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WHAT IS NEW IN FAKE NEWS?

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What is new?

1. The 'fake news' phenomenon is a reflection of the increase in propaganda and subsequent fall in credibility of the mass media, presenting certain peculiarities with regard to other online content. Yet it is precisely the act of being online that turns traditional propaganda into 'fake news'.

2. Content is the informative aspect in which misinformation can be identified, the only place in which it is possible to find discordances between the reality and its representation. Although, this task is not easy when it concerns information created or altered from an original piece of news by an individual and then distributed without reference to its origin or foundation. What makes fake news powerful is the difficulty of distinguishing it from reality and the way in which it is designed to suit particular receptive domains.

3. The most obvious example of the above is the distribution of fake news on online platforms. The communication infrastructure, platforms and culture behind these situations do not only affect the volume of information and speed at which, in this case disinformation, spreads, but also its content.

4. The fact that technology is affecting information is not a new phenomenon. The invention of the printing press revolutionized the world of knowledge and Renaissance society and in the 19th century, its derivative, the steam printer, sped up and expanded the printing network, allowing for newspapers to be distributed further afield, and for the creation of the telegraph that opened up a national communication network that broke down local borders to information. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that "just as the industrial revolution produced a profound change in society, as a result of developments in the production cycle and the life of workers, the transformation in the field of communications is leading major cultural and social transformation today". *

5. Information technologies have set off a revolution in the shape of public opinion. In online society, information is not only the prime commodity of economic production but also of social organization and governance. "The technological revolution centred on information has transformed our way of thinking, producing, consuming, selling, managing, communicating, living, waging war and making love". †

6. This has provoked an imbalance between the symbolic and the material. The symbolic is society's culture that changes extremely quickly, and the material is the economic and political system that advances slowly and is hard to change; they are not looking to move at the same pace, but to manage to understand each other. As a result, a number of questions are raised, which discuss the establishment of a balance between the massive influx and speed of information and basic individual rights, in areas such as the ownership of mass media, data storage (especially when regarding personal data), anonymity, the importance of the physical space of the messenger when faced with the localization of servers, and the nature of the truth and its legal and practical enforceability.

7. Although the internet and mobiles are the two main technological developments concerned, within them there exists an ecosystem of complementary tools, including social networks and their algorithms, which condition social and informative dynamics and introduce a series of changes to the traditional concept of reality.

Fiction and Reality

8. While the transformation that we are describing occurs in a digital context, it has consequences further afield. For a long time the digital world has been considered a false, less authentic version of reality; as if the online world were no more than a distorted reflection of the

* Benedicto XVI, Mensaje para la XLV Jornada Mundial de las Comunicaciones Sociales, 2011. Available in: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day.html (consulted 25/01/2018)

† Castells, M. *La era de la información: Economía, sociedad y cultura*. Volume 3. Alianza Editorial. Madrid, 1999. Pp. 13

offline, like the myth of Plato's cave.

9. This perception is not uncommon. Many people still think that what happens on the internet is not completely real; like in Las Vegas, what happens on the internet stays on the internet. As such, social consequences affect those that live in the internet, millennials, digital natives, and the lives of those that use the internet as they can have not been majorly affected. However, the impact of the internet in reality is universal, and even affects those who have never used the technology in their life. It directly affects the workplace as well as public opinion, and has already changed the way that people think and behave in the world around them. All things virtual are also real, sometimes more so than real life itself, by underscoring perceptions and the behavior that results from them.

10. The third element to enter into this equation with the virtual and the physical is the fictional. A clear example of the breakdown of the lines of fiction and reality can be observed in DAESH's communications strategy. By consciously imitating video games and blockbusters, they generate attention, creating a humanized image of the terrorist and a depersonalized image of victims*. By contrast, traditional media does not reflect the consequences of their barbarism in all its harshness.

