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Fake news and its impact on trust in the news. Using the Portuguese case to establish lines of differentiation

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Abstract

While a far from recent phenomenon, fake news has acquired a very special significance in the wake of the latest US elections. Against a broad background of different definitions and subtypes that require us to find a new, broader definition of the concept of fake news, the main debate about it concerns its scope and reach, which vary primarily in terms of intentionality and exactly how it disrupts the information process. With the discussion also focusing on the threats to (McChesney, 2014; Fisher, 2018) and opportunities for (Beckett, 2017) journalism itself, we seek to expand the debate on fake news to its impact on the dimension of trust in news. The starting point is Fletcher and Nielsen's (2017) idea that, because they don't make a clear distinction between real and fake news, Internet users feel a generalised sense of distrust in the media. Using data from the latest (2018) Reuters Digital News Report survey of a representative sample of the Portuguese Internet-using population, we describe the main reasons why the Portuguese (increasingly familiar with fake news and disinformation and their impacts) have been displaying higher levels of trust in news than counterparts in other countries, such as the United States –reasons that are linked to Portugal's media system and historical context.

Keywords

Fake news, Trust in news, Impact of fake news on trust in news, Lines of differentiation, Portugal, Portuguese media system.

1. Introduction

Although the phenomenon of fake news is not a recent one in the sense that various authors say it originated in previous centuries and goes hand in hand with the history of the mass media themselves (Hofseth, 2017; Schudson & Zelizer, 2017), the age of hyper-information (Andrejevic, 2013), sub journalisms (Picard, 2015) and online news (Karlsson, 2011) has added another dimension to false news.

With the transition of journalism from print to the networked online sphere, what becomes most noticeable is that unsubstantiated rumors and flat-out lies are engaged with by audiences just as much, if not more so than authentic, well-researched information (Zaryan, 2017, p. 1-2).

The act of reporting an event, occurrence or fact is no longer exclusively reserved for accredited professionals, in a phenomenon that is bringing with it two opposing dimensions: threat (Champy, 2011) and opportunity (Freidson, 2001) that are both characteristics of ambivalence in the professions (Rodrigues, 2012; Abbott, 1988).

With the more or less self-legitimated opening up of the news production process to new parties (citizen journalists, networked journalists, etc), the dimensions of objectivity have ceased to refer to and depend on an accredited code of professional conduct and now depend on the reporter's individuality (Mellado, 2014; Shoemaker, 2009, 2013), which may be more or less aligned with a professional practice.

An article published in *Science*[1] entitled *'The spread of true and false news online'* concluded that fake news spread farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than true news.

The topic of fake news is thus on the agenda and was especially in the limelight during the last US presidential elections (Lewis, 2017, p. 18). The discussion ranges from the impact and consequences of fake news to the type of public policies that ought to be used to fight the threat, via controversial and contrasting perspectives in which fake news is seen as an opportunity in the journalistic field.

An EU study entitled *Fake News and Online Disinformation*[2] produced some overall results on how Internet users in Europe positioned themselves with regard to fake news. Respondents to 26576 telephone interviews conducted in February 2018 characterised the traditional media (radio, television and printed newspapers) as the most trustworthy sources of news. Those with higher education qualifications tended to feel more trust in a range of different formats, whereas the younger respondents (aged 15-24 years) tended to trust news and information they accessed online more. At the same time, the more highly educated also said that they both encountered fake news more often and were more confident in their ability to identify it as false. 85% of the respondents felt that fake news was a problem in their country, while 83% considered that it was a problem for democracy in general. In the respondents' opinions, the prime responsibility for staunching the dissemination of false should lie with news journalists and national authorities. It was again those with higher levels of education who used social media on a daily basis who expected the strongest reactions from the different decision-makers.

The study's conclusions highlight a clear tendency: that it was the most highly educated respondents who said they both came across fake news most often and felt more comfortable with the process that enabled them to detect its falseness.

