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**NEW MEDIA MESSAGES AS RESPONSE TO THE  
TECHNOLOGICAL ABILITIES OF MODERN COMMUNICATION**

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*Abstract*

Any changes in mass media content lead to the change in the media system; the latest, in its turn, reflects a different quality of communication (the author's character, channels, effects), which undoubtedly becomes an object of attention of mass communication researchers. The contemporary mass media content is characterized with its messages, built after the traditional news-making (both in journalism and in PR) models, and story-telling, narrative ones. The trend for the mass media content is the use of various fakes. Recently the term "fake news" has acquired a new meaning. It relates to the certain news messages which appear either in mass media (online or offline), or in social networks and do not have factual foundation, but are presented as facts, not a satire. This may include news, leading articles, investigations and others, which cheat on the audience deliberately and consciously, meaning to gain some political or financial profit. The article poses the following research questions: 1) what messages in modern media communication in the social networks are considered fake by young people? 2) what reasons do young people have to trust the messages in the social networks which are fake in their nature? The purpose of the study is to reveal the types of messages in modern media communication in the social networks considered fake by young people and to study the reasons of trust in such messages of the social networks. During the research we revealed three types of contemporary messages in media communication: hype, flogging and sockpuppet.

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**Keywords:** Mass media space, content, message, fake, online-communication.



## 1. Introduction

Any changes in mass media content lead to the change in the media system; the latest, in its turn, reflects a different quality of communication (the author's character, channels, effects), which undoubtedly becomes an object of attention of mass communication researchers. It is necessary to underline that we do not mean the traditional system of mass information (if not interpreted "widely", supported by contemporary realities existing in media space), but we mean the system of mass communication, including both cinema and fiction literature which can be unlimitedly transmitted through various channels, including digital ones.

New media change the number and the quality of communications between their actors.

The intensification of informational changes makes a great influence upon those public media practices which provide the perception and spread of the information, upon the character of social relations and interactions of the participants of this change. In Wolton's (2015) opinion, "the appearance of the Internet makes an accent upon the commonness of technical progress and communicative progress" (p. 26).

The facts presented in contemporary researches show that: 1) 62% of adults in the USA receive news in social networks (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016); 2) the most popular fake news were spread in Facebook broader than the most popular real news (Silverman, 2016); 3) many people who see fake news tell that they believe it (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016); and 4) the most discussed fake news were about the elections of Donald Trump and his victory over Hillary Clinton (Silverman, 2016).

The contemporary mass media content is characterized with its messages, built after the traditional news-making (both in journalism and in PR) models, and story-telling, narrative ones (Adam, 2011). The trend for the mass media content is the use of various fakes.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. The story of fake news study

Though for many the term "fake news" may seem completely new, it has been long used in scientific researches. The scientists applied this term to study "satirical news show" (Reilly, 2012; Rubin, Chen & Conro, 2015), "parody news show" (Day & Thompson, 2012), "fake news comedy show" (Pavlik, 2005) or just "fake news show" (Rahman & Marjan, 2013; Storskdieck, 2016). The political satire in TV shows formed "fake news" as a genre" (Balmas, 2014). Such shows covered a great range of real problems and became the main source of news for many young watchers (Pavlik, 2005). Their news materials were called fake not because of the content, but for the parody on the net news using sarcasm and laughter to discuss the real social issues (Marchi, 2012).

### 2.2. "Fake news": new meaning

Recently the term "fake news" has acquired a new meaning. It relates to the certain news messages which appear either in mass media (online or offline), or in social networks and do not have factual foundation, but are presented as facts, not a satire. This may include news, leading articles, investigations

and others, which cheat on the audience deliberately (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Rubin et al., 2015) and consciously (Klein & Wueller, 2017), meaning to gain some political or financial profit.

Fake news quite often are spread by those who do not know that the facts are invalid (Klein & Wueller, 2017). Fake news appears when the false information is spread several times and disappears when the facts are not spread any longer (Giglietto, Iannelli, Rossi, & Valeriani, 2016).

Facebook, where much fake news appears, offered its own definition of what fake news is (Weedon, Nuland, & Stamos, 2017). Facebook defined “fake news” as “disinformation” or “incorrect and manipulative” information (content) which is spread deliberately and may include more sophisticated methods of submission of incorrect quotations or facts, or a deliberate intensification of biased or misinforming information. Facebook also made a clear difference between fake news and disinformation, i.e. undeliberate spread of incorrect information without any malicious intent.

### **2.3. Scientific study of fake content**

As the study of fake content is a new research field, a limited number of scientific researches on the problem have been published so far.

One of the earliest researches of fake news (Polage, 2012) states that when people are constantly influenced by fake news, presented as real ones, they often relate these facts to other, more reliable, sources. It helps to draw the conclusion that the spread of fake news among the young audience can be connected with a low ability of students to verify the information received from the Internet, so some work on the increase of media literacy must be held (Craft, Ashley, & Maksel, 2016; Williams, 2016).

The results of the survey about the role of fake news in the 2016 Presidential election (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017) show that only 8% of respondents see and believe fake news. Another research shows that the USA college students have no proper training to differentiate between the real and fake news (Wineburg & McGrew, 2016). The researches (Giglietto et al., 2016) found three factors, influencing the audience to believe fake news: the plot itself, the content and the source.

