

The Impact of Fake News on Virtual Public Sphere

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Received: : 01/07/2023

Accepted: : 19/02/2024

Published: : 05/06/2024

Abstract:

This research paper seeks to understand the impact of the phenomenon of fake news on the virtual public sphere. This is done through a review of a wide range of theoretical works and empirical research. In addition to reviewing the concept of fake news and the virtual public sphere. We tried to examine the potential implications of the spread of fake news, which work to destroy the virtual public space, and are represented in: Erosion of democratic values, Undermining trust in institutions, Promoting conspiracy theories, Aggravating the phenomenon of political polarization, The spread of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and social bots. We also tried to review a set of possible solutions to combating the spread of fake news and minimize its negative impacts on the virtual public sphere.

Keywords: Fake news, virtual public sphere, democratic values, trust in institutions, conspiracy theories, political polarization, echo chambers, filter bubbles, social bots.

Introduction:

The emergence of social networking platforms has changed the way individuals communicate and participate in public discourse. It provided a new virtual space for individuals to engage in debate on a wide range of social, political and cultural issues, leading to the formation of a new virtual public space. Although we acknowledge that, these platforms are not a complete replacement for the traditional public space, as there are many aspects that are dealt with in real life that cannot be completely replaced via the Internet.

Through their use of social networking sites, individuals can express their opinions and viewpoints on a variety of topics, update their friends and followers on their activities and events, and share important and interesting news and information with others. In this way, social networking sites shape and expand the virtual public space, where ideas and information are exchanged and engagement in dialogues and discussions is widespread. Since these platforms allow individuals to engage in public dialogue easily and directly, they influence the way public opinion is shaped and formed on a variety of issues and topics .

Despite all the advantages of using and spreading social networking sites, they have also produced many negative phenomena such as addiction, threats to individuals' privacy, the spread of hate speech and extremism, cyberbullying, and the spread of fake news, which have become one of the greatest risks threatening contemporary societies in light of the digital environment. New. Simone Chambers points out that the development of social networking sites as a primary actor in the public space is what has made fake news a major challenge facing modern societies today (Chambers, 2020, p. 157). Of course, the phenomenon of misleading, false, or fake news is not a new phenomenon for humans, as such news has always played important roles in human history. But with the advent of the Internet and the spread of the use of social networking sites such as Facebook (facebook.com), the number of users of which as of April 2023 reached more than 2,989,000,000 users (Kemp, 2023). These digital social networks have become fertile ground for the spread and circulation of such news very quickly, and they are digital platforms that do not have an official editing process. This means that anyone can post anything they want on these platforms, regardless of whether it is true or false. As a result, social media platforms like Facebook have become a breeding ground for fake news. Shady news stories can spread very quickly across these platforms, because they are often designed to be sensational or emotionally charged. It can also be shared by people who think it is true, even if it is not (Rhodes, 2022, p. 2).

Public space, or public spaces, is undergoing major changes, becoming more personalized and fragmented. Today it also faces the influence of avatars, trolls and robotic messages. We also know that various actors, whether local, national or foreign, can produce structured and persuasive content that is deceptive, misleading and false. Detecting this type of misinformation has proven to be a difficult task (Iosifidis&Nicoli, 2021, p. xii). According to Susan Morgan, the virtual public space faces three main

challenges: The first relates to the concentration of power and money among a limited group of Internet companies that own the most important platforms. The second challenge relates to the significant change in the media landscape, as these major platforms now receive the bulk of advertising revenues that used to go to traditional news publishers, including local newspapers. Perhaps the most prominent of these challenges facing the virtual public space is the spread of misinformation and fake news, which can be used to manipulate public opinion. This is made worse by low levels of trust in institutions and experts, making people more vulnerable to misinformation (Morgan, 2018, pp. 39-40). While some spread false information intentionally or for the purpose of sowing doubt in people's minds for an ideological purpose, others spread false information in order to achieve financial gain. Edson Tandoc, Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling believe that financial and ideological motives are the main drivers behind the production of fake news (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018, p. 137)

The "fake news" crisis has become one of the most widely discussed topics, especially since the 2016 US presidential campaign. Although the term "fake news" was once associated with political satire, it has evolved to include anything considered "unrelated." precise". Jana Laura Egelhofer and Sophie Lecheler believe that fake news symbolizes a profound shift in political and public perceptions of what journalism and news mean. As well as how to access and interpret facts and information in the digital age (Egelhofer&Lecheler, 2019, p. 97)

So, with the spread of fake news in the virtual public space, especially through social networking sites, it may influence and incorrectly shape public opinion, and may lead to distortion of real facts and events. When people rely on fake news to make their decisions and form their opinions, it can lead to adopting wrong decisions and opinions and distorting facts. Consequently, fake news can affect the virtual public space and hinder understanding, dialogue and constructive cooperation between individuals and communities. This can negatively affect social, political and economic life. Therefore, the phenomenon of the spread of fake news represents a major challenge to democracy and an effective virtual public space. Therefore, understanding the impact of this type of news on the virtual public space is crucial .

