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FAKE NEWS, FAKE MEDIA AND HATE SPEECH IN FINNISH *MV-MAGAZINE* – HOW CAN LIBRARIES FIGHT AGAINST THE LIES?

Abstract

The concepts of fake news, fake media and hate speech are quite common, especially as they are used in social media. Various issues are dismissed as fake news. We define fake news as a deliberate and intentional lie that is being masked as news. A typical feature of fake media is that the media in question engages in conscious manipulation, in which media content or its context are intentionally altered to influence opinion. Hate speech has a different cultural history and context throughout the world. Here, we adopt Parekh's (2012) definition of hate speech. In Finland, hate speech is a colloquial term for inciting people against a group of people, which is a crime mentioned in the penal code.

The article presents a case study of *MV-Magazine* based on 525 online publications. Digital material is central to creating fake news since the material can be manipulated to the point that the original meaning is lost, obscured or distorted. The main theme of hate speech in the magazine was humanitarian-based immigration, with stories depicting refugees as criminals, invoking their own derogatory terminology, branding people's professional skills as inferior, engaging in extreme personalisation (names, pictures), and repeating the same points. The targets of such hate speech were refugees and those tolerant or neutral in their opinions about immigration. The motives were to defend 'correct' and 'traditional' values, to combat humanitarian-based immigration, to oppose public authorities and the mainstream media, and personal resentment.

Hate speech and fake news are linked to media literacy, the aim of which is to help people better understand and analyse media content. A library's role in teaching media literacy is essential. Librarians have the skills to evaluate different sources, and they specialise in offering reliable information for customers. Emphasis should be placed on providing media education to recognise fake news in social media and other online sources. Libraries provide access to information, but they must also teach people how to use it reliably.

INTRODUCTION

Rumours and exaggerated stories and their influences are certainly as old as humanity. Fake news and its dissemination is not a new phenomenon (Darnton 2017). The ‘fake news’ tradition is a part of the history of propaganda, one that dates back to the ancient world (Taylor 2013). What is a new addition to that age-old tradition is the fact that almost everybody can now do it effectively. Digitalisation, personal computers and social media mean having access to huge amounts of digitalised information. It means new ways to compose and process that information to produce new information. It also means instant worldwide dissemination (via the web), wide coverage and algorithmic methods. In addition, being able to comment on and discuss freely on social media has given rise to abuse and increased hate speech.

Freedom of speech does not mean the right to say things that are contrary to good manners. Democracy and respect for other persons form the bases of civilised society. On the other hand, information overload makes it more complicated to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the nature of fake news and false media via an online case study. In addition, we have considered the role of libraries in identifying false information. As an introduction, first we define the concepts of fake media and hate speech. After that, we present the case of *MV-Magazine* (original Finnish title *MV-lehti*) based on our previous research on fake media and its features in Finland (Haasio et al. 2017; Mattila et al. 2019). Libraries are central implementers of media education in Finland. Media education, especially for children and young people, takes place primarily in co-operation between schools and libraries. Since we view the role of the library as crucially important in the fight against false media and misinformation, we at the end of the article considered its role in affecting how people read and interpret the news.

WHAT ARE FAKE NEWS AND FAKE MEDIA?

Much in the media is currently being dismissed as fake news, ranging from deliberate lies to bias in the media, to differences in interpretation. We start with the issue of interpretation. It is quite common that two people see the same thing ('fact') but interpret it differently. Consider the all-too-familiar example of an empty glass capable of holding one litre of water: when adding half a litre water to it, would the glass then be half empty or half full? A different interpretation – when justified and valid – is not a lie or 'fake news' as such. Especially in today's social media world, this point is often easily forgotten when people begin accusing each other of repeating 'fake news'.

