



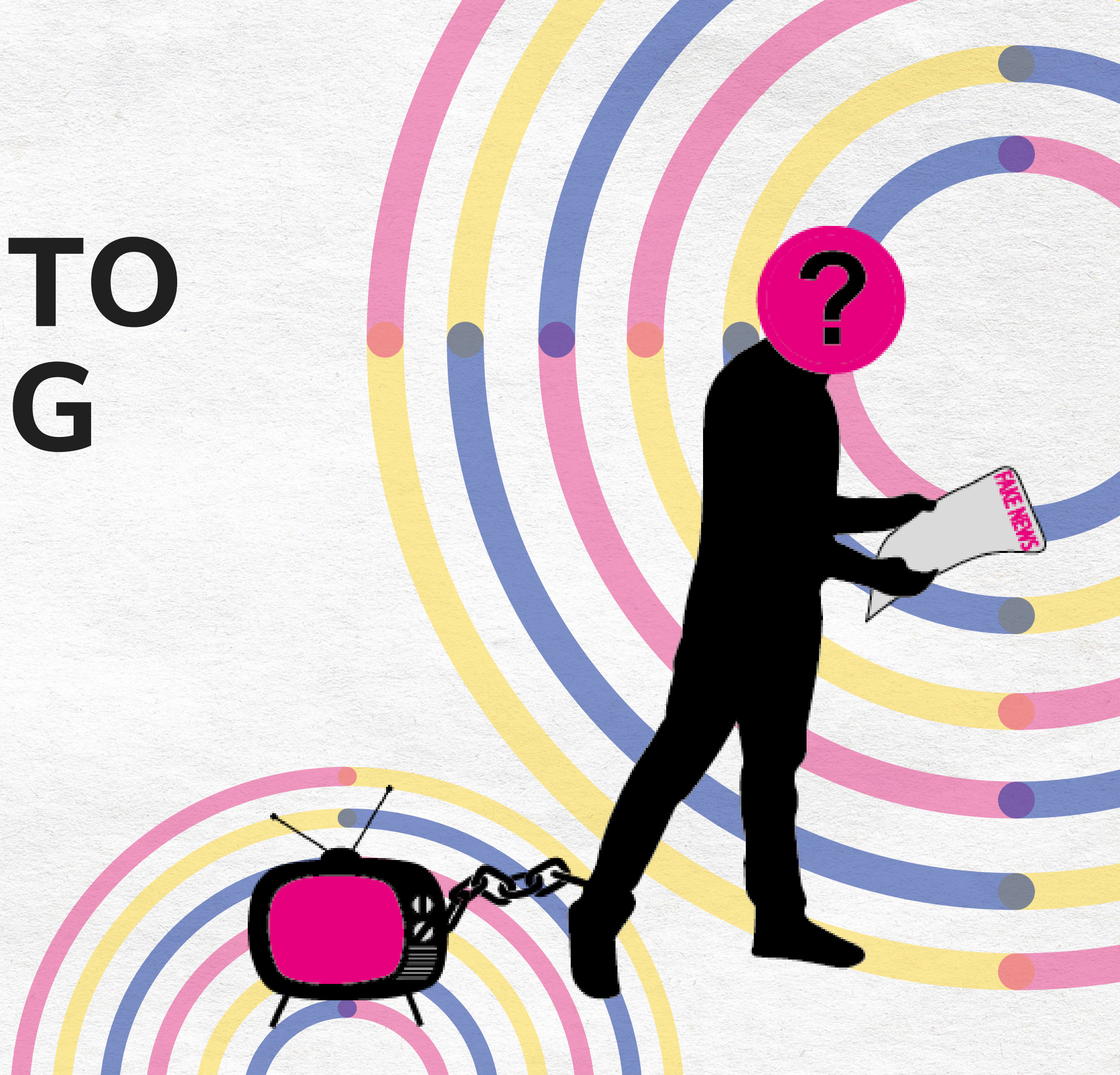
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STRUCTURED LEARNING
FOR AWARENESS IN MEDIA

2021 GUIDE TO CONQUERING FAKE NEWS

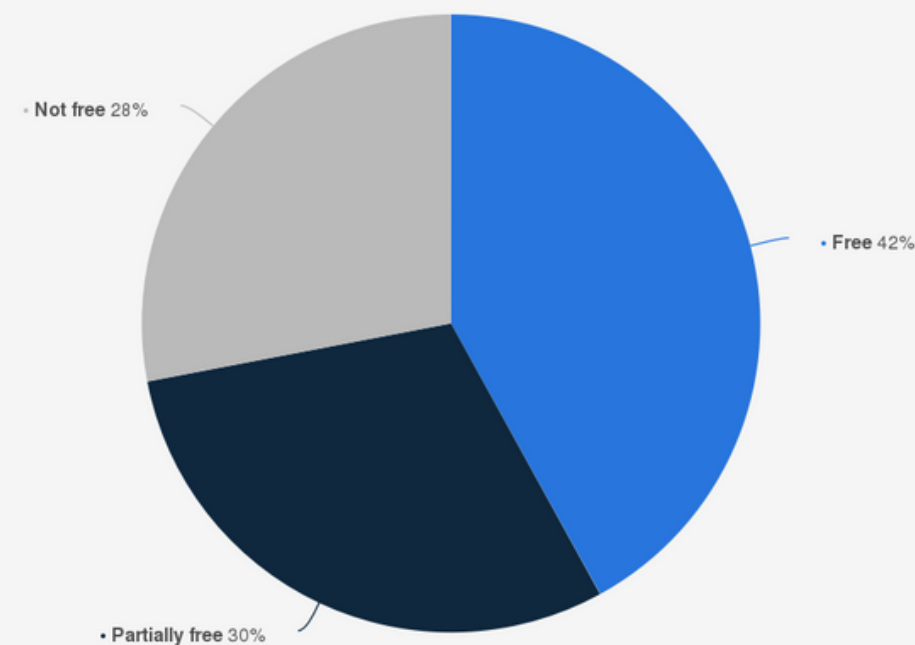
A **SLAM** INITIATIVE



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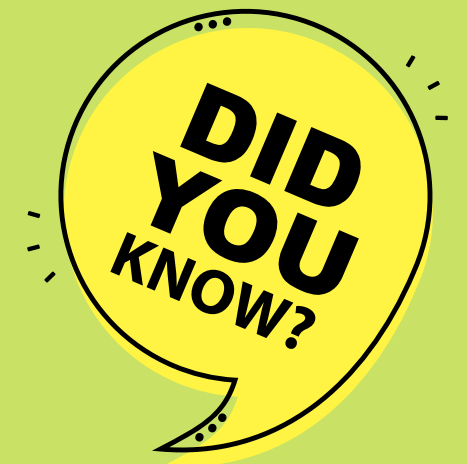
Degree of press freedom worldwide in 2020, by level of freedom



Source:
Freedom House
© Statista 2021

Additional Information:
Worldwide; 2020; out of 195 countries

"In 2020, press freedom was enjoyed by 42 percent of countries worldwide. However, this corresponds to only 20 percent of the global population. In 30 percent of countries there was partial press freedom and 28 percent had no press freedom at all."



Source: Statista, 2021



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WELCOME

The SLAM Manual for Fake News Detection is one of several tools developed throughout a 2 year long effort of all those involved in the implementation of this project. The content of this manual ranges from definition of fake news, significant examples of them and ultimately a variety of strategies designed to decrease their influence. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the very first step, and this manual represents the first step in our journey towards a world free of news manipulation.



What is SLAM?

Structured Learning for Awareness in Media

Structured Learning for Awareness in Media” (SLAM) aims at enhancing young people’s awareness and critical thinking on the role of Mass Media as a challenge and precondition for more inclusive societies towards migrants and refugees.



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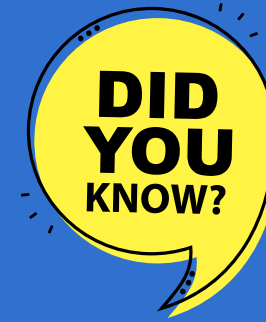
The project is involving 7 partner organizations from both EU and non-EU countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey.



#SLAM



Fake News Detection Manual



Did you know?

An MIT study found that false stories were **70%** more likely to get retweeted on Twitter in comparison to accurate ones.

44% of people admit to being deceived by fake news at least once. (IPSOS Global Survey 2019)

With over **1.8** billion active users per month in **2016**, Facebook accounted for **20%** of total traffic to reliable websites and up to **50%** of all the traffic to fake news sites.



#SLAM

The Facts (Part 1)



- The occurrence of fake news has become a major problem with online news sources. A distinction amongst three types of fake news can be made on a conceptual level: serious fabrications, hoaxes, and satire. Serious fabrications are usually news items written on false information, including celebrity gossip. Hoaxes refer to false information provided via social media, often syndicated by traditional news platforms. As for satire, it refers to using humour in the news to imitate real news, but through irony and absurdity.
- Research has shown that people's confidence in their ability to find information online made them overly confident about whether that information is accurate. In the other case, it was shown that dogmatism and religious fundamentalism, which led people to believe certain fake news, were associated with a lack of a critical and questioning mindset.
- It is important to note that not all news and information published by unofficial news sources is necessarily false. However, many unofficial sources have been extensively reported as unreliable by well-known debunking sites.
- There are also certain psychological phenomena that hinder our ability to decode fake news. We will mention some of them below.
- People are usually inclined to make conclusions about the truthfulness of things they hear, based on how familiar those things sound. This means that the more familiar something seems to an individual, the more inclined they are to believe it without checking the legitimacy of the source from which the information came from.



The Facts (Part 2)



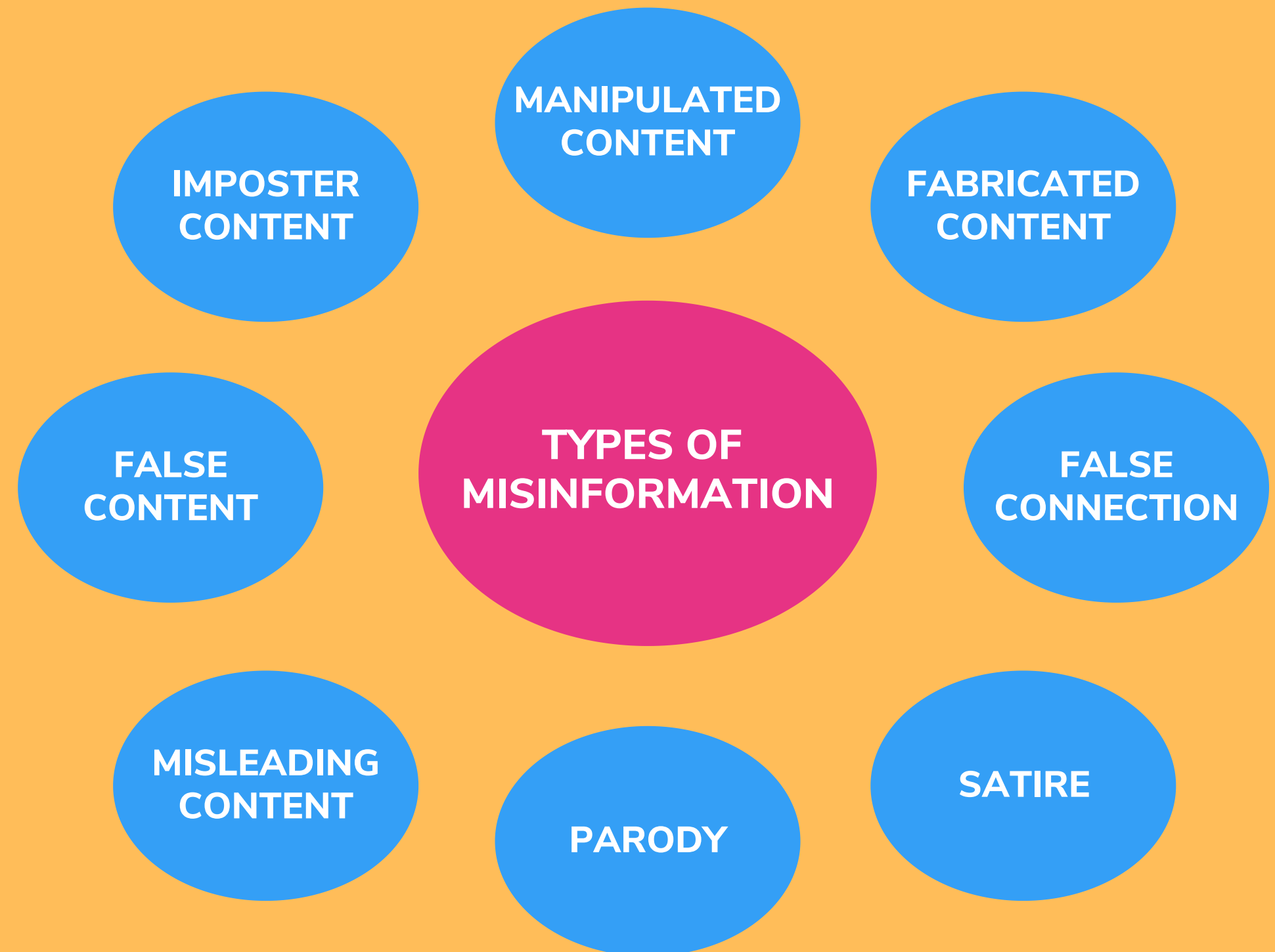
- Some individuals are likely to conclude that something is true just because it does not fit their expectations of how imaginative the provider of information can get in inventing a piece of news.
- It is a normal occurrence to question the motivation that lies in spreading fake news. Reasons for such a practice can be different, but most often have something to do with gaining easy advertisement. The type of advertisement related to the spreading of fake news is commonly called “clickbait” and examples of this are numerous. One of the examples is “Seventeen celebrities that have had botched plastic surgery... You won’t believe number 11.” Titles like this are strictly focused on advertisement and have no real value as actual news.
- Another thing involved in believability to be aware of is the availability heuristic. Things that are easily brought to the forefront of memory are given special status (Tversky and Kahneman 1974).
- The process of drawing conclusions regarding pieces of information, in a way that is similar to an individual’s personal set of beliefs is called confirmation bias. People are more likely to believe facts if their belief system is reinforced by said facts. Psychologically speaking, this is a heuristic by which agreement of articles with one’s own personal opinion reinforces faith in its truthfulness, while disagreement causes doubt in how true the article is.
- Becoming aware of these tactics utilized by those who spread fake news, is instrumental in recognizing them, especially due to the fact that fake news is created to be complementary to people’s beliefs and feel like they are factual.



Types of Misinformation

1) False Connection

This particular type of fake news is usually accidental and happens due to misplacement of visual aids and captions which are otherwise unrelated to the content of the article. Sometimes however, they are used on purpose in order to draw readership.



2) Satire/Parody

Content which is purposefully created to make fun of issues it refers to. However, it needs to be written in a way which guarantees obvious recognition of its nature, in order to avoid it being shared as real news.

3) Misleading Content

The type of content which is framed in such a way that it refers to individuals or details which have no relation to the actual content of the story. This usually occurs due to lack of journalistic ability or influence of politics, or simply due to labeling opinions as news.

4) False Context

Content which is valid and true, but due to falsification of context, loses its credibility. It usually occurs when quotes are misattributed or the dates are used incorrectly. This type of content occasionally appears on sites which do not extensively check facts, and is clearly aimed at influencing the public opinion.

5) Imposter Content

The impersonation of reliable sources in order to draw readership or hurt the reliability of the source that is being impersonated. This is the most often utilized tactic in propaganda and by those whose main goal is to turn a profit without concern over the reliability of information.

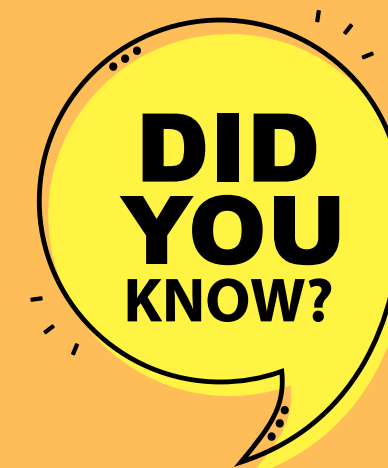
6) Manipulated Content

Content that is created by tampering with actual information, whether by digital manipulation of multimedia or simply by falsely citing sources. It is usually easily recognizable but sometimes not dealt with swiftly enough, which causes its spreading.

7) Fabricated Content

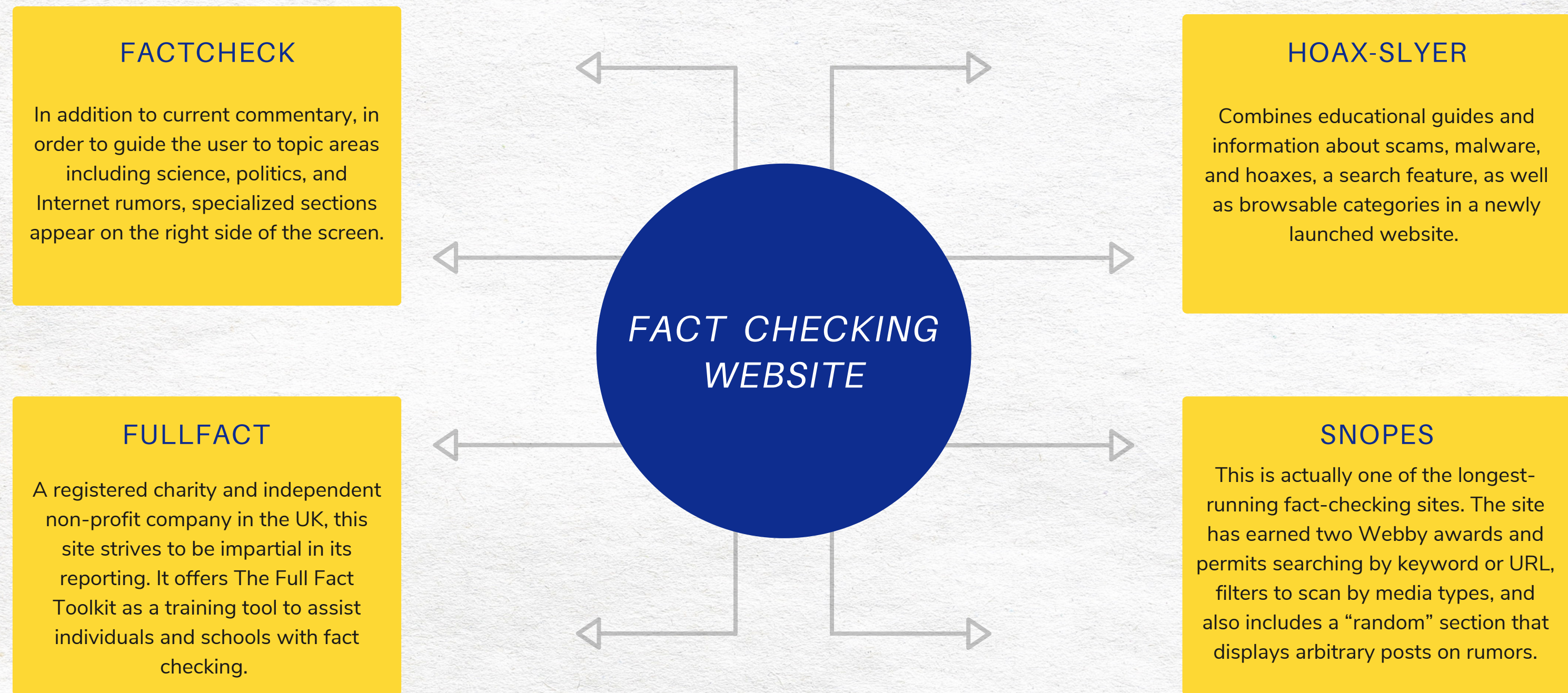
This type of content has no validity whatsoever, and it only exists to spread deception. It is usually created by creating fake videos to accompany the fabricated texts which are presented as factual and newsworthy.

