

# Information Ecologies

What is Capitalism?

# The sinister signs of QAnon

Interpretive agency and paranoid truths in alt-right oracles

Otis, Cindy L. *True or False: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News*. Square Fish, 2022. © Square Fish. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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In March 2021, high winds from a sandstorm wedged an enormous cargo ship, the *Ever Given*, in a narrow section of the Suez Canal. Operated by the Taiwan-based company Evergreen Marine Corporation, the stuck vessel threatened to slow the global economy. Still, to followers of far-right QAnon conspiracy theories, it drew another kind of attention. 'Evergreen', it turned out, had been the Secret Service's code name for Hillary Rodham Clinton – and the ship's call sign appeared to bear her initials: H3RC. The coincidences played perfectly into one of QAnon's grandest narratives about the evil afflicting Democrat politicians. Hillary Clinton, they inferred, must be using this ship to carry out her global child sex trafficking scheme (Palmer 2021).



AMERICANSNEWS/PROTONMAIL.COM 2018

## QAnon and Q's postings

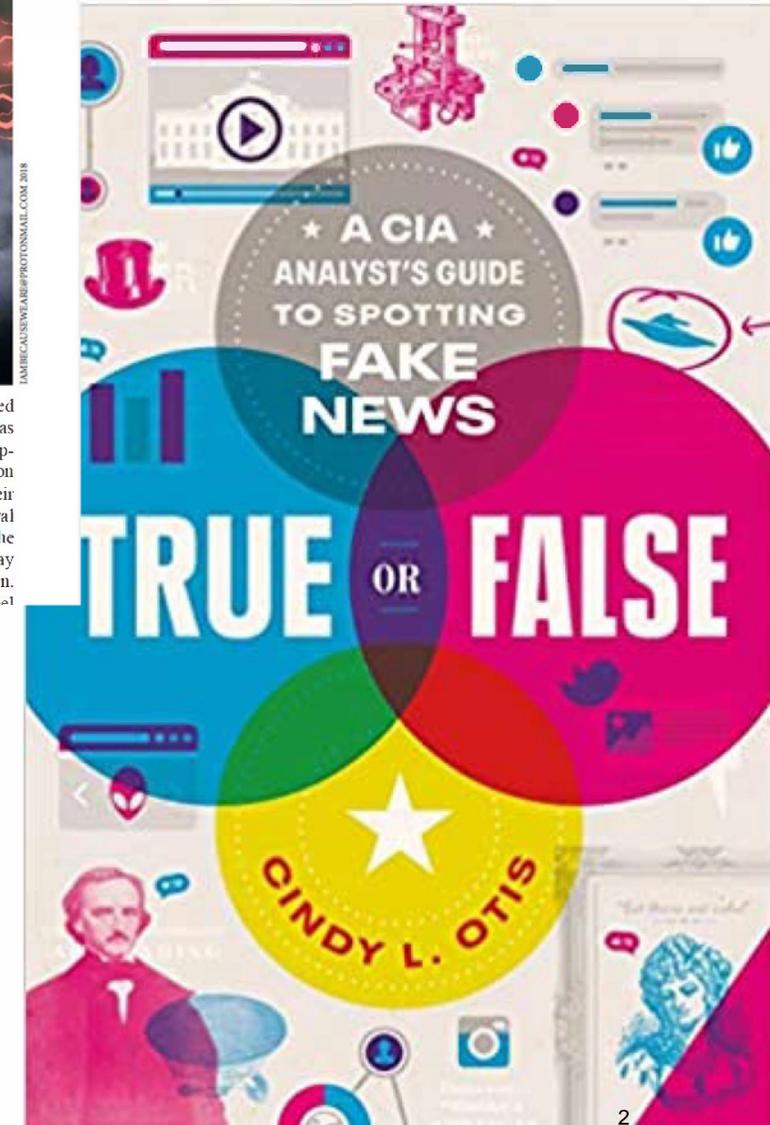
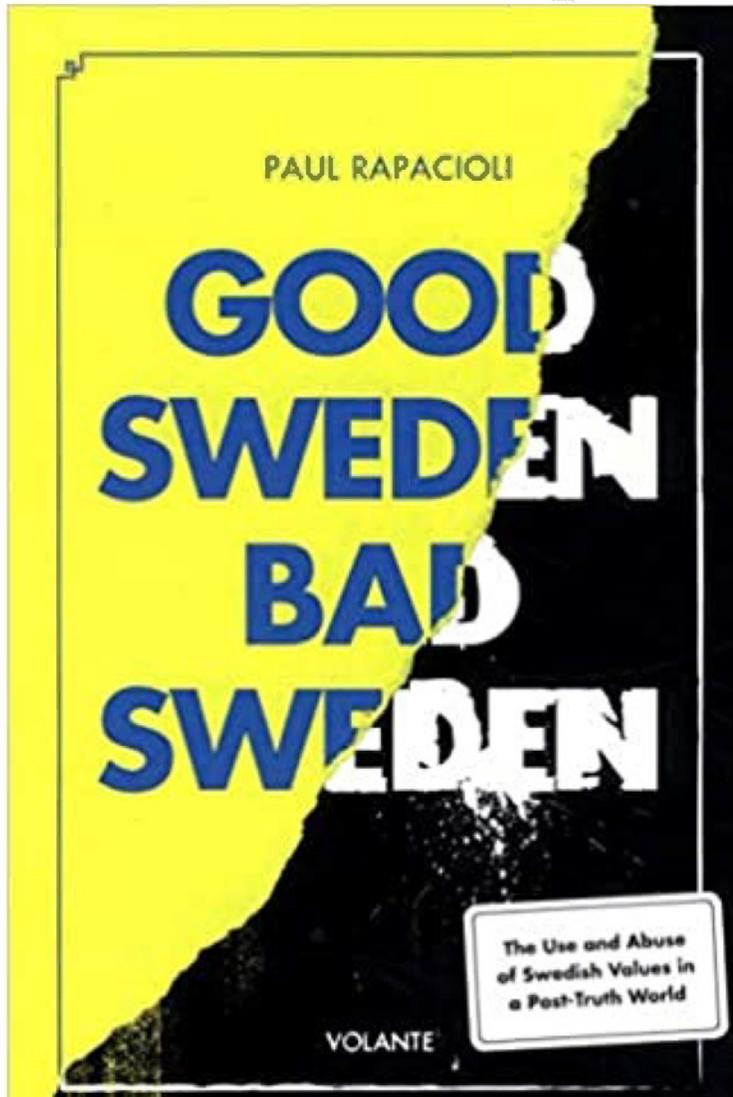
The quest for hidden meaning is a signature activity of QAnon adherents, even if their epistemological moves can beget absurd conclusions. Much has been written about the alarming conspiracy theories, millenarian beliefs, and white supremacist ideologies that snowballed under QAnon: the crescendo of QAnon's influence during Trump's tenure in office; and the fact that as of May 2021, about 15 per cent of Americans seemed to give credence to some QAnon theories (PRRI Staff 2021). But almost no serious analysis has focused on the peculiar and cryptic style of writing in Q's online postings (known as 'Q-drops'), a style some QAnon critics have dismissed as 'a lot of nonsense, a string of characters' (Sidner 2020).