We must also understand that journalism cannot be 'unbiased'. When publishing a piece of news, an editor always selects between what is worth reporting (news) and what is not newsworthy: one cannot publish every possible item of news: it is impossible. It is not 'fake news' if a journalist (or media site) writes about or reports on X but not Y – unless X and Y are fundamentally involved with each other, which, of course, is a totally different story. It is quite common that when a site publishes a story about oranges, someone will say that it should have published a story about apples instead. Furthermore, the published material usually always contains a point of view. The story (news) tries to tell something about something; it is not merely recounting a blunt series of 'facts' – which is just listing things, not publishing the news. The nature of good journalism is that a journalist tries to widen one's own viewpoint: instead of being one-eyed, one tries to see with both eyes and embed this polyphony in the material.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2017) tells us that 'fake news' entails any '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'. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, 213–214) define 'fake news' as 'news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false'. They also draw a demarcation line between 'fake news' and such things as unintentional reporting errors, rumours that do not originate from a particular news article, conspiracy theories, satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual, false statements by politicians or reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false. The concept of 'fake news' could also be considered in the framework of information theory. Karlova and Fisher (2013) place the dividing line between disinformation (deceptive information) and misinformation (inaccurate information). 'Fake news' falls clearly in the category of disinformation because the purpose is to give deliberately false information.

Vehkoo (2016/2017) has defined ‘fake news’ from the journalistic standpoint. According to her, ‘fake news’ is any misleading text (or, e.g. video) that mimics journalism but is not in fact journalism. It may mix fact with fiction, but it does not ultimately care about the facts: it is essentially a forge. Generally, the motive of those producing ‘fake news’ is to make money, sometimes for the satisfaction of cheating and sometimes due to political aspirations.

For our purposes, ‘fake news’ has the following features. It is a deliberately and intentionally made up lie, one which is masked as news. This is done by following the traditional external features of news stories. ‘Fake news’ is distributed deliberately and systematically. The channel is mostly the internet, especially social media and online magazines specialising in the spreading of fake news. (Haasio et al. 2017, 103.)

The fake news phenomenon is international, and its study is also international. But the structures, functions and logic of the media have certain national differences. In the USA, the so-called mainstream media has always had strong ties with big business and money. Nowadays, international media houses can own print media, digital media and television and radio channels. They reach a considerable audience and also reflect and shape prevailing thinking in such an environment. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few large companies has also raised doubts that the media's views are one-sided at best. (McMillan 2011; Chomsky 1997.)

In Finland, for example, the history of media has been different from that of the United States. The newspapers have mostly been committed to the political parties since the latter half of the 19th century. Little by little, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the newspapers detached themselves from the political parties and became more and more independent in their worldview. (Tommila (ed.) 1988; Salminen 1988.) This has meant that the power of media houses has increased when compared to the past situation. Today, very few newspapers claim to be the mouthpiece of a political party. The nationwide Finnish Broadcasting Company (hereinafter in the text YLE, as it is commonly known in Finnish) began its broadcasting in 1926. In 1934, the Finnish state took it over and the company has been state controlled ever since. The same story applies to television. The first TV channels in the late 1950s were owned by private entities, but in the early 1960s the state

(YLE) took over and the broadcasting went nationwide. From the 1980s onwards, it has been possible to establish private commercial TV and radio channels. (Endén (ed.) 1996; Wiio (ed.) 2007, 33–77.)

However, the bonds between the state and YLE do not in a Finnish context imply any type of authoritarian, repressive or propagandist ‘big brother’ broadcasting. State control means control by the Finnish Parliament. The Finnish unicameral parliament was established in 1907 together with universal suffrage (meaning both men and women of legal age were eligible for candidacy). Finland has always had a multiparty system, and the parliament has always consisted of many parties ranging from the political left to the political right. The parliament therefore does not affect YLE’s journalistic content.

There is no clear, generally accepted scientific definition for the term *fake media*. Fake media administrators and supporters instead use the terms *counter-media* and *alternative media* (Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus 2016). This kind of division comes first and foremost from debates in the United States. In addition to traditional mainstream media, alternative media has existed there since at least the 1960s (McMillan 2011), a media which has recently moved into the digital world in particular.