"One factor which can greatly affect trust in news is the outlet used. Globally, social media is seen as a less reliable source of news, and in the EU radio and television are viewed as more dependable. In the current climate of fake news and polarizing political events, young people around the world are having a tough time relying on the mass media , although this attitude is also seen among older generations."



Source: Statista, 2021

What are the best online resources for fact-checking?



1) FactCheck

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

In addition to current commentary, in order to guide the user to topic areas including science, politics, and Internet rumors, specialized sections appear on the right side of the screen.



2) Full Fact

<https://fullfact.org/about/>

A registered charity and independent non-profit company in the UK, this site strives to be impartial in its reporting. It offers The Full Fact Toolkit as a training tool to assist individuals and schools with fact checking.



3) Hoax-Slayer

<http://hoax-slayer.net/>

Combines educational guides and information about scams, malware, and hoaxes, a search feature, as well as browsable categories in a newly launched website.



4) Fact Checker: The Truth Behind the Rhetoric. The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm_term¼.a243fd45d352

The impersonation of reliable sources in order to draw readership or hurt the reliability of the source that is being impersonated. This is the most often utilized tactic in propaganda and by those whose main goal is to turn a profit without concern over the reliability of information.

5) Politifact

<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/>

Politifact offers scorecards for its fact-checking of claims made by members of the media, including pundits, columnists, and political analysts. Probably best known for their Truth-o-Meter and Trump-o-Meter, this site offers searching and browsing by articles, people, radio, bloggers, newspapers, and much more.

6) Snopes

<http://www.snopes.com/>

This is actually one of the longest-running fact-checking sites. The site has earned two Webby awards and permits searching by keyword or URL, filters to scan by media types, and also includes a “random” section that displays arbitrary posts on rumors.

The Washington Post

POLITIFACT

Snopes



How to decode fake news?

1)



Try to look at it from different angles and ask yourself the following questions: "Why has this story been written? Perhaps it is trying to get me to click through to another website? Is it to persuade me of a certain viewpoint? Could I be biased towards it because of my own beliefs?"

2)



Be careful of unusual top-level domain names, such as ".com.co" that are designed to appear legitimate but are often fake versions of a source. If you spot words like "blogger" or ".wordpress" in the domain, that usually indicates it is a personal blog rather than a news source.

3)



Inspect the site to make sure it's legitimate. You can check its mission and its contact information to understand if it's news, satire, or opinion. Read past headlines that are clickbait, notice who is or isn't quoted, and verify the information on other websites.



4)



OBSERVE THE
TEXT

Does the text have spelling mistakes or dramatic punctuation? This can be a clue that can help detect simple fabricated content, as most reputable sources have high proofreading and grammatical standards.

5)



DETECT THE
IMAGES

Keep in mind that photos can easily be photoshopped and manipulated. For example, strange shadows on the image or jagged edges around a figure are some things to look out for, but be careful even when they look flawless.

6)



EXPLORE WITH
THE EXPERTS

If a story seems suspicious, or doesn't seem to be properly cited, you can consider asking an expert in the field or consulting a fact-checking site.



DEVELOP A
CRITICAL MINDSET



EXAMINE THE
URL



CHECK THE
SOURCE AND EVIDENCE



OBSERVE THE
TEXT



DETECT THE
IMAGES



EXPLORE WITH
THE EXPERTS



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Major topics regarding fake news in 2021

CONTINUE READING TO SEE WHAT
THE SLAM TEAM HAS RESEARCHED
THUS FAR!



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FAKE NEWS

Position of Migrant Women



Author: Natalia Vuković
BRAVO BiH

A few days ago, we celebrated International Women's Day. Only one day a year when we remember the fight for women's rights, the long and uninterrupted fight of women around the world for an equal position in the family, society, at work, in educational institutions, on the street. This day is very important for the realization of basic human rights, especially the right to work and dignified working conditions, the exercise of electoral rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

All powerful people, government officials, presidents, philanthropists have fulfilled their duty and sent strong messages of support to women, pointing out their role in society. To be strong, brave, to fight for our rights. That we need to be educated, to be eloquent, ambitious, etc... How nice it sounds. Democratic. But is that really so?

What about those women who are fighting for minimum existential rights, such as the right to housing, food, clothing and footwear, the right to health care? Not to mention rights such as the prohibition of torture, the prohibition of slavery, the prohibition of discrimination.

Perhaps the more realistic question is whether they have the right to fight and what mechanisms of fight are available to them, given the handful of laws, regulations and conventions that are just a dead letter on paper?

Who are they? What are their rights? What are their needs for a life worthy of a man and why are they on the margins?

We can say that the year 2020 was very difficult and ruthless for the whole world, and it brought more problems to migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) and other countries – from spreading fake news on social networks, media harassment, border violence, intimidation and persecution, social exclusion to the marginalization of the most vulnerable categories.

Particularly vulnerable groups in the migrant population are women, who are often abused by dealers and smugglers. Due to insecurity, the unfavorable political situation in the country and poverty, thousands of them have fled their homes in search of asylum. Exposed to various problems such as worries about the continuation of the journey, pressure to preserve their families, even violence, they are increasingly experiencing a drop in mood, lethargy, stress, which contributes to increased depressive symptoms and trauma. Just some of the risks they face in their path to a better life and security are the danger of human trafficking, sexual harassment, exploitation, violence, harassment while traveling, which are greatly facilitated by legal invisibility – lack of identification documents and inability to exercise rights, language barriers and ignorance of the culture of the countries they pass through.

Women and girls face additional vulnerabilities when displaced by conflict. An inadequate and dysfunctional protection system allows perpetrators to abuse with impunity.



Lack of shelters, overcrowding in camps with extremely difficult living conditions, poorly lit, unlockable public toilets, common areas without a private sphere increase the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Where people are forced to live together in a small space, without employment and frustrated, violence grows that often manifests itself in the weaker. And they often remain silent for fear of stigmatization and punishment from their own families, shame, helplessness, and moral condemnation in their own environment.

And even when abuses occur, many migrant women and girls lack the resources, support systems, and knowledge to seek help, as well as language barriers that further facilitate attacks. Behind the attack may be a violent partner, roommate, smuggler and volunteer who imposes and abuses them. Migrant women also face double discrimination – as women and as migrants. Racism and xenophobia appear as direct consequences of large migrations. Xenophobia against non-compatriots, especially towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, is one of the main sources of modern racism. And antiimmigrant sentiment is constantly on the rise in many countries.

Negative views of migrants and refugees have become a practice in the media, creating prejudices and stereotypes about them that lead to social exclusion.



With biased reporting and sensationalist headlines that mostly have nothing to do with the real situation on the ground, the B&H public is poisoned by a lot of false news and misinformation about refugees and migrants. But of course this is not surprising because we are a nation in which the media builds the opinion and attitude of public opinion. Headlines such as “Refugees and migrants are exclusively men” further aggravate their situation by leaving them invisible and contributing to their further marginalization. It is true that most refugees and migrants are men, but the number of women and children is by no means negligible.

Reports of rape and sexual abuse in refugee accommodation, and during travel, have been almost nonexistent in public. Yet the dark figure is large, although there are no official reports. Many cases have never been recorded, nor will anyone be held accountable. According to information in the Sarajevo area, information on attempted rape and rape of migrant women has been confirmed. The victims stated that while traveling from Turkey to B&H, they were exposed to abuse by migrants, but also by the staff of the camps where they were staying. But they are not ready to talk about it publicly, because of secondary victimization, personal beliefs and partly because of distrust in the protection system. It must be taken into account that these are women who lived in patriarchal environments and who are less educated because they did not have the opportunity to go to school.

There are also cases of children who engage in sex for the purpose of survival in order to pay smugglers to continue their journey because they have run out of money or have been robbed.

Insufficient media space, lack of information on the social position of migrant women, and even insufficient institutional commitment to this problem lead to women experiencing discrimination not only on the basis of migrant status, but also on the basis of gender. This is supported by the fact that the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina very rarely publish data on the number of migrant women, and almost never on their needs, which further threatens their social position. The situation is no better when it comes to countries in the region such as Croatia and Serbia. The first available online UN reports on the number of migrant women in Bosnia and Herzegovina will appear only in 2019, and special attention to the number of women, their needs, and programs and assistance to women comes into focus from February 2020. In March 2020, according to the UN monthly report on the migrant situation in B&H, it was determined that the number of new migrants was 4,795, of which 451 were women and girls, which represents 18% of the total number of migrants.



Migrant women also face discrimination in the economic sector, on national, racial and gender grounds, in terms of pay, overtime, opportunities for advancement in work, access to the health and education systems, and they are very often exposed to verbal, physical and sexual harassment, abuse in the workplace.

As another in a series of problems that migrant women still face, there are health risks both in transit and in destinations that are additionally affected by climate change and unsafe travel conditions. A significant number of migrant women are pregnant or become pregnant and may lose access to sexual and reproductive health protection during travel or in the chaos of displacement, which can have serious consequences for their health. It is considered one of the leading causes of death, illness and disability among displaced women and girls of childbearing age.

What has been alarming lately is that a large percentage of refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. A study by the German Federal Chamber of Psychotherapists shows that 70% of refugees have witnessed violence. More than half of them felt it violence on their skin, and 43% of refugees have survived torture, including a large number of women.



Access to psychosocial assistance is becoming one of the important links in easier social inclusion in society, adaptation to the new environment and mitigation of the consequences of the migration process. This availability in B&H is not at an enviable level because it is provided only in some camps due to limited human resources and language barrier, lack of translators.

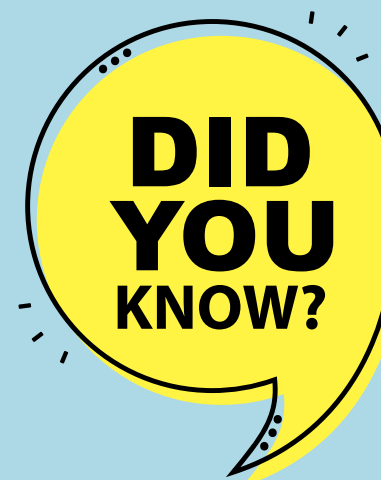
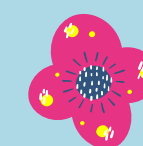
Although all these problems go far and have their roots in the past, because women in the process of migration throughout history have been discriminated against in a way that they were invisible and unrecognized as participants in migration, even though they made up half of the total number of migrants. Until recently, they were not recognized or protected by conventions, including the Law on Movement and Residence of Aliens and Asylum in B&H. The UN conventions and B&H laws mention the term “migrants and their families” where men are generally understood as migrants and their wives and children, from which it can be concluded that women in theory had only a passive position in the migration process. The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees also prefers men as refugees when defining the term “refugee”. Given that this notion is not gender sensitive, it can be concluded that the need to protect migrant women was not recognized during the drafting of this convention. This is supported by the fact that the part of the Law on Refugees that refers to nondiscrimination does not state that discrimination on the grounds of sex is prohibited.



From all the above we can conclude that women throughout history have been both de iure and de facto discriminated against as participants in migration, which has had a negative impact on their social position in society, legal protection, access to the labor market, education and health system. Although women currently make up about half of the world's migrant population, as do half of the world's population, this practice continues today. The number of women being affected by violence is immense and growing everyday. According to a WHO report, 1 in 3 women globally experience violence and discrimination. This is not a feminist fight, a fight of women for their rights. This is a fight of all of us because every human being on the planet deserves and has the right to a dignified life. That is our moral obligation. They need us, our support and compassion. Because tomorrow it could be you!

What is a paradox is that all three constituent people in B&H experienced temporary or permanent displacement from their place to other parts of B&H or abroad during the last war, so it would be reasonably expected that the B&H population shows compassion and empathy for the plight of migrants. Experience on your own skin should allow for easier identification. But the reality is different, because unfortunately more than 20 years after the war, B&H is still a post-war society. How do we accept others when we cannot accept ourselves?

The migrant crisis has shaken Europe and its values to the core. The European Union revealed all its weaknesses when there was a sudden influx of migrants. The ideas of European humanity, solidarity and openness have been called into question. Has the EU remained stuck between human security and state security?



"There are 78 million international migrants in Europe, more than one third of the global total."

Source: IOM, 2021

Migrant's Image in Bosnian - Herzegovinian Media



Author: Dragan Zelenović
BRAVO BiH

Due to many years of conflicts and wars in the Middle East, a large number of residents from the countries of that area are trying to find their refuge on European soil. Since 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been facing a large influx of migrants, who enter in our country often illegally. Since then, local media have become more actively involved in reporting on this population.

Since the beginning of the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the media, in most cases, have used the term migrants for these people. With the widespread xenophobia in our society, it seems that the media do not contribute to calming the situation, when it comes to the migrant crisis, and newspaper articles are written with the intention of attracting as many readers as possible, without checking information about the certain events. Media with more empathy for this group of people make a distinction between different groups, and use names like people on the move and refugees, although their number is very small.

According to international and laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a refugee is any foreigner who has fled the country of origin due to war or fear of persecution, while a migrant is any person who has left the country of origin, usually for economic reasons. An analysis of the most – read media in Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that very few of them have written about this difference, trying to explain to the public the difference between the two terms.

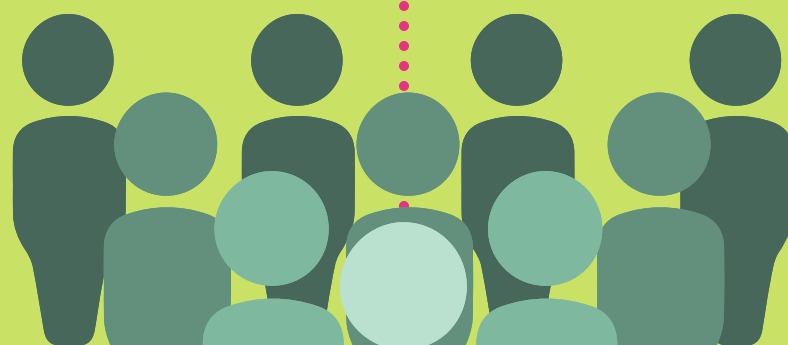
Some of them are N1, Anadolu Agency – Bosnian service, VOA in Bosnian and BUKA. Further, it seems that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the least mentioned group in the media are asylum seekers, the people who have applied for asylum in our country, whereby they can receive one of the two forms of international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection).

All these groups in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian media are mostly called migrants, and the articles about them are usually full of negative news. Some of them have the following titles: “Migrants who committed an armed robbery in Zenica caught in Donji Vakuf”, “Details of the horrific crime near Tešanj: Migrant stabbed with knife in the head”, “A migrant, accused of rape and infected with HIV, has escaped”, etc. By the number of news that speak negatively about this population, the site by name antimigrant.ba is in the forefront, using very often pejoratives in its articles, such as brothers in faith, lovers of people on the move¹, brothers from ISIS, “miserable” muhajirs², etc., which makes readers to feel more disdain toward migrants.

Most of the sources used by the Bosnian media in reporting on migrants are unreliable and are often based on eyewitness comments, when it comes to committing crimes, without waiting for an official report from the authorities.

Media that are better equipped and have a larger structure and coverage are often sources of smaller media with regional character, although neither of them shows serious attention for fact-checking. The most famous case of false news-spreading is related to the murder of a young man from Ilidža, where a migrant of Moroccan origin was accused of that crime. Shortly afterwards, news of the event have been spread through media portals, with a prominent image of the first defendant. A few days later, the police arrested a person who matched the description, although it turned out shortly afterwards that he was not a murderer, but a Moroccan with a similar appearance. However, this did not stop the Bosnian media from reporting on the latter as a murderer, without waiting for confirmation of identity by the competent authorities.

Finally, it should be emphasized that most media write and act according to the directives of their governing structures, which are often different political parties. Depending on their attitude towards the migrant issue, the tone of media reporting is also directed (e.g. RTRS, Bljesak.info, STAV Magazine, etc.). Negative views of migrants and refugees have become a practice in the media, creating prejudices and stereotypes about them that lead to social exclusion.



¹ referring to the people who are helping them

² Muhajirs is an Arabic term for migrants.

Donald Trump – Fake news, is there any truth?



Author: Imran Polovina
BRAVO BiH

The most dangerous lie: The coronavirus was under control

This was more like a family of lies than a single lie. But each one — the lie that the virus was equivalent to the flu; the lie that the situation was “totally under control”; the lie that the virus was “disappearing” — suggested to Americans that they didn't have to change much about their usual behavior. A year into the crisis, more than 386,000 Americans have died from the virus. We can't precisely say how the crisis would have unfolded differently if Trump had been more truthful. But it's reasonable to venture that his dishonesty led to a significant number of deaths¹.

Manufacturing jobs

Trump falsely claimed that they “added nearly 600,000 manufacturing jobs.” This would have been an exaggeration even if you stopped the clock in February. (At that point, before the pandemic-related crash in March, nearly 483,000 manufacturing jobs had been added during the Trump presidency.) But now, the claim is flat wrong. As of September, around 164,000 manufacturing jobs had been lost since Trump took office.

FALSE

Another Trump's false statement is related to Barack Obama and “his statement” that “you'll never produce manufacturing jobs.” That's not what Obama said. At a 2016 town hall event², Obama did say that some manufacturing jobs went away from the US for good — but he also boasted about how many new ones were being created in the US.

NATO

Another category of false claims said by Trump is related to NATO.

He claimed that he was responsible for securing an extra “\$130 billion a year” in military spending by other countries. Actually, NATO says the increase is \$130 billion total between 2016 and the end of 2020, not \$130 billion per year. (NATO does give Trump credit for the increase, but it's worth noting that spending has been rising since 2015, before Trump took office.)

Trump said that before him, NATO members “weren't paying their bills” and “were delinquent.” That's not how NATO works. While the alliance has a target of each member spending 2% of GDP on defense, failing to hit that target doesn't create bills or debts³.

Veterans' Choice

Trump repeated another of his favorite rally lies, declaring that they have “passed VA Choice.” Obama signed the Choice bill into law in 2014⁴; it was an initiative of two senators Trump has frequently criticized, Bernie Sanders and the late John McCain. What Trump signed was the VA MISSION Act of 2018, which expanded and modified the Choice program.

Trump has made this claim more than 160 times.

The most alarming lie saga: Sharpiegate

In 2019, Trum tweeted that Alabama was one of the states at greater risk from Hurricane Dorian than had been initially forecast. The federal weather office in Birmingham then tweeted that, actually, Alabama would be unaffected by the storm.

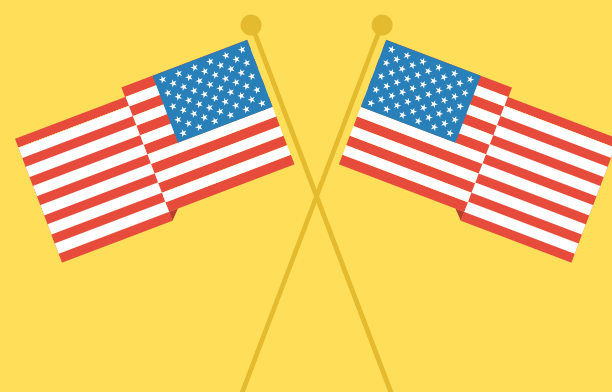
Not great, but fixable fast with a simple White House correction. Trump, however, is so congenitally unwilling to admit error that he embarked on an increasingly farcical campaign to prove that his incorrect Alabama tweet was actually correct, eventually showcasing a hurricane map that was crudely altered with a Sharpie.

