

## FAKE NEWS AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

Gabriela BELOVA, Gergana GEORGIEVA

“Neofit Rilski” South-West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria  
gabrielabelova@gmail.com, georgieva@law.swu.bg

**Abstract:** *We are living in the so-called era of fake news in which cybercriminals have been delving into this phenomenon and turning it into a lucrative business. Fake and invented media websites are created to resemble legitimate media. Some criminals use methods such as modifying legitimate documents and distribute them as part of, for instance, disinformation campaigns. Propaganda is unequivocally bound to national security and it is a risk to it. Since fake news is a unique area where challenges appear to be very complicated, it should be dealt with via more and better usage of national security communications. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Collins Dictionary has announced “fake news” as a word of 2017. Furthermore, the European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel considers that fake news is suppressing the media and society as a whole, calling for an EU-level analysis in order to assess the amount to which fake news menaces the EU and pinpoint whether it is likely to find a common solution regarding this issue.*

**Keywords:** fake news, security, Internet, social media, EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, digital economy, cybercrime

### 1. Introduction

“Fake news” is a term which is approximately modern and has been thought of as one of the biggest menaces to democracy. Except for the fact that it is a favorite notion used by Donald Trump, the Collins Dictionary has announced “fake news” as a word of 2017. [1] This phenomenon has been raising tensions among peoples, which could likely lead to the regulation of social media. Still, no one could thoroughly agree upon what it represents or how great the issue is and whether there is anything that can be done with it.

### 2. Internet and social media

Prior to the emergence of the Internet, it used to be a lot more costly to disseminate information. In order to build confidence years were necessary. There used to be

quite less complex explanations defining terms such as the news and the media. This definitely facilitated regulation or self-regulation.

However, the increase of social media has destroyed plenty of the borders that prevent the spread of fake news in democratic countries. In particular, it allows everyone to produce and distribute information, specifically to the ones who have turned out to be the best in their work with social networks.

Facebook and Twitter have made it possible for people to share information a lot more frequently. It has never been the same as it is now. Publishing platforms such as WordPress allow everyone to make an ever-changing site easily. In a nutshell, obstacles to the false news have been removed.

### 3. What exactly is fake news?

One problem is that fake news can exist in

many different forms, from various authors, and with versatile motives, including without being restricted to:

- commercially sensational content;
- news which has not been ideologically driven. However, they could sometimes no grounds whatsoever. The main objective is to stimulate web traffic. Then the goal is to generate advertising revenue;
- state-sponsored misinformation, whose aim is not revenue. It is influence. Business sites can create content that shakes public opinion and provokes separation. It gives the impression of supporting a certain candidate/idea, which could be domestically as well as abroad. The news produced might be mixed with genuine or sensational content;
- strong guerrilla news sites which can combine facts and opinions, roughly support a political point of view. They might also support a party or position as alternatives to mainstream media;
- the social media is another one; Twitter bots who publish deceptive pictures; Facebook ads sponsored by various intelligence teams, YouTube clips that say terror attacks are scams, etc. All of them are not links outside social media. They are a part of the social networks;
- satire or parody - websites like Daily Mash have been in existence long before the fake news was considered a kind of an issue. [2]

These are some other definitions and motives that are making it really hard to efficiently deal with fake news. A few types, including forged commercially traded websites, are opposed to discontinuation of advertisements. This does not, however, influence, for example, misinformation campaigns. Cautionary advice of prospective fake news material has been introduced by Facebook. This, of course, does not help particularly in dealing with the content that exists on the site itself.

#### **4. Security and fake news**

We are living in the so-called era of fake

news in which cybercriminals have been delving into this phenomenon and turning it into a lucrative business. Prices for their services seem to be extremely affordable. Fake and invented media websites, for example, are created to resemble legitimate media. Some criminals use methods such as modifying legitimate documents and distribute them as part of, for instance, disinformation campaigns. Experts have identified nearly 2,800 “living fiction” sites. This is done by altering a single letter in a web address creating a fake “clone” on a true news site.

#### **5. Fake news as a business model and threat**

Although the use of diverse techniques in political campaigns has become a source of serious concern, the same methods can also be used for profit.

Easy access to relevant tools highlights the almost complete lack of bottlenecks. According to Rick Holland, vice president of strategy at Digital Shadows, “toolkits” are available for temporary use for just \$ 7 to control bots in social media. [3]

Many of these services are advertised in Dark Net where users are hard to identify. But some are openly advertised as marketing tools. Holland stresses that misleading information has long existed, but now “the new in the digital world is the speed at which such techniques spread throughout the world.”

The attention of security experts is attracted to fake news and because they are used to distribute malware.

In Scott Nelson’s opinion, SecureSet’s vice president, fake news is the newest line in social engineering and hacking. Like phishing attacks, there are many possibilities. Not every suspicious link on Facebook has to be considered fake, and automated solutions to their disclosure cannot identify any suspicious or untrue story. [3]

The use of fake news to distribute malware through social networks is a relatively new

approach, but malware detection and blocking methods are almost the same as phishing attacks: recognizing and reporting an incident; security team review and solving any network problems that allowed the malware.

