

ТЕОРІЯ ТА ПРАКТИКА ЖУРНАЛІСТИКИ

UDC 070.16:355(477)

<https://doi.org/10.23939/sjs2021.02.001>

Bilohrats Khrystyna

PhD, assistant,

Department of journalism and mass communication,

Lviv Polytechnic National University

Khrystyna.R.Bilohrats@lpnu.ua

PECULIARITIES OF FAKE MEDIA MESSAGES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF RUSSIAN FAKES ABOUT UKRAINE)

© Bilohrats Khrystyna, 2021

Information wars have long been used as a full-fledged weapon against the enemy, using both manipulation and completely fake messages. The methods used to disseminate false media messages by their authors are completely different, but the goal is almost always the same – to make the target audience that consumes information, believe and be influenced.

Scientists have identified three main elements of the media chain: the author of the message – the transmission channel – the recipient of the message. According to M. McLuhan, media channels of information transmission are a technical continuation of natural channels: radio (auditory), printed periodicals (visual), television (combination of vocal and visual), and Internet MMC (combination of auditory, optic and visual).

Therefore, it is worth considering the ways in which fakes are distributed – through photos, videos or just texts. Very often two or sometimes three distribution channels are used, because video can accompany text and attached to it photos, so this division should be considered conditional.

Having analysed fake reports from the Russian-language media segment, it became possible to draw conclusions about the use of basic evaluation criteria according to professional journalistic standards of publications. The emotionality of the texts, which was conditionally divided into two groups – “excessive emotionality” and “moderate neutrality” was taken into account. As for the excessive emotionality of the texts, it has been determined that it is most common in the video, a little less in the photo, and very little in the texts. As to the studies concerning the topic of fakes in the Russian-language media segment, a vast majority of studies concerned Ukraine, and military issues namely.

Usually, the authors of fake media reports aim to destabilize the situation, and to make the target audience believe in nonsense and behave predictably, to divert attention from their own problems.

Key words: fake, mass media, media, media messages, manipulations, information wars.

Formulation of the problem. Media messages have always been and are now the main component of communication in the chain of information transfer from the media to recipients. During active information flows, you can often see the manipulation under the audience by changing the angle of presentation of certain information that is present in the message.

The aim of the study is to determine the manipulative peculiarities of fake media messages.

The object of the study is fake messages in the Russian-language segment of the media.

Analysis of researches and publications. In their works, the issues of fake information were analysed by Lavnykevych D. [4], Minchenko O. [6], Mudra I. [7], Saprykin O. [8]. Peculiarities and construction of media messages were studied by Feller M. [9], Kosyuk O. [3]. Gorbachev S. [2] and the authors of the publication “Media Literacy in Ukrainian Society: Trust, but Check” [5] wrote about critical thinking and media literacy.

Presenting of the main material. With the spread of the Internet, ease of access to it, the emergence of social networks covering hundreds of millions of people in almost all countries, the creation of international interest groups, the Internet has started to be used as a source of propaganda, psychological influence, and for disseminating of conscious misinformation.

Today, perhaps the most insidious and dangerous weapon of mass destruction of human consciousness is considered “fake”, which in English language means falsification, forgery, fraud. Fake, if to understand this term as an instrument of information warfare means misinformation, intentional distortion of certain phenomena, facts, events, and the malice of such distortion is carefully hidden; on the contrary, a fake message contains all the signs of a true message, which makes it possible to influence a certain audience through the use of simulacra [8, p. 89]. Appropriate resources have been created for the distribution of fake messages on the Internet, which are purposefully saturated with information, both reliable and unreliable.

Today, it is difficult to distinguish false (fake) information from the true one, as it appears more and more often in the media. The goal of such information is to mislead people. Unfortunately, even professional journalists spread fake messages on their pages on social networks or in their own materials through the media. The popularity of such messages in mass media and on social media guarantees the audience a daily dose of misinformation, rumours or frank lies. It is difficult to constantly fight with such a tool of information warfare, because it is not always possible to distinguish truth from lies.

The main purpose of fake messages as a tool of information warfare is to create doubts and to convince the audience of the veracity of the information provided.

The goal of fake messages is to:

- misinform the audience;
- promote one’s own vision, policy or position;
- to provoke aggression;
- sway your own thoughts and make you doubt;
- provoke panic;
- change the opinions of the audience;
- to encourage certain actions;
- activate attention and interest the audience;
- to convince the audience with fictional facts;
- to intimidate the audience, etc. [7, p. 185].

