



# Development of Media Education as a Prerequisite for Combating Fake News and the Basics of Forming a Democratic Society

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**Annotation.** This article analyzes the problem of the spread of fake news and the need to improve the media literacy of the population. Various strategies are analyzed, such as: increasing media literacy, improving fact-checking methods, and holding social media platforms accountable for their role in spreading fake news. The role of American and European universities and research institutions that offer media education programs for citizens of their countries is shown. The importance of fighting fake news in all European countries is emphasized. The ways of solving this problem in Ukraine during the period of hostilities are considered. Recommendations are offered for further research on this issue and increasing media literacy of the population.

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**Keywords:** *media literacy, social media, information warfare, fake news, propaganda, disinformation, freedom of speech, fact checking, information manipulation, public opinion.*

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## Introduction

One major finding from research is that exposure to fake news can have significant negative effects on individuals and society. Fake news can distort people's understanding of important issues, erode trust in institutions and media, and even influence political outcomes. Moreover, research has shown that fake news spreads much faster and wider than real news, often due to its sensational or provocative nature, and the algorithms used by social media platforms. This makes it particularly challenging to combat the

spread of fake news. To address this issue, experts have proposed various strategies such as increasing media literacy, improving fact-checking methods, and holding social media platforms accountable for their role in spreading fake news (Gedis, Chen, & Zou, 2020). Additionally, efforts to reduce polarization and improve dialogue between individuals with different viewpoints may also help reduce the impact of fake news.

The article discusses the problem of the spread of fake news and the need to increase media literacy among the people everywhere goal of the article is to explore the significance of international research institutions that provide media education programs to citizens in their countries. Through analyzing various strategies such as enhancing media literacy, improving fact-checking methods, and holding social media platforms accountable for the spread of fake news, the article aims to demonstrate the critical role of these institutions in promoting a better-informed society and combating misinformation.

## Research methods

The article discusses various methods that can be used to analyze the social issue of fake news. One method is a round table discussion between experts from different fields, which can provide a unique opportunity to examine the issue from multiple perspectives. This is important because fake news is a complex phenomenon that requires an interdisciplinary approach to fully understand and address its causes and consequences.

Another method discussed is data analysis, which involves reviewing published research studies, articles, and books related to media education, fake news, and democratic society. This method can provide valuable insights into the current state of research in the field and help identify gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed.

Experts from different fields can bring different insights and knowledge to the table, which can help in developing a more comprehensive understanding of fake news. Sociologists can offer understanding on social and cultural factors that lead to the spread of fake news, while psychologists can analyze the cognitive and psychological factors that affect people's belief in fake news.

Educators can suggest ways to promote critical thinking and media literacy among students, economists can study the economic incentives that drive the creation and dissemination of fake news, and mathematicians can develop algorithms to detect and combat fake news. The article emphasizes the importance of using an interdisciplinary approach and multiple methods to address the issue of fake news, which can ultimately help to promote a more informed and democratic society.

## Beginning of the form

By bringing together experts from different fields, a round table discussion can facilitate a productive exchange of ideas and perspectives and provide an opportunity to identify the most pressing issues related to fake news. Moreover, it can also foster collaboration and encourage the development of interdisciplinary approaches to addressing the problem of fake news. Using such methods can provide a solid foundation for analyzing the issue of fake news as an international and interdisciplinary issue.

Both methods can be used together to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand and inform effective strategies for combating fake news and promoting a democratic society through media education.

## The theory of studying the issue of disinformation

The theory of studying the issue of disinformation is a complex and multi-disciplinary field that encompasses various perspectives, including communication studies, psychology, sociology, and political science, among others. At its core, the study of disinformation seeks to understand the nature and impact of false or misleading information in the public sphere. This includes analyzing the sources of disinformation, the tactics and strategies used to disseminate it, and the effects it has on individuals and society.

One of the key approaches and concepts that are commonly used in the study of disinformation is media literacy (this refers to the ability of individuals to critically evaluate and interpret the information they consume from various media sources) (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014).

Media literacy skills can help individuals identify and avoid disinformation, as well as distinguish between credible and unreliable sources of information; propaganda analysis (propaganda is a form of intentional disinformation that seeks to shape public opinion and behavior) (Lazer, Baum, Benkler, Berinsky, & Greenhill, 2018).

