

FAKE NEWS AS AN INDISPENSABLE PART OF MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract: False news and rumors have grown frequent in today's world. The dissemination of such information has only been helped and hastened by the media and modern information and communication technology, with far-reaching repercussions. Traditional media is losing its audience's confidence, and more and more people are getting their news from their peers through social media. Not only has social media altered the way news is distributed, but it has also called into question long-held views about what news should look like. One thing is certain: this situation cannot be sustained; a new paradigm must be developed to restore trust in the media and the information they provide.

Keywords: media, fake news, communication, post truth

1. Introduction

In the media world today, we increasingly encounter misinformation, manipulation, but also false news that we have encountered many times in history and have actually been present since the existence of humanity. Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, said Swift as early as 1710. The World Centre for the Prevention of Digital Hate, by analysing almost a million accounts on social networks, came to the information that most of the fake news

circulating in the online space comes from 12 people. On Facebook, the twelve are responsible for as much as 73 percent of fake content (Fake news in the hands of 12 people).

With the help of the mass media, messages and contents are constantly inserted, and the unwritten rule is that socialization is measured by exposure to media messages, i.e., an individual is desocialized if he is insufficiently exposed to the media. The dawn of the post-truth age, marked by the rise of alternative media and inter-

net social networks, has ushered in a slew of demagoguery, nonsense, lies, hoaxes, disinformation (a more popular phrase is "fake news"), and conspiracy theories, with propaganda and manipulation playing prominent roles. Dissemination of disinformation and its consequences for individuals, society, and politics are among the most contentious issues of our time, despite the fact that it is a long-standing occurrence. The advent of digital media has brought, apart from other things, a decline of public trust in traditional (mainstream) media, and conversely a boom in alternative information sources. [Moravčíková, 2020]

Why this is important? Many people find themselves relating their personal life to what they see or read on social media, leading to the impression that they are missing out. Companies routinely barrage individuals with material about "liking" or "following" them on social networking platforms, which is unsurprising. It's more harder to go more than a few hours in a social setting without hearing a friend or other individual talk about what they posted, liked, or read on a social networking site. For many people, especially college students, using social media has become a routine and perhaps addicting activity. Social networking sites can mean a new channel for

communication, knowledge, entertainment, and even self-expression. [Abel et al., 2016] A 2019 study in Serbia [Kuzmanović et al., 2020] found that surveyed children and young children and young people, aged 13-19, use digital media significantly more often than traditional, print media and television (99% of them use a mobile phone every day). During the working day, half of the respondents spend between 2 and 4 hours on the Internet, during the weekend almost half spend between 5 and 7 hours a day, some even more. Over the past year, 96% of children and young people in the sample, according to their own statements, encountered content in the media that upset, frightened, angered or provoked some negative emotion; a third meet this content every day, and a quarter at least once a week. Harmful content is most often encountered in the following media: on television, i.e., in reality programs (59% daily), in series and movies (28% daily), then in content that "pops up" during Internet browsing (39% daily), on websites or online newspapers (36% daily), social networks (26% daily), photo-sharing websites (24% daily) or videos (24% daily). According to almost all respondents, the state should sanction those who spread false news.

According to the EU Kids Online Croatia (2018) survey, children aged 9 to 17 spend most of their free time with the media, especially the Internet. Namely, during the working week (school days) 21% of children spend 1 hour a day on the Internet, 27.3% of them spend two hours a day on the Internet, 13.6% three hours a day, 8.0% four hours a day, while 15.6% of children spend more than 5 hours online every day. Only 14.4% of children spend half an hour or less online. During the weekend, the amount of time children spend online also increases. Thus, 11.8% of children spend 1 hour a day on weekends on the Internet, 21.8% two hours a day, 19.9% children three hours a day, 12.8% children four hours a day, while 25.5% of children on the Internet spends 5 hours or more over the weekend. Only 8.2% of children spend half an hour or less online during the weekend. [Ciboci et al., 2018]

Those who spread fake news today are especially manipulating on social media because they are well acquainted with the way they work. Once they harm someone, it is difficult to correct it because a lot of people are usually involved in their spread. In addition to posing a serious threat to the main achievements of modern society, spreading false news is legally punishable or criminal. Due to the

huge number of users and the viral dissemination of information in digital format, in the era of the so-called "Post-truths", social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) are especially suitable for spreading false news. Fake news has been described as completely or partly false information, (often) appearing as news, and typically expressed as textual, visual or graphical content with an intention to mislead or confuse users. [Kalsnes, 2019]

