

**FaR 2021**

**International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”**

**FAKE MEDIA PRODUCTS AS SPEECH AGGRESSION  
PROVOKERS IN NETWORK COMMUNICATION**

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**Abstract**

The paper deals with the problem of the potential aggressive impact of fake media products on a user of a social net. The authors raise three important questions. Firstly, is network communication safe enough to users or does it need to be secured? Secondly, whether speech aggression in new media is invoked by fakes. And thirdly, how to prevent the harmful impact of faking and other aggressive behaviour of social net users. These questions are central to an understanding of how to deal with criminal speech interaction and countermeasure violent speech aggression that is virally invoked by fakes. The results of the undertaken speech-related research provide the insight into the phenomena of online abuse and the anti-aggression strategy based on special linguistic knowledge that can help to detect fake media narrative. The article also problematizes straightforward interconnection of fakes and violent speech aggression, as the impact of fake media products is not obligatory criminal but always, one way or another, harmful. Obviously, media fake product integrated with online abuse can cause aggressive reaction among online participants involved in the reference situation as well as among third parties offline. The authors focus on linguistic markers that can help to identify forgery in the presence of significant "artefacts" occurring in the production of a fake media product.

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*Keywords:* Speech, online communication, security, fake media product, linguistic markers, verbal aggression



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## 1. Introduction

The main features of communication in new media include physical distance, anonymity, and reduced social cues. Social networks form an environment “where people feel free to, or even compelled to behave in extreme and inappropriate ways” (Thurlow et al., 2004, p. 70). Digital threats in today's realities are the distortion of information, fakes, the undermining of traditional values, and the manipulation of public consciousness. The digital technology helps to hide personal identity and thus provokes substitution of facts with their interpretations or simulacrum. Fakes are aimed to violent, unexpected, repressive introduction of values that are contrary to traditional national customs and values. The object of influence is the cultural and historical environment, the system of national values and priorities. Their destruction is a direct undermining of the spiritual foundations of both the national community and the state as a whole. Fake media products have an influence on public opinion through emotions, and irrational methods of persuasion that cause social antagonism and online aggressive behaviour. Causation of an aggressive reaction to a fake media product is usually associated with the frustration that a person experiences from the detected deception and reduction of social cues in digital communication. The Internet users do not have access to the body language and paralinguistic features of oral speech that are more informative to lie detection in a spoken message. The lack of intonation, unseen gestures etc. are compensated through the use of smileys, emoticons, graphics, videos, etc. that alongside with linguistic features help to disambiguate users' intended meanings and identify a fake speech product.

### 1.1. The phenomena of a fake media product and its impact

The concept of "fake media product" is quite broad and includes a number of different phenomena of the media environment. Fake imitates informativeness at the formal level, that is, it corresponds to the most prominent characteristic of information genre features. The main feature of a fake is the special emotional form of information presentation that appeals to the sphere of feelings and emotions. False information presented under the guise of a reliable message can be presented in the form of a presupposition, a hidden statement, a hint or value judgments containing emotionally expressive assessments, subjective opinions that cannot be verified for compliance or inconsistency with reality (Galyashina, 2019). Headlines have the greatest emotive impact in the structure of fake media products. The internet headlines allow users to navigate information flows. In various news aggregators, e.g. Yandex, Rambler, Google, etc. the user sees the headlines of news only, so it determines the reader's choice of a particular article. Another peculiarity of a fake media product is its graphic pictoriality and iconicity. In face-to-face communication, interlocutors use intonation, prosodic strategies, specific keywords and phrases to convey information and their feelings. In informal digital communication graphic, icons, etc. replace paralinguistic and linguistic forms of providing information. The main reason to use pictures and symbols is to add emotional connotation to the specific parts of verbal communication in all domains of social interaction. Internet users have access to a large variety of icons on keyboards, apps and websites in order to compose emoji-nuanced messages allowing emotivity to be inserted in informative or analytic speech product like prosodic markers in oral speech. Emoji code in addition to special manipulative keywords and implications provides the potential for ambiguity that become increasingly dangerous in the

intercultural context of global network communication. Fakes are closely related to disinformation, which is understood as deliberately false information disseminated in order to achieve manipulative or misleading aims and provide criminal or harmful impact on the respondents (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). A fake media product may contain not only specially prepared deliberately false information but also verifiable information with scandal and resonant nature taken out of the context. In a social net, a fake as clickbait spreads virally and therefore poses a great potential threat to users. The aim of its viral spread is to create a hype around an imaginary occasion and engage more and more people in a broad discussion. It can also be used to provoke panic, mass riots, discredit public politicians and public figures, and promote the activities of terrorists and extremists (Verstraete et al., 2017). The potential to be anonymous online continues to be beneficial for those who have sinister reasons to spread untrue information and hide facets of their activity with catastrophic consequences. Thus, media fake product incorporated with online abuse can provoke violent aggressive reaction among online participants involved in the reference situation as well as among third parties offline (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