The slapstick might have been funny had White House officials not leaped into action behind the scenes to try to pressure federal weather experts into saying he was right and they were wrong⁵. The saga proved that Trump was not some lone liar: he was backed by an entire powerful apparatus willing to fight for his fabrications.

The ugliest smear lie: Rep. Ilhan Omar supports al Qaeda

At a White House event in 2019, Trump grossly distorted a 2013 quote from Rep. Ilhan Omar to try to get his supporters to believe that the Minnesota Democrat had expressed support for the terrorist group al Qaeda⁶.

Trump went on to deliver additional bigoted attacks against Omar in the following months. But it's hard to imagine a more vile lie for the President to tell about a Muslim official — who had already been getting death threats — than a smear that makes her sound pro-terrorist.



¹ Sam Baker, "Trump: Coronavirus is "under control"", AXIOS, <https://www.axios.com/trump-coronavirus-under-control-5f114a16-9952-428c-bc07-3cfa360b0977.html> (accessed 21 March 2021)

² "Questions for President Obama: A Town Hall Special", PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/questions-for-president-obama-a-town-hall-special> (accessed 21 March 2021)

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⁴ Cameron Branchley, "President Obama Signs Bill to Give the VA the Resources It Needs", The WHITE HOUSE President Barack Obama, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/08/07/president-obama-signs-bill-give-va-resources-it-needs> (accessed 21 March 2021)

⁵ Christopher Flavelle and Lisa Friedman, "NOAA Officials Feared Firings After Trump's Hurricane Claims, Inspector General Says", The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/climate/trump-hurricane-dorian-noaa.html> (accessed 21 March 2021)

⁶ Daniel Dale and Sarah Westwood, "Fact check: Trump falsely accuses Ilhan Omar of praising al Qaeda", CNN politics, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/15/politics/trump-falsely-accuses-omar-al-qaeda-fact-check/index.html> (accessed 21 March 2021)

Press Freedom Index – Analyzing the Data



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BRAVO BiH

Being a journalist

Journalist job is very dynamic and, in some cases, even dangerous. To be a journalist, one needs to have excellent analytical abilities and distinguish truth from lies. In everyday work, journalists face various disinformation and hate speech, which can be a significant obstacle in delivering the correct information to the audience. In today's society, with the uprising of the internet and social media, a journalist's job is not easy at all. Although someone could say that the internet and social media platforms gave journalists extensive freedom to express their opinion freely – that is not true in all cases. Journalists have more options to place their information on various platforms than in the days of “old media.” Still, there are also more censure and fake news circulating in the public space.

Nowadays, journalists are being threatened, and their freedom of speech is under attack. In some parts of the world, the media environment is much better compared to other ones. For example, according to the Reporters Without Borders Index, Press Freedom is the highest in Scandinavian countries, where Norway is in the first place, followed by Finland and Denmark. On the other hand, authoritarian government regimes, such as those in Saudi Arabia, China, or North Korea, affect press freedom heavily, placing those countries at the same bottom of the list.



Western Balkan and the Press Freedom

Analyzing this topic, it is interesting to observe the Western Balkan region. Also, we will take a look at Italy, Bulgaria, and Turkey for a more detailed analysis. Balkan, as the turbulent region near the heart of Europe, always had its uprisings and downturns. Compared to the Press Freedom Index in other Western European countries, the Balkan region lacks behind. The highest press freedom rank has the Bosnia and Herzegovina, placed on 58 positions, followed by Kosovo (70), Albania (84), North Macedonia (92), Serbia (93) and Montenegro (105). If we include Turkey in our analysis, the situation will only deteriorate because Turkey's position (154) is far worse than the countries mentioned above. Interestingly, Bulgaria, an EU member country, is placed very low on the 111th position. On the other hand, Italy has much better results, being in the 41st position.

What are the reasons for such a situation?

There are many reasons responsible for the low press freedom environment in the Balkans. The Balkan countries are in some unfinished transition when one step forward could mean two steps backwards. However, some common patterns can be traced. According to Reporters Without Borders, division along ethnic lines and constant nationalist rhetoric is present in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Lack of transparency and terrible working conditions for journalists makes them vulnerable and unprotected from various political agendas that control the media. Serbia with Albania encountered fall by 3 and 2 positions respectively compared to 2019, which sends some message to us. A significant and influential state control raises many concerns making Serbia criticized by the EU authorities. Journalists are not protected enough and often attacked. Some parallels can be drawn with the situation in Albania, as well.

In many cases, the Albanian government tried to control the media with the argument of trying to mitigate fake news, which was their alibi to create laws and regulations against press freedom. In North Macedonia, some steps forward were made, but the overall situation is not good. Cyber and verbal attack over the journalist remains a big issue. But, although there are severe obstacles for higher Press Freedom scores in the Balkans, what can we say for Bulgaria? Reporters Without Borders.

Analysis argues that the Bulgarian journalism environment is faced with severe drawbacks such as corruption, political oligarchy and a complete lack of transparency. Although an EU member country, Bulgaria will need to work hard to compete with other European countries. Italy, also an EU member country showed a much better score than Bulgaria. direct Turkey into an authoritarian state.



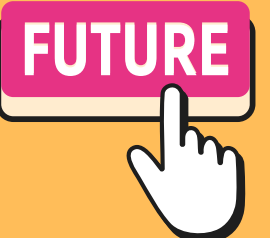
Press Freedom and Fake News

It is not too hard to make a connection between the low press freedom index, and the fast spread of fake news. In areas where press freedom is under attack spreading of fake news is significantly more present. Balkan is the perfect example of such a phenomenon. Covid-19 pandemic just deteriorated the situation and enabled so-called experts to be louder and more eager in spreading their “truth”. According to the leading fact-checker website in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Raskrinkavanje.ba) during the last year, fake news spread exploded and reached its peak compared to the period before. Sensational titles and articles with ad-sense plug-ins can make a lot of money if people often click on them, and that wisdom people from the Balkans uncovered recently. For example, in Serbia, health officials, has spoken nonsense about the pandemic advising people to go shopping in Italy at the beginning of the pandemic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, people get advice to go to the mountains and woods, take fresh air because that helps in fight against the virus. That was only the beginning. According to Raskrinkavanje.ba, posts about artificial virus made in some laboratories in China, Bill Gates responsibility for the pandemic and various conspiracy theories started to get media attention because people started to believe in it. the BBC also stated that Italy faced a fake news uprising and that such a problem appeared in Turkey and Bulgaria, as well.

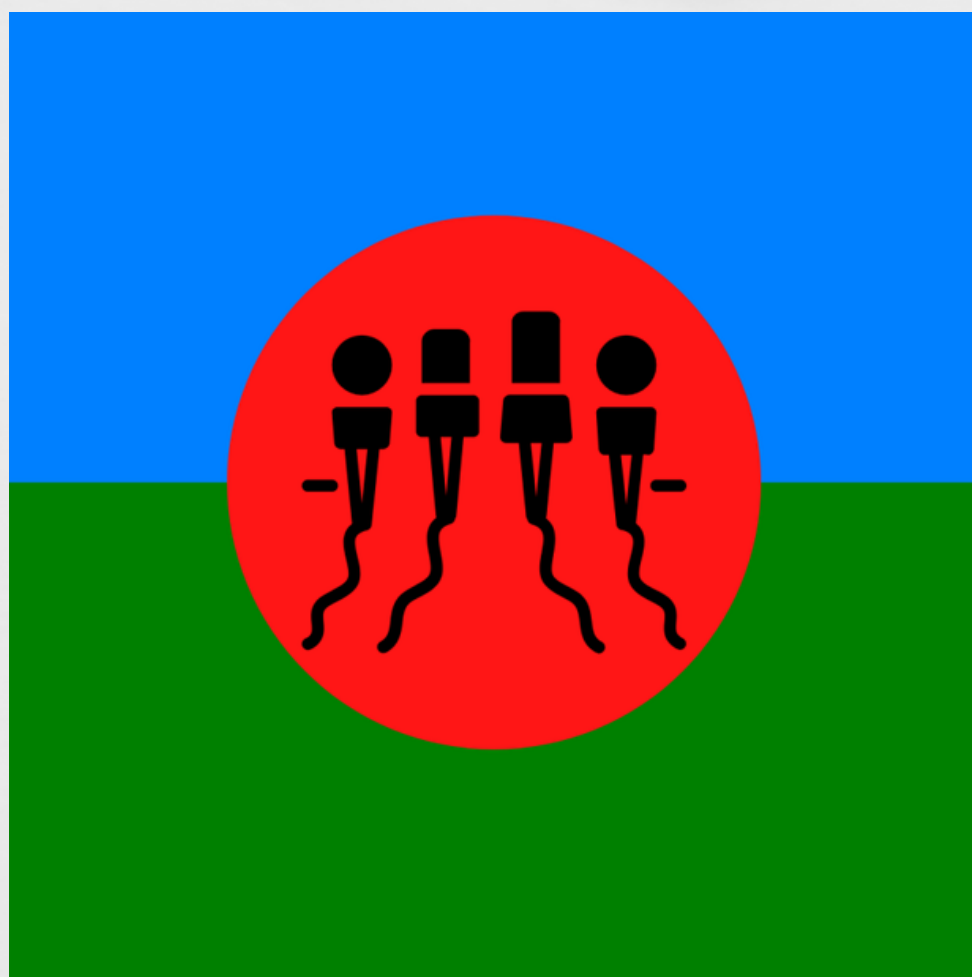
Therefore, a global crisis can enhance fake news spread and boost disinformation rapidly. In a globally connected world, citizens should educate themselves and be well informed, because sometimes consequences can be harmful. Especially if someone advises you to take unknown pills or medics, which are not approved, by health officials and regulatory bodies. Sadly, that proved to be a case in the Covid-19 pandemic.

What to expect in the future?

The future of a journalist job in some aspects is very uncertain. Society as a whole must be proactive and express their willingness to be on the side of the journalist. Gill Phillips, writing for the Guardian, presents examples of widespread brutality to a journalist, from Mexico to Saudi Arabia and Europe. Balkan countries need to foster their democratic processes, increase transparency, fight against corruption if they aim to join the European Union. Such an approach is essential for journalists to gain more rights and freedom and better working conditions. Speaking about fake news, fact-checkers sites started to gain more visibility and to be the first step which somebody can make to see if some news are truth or lies. Therefore, everyone should try to find the fact-checkers site in their home country and be properly informed.




Roma people in the eyes of media during the migrant crisis



Author: Ajla Aljović
BRAVO BiH

Anti-Roma racism, anti-Gypsyism, anti-Romaism, Romaphobia... – why do our neighbors bother us? Why do we have prejudices against diversity and dissimilarity? Isn't that considered to be wealth and beauty?

The Romani people, in most countries that are members of the SLAM project, are the largest national minority, but this position and status in society have not given them any honors and privileges. Instead, the conditions in which they live are, to put it mildly, catastrophic. The latest research by the Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction of the Government of the Republic of Serbia is proof of this statement: 32,000 Roma do not have access to proper water, then 24,000 of them do not have electricity, and 93,000 Roma do not have sewerage. However, this is not the end of the problems they are facing. Romani people do not have access to health and social services, employment, education... The coronavirus pandemic has further aggravated all these problems. During the mentioned pandemic, experts advise us to keep a social distance, but that distance is always and everywhere present towards the Roma, especially during the crisis. According to the research, a large number of the population shows a moderate to high level of social distance towards Roma.



We are witnessing the ghettoization of the Roma population. The media contributes greatly to this. Roma are instrumentalized in accordance with the daily political desires of the government. The government's discourse is accepted, especially when it comes to Roma and migrants. Roma asylum seekers are often considered to be “fake” by political representatives and the media. One can also hear in the media that the Roma themselves are to blame for their poverty and poor living conditions because that is their tradition.

If we compare the writing of media and their coverage of Roma and migrants, this could be summarized as follows. Since the beginning of the migrant crisis, the media have had different criteria for Roma and Migrants. While migrant camps are visited almost on a daily basis and articles about that population are written with a certain amount of empathy and understanding in order to solve this issue, reporting on Roma is quite the opposite. The Roma are interesting to the media only on exceptional occasions, when some international days related to the Roma are celebrated, but even then there are numerous stereotypes and prejudices. The social maladaptation of Roma to the environment in which they live is almost always mentioned. The executive director of the Roma Information Center “Kali Sara”, Sanela Bešić, believes that the attitude of the media towards Roma and their communities is a mirror of the politicians’ attitude, but also the attitude of the entire society and its laws.

Both migrants and Roma appear in the fake news – as separate groups, but also together. It is often the case that Roma present themselves as migrants and beg. We are also witnessing migrants being accused of criminal acts, murders and similar things, but in fact these acts are committed by Roma. Fake news and hate speech against migrants are also present on social networks, and among them the leader is Facebook group “Movement STOP settlement of migrants” that was created on March 25, 2020 and has over 300.000 members, according to Voice journalists. The most drastic examples are calls to kill and expel migrants. Disparaging and stereotyping of that population is second in frequency. Some of the headlines that link migrants to criminal activities are: “Father of a young man attacked in Sarajevo: Migrants broke his skull, the operation lasted 3 and a half hours.”, “A boy was intercepted at the train station, MIGRANTS ARE SUSPECTED.”, “THREE HOURS OPERATED IN HOSPITAL: Migrants brutally beat a minor in Sarajevo.” The media serve fake news, hate speech and generalization, and the institutions do not prevent this, nor the racist messages that can be found in the comments on the articles.

Migrants, as well as the Roma national minority, are still associated with criminal acts, violence, and security breaches. Some Kosovo media falsely reported that a Roma girl kidnapped children, which led to the girl being physically assaulted twice.



Is it fair, okay, human to believe in hear-say stories and false rumors, and create prejudices? The critical consciousness of the wider masses is not sufficiently developed. We blindly trust the media, which are increasingly using clickbait and false statements, and which are categorized as a crime act, rather than accurate and verified information.

However, this is not the only example of an attack on Romani population. Protests and violence against Roma, as well as various intimidations, are present in many countries. Italian authorities intend to expel all Roma who do not have Italian citizenship. In addition, the demolition of Roma camps without the provision of replacement accommodation has become increasingly common in Italy.

When it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, small steps have been taken to protect Roma rights, but this is still “not in bloom”. The phrases “I will give you to the gypsies” and “The gypsy woman will steal you” can often be heard among people. Those sentences are derogatory, discriminatory and unpleasant to hear. The report on the position of Roma in B&H showed that the state does not provide enough basic rights for Roma. Crimes committed out of hatred against Roma are not uncommon and the lack of an appropriate response from the authorities can create a climate of impunity and deepen the experience of marginalization.

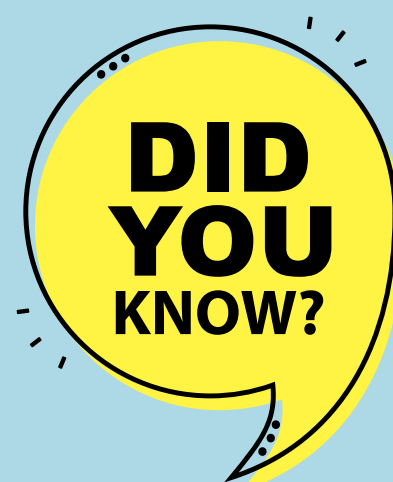
If we want to comment on crimes committed by Roma – there are no statistics for Roma in the registers of crimes and misdemeanors, and it is not possible to determine whether the assumption that Roma have a high degree of violation of the law is really correct and trustworthy.

Through direct normative influence, the media influence the creation of prejudices, but also their augmentation. Minority groups in the media are portrayed through negative bias both qualitatively and quantitatively. Why is it like that? The answer is simple – the media are market-oriented towards the majority, the dominant group, because of the political and economic power that the group possesses. In the last few years, Roma have been marginally present in the media space, while a significant percentage of attention has been paid to migrants. Media writing is stereotypical for both categories and depends on daily politics, which uses media to create public opinion about migrants and pushes Roma to the margins of society. We are increasingly witnessing “sensational” reporting by the media that transmit the information served without their analysis, verification, without initiative and research approach.

Every event in which the actors are members of the Roma minority points to the fact that the media have double criteria: one for the Roma and the other for the rest.



It is certain that triviality, sensation and extreme superficiality in the approach to the treatment of topics in the media today, have sponsored that topics about the Roma and their lives are treated without any empathy and will to influence the much-needed changes. Emphasis is placed on peripheral details, not on the essence. This does not help anyone, and it harms the Roma community the most, about which prejudices are only further created and strengthened. And as a conclusion to all of the above, it would be the following: Roma are collateral damage to political action as a whole.



"A survey conducted in nine eastern and southern member states – Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – showed that about a quarter (26%) of Romani experienced discrimination there, compared to almost a half (45%) in Western countries."

Source: Fundamental Rights Agency,
2021

“News you don’t believe” – Audience perspectives on fake news



Authors: Ajla Aljović, Sara Međić, Emir Šogolj, Omer Muminović
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Key findings

Based on R. K. Nielsen and L. Graves’ research, we present you several key findings related to fake news:

- Poor journalism, brainwashing/indoctrination and advertisement are named as some of the most common fake news’ instances.
- Politicians, the media and certain platforms are “working” together to create a problem known as fake news. Participants agree that journalists present information without any research and checking, that stories with politicians as main characters are almost always a fake news.
- Respondents define a discrepancy between fake news and “ordinary” news as “one of degree”.

So, according to these findings, we can provide two basic definitions of fake news:

1. Fake news could be portrayed as “inaccurate information presented as an objective news story and designed to deceive people in some way.”
2. Fake news could be seen as “deception with the appearance of befittingly produced news but without the underlying strategic journalistic operations or purpose.”

Additionally, based on research, we can say that fake news are only partially fictitious articles. This type of news is much more related to grievances, frustration, exasperation.

General overview

Recent political events, such as the 2016 US presidential election, are characterized by a booming number of so-called “fake news” which were shared on social media platforms. While misinformation and propaganda have existed since past, their importance and influence within the age of social media remains not clear. Indeed, massive digital misinformation has been designated as a serious technological and geopolitical risk by the 2013 report of the planet Economic Forum.

A considerable number of studies have recently investigated the phenomena of misinformation in online social networks like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Wikipedia. Research related to the expansion of both true and false news in Twitter showed that false news is characterized by a faster and broader dispersal than true news mainly thanks to the attraction of the novelty of false news. A polarization in communities is additionally observed within the consumption of stories generally and corresponds with political alignment. Latest research and scientific papers divulged bots and their capacities. Shao et al. found that, during the 2016 US presidential election on Twitter, bots were liable for the first promotion of misinformation, that they targeted influential users through replies and mentions which the sharing of fact-checking articles nearly disappears within the core of the network, while social bots proliferate. These results have raised the question of whether such misinformation campaigns could alter popular opinion and endanger the integrity of the presidential election.

In this article, we are going to present you a combination of qualitative and quantitative data gained through different research methods.



Structural shifts underlying the fake news discussion

The first structural change is a widespread crisis of confidence between news media and other public institutions including politicians and much of the public in many countries. It is apparent that this devaluation in certitude began before the emergence of digital media; it is partly driven by tabloidization of the news landscape and rising political polarization, accompanied by a diminished sense of common ground and more frequent and intense political attacks on the news media. Another structural change is the motion from a 20th-century environment influenced by broadcast and print mass media to a growingly digital, mobile, and social media environment. In this environment, it is easier to publish any kind of information, including false and fabricated ones. Several independent pieces of research suggest that in the United States, only a minority have actually been exposed to demonstrably fake news stories, and that these stories have in most cases made up only a very small fraction of people's total information exposure. There is clearly a significant amount of dis- and misinformation circulating in our changing media environment.

The exchange of information is now democratized, thanks to social media platforms and digital content production technologies (like Photoshop).

