Francesco Biondo / Gevisa La Rocca /
Viviana Trapani (eds.)

Information Disorder

Learning to Recognize Fake News

Francesco Biondo / Gevisa La Rocca / Viviana Trapani (eds.)

Information Disorder

The Fake News project was developed as a social project to suggest an idea of a plural, open, and dialectical society. One product of social action is public opinion, which directly and indirectly influences policy decisions, including those concerning the control and prospects of social innovation, thus exerting pressure on any kind of democratic regime. Disinformation hinders the free process of public opinion building by using various means to negatively influence public opinion with the effect of widening the chasm between decision-making power and active citizenry, who in turn needs to be properly informed to usefully contribute to achieving publicly shared goals in a transparent manner.

The Editors

Francesco Biondo is an associate professor of Legal Philosophy at the Department of Law, University of Palermo.

Gevisa La Rocca is an associate professor of Sociology of Communication at the Kore University of Enna.

Viviana Trapani is an associate professor of Industrial Design at the University of Palermo and coordinator of the Master's Degree Course in *Design and culture of the territory*.

Information Disorder

Francesco Biondo / Gevisa La Rocca /
Viviana Trapani (eds.)

Information Disorder

Learning to Recognize Fake News

PETER LANG

Cover illustration: © Cinzia Ferrara

Peter Lang – Berlin · Bruxelles · Lausanne · New York · Oxford

This publication has been peer reviewed.

www.peterlang.com

Contents

Part III Justice and Misinformation

Part IV Information and Misinformation Design

Serena Del Puglia

Citizen journalism and social innovation. Digital platforms for qualitative implementation of participatory journalism

Abstract: The power of the media, internet, social networks and sharing platforms system, together with the pervasiveness of digital tools in everyone's life, have made communication an ever more articulated, and increasingly complex field. In addition to accelerating the dissemination of content and information, these tools have opened the door to extensive participatory information processes. The article takes some emblematic case studies of participatory journalism platforms that can make a valuable contribution to setting in motion co-design processes in the news world. Within this framework, an attempt will be made to frame a scenario in which design can find its own place in a planning space yet to be systematised, in which communication design can play a substantial role.

Keywords: Participatory journalism, fact-checking, communication design, social innovation, culture

Web_information_participatory_processes

Mass democratic access to new media and the internet, coupled with extensive and pervasive use of digital tools, the spread of social networks and open sharing platforms have made it possible for all to disseminate content and information, making communication an ever more articulated field with a high degree of complexity.

Openness, accessibility, collaboration and free distribution are therefore the main features of a new world of communication, which is taking shape online in ways that are also very different from each other. The internet allows anyone, at least ideally, to become at the same time both an author and distributor of information and of their own thoughts, through the richness of hypertext notation, the possibility of using different modes of communication-text, images, audio, video, 3D animations – at almost no cost and with a relatively low level of computer literacy, bypassing traditional figures such as the publisher, graphic designer or distributor (Bollini, 2014, pp. 133–134). Especially in the Web 2.0 and thanks to social-sharing or blogging platforms, the internet has become an alternative and often preferred vehicle of information and content compared to more official communication channels, laying the foundations for a structural

crisis[1] (Baricco, 2018, pp. 76–77) that has progressively affected all the professional figures involved in the process (journalists, authors, graphic designers, editors).

The prosumer concept[2] (Toffler, 1980) has gradually transformed the role of readers. They can post and share comments, write reviews, rank genres, overwrite original content and produce new content themselves. Through the ability to interpret and visualise data, and to make (certain and secure) news and information usable and comprehensible, communication design is confronting, today, practices that make domestic and widespread design activities previously delegated to specific fields of experience and professionals. And in view of such new perspectives, the project opens up to dynamic systems – generative platforms – in which "the final artifact no longer matters (or at least not only) as much as the dialogic structure that is built and that represents the connective tissue[3], the environment in which new forms of dialogue are built [...] collaborative and open source models that base their paradigm on the collaboration between designers and users" (Piscitelli, 2019, pp. 106–107). Each co-author, who brings specific normative, technological, and experiential needs, is a modifying element in the narrative process whose core terms are therefore "relationship" and "confrontation". In these "new geographies of dialogue" (Piscitelli, 2018) and knowledge, which are digital, mutable and dense, the designer is therefore required to have "a much more articulated knowledge [...] capable of [...] structuring real, dedicated [dialogic] languages" (Piscitelli, 2019, p. 106).