### **1.2. Aggressive speech behaviour in computer mediated channels**

There are some most popular forms of online antisocial speech behaviour that is associated with a fake media product. Its harmful impact can provoke aggressive reaction of an addressee. The first form of online antisocial behaviour is flaming which is a hostile digital communication including insulting messages that can implicate untrue information hidden in a nasty joke or sarcastic remark. If a reader does not understand the humour, he/she would react aggressively towards other users in the Internet environment. Secondly, it is worth mentioning online trolls (pranks) who cause disruption through deception. The forum or chat participants often believe that trolls are sincere in their opinions or messages and had no intention of offending the target victim. The trolls' speech actions may have a negative impact and provoke offensive reaction as well as violent off-line aggression. Thirdly, we should mention cyberbullying associated with spreading deliberately untrue and hostile data in the media by the aggressor who has a harmful intention towards the same person or the group of people selected by racial, national, gender, language, etc. attributes. Cyberbullying can be sometimes considered as the aggressive retaliation for the wrong caused by the victim as they felt themselves frustrated or emotionally distraught (Sabella et al., 2013). The interconnection between fakes and violent speech aggression is not evident. The impact of fake media products is always harmful to the participant of online interaction but is not obligatory connected with criminal offline abuse or violent extremist actions. Obviously, media fake product implicated in antisocial speech behaviour is likely to provoke violent aggressive reaction among online participants involved in the reference situation as well as among third parties offline.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Solutions to outstand online aggression invoked by a fake media product lie in a multifaceted and informed response to semantic threats with the help of special forensic linguistic knowledge. In this work, a semantic threat is defined as a deliberately unreliable or taken out of context, socially significant information disseminated under the guise of credible data that poses essential danger to the safety of new

media users. Semantic threats can be studied from different angles. Based on special forensic analysis to the understanding of how-to countermeasure criminal speech behaviour in social networks, we consider aggressive online people's reaction on fake media products as being provoked not only by flaming, trolling or cyberbullying but semantic fact distortion as well.

### **3. Research Questions**

In our study of multimedia threats to the ideological security of Internet communication, the main attention is paid to the examination of messages in the media sphere containing completely false or partially distorted news information presented under the guise of reliable data. The undertaken research highlights three important aspects of fake media products connected with online verbal aggression. The first hypothesis is that social network communication is not safe enough to users because of semantic threats so that it needs to be secured. The second idea is that verbal aggression in media seems to be invoked by fakes connected with antisocial speech behaviour (flaming, trolling, bullying). The third aspect is how to prevent the harmful impact of fakes resulting in criminal effect of aggressive behaviour in new media. These issues are central to an understanding of how to deal with criminal speech interaction and countermeasure verbal aggression that is virally invoked by a fake media product.

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

The purpose of the research is to highlight the complexity of the phenomena of aggressive and criminal speech behaviour invoked by a fake media product. The study is aimed at the identification of semantic threats on the basis of special knowledge in order to counteract provocative impact of fact distortion on the individual, group and public consciousness of the users in the Russian-language segment of the Internet. Semantic threats are considered as being closely connected with faking in the media environment that contributes to the formation of distorted concerns about current events which has an adverse impact on all spheres of society.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study uses a set of methods, including a retrospective analysis of academic literature, comparative legal and logical analysis, academic methods of forensic linguistic expertise. The methodology of the study was based on the laws of dialectical and formal logic and such scientific methods as comparative-analytical, system-structural, semantic linguistic analysis. 1673 comments in social networks (VKontakte and Odnoklassniki) made by users to 150 fake media products posted in January-December 2020 were the primary source of Russian language text materials. The semantic method was used to explicate the connotation (positive, negative, neutral) of a comment as well as to determine the author's attitude to the subject of speech and its explicitness. The method of propositional analysis was useful to determine the type of propositional appeal and other motivational structures used by the author, to reveal implicit linguistic means in order to encourage the reader to perform certain actions desired by the commentator or to adopt the desired point of view.

