GABRIEL RADKO ⓘD

Fake News in Social Media – Classification and Case Studies as an Important Guide for Media Education

ORCID: 0009-0000-7729-0382, Mgr University of Rzeszów, Faculty of Education and Philosophy, Institute of Pedagogy, Poland gabrielradko@gmail.com

Abstract

The essence of this publication is an attempt to characterize the term of fake news in the social media environment. Social media platforms are commercial entities that are difficult to control and focused on user-generated content. Therefore, they constitute an effective space for spreading disinformation, both intentional and unintentional. The definitions of fake news, their types and examples were analyzed, and a case study was conducted in relation to two important events – both geopolitically and media-wise – the war in Ukraine and the presidential elections in the USA. The last chapter is a proposal of activities that will help you differentiate truth from false information and develop your own media competencies.

Keywords: disinformation, fake news, communication, media competencies, media, social media

Introduction

The intensive development of information technology, as well as the rise of social media, has meant that place and time – so important in face-to-face communication – no longer matter for the circulation of information. Distance, date and time in the transmission of news are no longer an obstacle. For a person connected to the network, the world is at his fingertips. Quick and easy access to publications coming from the other side of the world is a common phenomenon in our country today. Note that in 2021 more than 92% of Polish households had access to the Internet (GUS, 2021).

The media – both traditional and modern – affect society as a whole, as well as its individuals. Using the full range of their capabilities, they can perform many functions in human life:

– recreational – related to spending free time, leisure and entertainment,

– cultural – involving the culture of family, local, national and multicultural life,

– integrative – related to building cohesion and sustainability of society, both locally and globally,

– educational – presenting knowledge-enriching materials, conveying norms and behavioral patterns,

– informal social control – the so-called fourth power, tasked with monitoring the actions of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government,

– the transmission of information and the co-creation of public opinion – concerning both the dissemination of news on politics, culture, sports, etc., but also influencing the opinions of audiences, shaping worldviews, dispelling or cementing prejudices (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej).

According to the 'Digital 2022' report published by Canadian company Hootsuite, the main reason Poles use the Internet is to search for information – 72.8%, and to follow news and current events – 61.3%. Given the average time we spend online – 6 hours 39 minutes a day (Empemedia, 2022) we can assume that broadband connection is the main source from which we get information. And that's how it is in reality. The Institute for Internet and Social Media Studies (Instytut Badań Internetu i Mediów Społecznościowych – IBIMS) in partnership with the Institute for Market and Social Research (Instytut Badań Rynkowych I Społecznych – IBRIS) in 2021 conducted a survey twice, the results of which may be surprising to many. It turns out that the window to the world for the vast majority of Poles is not Polsat's 'Wydarzenia', TVN's 'Fakty' or TVP's 'Wiadomości'. In first place – 60.8% in January (Instytut Badań Internetu i Mediów Społecznościowych, 2021b) and 67% in April (Instytut Badań Internetu I Mediów Społecznościowych, 2021a) – are information web portals (Onet, Wirtualna Polska, etc.). Surprisingly, none of the popular TV news program came close to 50% of respondents' indications. In January, 38.8% of respondents indicated social media such as Facebook and Twitter as a source of up-to-date information about Poland and the world. There is a noticeable drop in April – 2 9.5%, which is still better than the indicators of the daily press, weekly newspapers, radio and some TV stations (IBIMS, 2021). Thus, there is no denying the statement that social media have a significant impact on our understanding of the world – they shape public opinion and determine the decisions we make.

Social media are making available to every citizen what was previously reserved for a small group of accredited reporters. Tik Tok briefly documents warfare across our eastern border (a meeting between the former US President and thirty popular Tik Tokers can attest to the power of this service, which was organized due to Russia's ongoing assault on Ukraine and the narrative created around this war (Wirtualnemedia, 2022a). Using the Facebook app, we were able to

follow the coverage of the refugee reception point, which was shared by a friend of ours acting as a volunteer. The X portal (formerly Twitter) gives us the opportunity to instantly read the current position of any diplomat from any corner of the world. Youtube opens up to us an abysmal collection of interviews and analysis, whose authors are recognized journalists, experts, but also passionate people who are anonymous to the wider public. Social media are part of our everyday life. They participate in it and shape it. However, it is important to note that their nature is significantly different from the specifics of traditional media we have known for decades. They are used both by the one of the crowd and by popular TV personalities across the country. Small local businesses and large corporations are present in them. Social media is where fans and football players, fans and artists, voters, editors and politicians contribute. This is where audiences become creators, and creators become audiences, who transmit, communicate, promote, endorse, criticize, and enter into discussions. *Within this type of structure based on relationships of a horizontal nature, in which the division between subordinate and superior disappears, human life is increasingly focused* (Rutka, 2014, pp. 145–166). Educators see a clear need and potential in using such platforms in educational activities but also educating about them.