Alternative media differs from mainstream media primarily in its content, mode of production and distribution (e.g. Downing et al. 2001, v–xii; Atton 2002, 7–31; Fuchs 2010, 176–178). Thus, a wide range of media representing different worlds of thought and ideologies is defined as alternative media (see, e.g. Coyer et al. 2011). Many types of fake media have also sought to position themselves as alternative media. Here too, it would be appropriate to use the term ‘alternative’ for those false mediums close to the alternative right (alt-right) (Herrman 2017.) This positioning does not seem plausible since alternative media in the broadest sense have long and extensive links specifically to leftist or critical thinking (e.g. Sandoval and Fuchs 2010; Fuchs 2010; Coyer et al. 2011). Fake media deliberately and knowingly report things it knows to be false as ‘news’, that is, they wilfully spread disinformation (e.g. Haasio et al. 2017). As a result of such practices, false media seems to be related more to the tradition of propaganda (cf. Cole (ed.) 1998; Jowett and O’Donnell 2015) than to the tradition of alternative media.

A typical feature of false media has been that of conscious manipulation, in which media content or its context is intentionally altered to influence opinion (Rashed et al. 2012). Thus, fake media publishes fake news (Haasio et al. 2017, 102–104).

During the last twenty years, the reliability of the media has also begun to be questioned in Finland. The phenomenon is specifically related to digitalisation and the rise of social media. A typical example of this questioning is the founding of *MV-Magazine* in 2014. It was an online, free-to-read media whose agenda included challenging the mainstream media, publishing ‘fake news’ and using hate speech above all targeted at humanitarian-based immigration. Resistance to humanitarian-based immigration received additional impetus from the flow of refugees to Europe and also to Finland in 2015 (Haasio et al. 2017). The number of asylum seekers increased tenfold from 3,651 (2014) to 32,476 in 2015 (Finnish Immigration Service: Statistics).

WHAT IS HATE SPEECH?

The term *hate speech* is confusing, slippery and problematic for several reasons. First, it has a different cultural history and cultural context throughout the world. In the United States, for example – which is one of the key places from which the current debate on hate speech originated – hate speech is intertwined with the country’s historical experience and the ‘freedom of speech’ guaranteed by the Constitution. The U.S. Civil War as well as slavery have been cited as key historical experiences (Baker 2012, 79). In addition, the history of the United States as a destination country for immigrants is influential. The history of slavery brings to the discussion, among other things, issues of skin colour and subjugated status, the ‘inhumanity’ associated with slavery, racial segregation and other types of segregation. Being a country of immigrants, in turn, means that there have always been different ethnicities, different language groups, and different religions in the United States, ranging from different sects and interpretations of Christianity to other religions and mindsets. The ‘freedom of speech’ guaranteed by the Constitution, on the other hand, is treated in such a way that that freedom should not be restricted. In Europe, in contrast, contemporary hate speech must be viewed through the prism of World War II, Nazi German racial politics and the Holocaust (Baker 2012, 79). Nazi hate speech was linked to

genocide and the ‘racial war’ on the Eastern Front, where millions of people were killed on ‘racial’ grounds. However, the European historical experience of racial politics and genocide differs from the American experience, where ‘the others’ could easily be perceived visually, for example by their skin colour. In Europe, the concept of race was applied to the Caucasian population: it was visually impossible to distinguish Jews or Slavs from ‘Aryans’. Those to be destroyed had to be distinguished by other means, such as anthropological measurements. Based on this experience, most people in Europe believe that ‘freedom of speech’ must have some limitations (Baker 2012, 67–68, 79).

Another reason for the confusion of the concept is that hate speech has been viewed and defined in very different ways. The spectrum of definitions extends from objective to subjective definitions of hate. With an objective definition, hate speech is generally defined by features listed in law (e.g. Maussen and Grillo 2014, 176). With the subjective definition, hate speech is defined as speech that causes persons to feel offended or makes them feel emotionally vulnerable (e.g. Delgado and Stefancic 2004; see also Saresma 2017a, 47). The varying research perspectives from which hate speech has been examined have also often impacted the definitions of hate speech (Maussen and Grillo 2014, 175–177). For example, a scholar of populism may define hate speech as ‘a further and escalated form of populist rhetoric’ (Saresma 2017a, 45). However, obviously not all hate speech can be dismissed as populist rhetoric and not all populist rhetoric even contains hate speech.