2. Literature review

In today's age of information and technology, practically everyone in every aspect of society, economic, social, and political, is affected by the "media." The term media, in general, refers to many forms of communication, information, or entertainment used in society, such as television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. For information and pleasure, the majority of people rely on the media, whether electronic or print. The media has the ability to influence how people vote and spend their money. The media is there to keep people company from the moment they wake up in the morning until they go to bed at night. They can have an impact on how people eat, chat, work, study, and unwind. This is the social impact of the media. The media has a greater impact on us than just

being a source of information. They are a regular part of our lives. So there must be ethical norms and values that the media needs to follow. [New, 2017]

With the help of public relations professionals, modern media can construct the media reality that suits them at any given time. Specifically, the modern media environment, which is rich in ways of manipulating the public, gives good possibilities for all those who want to utilize it for their own ends. More truths are formed via the use of current media achievements, depending on the skill of the message creator, as well as the readiness of the recipients themselves, regardless of the geographical peculiarity of the circumstance and topic. [Dai et al., 2015]

Jean Baudrillard claims that the media have a great influence in directing social processes, i.e., "in a universe in which there is more and more information and less and less meaning". [Baudrillard, 1991, 83] With the help of the media, a new reality is produced, that is, reality is simulated by intertwining and mixing the true and the false by identifying the real and the imaginary. Spoken words and thoughts, concepts and facts acquire a false meaning and, with the help of the mass media, are con-

stantly repeated and communicated as indisputable truths.

Noam Chomsky also rightly points out the huge possibilities of the media to manipulate the masses of people without them even being aware of it, even with their tacit consent. He states that this is also the case in business, when goods, services, etc. need to be sold. It is enough to have your own corrupt journalists, editors and other producers and disseminators of information that suit you. They do not have to be true. Denials, corrections, court judgments, etc. they never had the effect of the first news. That is why media gladiators are in such a hurry to be the first to slander their opponent. [Chomsky, 2002]

Journalism and journalists today are increasingly realizing that truth, half-truths and untruths are ordinary goods that are paid for and have a price on the global market. Western media report under the great influence of their governments, business groups and the interests of various government agencies, and when these interests come into question, "almost by dictation or unwritten rule, all advocacy for the truth ceases, and thus objective information". [Vuković, 2014, 11] In his paper *Zvijer Nemanja*, [Zvijer, 2005] proves the connection between the political

needs of the USA and the film industry in various stages of Hollywood's development. This cooperation was most intense during the Cold War conflict, especially during the first two decades, when film production was uncritically inclined towards almost all state interventionist actions at the international level. He states that the influence of film on society is more complex and much more indirect than the patterns of classical ideological influence embodied primarily in textual forms. There is sufficient evidence to support the idea that a change is occurring in the way people perceive reality through the news, and that this shift is affecting the perception of what is true or false in the news. While this change has been dubbed "post-truth", without specifying exactly what it is, it could really be called anything, because what matters is not the name, but the phenomenon itself. [Capilla, 2021] "Fake news" has become a frequently used and emphasized term in the so-called "post-truth" era in which we now live. He is also much belittled: he is often blamed for disrupting election and referendum outcomes and distorting democratic public debate, often citing the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit referendum. [McGonagle, 2017]

Although the phenomena of fake news has a long history, its polit-

ical embodiment has only recently grown in popularity. Despite high levels of trust in society organizations and the media - and despite historically stable politics and media institutions - no Scandinavian country is immune to the threat of manipulated and false information. Phony news, deception, and misinformation have raised worries in Scandinavia and abroad about what is true and what is fake online. Sweden (49%) is the country where citizens are most concerned about fake news, followed by Norway (41%), and Denmark (41%). [Newman et al., 2018]

Fake news is a major source of concern for all parts of society, including government officials, policymakers, organizations, corporations, and citizens. By exploiting political, regional, and religious undercurrents, fake news is deliberately meant to sow a seed of distrust and intensify existing social and cultural dynamics. Fake news has a negative influence on individuals and society because it purposefully persuades consumers to accept false beliefs in order to further specific agendas. Organizations and companies face enormous hurdles as a result of the spread of fake news. In fact, fake news that promotes a specific viewpoint or opinion about a product, brand or organisation, which may not be true, can be deliberately designed

to mislead consumers. [Talwar et al., 2020]

Some authors [Moravková, 2020] claim that the media has a constructive influence, which must be acknowledged. First and foremost, they provide a forum for the expression of thoughts and they provide information (either accurately or distortedly) about occurrences in other regions of the world, allowing the general people to effectively reach the entire globe. On the internet, almost any aspect of human knowledge is only a few clicks away. Politicians and public figures are subjected to media pressure, and their reach allows them to act as political regulators. They investigate individual problems, including through investigative journalism, and assist in the detection and resolution of social issues. It is undeniable that the media promotes social values such as literacy and education from the start.