Subject and methodology of the research

Threats in social media

The lack of geographic and time restrictions on access to knowledge and information make our daily lives much more convenient than years ago. The opportunities and possibilities offered to us by modern media are unquestionable. However, researchers point out that these tools (especially when used in an inappropriate and uncontrolled manner) can have a harmful effect on users. According to the Institute of Health Psychology of the Polish Psychological Association, the most important risks of being on social media include:

– cybercrime (installation of malware, phishing for personal data and passwords),

– cyberbullying (including sexual harassment) (Goetz, 2012). Staniuk- -Rabenda (2014, pp. 113–114) elaborates on this concept by detailing such behaviors as teasing, stalking, denigration, humiliation, impersonation, exposure, deception, harassment, stalking, identity theft, making secrets public, cyberstalking, happy slapping, exclusion, and 'technical' aggression.

In addition to harming activities aimed at a specific user which are a digital extension of behaviors that have been occurring in social relations for centuries, recent years have also seen a flood of activities aimed at the mass audience, which are *an attempt to influence the results of elections, affect stock prices, deceive investors* (Newseria Biznes, 2017). We are talking about spreading disinfor-

mation, manipulating reality, sharing untrue messages that *increasingly play a political role* (…)*, can discredit politicians* (…)*, and influence important political events* (…) (Newseria Biznes, 2017). False narration (often from fake accounts) that is forwarded on by actual Twitter, Instagram or Facebook users without basic verification. **Fake news.** Researchers offer various definitions of this phenomenon. According to Rosińska (2021, pp. 31–32) they are *untrue media messages presented in the media as news but not real information. They can be intentionally created by the authors, or become fake news in the process of distribution through social media beyond the control of the original author. Fake news can also vary in the degree of falsity. They will be completely made-up news, partially made-up news, or news that is based on facts, but their arrangement, and therefore the message, is false*. The author notes the intentionality of the producers of false information, while allowing for the possibility of the evolution of information into fake news through social media users (an example of such evolution can be the detachment of information from the situational context, which changes its connotation). It also makes a distinction between fake news that is completely fictional and those that while based on real events manipulate them, creating messages that are far from the truth. Consulting agency Public Dialog in its report 'Fake news from the perspective of Polish journalists' offers a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon: *fake news is untrue information, the purpose of which is to mislead the recipient and thus evoke certain emotions and attitudes towards a given issue. Fake news is meant to shock and stir up controversy. Until now, it was considered that we qualify information as fake news only when it appears in the mass media. However, in the age of social media and universal access to the Internet, every user is a content generator. Any of us can create our own service or site and spread fake news. This leads to an exponential growth of this practice. Nowadays, the phenomenon of fake news is gaining momentum and is virtually unmeasurable on a global scale. Fake news is driven by emotions rather than facts, so it is often based on religious beliefs, values, views, stereotypes, prejudices, etc. In order for fake news to be effective as a tool of mass persuasion, it must refer to concepts that already exist in the consciousness of some social group* (…) (Public Dialog, 2018). Also in this case the intentionality of the sender and the purpose behind it is emphasized. The authors also note the scale of this practice. It is due to the specific nature of social media, in which every user becomes a mass sender. In addition, the role of emotions and personal beliefs in the process of spreading fake news was distinguished. They are much more important than facts when we talk about the formation of public opinion in the post-truth era (Public Dialog, 2018). Fake news must hit fertile ground, appeal to the viewer's worldview and evoke extreme emotions.

Characteristics of fake news

Classification and categorization of false information provided by the mass media is a topic of consideration for many researchers of the subject. Referring to the aforementioned report by the Public Dialog agency, we can adduce three basic types of them:

1. Completely untrue (false, contradictory, premeditated fabricated information is given), an example of such fake news could be a photo of Law and Justice MEPs holding crosses in the European Parliament:

Figure 1. A screenshot of a completely fake social media post "Strong group of exorcists already in action"

Source: http://www.facebook.com/RacjonalnaPL (15.05.2024).

