

THE DESTABILIZATION OF DEMOCRACIES THROUGH THE SPREAD OF DISINFORMATION: THE ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Motto: *No one dies of fatal truths nowadays: there are too many antidotes.*
Friedrich Nietzsche, "Human, All Too Human"

Abstract

Internet may be the most relevant development of our times, but together with its many benefits it has brought new challenges. One of them is disinformation or the so-called "fake news". This challenge should be approached both from an ethical and a technological perspective. Internet gives us access to a big amount of data but not all of it is true or valid, neither knowing the data is the same as understanding. Citizens are eager for information, but lies are more attractive than truths – generally considered as overrated – and whistle-blowers and social networks seem to be the only trustworthy sources. As a result, citizens – mainly the younger – are critically exposed to disinformation agents that sometimes even participate in disinformation networks organized at a State level in the battle for information; which poses a great risk for our democracies. A great problem to tackle this is the confrontation of legal measures to control profit-guided Social Networks and the persistence of basic principles for the EU such as the freedom of expression. The most effective way to face disinformation not falling under censorship must therefore be educating in critical thinking, and this means educating citizens in Intelligence Analysis.

Key words: *Disinformation, Intelligence Analysis, Critical Thinking education.*

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Contextualization: internet, information and disinformation

I'm in Internet, therefore I am. Internet is, without a doubt, an achievement that has supposed a changing of era. It has many positive effects: never before so many citizens had access to such an amount of information as Internet offers, thus empowering transparency, supporting innovation, serving as a tool denouncing of abuses for the defence of citizens' rights and liberties. New technologies also make our daily lives easier. But on the other hand, just like the Roman god Janus, it also has a negative side that produces insecurities and new risks, summed to its rapid power of propagation. It gives us access to information in real time but at the same time its speed makes us forget it very quickly.

In the new world of Internet, speed is above verification, thus lies can be easily spread in a short period of time reaching almost everyone. In addition, as a recent research on "fake news" undertaken by a MIT research group proves (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018, pp. 1146-1151), we consume more false information than truths regardless of the media we use, the conclusion we make is that citizens nowadays are easy to manipulate and, therefore, democracy is at risk.

Even if social networks seem to be a tool for "participation", they can be also used for "control": how are citizens going to make correct decisions if they live in a distorted reality? The frontier between truths and lies is becoming thinner and more liquid every time, to the point that it is hard to distinguish reality from fiction. New technologies mingle what is real and what is virtual, making us live in parallel worlds at the same time, worlds which are full of noise as everyone has something to say in every issue, and the ignorant and grotesque opinions (sometimes even aggressive) have been elevated to the category of "normal".

There is one thing clear about Internet: it is seducing. Social networks profiles keep growing as the anthem of our days seems to be "I'm in Internet – I'm an influencer –, therefore I am". Internet is nowadays the battleground of ideas, consequently also of lies and disinformation. But these new forms of communication only include those who think like one does, therefore debate is absent in the Net. This is the way how a great platform for the freedom of expression is becoming more and more of a "monitored liberty". We haven't doubt for a moment – what is worrying – to give up our privacy in order to gain "security" through new technologies, but at the same time, these new technologies have generated new tools to attempt against our privacy or damage our image, becoming so sophisticated that it is hard to detect falsifications (the so called "deep fake" or perfect falsifications). The use of

such disinformation techniques is both present at the personal level as it is in politics, business and international relations, where it poses a great risk for democracies. Indeed, we must be aware of how these tools weren't created to consolidate or potentiate democratic values, neither to educate well-informed citizens with a critical thinking. Furthermore, is anyone naïve enough to believe that the many researches on "fake news" financed by technological enterprises and investment funds will provoke a real Revolution? We are certainly allowed to "eat from all the trees in this Paradise" except from the one of critical thinking that would allow us to question the current dominant Model in the market for information. Personal data (tastes, interests...) have become a source of wealth, a precious asset for businesses and politicians, who with the help of algorithms and big data engineering are able to get to know us even better than ourselves. If you don't decide... they will do it for you. But what big companies such as Google, Facebook or Twitter know about us is simply what we have let them know. The massive use of our personal data in order to guide our decisions can be reflected in the words of R. Kapuscinski: *"The only player left at the world scene is multitude and its main feature is its anonymity, its lack of personality and identity. The individual has gone astray, has been diluted"*.

