FAKE NEWS - A CHALLENGE FOR OSINT

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Abstract: *"Fake news" is one of the major themes on public agenda in recent years, with a high potential for affecting social systems and democracy as a whole. Against this background, the increasingly use of fake content or alternative facts, coupled with the dynamics of social networks, has generated a special concern to understand and counteract this phenomenon. In the intelligence activity, the extent of the phenomenon and the magnitude of its consequences, amplified by the facilities provided by the social platforms, create significant difficulties in collecting and analyzing the information from open sources (OSINT), that obtained a considerable role in intelligence. In this context, this article aims to address the conceptual aspects and the implications of "fake news" as a reference point in identifying response measures meant to ensure - in a specialized way - the counteraction of the phenomenon.*

Keywords: fake news; disinformation; OSINT; social -media

1. INTRODUCTION

Flooding the public space in the past few years with misinformation, highly publicized under the name fake news, requires - as first steps in understanding these developments - the necessity of conceptual clarification of the term as well as the origins of the phenomenon. From this point of view, the working hypothesis from which we start this article is that the fake news do not represent a new phenomenon and could be placed in the sphere of rumor, manipulation and misinformation used by open sources throughout history.

Particularly, the assumption we take into account is that at present, the combination fake news – social media challenges the intelligence services: from the prospective of threats to democracy; in obtaining useful intelligence for national security from open sources (OSINT).

2. ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF FAKE NEWS

According to linguist Anatoly Liberman (August, 2017) from Minnesota University, etymologically the term fake news has a pejorative meaning, derived from the jargon of London thieves in 18th century. It could be related to Germanic verbs which means 'to cheat'. Subsequently the meaning of the term expanded, being associated with the verbs 'to steal' or even 'to kill'. According to Miriam-Webster site (2017), a well-known company for its dictionaries, the term fake news came into the generalized public language in the sense of false news at the end of 19th century and it was found in many press articles between 1890-1891.

This sense is not fully accepted and clarified in scientific community. The term begins to be assimilated by itself in the dictionaries starting in 2017, and the definitions are nuanced. The online edition of Collins Dictionary defines fake news as 'false information, often sensational, disseminated under the guise of news reporting', and Cambridge Dictionary 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'. Researches (Kleis, Graves, 2017:2-3) based on focus-groups also pointed out different prospective of the public opinion (figure 1) over the meaning of the term 'fake news' - from satira, to unprofessional journalism, to political propaganda, negative advertising and false news.

From our perspective, coupled with the above mentioned examples as well as the current context, a defining definition of fake news could refer to false or biased narratives and omissions of parts of truth, deliberately created and targeting the sensational and extreme components which generate emotional involvement or the strengthening of prejudices.

A retrospective over time demonstrates/proves that fake news is multiplying after the discovery of print and the appearance of mass-media (Jacob Soll, 2016).

"Fake 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.

Satire	Poor journalism	Propaganda	Some advertising	False news
Not seen as news Parody Funny Amusing	Superficial Inaccurate Sensationalist	Hyperpartisan content Politicians lying Extreme spin/PR	Ads and pop-ups "Around the web" links Sponsored content	**Not seen as news** For-profit fabrication Politically motivated fabrication Malicious hoaxes

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.

Fig.1. Public perception of fake news/ http://www.digitalnewsreport.org

A series of publicly exposed cases show that newspapers, radio and then television were commonly used to launch false news (Allcott, Gentzkow, 2017:211).

▪ spectacular, based on popular prejudices related to monsters, witches, sinners, who usually served to consolidate religious beliefs;

▪ fabricated in order to obtain political, financial or notoriety benefits.

The discovering life on the moon – 1835 'The New York Sun', the death Mark Twain, in poverty, in 1897 in London – New York Journal, the extraterrestrial attack on USA – 1938 Columbia Broadcasting network are only a few of the fake news in the sensational area that was being circulated at a certain moment.