The photomontage is quite obviously based on a dislike of the conservative Christian Democratic political party, portraying its members as overly attached to their religious symbols and negatively disposed to the institution in which they hold office. And while online political and worldview discussions are nothing new, what we have here is the proliferation of fiction – the crosses seen in the hands of MEPs have been added in a graphics editing program (Sawka, Czarnecka, 2019).

2. The truth is disputed (the viewer is misled, either by giving proper context to the facts or by presenting them in a selective manner), as exemplified by the politician's post about Donald Tusk's support for 'anti-EU Jobbik':

Figure 2. A screenshot showing selective facts presentation in social media "Donald Tusk went to Hungary and supported anti-EU Jobbik"

Source: http://www.facebook.com/DaszkowskiDamian (22.03.2023)

In fact, only an excerpt of the complex situation was presented. Firstly, the former European Council president admittedly visited Hungary and expressed his support, but not only for the Jobbik party, but for a whole coalition of Hungarian opposition parties that includes *the left-wing Democratic Coalition (DK) and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the 'green' Dialogue for Hungary (PM) and LMP – Hungarian Green Party, the centrist Momentum, and the right-wing Jobbik* (Sadecki, 2021, p. 2). These groups have united to oust Fidesz, which has been in power since 2010 and headed by Viktor Orbán. The situation is therefore not as black and white as it might seem after a cursory review of the situation presented in this post. Secondly, the claim that Jobbik is an anti-EU party is simply outdated. According to the Centre for Eastern Studies: *after the 2014 elections, the party began to change its image and began to move toward the center.* (…) *Jobbik, formerly Eurosceptic, has accepted Hungary's membership in the EU, and on certain issues – such as joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office – it even favors deeper integration* (Sadecki, 2021, p. 3). The quoted entry, while based on a real event, completely distorts the tone of the event by relying on outdated and out of context information.

3. Quote manipulation (skillful placement of a person's statement in context, cutting out sentences that change the meaning of the statement and thus support a particular thesis). As an example, let's take the high-profile reports in certain circles about vaccinations and the plan to depopulate the world:
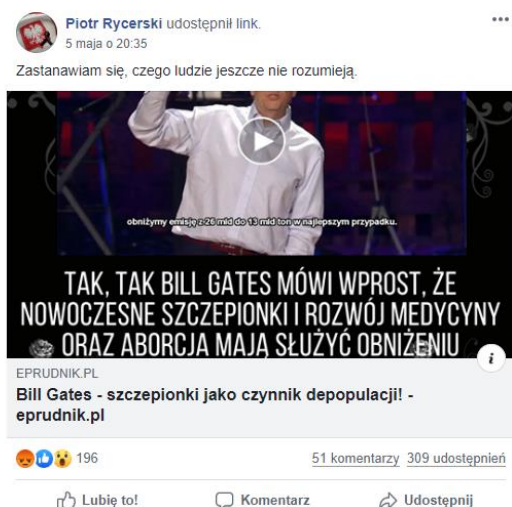
Figure 3. A screenshot showing quote manipulation on social media "Vaccines as a factor of depopulation"

Source: http://www.facebook.com/daszdasz (26.01.2023).

In the posted video Bill Gates addresses the issue of reducing carbon emissions. One of the factors that affects the amount of emissions is the number of people living on Earth. Thus, the Microsoft owner said that one way to deal with the climate crisis would be reducing population growth. And while at first glance this opinion may seem controversial, the full context of the statement is quite different. The idea is not to get rid of already living beings with deadly vaccines, but to curb birth rates in Third World countries. In poor areas the assurance of livelihood for the elderly is to have numerous offspring to support their parents. Less developed countries face a high infant mortality rate. Reducing this rate (through a modern preventive vaccination program) could lead to a situation in which people of childbearing age would more consciously plan for offspring. The idea is to lower the number of children born without the fear that some of them will die shortly after birth. This belief is based on an observation of demographics in rich and poor countries by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Jabłonowski, 2020). The commentary of the person sharing the video is also worth noting. He puts himself in the position of an enlightened person who understands more than the rest of society, in fact with a rather cursory knowledge of the issue.