Considering all this, in whom could we trust? Which institution has the moral authority and professionalism to guide us away from disinformation? Where can we find impartial and rigorous information of quality? Whose analyses are yet trustworthy?

Disinformation: a threat for the European Union

Technology dependence on information gathering will not stop. The media on paper or those supported on non-mobile devices (television and others) will become extinct over time and give way to current (and new) devices and media that will allow a greater dissemination of ideas, concepts and opinions.

Given the global reach of information dissemination platforms, ideas, concepts and opinions will increasingly start from a greater number of sources, amplified by a greater number of comments and displayed on an even greater number of information platforms and devices. The linearity or exponentiation in diffusion will depend on the news interest to the public. Even in adequate news and well-intentioned writers, the constant flow of information between different groups of persons undoubtedly influences the noise on the channel, transforming the information as it passes from hand to hand. This fact, which has generated a moderate risk for mistakes by well-

intentioned journalists, has become a threat through polarized political discourse, headlines aimed at "click-bait" actions and reaching high-risk forms such as states or local groups that, through the use of these media, undermine European discourse and/or political processes in Europe. Disinformation, used against the interests of a nation, is clearly defined by the European Union: *"disinformation [...] we define it as false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit."* (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018.) Disinformation generators can also analyse the population reaction to their information, modulating each message to implant their narrative in the population.

One of the bases of civilization is information. A civilization that is evolving more and more towards automation is based on information about the reality of its decision making, both for the optimization of its industrial, operational and organizational processes and for its management through the models of justice and equality on which the legislative system of the European Union is based. The decisions to be taken to improve and optimize any legislative process or base (from industrial processes to the adaptation of laws) must be based on a precise knowledge of reality, precisely the key factor that disinformation tries to attack, thus creating a distance between the different perceptions of reality: the "real" reality, the imagined reality (the reality perceived by the citizen) and the symbolic reality (which corresponds to the social and legislative model) (Johnston, 2018). Disinformation generates dystopia in the minds of citizens, separating reality from the result of its perception and distorting the credibility of the social and legislative model.

By adding to the actions of disinformation the lack of training from citizens to defend themselves, together with the lack of correct and abundant information on the part of the State and other social and journalistic groups, disinformation achieves its objective: citizen's incorrect decision-making based on false premises, manipulated and not corresponding to the imagined reality, according to Lacan's theory and directly related to Locke's epistemology, which is built around a strict distinction between knowledge and mere probable opinion or belief (Priselac, 2015). Citizens are eager for information and if the State and the media do not inform citizens truthfully and critically, others will do so, without so much truthfulness and based on their own agenda and interests.

Disinformation is not only located on websites – the classic web information manager on the Internet –, but it also accompanies citizens horizontally along all the platforms they use, mainly on mobile devices: from specific groups in Telegram to users of micro-blogging networks (Twitter), even helping some citizens to "jump and cross" information between different

networks, transferring information from one "app" to another. It is well known the influence that ISIS developed in some young people through videos aimed at lists of users of the mobile application Telegram (Kumar, 2017), channels also used by some intelligence agencies as a platform for Cyber-attack against their users (Dearden, 2018).

Platforms such as Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp and the like have a differentiating factor that is the persistence of the information. Although these networks allow messages to be erased after reading, this ability is rarely used because what is intended is the persistence and archiving of messages to reach a higher level of capillarisation, through the sharing of content from a user to other related.

One of the advantages of the ability to analyse disinformation is its persistence, allowing the establishment of processes of historical analysis (and even post-Morten) of certain sources of information. Probably in the immediate future we will see how other social media that do not maintain persistence of the news and that are very demanded by young people are the media that disseminate disinformation (Snapchat and others), given its massive distribution content and inability to check "persistent" content. This fact is not taken into account by some studies (Fletcher, *et. al.*, 2018) and would turn critical.

Given that the Internet Companies main objective in maintaining social networks is profitability, it is very difficult to prevent them from being open to anonymous publication, especially through false users or unidentified users, as the value of their networks rely on content. Although some of them indicate that they implement a code of practice, it is literally impossible by non-automated processes to evaluate the validity of the contents: Facebook receives on average 350 M of photographs each day, almost 2.5 M of photos per second (Aslam, 2018; Smith, 2018). Networks like Facebook and Google are working on Artificial Intelligence engines for automatic validations, but there are still years of development, training and debugging.

