



Fake News

from a journalistic perspective

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+ Fake News



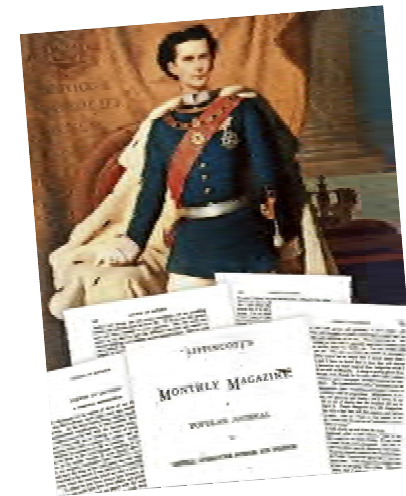
Top 10: Die beliebtesten Fake-News laut des Analysetools Buzzsumo

1. Obama unterzeichnet Dekret, um das Verlesen des amerikanischen Treueschwurs in Schulen zu verbieten (2.176.777 Engagements auf Facebook)
2. Frau gewinnt in der Lotterie, kotet auf den Schreibtisch ihres Chefs und wird festgenommen (1.765.146 Engagements auf Facebook)
3. Papst Franziskus schockt die Welt, unterstützt Donald Trump als Präsident, veröffentlicht Statement (960.000 Engagements auf Facebook)
4. Trump bietet jedem kostenlose One-Way-Tickets nach Afrika und Mexiko an, der Amerika verlassen will (801.741 Engagements auf Facebook)
5. Beim Ladendiebstahl: Zimtschnecken-Dose explodiert im Hintern eines Mannes (764.814 Engagements auf Facebook)
6. Florida: Mann stirbt bei Meth-Labor-Explosion nachdem er seine Fürze angezündet hat (668.842 Engagements auf Facebook)
7. FBI-Agent und Verdächtiger im Hillary-Email-Leak tot aufgefunden (567.000 Engagements auf Facebook)
8. Rage Against the Machine plant Wiedervereinigung der Band – und Anti-Trump-Album (560.038 Engagements auf Facebook)
9. Polizei findet Leiche von 19 weißen Frauen in Tiefkühltruhen, denen „Black Lives Matter“ in die Haut geritzt wurde (525.066 Engagements auf Facebook)
10. ISIS-Anführer ruft amerikanische Muslime dazu auf für Hillary Clinton zu wählen (522.812 Engagements auf Facebook)



+ Why is fake news a particularly relevant topic today?

- There was always fake news.
- Fake news has always influenced world politics: for example,
 - "incubator lie" in 1990, Gulf War
 - "sensational interview" with Ludwig II in 1882
 - "Constantinian Gift" 315 A.D. of approx. 900 A.D.
- But: Media have not been the ultimate "gatekeepers" and sole producers of news for about 15 years – everyone can be that now
- Media competence: Many people lack the competence to distinguish fake from real
- Studies also show that indifference and sensationalism are on the rise



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Example: Angela Merkel and Facebook

| Top 10 Artikel über Angela Merkel auf Facebook, sortiert nach Facebook-Interaktionen | |
|---|----------------|
| "Angela Merkel: Deutsche müssen Gewalt der Ausländer akzeptieren" 273.000, Gloria.tv | Falsch |
| "Merkel möchte allen Flüchtlingen schnellstmöglich Wahlrecht geben" 148.000, eine-zeitung.net | Falsch |
| "Psychoanalytiker Hans-Joachim Maaz: 'Angela Merkel handelt vollkommen irrational'" 99.000, Huffington Post | Meinung |
| "Merkel ist wahnsinnig Kanadisches Fernsehen liefert Beweise" 98.000, YouTube: HE RO | Falsch |
| "Merkel: Rente reicht nicht für alle" 98.000, Mittelbayerische Zeitung | Wahr |
| "Angela Merkel wurde bei einem Verkehrsunfall überfahren.." 88.000, debeste.de | Falsch |
| "Manipulation: Merkel verhängt Zensur über die ARD-Tagesschau" 83.000, Deutsche Wirtschafts Nachrichten | Falsch |
| "EILMELDUNG! Angela Merkel kündigt Rücktritt an!" 82.000, kulturstudio.wordpress.com | Falsch |
| "Merkel will in Afrika für Einwanderung nach Deutschland werben" 82.000, Deutsche Wirtschafts Nachrichten | Falsch |
| "Business Insider": Britisches Magazin: Angela Merkel ist die größte Bedrohung für Europa" 81.000, Focus Online | Meinung |

Facebook-Interaktionen sind die Summe aus Reaktionen, Kommentaren und Shares auf einen Artikel. Quelle: Facebook-Daten via BuzzSumo



+ How big is the phenomenon?