3. The first victim of the war is the truth

The importance of the media in shaping public opinion is probably most evident during wars, when reporters' reports are the only insight into events on the ground. Many wars first erupted as a form of propaganda and hate speech, which spread through the misuse of the media, making them a means of

war. The media largely maintains a stereotypical [Dašić, 2015; Dašić & Kostadinović, 2021] view of roles, positions of individual social groups and human relations in society.

Mass media are the fastest and easiest way to change the opinions, feelings, culture, and even the history of a nation. Instead of being a factor in promoting peace, today we have media that represent a means of preventing cooperation and tolerance, and media that strive for violence and war. Pokrajac [2010, 23] believes that the media today are only faithful servants of capital, their owners or political controllers, who are always in the function of specific interests. He is of the opinion that in order for modern media to be truly free and independent, they must be publicly owned and controlled from within, by the journalists themselves, and they are not dependent on owners and large companies. It is enough to have your own journalists, editors and other producers and disseminators of information that suit you. They do not have to be true. [Chomsky, 2002]

One of the most important whistleblowers in the media industry, the author of the book, "Journalists for Hire: How Politicians, Intelligence Agencies and High Finance Control Germany's Mass Media" Udo Ulfkotte admitted that he had been

writing and publishing articles under his own name for a very long time, written by agents of the CIA and other intelligence services, especially the German secret service. [Reljić, 2022] Disrespect for impartiality and professional standards is analysed in the book "Media Cleaning: Dirty Reporting" by the American journalist Peter Brock. Analysing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he calls the impartial behaviour of journalists "pack journalism" or "protective journalism". He explains the thesis that "pack journalism" in BiH, but in our area of the former Yugoslavia, was especially suitable for abuses, because the journalists themselves agreed in advance to the simplified system of black and white images. Affective reporting requires the use of motives that arouse the interest of viewers and are etched in their consciousness. Thus, in some western media, the story was forced about camps for mass rapes and concentration camps similar to Auschwitz, which were, as a rule, run by Serbs. The author states that journalists who did not agree to publish truths served in advance were marginalized or even attacked by colleagues. He cites the example of The New York Times correspondent David Binder, who dared to step out of the matrix of pre-divided roles. Binder wrote an article referring to the testimonies

of United Nations officials and military insiders who pointed out that Serbs did not fire projectiles at Sarajevo's Markale market. The "New York Times" refused to publish such a story, and another journalist was hired in his place, Roger Cohen, who had a much different view of the conflict in SFRY. [Dašić & Stamenković, 2015]

The Western media are heavily influenced by their governments when it comes to reporting on foreign policy or their own national interests. Western "free" media have shaped the picture of events in the former Yugoslavia in a way that suits their (public or secret) historical and ideological misconceptions, current or long-term political, economic, military or geostrategic interests. In the unfortunate events that took place in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, media reporters, who arrived from various quarters, were eager for sensations, in order to increase the viewership of their televisions or increase the circulation of their newspapers. Vuković [2014, 11-15] states that Western journalists tried to present events and reality in the second Yugoslavia as simply as possible. First of all, used to the simplified black-and-white story about "good" and "bad" guys for the sake of easier sales, according to the already formed cliché, they

represented what was happening in that way.