Analysis of research results

Case study: the war in Ukraine

This article was inspired by the information warfare that accompanies Russian military aggression against Ukraine, so I would like to focus on fake news about refugees from Ukraine. The narrative created around the migration crisis

associated with the outbreak of war had a schematic framework from the beginning. When the first refugees appeared at our eastern border, social media began to publish comments reminiscent of the difficult Polish-Ukrainian history. Their purpose was to tone down the positive attitude of Poles towards their neighbors fleeing war (Wirtualnemedia, 2022b). However, this did not inhibit the aid carried by Polish society. Thus, the disinformation rhetoric changed and the emphasis was shifted to the threat that would be posed by dark-skinned men crossing the border and reaching Przemyśl (due to the general mobilization announced by President Volodymyr Zelensky, male citizens aged 18–60 were not allowed to cross the state border, but foreigners studying and working there were allowed to flee the military area). False information about the alleged aggression of these people spread by, among others, the Facebook page 'Podkarpaccy Kibice' (Subcarpathian Football Fans), contributed to the creation of a 'city cleansing action'. Nationwide media reported on the beating of three Indian citizens (Polsat news, 2022). This is a clear example of how disinformation spread on social media can affect public sentiment and the safety of people in an area. It is worth mentioning that reports of aggression by dark-skinned refugees have been continuously debunked by both the Subcarpathian Police (Podkarpacka Policja, 2022) and the city authorities (Miasto Przemyśl, 2022).
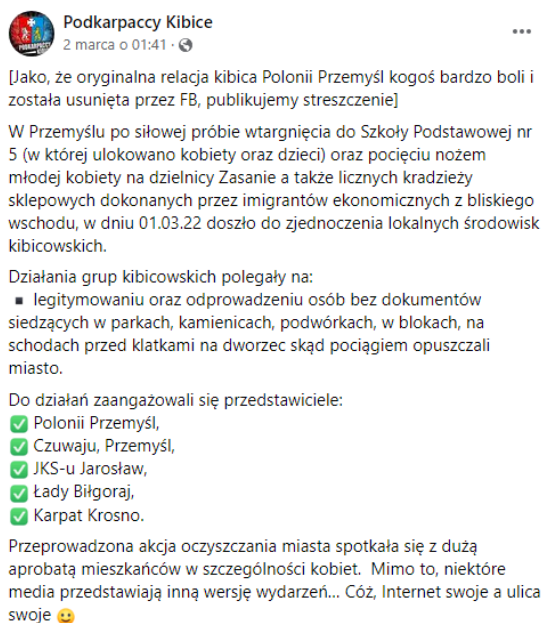

Figure 4. A screenshot showing disinformative social media post about crimes committed by refugees

Source: http://www.facebook.com/PodkarpaccyKibice (9.03.2022).

The next stage of the information war aimed at changing public attitudes were posts about the fictionalized dishonesty and demandingness of newcomers and special privileges granted by the authorities.

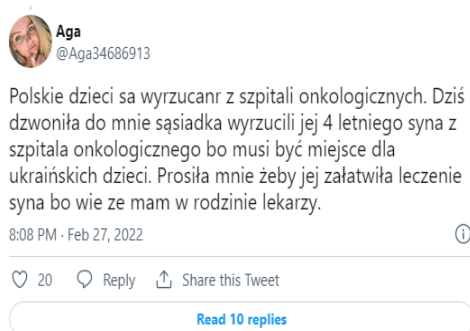**Figure 5. A screenshot showing false information about war refugee privileges**

Source: http://www.twitter.com/Aiako2000 (15.04.2022).

Figure 6. A screenshot showing false information about war refugee privileges

Source: https://twitter.com/aga34686913 (15.04.2022).

In the attached posts we learn about the situation of Polish students who were evicted from their dormitory and a neighbor's child who was discharged from the hospital to free up space for Ukrainian children. Both stories are building a narrative of unequal treatment of Polish and Ukrainian citizens within our country. Here, too, it is very easy to see the desire to pit Poles against the newcomers from a country ravaged by war. It is significant that we are not given to know which dormitory, which university, which hospital, or even which city the cited situations are supposed to refer to. We do not know who the neighbor is, we do not know the identity of the students. There is no way to verify these revelations. Researchers of the subject unanimously point to the source of such misinformation[1].