11. As a result, public figures discover that their fictional characters are even more influential "actors" than their physical selves, generating confusion that leads us to another question: what happens when a fictional character lies?†

12. Humor can have a similar effect. Internet users are able to build different perceptions, by creating fake satirical accounts for public figures for example, which directly affect the image of the person imitated and can sometimes end up confusing the public and the mass media.‡ The destruction of the barriers between the real and the unreal generates new question: is it possible to narrate reality through imitation, when it has not actually happened yet, or is it possible to "adorn" reality in order to transmit an image, more real than reality itself, to those that are not present at the time?

The weight of images

13. Images acquire a new level of prominence in this new ecosystem, introducing different aspects to the effects exposed in Giovanni Sartori's work, *Homovidens*§. Images are the main material through which information is transmitted. They are read in a passive way. Whereas the assimilation of a word requires knowledge of idiom and a language, images are processed automatically: they are seen, and that is enough. Man is converted into a passive receptor, incapable of transforming audiovisual impulses received passively through the underlying concepts in the images. Their capacity to understand becomes stunted; the mind needs written culture and verbal language to form judgments, but instead it remains submerged in colours, shapes, sequences and background noises. Together these factors impede the transformation of information into knowledge, of images into judgments and ideas, hindering the noble task of thought.

14. The resultant progressive dilution of the capacity for abstraction means that people receive an infinite amount of news, and become confused by the lack of structure on which to configure information, without an "intellectual grounding" on which to place the building blocks of daily life. The *homo sapien* is characterized by its capacity for reflection, for abstract thought.

* Lesaca, Javier. *Armas de seducción masiva*. Peninsula, Atalaya, 2017

† Support for Kevin Spacey, or his incarnation of the President of the United States of America in the series, House of Cards, created a lot of controversy. The case of the wrestler, Hulk Hogan, went to North American courts, and eventually achieved a favourable sentence, based on the distinction between the acts of the fictional character, inside and outside the ring, and the person that represented it.

‡ In different social media platforms false accounts are rife, and whether or not they warn of their parodic nature, they create a stereotype of the character that they are imitating, using humour. Some of them end up having more of a following than the real accounts of the person that they are parodying. In Spanish politics, notable examples include @EspeonzaAguirre and @NanianoRajoy

§ Sartori, Giovanni. *Homovidens*, Taurus, 1989

However it is increasingly turning into *homo viden*: a creature that looks but does not think, that sees but does not understand.

15. Audiovisual culture is even changing how we receive written texts. They are received in a different way; their function goes no further than explaining something that has been experienced as an image, which does not always correspond with the images of the event, but by accompanying the narrative, they surround it with a series of positive and negative connotations, depending on the intention of the author. Words are converted into images that, like other information, are processed in an immediate way, instead of being reflected on, which is ultimately insufficient in terms of informing the general public.*

16. When information is reduced to simple stimuli that affect the recipient[†], man responds more to persuasion and less to information. The prominence of the image also leads to a difficulty in explaining complex concepts that require a certain level of abstraction. The stimuli to which people respond are almost exclusively audiovisual, with the presumption of truth, and they only react to images that manage to create a reaction; man cannot avoid being converted into an emotional being. It is for this reason that “fake news” tends to be “news with politically-charged content, circulated without guarantees (...) and that is legitimized by an apparent authority.”[‡] The emotional content in rumors is more important than the factual and thus provokes emotional actions, normally hatred or slander.

17. Consequently, the mass distribution of images has decisively contributed to the success of ‘fake news’, by giving information the appearance of infallibility[§]. Communication is converted into a spectacle, rewarding simple concepts, misleading headlines, anything that draws the reader’s attention (click bait), although it can end up being reductionist. In the ecosystem of post-truth form reigns over substance, and images over ideas; there is a search for simple answers that divide the world into black and white, yes and no, and in which there are no nuances.