---

1   Alessandro Baricco, in his book *The Game*, offers a very effective description of the mechanism he calls *destruction of the elite*: "where collective intention and intelligence become action without having to be mediated through intermediate authorities."

2   Derived from the combination of the words *producer* and *consumer*, in participatory journalism this term identifies the overlapping roles of the reader as media producer and consumer.

3   De Kerckhove, a philosopher, sociologist, and follower of McLuhan, who is attentive to issues related to communication and the conditioning that technology has on language, defines the internet, as a form of extension of private intelligence and memory made collective. This is the starting point for the argument (1997) that takes Lévy's (1996) idea of connective intelligence a step further. It aims at connecting, linking, and establishing ties between intelligences, and at the relationship they have. See https://sociologia.tesionline.it/sociologia/articolo/l-intelligenza-connettiva-di-de-kerckhove/3331

Digital platforms for "risk-free" participatory journalism[4]

Citizen journalism, which emerged in the late 1990s, somehow "institutionalised" precisely this form of multi-player cooperation, basing its raison d'être in the active participation of readers (in the management, dissemination and creation of information). Closely linked to the issue of widespread design democracy, many emblematic experiences developed within design for social innovation take this path and focus on information as a primary public good of citizenship, which can redefine the active role of the community in processes of cultural production and promote and enhance civic engagement (De Biase, 2013), through online democratic participation (Battaglia, 2019).

PeaceLink[5], founded in 1991 as a BBS network[6], is a team of volunteer editors, technicians and translators and it has been engaged for years, through civic monitoring, the use of open data (images, videos, etc.), the study of public documents and deeds, in supporting humanitarian, environmental protection, and international solidarity initiatives. The validity and authoritativeness of their work have been validated by many national agencies and newspapers, which have used the results achieved by the "group" investigations and inquiries as a reference for news and in-depth reports.

Launched in 2000 by Oh Yeon Ho, a former investigative journalist, the South Korean newspaper OhmyNews (Fig. 1) relies on the contribution of more than 35,000 citizen-reporters in the news-making process.

The dissemination of the news is filtered on the one hand by the fact-checking work done by an editorial staff of about fifty professional journalists who are responsible for selecting the material and verifying especially the news articles, and on the other hand by a process of checking the truth of the news by the

---

4   Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby worked in the field of Interaction Design and were pioneers and keen observers of the implications that technology could have on humans and society. As we can reed in Ghisleni and Privitera's book (2009): with the advent of social networks "the technocratic spectre of the risk society [...] has also begun to materialise at the social level", generating "a world perpetually on the verge of uncontrollability, [...] in which social actors intervene with no small chance of influencing the course of events".

5   *PeaceLink*'s pacifist activity began after the First Gulf War in 1991 and continued during the Kosovo War (1999) and Iraq War (2003), when the website's consultations peaked.

6   Bulletin Board System (BBS) is a telematics system that allows remote computers to access a central computer to share or retrieve resources. Developed in the 1970s, the system formed the core of early amateur telematic communications, giving birth to basic telematics.

Fig. 1: Homepage of the platform OhmyNews

readers themselves, who are called upon to adhere to the newspaper's internal code,[7] which offers general guidelines on content, the feedback from which is displayed in infographics and charts, which can be consulted alongside the news on the website.