Drawing from a review of the theoretical and research literature, this paper seeks to examine the impact of fake news on virtual public space. This is done by, first: examining the relationship between fake news and virtual public space; Second: Knowing the various possible repercussions of the spread of fake news in virtual space. Finally: Proposing a set of measures that can be taken to combat the spread of fake news in the virtual public space.

1-The rise of fake news in the digital age:

Collin Dictionary defines fake news as false and often sensational information disseminated under the cover of news reports. Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow define fake news as news articles created to be intentionally false with the aim of misleading readers (Allcott&Gentzkow, 2017, p. 230). Edson Tando et al. define fake news as fabrications that are low in fact (low in their truth) and high in their direct intent to deceive (Tandoc et al., 2018, p. 137). Lazer and his colleagues (Lazer et al. 2018) define it as that fabricated information that mimics in form the content of news media, but does not mimic it in the organizational process or in intent. Through this definition, it becomes clear to us that there are three basic components related to fake news: 1- It is inaccurate information; 2- It relies on imitation to appear to be correct; 3- Having the intention to deceive. Claire Wardle prefers to use the term information disorder rather than fake news, considering that the terms currently used to describe information disorder are too broad and vague, and do not adequately reflect the full range of problems caused by false, misleading and manipulated information. The term "fake news" is often used to describe this problem, but it is not an accurate or useful term. Wardle believes that the term "fake news" is a simple way to describe a complex problem. However, it has a number of limitations. One of the biggest limitations of the term is that it focuses on textual content, such as news articles, while ignoring other forms of content, such as visuals and social media posts. This can lead people to overlook misinformation presented via these other forms (Wardle, 2018, p. 952)

Sven Bernecker, Amy Flowerree, and Thomas Grundmann summarize the concept of fake news into three basic conceptualizations: The first conceptualization can be described as the hybrid conceptualization: which views fake news as a mixture of news that lacks two elements. Truth and honesty at the same time. As for the second perception, it can be called the exclusionary perception: This perception views fake news as that news that lacks the originality necessary to become real news, due to its lack of the recognized rooting process during the news production process. The third perception is consumer (audience) deception: This is

the perception that views fake news as all news that tends to systematically deceive consumers (Sven, Amy, & Thomas, 2021, pp. 6-7)

In addition, we must distinguish between fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. UNESCO's handbook for Journalism Education and Training states, disinformation is a deliberate (often coordinated) attempt to confuse or manipulate people by providing them with false information. On the other hand, misinformation is misleading information that is created or disseminated without the intent to manipulate or the intent to harm another (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022, p. 2). Therefore, fake news is false or misleading information that is intentionally created to deceive people. Their main purpose is to make money, promote a political agenda, or cause harm .

Among the most important mechanisms contributing to the spread of fake news, Sven Bernecker, Amy Flowerree, and Thomas Grundmann believe that it is represented in: First: Features of communication technologies: Communication technologies in general and search engines that rely on algorithms can contribute to the spread of fake news. Social media platforms in particular contribute to the spread of fake news. This is because they prioritize engagement with content over content quality, they potentially create filter bubbles, and users tend to share news quickly without thinking critically about its accuracy. Second: Social conditions: People who are part of groups with strong beliefs and values, who are troubled and weak in resourcefulness, are more likely to be affected by false information that supports their current beliefs. As a result, they are less likely to consider information from sources that are perceived as hostile to their leaders, political elites, or other elites. This situation can create echo chambers, which contribute to conspiracy theories and false beliefs, making it difficult for people to correct their misconceptions. Third: Cognitive ideologies/approaches: Cognitive ideologies provide standards that guide how we evaluate the evidence that should be taken seriously and other evidence that we should ignore, such as the standard of journalistic balance, intellectual tolerance, and others. Cognitive ideologies are the product of previous experiences and contribute significantly to organizing news selection (Sven et al., 2021, pp. 7-8).