Having made this introduction, we base the discussion of fake news on its many meanings and definitions. We also suggest a new definition of the concept on the basis of the main bridges coming from the different descriptions of the phenomenon.

We then situate the discussion of fake news in terms of the main consequences and opportunities for journalism and introduce a debate on measures to fight it.

We also raise the question of trust in news, which will contribute to the main aim of this article, which is to understand how the impact of fake news characterises the differences between the Digital News Report countries where people's trust in news is concerned, especially when compared to Portugal. This is a particularly interesting international example, as it shows a much higher degree of trust in the news and media than in other countries like the United States. Portugal's political, social and media landscape makes the country a unique case study of unequivocal importance from an international viewpoint.

[1] http://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1146.full?utm_source=sciencemagazine&utm_medium=reddit&utm_campaign=vosoughi-18311.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-results-eurobarometer-fake-news-and-online-disinformation.

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2. Fake news as a concept: literature review

In the article *Defining Fake News*, Tandoc *et al.* (2017) set out a typology that uses different meanings and connotations to define the concept. It is based on an analysis of 34 academic articles and uses six different ways of characterising fake news: 1) Fake news as a satirical instrument, often in comedy programmes, 2) Fake news using parody for humorous purposes based on fictitious, fairly implausible news material, 3) Fake news as fabricated news, with no factual basis and disguised as real news in order to disinform audiences, 4) Fake news in the form of manipulated images and videos intended to create false narratives, 5) Fake news in the shape of advertising, but disguised as genuine news reports and 6) Fake news as propaganda aimed at manipulating audiences' political orientations and attitudes.

Zaryan (2017) points out that the definition of fake news in the media includes the dimensions of satire, hoax,[3] imprecise news, poorly reported news that is often retracted on the platforms that published it, misuse of data, and even journalism that is considered inaccurate and sloppy.

She argues that definitions of the concept have progressively come to depend on both the evolution and scope of the phenomenon itself and the various areas in which it is defined in the form of a specific externality that varies according to the field of analysis. In the journalistic field, for example, fake news is defined as: 1) authentic material used in the wrong context, 2) news products disseminated on websites that specialise in false news and use layouts similar to those of real media sites and 3) all false information and contents intended to manipulate public opinion (Zaryan, 2017).

Rubin *et al.* (2016) adds the term 'journalistic deception' to the discussion, defining it as an act of communicating messages either verbally in the form of a lie or non-verbally by withholding information in order to initiate or uphold a false belief. She defines three types of fake news: 1) fabrications in a fraudulent news format, 2) the hoaxing that is commonplace on social networks and 3) false news in the form of humour.

Allcott (2017) emphasises intentionality as a crucial factor in the definition of an ideal type of fake news. He sees it as truly false news that is deliberately produced with the purpose of manipulating readers. He calls the 2016 US elections an archetypical case of fake news.

Having said this, when Allcott (2017) constructs a typology of six forms of fake news, he argues that his first type arises out of unintentional processes that end up disseminating non-factual / untrue news. Type two is defined as rumours that do not originate from any earlier sources or news items. Type three involves conspiracy theories, which are hard to characterise as true or false, because of their nature and because the people who report them believe them to be true. Type four is satire that is unlikely to be seen as factual. Type five is characterised as false statements by political decision-makers, while type six is news or reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false. Finally, fake news is nothing new, or even recent, one example being the so-called 'Great Moon Hoax' of 1935, when the *New York Sun* published a series of articles on discovery of life on the Moon (Allcott, 2017, p. 214).

Similarly, a century ago the 'Yellow Journalism' described by Hofseth (2017) also fitted a model that distanced itself from factual journalism. Fake news was also very common during the First World War (Schudson & Zelizer, 2017).

Hofseth (2017) regards fake news as having two distinct purposes: to profit from the content that is produced and disseminated and to influence in the form of propaganda. Similarly, he believes that this kind of news can be created and spread either intentionally or involuntarily.