Lately, a large number of journalists, for the sake of publicity and sensationalism, are increasingly using exaggeration and lies. The reporter at NBC TV network, Brian Williams, the head of the most popular news program with over 9 million viewers, claimed that during the invasion of Iraq, he was in a helicopter hit by an enemy grenade, and in 2003 he was present in a hit plane that had to land because of that. Naturally, neither is true, so the question is what are the motives of a journalist who earns 10 million a year to do something like this. The mentioned journalist also had controversial reports during the great floods in New Orleans, when he claimed that "a large number of corpses are floating in front of the hotel". Fox News star Bill O'Reilly also used lies and exaggerated the danger he was in as a reporter, claiming that he found himself in El Salvador in the village where the massacre took place. Later, a video showed O'Reilly in a village with passers-by and some ruined houses. He needed exaggeration to have the credibility of a reporter who knows what war is, and is known as a big conspirator in the bombing of Serbia in 1999, when a Vietnam war veteran, who had over a hundred missions, appeared during the

show that after that experience he must criticize the "journalist who incites war." Bill O'Reilly earns \$20 million a year, so it is assumed that he is a victim of "infotainment", a standard that requires journalists to present even the worst news in a fun way, and to show events, especially war, as film plots, tense, dangerous and interesting. [Dašić & Ratković, 2015; Dašić, 2018]

Unfortunately, in addition to the military, a ferocious and propaganda battle has erupted in Ukraine's struggle. Kiev has been pumping out a steady stream of sophisticated propaganda geared at gaining public and government support in Western countries and bolstering the concept of Ukrainian military strength. The endeavor includes language guides, important statements, and hundreds of propaganda posters, some of which feature fascist imagery and even glorify Neo-Nazi leaders. Ukraine's public relations strategy is backed by an army of foreign political strategists, lobbyists in Washington, DC, and a network of intelligence-linked media outlets. The propaganda operation relies on an international army of public relations firms working directly with Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to wage information warfare. According to the unnamed source, more than 150 public relations firms have joined the misinformation campaign. The interna-

tional effort is being led by Nicky Regazzoni, co-founder of public relations firm PR Network, and Francis Ingham, a renowned public relations expert with deep ties to the UK government. One of the propaganda constructs distributed in the dossier is a video of the Snake Island incident, which was quickly proven false, in which Ukrainian border guards stationed on a small island were reported to have been killed after telling an approaching Russian warship that had urged them to surrender to "Go f*** yourself." The apparently slain soldiers, on the other hand, immediately reappeared alive and well, exposing their valiant stand to be a farce. Despite the fact that the story has been revealed to be false, the dossier includes a propaganda video that promotes it. [Cohen, 2022]

4. Social networks in the function of fake news

Fake news poses a serious threat to knowledge and democracy. [Fallis & Mathiesen, 2019] Disinformation in the media is not new. It has been with us since ancient times. A classic example of the spread of disinformation dates back to 1938, when Orson Welles' radio adaptation, the drama *War of the Worlds*, frightened about a million people. By adopting a radio news format through relatively new radio tech-

nology, along with actors playing the roles of reporters, residents, experts and government officials, radio drama director Orson Welles has found a smart way to tell the story of the Martian invasion. While his intention was to entertain listeners, the radio adaptation took the form of live news, at a time when radio was the main source of information in the United States.

Social media and interpersonal communication, which are generated by the translation of information technology into communication networks, have virtualized the new media notion that arose in the 1970s. Online interactions have grown considerably more desired, in addition to the establishment of too many social networks throughout time. As a result, personal ideas and emotions have taken the place of facts and evidence. We live in the information age, in which truths have given way to lies, giving rise to the term "post-truth."

Because of the advancements in information technology over the previous 20 years, social media is increasingly being used for news announcements and follow-up, particularly on mobile devices. This has resulted in a significant rise in the amount of data produced. Given the proliferation of information /news sharing pages on social me-

dia platforms around the world, as well as the sharing/posting of excessive amounts of information or news, many news sources must be verified after being accessed. Because there is no accuracy filtration procedure in the spread of information on social media, unverifiable news can reach a large number of people in a short period of time. Nowadays, it is important that users check the reality of such information in social media. [Cibaroğlu, 2019]

Traditional media have gained competition on social networks, and high-speed Internet transmission is a great challenge for those whose until recently, exclusive job was to inform the public. In Sweden, the public service does not chase ratings, has a whole channel dedicated to culture and a channel specialized in content intended for children, where the very thought of any political influence or pressure on editorial policy is rejected. Germany remembers media skirmishes about the cause of the accident and the crash of the "Germanwings" plane in which 150 people died. However, anger towards the young co-pilot is not so much present among the Germans, but above all towards the media that were eager for sensationalism.

