

DEZINFORMARE: MAI MULT DECÂT FAKE NEWS

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În ultimii ani, termenul de știri false a ajuns în prim-planul mass-mediei și al dezbaterii publice. Știrile construite care nu răspund efectiv la realitate pot avea impact și pot crea complicații asupra vieții politice, economice sau sociale a indivizilor; deoarece sunt adesea fabricate cu scopul de a înșela publicul. Dar pentru a percepe problema, trebuie mai întâi să elucidăm conceptul de știri false, pentru ca apoi, în baza pătrunderii fenomenului, în realitate – destul de complex, să putem concepe strategii pentru a le limita. În prezentul articol sunt evidențiate trei categorii ce țin de prejudiciile aduse și de falsitatea știrilor, care, în opinia noastră, pot contribui la înțelegerea mai clară a subiectului în cauză. Aceste categorii sunt informarea defectuoasă, dezinformarea și dezinformarea neintenționată, având o afinitate între ele, dar și unele diferențe principiale care generează interpretări diferite pentru fiecare dintre ele.

Cuvinte-cheie: mass-media, fake news, poluare informațională, dezinformare, media falsitate.

DISINFORMATION. MORE THAN FAKE NEWS

In recent years the term fake news has come to the forefront of the media and public debate. Constructed news that does not actually respond to reality can have an impact and create complications on the political, economic or social life of individuals, because it is often fabricated in order to deceive the public. But in order to perceive the problem, we must first understand the concept of fake news, so that we can then devise strategies to limit it. In this article we can see three categories about the Harm and Falseness of news, which in our opinion help to have a clearer picture of the subject. These categories are Malinformation, Disinformation and Misinformation, which have an affinity between them, but also some basic differences that create different treatment needs for each one of them.

Keywords: media, fake news, information pollution, disinformation, media falseness.

DÉSINFORMATION: PLUS QUE DE FAUSSES NOUVELLES

Ces dernières années, le terme de fausses nouvelles est venu au premier plan des médias et du débat public. Des nouvelles construites qui ne répondent pas réellement à la réalité peuvent avoir un impact et créer des complications sur la vie politique, économique ou sociale des individus, car elles sont souvent fabriquées dans le but de tromper le public. Mais pour percevoir le problème, il faut d'abord élucider le concept de fake news, pour qu'ensuite, en fonction de la pénétration du phénomène, en réalité – assez complexe, on puisse concevoir des stratégies pour les limiter. Dans cet article, trois catégories liées aux dommages causés et à la fausseté de la nouvelle sont mises en évidence, ce qui, à notre avis, peut contribuer à une meilleure compréhension du sujet en question. Ces catégories sont l'information défectueuse, la désinformation et la désinformation involontaire, ayant une affinité entre elles, mais aussi certaines différences de principe qui génèrent des interprétations différentes pour chacune d'elles.

Mots-clés: médias, fausses nouvelles, pollution de l'information, désinformation, fausseté des médias.

ДЕЗИНФОРМАЦИЯ: БОЛЬШЕ, ЧЕМ ФЕЙКОВЫЕ НОВОСТИ

В последние годы термин «фейковые новости» вышел на передний план средств массовой информации и общественных дебатов. Сфабрикованные новости, которые на самом деле не соответствуют действительности, могут повлиять на политическую, экономическую или социальную жизнь людей и создать осложнения, поскольку они часто сфабрикованы с целью обмана общественности. Но для того, чтобы осознать проблему, мы должны сначала прояснить концепцию фейковых новостей, чтобы затем, на основе проникновения явления в реальность — довольно сложную, — мы могли разработать стратегии по его ограничению. В данной статье выделены три категории, связанные с причиненным ущербом и ложностью сообщения, что, на наш взгляд, может способствовать более ясному пониманию рассматриваемого предмета. Этими категориями являются дезинформация, преднамеренная и непреднамеренная дезинформация, имеющие между собой сходство, но также и некоторые принципиальные различия, порождающие различные интерпретации для каждой из них.

Ключевые слова: СМИ, фейковые новости, информационное загрязнение, дезинформация, ложь в СМИ.