In his article *Fake News: The best thing that's happened to journalism*, Charlie Beckett (2017) returns to a fake-news typology made up of seven areas. The predominant terms used to

[3] The Cambridge Dictionary defines Hoax as a plan to deceive someone. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hoax.

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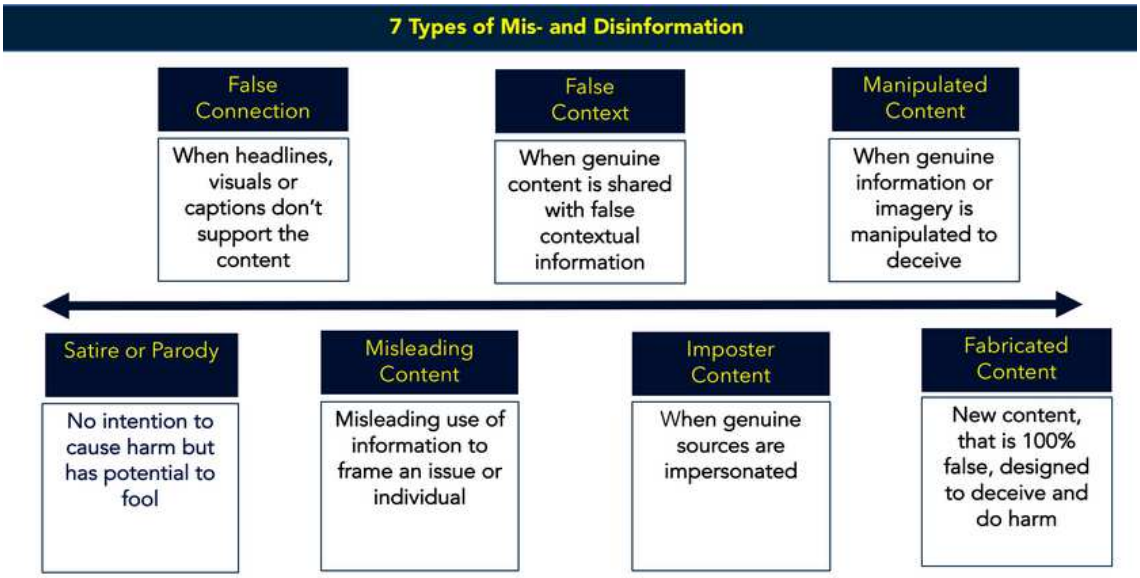
define the contents of false news include 'manipulation', 'false', 'deceitful' and 'illusory'. This depends on whether they are the result of satire and parody in which the primary goal is not to do any harm, they arise out of sharing or publishing in a totally unrelated context or they are 100% false and solely intended to manipulate and do harm.

Figure 1: The First Draft News typology.



Source: First Draft News, cited by Charlie Beckett (2017).

Derakhshan and Wardle (2017, p. 8-9) mention three types of information disorder: disinformation, mis-information, and mal-information. They also split the information process into three phases: creation, production and distribution. They argue that disinformation (e.g. conspiracy theories) is deliberate and seeks to harm a person, group, organisation or country, while misinformation (e.g. incorrect use of statistics) is false but not intended and mal-information (e.g. when contexts are deliberately distorted) is based on real facts and is intentionally used to harm a person, organisation or country.

Furthermore, some authors (Holmes, 2014; Zaryan, 2017) say the important thing is probably not understanding whether a story is real or not, because the only thing that truly counts is whether people access it or not. In other words, news –real or fake– only exists if people access or share it.

This idea highlights the need to look at the reception aspect of fake news and understand that its true impact is also defined by its audience.

Based on the contributions by the above authors, as a way of optimising their explanations, we suggest a new general definition of fake news. We have broadened the scope to include its variable impact and the way it is received as a condition for its existence in the tangible world. We therefore define fake news as any non-factual, misleading or unverifiable news that is received and read by at least one person. This content is produced and distributed on media channels, whatever its tenor (satire, humour, propaganda, fraudulent advertising, etc.) by one or more people using their own or another source, with the deliberate aim of distorting reality, disinforming, entertaining, manipulating public opinion, or harming others, or unintentionally as a result of the production and distribution of inaccurate information, with a variable impact on the social, cultural, economic and political spheres.