Anyone is now able to produce credible “noise” that is difficult to distinguish from high-quality information. While there is a general awareness of the existence of “fake news,” there is widespread disagreement over what comprises “fake news.” Merely labeling something as “fake news” can itself be considered mere propaganda, making it all the more important that journalists cite sources and “show their work. Current gatekeepers are more likely to view news production and dissemination as a business enterprise than as providing a public service. Additionally, the public perception of mass media as a corporate, profit-driven entity has further diminished its authority. Ownership of news distribution has shifted from traditional content creators to digital distributors. Digital distribution allows for highly efficient micro-targeting and limited exposure of users to challenging content. In contrast, when content creators also were responsible for distribution, diverse content was often bundled together for a mass audience, fostering the development (either voluntarily or serendipitously) of a common set of shared facts. Digital distribution also tends to favor popularity, engagement, and “shares” over expertise and accuracy.



Audience perspectives on fake news

In order to have a greater insight in audience perspectives on fake news in this changing media setting, we brought up the issue in 8 focus groups conducted across the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Finland. It is crucial to highlight that the term “fake news” generated bigger discussion in the United Kingdom and especially the United States than in Spain and Finland.

“Fake News” – News associated with misinformation from different sources, including journalists. Seen as distinguished from news primarily by degree. Also recognized as weaponized by critics of news media and platform companies.

News – Associated with professionally produced information that is accurate, timely, relevant, clearly communicated, and fair. There is often no clear agreement on where to draw the line between fake news and news.

These latter categories are seen as different from journalism in general primarily by degree; for audiences, the difference between fake news and real news is not absolute but gradual. The main categories in popular understandings of fake news: satire, poor journalism, propaganda, some advertising, false news.

st as much, if not more, than higher-quality information.

The intent of the creator is less relevant than the fact of the harm—the insidious damage is the fact that the proliferation of false information discredits sources of relatively accurate and credible information regardless of what a specific “fake news” story is intended to accomplish. Three corollary harms were noted: first, the problem of increasing fragmentation and politicization; second, the promotion of “safe news” at the expense of difficult or challenging news stories; third, the need for credible sources to allocate ever-diminishing resources to debunking inaccurate information (which poses both financial and reputational costs). People retweet or share an article based on its headline and without ever having clicked on—and therefore without ever having actually read it. This allows misinformation to be seen, accepted, and promoted just as much, if not more, than higher-quality information.

First – People see the difference between fake news and real news as one of degree

According to focus group responses, “fake news can be seen as a broad and diverse category and one that is separated from other forms of news primarily by degree.” Furthermore, respondents say that discrepancy between fake news and real ones is not “black and white” and that fake news are not a problem that exists for few years, but rather “an age-old problem”. Additionally, respondents offered a wide variety of fake news definitions.

One of definitions was that fake news are “news that don’t have a factual basis and are coloured, leaning, biased.”

Participants made a distinction between “source cues” and “social cues”. Source cues are brands participants trust, while social cues are people participants trust. Respondents said that when verifying information, they rely on family, friends and their own research.

Second – The main forms of fake news people identify are poor journalism, political propaganda, and some forms of advertising

The examples given by the participants of the focus group, were much more focused on their personal opinion regarding what fake news truly is, rather than on the actual definition of the term itself. Their examples were focused on incapable or biased journalism, use of media for propaganda purposes, content used in marketing and advertising, while very few of the participants spoke about fabricated content which presents itself as news. This demonstrates that people are inclined to look at the issue of false news from a broader perspective which inevitably leads to labeling certain individuals in positions of power as the guilty parties.



Journalism in its core is a noble craft which stands upon pillars of ethics and unbiased reporting. However, according to the opinions of participants, the work of certain categories of journalism derails the entire journalistic industry due to its sensational tone of reporting and lack of credibility in terms of providing factual news. Furthermore, another societal factor criticized by the participants in relation to false news, is politics. The participants argue that politicians manipulate news outlets by purposefully feeding them unreliable information which in turn causes a domino effect of propaganda being reported on as factual and undeniable truth.

Additionally, the participants of the focus group mostly agree on the opinion that clickbait titles and online adverts are designed to purposefully mislead the readers into opening websites which have an agenda. These websites range from simple advertisement space for whoever paid for it, all the way to specific individuals campaigning for, and spreading ideas that can otherwise not receive much attention in the mainstream media.

Satire however, as an example of purposefully misleading content, is not considered to be fake news. The reason for satire being „excused“ from this designation lies in the fact that any satirical content has an underlying tone which clearly shows the nature of the content and prevents its malintepretation as factual.

Third – People associate publishers, platforms, and politicians with fake news but also see trusted news outlets as a potential corrective

Most people would agree that the term fake news came to fruition and into existence due to lack of belief into those who report the news and those of whom the news actually talk about. When a public has the arguments to oppose and disagree with the media and politicians, it is inevitable that occasionally even factual news becomes labeled as fake. However, this happens due to the sheer number of news outlets that exist nowadays, and one of these outlets is always bound to enjoy more trust from the public than others.

Furthermore, people are constantly bombarded with online news. This type of news is simply too difficult to keep up with in terms of credibility, because every single social media user is able to bring content on different platforms which allow for said content to spread like wildfire. It is very difficult to discern what content is reliable in such a sea of sources which have very few filters that do the job of the editor in an actual news outlet.

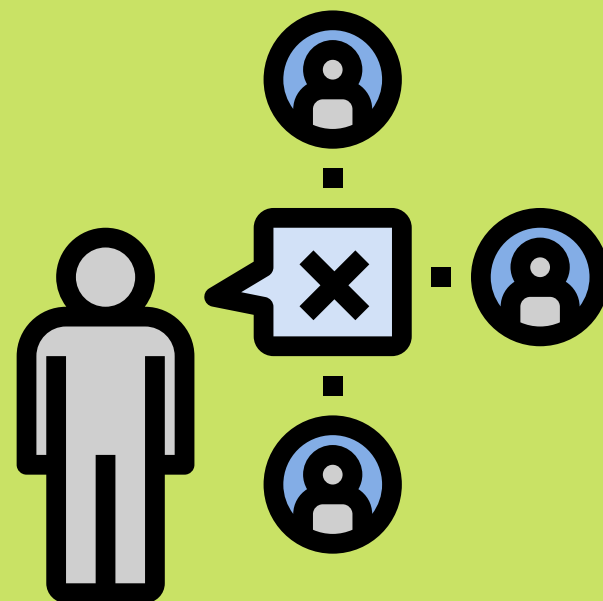
Fourth – People are aware of the fake news discussion and see the term “fake news” in part as a politicized buzzword

Participants of the study showed a very high level of awareness regarding the issue of fake news and all the possible consequences that might arise from their misinterpretation. They recognized that the main problem with fake news is the fact that the term itself is being used by particular individuals in positions of power to discredit their opponents and cause mistrust and havoc in the public opinion. Labeling something as fake news, without actual confirmation, in a world where information spreads incredibly fast, is a very powerful weapon in the arsenal of a politician in bringing down their opposition in the eyes of the public.

The low-trust context of the fake news – Discussion

According to the data, it can be notably stated that people lost confidence in the truth of news they consume. That is not strange because there is hyperinflation of information that is biased, irrelevant, and sometimes even dangerous in online space. If one-click and go to the online address they are pointing at, their data and privacy can be compromised and used for harmful purposes. Citizens of the US and UK showed a lower level of confidence in the news they consume than citizens of European countries, such as Spain and Finland. However, the difference is slight, and hence the trend is the same, but with negligible variations.

Moreover, people who were questioned stated that there is a lack of trust towards old media and institutions. In some cases, that could lead to potential security threats. One side of the coin is that one has a high level of critical thinking and does not believe everything he or she read on the internet. Still, the totally opposite situation is that one does not trust to official institutions and relevant information presented by law officials, scientists, or people appointed to vital positions in society. Therefore, the term “fake news” started to be used too much and without valid reasons. Some people even do not understand the term correctly. In their subjective opinion, it can be used for everything they considered is false. In the broad view, one environment heavily influences his or her opinions, perspective on the world, and attitudes toward “fake news” related content. All in all, trust is about building a reputation, which can collapse in one second.



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World Day of Press Freedom



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May the third is known as the World Day of Press Freedom. But, let's be real, are they really free? How are the journalists treated? Are they able to freely investigate and objectively inform us about the new events in the surrounding and the world?

As we mentioned in one of our previous articles, the Balkans is a very tempestuous region with many downfalls. Eventhough the press freedom is guaranteed on the Balkans, this region lacks behind the other European countries, according to the Press Freedom Index. Bosnia and Herzegovina is placed on the 58th position, Albania on the 84th, North Macedonia on the 92nd position, Serbia is the 93rd, while Montenegro is on the 154th position.

We often witness attacks, harassments and abuse of female journalists (as well as the male ones). Examples are Olivera Lakić, Živana Šušak Živković, Daško Milinović and many more. Civil society media organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) are very concerned about political influences on the country's media. Free Media Help Line, a free legal aid program provided by the Association of BH Journalists, registered 45 cases concerning the violation of journalists' rights in 2018. Five of those were brutal physical attacks, including one attempted murder. Among other violations the foremost frequent were political pressures and threats.

According to research by Mediacentar Sarajevo, due to a fall in advertising revenues, the media in B&H are getting increasingly hooked in to public finance. Subsidies and grants are allocated to the media during a non-transparent manner, while advertising revenues from public companies are exploited for political interests.

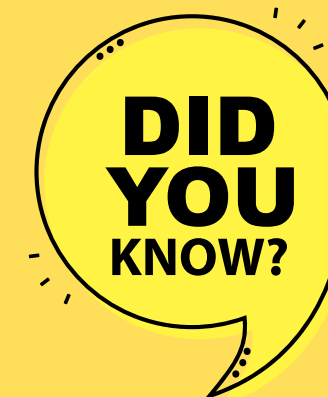
Media ownership remains under-regulated: there has been no law limiting media concentration of ownership since 2006 and no information on possible political influences is out there to the general public.



The polarised political climate, marked by constant verbal attacks and nationalist rhetoric, has created a hostile environment for press freedom. Editorial policies reflecting ethnic divisions and hate speech are ever more evident. Journalists are attacked for his or her ethnic origins also as what they write, especially about migration. Defamation suits by politicians often serve to intimidate journalists and deter them from pursuing their work. Manipulation of the media for political purposes continues, especially within the public broadcast media but also in privately-owned media (and online media in particular). Although implementation of the defamation laws has progressed, they still have a self-censorship effect on journalists. Nonetheless, investigative journalism plays a serious role in society and a number of other online media outlets have exposed significant cases of corruption. Yet no legislation has improved the general environment for journalists, no law on online media has been promulgated, and no progress has been made on media ownership transparency. The Covid-19 pandemic undermined and threatened press freedom in 2020. The government held press conferences without journalists being physically present, and officials avoided answering critical questions on the relevance of the government's measures. Some authorities and state institutions directly obstructed journalists' work, and in some cases, they even accused journalists of "inaccurate and malicious reporting".

That being said, we want to warn of the importance of truthful media reporting, without political pressures which often lead to some political games and fake news. Fake news—news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false designed to control people's perceptions of reality—has been wont to influence politics and promote advertising. But it's also become a way to fire up and intensify social conflict. Stories that are untrue which intentionally mislead readers have caused growing mistrust among people. In some cases this mistrust leads to incivility, protest over imaginary events, or violence. It is time to stop this and allow journalists and other press workers to do their job properly, genuinely, without pressure and objectively.

Press freedom is the foundation of many other basic human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Free media can call for accountability - raising awareness of clarity discourages corruption and human rights violations. The problems of marginalized groups and minorities can be heard. Accurate information and free media are the key to public discourse: they form common values and influence policies at the local, state and international levels. Freedom of the media is not limited only to investigative journalism - it also includes satirical texts, columns and editorials.



"The Reporters Without Borders have compiled the index annually since 2002 and levels of press freedom are calculated through a range of indicators such as media independence, transparency and the media environment in general."

Source: Statista, 2021

George Orwell - a soothsayer or just an ordinary writer with a vivid imagination / George Orwell's 1984 as a timeless scenario



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This article is basically set to uncover the veil of George Orwell's creativity in placing unexpired and timeless image adhered to the novel of "Nineteen Eighty Four" that coincided with political and fake news scenarios whose occurrence dated back to approximately less than fifty or sixty decades ago, but in a such way how these images repapered, reproduced, and interconnected with similar situations, political incidents and scenarios in both 20th and 21st centuries. We will try to critically analyze the characters' acts and quotes from the novel underlining the political images, fake news and their insinuations that the writer displayed not only for criticizing the political systems and regimes at that time but also for foreseeing his readers' future which will witness the repetition of the same scenarios.

The article will try to prove how the images appeared in Orwell's novel will remain as a mirror of renewable incidents as long as the dirty games in politics will never be over or removed. Finally, the article concludes thereupon the political ideology and scenarios in Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty Four" akin to such scenarios and incidents in truth additionally to the timeless qualities of his works which still appeal for readers of various generations and different cultures.

For those who haven't read the book yet, let's briefly introduce the novel 1984. This work is a dystopian fiction that is about a dystopian futuristic society in 1984 during which Britain has transformed into a "superstate" and named "Oceania" after the global war. Elements of war and futurism is a crucial theme which Orwell takes into consideration throughout 1984.

Oceania is ruled by a totalitarian government named "The Party" and therefore the Party's leader is Big Brother, who enjoys an intense cult of personality but might not even exist. The government has four ministries; Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of affection with torture and therefore the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. All jobs within the country are under the control of those four ministries. The country, which consists of senior party leaders, party members, and therefore the proletariat, is kept in check in the least times. Moreover, party members are civil servants and therefore the proletariat constitutes a category freed from support and supervision.

Sounds familiar (The Party – SDx, SBx, HDx; Big Brother – MD, BI, DČ...) and highly related to Bosnia and Herzegovina? Yeah, we know...

How can we connect this book with the SLAM project, its goals and fake news? Read the following paragraphs carefully.

Always eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or bed—no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters in your skull. / The people will believe what the media tells them they believe.



In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the characters' lives are completely controlled by government forces and beliefs. This control extends even to the foremost private recesses of an individual. Orwell depicts a bleak and dystopian world so barren of individuality and privacy that "nothing [is] your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull." He employs color imagery to convey the negative and stifling effects of such a world over the "colorless, crushed-looking" victims of its regime. Individuals are unable to measure open, free and authentic lives because the Party demands absolute loyalty and absolute control over its subjects. The Party even demands uniformity of thought and total control over even the foremost intimate and personal recesses of individuality, the mind.

Winston's decision to write down his private thoughts in a diary highlight the elemental human need for freedom of thought because it is the only vehicle available to him to "carry on the human heritage." Even the youngsters are used as weapons to invade their parents' privacy. They're actively encouraged to watch their parents' actions and betray them. Orwell's Oceania may be a world during which "It [is] almost normal for people over thirty to be scared of their own children."

Orwell's book concludes with protagonist, Winston, totally accepting the Party's rule, fully participating within the ritualistic Two Minute Hate, and believing that two plus two equals five. Nowadays, we seem to be Winston, but more importantly Big Tech seems to behave just like the Party. How is that? Well, we accept the cookies on every single website and online media, we agree with the Terms of Privacy on every single installed app without even reading it (yeah, you can relate this to Bill Gates, chipping, vaccines and 5G as well), we believe in Facebook news and comments on those articles, we believe in some "shocking, unbelievable, PHOTO+VIDEO" Instagram posts.

As mentioned in one of the previous articles and according to research by Mediacentar Sarajevo, due to a fall in advertising revenues, the media in B&H are getting increasingly hooked in to public finance.

Subsidies and grants are allocated to the media during a non-transparent manner, while advertising revenues from public companies are exploited for political interests.

Media ownership remains under-regulated: there has been no law limiting media concentration of ownership since 2006 and no information on possible political influences is out there to the general public.

What does this mean? This means that some famous and credible media in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in the service of several strongest political parties and journalists have to publish news that are permitted by their political bosses. We believe to those famous media, because their name is credible, they have the best status, but are they really trustworthy? I think that Orwell's quotes "The people will believe what media tells them they believe.", "The people will not revolt. They will not look up from their screens long enough to notice what's happening." are true in this case.



What I find disheartening is that there are a couple of simple things that are advocated for an extended time that might, if not solve the matter entirely, at least help significantly:



Add a warning message – Social media companies have tried to eliminate every friction point for users so as to maximize the quantity of communication and engagement on their platforms. But what if they took a special approach? What if, when a user was close to post or tweet something inflammatory, social media companies interrupted with a pop-up message saying something along the lines of: “Are you sure?” Instagram implemented something similar in 2019 to limit damaging reactive communications. Though this approach won’t prevent everyone from posting outrageous content, it’ll force tons folks to pause and reflect before we do so.

Stop showing suggested posts or videos as how to stay users scrolling / viewing even once they have seen everything that the people they follow have posted – YouTube launched AutoPlay in 2015, serving its viewers a series of continuously playing suggested videos. This feature is essentially considered because the main driver for the dissemination of utmost content. Instagram, which had resisted so far, changed its policy in August 2019 and commenced including suggested posts in users’ feeds.

Aggressively fight for facts – When someone writes that “two plus two equal five,” make it your mission to a minimum of stop propagating the lie, regardless of how exciting it's for your users. This may be an incredibly difficult and certain never-ending battle. Mistakes are going to be made. But they’re worthwhile. Efforts thus far are too timid; investments in robust fact checking teams and processes got to be ramped up dramatically. Researchers are still divided on whether placing warning messages alongside false information is effective in limiting the sharing of it. Some have concluded that it could make users less likely to shared; others have seen no impact. But it’s worth trying.



Relentlessly identify and pack up accounts, pages, and forums that promote hate – A study on the consequences of a ban of two hate communities by Reddit in 2015 demonstrated that “by shutting down these echo chambers of hate, Reddit caused the people participating to either leave the location or dramatically change their linguistic behavior.” In other words, the extent of hate decreased altogether, even when an equivalent users continued to use Reddit and joined other forums.



All of those solutions come right down to an easy idea: a very human-centric business—one that desires to enhance humanity—should support its users’ strengths, instead of exploit our weaknesses. Though our world today may resemble Nineteen Eighty-Four, there’s still time for us to write down a special ending.

Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.

It is scary how, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, the Party uses Newspeak to strip meaning out of language, making it impossible for people to possess certain thoughts. Reducing the amount of words available to people prevents them from having proper feelings and concepts, and makes the planet harder to process and comprehend. When language loses its meaning (“war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength”), the Party is on top of things of what's considered reality. Facts and independent thought don’t really exist anymore:

By 2050—earlier, probably—all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. the entire literature of the past will be destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron—they’ll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely become something different, but actually contradictory of what they went to be. Even the literature of The Party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you've got a slogan like Freedom is Slavery when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The entire climate of thought are going to be different. In fact, there'll be no thought, as we know it now.

During the preparation of this article, we did a qualitative research and compared several articles published on the Internet. We can see that numerous media use words such as “shocking, scary and exclusive news”, “PHOTO+VIDEO” and then there are max. 10 simple sentences which try to prove something that later turns out to be fake news. For example, have a glance at this article which uses clickbait title, catchy photos and aforementioned words:

<https://www.mojevrijeme.hr/magazin/2018/11/sokantna-vijest-koju-morate-znati-o-ovim-migrantima/>.

This article is great, detailed and its authors did a wonderful job in investigating the real truth. However, there is an article which says that migrants are preparing ducks for their meal at the river Una and that local citizens are shocked. That article is shared on Facebook by BHnovosti and when you try to open and read it, you can't :

(<https://novosti-tv.net/2018/07/05/sokantno-migranti-rostiljaju-patke-na-uni-biscani-zgrozeni/>).