It is also worth mentioning the manipulation, which has been used very often lately for distracting the attention to something else with the purpose to hide really important events that can cause great outrage in society.

Thus, a “fake” is a specially created news, event or journalistic material that contains false or distorted information that discriminates against a certain person or group of people in the eyes of the audience. Fakes are different in form, methods of transmission, content, so there is a need to classify them. According to the method of spreading, fakes can be divided into: mass media fakes (which are created especially for mass media and are distributed through them) and online rumours (when they spread someone’s lie through social networks).

Lavrynevykh D. offers the following classification:

1. Random fakes. Usually it is the result of editorial haste, incompetence, misuse of automatic translators, and imperfection of automatic spelling checkers.

2. Fakes, created for information warfare. Here, of course, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict remains in the first place, generating more and more bizarre fakes. This is the greatest use of false information in our time.

3. Fakes, created for commercial purposes. Such fakes are mostly used by unscrupulous businessmen, who make money on various kinds of pseudo-scientific developments.

4. Fakes, created to increase traffic.

5. Fakes, invented for an incomprehensible purpose [4].

According to the form, there are several types of fake news:

1) photos from another place or photos, forged in photo editors;

2) specially edited videos, or shot at a completely different time and place;

3) sites, and pages in social networks, created on behalf of other people, bots;

4) fake news, distortion of the original text.

Undoubtedly, no message can exist outside the communication, because then such a message would not make sense. It is always part of the communication process between the addresser and the addressee, between the means of mass media and the audience. Scholars present different classifications and features of the media chain, but the construction with the main components of the media message is a combination of four elements – three mandatory and one additional:

- the author of the message;
- transmission channel;
- recipient of the message;
- + reaction of the recipient [2].

It is difficult to agree that the last additional element “reaction of the recipient” may belong to the classic scheme of the communication chain, because the reaction is a feedback already, and such a connection involves creating a new message so the recipient, while sending the message becomes the author of the message, and the author of the message becomes the recipient.

If we consider journalistic reports as works, Feller M. believed that the structure should contribute to the goal for which it had been written, and to meet the expected process and direction of the reader's thought. The message will work effectively only when it is taken into account, on the basis of which material and in what way the reader will be able to think about it, and how it will evaluate (consciously or subconsciously) the feasibility of construction. The text has multifaceted authorial (from the author's point of view) and perceptual (from the reader's point of view) semantic structures. They include factual, thematic, compositional and architectural structures. They contain communicative, informational, logical-conceptual, psychological, and emotional-expressive substructures [9].

If you analyse false messages (fakes) through the prism of the above statements, you can see a list of mandatory elements that make up fakes:

- goal – conscious misinformation of the audience in order to be able to manage it;
- thesis will be the main for the whole message, amplified by manipulative methods throughout the message;
- topics – for the effectiveness of false information several topics in one message, linked together, can be used;
- message structure – illogicality is often used in this case;
- informational, theoretical or practical material will be distorted because of the submission of biased or incomplete information;
- expressive-evaluative vocabulary – to provoke emotions in recipients, and emotionally restless people are known to think very subjectively;

- details – there are too many details, and they do not always relate to the subject of the message, or some of them are specifically omitted by the authors, as this may change the whole essence of the message;

- coding – the recipient decrypts the information encoded in the message in his own way, so the authors have the task to use the most understandable to the audience codes that will be easy to decode and will not be difficult from the semiotic side for the audience, for which the message is created.

As a result, information and communication material are stored in memory -in mental or technical processors with the properties of fixing and storing data, which can later be reproduced [3]. Constant repetition of false information forces recipients to think objectively without using critical thinking.

When transmitting different types of messages in the MMC, special channels are used. To maximally convey the information message to the target audience, you should choose the right communication channel. Today, scientists distinguish five such channels (according to the senses): vocal (auditory), visual (optical), tactile (touchable), olfactory, gustatory.

Most of them correspond to specific means of mass media, which, as we remember, according to McLuhan M., are a technical continuation of the innate human organs:

- auditory is a radio,
- visual – printed publications and literature, as well as periodicals,
- a combination of vocal and visual – television [3], online media.

Speaking about the media features of fakes, it is worth mentioning the channels through which they are distributed – through photos, videos or just texts. Of course, two or sometimes three distribution channels are most often used, because video can accompany text and attached to it photos, so this division should be considered conditional. However, these three components are combined in full-fledged fake media messages, in which numerous recipients can sometimes believe.