Besides these, there were investigated fake news cases that marked a series of major political and diplomatic decisions:

▪ the alleged letter of Grigori Zinoviev, the president of Comintern, calling on British Communists to mobilize the sympathetic forces of Labor Party. Published on 1924 by Daily Mail, the letter contributed to the loss of the Labor Party's elections;

▪ covering the Soviet crimes of starvation of Ukraine's population, in the articles signed in 1931 by Walter Duranty, the chief of New York Times office in Moscow, which have resulted in an extension of the US willingness towards URSS;

▪ constant promotion by the Nazi of the protocols of the elders of Zion, a false text published in Russia in 1903, which suggested the idea of a global Jewish secret conspiracy;

▪ the existence of weapons of mass-destruction in Irak, which conducted to the American military intervention in the region.

Starting to US presidential elections in 2016, the term fake news stimulated intense approaches, studies and researches in academic, journalistic, political domains as well as technology companies. According to them, the goals of fake news are currently different, from the political ones, with the perverting of political dialogue (agenda, propaganda) – (Marwick, Lewis, 2017:107-110), to the business ones (traffic, financial gains) or are part of the global hybrid war, misinformation being a technique of the informatics - psychologic war (Trenin, D., 2018:2). The studies showed that subculture groups (the far right wing, trolls, the conspiracy theory supporters, conservatives) develops hacking techniques in order to increase their ideas visibility, but there is also the tendency to label, (especially from the political area) as fake news any piece of news that is against its their interests (Marwick, Lewis, 2017:108). Among these groups there are preferences for one type or another of the social media. A study realized by Oxford Internet Institute between November 2017-January 2018 underlined that Donald Trump's supporters network spread fake news especially on Twitter. According the same study, the far right groups were extremely active on Facebook in spreading fake news.

3. THE FAVORED FACTORS

The particular elements of the phenomenon today are related to the increasing trend of fake news, most of them produced and posted on the obscure sites. Their spreading is facilitated by the social platforms, that extended the possibilities of generating content directly by the user and global coverage of publishing.

If in the past manipulation was attributed especially to the driving political factors and the strong figures today the socialization platforms transformed the user into a possible manipulator. In this context there is a major difference between the level of filtration of message (compare to traditional market media), socialization platforms allowing the news to go directly to a great number of consumers.

Many researches pointed out that there is also a connection between social media algorithm and the advertising/commercial systems, exploited by persons interested in rapidly spreading of a message. (Wooley Howard, 2016:10). At the same time, the consumers play an important role both in generating content and in modeling of a certain type of journalism. According to specialized researches, the evolutions on fake news market are determined by the fact that people are open to fake news, especially to those based on prejudices they intensely shared (De Keersmaecker; Roets A, 2017:108) .

4. VULNERABILITY OF DEMOCRACY

The magnitude of the debates on the subject imposed fake news one of the `words of the year` in 2017, in Collins Dictionary. The developments are directly connected to the multiplication of concerns to limit the negative consequences of the fake news spread. Exponents of the academic, politics and business drew attention to the risk of erosion of the fundamentals of democracy and the erosion of trust in mass-media.

It's edifying the fact that World Economic Forum/WEF included digital major misinformation as one of the most important threats to the current society (WEF, 2018). Fears are strengthened by the survey realized between 5 and 7 of February by the European Union, which highlighted that most of the Europeans consider fake news is a real problem for every country and for every democracy in general (The Eurobarometer, March, 2018:1).

5. EFFECTS ON OSINT ACTIVITIES

For intelligence analysts who count on open sources (OSINT), this level of mistrust in mass-media has significant and permanent implications on the way they do their job.

We refer in this article to OSINT as defined in NATO Open Sources Intelligence Handbook (2001), respectively the selected, filtered and analyzed information from open sources, in order to answer to a request.