For our purposes, the most general definition of hate speech is that proposed by Parekh (2012, 40–41; cf. Gelber 2011, 83–84; Saresma 2017b, 227), who divides hate speech into three characteristics: 1) hate speech is directed at a defined or easily identifiable individual or against a group; 2) hate speech stigmatises the object by either implicitly or directly saying that the object has characteristics that are generally considered undesirable; 3) as a result of these characteristics, the existence of the object is undesirable and the object can be viewed hostilely. The target deserves to be destroyed or expelled, or at least oppressed and pushed to the margins of decent society.

When we studied *MV-Magazine*, we defined hate speech objectively based on the Finnish Penal Code. Hate speech and the dissemination of racist expressions have been criminalised in one chapter of the penal code, which talks about war crimes and crimes

against humanity, with the criminal title being incitement against a group of people (e.g. [Henttonen et al.] 2015, 15; Rask 2012, 265–279). However, the chapter was last updated in 2011 and does not contain the Finnish term *vihapuhe* (‘hate speech’). In fact, there is no such wording in Finnish law at all. Indeed, *vihapuhe* is a direct translation of the English term *hate speech*, which was originally used specifically in the United States (see Walker 1994; [Henttonen et al.] 2015, 15). In Finland, the term *vihapuhe* must be interpreted as a colloquial term for inciting anger against a group of people mentioned in the penal code.

Hate speech includes repetition, publicity and the persuasion of listeners. Repetition means that the hate speaker returns to his subject and target over and over again. A model example of this type of hate speech is the hate speech directed against Jews in Nazi Germany (e.g. Klemperer 1947). Hate speech always takes place in public, for example on the internet: in our view, there can be no private hate speech. Since the speech is public, it also has listeners. The hate speaker attempts to influence listeners and bend them to the speaker’s own position. The aim is to get the audience to share the stigmatising and contemptuous attitude of the hate speaker towards the object of the hate speech.

FAKE NEWS AND HATE SPEECH IN *MV-MAGAZINE*

Our study of *MV-Magazine* consisted of analysing all online material, including articles, videos and pictures, collected during a randomly selected two-week period (13 February–26 February 2017). The scope of the research material is 525 open access, online publications. Although the period of time was short, a longer-term follow-up assessment of *MV-Magazine*’s content proved our material to be a typical and representative sample of the material being published at the time. The publications were copied and stored on our own PCs and data disks and are currently in our possession.

By analysing the material, we seek to ascertain the ways in which fake news and hate speech are constructed and to whom such hate speech was targeted and what motivated it.

Ways to construct fake news¹

The source material used by *MV-Magazine* to produce its own publications consisted exclusively of material available electronically online. Printed material had not been used as a source in any of the publications included in the evaluation. We divided the sources used into the following groups:

1. Social media communities (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, LinkedIn, Suomi24)
2. Sources of authority (police, judiciary, other authorities, including foreign authorities)
3. Finnish online media (newspapers and magazines, YLE, MTV3 Broadcasting Company)
4. Ideological websites and blogs
5. Foreign online media
6. Sources cited by personnel, i.e. sources associated with a designated individual
7. Non-ideological websites and blogs
8. Other miscellaneous internet sources.

Social media communities (mainly YouTube and Facebook) were the most widely used sources cited in the *MV-Magazine* publications, accounting for almost a quarter of all sources used. The second most important group consisted of sources of authority (mainly Finnish police), which accounted for one-fifth of all citations. The third most important sources were domestic online media as well as ideological websites and blogs. On average, they each accounted for one in seven references. The use of other types of sources was significantly lower. Usually, the source material was copied and used without any permission from the original producer.

MV-Magazine has sought to create an image of itself as a reliable medium. To this end, some of the material published was factual, such as police bulletins. The fake news supported *MV-Magazine*'s ulterior motive, which was to take a highly anti-immigrant – especially anti-refugee and speaking out against humanitarian-based immigration – and anti-Islamic stance.

When constructing fake news, *MV-Magazine* followed certain procedures. First, neutral material could be accompanied by indirect references to or assumptions, unconfirmed conjectures and fabricated claims about a perceived threat, as determined by *MV-*

¹ The discussion in this section is based on analysis presented in Haasio et al. (2017).