Given that the vast majority of information platforms and social networks on the Internet are in private hands, the European Union should (as a measure of legitimate defence) regulate the dissemination of this type of news through the existing legal model, respecting its bases and fundamental rights (such as freedom of expression) but establishing models of identification and defence against disinformation (Smith, 2018).

Near future technology will allow a greater expansion of disinformation, facilitating the generation of more sophisticated information creation and distribution. Work such as the one carried out at the University of Washington applying deep learning technology to video recordings, has

succeeded in supplanting the image of a person in a speech, thus allowing the transmission of a false video message that, in the eyes of non-experts, could be considered true (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018).

Fake news and ethics: blame it on the user?

An enemy of the people: fake news. H. Ibsen in his 1882 play "*An enemy of the People*" (Business Insider, 2017) already warned us how behind the appearances of truth and transparency, lies and manipulation are hidden. Just like the main character of the play, Doctor Stockmann, we have also discovered the lies that the waters of Internet drive through the spa of Internet and the risks its poses for democracy. If as citizens, we need to be properly informed in order to decide and make opinions, information is revealed as key. But when information is false or biased, then we have a problem. Experience taught us how the communication enterprises' interests few times if any take into account society general interest. In our case, the Spa is Internet and new technologies, therefore the Spa cannot be stopped.

Just like in Ibsen's play, we need to denounce how our society is democratic only in appearance because its citizens lack of their own opinion but also of the needed information to conform one. The author reminded us that the strongest man is that who defends truth even when in solitude.

In current times, the problem is maybe even more complicated. As McIntyre explains in his book "*Post-truth*", the problem with "fake news" is not merely that they expand false information, a phenomenon that, as he also analyses has occurred all along history. The real challenge of "fake news" is rather that they present themselves as deliberately false and have a clear final goal: political manipulation (McIntyre, 2018, p. 120). The task of Ibsen's "strong men" is no longer to unmask the lies hidden behind the appearance of truths, but to counteract information that is openly and publicly false and still has a greater impact and diffusion than true information. How can we defend ourselves from disinformation when truth seems to be no longer the matter of debate? This question takes us unavoidably to ask ourselves how we value truth in current times.

"Truth is overrated": the business of Lies. Mankind has had the general belief – standing still in our days – that "truth is overrated" and there is no special reason why we should give up lying if we become self-benefit or advantage from it. The only limit is therefore set by the possibility of being discovered. What is truly important is not if what I do or say is true or false, moral or immoral... but rather only if it is useful for our own self-interests.

Why should I – as a politician – take into account the truth if I have to win the elections? Or, why should I – as a businessman – take into account the truth when I have to close a deal or sell my product? Furthermore, what would really happen if all of us said only the truth?

These questions have been present in the writings of thinkers since the very beginning of the Western Civilization. Already Genesis (Chapter III, verse I) alerts us on how falsehood was present in the origin of the world: *“The man said: The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. [...] The woman said: The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”* Maybe Paradise never existed; a place where truth, peace and kindness reign; a place previous to the appearance of lies.

Plato in his book *“The Republic”* (2005) deeply analysed the act of lying. Back at that time there was a successful doctrine called sophism. Sophists dedicated themselves to teach the young in the arts of persuasion. According to sophists, persuasion was necessary in order to progress and truth was not a requisite for the living. On the other hand, in Plato’s opinion, sophism was a mean method as it took advantage of the ignorant. We should maybe ask ourselves who are the Sophists of our time.

On this line goes also the New Testament (Matthew, 7:15) when it advises us to take precautions and *“beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”*.

Machiavelli’s advice was rather different (probably, if he had lived nowadays he would have been quite an *influencer*). In his famous book *“The Prince”* he affirms that in order to acquire and retain power we need to be willing to do anything which is useful for it, regardless if it is moral or immoral, legal or illegal. In his words the Prince *“needn’t be anxious about getting a bad reputation for vices without which it be hard for him to save his state: all things considered, there’s always something that looks like virtue but would bring him to ruin if he adopted it, and something that looks like vice but would make him safe and prosperous.”* (Machiavelli, p. 33) But we shouldn’t take him wrong, as Machiavelli is only recognizing the use of lies, what has occurred as we analysed since the beginning of our times. He is putting us in front of the mirror. Also in Chapter XVIII he wonders about *“How princes should keep their words”*. According to him *“Everyone knows that it is a fine thing for a prince to keep his word and to live with integrity rather than with cunning. But our recent experience has been that the princes who achieved great things haven’t worried much about keeping their word. Knowing how to use cunning to outwit men, they have eventually overcome those who have behaved honestly.”* Therefore, a Prince shouldn’t keep his word when *“that could be used against him”*. (Machiavelli, p. 37) This attitude is directly related to that of

appearances: *"But it's necessary to know how to camouflage this characteristic and to be a great pretender and dissembler"*. Appearances are what define us. More important that telling the truth it is to appear to do so because, also in words of Machiavelli *"everyone sees what you appear to be, but few feel what you are"*. (Machiavelli, p. 38)