+ Why are Fake News so successful?



- Fake news often have more hits than real news:
 - They have a particularly **high news value** due to their pure invention/strong exaggeration (surprise, deviation from the norm, negativity, potential for scandal, involvement of elites, emotionality ...)
 - In this way, they are also an **incentive to pass them on** - friends and acquaintances should also receive such "unbelievable" messages - the station also enhances its own value, distinguishes itself by passing them on
 - **NYU study:** Fake news is sometimes believed because social status and affiliation/belonging to groups/parties/companies/persons is more important than the truth (e.g. Praise Trump) - also proven by the theory of cognitive dissonance, which hides unpleasant things despite evidence
 - **"Filter Bubbles"** intensify the effect: On Facebook, that which is particularly interesting/sensational is broadcast, for the respective user

+ Why are Fake News so successful?



- Fake news are **faster** than real ones, **reach** significantly **more people**:
 - **MIT study**: 4.5 million tweets analysed; fake news reached an average of 100,000 people, real news 1,000; fake news is forwarded with 70% more probability; real tweets take 6 times as long to reach the same crowd.
 - Reason: **Social Bots are not the explanation** (they help both true and false news), but the mass of people. Reason also here: Higher news value, social status when forwarded

- The producers from fake news are – in reality – an nothing bound:



+ Awareness raising and education at Fake News

- "Paradoxical intervention" through online game on fakenewsgame.org - mechanisms and consequences are thus better understood
- Seek clarification from fact checkers: Many Media already do this in Austria and Germany (purchased daily newspapers regional/national, but also own platforms: Mimikama.at, FaktCheck.org, ARD fact finder), list: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fact-checking_websites
- Book tips:
 - Ingrid Brodnig: Lies on the Net, How fake news, populists and uncontrolled technology manipulate us. Brandstätter publishing house. (in German)
 - Melissa Zimdars and Kembrew McLeod: Fake News. Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age. MIT Press.



+ Examples

BREAKING NEWS: Hillary Clinton Filed For Divorce In New York Courts - The USA-NEWS
 Bill Clinton just got served — by his own wife. At approximately 9:18 a.m. on Thursday, attorneys for Hillary Rodham Clinton filed an Action For Divorce with the Supreme Court of New York.
 THEUSA-NEWS.COM

BREAKING: US Missile Strike Against Syrian Airbase Posed Threat to Russian Servicemen - Defense Minister

Macron Preparing Anti-Family-Policy - French Anti-Gay Movement
 Emmanuel Macron "is preparing an anti-family policy" above people, according to French politician
 SPUTNIK

Nick Coker and 2 others shared a link.

Mark Zuckerberg – Dead At 32 – Denies Facebook Has Problem With Fake News – The Shovel
 Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg – who died of heart complications at his...
 THESHVEL.COM.AU

ELLE Magazine (US) @ELLEmagazine

Kim Kardashian and Kanye West are splitting up 🙄💔 ellemag.co/NfdFPmA

10:23 AM - 18 Oct 2018
 8,276 Retweets 13,051 Likes

+ Links



- <https://www.businessinsider.de/international/most-viewed-fake-news-stories-shared-on-facebook-2019-2019-11/?r=US&IR=T> (top fake news 2019 globally)
- <https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000006188102/what-is-pizzagate.html> (video on strategic Russian fake news and the process of successful fake news)
- <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/thema/fake-news> (stories on fake news in German)
- <https://www.suedkurier.de/ueberregional/politik/Die-erfolgreichsten-Fake-News-Wir-zeigen-Ihnen-was-hinter-den-bekanntesten-Falschnachrichten-steckt;art410924,9713663> (top fake news German-speaking countries)