OSINT activity is carried out both in governmental and in private institutions, the domain finds one to provide a competitive advantage to any type of organization. A general look over the entities at global level with OSINT activity for the national security and the domains in which the open sources contribute is offered in the image below, published by Homelend Security Research (March, 2018).
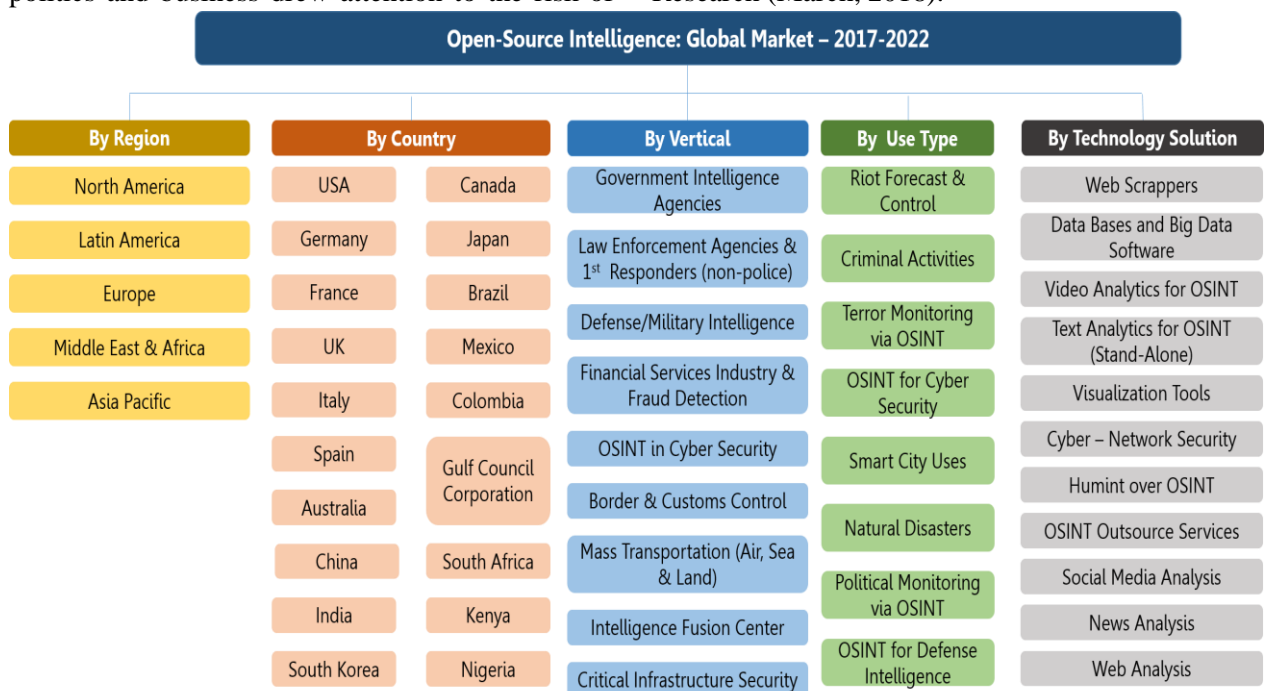

Open-Source Intelligence: Global Market – 2017-2022

By Region	By Country		By Vertical	By Use Type	By Technology Solution
North America	USA	Canada	Government Intelligence Agencies	Riot Forecast & Control	Web Scrappers
Latin America	Germany	Japan	Law Enforcement Agencies & 1st Responders (non-police)	Criminal Activities	Data Bases and Big Data Software
Europe	France	Brazil	Defense/Military Intelligence	Terror Monitoring via OSINT	Video Analytics for OSINT
Middle East & Africa	UK	Mexico	Financial Services Industry & Fraud Detection	OSINT for Cyber Security	Text Analytics for OSINT (Stand-Alone)
Asia Pacific	Italy	Colombia	OSINT in Cyber Security	Smart City Uses	Visualization Tools
	Spain	Gulf Council Corporation	Border & Customs Control	Natural Disasters	Cyber – Network Security
	Australia		Mass Transportation (Air, Sea & Land)	Political Monitoring via OSINT	Humint over OSINT
	China	South Africa	Intelligence Fusion Center	OSINT for Defense Intelligence	OSINT Outsource Services
	India	Kenya	Critical Infrastructure Security		Social Media Analysis
	South Korea	Nigeria			News Analysis
					Web Analysis