Magazine's own editors. The published material could also be intentionally re-titled in a deliberately misleading and even offensive way. Second, the editors attached illustrations to the published material in a misleading or intentional manner. For example, the news of a bus accident was accompanied by a picture of a dark-skinned bus driver, which had no connection to the news item itself. Third, *MV-Magazine* published fake news in its own right that supported its own agenda but had been prepared by others. Fourth, all of its source material was digital. In the digital world, source material is easy to copy, cut, paste and manipulate as desired. With traditional print media, this type of activity would be much more laborious to implement.

Central to the fake news published by *MV-Magazine* is the aim of detaching the source material from its original context and attaching it to another context, whereby the original meaning is lost, obscured or distorted. An entirely new context can even be created for the source material.

Ways to produce and target hate speech²

Of the 525 publications included in the research material, we identified hate speech, as defined above, in 131 publications (25%). When analysing these publications, we arranged the themes into five main categories: immigration (ethnicity, tolerance, immigration), authorities (including the media), wrong kind of femininity (misogyny and feminism), sexuality and political or religious ideology or beliefs. The category receiving the most attention was immigration-related hate speech, which accounted for almost two-thirds of all hate speech.

MV-Magazine devised its own terminology when discussing immigration. It assigned names to items that differed from those in the general language. It did not use neutral words, but regularly aimed for provocative and offensive alternatives. Racist expressions such as '*neekeri*' ('nigger') also appeared in the material. Ethnic hate speech attempts to link immigrants as a group to violence and crime, for example by attaching images of armed, dark-skinned people to the publications. Often, the method also involves branding people's professional skills as suspicious, questionable or otherwise incompetent. This has been the case, for example, with the Bishop of Helsinki, whom the publications

² The discussion in this section is based on analysis presented in Mattila et al. (2019).

consistently refer to as ‘miss’ instead of ‘bishop’. In addition to their questionable professional competence, the publications also called attention to people's way of life – real or imagined – in a way that is irrelevant to the topic at hand and intended to offend, stigmatise or undermine the object's overall social credibility. For example, sexual orientation was mentioned even when it had nothing to do with the topic of the article or story.

MV-Magazine's style is extreme personalisation, i.e. using people's names and pictures of them, which is an exceptional way to operate in the Finnish or Nordic media context. The publication justifies its actions by claiming to promote openness and honesty. But such personalisation is also used to incite hate speech. By showing that one person has behaved ‘badly’ in a certain way, for example by lying about something, the publications tap into an essentialist way of thinking often associated with racism and ethnicity, in which all members of a group necessarily act in the same way (e.g. Verkuyten 2003). Ergo, they all are liars.

Repetition is a well-known means of convincing an audience of a point used in classical rhetoric and also in propaganda (e.g. Aristotle 1433b.30–1434b.10; Corbett and Connors 1999; Doob 1950/1995, 1966, 61–89). *MV-Magazine* also takes advantage of repetition to intensify the level of hate speech. Following the logic of drumming repetition, the publications focus on making the same points about asylum seekers. The world seems to revolve solely around what they do. Even the same images are repeated in different publications, and several, almost identical publications on the same subject may be published in a short period of time.

The primary targets of hate speech are, on the one hand, asylum seekers and on the other those people who have a tolerant or neutral attitude towards their immigration. Some key media outlets and NGOs were also heavily attacked. In addition, hate speech was directed at Islam, which the publications called, among other things, the ‘paedophile religion’.

The motives for the hate speech in our material have been divided into five groups.

- 1) To defend ‘correct’ and ‘traditional’ values
- 2) To combat humanitarian-based immigration
- 3) To oppose the public authorities

- 4) To oppose the mainstream media
- 5) Personal resentment.