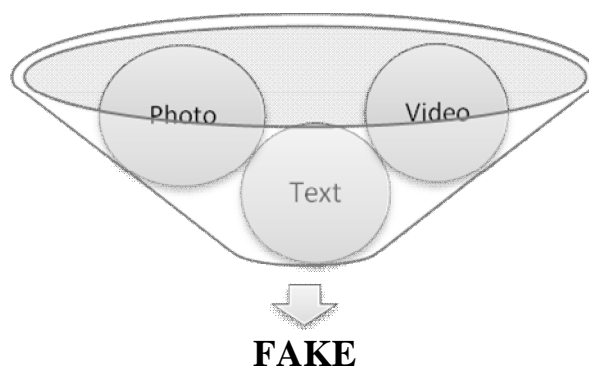


Fig. 1

Photos are the most common type of fake news distribution. Photo editor programs allow you to forge a photo in a way that benefits the author of the falsified information. An example of an “international” fake is a photo of a military vehicle damaged by a mine that never exploded. Channel 5 of Ukrainian television published a photo and reported that it was a mine fired by Russian troops. Russia 24 TV channel publishes the same photo and reports that “Ukrainian punishers fired on their citizens.” But according to Swiss journalist Gina Louise Metzler, the photo was taken by Al Jazeera during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A video fake is more complicated than a picture, because there is no easy way to find a video. It happens that fake journalistic materials are specially created for some invented news, and create a basis for it. For example, the case of A. Yatsenyuk, who allegedly fought in Chechnya, forced the prisoner to

“confess” about this nonsense. A fake report of the 1st Russian TV channel about a boy allegedly crucified by the servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine became a classic.

However, the latest type of fake is “Deep-fake” (combination of the words “deep” – extended and “fake” – false) – these are extremely realistic video or audio recordings created using artificial intelligence, in which someone allegedly says what he was “dictated to”.

The algorithm imposes the movements, facial expressions and words of one person on another. For example, in a video published by the online edition Buzzfeed, you can see how the “deep-fake” former US President Barack Obama says things that the real one never said.

Not so long ago, such videos could be created only by people who are the best specialists in creating special effects. But technology is evolving rapidly and is becoming more accessible to almost everyone. On the Internet you can find instructions for creating deep-fakes. High-quality “deep-fakes” are really difficult to detect for a non-specialist or common public. Therefore, different types of manipulation are implemented into life with much quicker than before.

The technology can be used to promote violence, sabotage elections, blackmail or any other provocation. And recipients because of such a spread of “deep-fakes” may lose trust in real videos as well. So far, “deep-fakes” are not used too actively, but the technology has the potential to help people and harm them at the same time. Resources have begun to appear to detect “deep-fakes”.

As to the journalistic material, fake journalistic materials often refer to authoritative media or distort messages or comments. This technique is often used to enhance the plausibility or credibility of a message. However, among such messages there are many fabrications that should be checked.

Examples include publications such as the fake statement by NATO Commander in Europe, General F. Breedlove about the possibility of an air attack on Russian troops in Ukraine (published on the page of the so-called National Anti-Corruption Portal). General F. Breedlove repeatedly expressed his vision of events, indeed. For example, in November 2014 in Kyiv at a press conference and meeting with the fifth President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, General F. Breedlove said that “the North Atlantic Alliance supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine and is ready to meet the needs of the Ukrainian armed forces through a comprehensive plan.” [1]. But not a word about a military attack on Russian troops.

Fake can often be created against one person (for example, “Dmitry Yarosh wins the presidential election”, “Arseniy Yatsenyuk fought in Chechnya”), groups of people (against the government of the country, against the party “Svoboda”), against a certain region or district (“Transcarpathian region wants to separate from Ukraine”), against the army (the “crucified boy”), and even against the state and the nation (“the Ukrainians dug up the Black Sea”).

Very often false messages are spread by hastily created online media. It is possible to distinguish certain features of a fake resource [8, p. 93]:

- 1) has no rubric “About us”, owners and employees, authors of publications are hidden,
- 2) little known, not quoted in traditional media,
- 3) messages are not confirmed by other sources, such as resources known by the confirmed information,
- 4) bright site design,
- 5) has, for the most, a resounding name (for example, “National Anti-Corruption Portal”. “National” status is granted only to state organizations and only by a special Decree of the President of Ukraine).

