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FAKE POSTS, REAL IMPACT: DECODING THE THE LANGUAGE OF PROPAGANDA

Introduction. Today, Ukraine and Ukrainians are in a state of war, not only physical but also informational and psychological, which, against the background of the exponentially rapid development of artificial intelligence, is taking the form of a so-called cognitive war, the main task of which is to destroy people not as a physical force, but as a society, utilising disinformation and fakes.

The aim is to explore the meaning and causes of disinformation, analyse examples and choose methods of detecting and avoiding fakes.

Disinformation is a method of psychological influence based on the intention to provide the target with information that misleads

them about the actual state of affairs and creates a distorted reality. It disseminates distorted, incomplete or deliberately false information to achieve propaganda, military (misleading the enemy), commercial or other goals. ***Fake*** news is a type of disinformation, a deliberate presentation of false information. It can be perceived as a joke - a deliberate distortion of facts to evoke positive emotions and laughter, but fake news increasingly turns into misleading disinformation. Its relevance today, in the context of the information war with Russia, is undeniable, as fake news aimed at destabilising the situation in our country is produced by the russian media almost daily (Semen, 2016).

From time to time, seemingly popular and reputable media outlets disseminate information from false or unverified sources or even create and disseminate false news. According to some journalists, such actions of publications and news agencies are intended to increase website traffic, "boost" ratings, distract the attention of mass readers from more important news and affect the reputation of political figures [2].

There are many reasons why disinformation spreads so quickly - according to some studies, even faster than accurate information.

One reason is that people are more likely to share a statement if it confirms their pre-existing beliefs - regardless of its accuracy. This cognitive bias explains why real people spread even more disinformation than bots. One study, for example, found that only 15% of news-sharers spread up to 40% of fake news (Horban, 2015). This statistic is sobering - but it also has its advantages. Since individuals are responsible for spreading so much disinformation, it is up to us - to be more careful about what we "like" and "share" - to help change this situation.

When detecting disinformation, the first step is to be aware of our habits - for example, that we are very quick to believe what we want to believe. Research shows that a tendency to think analytically and reflectively can inoculate us against believing fake news. For example, the fake news stories about the war in Ukraine that have been gaining momentum on X (formerly Twitter), especially after Elon Musk acquired it, claim that the entire war was fabricated. Some sources in the US cite the alleged lack of footage from the front line as evidence. One commentator on TRUTH NOW tried to present the war as a theatrical game.

The analysis of content in X by keywords confirmed the high prevalence of such fakes. Fortunately, they do not have many likes and shares. However, X is not the only source of fake information. However, we all know that the war in Ukraine is well documented. In addition to eyewitness accounts and their own stories, global media have collected much footage from the Ukrainian frontline. There is also evidence from governments and agencies worldwide that confirms that the war is real.

This example once again confirms that information should be carefully checked. Posts on Telegram, Facebook, X, or Instagram should not be trusted, especially now, in the context of the war with russia, and fake news should be distinguished from trustworthy news.

Let us look at the most common 'keywords' of the pro-russian narrative promoted by the authors of online publications in publicly available telegram channels. First of all, russian media falsely call Ukrainians *'nazis'* or '*fascists'* to discredit the Ukrainian government and military. russian propaganda often frames military actions in Ukraine as efforts to '*liberate*' regions from oppressive regimes, portraying Russia as a saviour. "*Civil war*" conveys the claim that the

conflict in Ukraine is an internal civil war rather than the result of russian aggression, intending to deflect responsibility from Russia. '*Denazification*' is used to justify military action against Ukraine, allegedly to eliminate Nazi elements, although such claims are not substantiated. '*Brotherly peoples*' emphasises the idea of a shared history and culture between russians and Ukrainians and is used to deny the sovereignty and separateness of the Ukrainian people. '*Kyiv - the mother of russian cities*' as a historical reference is used to justify russia's claims to Ukrainian territories and influence on Ukrainian politics. In general, many unique words have the flavour of russian rhetoric of the liberator and big brother. Therefore, we should be particularly attentive to such triggers and not allow the information bubble to grow due to our consumerist outlook. We should also ask more questions about the origin and purpose of such narratives.

Roman Holubovskyi, a well-known Ukrainian blogger and editor of the fake news website UA Review, says that the most challenging thing to recognise is specially created disinformation, often produced by russian media today (Holubovskyi, 2019).

Therefore, to avoid becoming a victim of fake information, the

following rules should be followed.

1. Be sceptical about any news on the Internet or posts on social media, especially shocking and scandalous reports.

2. Look for the source of the message. If the news refers to a specific person, it is worth checking whether this information is available on their social media accounts. If it concerns an organisation or political party, you should check its official websites.

3. Distinguish facts from comments.

4. Check photo information with the option ‘Search this image on Google’. Also, look at the date the photo was published and what it shows. For example, it is not uncommon for fighting in Syria or Iraq to be presented as happening in Donbas.

This algorithm aligns with the strategy for verifying online information proposed by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield called **SIFT** (screening in the process), which consists of four steps, each denoted by a different letter of the acronym (Caulfield, 2019). “S” stands for “Stop”. Stop and think; “I” stands for "Investigate". Investigate the source; “F” stands for “Find”. Find better coverage (There is also a *Google Fact Check* system that only looks for

information on sites that specialise in fact-checking.); “T” stands for “Trace”. Trace the source of the information.

Conclusions. Journalists' carelessness, negligence, unwillingness to verify information or even lack of time sometimes lead them to believe in fake news and, worse, to spread it. Moreover, the audience, unfortunately, was not ready to verify information on their own and to be able to filter it. Moreover, the Ukrainian media have not always been able to refute information, let alone apologise to their readers. Therefore, the recipient needs to be able to verify information to avoid being deceived by the media, which requires reading the news from several trusted sources and recognising lies. We must look for the source, distinguish facts from comments, learn how to use Google Photos and learn English.

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