



Some of the headlines surrounding the issue of "alternative facts" (screen shots).

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## Media Savvy: Do "alternative facts" really exist?

First it was "post fact", then "fake news", now we are confronted with "alternative facts". Do they really exist?

Post fact is simply a euphemism for editorialising, for adding your own inherently biased opinion to your description of the facts, or for swapping facts for opinion.

Fake news is just another term for salacious rumour that spreads like wildfire

(these days by social media algorithms).

But what about alternative facts?

When I read complaints about media bias, and that the MSM ("Main Stream Media") should "just report the facts", I am eerily reminded of my journalism studies at Curtin University in the early 1990s.

One of the first lessons we learnt was that journalism is an imperfect art. Each journalist has inherent and inescapable personal biases, ranging from age, gender and ethnic background, to educational qualifications, upbringing and political affiliations, among others.

Journalists can't escape their own selves, so no matter how hard they try, this baggage invariably influences how they gather news and report it. For as long as journalists are human (a fact even Donald Trump [acknowledges](#), albeit derisively), truly objective reporting is an unattainable goal.

This suggests that there really is such a thing as alternative facts. Scientists argue all the time about the results of studies. Different teams of scientists might come up with different results to similar experiments. Or interpret the same results differently.

But there lies the rub. We need to distinguish between facts, and interpretation of facts. Peer review is all about checking that the facts are correct. Deciding whether the conclusion has been inferred plausibly is a second, separate step.

Similarly, we could argue that a journalist's true job is not to "just report the facts", but to add context to make the facts comprehensible and the story meaningful. Audiences would be poorly served indeed if all reports were a simple bulleted list of dull factoids, with no attempt to make sense of them.

And what should this context be based on?

Once again, it is - simply - facts.

One thing we should all be able to agree on is that a precise, absolute,

indisputable number of attendees at the presidential inauguration *exists*.  
Right down to the last individual.

Whether anyone *knows* it is another question.

Which is why "alternative facts" could, at best, be equated to an "alternative *interpretation of the facts*", or "alternative *estimates of the facts*". But that's still one removed from the facts themselves.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer acknowledged as much during his [Fox interview with Hannity](#).

So, in my opinion, "alternative facts" do not exist. They are either [falsehoods \(NBC\)](#) or [lies \(CNN\)](#).

Alternative views welcome.

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