Distorting reality

18. Another factor that distorts the transmission of information is the confusion of opinion and information, or even worse, the disguise of opinion as information through simple techniques like the use of adjectives in texts based on facts. By blurring the lines between different types of truth, lies can easily arise. Able to present themselves as logical truths, based on facts, they seem to be immune to the subjectivity of interpretations. As such opinions are transmitted as facts and claim the presumption of the veracity given to facts that are “beyond agreement and consensus, and as such the discussions in their regard – exchanges of opinion based on correct information – will not be a means of determining them. Unwelcome opinions can be discussed, rejected or adopted but unwelcome facts are stubbornly fixed, unless they are outright lies.”^{**} As well as being founded on fact, opinions should respect general logic. Another common technique of misinformation is when hypothesis is taken as axiom and people come to, supposedly objective, conclusions with hypothetical basis. It is at this point that

* In this regard it is important to reconsider the famous phrase by E.M. Foster which said that “Books are facts to be read (which is annoying as that takes a long time); it is the only way of knowing what they contain. Some wild tribes eat them, but in the West reading is the only technique known”.

[†] Schwartz, Tony. *La respuesta emocional*. Ed. Liderazgo democrático 2. Quito, 2001. p. 37.

[‡] Dovifat, E. *Política de la información*. EUNSA, Pamplona, 1980. P. 406

[§] Ana Tudela reminds us in “Comunicación Propaganda y ‘fakenews’: con nosotros mucho antes de la tecnología”

https://retina.elpais.com/retina/2017/12/28/tendencias/1514460844_757457.html

(consulted 25/01/2018) how “Images of the dying cormorant coated in petrol that were emitted and published during the Gulf War of 1991, released after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, were an assemblage that fit like a glove in the story of the eco-terrorism practiced by Saddam Hussein. Ornithologists then went on to explain, when the French and Italian media (L’Évenement and Il Manifesto) decided to carry out fact-checking of the images that had spread across the globe, that it would not have been possible for neither ITN’s nor CNN’s television cameras to capture the birds while the Iraqis were there, nor are there cormorant chicks in the Persian Gulf in January.”

^{**} Arendt, H. “Verdad y política”, en *Entre el pasado y el futuro. Ocho ejercicios sobre la reflexión política*, Península, Barcelona. 1993. Pp. 253

opinion is converted into a farce; facts become confused with opinion and hypothesis becomes axiom.

19. Perspective is not just a common device but also a necessary one in terms of the process of representing reality. It is a fact that reality, and its subsequent transmission, very much depends on the eye of the beholder, and their respective view, whether that be faraway, nearby, filtered, complete or partial. The information generated is conditioned not just by the subjectivity of the issuer but also by their intention. They do not just select the facts, ignoring the unfavorable ones, but also manipulate them so that they support the position of the journalist, editor or issuer; for example, by exposing the entirety of a statement, or only part of it, or by accompanying news with images that support the opinion of the editor although they may not correspond to what actually happened (the sole face of disgust in a crowd of smiling people, or a photo of the President of the Government as they are informed of an incident of party corruption, even though the news item is not directly linked with it).

20. The phenomenon of *framing* can be viewed in the same vein. The term refers to the influence of the way in which a topic is framed by the issuer on the recipient's perception. The content and words selected by the issuer set and reinforce frames, which create a mental framework henceforth directing volitional, emotional and intellectual life in a clear but subtle way.*

21. The same with occurs with analogical reduction, which reduces a whole reality to just one of its components: attributing the defects of members to an entire group or the defects of a group to one individual, or generalizing an isolated event, making the anecdote into a category. The confusion of selected parts with the whole, as is often done when using general terms such as class, race or people, is also an effect mechanism used in misinformation.

22. Repetition also contributes to an appearance of veracity. Although according to studies carried out at the end of the 70s, the quantity of information was not decisive in forming public opinion; the reliability of the source and the quality of the information were valued more. However, the lack of clarity in the authority of sources and the confusion of information that we see today reinforces the role of repetition. Repetition leads to retention and once something is retained, its ties with the original source loosen and it is distributed as a fact in its own right.

23. All these forms of manipulation are reinforced by the new dynamics of communication; the brevity, the importance of the image and the ease of re-sharing content, typical on social networks, all favor the spread of these techniques that distort reality.