Indeed, fiction has taken part – very efficiently – of our daily lives since the very beginning of our civilizations (mythology, fables, fairy tales...). Another clear example of it is religion, which still nowadays plays a key role in society. Fiction – and falsity – has the power to capture our attention, at least more than truth does. Y. Noah Harari in his book *"21 lessons for the XXI Century"* reminds us with humour how *"some fake news last only centuries"* (Harari, 2015, pp. 256-258). Maybe this was the reason why J.A. Comenio already considered in the XVII century that *"telling fairy tales and fables to children"* should be forbidden, as children *"would become used to taking lies for fun and they themselves would become used to lie as well."* (Sommer, 1995, pp. 198)

Similar to Comenio's was Paul Hönn (1622-1747) opinion regarding lies. The German jurist and writer accused in his *"Encyclopaedia of deception"* bakers of *"frequently and consciously buying old, staid and worms-eaten grain, which turns flour black and bad-tasting, only to sell it at the same price as bread of good quality"*. Similar behaviour could be seen in shoemakers who sold old shoes at the price of new ones after they brightened them; as well as in tanners who *"sold goat leather as if it was mutton"* (Mendiola, 2006, p. 8). It would also be useful to ask ourselves if information is treated the same way as all these products.

Our society is still keener on impressions and appearances than in searching the truth. Maybe that was the reason why Nietzsche reminded us in his *"Human, All too Human"* preface how *"life has not been devised by morality: it wants deception, it lives on deception"* (Nietzsche, 1985). For many, governance and business are impossible without making use of lies; in other words, getting your hands dirty. Another philosopher, in this case Jean Paul Sartre, wrote about this concept in his play *"Dirty Hands"*, in which one of its characters claims *"As for myself, my hands are dirty. I have plunged my arms up to the elbows in excrement and blood. And what else should one do? Do you suppose that it is possible to govern innocently?"* (Sartre, 1981) In other words, do you suppose that it is possible to always tell the truth? Isn't truth overrated? For the Prison Chaplain in Kafka's *"The Trial"* the answer to this question is pretty simple: *"No-said the priest- you don't need to accept everything as true, you only have to accept it as necessary."* To what the main character Joseph K. answers: *"A melancholy conclusion. It turns lying into a*

universal principle" (Kafka, 2013). But if we analyse it thoroughly, his words are not so melancholy. The "Order of Lies" in which we live has its advantages, and it may serve for a "Higher Truth". In word of Winston Churchill: *"In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies"*. The problem might arise when some States and politicians pretend to live in a constant State of War.

Similar to the fairy tales and fables we previously talked about, other doctrines such as marketing are also based upon fiction and lies. Creating a brand and making it relevant in the market requires to constantly repeating how drinking that drink, dressing those clothes, driving that car... would satisfy our needs. Not even mentioning the many cases of fraud, the task is to dilute the thin line between fiction and reality and one of the most effective tools to do so is lying. This is what we called the Business of Lies.

Even if the Oxford Dictionary declared in 2016 "post-truth" as the word of the year, we must affirm that we aren't living in a post-truth era, simply because there has never been a "truth golden era" either. Truth and Lies have coexisted since the very beginning of our times. Propaganda, deception, disinformation... they are all usual working tools. We have been taught that truth shouldn't interfere in the achievement of our interests.

Likewise, neither are Social Networks new phenomena. As Niall Ferguson reminded us in his book *"The Square and the Tower"* (Ferguson, 2018), all along history there have been networks pretending to control our data and information in order to retain the power. But we would be fooling ourselves if we didn't admit that never before have lies been so profitable as today. But, why? What is the difference? New technologies enable diffusion both to information creators and consumers. Lies have now a global projection through social networks: the effect of lying has become global. In words of Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda at the Nazi Germany *"if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it"*. The biggest capacity to influence in others you have, the greater your power will be.