Fig.2. Open Source Intelligence Global Market/ https://homelandsecurityresearch.com/

As it was mentioned above, the OSINT analysts' main work front is open sources. In this category enter the well-known classical sources (mass media, newspapers, web sites, magazines, TV shows, blogs, social media). Practically, there are the same types of sources, which, traditionally, were associated with misinformation and persuasion. Besides the challenges generate by the continuous increase of data volume, the traditional limits of related to linguistic barriers, the amplification of the fake news phenomenon increase the difficulties faced by OSINT. This fact produces effects upon all intelligence system. Especially if we take into account the role of the open sources information considerably increased (being evaluated - a former director of CIA - James Woosley - at 90% from the whole intelligence activity).

6. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

To limit the effects of the fake news phenomenon, we consider that any organization which is dealing with OSINT needs a framework to rapidly assimilate the initiatives from bussiness and academic areas. It's worth mentioning in this case proliferation of the identification of those online fake news (as Buzzfeed sau Bellingcat, Snopes, Full Fact and FactCheck), as well as recommendations of multidimensional, meant to build the processes through which the news are consumed. In support of OSINT experts, there are also the analytical techniques based on analysis and critical thinking, which must lead to putting those questions that are suitable and, let us add, to finding responses to the extent by revealing a logical scheme based on evidence and inferences, induction and deduction, recognition of the patterns and identifications of possible tendencies.

Applying the principles of credibility of the source is a compulsory component in OSINT activity, but these could become time-consuming in the context of proliferation of obscure sources and in the absence of reliable technological solutions to automate collection and analysis from open sources. We believe that one of the solutions would be to perform analyzes of cloud based media markets that provide on one hand visual understanding of the media map as a whole and the correct placement of sources within it, internal relations, and on the other hand – tendencies. We consider that the mapping model of the media markets proposed (2016) by Erik Kleinsmith, vicepresident for Business Development in Intelligence, National & Homeland Security, and Cyber for American Military University, can be a solution for OSINT.

The proposal, presented in figure 3, offers the advantage of understanding the behaviour the different types of media (traditional mass-media, blogs, forums, social media), area of influence and the contribution in forming and promoting some news.
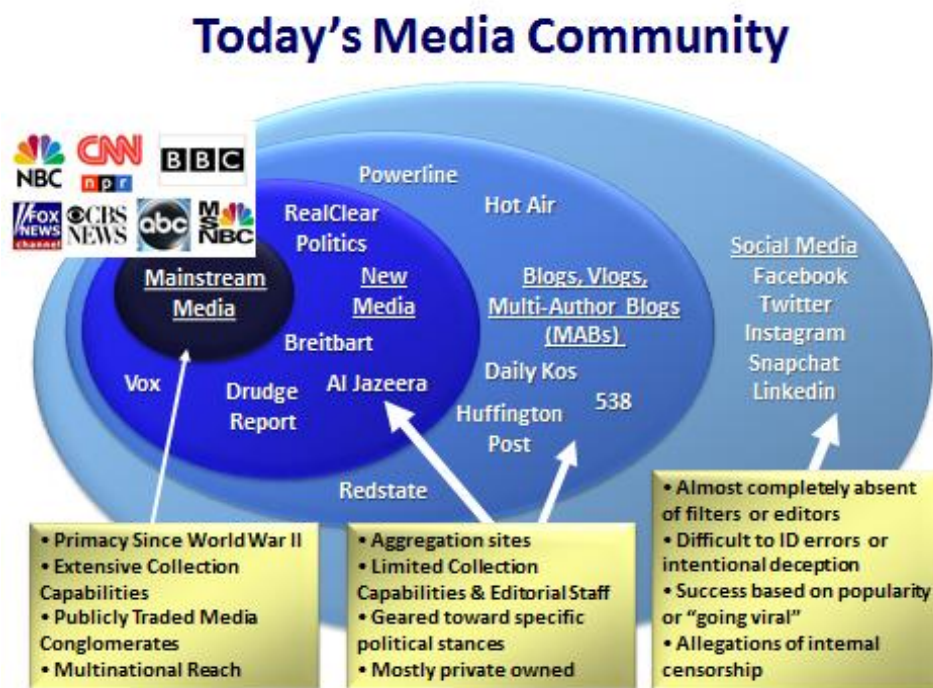