The cited examples perfectly show what fake news is and on what principle it works. We can note several important features, being their common denominator:

- intentionality,
- evoking extreme emotions (positive or negative),
- persuasion and polarization, which arouse the need to take sides,
- addressing current and controversial topics.

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[1] I encourage you to read Polish articles about Russian bots and trolls: https://spidersweb.pl/2022/03/instagram-przypomnij-haslo-rosyjskie-trolle-jak-rozpoznac.html; https://www.telepolis.pl/wiadomosci/wydarzenia/rosyjskie-trolle-polska-dezinformacja-hejt, https://ibims.pl/komunikat-ws-prorosyjskich-atakow-informacyjnych-24-02-22/ (11.01.2025).

Figure 7. screenshot of false information and correction by the Polish Ministry of Health on social media

Source: http://www.twitter.com/MZ_GOV_PL (15.03.2023).

Case study: the U.S. presidential election – *If you do nothing, (…) Trump can win!* (Levy, 2022, p. 363)

While discussing the topic of fake news being used for political purposes, it is worth leaning into other important events in recent world history.

The outcome of the 2016 US presidential election was influenced by Russian manipulation, according to US journalist Steven Levy. These activities were carried out on popular social media.

Ned Moran, a Facebook threat intelligence analyst came across a lead on the activities of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (until 2004 the GRU, the Russian equivalent of the US CIA), in the Western world known colloquially as the Ministry of Propaganda. At issue are two units that have given themselves the names Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear. Before the presidential election, in which Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump were the main candidates, it turned out that accounts affiliated with the Ministry of Propaganda were highly active in seeking information on people from the Democratic community. The social network owned by Meta Platforms reported its concerns to the FBI, but there was no concrete response. Soon, Russian units launched an attack on the email inboxes of Democratic Party members. *One member of the Fancy Bear group (…) admitted that he had stolen the emails* (Levy, 2022, p. 350)". At the same time, efforts to activate Facebook users to share content planned by Russian services were detected. No one expected such a turn of events,

the social network was unable to react in any way. *Stamos was quick to point out that Facebook was unprepared for some of the problems that could have arisen in the 2016 elections* (Levy, 2022, p. 350). Around June 8, DCLeaks pages were launched on Facebook and Twitter, where the stolen content was published. Of course, we cannot call the content of the virtual correspondence fake news. However, the desire to influence the public by any means available is visible to the naked eye. At first, everything looked like the actions of people not connected with the former GRU – the site was founded by Alice Donovan, with Jason Scott and Richard Ginrey helping with the promotion – these are by no means Russian-sounding names. However, after careful analysis, the Facebook team discovered DCLeaks' ties to the Russian services. The portal unfortunately did not take immediate action. *WikiLeaks, a site that disseminates classified information from leaks, posted the stolen emails and the American press was able to draw from it at will, just as the Russians wanted* (Levy, 2022, s. 360). The site was only removed when it lost more relevance. Another of Facebook's shameful secrets is its focus on profit and its desire to please Republicans, who have attacked the Meta-Platforms authority time after time for alleged unfair treatment. After pressure from right-wing columnists and politicians, Facebook abandoned the selection of information in Trending Topics (until 2018 it was a box on the right side of the portal, showing popular news) by 'human hands' in favor of verification by algorithms. *Without human oversight, the algorithms promoted such posts that were successful on News Feed, and therefore attention-grabbing, but ignored questions of their veracity, intent and acceptability* (Levy, 2022, pp. 356–357). To make matters worse, links to articles were presented in the same way – trustworthy newspapers that had been verified over the years had the same visual value as a fake news site that had been created a few days ago. A huge step was taken towards tabloidization of a site with about 2 billion users. The problem was not only the manipulation of voter sentiment through leaked correspondence. The social media platform became an excellent source for distributing completely false information. In the last moment of the campaign, the number of fake news stories appearing on Facebook increased dramatically. *To avoid meddling in the election, Facebook basically gave the green light to sensationalized disinformation posts that were sure to influence the election* (Levy, 2022, p. 364). And the manipulators' modus operandi was clear:

- – impersonating opinion-forming sources,
- – fabricating stories about Hillary Clinton,
- – posting links to fake stories on Facebook.

To show the scale of the problem, the author cites a story from November 5, when the Denver Guardian website (designed to pretend to be the real website The Denver Post), which had been prepared almost six months earlier, reported on the alleged suicide of an FBI agent suspected of leaking emails from Democratic

mailboxes. The headline of this fake news reached 15 million users and was shared 500,000 times.