Times

24. Another factor that has contributed to the success of "fake news" is the new idea of time. In the world of information, journalistic time, from day to day, or televised time, from one TV update to the next, have been replaced with an expectation for constant updates, which sometimes even tries to predict reality[†] in order to attract a bigger audience in the battle for attention. Audiences are increasingly demanding and expect immediate responses, forgetting that reality is a process of constant renewal; they cannot wait to find out and spread news in real time. It is important to bear in mind the effects that this sort of dissemination has on our own image.

25. Resultantly, information is developed as soon as it is produced, without being checked or reflected upon. It is distributed automatically according to what is suggested by the title or image that heads it up, and by the person that published it, regardless of whether they had time to check the content or not. The dynamic thus generated rewards speed over quality, creating informative cycles that often do not even last twenty-four hours, exhausting information before it has time to be published in the written press the following day.

* Lakoff, G. *Don't think an elephant*, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004

† In Spain, especially on Wikipedia, a current trend involves suggesting that people are dead when they are actually in good health. For example, the nurse who contracted Ebola was cremated and then miraculously came back to life again.

26. The problem of this immediacy is that it leaves a mark. While the storage and archiving of information means that it becomes transient, thus limiting its impact within certain informative cycles after a couple of days, the infinity of storage capacity and its availability means that statements can be recalled in seconds from the respective website months or even years afterwards. These contradictions are also subject to mass diffusion and sometimes, when seen out of context, can be subject to “fake news”.

Transparency and Information Overload

27. As well as speed, it is also important to consider the obligation to accept transparency. We live in a transparent world in which, whether we like it or not, everything we do is known about. It is useless and almost impossible to try and avoid people finding out about something; even the most intimate of details are ultimately made public. The renowned Gospel passage warning that “nothing is hid, that shall not be made manifest”^{*} has gained a whole new level of relevance, now in real time.

28. Information has stopped being a scarce commodity, only available to the privileged few, to one that the whole world has access to. For each event or reality that arises, thousands of analyses, opinions, version and data appear. They accumulate in a chaotic way on social networks and are distributed with an almost infinite capillarity through various terminals to which citizens are connected. The receiver has the power to quickly access infinite sources of information, receives a greater quantity of information and channels, and selects this content according to quick, not always considered, impulses, which often involve subsequent reflection.

29. There is also no direct relationship between the quality of communication and the quantity of information. The act of exposing lots of data does not equal transparency; in the current context the overload of information actually hinders communication. Despite the abundance of information, certain realities manage to go unnoticed, benefitting from the simpler and more eye-catching aspects of others. Revel highlights that “The abundance of information is less to do with the importance of the event, than with the ease of noticing it”[†] and, moreover, how spectacular it is. Data is ultimately insufficient and often ends up becoming a source of misinformation that hides the reality that either hides the reality that it is trying to show, or offers a different vision. One of the most subtle forms of post-truth is radical transparency. In the era of information overload, the truth is less about revealing everything and more about setting things out clearly. This effect can only be achieved when the context is given and data is processed, creating a story. However, again this process enters involves the aforementioned risks associated with representing reality.

30. In the era of streaming, nothing is what it appears at first sight. There is always more information than there seems to be, which provides new visions and data that contrast with those already in circulation.

31. As a result there is a complete overload of information and thus it becomes essential to attract attention over other items in the sea of other emotionally relevant stimuli.

32. In this environment in which information floods in from all sides, facts and data are treated as relative to one another. As a result the process of showing facts to correct errors in information is an insufficient means of correcting these errors.

Perception and Cognitive Dissonance

33. Communication is performed through perception; the individual’s ways of receiving and processing information received. Daniel Kahneman[‡] identifies two fundamental forms of communication: the first, a quick, instinctive and emotional system and the second a slower, deliberative and logical system. Information technologies have radically altered the balance between these two forms of perception.[§] Emotional thought is constructed around logical

^{*} Gospels, Luke 8:17, Gospels, Mark 4:22, Gospels, Matthew 10:26

[†] Revel, JF. *Comment les démocraties finissent*, Grasset, 1983. pp. 163-165.