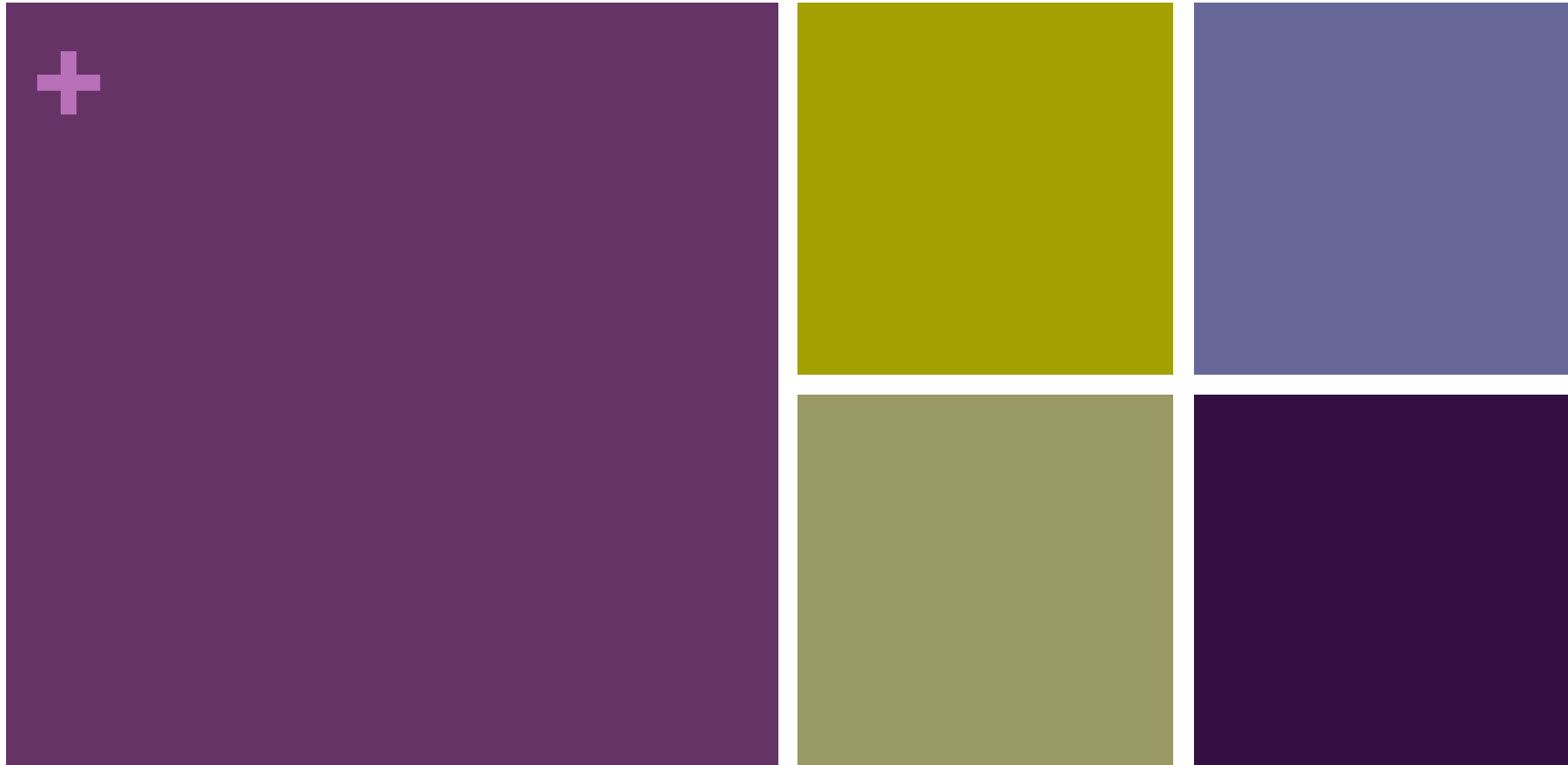
+ But where do "fake news" begin?

The collage features several news articles:

- unzensuriert:** A German news outlet with a red banner at the top that reads "Demokratisch, kritisch, polemisch und selbstverständlich". The main article is titled "Volksgesundheit: Schwarz-Grün bereitet budgetär Covid-19-Zwangsimpfungen vor" (Public Health: Black-Green prepares budgetary Covid-19 compulsory vaccinations). It discusses the Austrian government's plan to fund compulsory vaccinations against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Fox News:** A headline reads "FBI in possession of Hunter Biden's purported laptop, sources say". The sub-headline states: "The FBI and Justice Department concur with DNI Ratcliffe that the laptop is not part of a Russian disinformation campaign." The article is by Jake Gibson and Brooke Singman.
- Breitbart:** A headline reads "WIKIPEDIA EDITORS CENSOR HUNTER BIDEN BOMBHELL, CALL NEW YORK POST 'UNRELIABLE' SOURCE". The article is by T.D. ADLER and dated 19 Oct 2020. It discusses Wikipedia's decision to remove mentions of Hunter Biden's name.