Edson Tandoc et al believe that there are two main motivations behind the production of fake news, the first is financial and the second is ideological (Tandoc et al., 2018, p. 137). The financial motive, as Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston see, is the emergence of many misleading, apolitical entrepreneurs who produce fake news to make money in the “attention economy.” This type of thriving online media economy points to an economic environment centered around attention as a primary resource. In other words, the modern economy is moving from determining value based on scarce material resources to determining value based on the interest that users and consumers attract. As for the ideological motive, it may be the use of disinformation campaigns by the extreme right or any other radical forces within a country, through the national mobilization of movements, parties, and electoral campaigns against the existing authority. The ideological dimension may be represented in the conflict between countries through targeting foreign governments, along with their agents, of the political process, parties, and politicians within a country that it considers its enemy (Livingston & Bennett, 2018, pp. 132-134)

VianBakir and Andrew McStay see fake news as a source of three problems of a social and democratic nature. The first problem is that it produces informed citizens for us, but their knowledge is based on false and misleading information. The second problem relates to the possibility of those citizens with incorrect and misleading information continuing in the same situation due to their remaining in echo chambers. As for the third problem, it revolves around the possibility that they are emotionally charged or filled with anger due to the emotional or provocative nature of much fake news (Vian and Andrew, 2017, p. 159)

Christian Fuchs emphasizes that the concept of fake news is not a new concept but has been around due to the existence of sensationalist ideologies and media. Fake news essentially consists of incorrect and subjective data, primarily disseminated through social networking platforms. The production of fake news ignores established standards and professional standards of journalism. Fundamentally, fake news is ideological, as its creators intend to deliberately mislead and deceive people (Fuchs, 2023, p. 194)

Christian Fuchs believes that fake news is an expression of a high degree of instrumental thinking within society. Instrumental reason is an ideology that views and treats human beings as mere objects, resources, and tools to advance specific and often self-serving interests. The widespread spread of instrumental reason has given rise to various social issues, including increasing social inequality, concerns about social degradation, the emergence of new forms of nationalism, the dominance of popular media in the public space, and the pervasive influence of advertising, branding, consumer culture, and the prioritization of excitement and entertainment over substance, and the spread of an accelerated and shallow news culture.

This news culture leaves little time and space for meaningful political engagement and debate (Fuchs, 2020, p. 260)

Although the term has been criticized as vague and unhelpful. Dan Ehrenfeld and Matt Barton see it as a useful, comprehensive term that can be used to refer to a wide range of practices and phenomena that characterize current public space. They cite the work of other scholars who have studied related topics, such as virtual government policy, post-truth rhetoric, Donald Trump's rhetorical style, and the relationship between media literacy and fake news. They believe that all of these phenomena are part of a larger trend toward blurring the lines between fact and fiction in the public space. It is important to understand them to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Ehrenfeld& Barton, 2019).

2-The new virtual public space:

Hannah Arendt, in her book "Human Condition," emphasizes that public space plays a crucial role in human life. Without such a space to discuss concerns that concern everyone, people have no meaning to their existence. It also emphasizes that without a clear political public life (such as group discussions of concerns) we have no real sense of being truly human. In other words, an explicitly political public life sustains the development of our sense of self (Arendt, 1998, p. 193). Public space is essential to a healthy democracy, as it allows citizens to stay informed about what is going on around them, participate in the democratic process, and hold their governments accountable. However, it is important to note that public space is not perfect, can be influenced by powerful interests, and it can be difficult to ensure that all disparate voices are heard. Despite this, public space remains an essential tool for citizens to exercise their democratic rights.

The current state of public space is characterized by instability and constant transformation. Philip Schlesinger describes the current public space as an unstable "post-public space." Our traditional understanding of public space - shaped by the media age - is being disrupted and transformed by the digital age. The outcome of this transition remains uncertain, and the concept of public space is subject to new reconsideration. In addition, states' responses to the development of the Internet led to a major "regulatory turn." As governments and regulatory bodies grapple with issues such as privacy, online harassment, hate speech, misinformation and fake news. These regulatory efforts, along with these challenges, could reshape the future of public space, as they could impact the openness and accessibility of online platforms (Schlesinger, 2020, p. 1546)

The rapid spread of the Internet in daily life, and its use in the field of political communication, has led to the emergence of some new ideas related to (electronic) (cyber) (virtual) public space, which attempt to describe, understand and explain the new public life. We can classify these ideas into two main trends: The first trend represents a group of researchers such as (Connery 1997; Poster 1997; Knapp 1997; Fernback 1998), who emphasize that the new virtual public space is nothing but a complement to that traditional public space. While supporters of the second trend, such as (Buchstein 1997; Hague and Loader 1999; Wilhelm 2000), see that the virtual public space is a new and radically different version of the traditional public space (Oblak, 2002, p. 8)