AgoraVox, one of the first Europe-wide examples of an online newspaper built with citizen input, was born following the example of OhmyNews. A hallmark of European participatory journalism, with its three versions in French (2005), English (2006) and Italian[8] (2008), Agoravox enables citizen contributions to be published alongside articles written by professional journalists, in the deep-rooted belief that the Web can foster the development of individual intelligence and create communities of practitioners by combining technical means and personal qualities. Each author takes responsibility for the truthfulness of the information published, and a following editorial step[9] provides for verifying the article's compliance with editorial policy (Fig. 3).

---

7   An in-depth examination of the topic can be found in Luca Rasponi's dissertation (2008) in Applied Computer Science titled *Peacereporter e il giornalismo partecipativo*.

8   Directed for Italy by Francesco Piccinini, founder of *Fanpage*, a digital information project based on social network interaction with citizens.

9   The core of the editorial staff consists of volunteer independent editors and research experts from the Foundation.

Fig. 2: Screenshot from the website OhmyNews. Section fact-checking, details of infographics highlighting the "degree of truthfulness" of information (author's collage)

Fig. 3: Screenshot from the website AgoraVox. Section Politica editoriale

Fig. 4: Homepage of the platform Bellingcat

In addition to the dual author/editor filter[10], there is also the feedback from reader comments[11], which can also be edited according to editorial policy.

On the international scene, Bellingcat (Fig. 4) is an investigative journalism site founded in 2014 by British blogger Eliot Higgins.

Having become a benchmark for its methodology, Bellingcat[12] uses open-source intelligence technology and tools to track down data already available on the Web (e.g.: YouTube videos, Google Earth images, public databases, photographs circulated on Twitter) to be used to verify or reconstruct the evolution of a story. The foundation of the operation put in place by Bellingcat is the construction of a transparent and replicable methodology that can be used by any reader with little technological expertise to conduct surveys and checks, in a collaborative mix of expertise that rebalances power over the use of data. The Web becomes a treasure chest of data for journalists, activists and citizens who want to check the level of accountability and transparency of governments, political movements and other public and private organizations.

Conclusions

The transformation of the role of the reader (into author) ultimately undermines an established information system and opens many questions on the redefinition

---

10 Moderators are reporters who have published at least 4 articles and received a positive vote from readers.

11 The editors reserve the right to remove off from the website any article that proves to be inaccurate or incorrect even after they are published on the Web. Articles that are commercial, pornographic, or racist, or incite hatred or violence are rejected.

12 Bellingcat has now also become a point of reference for professionals, journalists, researchers and analysts with expertise in international conflicts, online extremism and cybersecurity

of roles and relationships between professionals and users. Open data and open source resources, and the ability of users to produce content, to publish it digitally and to distribute it independently really become a resource in which design repositions its expertise, but also an opportunity to reinvent its mission with respect to the complexity of tools and the migration of languages to other media registers (Bollini, 2014, p. 138). When the user becomes an active participant in the authoring and design process, design culture also needs to find new forms of relationship and dialogue.

In such a dense context, the communication design/er, working on a concise and immediate rendering of complex data, is called upon to find effective solutions to the distortions of digital communication, acting as an "enabling design/er" (Bollini, 2014, pp. 137, 138) capable of teaching "autonomy and self-help" skills (Geronimi Stoll, 2013), designing the conditions for accessing, and gaining access to, knowledge, enabling the proper construction and fruition of information and news -both verifiable and secure[13] – and providing citizens with the tools to make informed decisions, in knowledgeable democratic participation in culture and social life[14].

By shifting the focus from visualisation as a result to visualisation as a process (Ciuccarelli, 2014, p. 89), through the design of communicative artifacts, multimedia systems and tools, and graphical interfaces to communicate and make data, news, and information intelligible, communication design can build an interactive communicative system (Ciuccarelli, 2014, pp. 88, 89) that can enable cognitive processes that are very different in nature, requiring specific data and information processing[15]. By mediating points of view, offering keys for interpreting reality and combining individual visions with respect to collective scenarios, a cultural system (collective and connective) capable of illustrating

---

13 It is worth mentioning the new opportunities offered by Web 3.0 perspectives, which have yet to be explored. *Fact Protocol*, for example, is a multi-chain, scalable enabler of content verification to mitigate disinformation. The protocol uses two factors to validate news and facts. One uses News Registrars (NRs) and the other News Validators (NVs) to check again the facts and authenticate the citations/references attached by the NRs.