## **3. Research Questions**

RQ 1. What messages in modern media communication in the social networks are considered fake by young people?

RQ 2. What reasons do young people have to trust the messages in the social networks which are fake in their nature?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to reveal the types of messages in modern media communication in the social networks considered fake by young people and to study the reasons of trust in such messages of the social networks.

## 5. Research Methods

The Internet is a part of everyday life for the generation of contemporary young people. We organized some focus-groups to understand the reasons of trust in fake and hype content by young people.

The focus-groups were organized in January and February 2019. We had a session with the students of the Chelyabinsk State University, the Ural Federal University of the first Russian President B.N. Eltsin, the South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University. Later we discussed the results of the session with the students to receive some feed-back and comments.

As all the students were out of age, we did not need a special agreement of their parents. 102 students of 18 to 20 years old took part in the research. All the sessions were recorded, the report was written immediately after each session.

## 6. Findings

During the research we revealed three types of contemporary messages in media communication: hype, flogging and sockpuppet.

Hype (from “hypodermic needle”, a deception, excitement, borax advertising) is the notion in modern mass media content which means a sudden splash of interest in mass media or in the Internet to a certain event or a person.

We detach the following kinds of hype: 1) negative, 2) positive, 3) personal, 4) situational.

The negative hype is based upon scandals, arguments, tragedies. It has a negative colour; the event of the person of hype-focused attention is ambiguous and causes discussions (the tragedy in Kemerovo and video blogger Nikolay Sobolev).

The positive hype is built upon the cultural and socially meaningful events (the collaboration of labels Supreme and Louis Vuitton, the appearance of the new season of the TV series “The Game of Thrones”).

The personal hype may be divided into two sub kinds: 1) a person uses a hype-event to become famous (Alexey Navalny), 2) a person himself makes something extraordinary, strange, resonant (clips of Filipp Kirkorov “The colour of mood is blue”, “Ibitsa”, “The colour of mood is black”).

The situational hype is constructed round some resonant event. It may be useful, helping to promote something (the song of the band Estradarada “Vitya needs to go out”), or harmful, causing losses and notoriety (a photo of a black boy in a hoodie with a sign “The coolest monkey in the jungle” on the site H&M).

Hype performs the following functions: 1) informative; 2) communicative; 3) forming the public opinion; 4) advertising; 5) recreational.

The informative function allows reaching the audience with the acute and resonant information quickly and properly.

The communicative function allows connecting the hype-object and the audience. The communication itself is built around Internet comments, likes, views and reposts, which testify the reaction of the audience upon the events described.

The function of forming the public opinion produces trends in the society, creates informational reasons and builds the informational content of the Internet. This function helps creating the content, immediately attracting the attention of a larger audience.

The advertising function allows promoting the goods or services quickly and effectively due to hype. It also helps a person to gain popularity and to increase the rating and the number of followers for blogs and YouTube-channels.

The recreational function helps drawing the attention of the audience to the hype-content and is expressed through mems, quotes, parodies and anecdotes.

Sockpuppet (from “sock” and “puppet”) is a technology of false identity accepted by a member of Internet-community to imitate marketing from mouth to mouth.

A kind of sockpuppet is flogging (from “fake blog”), a term describing the practices when an organization or a man creates a false person in a blog or in an Internet-chat (Craig, 2007). For instance, a PR-specialist pretends to be a client to post positive reviews in a blog.

Thus, the transformation of the modern mass media content under the influence of new technologies of communication leads to the appearance of possibilities to manipulate the audience with the help of the new type of messages, built on the deception and false identity.

During the focus groups processing and answering the question “What are the possible consequences of fake news?” 64 out of 102 respondents claimed that “the news become unreliable”, 28 answered: “the validity of news becomes uncertain”. 83 respondents told that “fake news creates social problems”. Only 19 respondents consider that fake news is not the problem. The respondents think that the reasons of hype and fake content appearance in social networks are in the desire to earn money on fake news. Answering the question “What can we do about fake news?”, 77 out of 102 respondents believed that “media literacy education” is important. 25 respondents suppose that the responsibility for informational validity lies upon the content makers.

The reasons of trust in fake and hype content in social networks, revealed during our research, are mostly within the mechanism of spread of such information through social networks, and it may be called a “virus”. So, the dynamic of transmission of hype and fake content may be compared with the transmission of disease strains. Rumours, as well as infections and opinions, are formed through social contacts.

## **7. Conclusion**

In our research we answered the questions of what messages in modern media communications in social networks are considered fake by young people, and what are the reasons of trust in messages in social networks by young people which are fake in their nature.

What counter measures can be taken to resist the fake content? We may follow the international experience. In France there are websites with the system of cross-check, constructed in cooperation with such informational agencies Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Le Monde. The consumers may check the news articles and check the organizations participating in the process of the check-up. In Great Britain there is a professional team to check up the facts in the national public broadcasting (BBC)> In South Korea there is a “Center for Fact Checking”, founded by the Seoul National University in cooperation

with the public broadcasting “KBS” and main newspapers (Joong Ang Ilbo and Chosun Ilbo). The reliability of such news is marked with a simple for perception counter, so the users may visually check if the news is fake or real.

The use of such technologies allows the Russian audience to solve the problem of trust in fake content.

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