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3. Fake news, a threat to or an opportunity for journalism? The different currents of thought

Fake news that may be regarded both as a model that simultaneously generates uncertainty in the shape of the bankruptcy of news-related values and an opportunity for journalism appears to have originated ambivalently. This ambivalence is very close to that identified in the discussion on the risks and opportunities posed by citizen, participatory and/or networked journalism in a context in which the boundaries between news producers and consumers are being redefined (Singer, 2008; Shoemaker, 2009; Beckett, 2008, 2010).

Quite apart from anything else, authors like Beckett (2008, 2010) have an optimistic/celebratory view of the benefits of sub-journalisms lying outside any accredited sphere of activity. They talk about the phenomenon of fake news as a clear opportunity to establish a stronger and more adaptive journalism, while others (McChesney, 2014; Hofseth, 2017; Fisher, 2018) prefer to underscore its harmful effects on the media sector in general and journalism in particular.

In his article about the major opportunities offered to journalism by the fake news phenomenon, Beckett (2017) concludes that fake news is the best thing that could have happened to it. He points out that the whole phenomenon is a symptom of a new moral panic and is the very last chance for mainstream, accredited, professional journalism to be able to show that its value comes from the specialisation and expertise of professionals who are qualified for the task and work in accordance with specific codes of ethics and conduct. He argues that it is a wakeup call for journalism itself, for it to become more transparent and develop new business models centred on verification and the fight against disinformation. Previously, Borden and Tew (2007) explored the way in which fake news encourages journalists to produce better contents by engaging more closely with the ethical and regulatory commitments of journalism (i.e. factuality and objectivity). They state that journalists can learn some valuable lessons [especially ethical ones] from their encounter and interaction with fake news (Borden & Tew, 2007, p. 311). They conclude that "by learning from the strengths and limitations of 'fake' news as a form of media criticism, journalists can align their performances with the moral commitments that define them and thus inhabit their role with integrity" (Borden & Tew, 2007, p. 313). It is also from this standpoint that Sayej (2018) views the way in which fake news demonstrates the importance of journalistic accuracy and expertise in the fight against news manipulation and the defence of democratic values.

On the other hand, a number of recent reports and publications[4] point out that fake news is having a positive impact on the so-called traditional media in terms of trust and consumption (i.e. an increase in digital subscriptions). One of the clearest cases is the *The New York Times*, whose online subscriptions experienced unprecedented growth[5] in the wake of the latest US elections, as a result of the 'Trump effect.'[6]

At the same time, Beckett (2017) argues that the fact that new tools for fighting false and adulterated information are being developed, not least by public policies targeting news literacies, is a sign that the main beneficiary will be the journalism he calls 'mainstream.' He believes that, when all is said and done, in the long term the fake news phenomenon will not disappear, but that, more importantly, it is treatable and may benefit the traditional media.

At the other extreme lies the idea –currently fairly hegemonic in the discussion on disinformation– that fake news will have a destructive impact on citizens' trust in the news in

[4] https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/news/fake_news_lifts_trust_in_traditional_media/39256. https://ameinfo.com/media/print/fake-news-increases-trust-traditional-media-survey/. https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2018/07/13/fake-news-the-media-industry-strikes-back/.

[5] https://qz.com/901684/thanks-to-trump-the-new-york-times-added-more-subscribers-in-three-months-than-in-all-of-2015/.

[6] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/02/06/is-donald-trump-saving-the-news-media/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9f436189da83.

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general. This will purportedly lead to a process that is more one of discrediting journalism itself, inasmuch as distrust could then spread to the product of accredited journalistic work. Authors such as McChesney (2014) consider that the advent of fake news constitutes a deterioration of both journalism and democracy, while Fisher (2018, p. 19) notes that fake news suggests bankruptcy of the so-called fourth estate.