Fig.3. Map of Media/ https://inpublicsafety.com

The OSINT activity, either governmental or private will depend on common public-private effort for ensuring the right of correct information.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The examples presented in this article show that fake news took part in the disinformation, manipulation and propaganda arsenal of the interest s groups in history. Fake news phenomenon highlighted the fact that non-state entities or groups of individuals could catalyze major political changes with minimum costs, wherever in the world by means and platforms with global coverage, unsubordinated to any government. The solutions promoted in public space cover a wide range of from returning to rules and strict editorial standards to legislative interventions and collaborative civil initiatives to expose the fake news.

Against this background we consider that in OSINT activity (figure 4, reprezentare a autorilor) there is a need for a combined approach between the rigor of analysis – critical thinking, application of structured methods and techniques as those like validation of sources and models of understanding the media landscape. All these must be supported by investments in tools of automatic collection, Data Mining, Web analysis and Big Data.
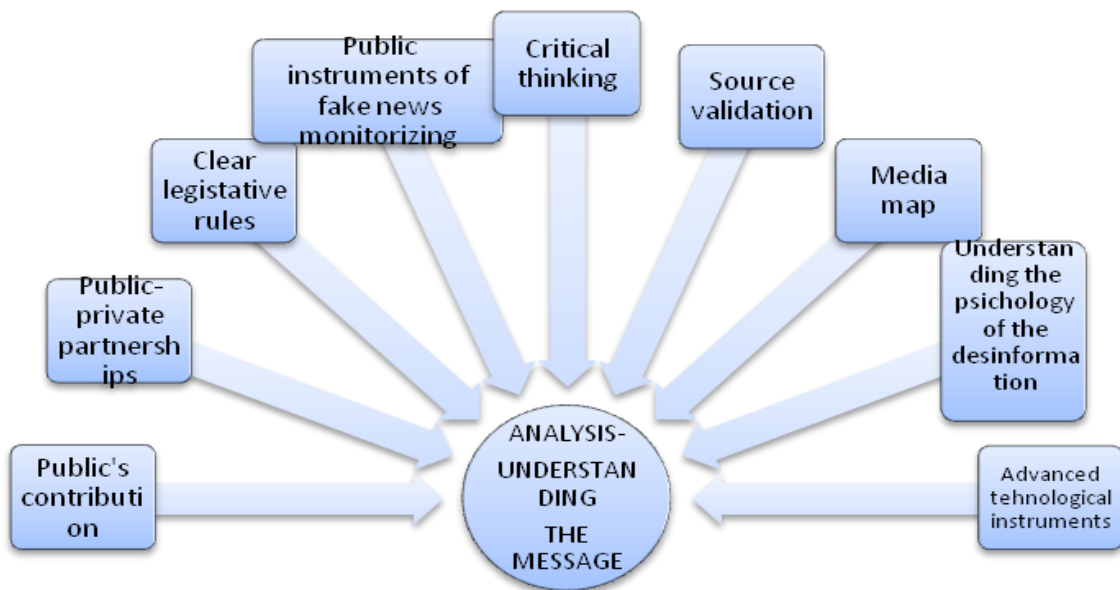

Fig.3. Map of Media/ https://inpublicsafety.com

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