## **6. Findings**

The harmful and criminal impact of a fake media product (fake mental intrusion) is realized through the use of certain linguistic and paralinguistic techniques for intruding in the reader's consciousness falsified ideas. They include semantic presuppositions, interrogative constructions with implicit semantics, implicit logical connection, logic of the absurd and impudent analogy, refutation of a hidden thesis, appeal to authorities and general knowledge, collapsed comparisons, pragmatic presuppositions, communicative implicatures, etc. The structure of 97 % fakes distributed in social networks does not correspond to the standard structure of news (the title, the lead and the article). These fakes are represented by a summary lead or a sensational exclamative headline with negative information about an accident, disaster, catastrophe, and other collapses. 73 % of the analysed comments on fakes in social networks express negative emotions and aggressive assessments. It causes flaming, trolling and bullying and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

### **6.1. Semantic features of a fake media product**

Distinctive features of a fake media product content include vitality, essentiality, sensationalism, strongly worded and categorical judgments, ambiguity and double meaning, accent on terror, fear, strong feelings and emotions, repetition of the same information, hidden threat, truisms (generally accepted truth), reference to authority, pseudo quotations.

### **6.2. Lexical features of a fake media product**

The potential of the lexical level of the Russian language system is realized on the basis of the individual choice of lexemes and is represented in a fake media product mostly with the following techniques: an appellation for maximum dissemination of information, the use of assessments, stylistically marked words and expressions, wordplays, puns, quibbles, metaphors, comparisons, metonymies, epithets, equivoque, hyperionisms, euphemisms, manipulative and propaganda words, ideologemes, etc.

### **6.3. Syntaxis of a fake media product**

The syntaxis of a fake message (syntactic structure) is characterized by the predominance of simple common sentences, non-union proposals, complex sentences with subordinate determinants, reasons or conditions, emotionally and expressively marked syntactic constructions, exclamations, rhetorical questions, sentences with references. There are also syntactic repetitions, inversions, personal appeals, pragmatic and semantic presuppositions, interrogative constructions with implicit semantics, implicit logical connection, refutation of a hidden thesis, collapsed comparisons, communicative implicatures, syntactic means for brain washing. They include the use of emotionally and expressively colored syntactic constructions, prevalence of specific linguistic markers of doubtfulness (such as 'highly likely', 'very much possibly', etc.), signs that indicate conviction of guesses and conjectures.

## 7. Conclusion

Fake media product is the deliberately false vital information disguised as a reliable message for the manipulative or provocative purposes. Diagnostic features of a fake media product are as follows. Fake is always an untrue message containing unreliable negative sensational info. Doubtful or unauthentic information is usually disguised as reliable and credible data.

Fake media products are created to circulate mainly in new media: social network sites (such as Facebook, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki), search engines (such as Rambler, Yandex, Google, etc.), blogs (such as LiveJournal), wikis, including Wikipedia, the microblogging site Twitter, media-sharing sites, video hosting sites (such as YouTube), sites as Instagram, etc. Fakes tend to appeal to deep feelings and vivid emotions. Fakes are always intended to spread in order to achieve certain vile goals: manipulation of public opinion; obtaining illegal benefits, somebody's discrediting; for hype, fraud, blackmail, cyberbullying, flaming, provoking panic and social chaos and riots, violent crimes, etc.

A fake media product is based on the relevance of faith and contains vital information that can cause strong emotions with mostly negative impact on the addressee provoking aggressive online or offline behaviour. The results of the undertaken research can provide the insight into phenomena of online abuse and the anti-aggression strategy based on special linguistic knowledge that can help to detect fake media narrative with a potential aggressive impact. The findings of our study do not prove the straightforward interconnection between fakes and violent speech aggression, as the impact of fake media products is not obligatory criminal or deviant but it might be very emotionally harmful and thus being aggressive for the addressee.

So, media fake product integrated with online abuse can provoke violent aggressive reaction among participants of the online discussion involved in the reference situation in a social net as well as among third parties offline.

## Acknowledgments

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 20-011-00190 'Conceptualization of countering information threats in the Internet environment using special legal and forensic linguistic knowledge'. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8989-1003> (a), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2819-8517> (b).

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