Introduction

In the 20th century the term disinformation comes from the translation of Russian „Dezinformatsiya” [1; 2; 3]. The Soviet secret services initially used the word „Maskirovka”, which had the meaning of Military Deception [4]. M. Пасепа was a former Romanian intelligence officer, and in his book he explains that the word „Dezinformatsiya” was invented by Stalin, who chose a French-Sounding Title, to make world public opinion believe that it comes from the Western world [3]. He says „Disinformation” was used as Warfare Tactic by the Stalinist government during World War II and later by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The GPU, a precursor to the KGB, was the first organization to use the term misinformation for Intelligence Tactics [5]. The most crucial part of these tactics is Media Manipulation, as Vladimir Putin suggested in his discussion with Larry King on CNN: „they have the purpose of gathering information, synthesizing it and presenting it for the consumption of decision makers” [6]. Putin has excelled at using the manipulative potential of the media to consolidate power inside Russia and, increasingly, to wage an information war against the West.

James Carey reports that we are not just talking about communication and information, but „a portrayal of the contending forces in the world” [7, p. 16]. We thus realize that the media can be manipulated or in general used by various strong interests because they are the means of accessing power to public opinion and popular feeling. But there is a significant feature of the media that is about the transmission of the news today. In the last fifty years, with the appearance and dissemination of television and especially after 2000 with the Internet, people have much easier access to information. An informative environment supported by ICT’s (Information and Communication Technology) has been formed, which offers rapid transmission of information and news. The user with new technologies can produce their own quality content in a cheap way and publish it, while information can be transmitted in real time through social media.

Disinformation: the essential features

It was observed, in fact, „what we see unfolding right before our eyes is nothing less than Moore’s Law applied to the distribution of misinformation: an exponential growth of available technology coupled with a rapid collapse of costs” [8]. So, just

like information, misinformation can penetrate the social masses at greater speed and in a wider range. Taking advantage of the opportunity the internet presents for collaboration, communication, and peer production, these groups target vulnerabilities in the news media ecosystem to increase the visibility of and audience for their messages [9]. In addition to its positive side, the Internet has become a breeding ground for false information [10, p. 591]. The immediacy of transmission of information and the interactivity provided by the Internet and the ICTS today makes us approach in a slightly different way to misinformation and false news [11, 12, 13] distinguish three dimensions of Harm and Falseness, describe the phenomenon of misinformation as Informational Disorder and divide the misinformation into three categories:

Malinformation: Genuine/true/reality-based information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

Disinformation: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country.

Misinformation: Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm.

It seems to be judicious to try to explain the phenomenon by the action of polluting the informational space, to describe it with the term Information Pollution [14], but referring only to the storm of useless information that the media offers to the individual daily. That is, it focus on the usability of information. As we have seen above, however, there is a wider distinction and misinformation is divided into three categories, depending on whether the news is true and what are the intentions of the news transmitter. As the author of a study by the Data Research Institute notes, „Recent controversies over „fake news”, and concerns over entering a „post-fact” era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically

inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture. Journalists, commentators, policymakers, and scholars have a variety of words at their disposal — propaganda, disinformation, misinformation, and so on — to describe the accuracy and relevance of media content. These terms can carry a lot of baggage. They have each accrued different cultural associations and historical meanings, and they can take on different shades of meaning in different contexts. These differences may seem small, but they matter. The words we choose to describe media manipulation can lead to assumptions about how information spreads, who spreads it, and who receives it. These assumptions can shape what kinds of interventions or solutions seem desirable, appropriate, or even possible” [15, p. 1]. It is precisely in this context that „the perception of the media as an equivocal mirror” [16, p. 237] is justified.

In this way, we describe characteristically the variety of misinformation definitions and how much value it has to understand it, in order to face it and deal with it.

Malinformation

We are talking about malinformation when genuine/true/reality-based information is shared to cause harm to a person, organization, social group or country, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere [11, p. 5]. A document that should stay away from public dialogue, for example, is a secret report by the anti-terrorist service. The content of this report should be kept secret, so that the Anti-terrorist Service will operate more effectively. It is important to emphasize the existence of intent. Malinformation is a kind of information that causes or has the intention of causing damage and hurting the public interest. It can also turn against persons, without public interest, that is, talking about personal harm. As we can see, Malinformation is based on real

facts, as opposed to the Misinformation that contains untrue information. Also, malinformation is malicious information, as there is an intention of damage, while the Misinformation does not have that intention. Malinformation is a little different from disinformation, as we are dealing with the authenticity of the news. Malinformation, as we said, contains true information/news, while Disinformation is false. Nevertheless, both have the intention of causing damage. Therefore, malinformation and disinformation have a form of affinity, as we are talking about malicious information. To better understand Malinformation, let's look at a more detailed example. In March 2017, Wikileaks released secret CIA documents. This series of documents was named „Vault 7” and described the CIA's operational capabilities for electronic espionage and electronic warfare, and also reported how they monitored the 2012 French Presidential Election. Among other things, they revealed the ability to hack web browsers (Google Chrome, Mozilla, Microsoft Edge), Smartphones (iOS, Android), Cars and Smart TV's.