O. Minchenko writes about the following main signs of a fake media message:

- news, the facts of which are based on messages from social networks;
- messages that begin with “sensational” or questions to recipients;
- accents, bright epithets or “labels” in the material [6].

Fakes are diverse and are actively spread through social networks and mass media. In any case, you can not treat fakes and fake publications superficially. The funds spent on their creation, time, effort, other resources, and all this, according to the authors of fakes, should return to the benefit of the authors and, consequently, a loss to society. The analysis of false reports in modern mass media has been carried out

taking into account such characteristics and criteria for their evaluation as: efficiency, balance of opinions, completeness of information, truthfulness of information, vocabulary neutrality [5].

The largest amount of content (more than half of all reports in this sample) is devoted to the war in Ukraine. The main topic is the favourite sayings of Russian propaganda: “country of failure”, “country that does not exist”, “country that failed” (failed state). Everything is very bad “in Ukraine”, catastrophes and failures have happened or are about to happen, there are troubles inside and outside the country, and so on. Virtually any informational reason in the Russian-language media segment is used to create “news” with the right message.

The main purpose of fake messages which is the main tool of information warfare is to make you doubt. To achieve the goal, false or unreal information is added to the texts, or actual events are confused with distorted ones. And the fake itself is considered successful when it is accepted as true and disseminated by journalists and media recipients.

After text fakes, the second place is occupied by video fakes, when a part of the video is cut out and information is presented in a different context, which is more beneficial to the person who is the author of a false message.

Propaganda in the print press has also changed recently: fakes have a certain focus, which shows that there is an information war all around. In the beginning, these were theses aimed at demoralizing the country and society: about Maidan snipers, CIA agents who organized it, about the junta sitting in Kyiv. Messages have changed in recent years. The main topic has changed to the next: the army is bad and the government is anti-Ukrainian.

Having analysed 100 fake reports from the Russian-language segment of media channels and online publications

“Russia”, “LifeNews”, “Interfax”, “Novorossiia”, “NewsFront”, “Lenta.ru”, “REN-TV” and others, we can draw conclusions about the use of basic evaluation criteria for professional journalistic standards of publications. It is worth mentioning that a lot of information is also spread on social networks. Not often, but it happens that public figures on their pages on social networks spread false information, so their message becomes the primary source of fake.

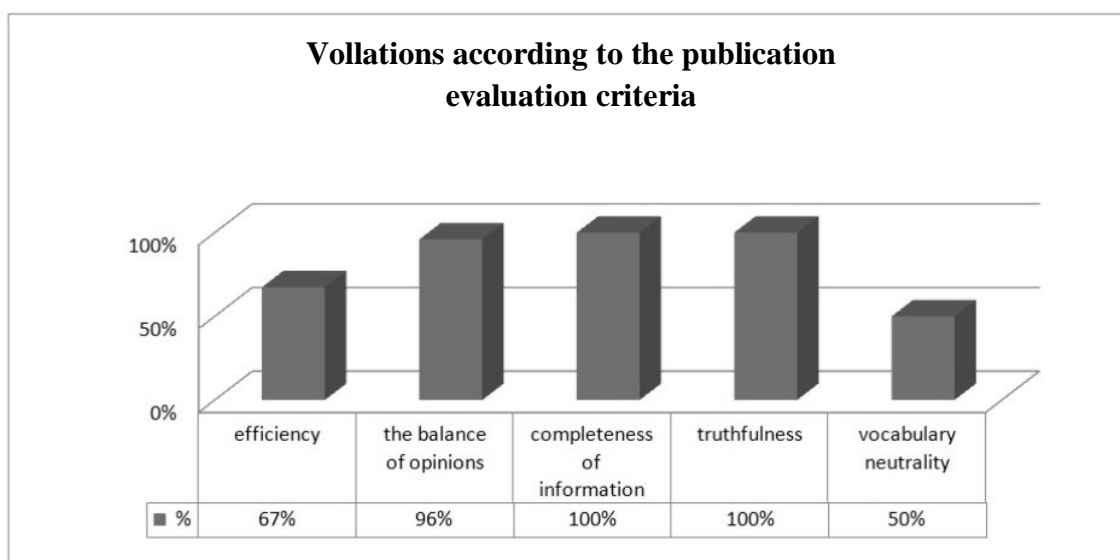


Fig. 2

The peculiarities of the violation of the effectiveness of the information presenting by the media are that photos, videos or certain facts are published with a delay of several years, posing as recent events.