In Hofseth's (2017) opinion, although fake news has always existed, it used to pose a low-level threat that was easily countered with greater attentiveness. However, this Reuters Institute analyst upholds that fake news is now attacking the very system whose foundations lie in the Information Society. He says that it is casting doubts on the credibility of the media and helping create the image that the media only offer one of a variety of possible truths, which is very often the one we want to relate to. He thinks this represents a threat not just to the media but to the whole structure of society.

Moreover, this realisation leads us to consider that any analysis of fake news essentially centres on the dangers it poses for journalism, for the media as a whole and for societies in particular. Authors like Watts and Rothschild (2017, p. 24) claim that the social media, which are vehicles for the propagation of disinformation hubs, are contributing to growing problems in democratic discourse.

4. Public policies

Acting via the European Commission, the European Union has pioneered the discussion of the problems generated by disinformation, misleading information and the propagation of fake news in online interactivity contexts.

In its March 2018 report[7] to the Commission for the Digital Economy and Society, the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation set out a range of preventive measures and recommendations designed to delimit the phenomenon and mitigate its negative consequences more effectively.

In short, it recommended that all online platforms and social networks should be subject to a code of principles and practices –which some organisations already follow. This code would include 1) identifying and removing illegitimate accounts and profiles, 2) integrating algorithms with the ability to differentiate between contents and promote the more effective location of credible contents and information, 3) promoting more efficient contexts of demonetisation of the process of fabricating false information and 4) promoting the interoperability of and collaboration between independent sources and organisations focusing on content verification.

Supporting the main recommendations with the data produced by the Eurobarometer's *Fake News and Online Disinformation* module, which we discussed in the introduction to this article, the group chaired by Mariya Gabriel warned that measures were needed to fight a phenomenon based on capturing the emotions of target audiences and seeking to orient and manipulate public debates on the one hand and to generate revenues and other benefits on the other. The module's results also show that verifying the facts after false news has already been disseminated is not the best way to fight this phenomenon, as it does not reach the people who accessed the information in the first place.

In addition to drawing up a code of practice and principles for online platforms, the main proposals include measures to protect high-quality journalism by expanding the rights granted to online publishers. This will enable them to adapt to the changeability of the digital landscape and promote platforms for exchanging best media literacy practices, so that citizens have access to tools that will make it easier for them to unmask and discredit disinformation hubs. The key elements of the policies set out by the working groups are: 1)

[7] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation.

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greater transparency, 2) higher digital literacy, 3) empowering users and journalists alike in the fight against disinformation, 4) safeguarding the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem and 5) promoting continuous research in the fight against disinformation.

Even at a micro-level –that of teaching institutions– measures are being taken to fight the phenomenon. For example, a Cornell University workshop[8] listed a range of recommended preventive measures: 1) look for *bona fide* websites, and to that end always see if they give contact information in the form of verifiable addresses and links, 2) always look for an *About page*, which is normally found in the header or footer of the home page, 3) critically scrutinise the staff list and try to determine whether they are real people or stock photos[9] and 4) perform an independent search for the news sources that are used and compare URLs, e.g. abcnews.com.co (fake site) versus abcnews.go.com (real site).

Figure 2: How to spot fake news.

Source: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.[10]

Derakhshan and Wardle (2017) state that one of the reasons for the substantial degree of stagnation in the regulation of and fight against fake news is the lack of a rigorous definition of the concept as a phenomenon.

[8] http://guides.library.cornell.edu/c.php?g=636325&p=4452003.
[9] Stock photos (stock photography) are professional photographs of. common places, landmarks, nature, events or people that are bought and sold on a royalty-free basis and can be used and reused for commercial design purposes. https://www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/stock_photo.html.
[10] https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174.