Of course it is not only elections that have fallen victim to social media. The passive attitude of Mark Zuckerberg and his staff has affected many other areas of life, including health. (…) *when you searched for information about vaccines on Facebook, the search results were dominated by anti-vaccinationists with their made-up stories and conspiracy theories. They were a small minority in a huge country, but they set the tone of the debate* (Levy, 2022, p. 361). Therefore, it can be concluded that this huge platform had its (passive) share in the procedure of spreading disinformation on many important topics.

The stories mentioned concern events from almost a decade ago. Since then, Facebook has partnered with independent verifiers to check questionable content for credibility. However, observing the still ongoing flood of fake news concerning, among other things, Ukrainian refugees – the social media situation is far from optimal. In addition, given reports about the portal's resignation of fake news trackers, describing their actions as censorship of online content, we can't count on an improvement in standards (tvp.info, 2025).

Conclusions from the conducted research analyses – ways to deal with fake news

The development of information technology with all its advantages poses a huge challenge to society. There is no doubt that we are currently witnessing a never-before-seen crisis caused by a flood of information of questionable quality. Access to a multitude of (often polarized, worldview- and politically-charged) mass media can create a situation in which the recipient is unable to distinguish truth from manipulation.

It might seem that only half-truths and narratives built on the basis of events taken out of context are a problem. However, as the examples cited earlier show that also completely made-up reports by many social media users are treated as facts. So how can we deal with fake news? In an optimistic scenario, formal education from the youngest grades should be the answer to problems with understanding, verifying and interpreting data about the reality around us. However, counting on the panacea that would be the decisions of the Minister of National Education is wishful thinking. As Pęczkowski (2015, p. 42) notes – Polish schools are not keeping up with the dynamically developing world. This applies to every aspect of technological development of the reality around us). For many years, educators have been pointing to the need to introduce media education in Polish schools, but outside of academic centers, it is in vain to find such a subject in domestic educational institutions, and the content related to this topic is scattered (Drzewiecki, 2010; Łuc, 2018). And action should be taken here and now. This does not mean, of course, that the efforts of media researchers are meaningless.

Their presence in popular media provides an opportunity to capture the attention of the average audience, and the scientific publications they offer broaden the horizons of those already interested.

Given the tardiness of decision-makers (whether politicians, services or social network owners), it's worth introducing a few habits into your daily life that will help you develop your own media competence to distinguish manipulation from reality:

Don't stop at the headline, and if you don't have time – wait

We live in a time of information overload – there is no doubt about it. On the one hand, we are not limited in our access to news by time of day or distance. On the other hand, the time to thoroughly dig into each news item of interest is not unlimited. In such a situation, there is a tendency to superficially scan the text, or even to draw conclusions based on headlines alone. This is a mistake. The digital press is outdoing itself in editing more and more 'clickable' titles. It therefore becomes fundamental to thoroughly analyze the text you are reading – in its entirety and noting the situational or historical context. If a topic interests you, but you don't have the time to read it and understand the situation being described, hold off on making judgments and publishing them on social media. By failing to show restraint, you may unknowingly not only spread false information, but also become the author of it.

Use Internet resources, compare

As already mentioned, the multitude of online information sources can cause problems in understanding and interpreting the data presented. But with a little effort and good intentions, this disadvantage becomes a huge advantage. If a piece of information interests us enough that we want to pass it on (e.g., via social media), verify it in several sources. If we come across a screenshot of a controversial post by a politician on Facebook, let's visit the politician's profile and verify whether such a statement actually took place. This is the opportunity the World Wide Web gives us. Let's take advantage of it.

Verify accounts

Social media is teeming with bogus accounts trying to push their alternative vision of reality. The owners of large social media platforms are unable to control the misinformation spreading on them. Therefore, if we come across a post that evokes extreme emotions or its veracity is difficult to verify, let's take a look at the person who shared it. Let's check if the account isn't targeting a specific message. Using Google tools, let's verify the profile picture (using Google image search, we are able to determine if and when a photo has appeared on other sites, so we can find out if the avatar of a suspicious user is not simply copied from