After this brief review there is one affirmation we can make to the point: firstly, we prefer lies to truths and truth is overrated; secondly, the road that takes us to power is constructed through hypocrisy and lies. In conclusion, truth and power don't go well together. If we want power, we will need to make use of lies, and if we want the truth we will need to give up power. Therefore, the question we all need to answer is the following: To whom do I serve... truth or power?

We would also be lying ourselves if we, after all the previous, considered that everything nowadays is false and that the bet for truth is a bet

for failure. Also, in the name of truth the worst actions against dignity have been committed, justified by many by considering truth as a metaphor of its times. Undoubtedly, Pilate's question is yet unanswered "*What is truth?*" (John, 18:38). In order to take the right decisions, we need to have rigorous and precise information. When reality is presented distorted to us, our decisions are determined by lies. How can we avoid false information and detect truth in the mess of Internet? How can we overcome the general believe that truth and facts have nothing to do with each other?

In Plato's "*The Republic*" (2005), there is an interesting myth for the current world we live: The Myth of Gyges. Gyges discovered a golden ring with which he became invisible. Using this power, he seduced the Queen, killed the King and so became the new Governor. What if we had a gadget that enabled us to spread fake news through Social Networks with the certainty of never being caught? Could we resist the temptation? Gyges couldn't.

The search for the Truth has been one of those values that has guided the Western civilization towards the noblest acts, giving meaning and a common goal to our history. We have reached a point at which we debate if the mere act of telling the truth is worth. Facts are no longer assumed as such due to objectivity, but rather because we agree with them or they emotionally move us. Everything is questionable and what we search in communication is no longer discussing with others but only reaffirming our ideas. But truth is different than that, because it inherently entails debate and contrast. In words of Antonio Machado the truth is "*not your truth: the truth. Come with me and we'll search for it. Yours, you can keep it for yourself.*"

Disinformation agents. Blame it on the media?

But blaming it on the users alone wouldn't be missing a key factor in the equation of disinformation in Internet: the communication agents, the set of actors who must help citizens in the decision-making process based on rigorous information, formed by professional journalism at the service of society, together with Think Tanks, study centres and universities, all amalgamated with real information and analysis from the State. A model of truthful information generation will not leave space for disinformation generators, leaving their generators exposed to the informed citizen through their obviousness and shortcomings.

On the other hand, the 21st century's technological wealth (previously unthinkable) has facilitated the emergence of black swans from sources of information that, although reliable, have staggered states through the value of

the new information model based on the dissemination of restricted and secret information that has been filtered. Its maximum exponent is WikiLeaks.

Apart from the natural ethical, moral and national security considerations, the WikiLeaks model has impacted the entire chain of information generation and dissemination, modifying how citizens see their leaders and state, showing them that imagined reality (according to the Locke model) has nothing to do with symbolism. The model initiated by WikiLeaks has created a trend in almost the entire journalistic profession, with few media resisting to receive filtered information. In fact, prestigious media such as The Guardian facilitates anonymity through Tor network for anyone who wants to anonymously deliver filtered reports (*The Guardian*, 2018). This new vision of "obtaining information" according to the jargon of intelligence generates new challenges and approaches.

Among these risks are the strategic ones, based on internal leaks of confidential documents that could harm the European Union, to media "of low professional consideration" that prefer the exclusive news (ergo, increase in income) to the responsibility of the publication. In fact, the professionalism of the press saved in some ways the confidentiality (and their life in some cases) of those involved in the secret documents related to the Iraq war that Bradley Manning delivered to WikiLeaks, being sent before to a network of prestigious newspapers that processed the information received with a common criterion and responsibility, erasing critical information about persons and specific situations.

One fact worth reflecting on is the value and "respectability" of the media that filter information and how they are used for disinformation. After the WikiLeaks' information leak by Edward Snowden on the Internet and telephone interception systems in the USA, by Bradley Manning on Iraq, TTPA documents and Sony information among others, WikiLeaks achieved a very high prestige as a reliable source of information (without considering its moral and ethical values) according to the quality of the information they were delivering. When Hillary Clinton's email contents were illegally accessed and distributed, allegedly to destabilize the U.S. elections (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017), the architect of this action used WikiLeaks with its "prestige" as a quality informant and with the necessary impact capacity on content dissemination across the traditional media, turning WikiLeaks into a pawn at the service of manipulation and information war and undermining its previous reputation.