Fake authors often use photos from the wars long before the Russian-Ukrainian war, images that were processed in special graphics programs and could be seen on the Internet long before they were published in the media, or even photos from films. The same features have the video materials, too – they have usually been shot long before the event. As for text fakes, there are far fewer of them. This may be, probably, explained by the fact that both photos and videos are often accompanied by some text while publishing.

Almost never fake messages include interviews taken from the representatives of the other side of the conflict, as it is not profitable to show non-informational views, as this may lead some recipients to think critically, and to consider more precisely the issues, discussed in the propaganda material. However, there are exceptions – sometimes you can see how the representatives from the other side are being interviewed or commented on the events. In such cases, false simultaneous translation is usually given if people speak a foreign language, or the interviewees are simply shown and their direct speech is not given.

As it can be seen in Fig. 2, one hundred percent violations occur in the information completeness and veracity. The main manipulations are carried out when important details are omitted or not provided deliberately, what, in turn, can significantly affect the final conclusions about certain information.

Vocabulary neutrality implies a certain emotional “detachment” of the journalist when writing the text, as the words may indicate his subjective position or premature conclusions, which is a sign of unprofessionalism. However, this criterion, actually, is least violated in the text publications.

Having divided all the analysed publications into two conditional groups – “excessive emotionality” and “moderate neutrality” (see Fig. 3), we have drawn the conclusions about the emotionality of fakes in mass media. The division into two groups is conditional, because in all false media messages you can see certain manipulative messages that are aimed at making the audience remember the information provided, and to do this you need to influence the emotional state of recipients in different ways. In general, the group of “excessive emotionality” included materials that contained information about murders, rapes, burning of believers, and alleged burial of still breathing people, by the Ukrainian military men, victimization, tortures and more. And the group of “moderate neutrality” included, for example, materials with information about a Ukrainian journalist-saboteur, Russian observers who would not be allowed to the elections in the USA, the Ukrainian language issue and more.

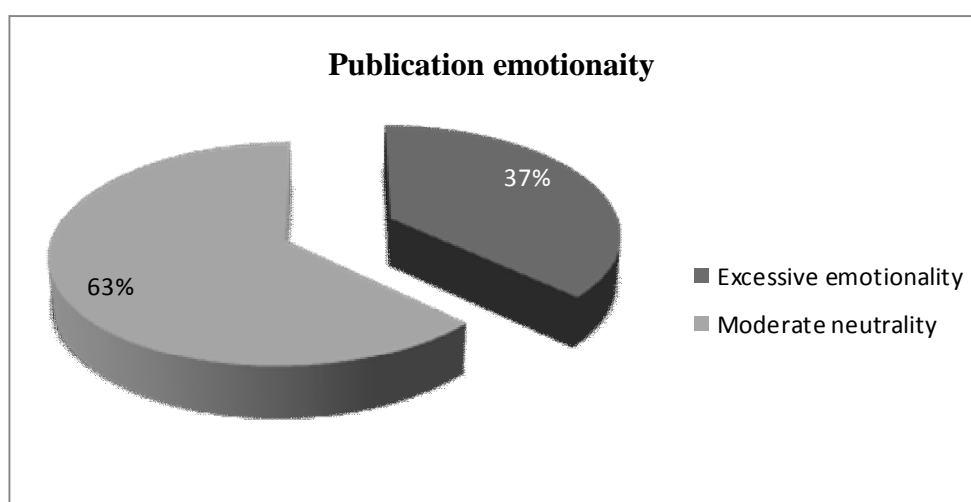


Fig. 3

Observations showed that the most active emotional vocabulary in media materials was used in video – 47.1 %, slightly less in photos – 35.2 % and the least in purely text publications – 17.7 %. Probably, such attempts to influence through video and photos are connected with the fact that the video actively uses non-verbal means of communication – gestures, poses, facial expressions, intonations, and

also videos from other military conflicts were shown – for example, the Ukrainian war has repeatedly been illustrated by the videos from Dagestan or Syria, and the photos which ostensibly were from real events which took place were footage from films.