My purpose here is not to explore the sociopolitical reasons for QAnon's rise or the content and impact of

2017). This tension in the American zeitgeist has surged dramatically in the ongoing era of Trumpism. Trump has made innumerable counterfactual claims. He and his supporters treat the opinions of experts as infringements on individual liberty. Though Q hasn't posted in months, their paranoid antagonism toward the truth claims of liberal authorities remains a force on the American right. And the digital space in which QAnon flourished stoked a new way of conveying and identifying what counts as information, one that allows citizens without public distinction to feel

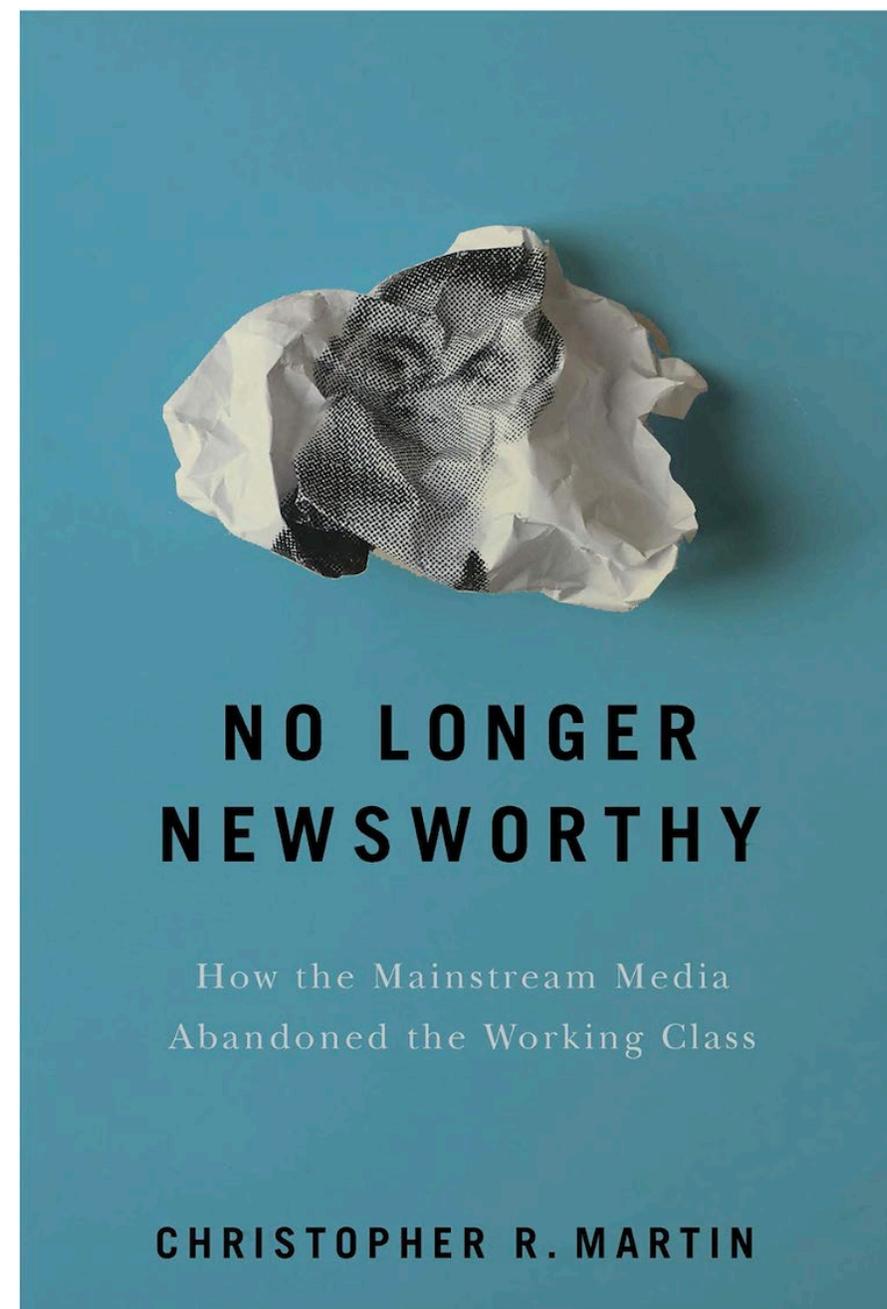
McIntosh, Janet. "[The Sinister Signs of QAnon: Interpretive Agency and Paranoid Truths in Alt-Right Oracles](#)," *Anthropology Today* 38, no. 1 (2022): 8–22. © John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Rapacioli, Paul. *Good Sweden, Bad Sweden: The Use and Abuse of Swedish Values in a Post-Truth World*. Volante, 2018. © Volante. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.



# Key Historic Shifts in Media Ecologies in the United States

- **1) newspapers shift away from working class audiences** - shift in media companies in 80s and 90s, newspapers based in cities that had appealed across class spectrum increasingly target better off consumers to increase revenues – mainstream media outlets abandons more working class audiences creating a vacuum (Chris Martin “*No Longer Newsworthy*”, 2019, Cornell University Press)



# Fairness Doctrine

*“the public interest requires ample play for the free and fair competition of opposing views, and the commission believes that the principle applies... to all discussion of issues of importance to the public”*

2) **Demise of Fairness Doctrine** – Fairness doctrine established in 1949 in United States, argued that news broadcasts had to have “balance”, had to give equal time to different political candidates; Effort to codify it by law by Congress vetoed by President Reagan in 1987.