What is more “shocking” here is that people believe in the second article, they think it is reality, they choose to generalize and believe in fake videos and photos.

Our own language is becoming more reductive and simplistic, as a results of social media's character limits and use of hashtags to surface and promote catchy, easy-to-understand ideas, events, and trends. On these platforms, nuance isn't rewarded. And by allowing any opinion (no matter how fringe) to require on the looks of fact, social networks have made it harder for us to grasp our reality.

The rise of ‘alternative facts’ has spiked the sales for George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984, as people steel oneself against the truth of a Big Brother dystopia.

Facts are indisputable truths. Facts aren't subjective, measurable or up for discussion. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘facts’ in the following way: “A fact may be a piece of data presented as having objective reality.”

So when Kellyanne Conway tried to press the narrative that falsehoods might be called “alternative facts,” people were understandably alarmed.

Parallels are drawn between Conway's statement and George Orwell's novel 1984 during which ‘alternative facts’ — there called ‘untruths’ and ‘doublespeak’ — are employed by an authoritarian government in an effort to regulate the narrative of its people's reality.

If there's any excellent news to require faraway from Conway's comments, it's that these parallels have actually led many truth-seekers to select up Orwell's important novel to realize some perspective. The Washington Post is one among many shops now reporting that the long-lasting classic has soared to the highest 5 on Amazon.com.



FACT

Forbes' article "As Orwell's 1984 Turns 70 It Predicted Much Of Today's Surveillance Society" from 2019 says this: "George Orwell's famous novel Nineteen Eighty-Four turns 70 years old next month. Looking back on its predictions and the state of the world today, how much did it get right in its predictions of a dystopian surveillance state where every word is monitored, unacceptable speech is deleted, history is rewritten or deleted altogether and individuals can become 'unpersons' for holding views disliked by those in power? It turns out Orwell's predictions were frighteningly accurate.

"In 1984, it was the state that determined what constituted acceptable speech in keeping society orderly.

"In 2019, it is a small cadre of private companies in Silicon Valley and their executives that wield absolute power over what we are permitted to see and say online.

"In 1984, there were just a few countries to which most of the world's citizens belonged.

"In 2019, there are just a few social media empires to which most of the world's netizens belong.

"In 1984, it was the state that conducted surveillance and censored speech.

"In 2019, social media companies deploy vast armies of human and algorithmic moderators that surveil their users 24/7, flagging those that commit thoughtcrimes and deleting their violations from existence. Those that commit too many thoughtcrimes are banished to 'unperson' status by these same private companies, without any intervention or even in contradiction with the will of the state and without any right to appeal."



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Fake news – definitions and characterization



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Fake news – a definition

“Recent political events – notably the controversially close Brexit referendum in the U.K. and narrow win of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election of 2016 – have led to a wave of interest in the phenomenon of “fake news“, which is widely believed to have played a significant role in shaping the outcome of both political contests.”^[1]

If we want to understand the distinctive aspects of the recent onslaught of fabricated and misleading information that passes itself off as news, we must first understand some of the core epistemic functions of news. The emphasis has been on their reliability as a source of factual information for the consumer. Consumers of news media are the recipients of a specialized form of testimony, and it is understood that consumers of news also incur epistemic obligations.

It is assumed that competent readers can distinguish between factual reports and opinion pieces, and will use the same basic screening methods (e.g., for errors and inconsistencies) they would be using when evaluating the testimony of a trusted and competent interlocutor. Naively accepting reports without further analysis comes dangerously, trust in putative epistemic authorities is by necessity provisional, and basic critical questions – concerning the credibility of the source, its reliability, motives, interests, consistency and track record – should never be entirely suppressed.

News media – serving as the source of much of what we take ourselves to know. Without reliance on curated news reports we would know precious little about what goes on in other countries, about the world of politics, or even about what the latest sports results are. Of course, communicating reliable information is not their only social function because even consumers do not always turn to the news for knowledge and information only, but also for entertainment and diversion. The most important epistemic function of the news is to furnish us with reliable factual information.

“In addition to acquiring specific beliefs by accepting the corresponding news reports, we also rely on the news media for overall coverage. If our environment’s epistemic coverage is deficient, we will no longer be reliably apprised of significant changes in the world around us, and whatever knowledge may have been acquired at the initial point of belief formation will gradually erode.” [2]

To this way the news provides us with epistemic coverage, which in turn safeguards existing knowledge by keeping us abreast of changes in the world.

Traditionally, the news has been presented in a fixed and, aggregate form, as a news bulletin of a certain duration, or a newspaper edition with a certain number of pages. This necessitates not only tough editorial choices regarding what to include, and what to leave out, but also presupposes the knowledge of the target audience – since, for obvious commercial reasons, the selection of topics must have a sufficiently broad appeal. The consumer, in turn, can infer from the selection of articles of news segments what other people in their community tend to be interested in. As the journalist Stefan Schulz puts it, “Newspapers inform people about what information other people seek out when they wish to learn about world.” [3]

Historically, the newspaper industry has been no stranger to bias, distortion, manipulation and outright fabrication. As Robert Love puts it, “In the early days of American journalism, newspapers trafficked in intentional, entertaining hoaxes.” “More recently, CNN and The NEW York Times were used by the U.S. military as unwriting co-conspirators in spreading false information, a tactic known as psychological operations”“, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. The faking of news stories has been around for a long time, and every iteration of technological advancement, has unleashed new possibilities of deception and fabrication.” [4]

„Fakers”“ usually used a reputable member of the community such as a doctor, dentist, architect, or other professional or businessperson man, who, for money, would corroborate the story to any reporter that the local paper might send to investigate in bona fides. „Fake news” then involved deception, not only of the consumer but also of the middle-man: the editor of the local paper, who “ now constantly on the alert for fake stories, is often deceived, and sends on of the reporters of his own paper to investigate the matter”, only for the local reporter to encounter the planted report. As the art historian Mark Jones puts it, with some hyperbole: “Each society, each generation, fakes the thing it covets most. ”Fake news typically mimic the “look and feel” of mainstream sources to garner credibility and for some consumers, fake news appears to swamp traditional news sources, even subverting the latter's claim to authoritativeness. This seems to be the overt goal every time Donald Trump uses his Twitter account to denounce a critical news story as, in his trademark all-caps, “„FAKE NEWS”“, which he did a total of 73 times between 10 December 2016 and 24 July 2017 alone. Most of the time, the label is applied not to specific, but indiscriminately to news organizations such as CNN, MSNBC, or The New York Times.

The view that fake news could be an effective tool for promoting media literacy, no longer is it reserved for sophisticated-and ultimately self-critical media formats that aim to educate their viewers. Instead, it has come to be associated with sources that spread falsehoods by manipulating their consumer's emotions and tapping into deeply held partisan beliefs.

[1] Gelfert, A., Fake News: A Definition

[2] Godler Y, Reich Z, Miller B. Social epistemology as a new paradigm for journalism and media studies. *New Media & Society*. 2020;22(2):213-229.
doi:10.1177/1461444819856922

[3] Gelfert, A., Fake News: A Definition

[4] Gelfert, A., Fake News: A Definition

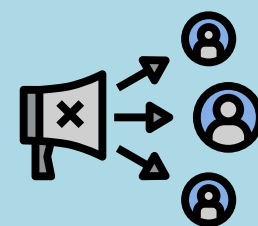


Surveying recent characterizations of 'fake news'

The notion of fake news is defined and characterized in a number of ways, both because of political issues and due to other different spheres of life. According to Lilleker, ‘fake news’ is “a catch-all term with multiple definitions”. Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘fake news’ as: “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke.”[1] Another definition says that fake news is a faux or insinuating statistic offered as information. It frequently has the goal of diminishing the popularity of someone or an entity, or creating wealth through advertising revenue.

Media scholar Nolan Higdon has described fake news as “fake or deceptive content material offered as information and communicated in codecs spanning spoken, written, printed, electronic, and virtual communication.” As defined by Dictionary.com, fake news is “false news stories, often of a sensational nature, created to be widely shared or distributed for the purpose of generating revenue, or promoting or discrediting a public figure, political movement, company, etc.” or “false news stories, often of a sensational nature, created to be widely shared or distributed for the purpose of generating revenue, or promoting or discrediting a public figure, political movement, company, etc.”^[2] Others may relate ‘fake news’ to words such as ‘hoax’, ‘gossip’, ‘rumor’, ‘deceit’, ‘fraud’, ‘scam’.

Once common in print, the superiority of fake news has accelerated with the upward thrust of social media, in particular the Facebook News Feed. Political polarization, post-fact politics, affirmation bias, and social media algorithms had been implicated withinside the unfold of faux information. It is once in a while generated and propagated through antagonistic overseas actors, particularly all through elections. The use of anonymously-hosted fake news websites has made it tough to prosecute benefits of false news for libel. In a few definitions, fake news includes satirical articles misinterpreted as genuine, and articles that employ sensationalist or clickbait headlines that aren't supported withinside the text.



Generally speaking, fake news has three characteristics:

- Inaccuracy regarding facts
- Optimization to share
- The main purpose is to shroud or buckle with emotions; feeding on prejudice or bias.

A news article isn't fake because it's rude or inappropriate. A news article that challenges your beliefs or values isn't fake news. A news article that's rejected by those in power doesn't make that story a fake news article either. What else isn't fake news? Satire, honest reporting mistakes, journalism you do not like aren't fake news.

Fake news are stories that are extremely untrustworthy, false, faux, stories that are fabricated and contain no sustainable sources or quotes. Types of fake news are misinformation and disinformation. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary and University of Michigan library website, misinformation is “false or inaccurate information that is mistakenly or inadvertently created or spread; the intent is not to deceive”, while disinformation is “false information that is deliberately created and spread in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth”.^[3]

^[1] Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/fake-news> (Accessed on 27 March 2021)

^[2] Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/fake-news> (Accessed on 27 March 2021)

^[3] University of Michigan Library Research Guides, <https://uides.lib.umich.edu/fakenews> (Accessed on 27 March 2021)



Fake news: A stipulative definition

Just as disinformation is a species of information, fake news is, in a sense that needs to be spelled out, a form of news. This claim is by no means uncontroversial, since it might appear to create a false equivalence between epistemically “high-grade” and “low-grade” entities, so to speak. The very suggestion that disinformation is a species of information has been met with forceful criticism.

Perspective matters. For the recipient of a piece of disinformation, or someone who is confronted with an instance of fake news, it does little good to be told that they should only accept what they are told if, in fact, it meets the requisite criteria of veracity and truthfulness. Therefore, building truth and veracity into the very definitions of ‘information’ and ‘news’—in other words, making them success terms—does little to address the pressing epistemological problem: how to respond to claims presented to us as true by a putative news source, given that, for all we know, they might (or might not) be fake news.

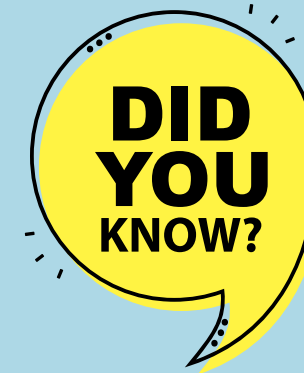
For one, fake news is misleading, in much the same way that disinformation is misleading: it is “likely to create false beliefs” (Fallis 2015, p. 406). As discussed earlier, fake news may sometimes be fabricated from thin air, in which case it can at best be accidentally true. More often than not, it is built explicitly around falsehoods—especially claims that, if true, would be sensational—which it promotes and perpetuates.

Perhaps a given claim, as a matter of chance, happens to be encountered only by an especially critical subset of reasoners, none of whom is taken in by it, even though the average person would have easily been fooled. Yet, arguably, what matters in the case of fake news, and gives urgency to it as a sociopolitical phenomenon, is that sufficiently large numbers of people are in fact taken in by it.

What matters, then, is that, all else being equal, and taking into account general background conditions such as overall levels of media literacy, a piece of fake news that is released is likely to result in (and often does cause) false beliefs on the part of its target audience. For a putative report to count as fake news, it must be likely to mislead not only in a non-accidental way, but deliberately. What matters is that the purveyors of fake news deliberately engage in practices that they know, or can reasonably foresee, to lead to the likely formation of false beliefs on the part of their audience, irrespective of whether they themselves have a stake in those beliefs (as a political activist might have), or whether they are just in it for the money (as the Macedonian website operators were[1]). Importantly, the spread of false beliefs is not merely a side effect of fake news, but is a direct result of its function. By contrast, fake news is designed to operate in a way that is unconstrained by the truth, either because it aims to instil falsehoods in its target audience (for example, in order to discredit a political opponent), or because the way it is deliberately operated is objectively likely to mislead its target audience, its real goal

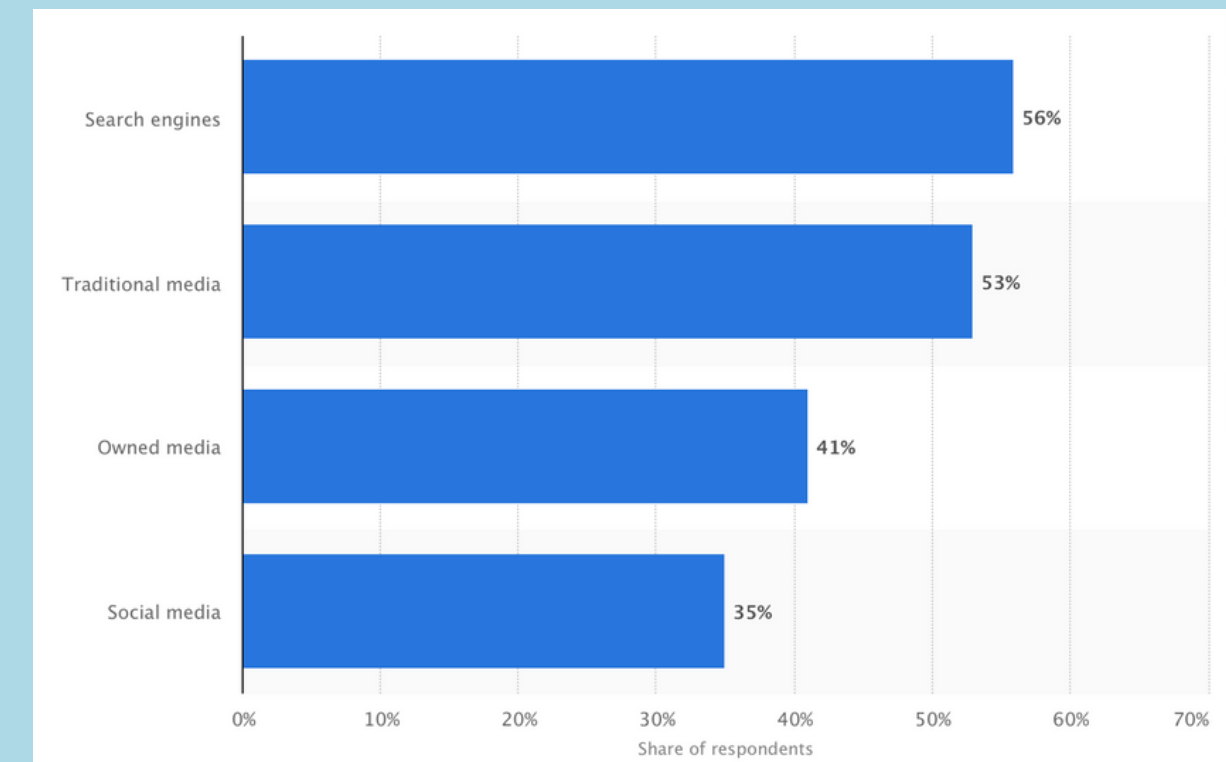
being (for example) the generation of clickbait through sensational claims that attract an online audience.

Fake news is the deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design.



"Data on the level of trust in selected media sources worldwide as of November 2020 showed that 53 percent of respondents stated that they trusted traditional media to provide general news and information, compared to just 35 percent who considered social media trustworthy."

Source: Statista, 2021



MEDIA FREEDOM INDEX FOR 2021!



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Freedom of the media, freedom of expression, and access to reliable information are the main foundations and backbones on which every functional, civilized, and democratic society rests. This is what the theory, the academic community, the European Union say... But the practice shows something completely different, which is supported by the announcement of Reporters Without Borders on media freedoms in the world for 2021. This report presents a cross-section of the state of media freedom based on an assessment of pluralism, media independence, the quality of the legislative framework, and journalists' security in each country.

Many governments have used the coronavirus pandemic to cover all their failures in both the country's policy and in the fight against the pandemic to restrict journalists' access to information, sources, and obstruction of field reporting.

So the public often has access only to the data on the pandemic provided by the state, which provides a lot of space for manipulation. The Reporters Without Borders report for last year is devastating and records a dramatic decline in media freedom around the world. Media work was partially or completely blocked in more than 130 of the 180 countries analyzed.

Reporters Without Borders' Media Freedom Index for 2021 showed that media freedoms were restricted in 59 countries, and completely blocked or severely hampered in 73 of the 180 countries analyzed, representing 73% of the total number of countries analyzed. These countries are classified as "very bad", "bad" or "problematic" for media freedom and are marked in black, red, or orange on the World Press Freedom Map.

COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS



When it comes to the countries of the Western Balkans, they are in the orange zone, which is assessed as a "problematic" state of the media. Among them, Bosnia and Herzegovina is by far the best. Kosovo recorded the biggest drop by as many as 8 places and is currently in 78th place, followed by Albania in 83rd, Northern Macedonia in 90th, Serbia in 93rd and Montenegro in 104th place.

According to the Media Freedoms Index for 2021, although it occupies the best position among the countries of the Western Balkans, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has not improved at all compared to the previous year, as it is still in 58th place out of 180 countries. Although our country has the most liberal media laws that guarantee a high degree of media freedom, their great shortcoming is their improper implementation and enforcement. According to the report, a polarized political climate prevails in BiH, permeated by constant verbal attacks and nationalist rhetoric, thus creating fertile ground for creating a hostile environment for media freedom. Editorial policies that reflect ethnic divisions and hate speech, increasing attacks on journalists due to ethnic origin, a hostile climate when it comes to reporting on migrants, politicians' defamation lawsuits as intimidation and pressure on journalists, even though defamation was decriminalized in 2003., non-transparency of media ownership and increased private sector control over the media, unfavorable working conditions (short-term contracts and low wages), regime media through which political parties place their information and campaign, limited access of journalists to information, legal insecurity of journalists and lack of regulation in certain areas (law on online media) and the Coronavirus pandemic are all factors that have greatly threatened media freedom and the position of journalists during 2020.

Of particular concern are the increasing incidence of online violence and the increasing number of threats that journalists receive through social networks and in comments on Internet portals.

At the World Index of Media Freedoms, Serbia is declining from year to year and currently ranks 93rd, which indicates that media freedoms are increasingly being violated and that there is less and less space for critical journalists and media. With the arrival of Aleksandar Vučić to power, media freedoms have significantly decreased and Serbia has become a country insecure for journalists, where fake news from the pro-government media is becoming more visible and alarmingly popular. Journalists do not enjoy the support of the authorities and are legally unprotected, many attacks on journalists have remained uninvestigated and perpetrators unpunished. Attacks on the media and journalists have become commonplace, not only verbal but also death threats where we have a case of arson in the house of Milan Jovanovic who wrote about corruption at the local level. But in this situation, a shift was made and the perpetrators were brought to justice and punished. Furthermore, we have the case of journalist Ana Lalic who was held overnight in a cell in April 2020, after being arrested at her home for reports of a local hospital regarding a lack of equipment to fight the pandemic. This was all due to the enactment of a draconian law (which was later repealed) and an attempt to introduce official censorship using the pandemic crisis.