The digitization of news has called into question the traditional defini-

tion of news. Online platforms provide space for journalists to reach a mass audience. Through their accounts on social networks, users can post information, photos, videos and narratives about events, the so-called with valuable first-hand news, Twitter, for example, has become the perfect platform to quickly spread the word about the latest news. Not only has social media changed the distribution of news. Now, a tweet, which at most has 140 characters, is considered news, especially if it comes from people in power. [Tandoc et al., 2017]

The place of Veles in Macedonia in 2016 became the heart of the fake news scandal. Boris and his friends produced more than a hundred fake pages that were supposed to benefit Donald Trump, the US presidential candidate. Probably the most quoted news is about how Pope Francis supported Trump in the 2016 election. Boris from Macedonia allegedly made more than 200 fake Facebook pages with the team, so he publicly confessed about it in an article for Wired. Some of the information he published seemed so credible that a large number of journalists passed it on. The lie became the truth without anyone having to call it the truth a thousand times and without a special ministry of propaganda or censorship. The social networks have ful-

filled their purpose as well. The notion of fake news soon became ubiquitous, largely because it was inaugurated by Donald Trump himself, accusing the media of reporting that he was the creator of fake news. [Pangrazi, 2018]

According to recent literature, misinformation and fake news have become a major global concern since the commencement of the COVID-19 epidemic, affecting all citizens. However, as multiple studies have revealed, the method in which it reaches young people is exceedingly disturbing. Misinformation and fake news have been intrinsically human challenges since the dawn of time, but the magnitude of the problem and its ease of propagation through social media necessitate immediate action by colleges and stakeholders (media and policymakers). Current civilizations rely on massive volumes of information and knowledge circulating on the Internet, which are developed not only through traditional ways but also by all types of users becoming producers, resulting in fake news and disinformation. This situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic to an unprecedented extent through social media, with special concern among young people. In one study, [Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021] results show that young Spanish people use networks for information,

showing a surprising lack of trust in social networks as the media they consume the most. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, they have consumed the most content relating to politics, entertainment, humor, and music. On the other side, there is widespread skepticism about politicians, the media, and journalists. The conclusion is that media literacy is still more important than ever, but with the added difficulty of mistrust, it may be time to reconsider.

As a result, the media plays a critical role for all nations. However, as previously noted, the media may be a terrible weapon because it can injure individuals far and wide. As a result, media ethics and media workers adhering to an ethical code of conduct and developing integrity are critical. As a result, both as professionals and as individuals, they must act ethically. The media world-wide, share certain ethical norms and values but cultural and ethical traditions of a country can also help strengthen belief in these norms which can thus lead to putting them into practice with right good will. [New, 2017]

5. Conclusion

The media have evolved into a stage for a wide range of public life events; they are a source of power, a possible means of influencing and controlling the people, and an

instrument for promoting one's own interests. They operate much like a factory, creating their own messages, media personalities, opinion leaders, and pseudo-experts.

Fake news is actually a much narrower term than the concept of disinformation. The goal of fake news, which is actually based on non-existent or distorted "facts", is to deceive and manipulate the audience. That is why it is very important to learn to recognize fake news because sometimes we ourselves - without checking such "news" which is not really news - become part of the circle of spreading fake news in public, especially through social networks

where almost all of us have open personal profiles.

Only by educating oneself and actively working with knowledge and information sources can people fight ideological influence. Sceptical and critical thinking, information verification, and active thinking, we believe, will be the most powerful weapons in this uneven conflict. To change from a passive, yes-saying consumer of media messages to a critical evaluator, one must exert personal effort. As Aristotle put it, a teacher must be able to doubt first and foremost. Because spiritual doubts lead to revelation of the truth.

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LAŽNE VESTI KAO NEIZOSTAVNI DEO MEDIJSKOG DISKURSA

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Apstrakt: Lažne vesti i glasine su postale učestale u današnjem svetu. Širenje takvih informacija samo su pomogli i ubrzali mediji i moderna informaciona i komunikaciona tehnologija, sa dalekosežnim posledicama. Tradicionalni mediji gube poverenje publike, a sve više ljudi dobija vesti od svojih vršnjaka preko društvenih medija. Ne samo da su društvene mreže promenile način na koji se vesti distribuiraju, već su dovele u pitanje i dugogodišnje stavove o tome kako bi vesti trebalo da izgledaju. Jedno je sigurno: ovakva situacija se ne može održati; mora se razviti nova paradigma kako bi se vratilo poverenje u medije i informacije koje oni pružaju.

Ključne reči: mediji, lažne vesti, komunikacija, post istina