The Internet has provided a new platform for communication and interaction between individuals, allowing information and ideas to be disseminated on a global scale. This has created new public spaces online, where people from diverse backgrounds can come together to discuss and debate issues of common interest. One of the major advantages of the Internet as a means of public communication is its ability to overcome geographical and time barriers, allowing people to participate in discussions and debates in real time regardless of their location. This has facilitated the creation of virtual communities that can discuss and deliberate on a range of issues, including issues related to politics, social justice, and the environment. These communities often cross national and cultural boundaries, allowing for a truly global exchange of ideas (Benrazek, 2022)

Funk Andreas points out the need to envision the virtual public space as having much greater deliberative potential than the traditional media public space. In addition, it is distinguished from that space in terms of the dimensions of space and time. In terms of the time dimension, it is possible to move from the traditional public space to the virtual public space very quickly, allowing citizens to communicate with each other and work on many political issues with the least possible effort and in a very quick time. In terms of the spatial dimension, public space is no longer a place where communication is limited to some areas only. Computer-based media communication has expanded the spatial dimension in the virtual public space, and has enabled citizens to engage in international affairs and issues regardless of the borders of the national state (Funk, 2016 , p. 44). Thus, virtual public space can give rise to a transnational public space when information and ideas flow—with great speed—among producers, distributors, and local, national, regional,

and international audiences (W. Chen, Tu, &Zheng, 2017, p. 5). Poor (2005) believes that the virtual public space is a space for discussion. It is also an open space where a wide range of Internet advocates come together to discuss many issues; Especially issues of a political nature; These issues are judged on their value (Coleman &Blumler, 2009, p. 35).

Despite all the important advantages of the Internet for public space, there are also many concerns about the impact of new technologies on public space. Some critics argue that the rise of social media has fragmented public opinion, as people tend to seek out and interact with others who share their views, rather than engaging in open and diverse debate. Which in turn leads to making public space a fragmented and dispersed space. Li Chen, This is instead of them entering into rational and critical dialogues, which are considered essential standards for public space (L. Chen, Wu, & Li, 2018, p. 2231)

Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston believe that the cause of the disinformation we experience today stems from a crisis of legitimacy in formal institutions. In a well-functioning public sphere, these institutions provide the ground rules for public debate by grounding it within a mix of competing political goals and values, demands for reliable evidence, and standards and processes for communicating and resolving disagreements. When these institutions lose legitimacy, they are no longer able to effectively anchor public debate, leading to the spread of misinformation. Accordingly, the standards of rational debate between competing viewpoints have collapsed, and have been replaced by deliberate distortion and reckless lying. This has disrupted the basic functioning of democratic public spaces. Consequently, institutions that were once capable of verifying truth claims and defining a more cohesive public space have collapsed, leaving a vacuum of knowledge and understanding in which citizens feel lost and exhausted (Livingston & Bennett, 2021, p. 10)

ZiziPapacharissi believes that the Internet (including social networking sites) has the potential to revitalize public space, but this potential is also limited by many factors. It also points out that the data storage and retrieval capabilities of Internet-based technologies provide information that was not previously available, but unequal access to information and lack of media literacy harm the representation of different groups in the virtual sphere. It also points out that Internet-based technologies enable discussion on a global scale, but are also capable of fragmenting political discourse. Ultimately, Papacharissi believes that whether the Internet becomes a truly public space depends on how it is used. If people use it to engage in meaningful conversations and discuss important issues, it has the potential to become a powerful tool for democracy. If people use it to spread misinformation or promote hate speech, it can be a force for division and polarization (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 9).

3-Potential repercussions of the spread of fake news on the virtual public space:

Within this research paper, we will focus on the most important phenomena that pose a clear threat to the virtual public space, which are: the erosion of democratic values, the undermining of trust in institutions, the promotion of conspiracy theories, the spread of political polarization, and the spread of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and social robots.