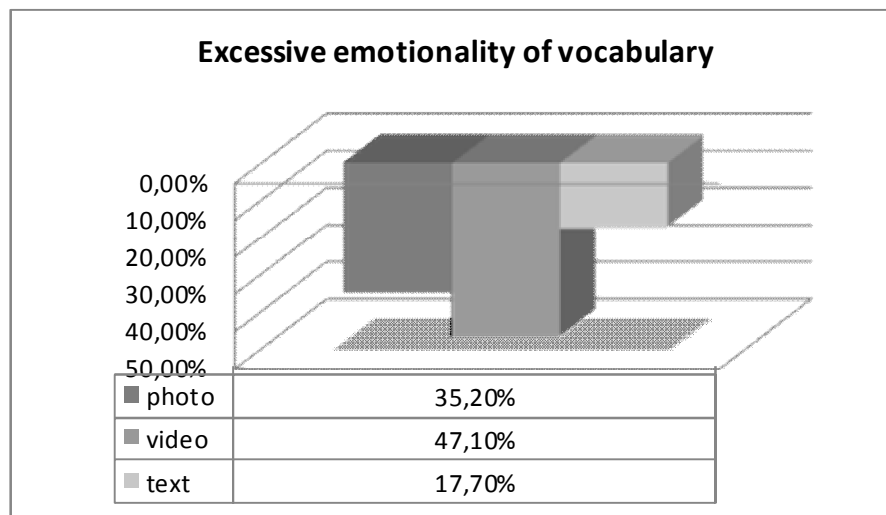


Fig. 4

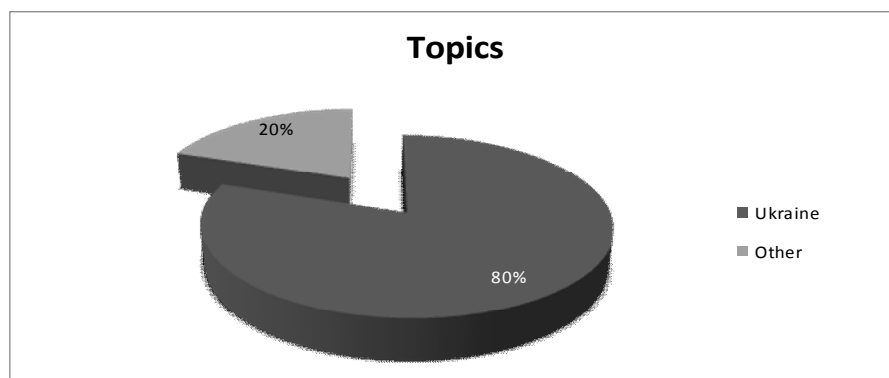


Fig. 5

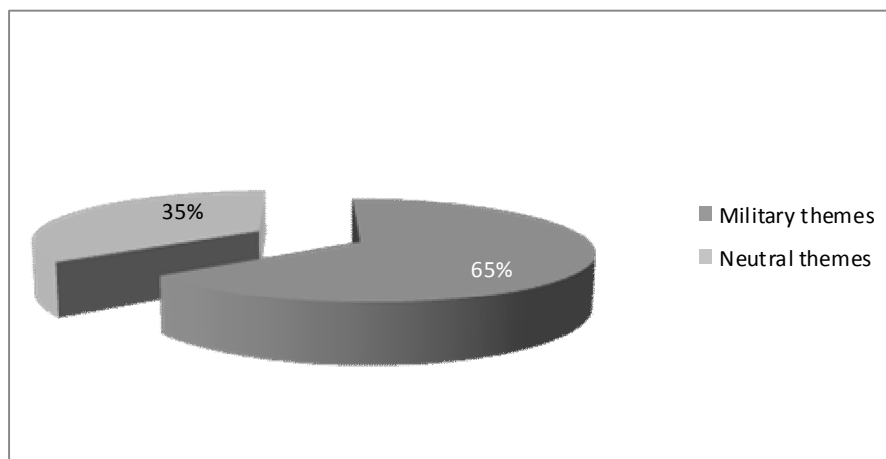


Fig. 6

According to fake observations, events from Ukraine or with Ukrainians were very often mentioned, as a percentage it turned out that 80 % of the topics of fake media reports concerned Ukraine, and the remaining 20 % were on other topics (see Fig. 5).

The fakes disseminated through mass media and social networks contained 65 % of the information about the war in Ukraine or the Ukrainian military men (see Figure 6), and the fascists, the Nazis much less, were mentioned for comparison with the Ukrainian servicemen. Slightly more than a third of the materials (35 %) concerned other topics.