All of these documents or at least a big part of them are considered authentic, as CIA officials themselves and the US government acknowledged it in their statements. In addition, Donald Trump himself said that „The Cia was hacked, and a lot of things taken” and the director of the service described the Wikileaks a threat to national security. People who released Vault 7 clearly had some financial / personal / professional /political /social incentive to do it and probably wanted to cause damage / problem to either the US government, the state mechanism or some persons, publicizing confidential documents referring to real facts. That is, we have a classic case of Malinformation.

Misinformation

Misinformation is described ordinarily as contentious information reflecting disagreement

among people, false information that can „mislead people even if unintentionally promoted or mistakenly endorsed as being true” [17, p. 368]. In a more general definition, it is shown that misinformation is well-formed and meaningful data (semantic content) that is false [18]. Misinformation does not arise through the intention to deceive the users. Misinformation is subsequently adding inadequate information to knowledge communication, which, in turn leads to wrong idea and knowledge construction among people [19]. This is characterized as „inaccurate information” [20, p. 2], but they do not mention the issue of intent, so the definition is incomplete. Misinformation is conveyed in the honest but mistaken belief that the relayed incorrect facts are true [10]. Someone can spread misinformation innocently by saying or writing things that are untrue while believing them to be true [21]. Inaccurate and misleading information is misinformation when the source has made an honest mistake [22, p. 1] and „is misleading information that is intended to be (or at least foreseen to be) misleading” [23, p. 407]. Misinformation is information whose inaccuracy is unintentional and can spread when journalists misinterpret or fail to independently verify a source's claims [15, p. 2]. According to the most complete definition, Misinformation is false information, but not created with the intention of causing harm to a person, social group, organization or country. As we observe, Misinformation is not malicious information. The news transmitter does not know that this is wrong or false and thus he distributes it to the receivers, believing that he is rightly informing them. Also, it is particularly worrying that in the first phase, the person tends to believe any information/news he encounters and this contributes to his rapid dissemination. We mean the rapid dissemination of false news. According to Southwell et al., people who encounter misinformation tend to believe it, at least initially; many media systems often do not

block or censor many types of misinformation before it appears in content available to large audiences; countering misinformation once it has enjoyed wide exposure can be a resource-intensive effort [17].

A classic example of misinformation was a satellite photo, with forest fires in Australia. On January 5, 2020 a photo was uploaded to social media depicting a huge part of Australia burning. The photo went immediately viral and was republished by thousands of users of social networks (including celebrities with millions of followers), who of course did not want to damage someone, but to inform people and raise awareness of the tragic event. The next day, however, the truth began to become known. As it turned out, it was a composition image of satellite data purporting to show fire-affected areas for the past four weeks, with the 3D render of the image giving an exaggerated effect (and also includes routine dry season burn offs in the north). However, many have shared it believing it shows the scale of fires from space. Thus, a false news spread on a global scale, but without bad intention.

Disinformation

Disinformation is simply misinformation purposefully conveyed to mislead the receiver into believing that it is information [18, p. 260]. Also D. Fallis in „A Conceptual Analysis of Disinformation” reports that disinformation is misleading information that is intended to be (or at least foreseen to be) misleading [24]. In extent, he says that the standard dictionary definition of disinformation is “deliberately misleading information announced publicly or leaked by a government or especially by an intelligence agency”. It thus pays particular attention to the misinformation that hides political motives, as it comes mainly from state agencies (government, secret services). Some researchers use the term „deceptive signal” [25, p. 74] and reports that „if it benefits the sender at the expense