14 *Engaged Journalism Accelerator* (2018), sponsored by the European Journalism Centre, promotes participatory journalism with the aim of restoring trust in the media among citizens and developing new models of sustainability and economic independence.

15 In the desire for equitable (and secure) community-driven distribution of data through technologies still in the making (blockchain and dApps), the opportunities, and new challenges, offered by Web 3.0 open new application avenues for design, which will have to play a role in building new mental models of learning.

significant aspects of the relevant social reality is described. By interpreting conflicts and antagonistic positions (without unifying them), design can offer a valuable contribution[16] to renegotiate the meaning of our being a dialogical and cooperating collectivity (Piscitelli, 2019, p. 117), projecting toward "an idea of the future, […] [and designing] spores to affect reality" (Piscitelli, 2019, pp. 121–122).

References

Baricco, Alessandro: The game. Einaudi: Torino, 2018

Battaglia, Rosy: "Giornalismo civico e giornalismo partecipativo: cosa sono e perché". Micron, 02 Novembre 2019, pp. 20–21, retrived 10.3.22, from https://www.rivistamicron.it/terza-pagina/giornalismo-civico-e-giornalismo-partecipativo-cosa-sono-e-perche/

Bollini, Letizia: "Le merci comunicative digitali: quale ruolo per il designer? [Digital communication goods: what role for design and designers?]". DiiD 57, 2014, pp. 132–138, retrieved 10.3.22, from DOI 10.30682/diid

Ciuccarelli, Paolo: "Il design dell'informazione tra dati aperti e attivismo visual. [Information design between open data and visual activism]". DiiD 57, 2014, pp. 86–89, retrieved 10.3.22, from DOI 10.30682/diid

De Biase, Luca: I media civici. Informazione di mutuo soccorso. VITA/Feltrinelli: Milano, 2013

De Kerckhove, Derrick: Connected intelligence: The arrival of the web society. Somerville House: Toronto, 1997

Geronimi Stoll, Marco: Smarketing. Comunicazione per tutti i piccoli che hanno grandi cose da dire. Altraeconomia: Milano, 2013

Lévy, Pierre: L'intelligenza collettiva. Per una antropologia del cyberspazio. Feltrinelli: Milano, 1996

Piscitelli, Daniela: "Poetiche e pratiche dell'ascolto". In: various authors. Listening design. Il design per i processi di innovazione. LIStLab: Barcelona, 2018

Piscitelli, Daniela: First things first. Comunicare le emergenze. Il design per una contemporaneità fragile. Design experiences – Listlab: European Union, 2019

---

16 *The Montreal Design Declaration* (*World Design Summit*, Montreal, 2017) supports the central role of design in finding effective solutions to the planet's enormous economic, social and environmental challenges. See http://www.designplayground.it/2018/01/montreal-design-declaration-tutte-le-persone-meritano-di-vivere-in-un-mondo-ben-progettato/

Privitera, Walter: "Ulrich Beck: sociologia del rischio e nuovo cosmopolitismo". In: Ghisleni, Maurizio / Privitera, Walter: Sociologie contemporanee. UTET: Torino, 2009, p. 55

Rasponi, Luca: Peacereporter e il Giornalismo Partecipativo. (University of Parma. School of Humanities And Philosophy. Degreecoursein Journalismand Editorial Culture – Academic Year 2008/2009), retrived 15.3.22, from http://www.lucarasponi.it/stanza101/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PeaceReporter-e-il-giornalismo-partecipativo.pdf.

Toffler, Alvin: The third wave. William Morrow: USA, 1980