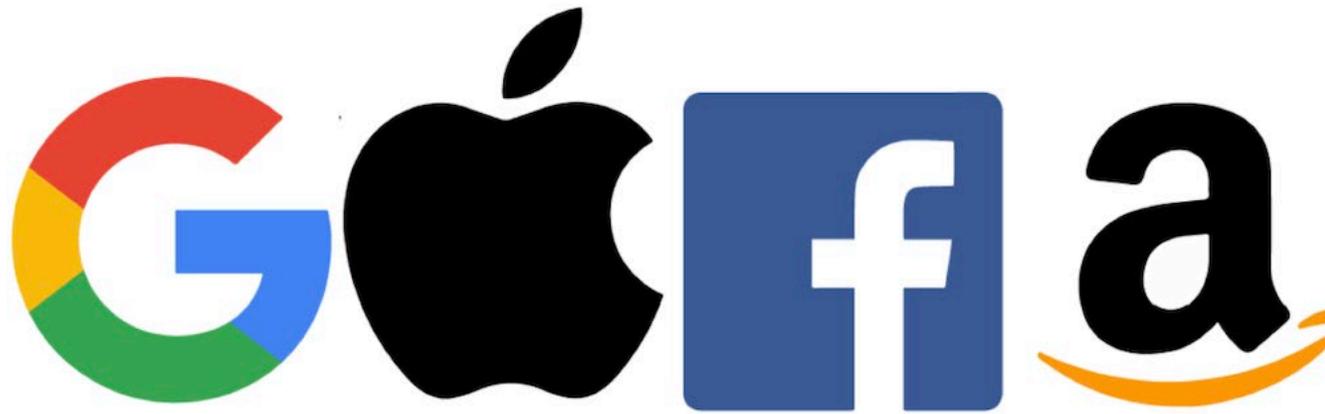
- 3) **Rise of cable broadcasts** to which Fairness Doctrine did not apply

Rise of CNN in 1980 and Fox in 1996 (Fox under Roger Ailes in particular popularized idea that news not to inform but product to be sold to be tailored to consumer tastes); 24/7 newscasting heightens sensationalizing as fight for attention; target more and more niche audiences



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**3) Tech companies outside regulatory frameworks** - rise of large tech companies and spread of internet (late 1990s – mid 2000s); they argued that they were technology companies linking users not media companies, so outside existing regulatory structures; advertising and other economic incentives undermine prior models of journalistic accountability

**RESULT -> media with recognized journalistic standards and accountability is increasingly behind paywalls; while misinformation and disinformation is economically incentivized to spread**

MAGAZINE

FOURTH ESTATE

**Opinion | Alex Jones and the Lie Economy**

The incentive to churn out fantasy is more powerful than any defamation suit.



Recent lawsuits against Alex Jones from Infowars showed that he made \$800,000 a day peddling conspiracy theories (through ads selling dietary supplements, survivalist gear and gun paraphernalia)

# The spread of true and false news online

SORUSH VOSOUGHI , DEB ROY, AND SINAN ARAL  [Authors Info & Affiliations](#)

SCIENCE 9 Mar 2018 Vol 359, Issue 6380 pp. 1146-1151 DOI: 10.1126/science.aap9559

↓ 24,336    🗨️ 1,530



## Lies spread faster than the truth

There is worldwide concern over false news and the possibility that it can influence political, economic, and social well-being. To understand how false news spreads, Vosoughi *et al.* used a data set of rumor cascades on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. About 126,000 rumors were spread by ~3 million people. False news reached more people than the truth; the top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1000 people. Falsehood also diffused faster than the truth. The degree of novelty and the emotional reactions of recipients may be responsible for the differences observed.

*Science*, this issue p. [1146](#)

## Abstract

We investigated the differential diffusion of all of the verified true and false news stories distributed on Twitter

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Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. "[The Spread of True and False News Online](#)." *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146–51. © American Association for the Advancement of Science. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

MIT scholars show that misinformation on Twitter spreads 6x faster than accurate information in article from Science in 2018



THE TECHNOLOGY THAT CONNECTS US  
ALSO CONTROLS US

WATCH NOW | NETFLIX

The Social  
Dilemma, 2020,  
dir. Jeff Orlowski

## THE DILEMMA

Never before have a handful of tech designers had such control over the way billions of us think, act, and live our lives.