Other elements in the collage include a "20 OKT" calendar snippet, a "FOX NEWS" logo, and a "SECOND LIFE" advertisement featuring a couple.

Wikipedia has joined Twitter and Facebook in seeking to suppress revelations from the *New York Post* about Hunter Biden allegedly securing a meeting between his father, then-Vice President Joe Biden, and a high-level adviser to Ukrainian energy company Burisma where the younger Biden served as a board member and which faced serious corruption allegations. Editors recently deemed the *Post* an "unreliable source" on Wikipedia and cited this as a reason to exclude mention of the story.



**Construction of reality
and news values**

+ Journalism and reality

- *"You always have to be amazed at the conviction with which journalists believe they know what just happened or how it really happened." (Westerbarkey 2002, 48)*



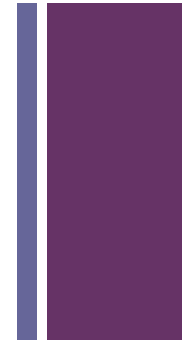
+ Learning reality

- *"We observe, organise our observations, develop action plans - and objectify our observations so that we believe in a reality that exists independently of our thinking. We are not aware of the extent to which we grow into a social reality and adopt the rules that apply in it". (Weischenberg 1995, 525)*



+ Two points of view

- The "**Ptolemaic**" view: journalism as a passive mediator, as a mirror of reality. This believes in an image.
- The "**Copernican**" view: journalism as a provider of an interpretation of reality. This is constructivist in nature. What we see is precisely an image of reality based on the respective "social location", which can be more or less "realistic".



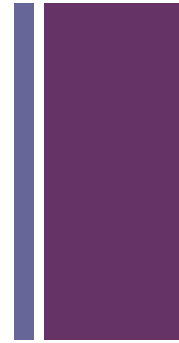
+ Three dimensions

- Reality is created through perception, observation, thinking, description and is in this respect three-dimensional (cf. Schmidt 2002, 17ff):
 - (1) one observer
 - (2) observed
 - (3) something and puts this observation together with reality.



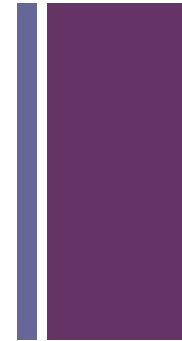
+ Reality and relativity

- The observable world is only observable to a limited extent.
- The problem of relativity also lies in the ability to grasp things.
- Universal, gapless observations are never realistic, indeed impossible (cf. Sievert 1998, 30).



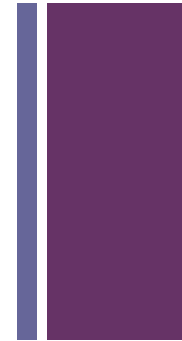
+ No mirror of reality

- Current empirical analyses show that media do not reflect but construct their own realities (cf. Bonfadelli 2003, 51).
- Media work *"in a structurally determined and self-referential way; they do not depict any realities, but create their own realities through criteria of perception and selection, to which they react autonomously and reproduce them in specific ways."* (Maresch 2002, 157).



+ No mirror of reality

- Media construct according to "rules, routines and rituals" (Löffelholz 1995, 174f)
- Journalists produce "*constructs of reality*" (Pürer 2003, 202)
- One *cannot* "not construct" (Weber 1999, 7ff)



+ Realists vs. constructivists

- Weber (1999, 46) contrasts "realists" and "constructivists".
 - The former believe in a representation of reality that comes to the recipient faster, more directly and uncut. With the help of classic quality features, journalism is moving in a positive direction.
 - The latter view the "higher, faster, further" policy critically: the closer the camera is to the subject, the smaller the detail. Live instead of background, and more direct but selective camera presence. An increasing concealment of constructiveness can therefore be assumed.

+ Journalists as realists

- Journalists, for their part, believe for the most part that reality should be portrayed as it is, which includes the existence of this possibility.
- This is proven, for example, by the study "Journalism in Germany" (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1994, 2006).
 - By learning techniques, socialisation in the working environment and dealing with forms of presentation and reporting patterns, journalists are also forced to form a picture of "reality as such" (Weischenberg 1995, 525), they believe they can make "true statements" about it.