Another fact that we must consider – especially after seeing the impact that secret information such as the one distributed by WikiLeaks – can affect and destabilize a State, is the level of information that the European Union

publishes about its operation. There is no doubt that it is a fundamental right of the European citizens to know the operations, forecasts and strategies of the European Union (such as those found at <http://www.europa.eu>), but this information could be used (and in fact it is) by third countries as an aid in their intelligence analysis for the establishment of their global strategies, in which the EU is one more element to take into account. Once again it is necessary to establish a balance between the right to know of EU citizens and the dissemination of information.

Attacks on society based on information

Civil society is the new target of disinformation. And disinformation should not be combated by a one-dimensional approach, as the message conveyed and its technique encompasses multiple dimensions (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018).

Citizens are much more exposed actually to news that they were in the pre-Internet and pre-Mobile era. Young generations, under the paradigm Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), base their judgment and knowledge on information directly obtained from Internet (Healey, 2014). As disinformation spread is interlinked directly with the development of digital media (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018), we can conclude that new generations are directly exposed to the levels of disinformation present on social media, one of the main instruments used for information, advice and guidance, in their decision-taking processes.

Digital media and its exponential growth have also enabled the production and circulation of disinformation with a wider and easy reach, on a larger scale than previously, often in new ways that are still poorly mapped and understood (Fletcher, *et.al.*, 2018).

As new technologies are deployed, new techniques, procedures and methods should be developed. As an example of this fact, in 2014 three authors from the Republic of Belarus wrote for Russia's journal *Vestnik Akademii Voyennykh Nauk* (Journal of the Academy of Military Sciences), an article in which exposed that the military must train specialists who were prepared not only for armed conflict but also for information-psychological and other new-generation warfare, including psychological warfare (Kuleshov, *et.al.*, 2014, pp. 104–109). The same article describes targets and narratives identified in information campaigns, developing the following ideas:

"To win an information-psychological confrontation, a belligerent must:
- *change citizens' traditional moral values and 'landmarks', create a lack of spirituality, and cultivate a negative attitude towards one's cultural legacy;*

- manipulate the consciousness of social groups by implementing so-called 'democratic transformations';
- disorganise state administrative systems;
- destabilise political relations among parties and coalitions to provoke conflicts and distrust; exacerbate political struggles and provoke repression against the opposition;
- reduce the level of information support for organs of authority;
- misinform the population about the work of state organs;
- provoke social, political, national, and religious conflicts;
- mobilise protests and incendiary strikes, mass disorder, and other economic protests;
- undermine the international authority of a state; and
- damage important interests of a state in the political, economic, defence, and other spheres." (Kuleshov, et.al., 2014, pp. 104–109)

Targeting audiences

Disinformation-generating agents are continuously adapting their message to target audiences. Countries that use disinformation at the state level are adapting to traditional and local languages as long as media for the geographical and cultural places to which they are directed:

- China: "aimed at influencing and conditioning perceptions. It is conducted through television programmes, newspaper articles (particularly in *China Daily* and the *Global Times*), books, films, and the Internet, as well as through monitoring and censorship of social media networks and blogs such as *Sina Weibo* (China's equivalent of Twitter) by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s 2 million official 'public opinion analysts'. China's extensive global media network, most notably the *Xinhua News Agency* and *China Central Television (CCTV)*, also plays a key role, broadcasting in foreign languages and providing programming to stations throughout Africa, Central Asia, Europe, and Latin America." (Jackson, 2015)

- Russia: "Not surprisingly, the government in Moscow now controls the majority of television and print media in the country. The majority of television and print media in the country. Freedom House, an independent human rights watchdog organization, evaluated Russia's press status as 'not free' in 2014, citing a 'vast, state-owned media empire' and the consolidation of several national media outlets into one large, state-run organization, *Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today)*: The state owns, either directly or through proxies, all five of the major national television networks, as well as national radio networks, important national newspapers, and national news agencies. ... The

state also controls more than 60 percent of the country's estimated 45,000 regional and local newspapers and periodicals. State-run television is the main news source for most Russians and generally serves as a propaganda tool of the government cal policy goals' in a 2014 Baltic News Service report. Moscow has exploited its nearly exclusive control over Russian-language information, investing heavily in its state-run media apparatus, including a 2015 budget of '15.38 billion roubles (\$245 million) for its Russia Today television channel and 6.48 billion roubles (\$103 million) for Rossiya Segodnya, the state news agency that includes Sputnik News,' the Guardian said. By saturating a market already devoid of moderate independent" (Cotter, 2016).

