fails to transfer users to the fictional world of *A Cure for Wellness* (2016) nor does it allow a simultaneous combination of both worlds by using an interface (such as social networks), which acts as a contact space. Rather, it gives shape to a third modality that we have called “disruptive” (Figure 8), which uses disinformation to replace the user's own reality with a false reality that is difficult to link to the one represented in the film, as there is no official contact space, references from fiction or apparent narrative links.



Figure 8: Disruptive Reception Modality.

This disruptive modality goes beyond the classic reality fiction binomial (intersection A) by incorporating a third axis through fake media and fake news: a false reality. This axis coming into play enables two new intersections that blow up the user's reality through disinformation. In the first junction, the aim is to replace this reality with a distorted one that maintains some connection with the film (intersection B). Fake news coupled with transmedia storytelling operate in this space. In the second one, the user's reality can be compromised and swallowed up by a false reality generated by an extensive fake framework (intersection C) consisting of fake newspapers, fake profiles on social networks and fake news that are completely unrelated to the film, present a fictitious reception context or promote themes related to the story. Thus, as opposed to the other reception modalities (immersive and inclusive), the two new intersections lack references that allow users to discern their own reality. This distortion can also operate beyond the recipients of this campaign if they share the fake news considering it genuine, which would lead to cases of misinformation. This disruptive modality, at the same time, transfers the problem of disinformation and fake news to the "off-screen studies" pointed out by **Gray** (2010). In this sense, the paratexts identified (trailers and frames) in some fake news are used as ingredients to model a context of disinformation that positively influences the reception of the film. This inextricably implies a redefinition of these paratexts, since their meanings are contaminated by the disinformation around them.

6. Conclusions

Initially, the study carried out highlights the importance of developing virtual archaeology studies to reconstruct, understand and analyze in depth unique and ephemeral phenomena such as the marketing campaign addressed in this research. Based on the results obtained, it is possible to state that it was a network of fake media that took the form of emerging local media with identical content structures and a large set of fake news covering various topics and with a mainly local and national proximity. Despite the size of the framework, however, there was an effort to economize the construction process by cloning and localizing the fake news, which turned the five identified media into copies with small aesthetic and content variations.

Furthermore, detecting these creations was complex, given there was a general disconnect between the fake news and the film. Despite finding certain thematic concomitances, the absence of obvious intersections with the film reveals how the strategy analyzed was not conceptualized from the perspective of contemporary film marketing, but rather from taking as a reference the circuits of disinformation related to the production, dissemination and reception of fake news in the online world. With regard to the composition, these items of fake news were characterized by being short and including: names of fake journalists; visual material from the Shutterstock image database; fake sources and quotes that, in some cases, appeared interspersed with real quotes from prominent figures; hyperlinks that redirected the user to other genuine, fictitious or promotional digital spaces; and hashtags associated with the film's promotional campaign and political and social movements. Therefore, the application and combination of all these elements, typical of information disorders, involved a complex decoding that made it difficult to identify these marketing creations as fake news.

The disruptive reception mode uses disinformation to replace the reality of the user himself with a false reality that is difficult to link to the one represented in the film

Based on all this, fake news was essentially designed to meet several objectives: to create content with the potential to go viral that incorporated advertising for the film; to extend the advertising spaces dedicated to the film in order to increase user traffic to the official website and tie-in websites; to diversify the meanings of the hashtags used in the film campaign on social networks to enhance and broaden the discourses surrounding it; and, finally, from a holistic perspective, to alter the reality with the intention of establishing an optimal reception context in which the film story is impregnated with a certain realism. Achieving all these goals, however, implied a high risk of distorting the reality, hence this strategy based on information disorders proposes a disruptive reception modality in which reality can be compromised by a false reality configured to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

Despite the initial approach of this strategy based on fake news, the transgression of ethical codes within the world of marketing and the absence of a firm social responsibility by *20th Century Fox* and *Regency Enterprises* determined its fragility and unsustainability. Even then, taking into account the ambitious objectives of this "unofficial" promotional campaign and its initial dimension, it is necessary to question whether it is truly an isolated case or whether there are more undetected (and therefore successful) fake news campaigns in the field of film promotion or in other related sectors. Likewise, it would be worth considering, given the significant web infrastructure deployed and the ideological baggage carried by certain fake news, whether this unusual strategy was simultaneously designed to promote or achieve other purposes unrelated to film marketing.

It is necessary to question whether the promotional campaign for *A Cure for Wellness* (by Verbinski, in 2016) is it an isolated case or there are more undetected and therefore successful fake news campaigns

From another perspective, although it is a failed marketing experiment, the extensive use of newspapers and fake news

as a connection with users could be reoriented to the construction of new fabrics of tie-in websites in future transmedia projects that opt for an inclusive reception mode. In such a case, taking into account the current potential of generative artificial intelligence, the large-scale creation of tie-in media and tie-in news able to feed back to each other, could open a new horizon filled with marketing possibilities. For example, such creations may allow the interconnection of fiction and reality by adopting a journalistic approach, generating connection points between different fictional worlds, exploring the potential of advertising spaces to promote other film productions or transmedia strategies of the same film studio, or even developing new cross-promotion formulas to interconnect films with commercial brands.

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