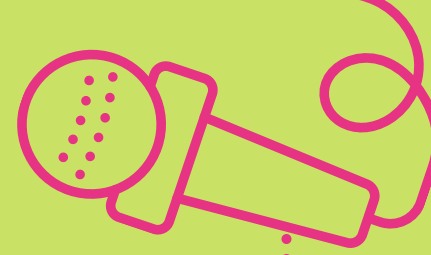
Montenegro is ranked the worst of all the Balkan countries. Although there was a change of government after 20 years, no significant improvement took place.

The new Montenegrin government cited strengthening media freedom and improving working conditions for journalists as a priority, and announced changes to the 2019 media laws, but all that remained in the form of mere promises.

State from the region that has the privilege to have the best position is Slovenia, which is ranked at the 36th position, followed by Croatia, which recorded a decline of 3 places and is in 56th place, and this is its best ranking since 2013. Croatian journalists investigating corruption, organized (war) crimes are often exposed to harassment and various pressures. “Humiliating” media content has been criminalized since 2013, and physical attacks, threats, and cyber-violence remain a major problem, as is the government's passivity in taking concrete protection measures. At least 924 lawsuits against the media and journalists are currently active in Croatia, of which prosecutors are demanding almost HRK 78.5 million, which shows that the prosecution of journalists and the media continues. Although that number is in reality even higher. Politicians, judges, and powerful people have found a legal mechanism for censoring, intimidating, and silencing critical journalists and the media through lawsuits, high fines, and defense costs.

THE STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN OTHER COUNTRIES

At the top of the list of the safest countries for journalists, the first 12 places marked in white for many years are certainly the



Scandinavian countries, which are known for their well-developed public support for journalistic work.

Norway has been in the first place as the best-positioned country for five years in a row, although, as it is stated, the media in that country complained about the lack of access to state information about the pandemic. Finland retained second place, while Sweden regained its third position, which last year was held by Denmark, which took fourth place this year. This year, only 12 out of 180 countries (7%) can claim to offer a favorable media environment, compared to 13 countries (8%) last year.

Yellow marks the 13th (Germany) to 48th place in Romania. Germany was stripped of its classification as “good” because dozens of its journalists were attacked by supporters of extremist groups and groups that support conspiracy theories during protests against restrictions imposed in the fight against the pandemic. The United States also belongs to the yellow zone, ranking 44th and down one place, although the last year of former President Trump was marked by a record number of attacks on journalists (about 400 cases) and arrests of journalists (130) as they tried to cover protests. across the country against systemic racism and police brutality against colored people. But with the arrival of new President Biden, the situation is improving where he promises to support the environment of truth and points out that the goal of his administration is for the United States to regain the status of a world beacon of freedom of expression.

Russia belongs to the red zone because its situation is classified as “bad” and is in 150th place.

It set in motion its repressive apparatus to limit and control media coverage of the protests in support of Kremlin opponent Alexei Navalny. Major TV channels continue to bombard viewers with propaganda, and vague and selective laws are used to arbitrarily arrest journalists who are often labeled “foreign agents.” Turkey also belongs to this group, which ranks 153rd. In “New Turkey” under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Internet censorship has reached its peak. Turkish military operations along the border with Syria, political manipulations of the Syrian refugee crisis, and the coronary virus pandemic have been used as major tools to strengthen authoritarian policies towards critical media and use the first-instance system for political purposes. The government controls 90% of the national media, and criticizing and holding the government accountable is now almost impossible, as pluralism seeks to be removed by all possible means. Belarus has fallen by five places compared to 2020 and is now 158th out of 180 countries, and the description states that it is “the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists.” 97 journalists were arrested in Belarus last year, 11 are currently in prison, and 50 Internet sites have been blocked.

Countries that are painted black are classified as a “very bad” environment for media freedom and range from 160 to 180 seats. China ranks 177th, which continues to tighten internet censorship, surveillance, and propaganda to unprecedented levels. Next, China is followed by three totalitarian states that

are always in the last three places Turkmenistan (178), North Korea (179), and in last place Eritrea.

These countries have absolute control over all news and information with claims that they have not had COVID-19 cases.

At least 30 journalists were killed worldwide in 2020, while 21 of them were killed for their work, which is ten more than last year. Other journalists were killed in firefighting or fighting in conflict areas, but also on other tasks that proved life-threatening. Mexico (143) was the most devastating country for journalists where cartels, criminal groups, and militants were responsible for killing journalists, followed by Afghanistan (122), the Philippines (138), Syria (173). According to the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), last year had the lowest number of murders of journalists since 2000 – 26. In Iran (174) we have a case of the direct and public killing of journalists by the government. Iran executed journalist Ruhollah Zam on December 12 for critically reporting on Iranian officials and providing information on the timing and locations of protests in 2017. The death penalty was hanging. The situation is most dangerous for journalists involved in investigative journalism and following the police in their reports, violence related to illegal narcotics and crime. Of particular concern is gender-based violence directed at female journalists.

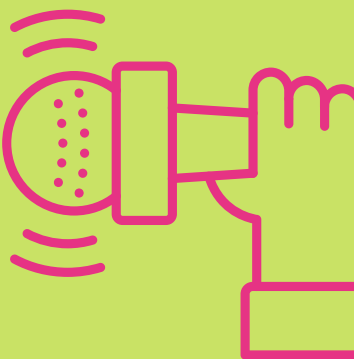
“Journalism is the best vaccine against disinformation,” said RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire.

“Unfortunately, its production and distribution are too often blocked by political, economic, technological and sometimes even cultural factors. In response to the viral nature of cross-border disinformation, on digital platforms and social networks, journalism is the main way to ensure that the public debate is based on a diverse set of facts,” Deloire noted.

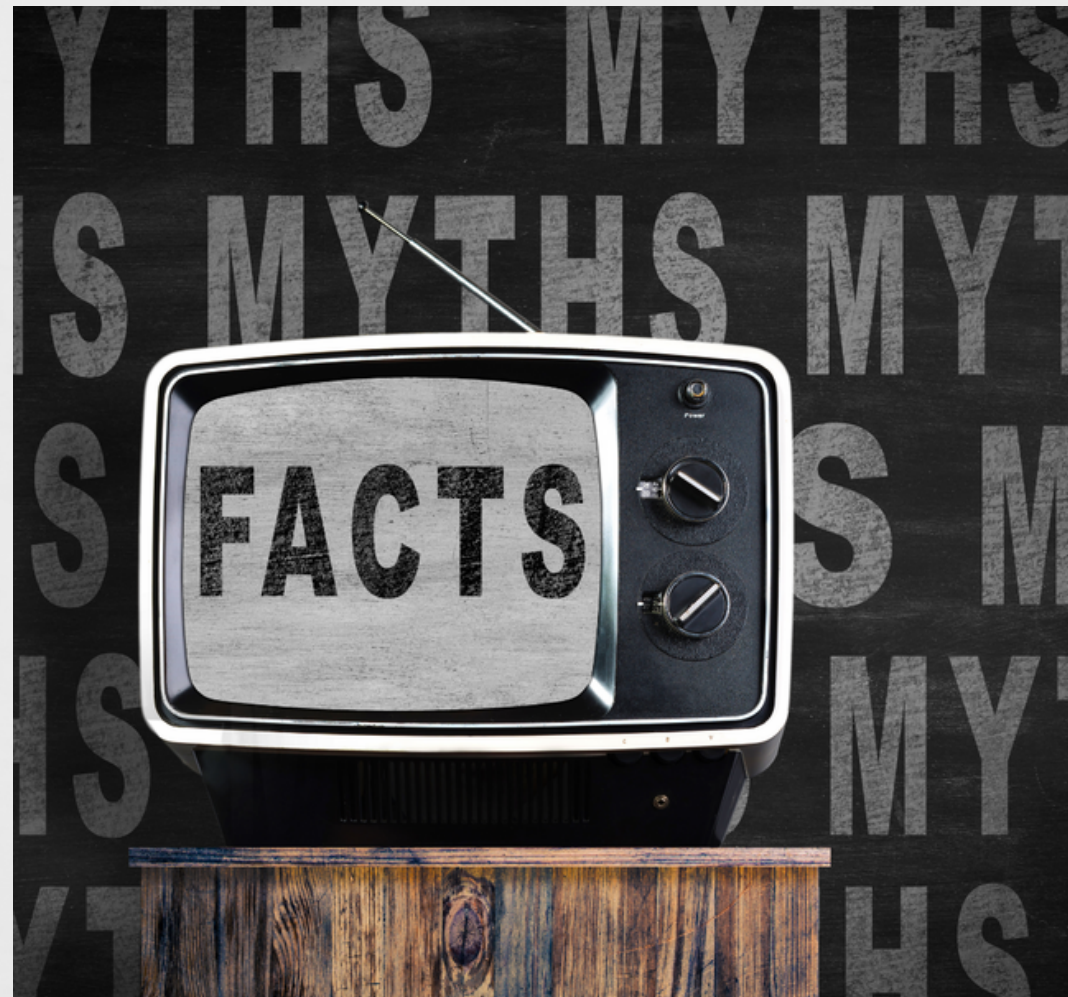
What we can conclude is that media freedoms are threatened and that there is a climate of fear and tension in the media world where hatred and animosity towards journalists turn into violence. The number of countries marked as safe for journalists is constantly declining and authoritarian authorities around the world are tightening the noose around the media. Another big problem is the fact that media houses are owned by politicians, powerful people, oligarchs who control newspapers and television and use them as a tool to achieve personal goals. Based on all these information, we can speak of a globally uncertain climate for journalists.

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Storytelling and fact-checking



Authors: Ajna Veladžić & Omer Muminović
BRAVO BiH

Storytelling

Once upon a time, one wanted to bring others together, educate, entertain and call them on the action in a unique way. And one told a story. Their audience was touched and inspired by never before heard narrative full of interesting characters, memorable events, and catchy sayings. It was almost a magic and, concurrently, a trendy must-have power. Story by story, the real art of storytelling was created and happily used and admired until the end.

Back to the present, there are plenty of good stories told and written every day for a long list of purposes. Beginning from the business sector, motivating workers and students, to actions of non-governmental and political establishments, well-told stories always do their job. They change us from within, redirect our perspective, and make us move. Stories make everything look possible, and people, loving to believe that, love stories as well.

While storytelling can be used in all spheres of life, it has its importance in cultural preservation. Have you ever heard of the Western African model of storytelling? We bet that it is pure fun to sit around the fire after dinner and listen to a storyteller. Additionally, credits to Irish storytellers as well. They do an exhausting job traveling from village to village to gather people, educate and entertain them.

For sure, they must have noticed what psychologist Jerome Bruner's research suggests, that a story is more memorable than a fact. To be precise, 22 times.

Therefore, either through culture, religion, or work, all of us get in touch with this kind of art and become aware of its power. Undoubtedly, we all receive an incentive to develop ourselves into good storytellers.

Finally, we leave you with the famous storytelling of Steve Jobs in 2015, having in mind his words:

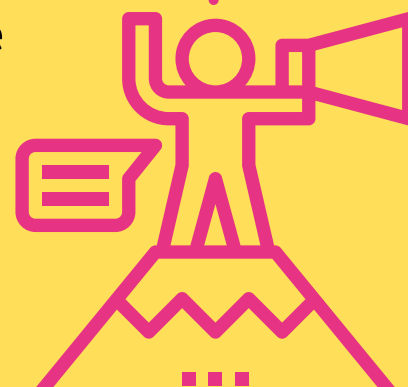
"The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values, and agenda of an entire generation that is to come...."

Fun fact: He was not always a good one. We all need some practice.

Fact-checking

In the 21-century media environment, there are various challenges media consumers need to be aware of and overcome. Because, in essence, media should aim to inform people about essential everyday news and not to manipulate people's emotions, which can be the case nowadays. However, that is not simple to advocate for since media are getting its attention by headings causing an emotional reaction. Establishing connections between news and people's everyday lives, mainly personally, makes them very influential and omnipresent. In that manner, by personalized advertising with sponsored information, individuals are often first and the last barrier for widespread misinformation or news, which are essential to be informed about. But, since a challenge emerges, a potential solution goes alongside. In terms of this specific issue, fact-checking occupation gains its momentum.

However, the phenomenon of fact-checking is not a 21-century invention. Its roots date back to the past. For example, in the USA, the first fact-checking initiatives began to appear in the period between 190 and 1900 when organizations for correction of misleading and inaccurate news were first time opened (Fabry, 2014).



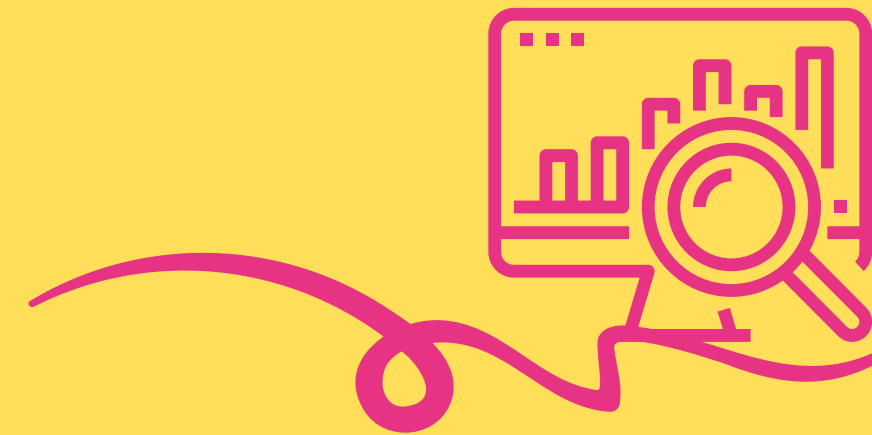
As time passes and significantly more news started to be presented to the public daily, fact-checkers gained their importance globally. Social media platforms, such as Facebook in the first place, revolutionized communication but also caused people to freely write the first thing on their mind without being accountable for possible consequences they can drive. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), based at the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, accelerated global response by connecting fact-checkers globally by establishing fact-checkers in Africa, Europe, North America, and other geographical areas.

However, not everyone is familiar with how fact-checking works. Often, because of a lack of information, fact-checking reports go under the radar. But, as ordinary users of social media, having them "on our side" is an alternative for every responsible online user to be appropriately informed and objective. Wright State University (2021) point out steps that can be undertaken to evaluate the newest information, stating four main steps in the following order:

- Use fact checking sites
- Evaluate the information using CRAAP test (Currency, Relevance, Accuracy, Authority and Purpose)
- Check biases
- Step Away

FACT-CHECKED 🔍

And almost every time, we will find that using fact-checking sites is the first step in evaluating suspicious information presented to us daily.



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Glance at Turkey



Author: Ajna Veladžić
BRAVO BiH

Let us take a look at a country that is in variety of economic, political and cultural ways connected to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to other Balkan countries.

Did you know that Turkey is one of the largest jailors of journalists, competing with China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia? Clearly, something is going on in country's media world.

According to Reuters Digital News Reports, trust in news overall in 2020 was 55%, which was pretty high, similar to other countries. However, there is still a worrying fact that whooping 49% say that they encountered fake news in the week prior to survey¹. If we compare the statistics to Germany's 9%², we can envision the volume of the problem. Turkish media became a pool of news, whose large portion is reserved for fake ones. People rightfully complain about the issue, finding it difficult to distinguish between made-up stories and vive reality.

Exploring their levels of suspicion, there is correlation found between type of media channel and mistrust. Research „Medya Kullanımı ve Haber Tüketimi“ recorded less mistrust in consumption of TV and printed news. On the other hand, people tend to be more suspicious when getting in touch with internet

news. This may explain why most people across the country show a tendation toward TV news, although citizens of urban areas use internet more.

In further exploration of mistrust toward news by Turkish population, the research showed that individuals who reported to follow politics, culture or science news doubt the validity and truthfullness of the news more than individuals who said to follow other topics.

To complete the overall picture about fake news affairs in Turkey, let us go back to journalist prisoners. Political parties are believed to have control over media, creating pro-government channels that, according to Reuters Digital News Reports, tend to be trusted less but more loyally by those who do have trust.

Clearly, people feel a need for better and independent media system that will serve society truthfully as well as for education that will help people to distinguish between fake and real news. In strive for resolving the issue, there is Teyit.org, a positive example of contribution to eliminating harmful lies and to increasing awareness in media.³ Functioning as a website, Teyit.org debunked hundreds of fake stories and reports to recieve more than 30 suspicious news a day to check . Besides, Teyit.org works on educating public on recognizing fake news.

As **SLAM**, we share opinion of Teyit.org's founder, young journalist, Mehmet Atakan Foca: „To tackle the problem of fake news, it's not enough to publish articles about misinformation. We want to educate people and give them the tools to strengthen their capacity for verification.“

In the end, let us look at some of most brutal and banal fake news publish by Turkish media.



„The rocket fired by Germans will hit the USA.“⁴



"Thousands of people are continuously being slaughtered in Myanmar's state Arakan. Those who stay silent about crimes against humanity become partners in crime."⁵



"Raped Crocodile in Zoo. First put to sleep. Having tied its limbs..."⁶

- ¹ Mark Lowen, "Fake news in Turkey: Hunting for truth in land of conspiracy", BBC News, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.com/news/amp/world-europe-46137139> (accessed 21 March 2021)
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E vërtetë apo e gabuar?



Author: Ezana Ćeman
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According to a 2018 Media Literacy Index report conducted by the Open Society Institute in Sofia, it was found that “Balkan countries are the most susceptible in Europe to ‘fake’ news – owing to their highly controlled media, low educational levels and low levels of trust in society [1].” Every single country, not only in the Balkan region but worldwide, has had its own experiences with fake news and press freedom or the lack thereof but it all comes down to one thing – how is it being handled? The main country of focus for this country-level analysis is the beautiful Republic of Albania. Being one of the most beautiful countries I have ever personally visited, full of rich and traditional culture, amazing food, a complex language with various dialects, and perhaps the strongest feeling of nationalism you have probably ever experienced, you might say Albania truly has it all. But, is this the case when it comes to fake news in Albania?

As of this year, Albania is currently ranked #83 in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, positioned about average when compared to its neighboring countries [2]. Bordering Albania, Kosovo* is ranked #73, Montenegro is ranked #104, and Greece is ranked #70 [2]. Albania has seen a mix of increases and decreases over the past 8 years which can be seen in Table 1 below.

Year	Ranking		Year	Ranking	
2020	84 / 180	↓	2015	82 / 180	↑
2019	82 / 180	↓	2014	85 / 180	↑
2018	75 / 180	↑	2013	102 / 180	=
2017	76 / 180	↑			
2016	82 / 180	=			

Table 1. Ranking since 2013 (Source: Reporters without borders)

Aside from Albania’s ranking when it comes to freedom of the press, the country has had its own issues with the handling of fake news and disinformation, many issues that are still avidly prominent today. In a 2021 study titled “Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Ways to Effectively Counter Them”, Albania along with the rest of the countries in the Western Balkans were analyzed and key points related to Albania's case were found which will be explained further on in the text [3].

Case Study #1: The Social Media Prime Minister

Dubbed “The Social Media Prime Minister”, Prime Minister Edi Rama is currently serving as the 33rd Prime Minister of Albania and he has had his fair share of run-ins with spreading disinformation for political purposes. Just like with every country, politicians are known for taking advantage of the people they are supposed to represent and protect by spreading disinformation and by discrediting the media but how does this help PM Rama in the long run? In March 2020, what we know as the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, PM Rama was forced to make a public apology due to his role in the spreading of disinformation. His misconstrued views of a video made international headlines and caused tensions between Albania and Spain which could have been ultimately avoided if he and his team did their due diligence and fact-checked what was going on. “Rama was forced to make a public apology in March 2020 for fabricating allegations that Spanish officials were deploying violent police tactics to stop the spread of COVID-19. His ‘evidence’ turned out to be a video of Algerian riot police attacking protesters [3].”