On the Internet, the information agencies of the respective countries have a presence in all the social networks with the greatest impact (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat...) as an amplifier of the information generated from traditional media.

Disinformation targeting population creates risks that include threats to "democratic political processes, including integrity of elections, and to democratic values that shape public policies in a variety of sectors, such as health, science, finance and more." (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018)

The clearest example is the United States, which certifies the impact and possible turnaround in a democratic election carried out from an opposing country, with the aim of destabilizing its political class (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017). The United States government study referred here ensures that "We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump:

- "Russia's intelligence services conducted cyber operations against targets associated with the 2016 US presidential election, including targets associated with both major US political parties."

- "We (USA assess with high confidence that Russian military intelligence (General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate or GRU) used the Guccifer 2.0 persona and DCLeaks.com to release US victim data obtained in cyber operations publicly and in exclusives to media outlets and relayed material to WikiLeaks."

- "Russian intelligence obtained and maintained access to elements of multiple US state or local electoral boards. DHS assesses that the types of systems Russian actors targeted or compromised were not involved in vote tallying."

- *"Russia's state-run propaganda machine contributed to the influence campaign by serving as a platform for Kremlin messaging to Russian and international audiences."* (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017)

One of the key aspects of these activities is their defence capacity based on "plausible deniability": *"By their nature, Russian influence campaigns are multifaceted and designed to be deniable because they use a mix of agents of influence, cut outs, front organizations, and false-flag operations."* (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017)

On the other hand, countries such as Russia maintain in parallel to political and even military actions operations that could be qualified as information actions on the population of their areas of strategic interest, generating a narrative spread by means controlled by the State and directed to specific sectors of the population of those areas of interest to them: *"Putin has leveraged the fact that most Russian-language media available throughout the world is broadcast or rebroadcast directly from Russia, where the Kremlin maintains a tight grip on the media. This has created a series of exclusive narratives, carefully crafted to influence specific population groups, including those beyond the borders of Russia and eastern Ukraine."* (Cotter, 2016)

Educating in critical thinking: Intelligence analysis

Through all the previous analysis we can conclude that the current challenge of "fake news" or disinformation in Internet cannot be approached from one perspective alone. Ethic and informatics (among so many other areas) must be combined in order to pose realistic solutions to this problem. Both the user – who discredits truth and is generally not properly trained to detect lies – and the communication agents – who have displayed targeting mechanisms and, in some countries, complex political and security strategies making use of disinformation – are to blame.

Good practices tend to fall into three major categories, transparency, trust-enhancement, and media and information literacy (De Cock Buning, et al., 2018), relying again on crucial EU's document, and in order to act against disinformation, the EU recommends activities in the following directions:

- "1. Enhance transparency of online news, involving an adequate and privacy-compliant sharing of data about the systems that enable their circulation online;*
- 2. Promote media and information literacy to counter disinformation and help users navigate the digital media environment;*

3. *Develop tools for empowering users and journalists to tackle disinformation and foster a positive engagement with fast-evolving information technologies;*
4. *Safeguard the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem;*
5. *Promote continued research on the impact of disinformation in Europe to evaluate the measures taken by different actors and constantly adjust the necessary responses.*

The EU also advises to disregard other type of solutions that could even be simplistic given the complexity of the problem or relay on actions against EU regulations and spirit, as censorship, Internet fragmentation or any technological intervention on Internet's technology.

Other solutions according to EU spirit include *"Civil Society Actors and journalism-NGOs, fact-check and verification, consumer protection and media literacy training as watchdogs, as well as by holding political and economic powers accountable for their actions."*

A good starting point would be requesting big social networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Google to better self-regulate the spread of fake news, together with a better legislation on the matter from Governments and more self-responsibility from the users. But investing in the human factor through education reveals to us even more urgent. We need to educate citizens in critical thinking through the Intelligence Analysis if we don't want that democracy vanishes. But this task has many challenges: how do we transform digital citizens – conformist and easy to manipulate – into critical citizens?

One of the Internet traps in which we have felt is believing that knowing data was the same as understanding. However, we have become aware that knowing what is happening is not enough to really understand reality, we need to give a meaning to it. But analysing is not a common trend, but rather almost a revolutionary act.