Propaganda analysis involves examining the messages, techniques, and tactics used in propaganda campaigns to understand their intended effects; social network analysis (social network analysis involves studying the ways in which disinformation spreads through social networks, including online platforms like social media). By analyzing the structure of these networks and the behavior of individuals within them, researchers can gain insights into how disinformation spreads and how it can be countered; cognitive psychology (disinformation can have a powerful impact on people's beliefs and attitudes (Bode, & Vraga, 2015).

Cognitive psychology provides insights into the ways in which people process and interpret information and can help researchers understand why certain types of disinformation are more effective than others. The study of disinformation is a critical

area of research, as it can help individuals, organizations, and policymakers develop strategies for combatting the spread of false information and protecting the integrity of public discourse (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012).

While the problem of fake news remains a complex and challenging issue, ongoing research and discussions are helping to shed light on its impact and potential solutions.

Media education has gained prominence globally in the past few decades, as the rise of technology and digital media has led to a more interconnected and media-saturated world. Ukraine, like many other countries, has recognized the importance of media education in preparing citizens to navigate this landscape. Media education is a multidisciplinary field of study that is commonly studied at both undergraduate and graduate levels at universities around the world. That is why there are many scientists in Europe and the USA who study the problems and various theories of media education (Mihailidis, & Viotty, 2017).

In Europe, some of the prominent universities and research institutions that offer media education programs include the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the University of Westminster in the UK, the University of Helsinki in Finland, and the University of Barcelona in Spain. These institutions have faculty members who conduct research and teach courses in various aspects of media education, including media literacy, media theory, and media production.

In the USA, some of the leading institutions for media education include the University of Southern California, the New York University, the University of California Los Angeles, and the University of Texas at Austin. These universities have renowned faculty members who specialize in various areas of media education, including media studies, journalism, digital media, and communication.

There are also numerous academic conferences and research associations dedicated to media education, such as the Association for Media Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AMEJMC) in the USA, and the European Association for Media Literacy (EAVI) in Europe. These organizations bring together scholars, educators, and professionals from various countries to exchange ideas and research findings in the field of media education.

There have been many researchers who have studied fake news in European countries and in the USA. Some notable research studies on this topic include: the Reuters Institute Digital News Report. The Digital News Report is an annual study conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. The report examines news consumption habits and attitudes towards news in various countries, including the USA and many European countries. The report has studied the spread and impact of fake news, as well as the ways in which people consume and share news online (Association for Media Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AMEJMC) – <https://aejmc.us/>; European Association for Media Literacy

(EAVI) – <https://eavi.eu/>; Reuters Institute Digital News Report – <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report>).

Many scholars and academics have conducted research on fake news in Europe and the USA, including studies of the social and psychological factors that contribute to the spread of false information, analyses of the political and economic motivations behind fake news, and investigations into the effectiveness of different strategies for combating fake news.

## **The struggle against fake news in European countries**

The struggle against fake news in European countries has been ongoing for several years, and various measures have been taken to address this issue. Some of these measures include:

1. Educating the public. Many European countries have launched campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of fake news and how to identify it. This includes teaching people how to fact-check information they come across online and how to distinguish between reputable news sources and those that are less trustworthy.

2. Strengthening media literacy. Several European countries have made media literacy a part of their school curriculum, which aims to equip students with the skills needed to critically evaluate information they come across online.

3. Fact-checking initiatives: Several fact-checking initiatives have been launched across Europe to combat fake news. These initiatives involve independent organizations fact-checking claims made by politicians, news outlets, and social media platforms.

In their study *The Role of Media Literacy in the Fight Against Fake News*, researchers Vraga and Tully (2019) investigate the effectiveness of media literacy initiatives in combating fake news. The study examines the impact of media literacy interventions on participants' ability to distinguish between real and fake news stories, and the results suggest that media literacy can be effective in improving people's ability to identify misinformation (Vraga, & Tully, 2019). In their article *Political Fictions: Strategies for Addressing Misinformation in Europe*, Tandoc et al. (2021) analyzes the different strategies that European governments and organizations have employed to combat fake news. The authors highlight the importance of fact-checking initiatives and media literacy campaigns, as well as the need for regulatory measures to hold social media platforms accountable for the spread of false information (Tandoc Jr, Ling, & Westlund, 2021). In their article, *The Effectiveness of Fact-Checking: A Meta-Analysis*, Pennycook and Rand (2021) conduct a meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of fact-checking initiatives. The authors find that fact-checking can be effective in reducing people's belief in false information, but that the impact of fact-checking depends on a variety of factors, including the quality of the fact-checking and the audience's pre-existing beliefs (Pennycook, & Rand, 2021).