Albanian newsite, Exit News, “commits itself to independence, accuracy, and honest reporting, we pride ourselves on digging deeper and telling the stories that others do not wish to cover [4].” Many media platforms are either completely biased or even scared to tackle strong political figures like a Prime Minister for example but not Exit News.

By instilling fear in the people he is supposed to protect, PM Rama used a video of Algerian riot police attacking protestors, claimed this was happening in Spain, and then threatened his own people with the same use of force if curfew was broken. Exit News did their due diligence and shared with the people how this video has nothing to do with Spain or COVID-19 and they state “The Prime Minister’s attempts to pass off these images as a government’s ‘normal’ reaction in a time of crisis may be a cause for concern [5].” Instances like the one aforementioned should all be a cause for concern because it simply should not happen today and it should not happen by someone who holds so much political power.

Case Study #2: Anti-defamation package

In December 2019, just months before the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and PM Rama’s public apology, Albania introduced its “anti-defamation package”, a set of laws that was “supposed to” tackle the fight against disinformation. This package was highly scrutinized by journalists as well as the Council of Europe as it is an “an attempt to muzzle the media while the government countered it was merely regulating “a jungle of misinformation and hate [6].” So what does the package specifically include? Simply put by Reuters editor Enton Abilekaj, “This law says ‘if we do not like your news story, we can remove it and fine you’ [6].”

How is this possible in 2021? Easy. When the government itself is heavily corrupt (Transparency International has Albania ranked as #104/#180 in its 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index), then laws are changed and created to benefit those who are in power. Reuters states “Parliament adjusted two laws to empower the Albanian Media Authority (AMA) and the Authority of Electronic and Postal Communications to hear complaints about news websites, demand retractions, impose fines of up to 1 million leke (\$9,013.88), and suspend their activity [6].” At the end of the day, it is all business. As unfortunate as it sounds, these laws were not created for the betterment of the country, rather as a way to censor the media and to make quick money simultaneously.

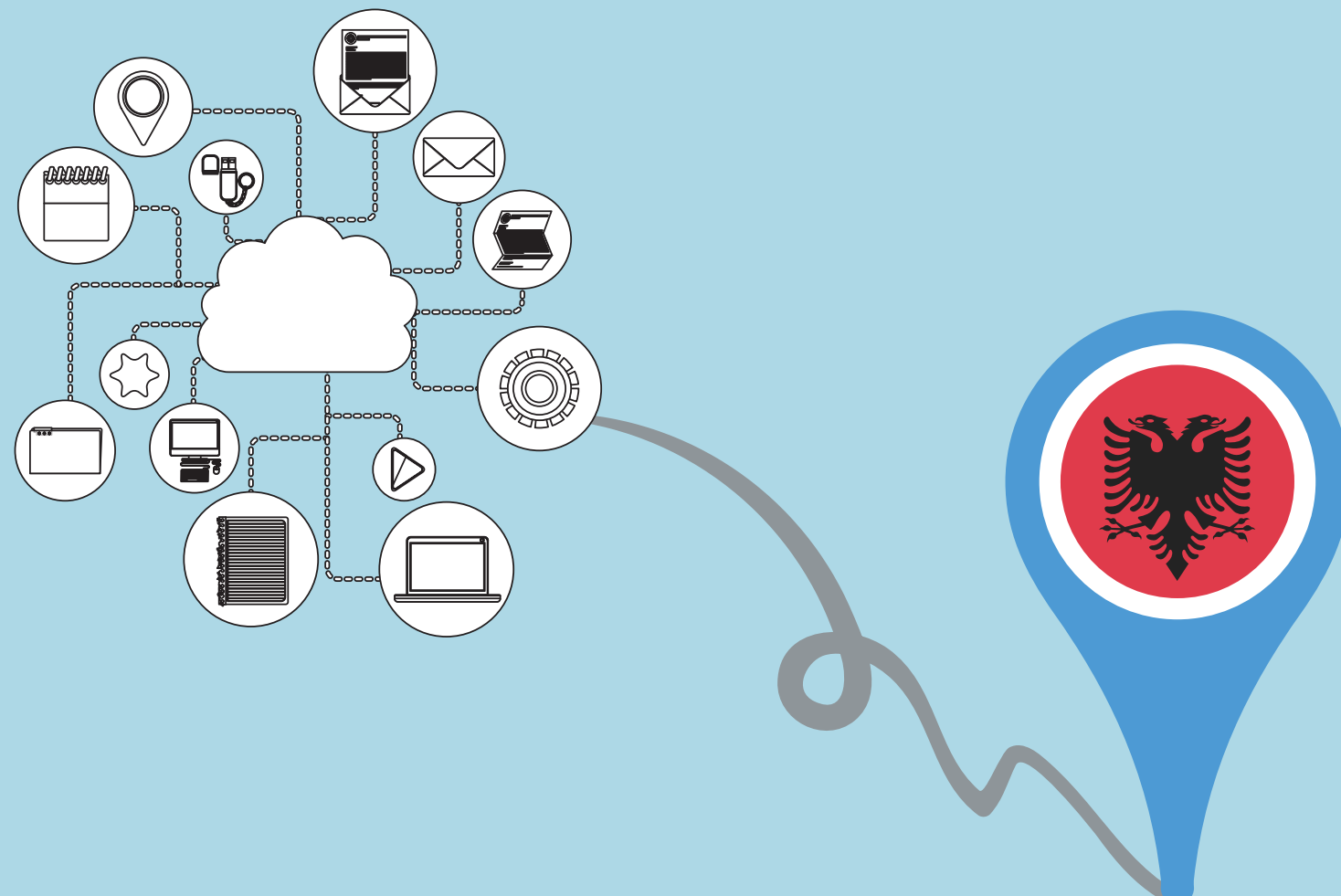
What happens next?

Just like with every country in the Western Balkans and across the world, fake news and the spreading of it are major topics of conversation where next steps are still being determined. Just two weeks ago, PM Rama declared victory in Albania’s general elections. Even with his public apology and many negative run-ins with the media, he seems to have the public’s support nonetheless. In regards to the anti-defamation package, Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that the package and its newly enforced laws were in urgent need of improvement yet improvement has yet to come.



Although every country is different and every case is different, what we can do as constituents is to educate ourselves as much as possible on the realm of fake news and to educate others to ensure that manipulation tactics are not being used to construe our own thoughts and ideas. We here at SLAM are hoping for a better future and it all starts with us.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



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Fake, but Not for No Sake: News in Italy



Author: Ajna Veladžić
BRAVO BiH

We continue our exploration of the fake news world in the country rich in cultural, fashion, religious, and political events. Thanks to widespread misinformation, the people of vivid Italy struggles to keep up with continuous happenings in their spirited cultural and societal life.

Only 29% of the Italian population reports that they trust the media (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andi & Nielsen, 2020, p.75). The reason lays primarily in political influence on journalism in form of corruption or either aggressive forcing. To illustrate, there are cases in the pre-election period in 2016. Italy was shaken by a shocking story about a 9-aged Muslim girl being raped by her 35-year-old 'husband'. In addition, photographs of a Democratic Party member, Maria Elena, joining the funeral of mafia boss Salvatore Riina were circulating across the country. The news, however, was fake, but not for no sake. As it was never completely clarified who stands behind the ideas, it is reasonably believed that political propaganda was in action for once again, this time to advocate attitudes against immigration and to harm the reputation of political rivals.

Recalling that the news was published in the pre-election period, everything does add up.

Therefore, it makes sense that the most trusted media brands are those that are least associated with political parties and organizations.

Facebook for Italy, Italy for Facebook

According to Matteo Renzi, a party leader, social media, especially Facebook, has a crucial influence on democracy in the country. Interestingly, his statement leads to a decision from Facebook to create a special 1-month program for Italian users in 2018. The program worked as a debunking system that would receive reports of fake news from users and then deliver it forward to working professionals situated in Italy. They would not only check the truthfulness of the news but also write an accurate version if the initial one was proved to be fake. The result showed up two years later – in 2020, Facebook was the second most trusted and favored social media channel in Italy, winning the trust of 75% of Italians. To compare, Twitter was trusted by merely 18%.

However, Italy's struggle with rampant misinformation is ongoing and the country started to show efforts not only to suppress the spreading of fake news but also to educate the people to recognize and distinguish between real and fake ones. With that aim, some experimental projects on media literacy are brought into being and hopefully, will be a stepping stone in boosting Italian media quality.

Coronavirus news



Let us recall how severely Italy was affected in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. General public panic and uncertainty created an environment ideal for generating and spreading fake news. Not surprisingly, the news was usually made in a way to increase already overwhelming fear and panic at citizens. The pandemic may leave Italy with a lower rate of trust in media than it was before the pandemic.

Nevertheless, even if it does not happen, there is still a need for fighting the spread of misinformation and increasing media literacy to provide Italian residents with the deserved right to accurate news.

Finally, let us take a look at instances of fake news that have been encountered by Italian people in the recent period.



Corona virus in Vimercate, contaminated women work at the shopping center 'Torri Bianche'.



„Fiscal joke: taxes higher for 3.2 million VAT numbers.“

Source: neXt



„Bills, the move that helps Di Maio in view of the ballot boxes.“

Soruce: Il Blog delle Stelle

FAKE

The pandemic of fake news in Serbia



Author: Sara Međić
BRAVO BiH

What is fake news?

Fake news is a media report that contains unequivocally false claims, that is, information that does not correspond to the facts. Unlike a reporting error, fake news involves knowingly misinforming the public. In other words, it is an information that someone invented and presented as real news or published knowing it was not accurate.

The phenomenon - fake news in Serbia

According to the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) report, Serbia is a country “with weak institutions that is prey to fake news spread by government-backed sensational media, a country where journalists are subjected to almost daily attacks that increasingly come from the ruling elite and pro-government media”. Regarding the 2020 Media freedom index, conducted by the RSF, Serbia is currently holding the 93rd of 180 places, which is a very low place for a country that wants to become a part of the European Union.

The Serbian media market is small and oversaturated with media working under extremely harsh economic pressure. There are more than 1600 media outlets registered in the Serbian Business Registers Agency (SBRA), although due to a poorly regulated media system, the exact number of registered active media outlets remains unknown. The two public broadcasters – RTS with the national coverage and RTV with the regional – receive most of their revenues from the state budget. Besides that, they are competing with other media outlets for shares on a shrinking advertising market, which according to Nielsen was worth round 174 million Euro in 2016. Meanwhile, in the new annual report of the US government-funded Freedom House, Serbia is placed in the category of hybrid regimes. The report highlights that there is regression in terms of democratic governance at the national level.

According to Radio "Slobodna Evropa", the Serbian media are one of the largest exporters of fake news to neighboring countries, as stated by data from specialized portals that monitor this negative phenomenon in the Western Balkans. At the same time, according to the latest available research on the impact of fake news, Serbia is the third country in Europe - just behind Romania and the Czech Republic. Although that is data from 2018, on the report of the European Communication Monitor, the editor of the Fakenews tracker portal, Stefan Janjić, points out that the situation has not changed much.

The number of fake news is shown by the fact that the portal Raskrikavanje detected 945 fake news in the years behind us, only on the front pages of the four highest - circulation tabloids in Serbia - Alo, Informer, Srpski Telegraf, and Kurir. Many of the fake news from Serbia are crossing borders into other countries. Research conducted in 2019, by Raskrikavanje, showed that from 29 media detected as sources of political disinformation, 15 of them are in Serbia.

On the front pages of Serbian media outlets, almost every sixth headline published in 2020 was fake news, according to a survey "Foreign Policy Consequences of the Covid-19 Crisis in Serbia" conducted by the Strategic Policy Council (CFSP) with the support of the US Embassy. The research "Epidemic of fake news" conducted by Dajana Ostojić and Miloš Mihajilica, showed that the main topics on the front pages were news related to the coronavirus - a total of 26.9 percent, daily politics - 17.5 percent, and of the major foreign that represented mostly the U.S. (170 times), Russia (84 times) and the EU (50 times).

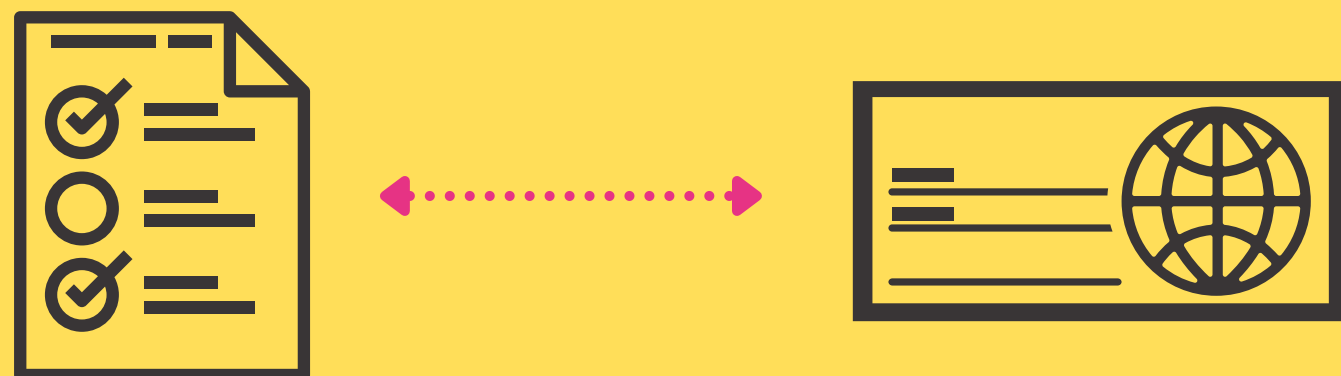


How to suppress the spread of fake news?

It is very important to learn how to detect fake news, because if we do not check information that get to us, probably we will share it on our social media platforms and fall into the circle of spreading fake news in the public sphere.

These are the 5 key things you should always do when reading an article:

1. Check the author of the article;
2. Check the look of the news portal/web page;
3. Check if the news portal has an impressum;
4. Check the news at other sources/news portals;
5. Think critically before you share the news.



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Insight into the Montenegrin "organized fake news and disinformation campaign"



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Through the previous articles of the Structured Learning for Awareness in Media (SLAM) project, you could get acquainted with the definitions and characteristics of fake news, and their presence in Turkey, Albania, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Now it is turn to have an insight into the „organized fake news and disinformation campaign“ in Montenegro, one of the countries participating in the aforementioned SLAM project.

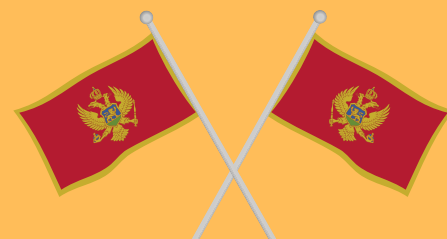
FREEDOM OF RELIGION LAW AND FAKE NEWS

Tensions surrounding the new Montenegrin law on Religious Freedom are quite high since the law was passed within the Montenegrin parliament at the end of December 2019, directly affecting the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The distribution of the law also led to tensions between Montenegro and Serbia.

The day the law was being voted on, an event occurred within the Montenegro's Parliament and 24 people including 18 MP's from the Democratic Front were detained. Since then, daily protests by citizens occurred in Montenegro, largely by those that declare themselves Serbs, expressing dissatisfaction with the law.

Despite disagreements, the law came into force January 8. Consistent with the disputed Article 62, religious communities in Montenegro got to prove property ownership before 1918, otherwise the property will belong to the state of Montenegro. All these things mean that Serbian Orthodox Church must prove ownership of the property including medieval monasteries and churches, as well as everything built before December 1, 1918, when Montenegro became a neighborhood of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro acknowledged that the law is "discriminatory and unconstitutional," and accused the Montenegrin authorities of "inciting divisions and hatred", while Bishop Amfilohije even said a war could ensue. The Montenegrin Government stated that Serbian Orthodox Church would still be ready to use its property but that it should be known what state property is, and also warned that Serbian Orthodox Church is undermining the statehood of the state of Montenegro.



In January 2020, Montenegrin Culture Ministry stated that Montenegro faces an unprecedented disinformation campaign, which culminated in weeks following the adoption of the Freedom of Religion law. It had been a coordinated campaign to spread fake news by variety of media outlets within the country and the region which are calling for religious and national [ethnic] hatred and violence in Montenegro.

TWO JOURNALISTS AND ONE EDITOR – IN – CHIEF ARRESTED AFTER PUBLISHING FAKE NEWS

On 12 January 2020, the Montenegrin police arrested two journalists of pro-Serb news websites, Gojko Raičević and Dražen Živković.

The two editors of the in4.net and borba.me were taken into custody for inducing panic in a public space because by publishing information about an explosion in Vila Gorica Palace, during which senior state officials, including Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović, organise receptions for distinguished guests.

After they published their stories, some regional media republished the "findings". The police later denied the report and said that a minor electrical failure had occurred at the villa, which was soon repaired.

The Police Directorate said Raičević and Živković were arrested because they publicized the news without checking them before.

But after his release, Raičević said he had double-checked the information before it had been published and claimed that his arrest was really about intimidating journalists.

Journalists' associations, civil society groups and opposition politicians warned that the arrests were a violation of media freedom.

The European Commission warned that journalists got to be ready to work safely and without worrying of harassment, political pressure, censorship or persecution.

On the eve of Orthodox Christmas, Montenegrin police arrested Angela Đikanović, the editor-in-chief of Montenegrin Fos Media portal. Đikanović had published false information that 250 members of Kosovo's special police unit ROSU would assist Montenegrin colleagues in securing law and order on Christmas Eve.

The editor – in – chief of the Fos media website, Angela Đikanović was placed in detention for 72 hours for “causing panic and disorder” after claiming in a piece of writing that the government might turn security forces in neighbouring Kosovo to assist quell Serbian Orthodox Church supporters' protests over the new legislation on religion.

Police arrested Đikanovic for reporting that Kosovo police Special Forces were poised to intervene in Montenegro over Orthodox Christmas.

The new law on religion has sparked a series of protests led by Serbian Orthodox Church officials who claimed that the legislation paves the way for the seizure of the church's property.

After the Council of Europe reported the arrest of Đikanović, the Foreign Ministry insisted that the arrest didn't affect media freedom in Montenegro or compromise the safety of journalists. The Ministry said Đikanović should have checked the information before it had been published.

“There are indications that the location of this information was an effort by a 3rd party to interfere in Montenegro's internal affairs with the intention of destabilising the state and disturbing law and order,” the Ministry said on January 10, 2020.

FACEBOOK, PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND FAKE NEWS

Given that the corona virus pandemic had made the traditional election campaign impossible, political parties chosen an online space, i.e. social networks, to run a political campaign and present programs. In Montenegro, it was mostly Facebook as the most used social network.

Journalist and founder of several online platforms, Duško Mihailović, agrees that a jump in the dissemination of false information was expected in the pre-election period. The number of webpages without the impressum and physical address had increased.

The digital forensic center was engaged in disinformation campaigns and spreading fake news on FACEBOOK. The DFC detected that unprecedented disinformation campaigns aimed at Montenegro from the same addresses as in the past were intensified during the election campaign. According to Borislav Visnjic, Russia, which uses pro-Russian media from Montenegro, but also from Belgrade, has been singled out as the main threat in this regard. "The narratives for this purpose are that Montenegro wants to revise history, that NATO membership is not useful, that the countries of the Western Balkans are weak and corrupt, as if the EU and the Alliance are weak and divided."



It has been announced from Facebook that it will launch an independent fact-checking program in Montenegro with one Montenegrin non-governmental organization. According to the explanation, certain information will be marked as false and in that way their visibility will be reduced.