1.3Erosion of democratic values:

Justin McBrayer believes fake news poses a major threat to democracy. He strongly agrees with what Francis Bacon said that “knowledge is power.” When individuals are deprived of knowledge, they are also deprived of power. Therefore, when ordinary citizens lack the ability to make informed decisions, it means that someone else has that power. This situation is not consistent with the principles of democracy, where power should belong to the people (McBrayer, 2021, p. xi). Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston argue that spreading lies and fake news ultimately erodes basic democratic principles. This is due to a massive combination of institutional decline, unrest in the public space, and increasing attacks on journalism and Enlightenment values. We have entered the "post-truth" era. If so, democracies based on norms of debate, deliberation, compromise, and reason may face significant challenges (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 134)

Fake news also fosters distrust in democratic institutions by sowing doubts about the integrity of democratic institutions, which leads to the erosion of trust in the electoral process and other institutions essential to democracy. This can also have a long-term impact on the public's willingness to participate in democratic processes. Many democratic countries are now witnessing increasing levels of misinformation circulating through social media and political websites that mimic forms of journalism. In many cases, this misinformation is linked to efforts by right-wing movements and parties to mobilize supporters against centrist parties and the mainstream press. This leads to a decline in citizen confidence in the reliability of

official information published by democratic institutions and pushes the public to turn to alternative sources of information. These sources are often linked to both nationalist (primarily radical right) and foreign strategies to undermine institutional legitimacy and destabilize centrist parties, governments and elections. The Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump in the United States are among the most prominent examples of disinformation campaigns aimed at disrupting the normal democratic order, but there are many other countries where signs of disinformation and democratic disruption are evident (Bennett & Livingston, 2018)

Democratic theories associated with the liberal or deliberative tradition emphasize the importance of rational and public deliberation and active participation in political processes. These theories require that citizens have a sense of belonging to a political community and trust in political institutions. This sense of belonging to a political community ideally enables citizens to participate in deliberations of public issues, make informed electoral decisions, and actively participate in democratic institutions. A well-functioning media system that enjoys the trust of citizens is a prerequisite for this form of participation (Monsees, 2023). Justin McBrayer believes that in an actual democracy in which the citizen plays a fundamental role in governance, it is crucial that he be rational and well-informed. This can be viewed as a dual requirement: rational individuals who lack information are just as likely to make flawed decisions as those who are well informed but irrational. For democracy to flourish, voters must possess reason and knowledge (McBrayer, 2021, p. 165)

However, this emphasis on rational debate, informed citizens, and social cohesion represents only one aspect of the democratic ideal. Trust in institutions should not be absolute, and the ability to protest and criticize political elites is not only permissible but necessary in democracies. A fundamental feature of democratic systems is that the exercise of governmental power is open to criticism. In democratic societies, citizens are not only allowed but encouraged to challenge information provided by the media and statements made by experts (Monsees, 2023, p. 156).

3-2-Undermining trust in institutions:

Trust is a critical element in building prosperous societies and strong democracies, as it works to achieve stability, cooperation and promote social justice. Among the most important elements that work to increase trust in the public space are: transparency, integrity, responsiveness, accountability and governance. Much empirical research indicates a decline in confidence in the government and in the democratic process, which is the dominant feature of the political culture in many countries of the world. Barbara Misztal attributes the lack of confidence in the democratic system to the following factors:

- 1- The presence of sophisticated, highly critical citizens who feel disappointed;
- 2- Due to the great ambiguity of institutional standards;

3- In addition to the emergence of a political class (politicians) that is not qualified and has not gained the trust of the people (Misztal, 2001, p. 372). Daniel Halpern et al argue that the level of trust in various institutions is diminishing in many areas of social life, including traditional media. This decrease in trust can facilitate exposure and subsequent spread of misinformation (Halpern, Valenzuela, Katz, & Miranda, 2019, p. 220)

Fake news can undermine trust in news media, social media platforms, and even democratic institutions. When people are exposed to false or misleading information, they may become skeptical of all sources of news and information, leading to a lack of trust in the media and other institutions. A study (Ognyanova Katherine Lazer, David Robertson, Ronald Wilson, Christo) indicated that exposure to fake news reduces people's trust in the media and increases their trust in government policy if it is of the same political color as them (Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, & Wilson, 2020). James Ball believes that the decline in trust in media institutions leads to the ignorance of the masses. When people stop trusting mainstream news sources, they become more vulnerable to polarizing and extremist messages from other sources. As a result, they may be more likely to believe fake news or other forms of misinformation. Ball also sees the decline in trust in mainstream media as a desecralization of journalism. This means that people no longer view journalists as objectively telling the truth. Instead, they view journalism as just another form of media that can be biased or inaccurate (Farkas&Schou, 2020, p. 59)

3-3-Promoting conspiracy theories:

Conspiracy theories can be described as a proposed explanation for a particular event or situation as a conspiracy. Conspiracy theories are often based on incomplete or questionable evidence and are not supported by prevailing expert opinions. They often include hidden or malevolent forces behind those events

or phenomena. It is also important to note that not all conspiracies are necessarily false or unfounded, but the term “conspiracy theory” is generally reserved for those theories that lack strong empirical evidence and are not possible in the opinion of most experts (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 4)

Fake news often promotes conspiracy theories that are not supported by facts or evidence. These theories can spread quickly across the Internet and can lead to distrust of key institutions. According to a study conducted by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, they found that fake information spreads faster and more widely than real information. People are often attracted to new and unusual information, such as fake news compared to other normal news (Brown, 2020). Fake news is often of an inflammatory nature, which makes it exciting news that deserves to be talked about and circulated widely. When this news spreads widely, it can turn into harmful and misleading conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories have been a common focus in studies of fake news. Daniel Halpern et al believe that individuals with a stronger tendency toward conspiracy-oriented thinking will be more likely to believe rumors or facts that lack hard evidence support, regardless of their political ideology or party affiliation (Halpern et al., 2019).

If we go back to the Corona pandemic, which served as fertile ground for the growth of fake news and conspiracy theories. Many false narratives spread very quickly online, often through social media platforms. Many conspiracy theories have attracted people around their version of events related to the pandemic, often fueled by statements by world leaders, government officials, politicians and conspiracy theorists. For example, former US President Donald Trump described the Covid-19 virus as the “Chinese virus,” and accused China of manufacturing it in a laboratory in Wuhan. At the same time, Chinese officials put forward another theory, suggesting that the US military was the one who introduced the virus to Wuhan. And it's not just governments that have enjoyed conspiracy theories; There are also people like David Icke, who suggest that the virus is spreading via 5G towers. This theory prompted some of his followers to sabotage communications towers across Europe. Additionally, there was a widely circulated paper from the Indian Institute of Technology (later retracted) claiming that coronavirus proteins had “uncanny similarity” to HIV proteins (Naem, Bhatti, & Khan, 2021, p. 145)

3-4-Exacerbation of the phenomenon of political polarization:

Cass Sunstein proposes the concept of “group polarization,” which means the tendency of individuals to shift after a period of deliberation or discussion toward a more extreme position that is consistent with the original inclinations of group members (Sunstein, 2007, p. 60). Psychologist David G. Myers previously demonstrated in the 1970s that when polarized groups are brought together to discuss issues, they tend to become more hostile and polarized over time (Iosifidis&Nicoli, 2021, p. 3). In the context of the Internet and new communication technologies, this concept suggests that groups made up of individuals who share similar views, and engage in conversations with each other, are likely to reinforce and amplify their existing beliefs, leading to views that are more extreme than they initially were. When the public is divided into these separate groups, each curating its own preferred sources of information and discussions, it can lead to further polarization. By interacting primarily with like-minded individuals, group members reinforce and amplify their initial beliefs. At the same time, the different deliberative groups, each composed of people with similar views, diverge from each other, because they engage primarily in discussions within their own groups. Consequently, this dynamic contributes to the fragmentation and polarization of society (Sunstein, 2007, p. 61)

Maxwell McCombs argues that when the public is divided, constructive discussions about the same social issues become very unlikely. This fragmentation makes it difficult for people with different viewpoints to engage in meaningful dialogue and reach consensus to address societal problems. As a result, this can negatively affect social cohesion and hamper the proper functioning of democracy. As Lance Bennett and Shantolyengar point out, as national audiences become more divided, the ability of media messages to change people's attitudes diminishes. In such a scenario, the media tend to cater to smaller, like-minded subgroups of the population, reinforcing existing beliefs and tendencies rather than encouraging openness or changing attitudes (Fonseca, 2014, p. 91)

Political polarization refers to the process by which political views within a particular demographic group become increasingly extreme, often in line with party orientations. This phenomenon leads to decreased dialogue between individuals with different political views and a decreased possibility of reaching political settlements. Jeremy Kleidosty believes that social networking sites play a dual role in this process. On the one hand, it can be a driving force behind political polarization, because it often serves as a platform for sharing content from different media. With the proliferation of partisan news channels, talk radio, and

websites, people are exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, with little room for opposing viewpoints. This content can be easily shared on social networking platforms, allowing polarized versions of news stories to spread quickly within specific political communities (Kleidosty, 2014, p. 975). Previous research has shown that individuals can become more polarized when they are constantly exposed to political information with a single ideological spectrum (Levendusky, 2013, p. 611).