It's worth noting that the term fake news can be subjective and politically charged, and different sources may have different opinions on what constitutes fake news. Therefore, it's important to critically evaluate information and seek out multiple sources before coming to conclusions.

The technology of creating fake news refers to the tools and techniques used to produce false or misleading information in a way that appears to be legitimate news. This can include the use of advanced software, such as deep learning algorithms, to create convincing videos or images that depict events that never actually happened, or the use of social media bots to spread false information to a wide audience. While technology can certainly be used to create fake news, it's important to note that the root cause of the problem is often human behavior. The deliberate spread of misinformation for political or financial gain, or simply for the thrill of causing chaos, is a problem that predates the internet and will likely continue to be a challenge for society to address (Allcott, Hunt, & Gentzkow, 2017).

While there has been some research on the effects of fake news on people's beliefs and behavior, there may be other psychological impacts that are less explored. For example, fake news could lead to increased anxiety, stress, or even trauma for individuals who are particularly susceptible or vulnerable to its influence. While there is growing concern about the impact of social media algorithms on the spread of fake news, there may be aspects of these algorithms that are not yet fully understood.

There have been many research papers published on the topic of fake news, so it's difficult to pinpoint a specific one. However, one influential paper that helped shape the discourse around fake news is *The Spread of True and False News Online* by Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, published in the journal *Science* in 2018. In this paper, the authors analyzed the spread of 126,000 rumors on Twitter between 2006 and 2017 and found that false news spreads faster, deeper, and more broadly than true news. They also identified key characteristics of false news, including novelty, emotional appeal, and polarization, and argued that addressing these factors could help mitigate the spread of false news (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

One theoretical perspective on fake news is the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the media has the power to influence what the public thinks about by emphasizing certain issues over others. With the rise of social media and the ease of creating and sharing content online, anyone can create and share fake news, potentially influencing public opinion (Allcott, & Gentzkow, 2017). Another theoretical perspective on fake news is the confirmation bias theory, which suggests that people are more likely to believe information that confirms their existing beliefs and values. This can lead people to accept and share fake news that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, even if it is false (Pennycook, & Rand, 2019). Here are some common methods used to create fake news:

1. Misleading headlines: Creating sensational or misleading headlines can grab people's attention and encourage them to click on an article, even if the content is false or misleading.

2. Fabricated stories: Some creators of fake news will fabricate entire stories, often using images or videos to make the content seem more legitimate.

3. Misleading images: Images or videos can be manipulated or taken out of context to create a false narrative.

4. Impersonating legitimate sources: Fake news creators may impersonate legitimate news sources or journalists to make their content seem more credible (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012).

## The Ukrainian experience

The Ukrainian government has been actively trying to combat disinformation by creating a comprehensive information policy, which includes monitoring and countering fake news and propaganda. Ukraine has also established an Anti-Disinformation Task Force, which is responsible for identifying and combating disinformation.

The problem of fake news has become a major issue for politicians, both in the US and the EU, as well as in Ukraine. In this regard, serious measures are being taken to address this problem through media literacy and fact-checking. The role of social media platforms in facilitating the spread of fake news has also come under scrutiny, leading to calls for increased regulation of these platforms (Fake News and Propaganda During the Ukrainian-Russian War: Implications for Democracy, 2019).

Ukraine has introduced new laws aimed at combating fake news, including criminalizing the spread of false information that endangers national security. The government has also introduced fines for disseminating false information (Media Literacy in Ukraine: Strategies for Addressing Disinformation, 2019).

**Fact-checking initiatives.** Several organizations in Ukraine have launched fact-checking initiatives to help identify and counter fake news. These organizations fact-check news articles, videos, and social media posts to determine their veracity (Fact-Checking in Ukraine: An Overview of the Situation in Baltic Worlds, 2019).