[‡] Kahneman, D. *Think Quick, Think slow*. Debate. 2015

[§] Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows. What the internet is doing to our brains*. W. W. Norton & Company.

shortcuts, known as cognitive bias, a psychological effect that diverts the thought process to distort interpretations, leading to false judgments and illogical and irrational conclusions. These bias, or fallacies, correspond with intuition and affect our actions and decision-making abilities. Perception is also determined by the circumstances of the individual receiver that determines which stimuli are received. As Llano points out “the base of reality cannot be automatically accessed by simply applying a rational method. Gaining such access requires an arduous education fuelled by a long tradition of thought”^{*}. The meaning of communication is not just determined by the content of messages but also by what the recipient has taken from previous experiences with the stimuli. Messages are no longer the starting point, but the final product, as they take into account the environment in which people experience stimuli. As Schwartz highlights “instead of being the end goal the public is now a target work force, their feedback is converted into part of the original message”[†] ; this theory on the resonance of information suggests that the efficacy of a message largely depends on the environment in which it is received. Information affects the individual’s internal map of emotions and it is according to these parameters that they, to varying degrees, accept or reject it. In this way, ideas are the basis of a person’s conscious behavior, whereas beliefs allow for semi-reflective behavior, influenced by the psychological environment, which determines understanding and thus leads to conditioned reflection.

34. The search for security leads us to judge facts and filter them according to whether or not they fit with a previous theory held, which begs the question: do people really like the truth or, in reality, do they want or need to be lied to? Arendt said that “Lies often end up much more verisimilar and attractive than reality”[‡]. This statement also has a logical explanation. Facts and data are selected on demand, thus reinforcing an individual’s position and serving as fuel to attack the opposition. In this way, reality is simplified through simple, even binary, answers that help to deal with complexity.

35. In the post-truth society, the appealing power of language is reinforced in order to prevent the recipient from forming their own opinion and to make them accept reality as it has been presented to them, as fact. This is done by appealing to emotional and instinctive sentiments that are changed and influenced according to imagination.

36. Technology has created access to a wealth of information, which has on the one hand caused unpredictable, non-linear consumption of information that allows for a selection of direct and indirect, institutional and personal sources of information. Individuals create their own informative ecosystem or personal world, which exists in parallel to other personal worlds and is a breeding ground for post-truth. This ecosystem is formed of auto-referential pieces of information that in the best part conserve a sort of internal consistency but that do not require any type of consistency with earlier texts, nor with reality. The result is a heavily biased perception of those who do not share the same informative ecosystem.

37. The plurality of the mass media, which was traditionally viewed as a meeting point and guarantee of objectivity, creates a false impression of being informed. This bias causes specialization. If an individual only focuses on a particular item of information they can take what they want from it in a biased manner. However, this process prevents them from gaining a general overview of the problem, something which is highly important if they are to understand its reality.

38. There have never been so many possibilities to access information. The new and varied sources of information allow for the reinforcement of individual ideas and thus give force to confirmation bias, in which attention and credibility are given to information that fuels one’s own beliefs. As has been shown previously, this human and universal mechanism is becoming

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^{*} Llano, A. “Claves filosóficas del actual debate cultural”, Humanitas, 4. Santiago de Chile. 1996.

[†] Schwartz, Tony. *The Emotional Response*. Ed. Democratic Leadership 2. Quito, 2001. p. 17.

[‡] Arendt H. *Truth and lies in politics*, Página Indómita, 2017. Cited by Daniel Gascón in Hannah Arendt y la verdad and truth and lies. Available at: <http://www.letraslibres.com/espana-mexico/politica/hannah-arendt-y-la-verdad-y-la-mentira> (consulted 25/01/2018)

increasingly powerful. Firstly, as a result of the increased variety of options in the mass media that allows people to choose platforms that best suit their interests. And secondly as a result of the algorithms used by personal communication tools such as WhatsApp and other social networks, which detect the preferences of users, displaying them more often and thus further reinforcing the knowledge and support of related topics. As such, while there may be more information than ever accessible, giving the illusion of more open debate, in reality the majority is either not accessed, or accessed by those convinced by its limited credibility. Instilled bias also causes people to pay attention to but a few elements of information and disregard the rest, when forming opinions and taking subsequent decisions, a process which could be called “truth on demand”. Undesirable or unwelcome facts can be ignored, in favor of personalized narratives. Information and corrections are selected in order to prove that a particular opinion is correct and that alternative ones are wrong.* This can even happen with verified information, as it is shared much more when it reinforces previous ideas than when it questions them.† When data is on the side of the individual, they share it. By contrast, when it contradicts them, they reject and ignore it. After all it is hard for people to admit that they were wrong and that their beliefs were fantastical.