## **6. The European Union and fake news**

The European Union is also involved in the fight against fake news. Recently, the European Commission has announced the creation of an expert group to develop a strategy to tackle the problem.

This serious problem is not unknown to Bulgaria either, and evident measures are taken by the relevant services since fake news is one of the phenomena with an increasingly destructive potential.

The avalanche of new technology solutions and the pace at which systems' computing capabilities are increasing have until recently made theoretical risks and threats quite real and tangible.

Finding fake news is not easy. Stanford's research last year proved students are extremely bad in differentiating between various types of online stuff, regardless of it being paid, faked or lawful. Facebook has a helpful list of ways to detect fake news that includes scrutinizing other sources and site URLs.

Concerning this, EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel began a public fake news conference on 13 November 2017. She declared the setting-up of an EU-level expert group in order to analyze the extent to which the problem associated with fake news threatens the EU. [6]

Despite the fact that they are neither illegitimate nor contemporary, fake news is being scattered at an alarming rate and basically endangering the welfare of society, democracy and the media in general. Thus, attempts should be made to determine and spot fake news as well as find the channels via which they are funded. The quality of journalistic education could be improved with an emphasis on building

the skills needed to gather information and distinguish the confirmed facts, manipulations, and propaganda.

According to EU Commissioner Gabriel, "fake news stifle the media and society". She is pushing for an EU-level analysis to assess the degree to which fake news menaces the Union and suggests whether it is likely to find a possible solution to that phenomenon. The main challenge is to define fake news and good journalistic practices. [4]

According to Christian Spahr, Head of the Media Program South East Europe of KAS Foundation, we are in an arduous situation with regard to media trust, with social media gradually gaining more confidence from professional media because people trust what they come across on Facebook more than the information they read in professional media. [5]

Irina Nedeva, chairman of the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria (AEJ-Bulgaria), points out fake news and propaganda as a few of the main challenges facing today's journalists. What is troubling, though, is the risk of resorting to excessive regulation that can be used to stifle freedom of speech. On the one hand, the great challenge is to distinguish the facts from half-truths. On the other hand - misleading content. AEJ-Bulgaria and its partners are presently considering how to strengthen the role of professional journalism, increase media literacy and establish fact-finding units in the Bulgarian news media. [5]

To overcome the phenomenon, transparency and a variety of high-quality information need to be ensured, and a better understanding of dissemination mechanisms and financial flows, and politicians, the media, and platforms could be engaged with the matter.

To date, illegal content (hate speech) has already been defined. However, fake news is mostly legal and it is not about criminalization. Freedom of expression, as well as the right to access information are inviolable and no one has the intention of

forcing people to believe in a particular news story. However, if the counterfeit news is not taken at European level, there exists a likelihood that the situation at a national level will deviate from the consented values.

## 7. Conclusion

There has been a lot of witnessing of how the Internet and the media are objects on behalf of which radical organizations attract supporters and spread propaganda as well as fake news. Among the most vulnerable ones for these risks are the democratic states. NATO and EU are already undertaking practical measures for their neutralization but it is important for each member state to have a transparent and concrete policy. There should be more

active and better usage of national security communications for the sake of countering the intertwined complicated challenges. [6] Fake news with anti-European content has already been analyzed conscientiously by the European Commission as well as other institutions. For the time being it is not only of importance to expose the propaganda mechanisms but also the EU should find straightforward messages in the social media in order to clarify its values and advantages of its political model in a better way. Moreover, the EU should disseminate facts but it is significant that it should manage to challenge more positive emotions.

## References

- [1] *THE COLLINS WORD OF THE YEAR 2017 IS... FAKE NEWS:* <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty> (last retrieved on 13 January 2018).
- [2] *Fake news: What exactly is it – and how can you spot it?* - James Titcomb and James Carson: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/fake-news-exactly-has-really-had-influence/> (last retrieved on 12 March 2018).
- [3] *Фалшивите новини като бизнес модел и заплаха (Fake news as a business model and a threat):* [http://cio.bg/9102\\_falshivite\\_novini\\_kato\\_biznes\\_model\\_i\\_zaplaha](http://cio.bg/9102_falshivite_novini_kato_biznes_model_i_zaplaha) (last retrieved on 18 February 2018).
- [4] *EU Commissioner Gabriel Launches Public Consultation on Fake News on November 13:* <http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1688379> (last retrieved on 13 November 2017).
- [5] *European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel: Fake news stifle the media and society:* <http://www.aej-bulgaria.org/eng/p.php?post=2605&c=146&d=2017-12-04%2012:22:43&n=european-commissioner-mariya-gabriel-fake-news-stifle-the-media-and-society> (last retrieved on 4 December 2017).
- [6] *Всеки четвърти българин вижда всекидневно фалшиви новини в медиите (Every fourth Bulgarian sees fake news in the media every day):* <http://www.mediapool.bg/vseki-chetvarti-balgarin-vizhda-vsekidnevno-falshivi-novini-v-mediite-news265850.html> (last retrieved on 20 January 2018).