another person's profile[2]). Let's find out if there is even a shadow of a chance that the information in question was published by a real person. As an example, let's take the twitter account 'Aga34686913' (https://twitter.com/aga34686913), whose post can be seen in photo 6. Aga, who presents herself as a conservative and Catholic, shares only controversial and polarizing content (mainly anti-vaccination and anti-Ukrainian). We are unable to determine her identity. In addition, she uses a photo of Annika Boron, an Instagram model from Toronto[3]. Is it worth trusting messages coming from such profiles and passing them on? It seems that the answer is simple. It is worth mentioning that unmasking a fake account is not always so simple. Manipulators often prepare profiles well in advance and publish content to make them look like normal users at first glance.
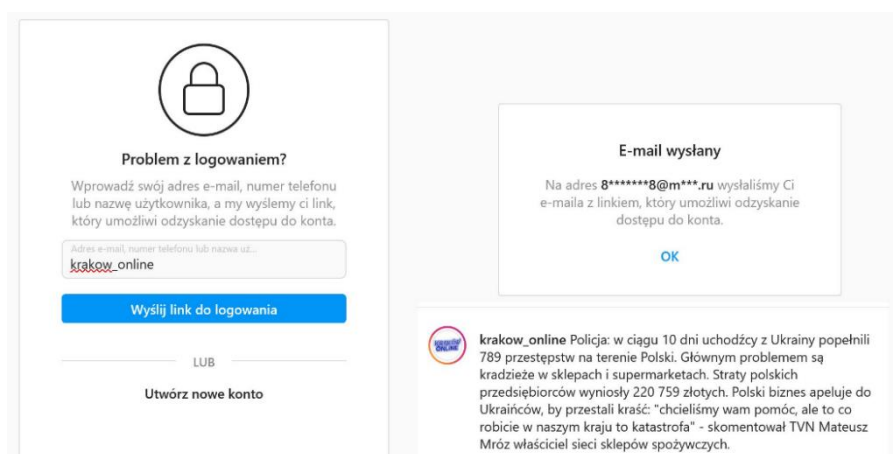

Figure 8. A screenshot of an entry from a disinformational profile registered with a Russian email address, impersonating local Krakow media

Source: https://x.com/gromotapl/ (19.04.2023).

Pay attention to spelling and punctuation

According to Giczan (2022)[4], a Belarusian opposition journalist and editor-in-chief of the Nexta website, much of the fake news is machine-translated from Russian. For a pro-Russian troll whose job is to torpedo the Western European Internet with fake news, the language barrier can be a big problem. Internet translators come to the rescue, which, as most of us probably realize, often cannot translate full sentences perfectly. While they do well with spelling, punctuation is

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[2] Instructions on how to use this tool can be found at the link:https://support.google.com/ web-search/answer/1325808?hl=pl&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&oco=0 (3.01.2025).

[3] https://www.idolnetworth.com/annika-boron-net-worth-127659 (14.07.2024).

[4] An entry on this topic with examples is available at the link: https://twitter.com/TadeuszGiczan/status/1514208630610046989 (10.01.2025).

a problem for them. So if we come across a comment that seems controversial, and on top of that the flawless spelling is accompanied by commas placed in completely unexpected places, we can assume that it has been run through an automatic translator.

Separate your biases, expectations and emotions from reality

According to the principle of confirmation bias, we tend not to seek objective truth, but to surround ourselves with information that coincides with our worldview. We watch only that television whose optics are convenient for us. We buy only the press that nods to our views. On Facebook, we browse only those pages that do not shatter our vision of reality (and Facebook's algorithm 'learning' our interests, offers us more and more content that cements our beliefs). This leads to closing ourselves in a filter bubble. To prevent this from happening (or to get out of this bubble) it takes our commitment. Let's make the effort and read news and opinions that are not to our liking. This allows us to open ourselves to a different perspective, draw our own conclusions and get to the truth. Information does not become true just because it is convenient for us.

Start reading not from the news, but from the analysis of fake news

In order to sift real information from opinion and propaganda, it is worth considering whether the sources we use are definitely sources of information. For several years there have been fact-checking organizations in the Polish media market, that is organizations that track down and clarify false reports. They point out not only false news, but also news that is consistent with reality, additionally supplementing it with situational and historical context. Here are some examples of the sites which measure up to current fake news in a transparent, reliable and accessible way:

– fakenews.pl – an initiative that at first was intended to be a one-man blog, but became the reason for the creation of the 'Counteracting Disinformation' foundation. On the site we can find studies divided into categories: politics, society, technology, health and Ukraine. Importantly, we will also find information on the people involved in the project, sources of funding and fact-checking methodology;

1. sprawdzam.afp.com – Polish branch of the French news agency Agence France-Presse. The site is divided into 3 leading sections (main news, regions, topics) making it easier to find interesting articles. As of 2019, Facebook is (still) using AFP's analysis results in more than 30 countries. The site can be viewed in more than 20 available languages.