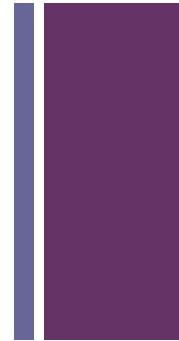
+ Models

- Encoding/decoding model by Hall (1990, 128ff)
- Two-step/multi-step flow of information in the sense of Vincent Galtung (1993, 177ff)
- Step model of reality modification by Larson (1980, 82f)



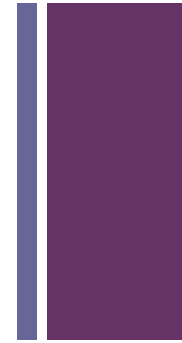
+ "Reality competence"

- *"The competence for socially acceptable differentiation management in stories and discourses based on collectively shared sense orientation on the model of reality through cultural programmes"* (Schmidt 2002, 26)
- What is decisive (constructivism): There are, on the basis of a common stock of signs and symbols, things that can be objectified, i.e. that can be observed almost uniformly - in other words, a "real" basis for reporting.



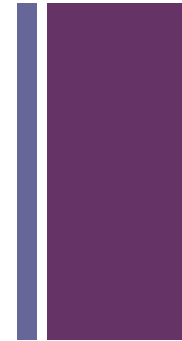
+ Influencing factors (selection)

- Selective perception: What is noticed, what is not.
- Personalisation: More attention is paid to the personal, less to the abstract.
- Comment: Neutral is less relevant than value.
- proximity: What is close to us personally/culturally is more important than anything else.
- "Institutional and professional factors" such as politically or organisationally intended selection and production decisions.



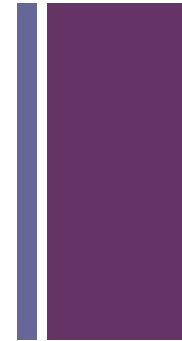
+ Three hurdles

- Westerbarkey (2002, 49-55) names three areas that counteract the transmission of reality in journalism:
 - "The media must always act as if, overt or covert."
 - "The mediation of reality can [...] simply fail due to cognitive barriers to reception." (for example incompetence as non-understanding or misunderstanding, disinterest, tact, tabooing)
 - From "gatekeeping" to "news constructing": "Karl Valentin once said that there is always just as much going on in the world as fits into a newspaper. He thus intuitively put the 'Janus-head' of the production of publicity in a nutshell, namely that mass communication is only possible through temporary negation of a large part of all events and topics."



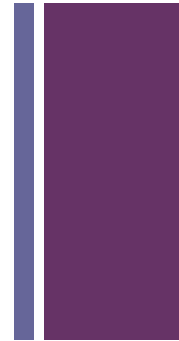
+ 13 stages of construction

- Weber (1999, 7ff) distinguishes 13 types of constructivity in the media reference:
 - 1) Conscious constructions in the sense of pure inventions;
 - 2) Conscious constructions with a low real base;
 - 3) Conscious "add-on constructions" with a real basis (real basis parasitically used);
 - 4) Conscious compositions with a problem of reality (new composition of known material, contexts; montages, edited interviews; this often includes unconscious distortion through excessive editing)
 - 5) Conscious compositions without any problem of reality (conscious, recognizable dizziness);
 - 6) Naive-realistic assertions of reality (increasing credibility through vocabulary such as "in truth" or "reality", "actual", "in fact" etc.);