3-5-The proliferation of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and social robots:

Social networking platforms, as Samuel Rhodes asserts, spread fake news through two influential mechanisms. First, there are the algorithmically powered filter bubbles that run in the background of these platforms. These algorithms expose users to content that matches their existing beliefs, with the goal of keeping individuals engaged for longer periods of time on these sites. Second, social networking platforms allow users to connect with others who share similar views, forming highly personalized echo chambers. Within these echo chambers, directional thinking continues to spread fake news, even when it is debunked or corrected (Rhodes, 2022, p. 2).

Echo chambers are isolated communicative spaces on the Internet, where people are exposed to like-minded individuals, and often in the absence of contradictory information to challenge false narratives or the prevailing consensus. This situation leads to a fragmented and disparate understanding of reality, which can be divisive and dangerous for society as a whole (Lazer et al., 2017, p. 5). Echo chambers, as Axel Bruns describes, arise when a group of individuals intentionally prioritize communication with each other and exclude outsiders from their network. As this network develops, that is, creating more connections within the homogeneous group while cutting off connections with outsiders, the group becomes increasingly isolated from outside viewpoints. At the same time, the opinions held by group members are widely circulated within the echo chamber (Bruns, 2017, p. 3)

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, take advantage of the structure of social networks, which are often closely interconnected and resemble those relationships that exist among individuals offline. Besides, these virtual networks often reflect existing social ties and tend to consist of individuals with similar political orientations. This homogeneity within social networks means that misleading or false information is rarely scrutinized or challenged when it aligns with the prevailing views of a person's like-minded peers online (Rhodes, 2022, p. 5)

The second factor that influences exposure to fake news goes beyond the choices made by individuals and their friends, as it is driven by algorithmically powered filter bubbles operating in the background. Eli Pariser coined the term “filter bubble” to describe the polarization phenomenon that occurs on social media platforms like Facebook. He asserts that algorithms, which aim to personalize and personalize users' online experiences, effectively isolate users within a bubble where they are presented with information that primarily corresponds to their past consumer behaviors. The main goal behind these algorithms is to connect individuals to information that is likely to interest them by prioritizing certain elements over others, ultimately creating a personalized stream of content that lacks diversity in the options presented to users (Rader & Gray, 2015, p. 175). These algorithms learn users' preferences and prioritize showing content that matches their preferences, due to the vast sources of content available on social media platforms. Previous research has shown that when people encounter information on social media platforms, they often consume it passively. Studies have also indicated that individuals are more likely to accept and absorb information when they encounter it in a negative way. This has raised concerns among researchers and those interested in understanding the extent of the impact of fake news that is spread through the algorithms of social networking sites (Rhodes, 2022, p. 6)

Many analysts believe that filter bubbles may have played an important role in shaping the outcome of the Brexit vote in 2016. When combined with the inherent human tendency to homophily in social networks, individuals tend to connect with others who Sharing the same beliefs and characteristics, these filtering mechanisms can give rise to strong, ideologically homogeneous networks. Content that aligns with members' values and norms is more likely to be disseminated within these networks. Besides, it should be noted that information shared within these bubbles can spread in a manner similar to the propagation of sound within an echo chamber, amplifying isolated sounds to give the impression of a united chorus (Greifeneder, Jaffé, Newman, & Schwarz, 2021, p 4).

There is also an aspect of the discussion surrounding exceptional filtered rooms. There are also so-called social bots, which are accounts that rely on creating or publishing harmful content. Disagreements vary over the precise definition of a social robot; He describes them as “job programs,” and describes them as “online personalities? In order to monitor a small group of public agents who are of widespread opinion”,

or “digital bots with artificial intelligence, or are automated or semi-automated accounts. These mechanisms on social media platforms have gained great attention due to the contribution as well as the global contribution to public opinion by amplifying particular topics, spreading misinformation, and influencing elections through what might be termed as “opinion machines” (Assenmacher et al., 2020, p. 1)

Social bots can create content, share it for distribution, and even like it autonomously with little or no human engagement. This greatly affects the nature, quantity, and credibility (in terms of likeability) of information, potentially reshaping the global PC network within specific online bubbles. While some social platforms like Twitter and Facebook work to limit the chaos of a financial program, this battle has become an ongoing one, as athletes who delight in cheating are happy to adapt their tactics to circumvent or outwit the latest details posted by privileged people who aim for enjoyment on networks populated by human users. . The future is very near, as a major development of fakery – deceptive videos or images that are extremely difficult to recognize as manipulated fabrications – will present ever more dire challenges to the environment and clear information (Greifeneder et al., 2021, p. 4)

It has become clear that social social media, variously understood as infratechnological constructs, tools for controlling social behavior, or semi-autonomous beings, have come to translate into villainous democracy in contemporary post-truth environments. Indeed, there seems to be a widespread consensus that “social networking networks can easily be used as tools for highly destructive political forms” (Farkas&Schou, 2020, p. 57). Together, these phenomena contribute to creating a fragmented, specific, and distorted virtual public space. Among other things, it hinders the exchange of diverse viewpoints, reduces the quality of public discourse, weakens the quality of open debate, and compromises ideals. Space requires us to confront all phenomena that are not virtual public safety, but finding ways and even staying in space is to preserve the space for civil society and purposeful exchange.