Internet is like an "information tsunami" which drives us through an enormous amount of information, most of it being trivial, false and misleading. All we need to do is to separate from it the "drinking water" which is the analysed information, information that would enable us to understand reality and see beyond its surface. The victim drowning under these waters is no other than democracy. Technological advances such as internet or artificial intelligence seem useless when employed by non-critical and narrow-minded citizens who can't distinguish between opinion and information, marketing and product, propaganda and history, ideology and politics.

Being difficult in the world we live in to establish an authority, a guideline, a common standard to identify truth, is urgent to provide our

citizens – specially the youth – of analysis techniques and abilities so that they can effectively participate in democracy. To educate in and for critical thinking through intelligence analysis implies at least to make the following assumptions:

- Becoming aware of how without information, there is no freedom. Those who have no information can't choose, decide nor control. Considering that information is not entirely neutral and objective, we need to inculcate citizens in the ability to make judgements because not everything doesn't matter neither everything is valid.

- Acknowledging that there is no critical thinking without a critical attitude, which requires of being open minded, tolerant and to question evidences. The best breeding ground for critical thinking is no other than the one that exchanges cultural perspectives, dialogues at the border, boosts our curiosity and astonishment, stimulates confrontation and fosters hypothesizing. We need new ways of asking.

- Learning to act on the terms of problems: the language. Because there is great difference in the use of one words and others.

- Learning to demand our media something more than entertainment. Because we yet prefer quick and superficial messages.

- Being aware of how education goes further than teaching institutions.

- Learning to be realists and confront risks and their consequences to avoid them, assuming that the contact with reality cannot be undertaken through internet alone.

- Learning to analyse (doubt, criticize) everything, including the democratic system itself.

- Learning to assume each own's responsibilities, even when they are easily transferred to others

- Accepting that being properly informed has an economical cost and that free information can lead to confusion. Information should not only be contrasted but extended with specialized literature, and we should also investigate and consult new and different sources.

- Learning not to make simplistic judgements: good-bad; friends-enemies.

- Being aware of how fear is always used as a weapon of control.

- Acknowledging how, even if the world is complex and exact truth may not exist, even if probably no politician tells the truth as it is, there is a difference between a democrat and a dictator.

- Remembering how in the way towards truth *"wanderer, there is no path, the path is made by walking"* (Antonio Machado).

Of course, the Intelligence Services have also a task in this process and – through Intelligence Culture – they should become aware of how a well-informed and educated citizen is always a great ally.

In conclusion, educating in and for critical thinking through intelligence analysis is no other than educating in the responsibility for what is useful, being useful everything that makes us improve as a society. It is good to keep always in mind that is better to die for an unconquerable truth than living for a well-paid lie. At the end, what is at stake in both cases is each one's self.

From intentions to Actions: 2018 CSISD course, educating educators

Following the EU recommendations on its last proposal regarding disinformation we have mentioned all along the text and also according to the considerations mentioned above, the Centre for Intelligence Services and Democratic Systems (*Cátedra Servicios de Inteligencia y Sistemas Democráticos* or CSISD) with the support of the Rey Juan Carlos University at Madrid has recently developed and implemented a pilot course on Critical Thinking and Fake News together with the Autonomous Community of Madrid; directed to secondary grade teachers as a vehicle to reach a young population who, as we have mentioned several times, are the most vulnerable to disinformation and are the citizens upon which the future of our democracies rely.

The main goal of this course is to create a layer of secondary school teachers with specific capabilities and knowledge to introduce critical thinking and disinformation detection to their students, including new concepts and tools in the already existing educating programs and extending their teaching skills on concepts not included in educational planning.

CSISD developed a complete syllabus together with a teaching program based on disinformation identification training and Critical Thinking skills, including the following topics:

- Basic Concepts:
 - The need for knowledge in society: history and concepts;
 - Terminology;
 - Critical thinking;
 - How disinformation arises;
 - Digital contexts as support and dissemination of information;
 - Ethics and the media.
- Information: channels and dissemination:
 - The individual and information;

- Sources of information.
- Impact of false information or disinformation:
 - Personal opinion and decision making;
 - Importance of Information;
 - Targeted attacks based on false information;
 - Impact on society and democratic systems.
- Initiatives to counter false information and how to be protected against false information, disinformation and other attacks through information:
 - Detection;
 - Contrast and information environment;
 - Methods to counter disinformation and false information.

The results have been very positive and the teachers and schools involved are demanding for new courses which will be carried out in the near future, with the intention of setting a precedent and promoting similar trainings in other areas of Madrid and Spain.

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