2. demagog.org.pl – a site until recently devoted mainly to verifying the statements of politicians (on a five-point scale: false, partial false, manipulated, true and unverifiable). Over time, the site has evolved. Today it publishes articles,

analyses and reports on news from the country and the world. The 'verified' tab lists all the politicians that have been screened, along with the quotes that have been analyzed.

3. fakehunter.pap.pl – a project of the Polish Press Agency and GovTech Poland, originally intended to expose fake news about the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the site features information on such topics as health, domestic and foreign policy divided into 3 categories: truth, fake news and unverifiable.

It is good practice to get verified news from transparent sources. In an age of information overload, troll farms and a crisis of authority, it is worth trusting those with the competence, knowledge and contacts to help review media reports. Perhaps, instead of reviewing news whose veracity we are unsure of, we should start by reviewing fake news whose falsity we can be sure of?

Alert

If a social media post seems suspicious to us, let's report it to the site administrator. Questionable content is reviewed. In the case of Facebook, they are not deleted, but marked as 'fake news'. They also have a link to the source of the post's rating. I evaluate this practice as beneficial – it allows me to see the lying content and confront it with reality.
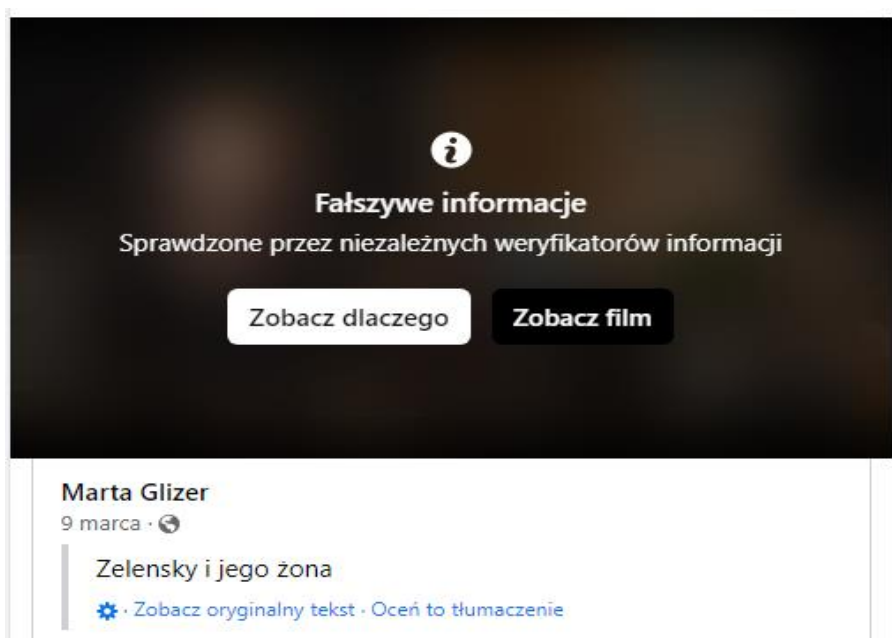

Figure 9. A screenshot of fake content verified by Facebook staff
Source: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100078846860078 (29.02.2023).

Conclusion

In the information society *information is treated as a product, as a commodity for sale (sometimes even as a raw material), which is becoming the main driving force of modern civilization* (Golka, 2005, p. 254). This is a huge threat. A commodity that can be sold and has a price is stripped of its ideas. Honesty and integrity often go by the wayside, benefits (economic or political) become more important to the sender. Truth builds an informed civil society, contributes to the development of a knowledge-based culture, preserving order in a rapidly changing world. Untrue information creates chaos, unrest and divides society. It is created for particular gain with the detriment of the public. It therefore becomes important to draw a clear line and distinguish between facts and harmful manipulation. However, it is difficult to put an individual before such a test without preparing him for it first. In conclusion – it is important that the drop of media education does not cease to wear away the stone of the traditional Polish school, permeating into our everyday life and providing inspiration for everyone.

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