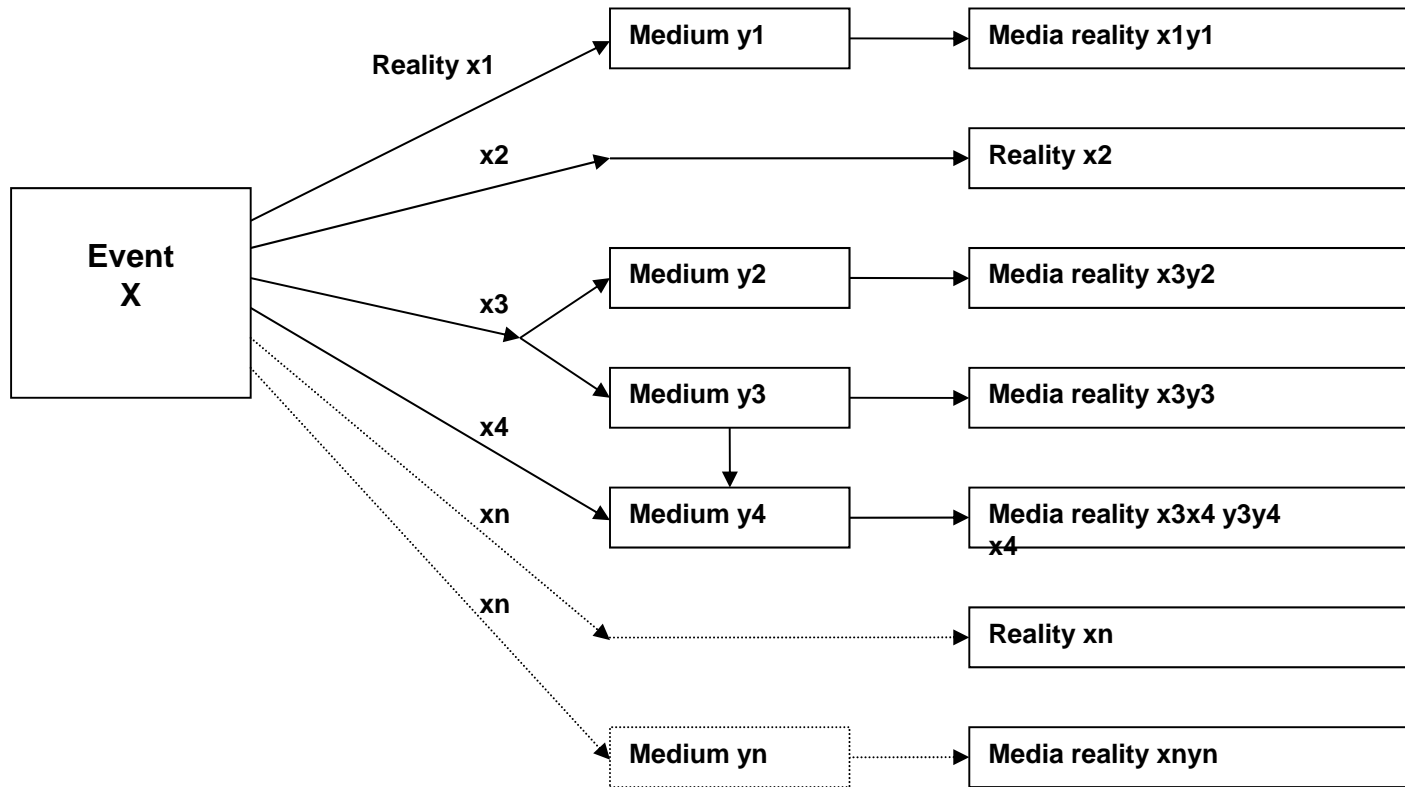


+ 13 stages of construction

- 7) Plural realities (topics with many "observer positions" - because they are very open and very complex, a reduction of complexity is necessary, which takes place on different levels that can be described);
- 8) Momentary realities ("ad hoc realities", only briefly topical, not secured, "state of play");
- 9) Double-edged realities (balance, weighting);
- 10) Exaggerations (scandalisation, sensationalisation);
- 11) Number games (relations, reference points);
- 12) Blurring (sloppiness, naming);
- 13) Unconscious constructions (unavoidable: the more technical intermediate design, the more often they occur, according to Weber, depending on the type of media, media genre, etc.).



+ Model of media realities



+ Food for thought

- The Austrian cyberneticist Heinz von Foerster:
“Statements say nothing about the object and
much about the speaker.”
- Whether *“there is a certain reality is not the
right question, nor is it the decisive one.”*
(Meckel 2002, 35).



+ Identification of topics

- Depending on
 - News factors
 - Target group
 - (periodicity of the medium)

+ News values

- Based on Galtung/Ruge's news value theory:
The more news values apply to an event, the more likely it is that it will be covered in the media or the more extensive it is potentially.
- Basis: (in German) “3-N formula“
proximity - benefit - news

+ News factors

- Topicality
- Threat/scandal potential
- Awareness
- Consternation
- Facticity
- Emotional content
- Exclusivity
- Possibility of identification
- Possibility of visualisation
- Possibility of personalisation
- Proximity
- Negativity
- Standard deviation
- Benefit/success
- Prominence/participation of elites
- Reach
- Damage/failure
- Nature of the topic
- Thematic career (continuity)
- Surprise
- Variation/composition
- Accessibility

+ Thank you!



Contact for networking, consultations and/or queries:

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