39. Social environments also determine how information is received, in particular when it allows people to identify with a group and hide what may damage, or not coincide with, the group’s position. The bandwagon effect, for example, is based on the need to belong and the shame of being different. Hence, people trust the opinion of the majority, creating an echo-chamber where opinions are mutually reinforced. The bandwagon effect is usually fuelled by the fallacy of polling, which hides its absolute dependence on how polls have been carried out and who they have asked, under the guise of data.

Fragmentation and Polarization

40. The confirmation bias triggers fragmentation between informative bubbles ‡ of parallel informative worlds, which makes it difficult for common spaces for debate to exist. Public opinion is understood as a framework for communication of varied types and on different platforms that underpins society. However, the general public sphere is currently being reduced to small highly mobilized blocks isolated from one another, which David Roberts has called the era of “tribal epistemologies”. §

41. The possibility of communicating and being informed in a selective, almost personalized way, which is principally facilitated through technology and social networks, creates micro-communities that have very little to do with one another. They are closed groups of mutual conviction in which confirmation leads to greater entrenchment of beliefs, and a subsequent suspicion of anyone who holds a different point of view, even if their claims are supported by objective facts. And this effect is furthered as members of the group share content in an acritical manner.** A lie repeated hundreds of times in social media quickly becomes reality in its respective circles of trust. It has never been easier to understand what other people think, and despite this, people have never been less active in trying to find out. For although it is easier to find out others intentions, it is also easier to reinforce one’s own and ultimately remain in a comfort zone of opinion: attempting to learn new things through people who hold similar views. This process creates a false sense of reality. When people always communicate within the same circles, they run the risk of having a distorted idea of reality.

* Sunstein, C., Scala, A., Quattrociocchi, W. Echo Chambers on Facebook. 2016. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2795110> (consulted 25/01/2018)

† Shin, Jieun, Thorson, Kjerstin. Partisan Selective Sharing: The Biased Diffusion of Fact-Checking Messages on Social Media. Journal of Communication. Vol 67, 2017. Available : <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcom.12284/full> (consulted 25/01/2018)

‡ Parisier, Eli. The filter bubble. The Penguin Press. New York. 2011.

§ Robert, David. Vox.com

** According to Forbes magazine 59% of the news shared online is shared WITHOUT having been read previously. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2016/08/08/59-percent-of-you-will-share-this-article-without-even-reading-it/&refURL=https://t.co/9QQBhdD9VR&referrer=https://t.co/9QQBhdD9VR#ce573742a648> (consulted 25/01/2018)

42. It is important to highlight that within these self-referential micro-communities the possibility of knowing and putting oneself in the place of the other encourages more radical positions and a lack of dialogue, hindering empathy^{*}. Together these two elements promote polarization and allow for the establishment of a single system of values, at least within closed groups that end up silencing and expelling dissidents. As different informative ecosystems interact they often clash, which in itself feeds this polarization, as the credibility of each radical position decreases according to their opposite's views, again fuelling the radical discourse of the other.[†]

Hyperconnectivity and other actors in communication[‡]

43. Information sources that are traditionally found in the mass media have also suffered the impact of ICTs. Technology does not just affect the way that information is distributed, but the entire communicative process of collecting, storing, organizing and distributing information. This impact affects the role of the citizen; they go from being a mere recipient of information to a major player in the communicative process. The aphorism that in communication "everything is done for the reader, without the reader" is no longer so relevant and the general informative hierarchy comes into question.

44. The number of sources has increased as it has become easier to create information sources and as citizens have become involved in the process. In the same way as other sectors have done, the informative process has suffered from the changes in the models of intermediation. It has become easier and more accessible without the traditional gatekeepers and regulators.

