
Writer's Statement for "The Future of Voting in a Misinformed Society"

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From the very first day of the semester, I realized Professor Holic's Composition II class was not going to be a traditional writing course. Professor Holic utilized various forms of multimodal mediums to teach his class, mainly comics. Our initial assignment was to choose a research question that has not yet been answered by current research. Considering we would be spending the entire semester focusing on this topic, choosing one became quite a daunting task. Additionally, Professor Holic required us to include a visual component in our essays. After overhearing some kids in my neighborhood discussing whether the earth was flat or not, I decided that I would focus on misinformation and fake news on the internet. Next, I had to narrow my research question down to something I could address in one semester.

Today it seems that politics are discussed everywhere and on every platform. Given that the term "fake news" has become so closely intertwined with politics, I chose to begin my research there. The first article I read that related to my topic of choice was "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," by Hunt Allcott and Mathew Gentzkow. Their research focused on the impact that fake news articles on social media platforms had on the 2016 election. Part of their study discussed how quickly the market for viral fake news articles was growing. I was shocked to learn that producing a single fake news article could earn tens of thousands of dollars. I continued to research the problems caused by fake news articles and what was being done to mitigate them. One thing that stood out to me in all of the studies and articles I had read was that none mentioned teens. Knowing that teens are the primary users of social media and that they are only a few years away from being eligible to vote, I wanted to know their thoughts on fake news. This led me to my research question "How will future voters deal with fake news on Facebook in future elections?"

My next obstacle was to find high school students to interview. Fortunately, there is a school bus stop right outside my house and I was able to get a few of the high schoolers to answer some questions regarding their experiences with fake news and other forms of misinformation on the internet. During these short interviews I decided to test the effectiveness of a preventative measure being implemented by Facebook to combat fake news. My research quickly uncovered a need to educate our youth in investigative research techniques to aid them in distinguishing between trust worthy information and misinformation.

In the beginning of the semester, I found it very difficult to focus on such a narrow research question since the more I read the more interested I became. As I kept researching I found myself asking myself new questions and veering off track. The issue of fake news and misinformation was far more complex than I would have guessed. Thankfully, the peer review sessions and discussion posts provided me with insightful critiques that really helped me develop this essay. Initially, when I chose this topic it was more for the sake having something to submit. However, as I continued to work on the assignment I really became invested in the issue. I wanted to highlight the threats future voters are facing and simple effective ways to overcome these threats. Thanks to the guidance that I received from Professor Holic and my classmates, I believe I was able to do so.