‘Correct’ values and lifestyles are particularly threatened by the ‘incorrect’ views on life and the wrong types of political values, including feminism, leftism, the values promoted by the green movement and the rights of minorities. The publications also view increased tolerance in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as a threat, as highlighted by letting females join the priesthood and the relaxed stance towards sexual minorities. *MV-Magazine* places the Lutheran Church in opposition to those who consider themselves ‘patriotic’. This manifests itself above all as hate speech against the actions of individual church workers, which expands into an attack on the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

The mass arrival of asylum seekers in 2015 provoked opposition to humanitarian-based immigration. The *MV-Magazine* stories portrayed the humanitarian-based immigrants as enemies and intruders, with opposition to them requiring a joint ‘patriotic’ effort comparable to that of combatting the Soviet invasion in the Winter War. Tolerance is seen as ‘unpatriotic’ and those who tolerant are portrayed as traitors.

Opposition to authority relies on the traditional Finnish hatred of authority figures (e.g. Haavisto and Kiljunen 2009, 35–36, 92). Conducting a smear campaign against the mainstream media is part of *MV-Magazine's* strategy. It consciously seeks to question the coverage of Finland's leading newspapers and YLE. This can be understood as an attempt to increase the credibility of its own publishing, exacerbate differences of opinion and gain support for its own views. The personal resentment of the editors and authors may also partly explain the use of defamatory language towards, for example, the Lutheran Church, the police and the judiciary.

LIBRARIES AND MISINFORMATION

Misinformation is information that may be false as well as incomplete, ambiguous or inaccurate (Karlova and Fisher 2013). These features are typical of fake news (Haasio et al. 2018). Hate speech can also be understood as misinformation or even disinformation.

Disinformation is deceptive information, whereas misinformation is inaccurate information (Karlova and Fisher 2013). During the last decade, the amount of misinformation and disinformation has grown rapidly, especially on the internet.

Both concepts are closely linked to media literacy, which aims is to help people better understand and analyse the media content. Media literacy can be defined as the ‘ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication’ (National Association for Media Literacy Education, n.d.). When fighting against fake news and hate speech, these skills become especially relevant.

The role of libraries in teaching media literacy is crucial. Fact checking and information literacy instruction are the most important tools for achieving this objective, and especially in the battle against fake news they are indeed very important (Batchelor 2017). Teaching media literacy is nowadays one of the main functions of libraries. Especially in public libraries, this objective is increasingly significant. Actually, schools and libraries are the institutions where such skills can be most readily learnt. This means that libraries have to take on an important role in media education. In addition, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has stated that ‘freedom of access to information is a right of all, and the increase in activities intended to deliberately mislead citizens leads inevitably to damaging everyone's human rights’. Both the IFLA (2018) and researchers (Haasio et al., 2018) have also pointed out that libraries play an important role not only in passing on the right information, but also in the fight against fake media.

First, libraries and librarians have the skills to critically evaluate different sources. Media education is one of the special branches of training received by all librarians. Secondly, libraries and librarians specialise in offering reliable information for customers. One can say that one of the main tasks of librarians is to promote the provision and use of high-quality information. This applies to both scientific and public libraries. Promoting equality and democracy is one of the basic tasks of a library, which it fulfils by providing the highest quality information available to all citizens. On this basis, it can be said that libraries must do their utmost to prevent the dissemination of false information and to improve citizens' information literacy.

Current media education has focused mainly on library collections, especially on printed material and the contents of different databases (Haasio et al. 2018). In the future, emphasis should be placed on providing media education on how to recognise false news on social media and at other online sources. The role of the library here is extremely important. Libraries are institutions that offer people access to information, but they must also teach them how to reliably use it.

DISCUSSION

Fake news and hate speech are disseminated through fake media, as the case of *MV-Magazine* shows. Fake media mimics real media, but its content is unreliable information, often disinformation, the aim of which is to propagate the agenda of the fake media. Often, promoting a particular agenda also requires or benefits from the use of hate speech. The ability to identify fake media or fake news also helps to combat hate speech.

The rise of hate speech and the spread of false media are both acute challenges that need to be addressed in our current information society. Often such side effects are justified by the idea of freedom of speech, but that is not the case. Hate speech is an attack on a minority and its representatives, and the aims of false media are purely propagandistic.

Identifying false and unreliable information is a skill required of all citizens. Teaching it is part of media education and a central task of libraries. Library staff must also be trained for this purpose. The importance of libraries is also remarkable in that they reach all citizens while at the same time fulfilling the basic task of promoting democracy and freedom of expression in the best possible way.

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