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5. 'People don't trust the news media'

An article by the Reuters Institute researchers Richard Fletcher and Rasmus Nielsen (2017) points out that Internet users do not make a clear distinction between real news, false news and other forms of disinformation and that this results in a generalised distrust in the media. They rest this assertion on a quantitative study based on a survey of 70,000 respondents in 36 markets. The study's conclusions suggested that: 1) the level of trust in the news media was low, 2) trust in social media was even lower and 3) many respondents only made a small distinction between fake news and poor-quality journalism.

At the end of the day, it is important to understand that the respondents in this study tended to take the view that what they considered to be low-quality journalism also contributed to less trust and greater scepticism in relation to the media in general.

This is why we first of all need to understand the meaning of such a relevant concept in the different intellectual disciplines (Lewicki & Mcallister, 1998).

Trust-related aspects are central to all human social activity (Fisher, 2018, p. 20) (Lewicki & Mcallister, 1998). The trust dimension is crucial at both the interpersonal level and the macro level of how societies function (Delhey & Newton, 2003, *apud* Fisher, 2018, p. 20).

From a strictly psychological point of view, Simpson (2007, p. 64) defined trust as the most important ingredient for the development and maintenance of happy and well-functioning relationships. He upheld that there were two types of conceptualisation of trust, the person-centred model and the dyadic interpersonal perspective. According to the first model, trust entails general beliefs and attitudes about the degree to which other people are likely to be reliable, cooperative or helpful in daily life. Under the dyadic (interpersonal) perspective, trust is a psychological state or orientation of an actor (the truster) toward a specific partner (the trustee) with whom the actor is in some way interdependent (Simpson, 2007, p. 264).

Mellinger (1956) was one of the first authors to address the importance of the subject. He defined trust as an individual's confidence in another person's intentions and motives and the sincerity of that person's word. Without trust, one person does not trust another or feel confident in the credibility of the information he/she receives from them (Fisher, 2016). Coleman (2012, p. 26) points out that trust is the foundational element of both social relations and the very notion of citizenship, while Lewicki and Mcallister (1998), Kohring and Matthes (2007) regard trust as crucial to social cohesion and the social order and a key concept for understanding functional societies.

Lewicki and Mcallister (1998, p. 439) regard trust as an extension of the behavioural dimension "in terms of confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct [...] by confident [they mean] a belief in, a propensity to attribute virtuous intentions to."

Questions of trust in the news have concerned academics for more than a century and led them to look at the issues of journalistic ethics and their normative guidelines (Fisher, 2018, 2016).

According to Fisher (2006), the need to be able to access trustworthy information is one of the pillars that underpin the search for and consumption of news, and we should not reject McQuail's *et al.* (1972) view that people primarily look for what they identify with, news included, in a scenario where trust is also about finding what is most desirable (Simpson, 2007).

Basing themselves on a literature review of the concept of 'trust in the news,' Fisher (2018) and Kohring and Matthes (2007) conclude that there is no clear definition of either that concept or the concept of fake news in the case of news media. Fisher (2018) also argues that there is a growing disconnect between the normative ideal of an informed citizen and complex influences on perceptions of the credibility of news in the digital age, when channels like the social networks are widely used in order to hyper-disseminate information (Carchiolo *et al.*,

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2018). Fisher (2018) states that there is rising tension between the ideal of 'trust' and the ever-greater pressure derived from the high degree of scepticism among consumers in the age of false news.

In their study, Kohring and Matthes (2007, p. 231) construct the first model of trust defined for communication studies. They claim that the study's results confirm the hypothesis that trust in the media can be seen as a (second-order) hierarchical factor comprising four lower-order factors, including trust in the selectivity of topics, in the selectivity of facts, in the accuracy of depictions and in journalistic assessment.

In the view of Schranz, Schneider and Eisenegger (2018), on the other hand, the question of the perception of trust in news is extremely important to sectorial sustainability, to the extent that intact trust in the media promotes not only the desire and willingness of audiences to pay for news, but also their acceptance of the advertising contents that are indispensable to the sectors' survival.

