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Post mass media in the modern informational society
"Journalistic text in a new technological environment:
achievements and problems"

**MISINFORMATION AS IGNORING PROFESSIONAL
PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to considering the difference between the concepts of "misinformation" and "disinformation". False information in the media is called disinformation or fake. However, not all false information is a result of a deliberate attempt to mislead the public. Along with disinformation there is misinformation that means the dissemination of false, erroneous information, the author of which is unaware of its falsehood. Unlike disinformation, a feature of misinformation is that the author does not intend to provide false information. The article attempts to distinguish between the concepts: "disinformation", "misinformation" and the fake news relating to it. Technological and ethical mistakes are considered, which need to be avoided in order to prevent misinformation. The emergence of fakes in journalist articles is associated with a violation of the basic principles of journalism: truthfulness and objectivity, which are set out in the international documents on professional ethics representing the basic requirements for a journalist work with information. It is shown that the appearance of misinformation is associated with ignoring the basic principle of journalism: to describe life, and not a fictional reality. The approaches to verify facts are presented; and the techniques to recognize fake news in the media and social networks are discussed.

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Keywords: Misinformation, disinformation, fake news, fact, factoid, empirical generalization.



1. Introduction

Journalism as a social institution emerged when people started to articulate a need for proven knowledge of changing reality to quickly find their orientation in a real life. In this case, we are talking about the articulation of information needs, that arose in the public consciousness at the turn of the XVI-XVII centuries. The rise of modern centralized governments, the emergence of market relations, international trade, science and culture, made people require the information that would help them to develop clear guidelines in the surrounding reality. With the evolution of journalism professional-ethical documents appeared. The works on professional ethics of a journalist contain reference requirements, based on the norm to respect the right of people to know the truth. “Timely provide them with the most objective and truthful information about reality, clearly separating the reporting of facts from opinions, opposing the deliberate concealment of socially significant information and the dissemination of false data” (Lazutina, 2013, p. 168). However, it was not easy to comply with the articulated professional requirements. There are many examples in the history of mass media when reliable information was replaced by rumors. Long before the appearance of professional ethical standards in journalism, Teofrast Renodo wrote in 1635: “I must tell you that a story is a tale about real events. The newspaper uses rumors” (as cited in Bespalova, 2003, p. 432).

The appeal to unverified information was caused by several factors: “the lack of development of oral and written mass information forms in the prepress period, the relative cheapness of rumors as a news source, censorship considerations, the desire to entertain the audience, the need to involve more people in information consumption and due to this increase circulation and the capitalization of newspaper companies” (Raspopova & Bogdan, 2018, p. 8).

Through the development of written forms of mass communication, several serious professional violations were classified such as slander, insult, plagiarism, as well as deliberate distortion of facts, or disinformation. “Disinformation is not the absence of information as such, but its special form, which creates an incorrect picture of reality for the audience” (Raspopova & Bogdan, 2018, p. 16).

At the turn of the XVII and XVIII centuries, with the growing circulation of newspapers, journalism evolved gradually into a mass profession, which in turn put the issue of professional training on the agenda (Endres, 2009). Journalism education as a system took shape in the 20th century, while the professionalisation of doctors, teachers, and lawyers took shape much earlier, in the 15th and 16th centuries. Most of the media worldwide employ historically self-taught journalists. In the course of their practical activities, they master approaches to creating journalistic texts. At the same time, in the conditions of rapid development of mass communications there is a great concern that authors without basic journalistic education will be able to fully master the tools without which it is impossible to work in journalism (UNESCO, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

Ignorance of the professional fundamentals leads to the fact that misinformation is being spread through mass information channels (Vicario et al., 2015). Misinformation is a false, erroneous information, the author of which is unaware of its falsehood. Unlike disinformation, the misinformation’ feature is that

the author provides false information unintentionally. We associate the misinformation process with technological errors in the work of a journalist. As a rule, these may be caused by the specifics of journalistic activity. Journalists work in the conditions of contradictory public practice, multivariate in nature and coupled with elements of spontaneity and chance. The distribution of inaccurate information is affected by the limited knowledge that a journalist has of reality, the diversity of value systems, differences in the interests and intentions of people, which, of course, make it difficult for journalists to obtain accurate information about the events. Also, the search for information takes place under conditions of limited time and is associated with a large physical and psychological overload of the journalist, which also makes it difficult to verify and recheck information.

With the development of the Internet, the appearance of inaccurate information became widespread, and the term “fake news” entered the active vocabulary of modern men. “Fake news is a fabricated news story, a lie in which can be recognized and debunked, although it can mislead the audience” (Raspopova & Bogdan, 2018, p. 5).

The fake news phenomenon is associated with a hoax, that is, the deliberate misleading of people by giving them non-existent facts that most of the audience perceives as reality. The emergence of fakes also occurs because of technological failures in the work of a journalist, when there is a substitution of a basic goal setting: “reflecting reality” is substituted by its “transformation” (Kazak, 2011).

3. Research Questions

Why are there “failures” in the work of a journalist that make him violate professional norms and lead to misinformation?