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Emery, David. "Sweden Bans Christmas Lights to Avoid Angering Muslim Refugees." October 27, 2016. Snopes. © Snopes Media Group, Inc.. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.



SAVE OUR SNOPES

## Sweden Bans Christmas Lights to Avoid Angering Muslim Refugees

Unreliable web sites spun a news story about the Swedish Transport Administration nixing Christmas lights on street poles into a fictional tale about kowtowing to Muslim immigrants.

By David Emery

Published 27 October 2016





## *How Russian Trolls Helped Keep the Women's March Out of Lock Step*

As American feminists came together in 2017 to protest Donald Trump, Russia's disinformation machine set about deepening the divides among them.

Barry, Ellen. "[How Russian Trolls Helped Keep the Women's March Out of Lock Step](#)," *New York Times*, September 22, 2022. © The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

New York Times article 9/18/22 on Russian disinformation trolls trying to deepen divides among women at 2017 women's march



**The long read**  
**How Thatcher and Murdoch made their secret deal**

In 1981, Mrs Thatcher needed a boost from the press. By supporting Rupert Murdoch's bid for the Times and Sunday Times, she made sure she got it. Harold Evans, who led an unsuccessful staff takeover bid, reveals a historic carve-up

**Harold Evans**

Tue 28 Apr 2015 00.59 EDT

**T**he coup that transformed the relationship between British politics and journalism began at a quiet Sunday lunch at Chequers, the official country retreat of the prime minister, **Margaret Thatcher**. She was trailing in the polls, caught in a recession she had inherited, eager for an assured cheerleader at a difficult time. Her guest had an agenda too. He was Rupert Murdoch.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/apr/28/how-margaret-thatcher-and-rupert-murdoch-made-secret-deal>

1/18

Article in Guardian in 2015 referencing materials found in Thatcher's papers after her death documenting secret meeting with Murdoch

## Former Australian PMs put Murdoch in the hot seat on climate change

The media magnate's empire, offering a platform to sceptical voices, is accused of holding significant sway in this arena

Simon Kuper FEBRUARY 11 2021

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“Citizens around the world need to take consumer action against [Rupert] Murdoch’s products,” says Kevin Rudd, former Australian centre-left prime minister. “This guy is one of the greatest enemies of climate change action on the planet.” Australia’s former centre-right prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, who has allied with Rudd against Murdoch, tells me: “The most effective voice for climate denialism in the English-speaking world has been Murdoch’s.” The mogul’s son [James](#), speaking more broadly, recently criticised unnamed “media property owners . . . who [know the truth but choose instead to propagate lies](#)”. For all the anxiety about fake news on social media, disinformation on climate seems to stem disproportionately from one old man using old media.

This is the most hopeful moment yet for global action on climate. The world’s three biggest powers have set targets for net-zero carbon emissions: the US and EU by 2050, China by 2060. Yet Rudd and Turnbull believe action requires confronting Murdoch. How central is he to climate inaction, and can he be confronted?

Murdoch probably does shape rightwing views on climate. In an Ipsos Mori survey of 20 countries in 2014, the three countries with least belief in man-made climate change were his main markets of the US, Britain and Australia. British attitudes have since improved, but the US and Australia retain large fringes of climate deniers, reports YouGov. These two countries have helped block consensus in international summits on climate. Murdoch, says Rudd, “isn’t just an Australian problem, or even

# Former liberal and conservative Prime Ministers in Australia: Rupert Murdoch has had profound influence in promoting climate change denialism in UK, US, and Australia

-Financial Times of Australia article, 2021

*What is Considered to be Good Evidence?*

*How Does Peer Review Work Among Academics?*

## *E.P.A. to Limit Science Used to Write Public Health Rules*



Contaminated waste water flowing from the Lee Mountain mine near Rimini, Mont., into a retention pond last year. Matthew Brown/Associated Press



By Lisa Friedman

Nov. 11, 2019

Want climate news in your inbox? [Sign up here for \*\*Climate Fwd.\*\*](#) our email newsletter.

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is preparing to significantly limit the scientific and medical research that the government can use to determine public health regulations, overriding protests from scientists and physicians who say the new

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