4-Measures to confront fake news :

Wardle Claire and DerakhshanHossein presented a set of recommendations for technology companies to address the problem of fake news and improve the quality of information on their platforms. These recommendations include creating an advisory board, providing data to researchers, transparency in algorithms and collaboration, providing contextual information, removing financial incentives for misinformation, and combating the amplification of information. Automated content and moderation of non-English content and processing of misleading audio-visual information. Governments should also understand the problem of fake news and take steps to limit the spread of misinformation, support quality journalism and protect government institutions from cyber threats, while ensuring reliable information is provided to people. Media organizations can also play a critical role in combating fake news by collaborating to streamline fact-checking and debunking efforts and produce educational content about critical thinking and verification. Civil society can also play an important role in addressing this problem by educating on the techniques used to spread misinformation and facilitating cooperation between various stakeholders. Ministries of education also play an important role in promoting the technologies and skills needed to deal with fake news and can update ICT curricula to include training on information verification, algorithmic surveillance, and forensic verification techniques (Wardle &Derakhshan, 2017, pp. 80-85). As an example of the efforts made by countries to combat the phenomenon, the European Union countries stand out at the forefront of the countries in the world that have taken concrete steps in this context. The European Commission has established a High-Level Group (HLEG) of 38 experts to provide guidance on tackling fake news and disinformation online. The high-level expert group stressed the importance of avoiding simplistic solutions such as censorship of freedom of expression and proposed a multifaceted approach centered around five pillars: enhancing transparency in the digital information system, enhancing media and information literacy to counter disinformation, developing tools to empower users and journalists, and protecting the diversity and sustainability of news media. European Union, supporting ongoing research to assess the impact of misinformation and adjust response measures as needed (Kalsnes, 2018, p. 13)

Artificial intelligence may represent the most important mechanism that can be used to confront the phenomenon of fake news and reduce the risks of information corruption. Artificial intelligence tools, including machine learning and deep learning, must be exploited to create computer systems to identify fake news in fields as diverse as politics, sports, and business. By reviewing a wide range of research, Mustafa A. Al-Asadi and SakirTasdemir found artificial intelligence tools that have been developed, combining both machine learning techniques and deep learning techniques to enhance accuracy in the process of detecting fake news (Al-Asadi&Tasdemir , 2022, p. 50)

Conclusion:

Fake news and the virtual public space are closely linked. The Internet in general, and social networking sites in particular, have allowed the rapid spread of misinformation and propaganda on a global scale. Fake news, which is intentionally misleading or false information presented as factual, can spread rapidly through social networking sites and other online channels, reaching a wide audience whose opinions and behavior it is likely to influence. This may have serious consequences for democracy and for society as a whole, because it undermines the ability of individuals to make informed decisions based on accurate and valid information. It can also contribute to the spread of false and extremist beliefs and ideologies.

Virtual public space can be a powerful tool for promoting freedom of expression, democratic participation, and the exchange of diverse viewpoints, but it also has the potential to amplify misinformation and propaganda. Therefore, it has become important for individuals, institutions and governments to be critical of the information they are exposed to online, and to take practical steps to verify the accuracy of news and information before sharing it with others. In addition, social networking platforms and other technology companies have a responsibility to address the spread of fake news and other harmful content on their platforms, through measures such as the use of artificial intelligence technology, user education, supporting good corporate journalism, and enacting deterrent laws for anyone who contributes to the spread of such shady information .

One potential solution to the problem of fake news in the virtual public sphere is to develop decentralized, community-led communication platforms that prioritize transparency and accountability, by enabling users to take an active role in content moderation and fact-checking. Such platforms can create a more robust and trustworthy virtual public space. In addition, increased collaboration between social media companies, governments, and civil society organizations can help develop more effective strategies to combat fake news. If these steps are implemented, society can ensure that the virtual public space remains a space for informed and productive democratic discourse.

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