FAKE NEWS ABOUT A LITTLE BOY ANDRIJA WHO WAS INJURED DURING THE PROTESTS IN NIKŠIĆ

A photo of a boy Andrija with an injury to his temple, which was allegedly taken as a result of a clash between protesters and police in Niksic during a protest over the arrest of an SOC priest, was widely shared on social networks.

The photo of the injured boy is accompanied by a comment that the injury was the result of "police brutality", and that it was "torture of the Ustasha police in Nikšić".

The picture does not show the boy Andrija from Nikšić, but Vigo from Boston in Massachusetts. The photo was taken in 2012, as shown by a Google search that leads to the Flickr page where it was originally posted.

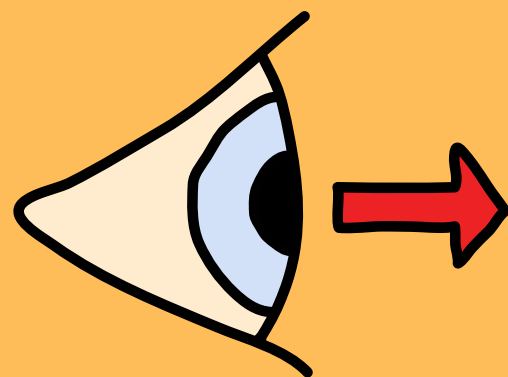


COVID – 19, LOCKDOWN IN PODGORICA AND FAKE NEWS

During the coronavirus pandemic, a number of measures were, and still are, in place to combat the spread of the virus. Locking and banning movement for a certain period of time was the best and easiest basis for making up fake news.

In December 2020, the movement restrictions of citizens in Podgorica was from 19 to 5 o'clock. However, the alleged PrintScreen from the Vijesti portal could be seen on social networks in the same period. That PrintScreen states that movement is prohibited from 13 to 5.

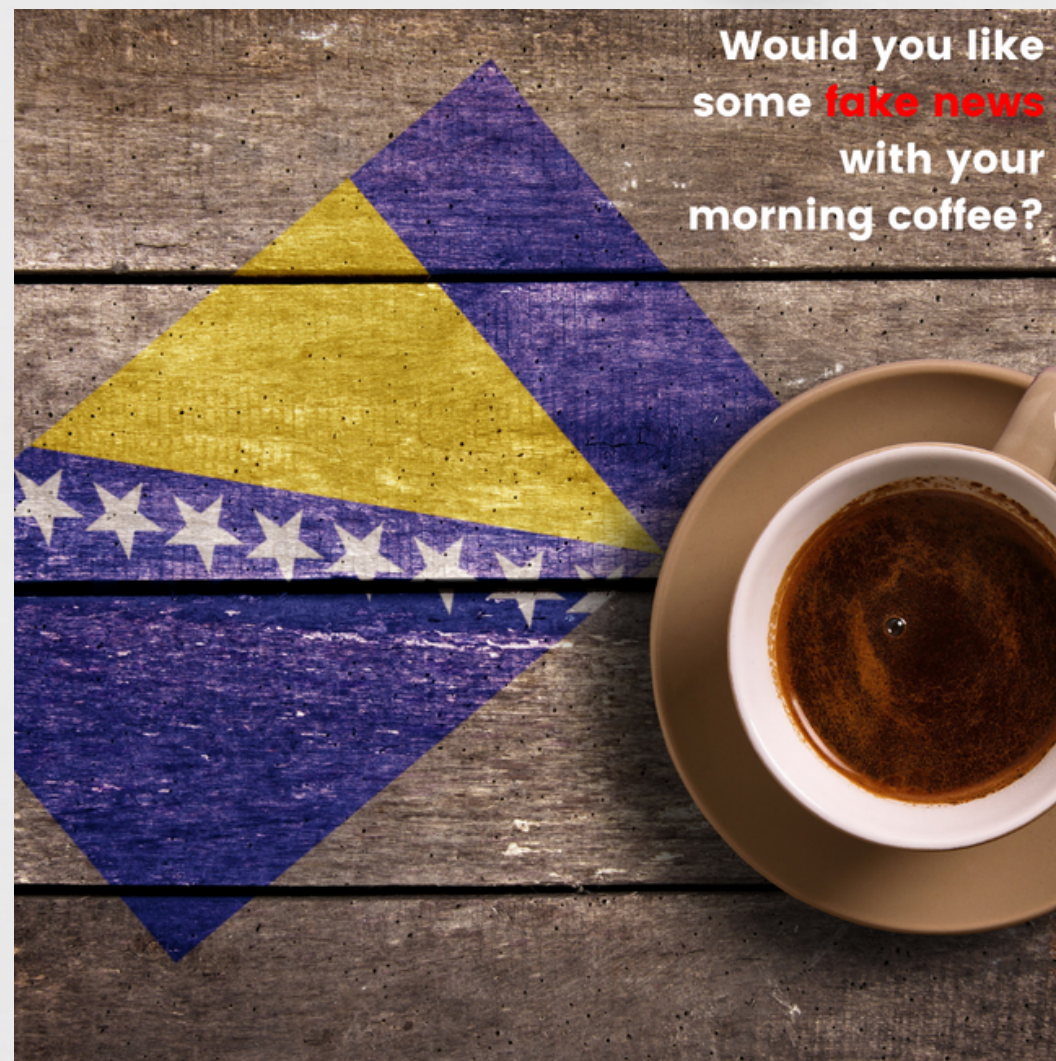
However, the National Coordination Body and the Vijesti portal stated that no extraordinary decisions had been made, that this information had not been published on the mentioned portal, and that it was a matter of editing.



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Truth with Many Faces – Fake News in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Author: Emir Šogolj
BRAVO BiH

A very famous song by Jefferson Airplane which came out in 1967 opens with the words “When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies...” This lyric perfectly describes life in Bosnia and Herzegovina ever since the conclusion of the bloody war fought from 1992 to 1995. Over two decades later the conflict which sparked violence all those years ago still persists in different forms. Ranging from political ideologies with a nationalistic undertone, all the way to relationships with the outside world, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a country without a significant level of unity. The most representative factor in the lack of unity is the way mainstream media in the country deals with news and the level of importance which is given to truthful reporting of facts. Fake news is sadly not only present in the country, but so woven into the process of reporting that the people are getting used to being deceived on a daily basis.



According to a research conducted in 2018 by the Open Society Institute in Sofia (Bulgaria) which deals with the level of media literacy in European countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina is third to only Albania and Macedonia when it comes to countries with the lowest level of media literacy in the Balkan peninsula. Taking into account the complex internal state organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and combining it with the discouraging fact of the country's level of media literacy, one can safely assume that Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a paradise for all those who want to spread misleading information and fake news. The topics mostly represented in articles which earn the label "fake news" in Bosnia and Herzegovina are domestic and foreign politics, celebrity culture, and country related issues such as economy and culture.

Battling fake news in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Since fake news came to prominence as a valuable topic for research in 2016 (BBC takes this as the unofficial start of significant research into the matter following 2016 US Presidential Election) a very small amount of said research came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. It comes as no surprise that a country with such low media literacy would fail to consider the impact of fake news on its society as a whole.

However, this started changing rapidly in the following years. Many websites appeared with the sole purpose of exposing fake news outlets, and calling them out publicly in relation to their dishonest and manipulative reporting. The most prominent of these websites is "raskrinkavanje.ba" which has gained immense popularity since it first appeared due to its track record of being accurate in recognizing what is true and what is fake news. This website came into existence as a result of the activities of an NGO known as "Zašto ne" which translates into English as "Why not". The members of this organization used reliable fact-checking methods with particular emphasis on statistical analysis in their research of news published in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their effort resulted in publication of a 106-page study related to the state of fake news in the country and the methodology necessary to prevent its spread titled "Disinformation in the online sphere: The case of BiH". This was given very little attention in mainstream media despite credible methodology used in the extensive analysis of this very important issue.

Current state of fake news in Bosnia and Herzegovina

According to the latest Press Freedom Index (PFI) published by the Reporters Without Borders, Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the 58th position when it comes to the freedom of media out of 179 ranked countries.

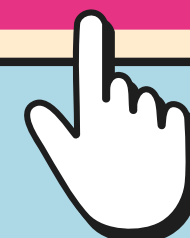


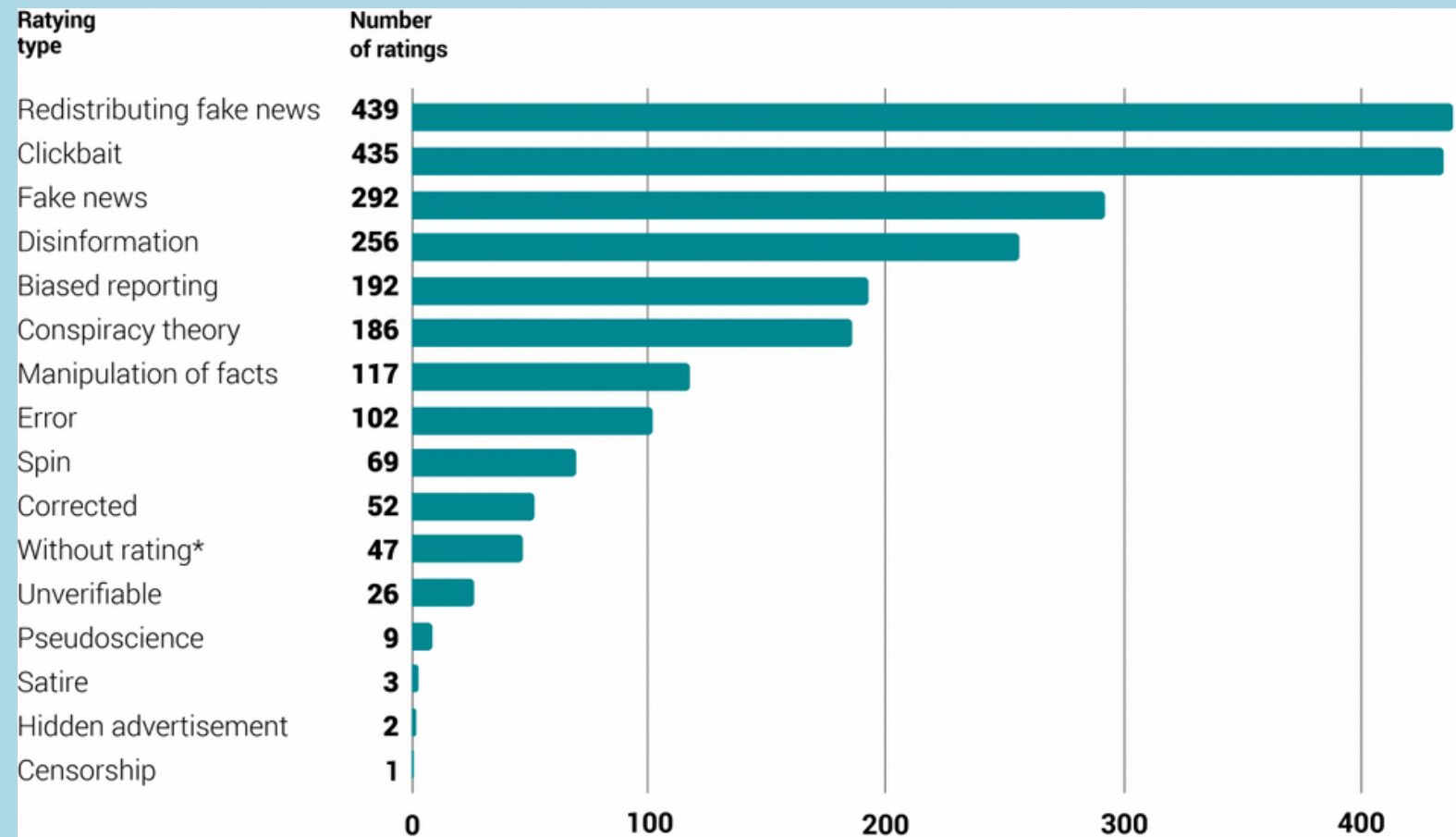
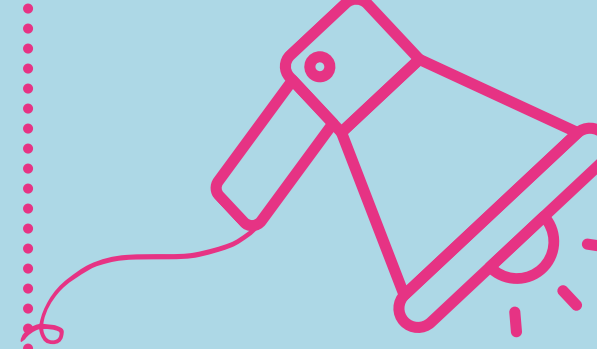
Considering the level of development, this is an encouraging fact to be made aware of, but unfortunately the freedom of press is being used for systematic spread of fake news. According to a 2018 analysis conducted by the raskrinkavanje.ba website, in the span of one year almost 2500 articles were labeled as either fake news or contained a certain degree of them. Out of the 2500 total articles, 62% or 1468 were related to politics and were published by 477 different media outlets. The sample also showed that following the blatant fake news themselves, the most often used type of false reporting was clickbait which serves to create profit for those who publish it. The most discouraging finding of this research was that 2 sources of fake news were state-funded news outlets one of which even represents a national television channel of the Republic of Srpska entity. Furthermore, the highest selling newspaper in the country for decades now, are owned by a man who has his own political party and was a former presidential candidate and a minister in the Federal Government. Needless to say, there is no analysis necessary to recognize that this newspaper is “biased” towards the goals and beliefs of its owner despite being bound to be unbiased and fair by the journalistic principles widely accepted around the world. This is the reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country that sits in the middle of the worldwide PFI table.

Truth with Many Faces

As it is with everything in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country with three constituent nations, the truth is often split into three different perspectives. For one side, a convicted war criminal such as general Ratko Mladić is a hero, for the other he is a criminal and for the third he is not exactly relevant in terms of the suffering their own nation went through in the Bosnian War. Similarly, the success of a Bosnia and Herzegovina national side in any sport is viewed as a massive reason for pride in one part of the country while it is considered completely irrelevant in another simply because it was achieved under a flag which is not exactly celebrated in that geographical area. Truth is an abstract concept everywhere, but very rarely is it so obviously just a matter of perspective as it is in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Truth in its essence should be unique and unchangeable, but in this small country in the Balkans truth has at least 3 faces at all times. Fake news can only be stopped when the truth is agreed upon, and as of the moment of writing, that seems like a movie plot twist that the Bosnia and Herzegovina motion picture is not yet ready to have unveiled.

FIND TRUTH

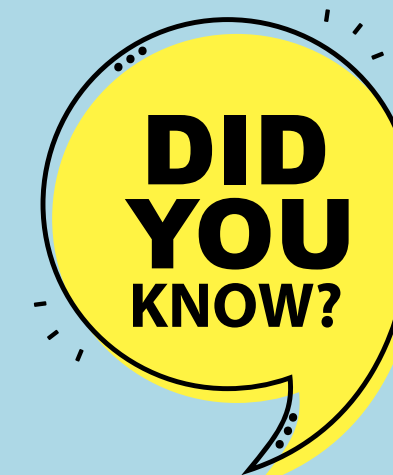




"The type of media manipulation dominant in the sample"

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"Bosnia and Herzegovina has a fact-checking website that cooperates with Facebook. Any piece of news branded by this fact-checker to be fake, goes further down the news feed of Facebook users, thus preventing high exposure of the fake piece of news."

Source: Statista, 2021

Combating fake news in Bulgaria



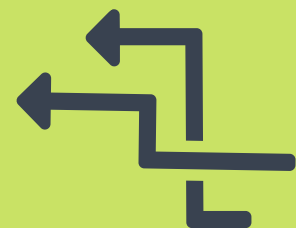
Author: Suad Murselović
BRAVO BiH

A new edition of the Media Literacy Index by the European Policies Initiative (EuPI) of the Open Society Institute has been introduced not so long ago. As you could see in one of our previous articles, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia are the least-resilient countries to “fake news” as the report by the Open Society Institute reveals.

This article will speak about Bulgaria, its ranking and way of combating “fake news”. Bulgaria is ranked 30th out of 35 European nations in the media literacy index for 2021, with Greece (27), Romania (28), Serbia (29), Turkey (31), and Montenegro (32). The Open Society Institute's European Policies Initiative (EuPI) in Sofia developed this research.

As for indicators of media literacy this research used the following:

1. Press freedom,
2. Education (PISA scores),
3. Trust in others, and
4. E-participation Index.



Bulgaria's negative score, according to observers, is the result of a low level of reading literacy evidenced by PISA evaluations, a bad appraisal of media freedom in international reports by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, and a low degree of public trust.

Several legislative measures to limit misinformation and "fake news" were attempted in Bulgaria during the first half of 2020. These attempts have so far been unsuccessful, and they are widely thought to violate Bulgarian law and the Constitution.

The fundamental issue with the present efforts, however, is the failure to define "disinformation" in a way that is not overly wide and ambiguous, and that is consistent with the Bulgarian Constitution, international human rights norms, and EU institutions publications on the subject.

For the time being, none of the three measures that have been introduced have provided a functional legal framework that is compatible with existing laws. Most importantly, neither proposal was in accordance with the Bulgarian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression, press freedom, and access to information.

Furthermore, it puts problematic expectations and duties on anybody who posts online or maintains an online platform, by automatically declaring such individual's data controllers, and, last but not least, by granting the CPDP broad powers to exert excessive control over online material.

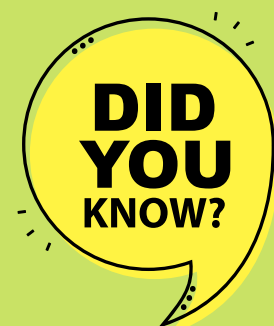
Up to which degree "fake news" can be a useful and powerful tool we can see in the following example, for political parties to gain greater power and influence, they simply journalists, or even a whole television network, to manipulating and divide society.

"Who is against you in the network?" is a documentary film by journalist Nadia Obretenova and Nikolay Todorov. The video focuses on children's unethical use of the Internet and social media, as well as the hazards they confront online and how they try to deal with them.





The Together Against Misinformation effort brings together non-governmental groups, the media, journalistic organizations, and higher education institutions to develop norms and regulations to combat disinformation and false news, as well as to educate the public about the dangers they pose. The campaign's target audience is students who have already attended a series of lectures organized by the university.



**"Fake News: A Global Epidemic Vast
Majority (86%) of Online Global Citizens
Have Been Exposed to it"**

Source: IPSOS, 2021

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Next Steps

To be filled in



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Thank you!

ON BEHALF OF THE ENTIRE SLAM TEAM, WE WANT TO THANK YOU FOR SHOWING YOUR INTEREST IN LEARNING HOW TO CONQUER FAKE NEWS IN 2021.

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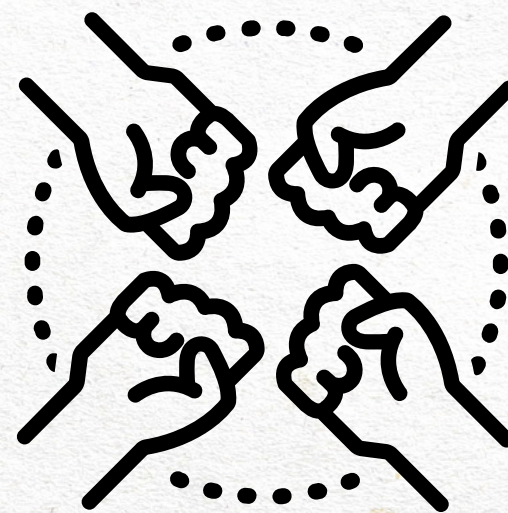


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