45. There are too many sources and analysis methods as well as a general lack of authoritative references, which whether or not they are accepted as interpreters of complexity, ultimately become suspicious. As a result of this abundance and diversity of information, the media is generalized and loses its referential character and authority. Moreover, the errors made by traditional media sources because of the aforementioned immediacy of the informative process, and the confusion of sources, have furthered the decline of the credibility of the media.[§]

46. In this way individuals join the media, often on equal terms. Personal information spaces are created in which citizens take shelter; faced with floods of content, they have a reduced and manageable, reliable and secure informative universe dominated by relationships with those who are closest to them in their personal and professional lives, and ideological views.

47. As they share information, citizens hyperconnected with the world, and with one another, become the protagonists of communication, questioning the differential concept of the mass media. The internet is increasingly used by citizens as a source of information, in fact 46% of European Union citizens followed the news on social networks in 2016^{**}, and when they do so, they do not distinguish between the original, more credible, sources of information and the rest of the content from family and friends^{††}. In fact 79% view the latter as a credible source

^{*} Sunstein, C. R. The law of group polarization. Journal of political philosophy 10, 175–195 (2002).

[†] <https://www.buzzfeed.com/charliwarzel/2017-year-the-internet-destroyed-shared-reality> (consulted 25/01/2018)

[‡] Arrese, A. Política post-factual y sociedad post-mediática, Researchgate 2017.

[§] President Trump has used some of these real or apparent failures to award prizes to fake news https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2018-01-18/trump-fake-news-awards-noticias-falsas-premios_1508101 (consulted 25/01/2018)

An example can be consulted at: <https://theintercept.com/2017/12/09/the-u-s-media-yesterday-suffered-its-most-humiliating-debacle-in-ages-now-refuses-all-transparency-over-what-happened> (consulted 25/01/2018)

^{**} Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016, available at: <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Digital%2520News%2520Report%25202016.pdf> (consulted 25/01/2018)

^{††} According to the report "I saw the news on Facebook" by the Reuters Institute for the Study of

of information, followed by the views of academic experts (72%), employees of businesses (60%), and businesses whose services they use (59%). Information from journalists (48%), CEOs (43%), well-known online figures (42%)* and celebrities (29%) are at the bottom of the list.[†]

48. The weight that interpersonal communication gains through social networks has led to the mass creation of bots, anonymous, automated and sometimes fake accounts that act as individuals online and increase the massive distribution of specific information, aiming to create currents of public opinion, acceptance or rejection of people or ideas, in an artificial way.[‡] By giving off the impression that they have widespread support, these features create a bandwagon effect, and others accept the ideas shared by this apparent majority. This generates herd behavior, by which individuals neglect personal responsibility and submit themselves to the will of the collective; they imitate one another and deny discrepancy. The redundancy of misinformation, especially when it is found in the mass media, is set up as a “belief”, an unquestionable basis whose denial implies the risk of being disqualified.

49. As shown above, manageable and accessible tools are now widely used, allowing for the mass dissemination of information, which in turn impacts on the decentralization of information. However, “propaganda is still in the hands of those who can really produce it, whether that be States, governments, groups in power. (...) Propaganda is only effective if it is made in a professional way and those who have the ability to make propaganda are not individuals, but organizations, whether they be state organizations or otherwise.” Although technology has empowered the individual and accelerated the exchange of ideas, it has also redistributed power such that it is concentrated in the hands of the few.

Journalism at the University of Oxford, in 2017 over half of British people obtained information from social networks. And of this half, over 50% do not remember the correct information source.

* The use of influencers is not something new. In the First World War, the British government developed a programme to influence public opinion through popular world figures in the media, politics and business. By pressurising the US government in this way, they managed to convince the country to come out of neutrality and get directly involved in the war, under the premise that “It is better to influence those that can influence others than directly address the masses”.

[†] Edelman Trust Barometer 2016

[‡] <http://agendapublica.elperiodico.com/desde-rusia-bots/>