4. Purpose of the Study

The emergence of fake news is directly related to the violation of the basic principles of journalism: truthfulness and objectivity. Truthfulness is expressed in the accurate representation of the fact as a proven, reliable knowledge of the changes in real life. Objectivity is a matter of interpretation and interrelation of the facts. To overcome the rising contradictions, the international principles of professional ethics in journalism are of great importance. They set requirements for the work of a journalist with information. The International Principles of Journalistic Ethics define truthfulness and objectivity as the core of the journalist’s professional duty: The foremost task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality (Accountable Journalism, 2019). This study was aimed to reveal the “failures” in a journalist work violating professional norms and the underlying reasons of misinformation.

5. Research Methods

This study applied functional and content analysis for studying mass communication.

6. Findings

According to Prokhorov (2011), “It happens that abandoning the principle of objectivity does not have malicious intent. Sometimes these are elementary mistakes of a journalist, conscientious errors that need courage to recognize and correct them” (p. 117). In Russian legislation there is no requirement for an apology. “No one can be forced to express their opinions and beliefs or abandon them” (Constitution of Russian Federation, 2019). Foreign legislation is based on the same principles. “The American court cannot oblige the media to apologize. It has the authority to oblige to publish a refutation and compensate for damages, and the refutation states that the court found some facts wrong” (from the statements of the United States Federal Court of Appeals Pierre Leval) (Raspopova, 2018). Despite the fact whether to bring an apology or not is a matter of personal choice of a journalist, he is required to honestly admit mistakes and correct inaccuracies. “Hushing up mistakes, let alone ignoring to admit them, makes it difficult to search for truth during a dialogue between different media, undermines the credibility of journalists, and therefore is a serious violation of professional ethics” (Prokhorov, 2011, p. 118).

In the context of the above, it is important to note the significance of the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, adopted at the Second World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists, which was proclaimed as the standard of professional behavior of a journalist. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents (IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, 2019).

At all stages of working with the text, the journalist shall refer to the documents as the main method of obtaining information. With the development of the Internet, unauthentic photographs, international databases, reports, court decisions materials, various registries, and others have become widespread. While working with documents, a journalist must view them, process them, and mandatory verify them. Verification is meant to control the reliability of information by examining its sources. When organizing a conversation with a person as a living source of information, it is important to recognize the basis of his statement: whether it is based on facts or opinions or it causes doubts about the authenticity of the transmitted information; and if this statement leaves an impression that can mislead the audience. When working with a newsmaker, it is important to verify the facts cited by him, since the unspecified information can lead to a fake, a substitution of real facts. Stories told by a person can carry fiction that is permissible in the interpretation of a person’s own life (Zhang et al., 2018, pp. 605-606). In other cases, it is necessary to consider information from a critical point of view and distribute only the one that can be considered reliable.

The basis of the journalistic text consists of facts, that objectify what is happening in reality. A fact is an element of the text that carries information that is always verifiable, because it contains an indication of the necessary parameters of what is happening, revealed by answering the questions: “Who? What? Where? When?”. When there is no answer to one or more of the questions, the facts are replaced by factoids or empirical generalizations. “Factoid is an element of the text that lacks completeness and accuracy in the representation of reality” (Raspopova, 2017, p. 118). Empirical generalizations represent the information in the text with a minimum specification in a form of generalization, done approximately. The publication

of factoids and empirical generalizations by the journalist demands the utmost caution, as well as providing the text with the reference on its intended source.

The first failure occurs when there is no confirmation of the information in the text, which should be recorded on a photo, video or in writing with clear evidence of the authenticity. Choosing a source of information is not an easy task for a journalist. In order to prevent the publication of unconfirmed information received from unnamed source, it must be proven by other sources not affiliated with the first one. A modern system of information sources developed in the mass media includes press services, newsmakers and insiders. A special role in the provision of information and verification of its authenticity belongs to the insider. An insider is a person who has access to information and who is ready to share this information with a journalist. The name of the insider is not made public, but in order to avoid the publication of inaccurate information, the journalist must report his name to the editor-in-chief.

Along with traditional sources of information, the journalist actively uses social networks that can instantly respond to changes in real life. Working with social networks includes checking the accuracy of accounts, the location of the author of the message, the date of the message, citing the statuses and posts that appear both in print and online. Social media report mostly an already accomplished fact, but without details of what is happening. In the fight against unverified facts, it is important to expand them by using other sources of information. Professionalism of a journalist in interaction with sources of information will allow him to avoid situations when facts are replaced by factoids and empirical generalizations (Raspopova, 2017, pp. 117-118).

Due to the development of the Internet, the technological errors in a journalist work with information have become large-scaled (Goran & Karamarko, 2015). At the same time, “the Internet filters and filters out information in the way that traditional media and TV couldn’t imagine, since those, so called, are largely off the ground and physically cannot pay attention to all the news and analysis” (Bernstein, 2017, p. 454).

7. Conclusion

In the context of the above, it can be concluded that the mastering of modern technologies in collecting and verifying information, as well as reliance to the international professional standards could help overcome errors in creating of a journalistic text.

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