of the receiver, we will not shrink from following the biological literature in calling it deception” [25, p. 80]. The term deception contains the intention of an action at the expense of another, so we have an intentional deception, which means disinformation. The disinformations intentionally want to misdirect, deceive or delude and it is not clear who the actual author is, there is no actual reference to the information source [26, p. 1515]. The term is generally used to describe an organized campaign to deceptively distribute untrue material intended to influence public opinion [21]. There is the definition of disinformation as distribution, assertion, or dissemination of false, mistaken, or misleading information in an intentional, deliberate, or purposeful effort to mislead, deceive, or confuse. It might therefore be described as “misinformation with an attitude” [27, p. 231]. Disinformation denotes false facts that are conceived in order to deliberately deceive or betray an audience [10]. By analyzing disinformation themselves, they also report the term „bullshit”, where the agent’s primary purpose is not to mislead an audience into believing false facts, but rather to convey a certain impression of himself. The disinformation could possibly be more informative than misinformation [20], perhaps because any reveal or implication may be deliberate and they give the following example: consider an instance in which a speaker provides partially distorted information to the receiver (e.g., „The new phone comes out next year”, when, in fact, the new phone comes out this year). In this case, the receiver is partially informed about the fact that a new phone is coming out. Disinformation may reveal the malicious intent of the speaker. If the receiver happens to know that the new phone comes out this year, she might suspect that the speaker is intending to deceive her. Here, the receiver is informed about the potential intent of the speaker, which is external to the message actually being delivered.

With this example they want to show that there are cases where misinformation or what we call false news can contain some true/genuine information on trying to deceive the receiver (of course this rarely happens). According to the most complete definition, disinformation is false information and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country. As we can see, Disinformation and Malinformation have an affinity, in terms that in both cases there is the intention of the transmitter to damage or deceive someone. On the other hand, if we look at it from the point of view of information quality, disinformation and misinformation are similar, because they both contain false or incorrect information. Regardless of all, we can say that Disinformation is the worst and most toxic category of information, as it includes all the negatives of the other two categories. On the one hand, the transmitter shares false or incorrect news, on the other hand he does it deliberately and with malicious motives, in order to deceive the public for his own benefit.

An example of Disinformation is Saddam Hussein's attempt during the Gulf War to use television as a means to show that foreigners held in Iraq were treated with courtesy and hospitality. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein directed a press conference with a group of British hostages with their children. Dressed in political clothing, he caressed the children and asked them if they were given enough food, if they had toys and praised the role of the children in defending peace. While apparently he intended to reassure the Western viewers and push Western governments to abstain from military actions, the press conference was treated by many in the Western world as a shameful use of hostages, held despite their will [28]. Hussein was using the media to make black propaganda in his favor, many described him as „predator of press freedom” and report that the Iraqi regime used every means to control the press and silence dissenting voices. Uday

Hussein, Saddam's oldest son, controlled about a dozen newspapers in the country as well as Iraq's most influential television and radio stations. It is characteristic that after the fall of Saddam, instead of a few, tightly-controlled media outlets, Iraqis had a choice of hundreds of printed publications and dozens of radio stations and television channels, broadcasting from both inside and outside the country. We thus observe the manipulation of some media by public actors and their use to produce stretched and false news, deliberately. The purpose in the case that we just saw is the personal interest and the harm/deception of another (the public opinion of foreign states). In this situation, we have a classic case of disinformation.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of misinformation, which in recent years, with the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT's) is created and spreads easier and faster than in the past. Misinformation creates a variety of problems on a large scale, in various groups of citizens within society, hindering proper information and undermining democracy. For this reason it is treated as a public problem and efforts are being made by various countries around the world to reduce it or to eliminate it. This is precisely where dangers and problems arise: „on the one hand, the mass media creates a new and true public space. On the other hand, they can create, at the same time, a false public space, which actually diminishes the potential of the mass media as a constitutive and comforting element of the public space” [29, pp. 10-11].

Developing a common framework of strategies, which will effectively regulate the various types of misinformation, without compromising freedom of expression, is a major challenge for democracy and the European acquis. Serious questions also arise, as government surveillance and management

of Internet content, combined with the use of mass surveillance and data collection methods, in the name of national security and protection against terrorist threats, can be considered the alibi for the imposition of censorship by the state. Greater transparency is sought in the policies of Internet service providers (Google, Facebook et al.) to combat the misinformation that takes place through their platforms. Particular emphasis is placed on adequate information regarding the content protocols provided, and in particular on political advertising, as these ads influence people and produce a political effect.

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