**Media literacy programs.** Ukraine has launched various programs to improve media literacy among its citizens, including initiatives to educate people about how to identify fake news and disinformation. These programs aim to help people recognize the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information (Media and Information Literacy in Ukraine: Past, Present, and Future, 2019).

When conducting a critical analysis of resources dedicated to fake news, it is important to consider whether the information is based on evidence or assumptions. Resources that provide information based on facts are more trustworthy than those that rely on rumors or unverified claims. It is important to consider the consistency

of information provided from different sources. Resources that provide controversial information or have significant disagreements in their reports may be unreliable. It is recommended to cross-check information from different sources to ensure accuracy and reliability. This can help identify any potential biases or misinformation.

When evaluating resources on any topic, it is important to consider the trustworthiness of the source. Some sources may have biases or agendas that influence the information they provide. Therefore, it is important to consider the reputation and credentials of the sources used.

The critical analysis of resources dedicated to fake news should focus on the credibility of the source, objectivity, timeliness, information based on facts, consistency, and cross-checking. By considering these factors, one can assess the accuracy of the information provided and make informed decisions.

## Conclusions

The fight against fake news requires a comprehensive approach involving different stakeholders and strategies. That is why it is important to promote media literacy among the population. It is important to teach citizens how to recognize and verify fake news. Media literacy should be integrated into the education system and offered as a lifelong learning opportunity.

Media outlets should also be encouraged to fact-check information before publishing it. It is important to support fact-checking initiatives and provide funding for these initiatives, which can help to identify and debunk fake news and disinformation. Social media platforms should be more transparent about how they operate and how content is distributed. They should also provide users with tools to report fake news and disinformation. This will promote collaboration between the government, civil society, media, and technology companies to address the problem of fake news.

Such an approach may involve exchanging resources and expertise to identify and combat fake news and to promote ethical journalism and ethical standards. This will require ongoing efforts and collaboration among various stakeholders to ensure that citizens have access to accurate and reliable information. The methodology of fake news involves creating sensational content to attract people's attention and spreading false information to influence public opinion. Familiarity with fake news and data technologies is part of media literacy for the population.

Fake news can have a significant impact on society, and combating it is the responsibility of all individuals. This applies not only to those who consume news, but also to those who create and spread it. Journalists and media organizations have a special responsibility to report the truth and verify facts before publication. Social media platforms also play an important role in combating fake news by taking measures to label and remove false information from their platforms. Thus, the responsibility for



combating fake news lies with every member of society. This requires collective efforts to promote accuracy and accountability and to ensure that false information is not spread uncontrollably.

Ukraine is a key factor in the current tensions between Russia and the West, and fake news about Ukraine can have serious consequences for regional stability and international relations. Ukraine has become the target of complex disinformation campaigns, with false narratives spreading through social media, news sites, and other channels. Fake news can have serious consequences for Ukrainian society when false information fuels tensions between different ethnic and linguistic groups and undermines trust in democratic institutions. That is why the development of media literacy skills among citizens, as a prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic society, is becoming an increasingly important factor for Ukraine in the era of full-scale military action.

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# Žiniasklaidos ugdymo plėtra kaip būtina kovos su netikromis naujienomis sąlyga ir demokratinės visuomenės formavimosi pagrindas

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## Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojama netikrų naujienų plitimo problema ir būtinybė gerinti gyventojų žiniasklaidos raštingumą. Nagrinėjamos įvairios strategijos, tokios kaip: žiniasklaidos raštingumo didinimas, faktų tikrinimo metodų tobulinimas ir socialinės žiniasklaidos platformų atsakomybė už jų vaidmenį skleidžiant netikras naujienas. Parodytas Amerikos ir Europos universitetų ir mokslinių tyrimų institucijų, siūlančių žiniasklaidos švietimo programas savo šalių piliečiams, vaidmuo. Pabrėžiama kovos su netikromis naujienomis svarba visose Europos šalyse. Svarstomi šios problemos sprendimo būdai Ukrainoje karo veiksmų laikotarpiu. Siūlomos rekomendacijos tolesniam šios problemos tyrimui ir gyventojų medijų raštingumo didinimui.

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**Esminiai žodžiai:** žiniasklaidos raštingumas, socialinė žiniasklaida, informacinis karas, netikros naujienos, propaganda, dezinformacija, žodžio laisvė, faktų tikrinimas, manipuliavimas informacija, viešoji nuomonė.

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