Conclusions. In fact, information war is not a completely new phenomenon as it can be traced back to ancient history, but with the development of technology, the means and tools of information war have modified greatly.

The emotionality of fake publications, active coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the topic of Ukraine in general are attempts to enhance enmity and attempts to divert attention from their own problems and the much more significant events, taking place in Ukraine.

To counter the spread of false media messages, it is necessary to find fakes and debunk them by verifying information, training professionals who cannot be manipulated, and, most importantly, raising the awareness of the target audience through training and the development of critical thinking.

REFERENCES

1. Burnos T. Breedlove in Kiev : results. Access mode: <http://m.golos-ameriki.ru/a/bridlove-kyevresults/2536150.html>.
2. Gorbachev S. PROMETHEUS. Critical thinking for educators. Media Literacy Section, 2017. Access mode: https://edx.prometheus.org.ua/assets/courseware/23b3c2511591b71c5bd90405399da416/asset-v1:CZ+CTFT101+2017_T3+type@asset+block/%D0% % B5% D0% BA% D1% 86% D1% 96% D1% 8F_25_% D0% BA% D0% BE% D0% BD% D1% 81% D0% BF% D0% B5% D0% BA% D1% 82.pdf
3. Kosyuk O. M. Theory of mass communication. Textbook. Lutsk, Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, 2012.
4. Lavnikovich D. Fakes as a new media reality. Access mode: <http://mediakritika.by/article/3573/feyki-kak-novaya-media-realnost>.
5. Media literacy in Ukrainian society: Trust, but check. K., Pictorik, 2017.
6. Minchenko O. Fear and hatred in the network : a review of sites that spread fakes and rumours. Access mode: <http://watcher.com.ua/2014/09/26/strah-i-nenavyst-v-merezhi-ohlyad-saytiv-scho-poshyryuyut-feyky-ta-chutky>.
7. Mudra I. The concept of “fake” and its types in the media. TV and radio journalism. 2016. Edition 15. Access mode: http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Tir_2016_15_27
8. Saprykin O. A. Fake as an instrument of information war against Ukraine. Library science. Document science. Informology. 2016. No. 1. P. 87-94.
9. Feller M. D. Basic requirements for the structure and text of the message (standards, recommendations). Access mode: <http://journlib.univ.kiev.ua/index.php?act=article&article=127>

Христина Білогораць

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ НЕПРАВДИВИХ МЕДІАПОВІДОМЛЕНЬ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ РОСІЙСЬКИХ ФЕЙКІВ ПРО УКРАЇНУ)

Інформаційні війни вже давно використовують як повноцінну зброю проти ворога, при цьому застосовують і маніпуляції, і фейкові повідомлення. Методи при поширенні неправдивих медіаповідомлень в їхніх авторів бувають абсолютно різними, проте мета практично завжди однакова – змусити цільову аудиторію, яка споживає інформацію, повірити і потрапити під вплив.

Науковці визначили три основні елементи медійного ланцюжка: автор повідомлення – канал передавання – одержувач повідомлення. За М. Мак-Люеном медійні канали передавання інформації є технічним продовженням природніх каналів: радіо (слуховий), друкована періодика

(зоровий), телебачення (поєднання вокального та візуального), та інтернет-ЗМК (поєднання слухового, зорового та візуального).

Отже, варто зважати на те, якими способами поширюють фейки – через фото-, відео-матеріали чи лише за допомогою текстів. Дуже часто використовують два, або інколи і три канали поширення, адже відео може супроводжувати текст і фото до нього, тому такий поділ потрібно вважати умовним.

Проаналізувавши неправдиві повідомлення з російськомовного сегменту медіа можна зробити висновки щодо використання основних критеріїв оцінювання за професійними журналістськими стандартами публікацій. До уваги бралася емоційність текстів, яка була умовно поділена на дві групи – “надмірна емоційність” та “помірна нейтральність”. Стосовно надмірної емоційності текстів було визначено, що вона найбільше поширена у відео, трохи менше на фото, і зовсім небагато у текстах. Досліджено тематику фейків російськомовного сегменту медіа – переважна більшість стосувалася України, а саме – воєнних питань.

Зазвичай, автори неправдивих медіаповідомлень мають мету дестабілізувати ситуацію, змусити цільову аудиторію повірити в нісенітниці та поводитись прогнозовано, відвернути увагу від власних проблем.

Ключові слова: фейк, ЗМІ, медіа, медіаповідомлення, маніпуляції, інформаційні війни.