In a study in which she analyses the content of the discourse on the topic of surveillance by both media journalists/organisations and non-journalists on Twitter, Kapidzic *et al.* (2018) finds differences in the various dimensions of the discourses that were produced: 1) the dimension of impartiality, 2) the gatekeeping role of journalistic discourse and 3) the sense of responsibility and transparency of the discourse. The results show that journalists' tweets differ in all three dimensions from those posted by non-journalists, only a few of whom follow the norms applicable to journalistic outputs.

Schranz, Schneider and Eisenegger (2018) agree with Kapidzic's *et al.* (2018) views on the differences between journalistic and non-journalistic discourse and the repercussions these differences have on the norms governing journalistic outputs. Their argument, which is quite close to the theory of the journalist's jurisdictional power over the news (Benson, 2008), is that only the consumption of news in traditional formats using conventional-quality services, such as newspaper subscriptions, helps establish trust in the media.

That being so, it is possible to say that there is a perception among scholars that trust arises as an extension of the activity of the traditional media and in correlation with accredited journalistic practice in newspapers and on radio and television, but that the growth of production and dissemination in digital formats led by the social networks is corrupting, antagonising and making it difficult to determine an ideal of trust in news.

On suggesting a definition of the concept of trust in news as one of the goals set for this article, we find that this trust must be regarded as an extension of the trust in and positive expectations of the conduct of issuers. In other words, trust in news must be regarded as an extension of the trust in the different media and news agencies and the selectivity, impartiality, factuality, credibility and objectivity of the reports and stories they put out. It is therefore closely associated with the work of the traditional media, journalistic expertise and its positive social function. All these are highly conditioned today by the production of non-factual, unverifiable, misleading and inaccurate contents as a result of decentralised news non-markets, sub-journalism, the primacy of the economic value of news and the dynamics of disinformation, propaganda and manipulation of public opinion.

Public opinion studies tell us that trust in news is at historically low levels and that the existence of false news is leading to a bankruptcy of the so-called fourth estate (Fisher, 2018, p. 19). It is therefore necessary to continue to address the phenomenon, but without forgetting the characteristics that distinguish the media landscapes in different countries and the need to take care when interpreting the structures for measuring and reading trust in the news in different contexts and geographic areas. It is also important to examine the relationship of trust in the news in detail, depending on each platform and type of media used.

In the latest *Reuters Digital News Report* (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) surveys conducted in Portugal in conjunction with the Media/Communication Observatory (OberCom), the News

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Sources and Trust in the News module produced some interesting results on the issue in the Portuguese context.

6. Methodology and sampling

This article's methodology focuses on quantitative methods using mainly univariate analyses of data collated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in its Digital News Report 2018, which in Portugal was prepared in collaboration with the Media/Communication Observatory in Lisbon.

Although it focused special attention on data concerning Portugal, this Reuters survey was answered by Internet users in 37 countries, in representative samples. In Portugal, there were 1,049 respondents in 2015, 2,018 in 2016, 2,007 in 2017 and 2,008 in 2018. Some questions were repeated every year, while others –namely about fake news– were added in 2018 to the News Sources and Trust in the News module, which was the focus of our analysis.

The 2018 Reuters Digital News Report Portugal used an online survey during the months of January and February. It surveyed only Portuguese Internet users (in mainland Portugal and the Azores and Madeira autonomous regions). In other words, it addressed the attitudes and practices of around 70% of the Portuguese population (% of Internet users in Portugal). Nonetheless, the sample represented the entire Portuguese population, including the 30% that did not use the Internet. It was therefore not representative of just Internet users but rather the population as a whole, although only Internet users responded. The sample numbered 2,008 respondents in 2018, when the Reuters Digital News Report included News Sources and Trust in the News module for the first time. They consisted of 10.7% aged 18 to 24, 13.9% aged 25 to 34, 17.9% aged 35 to 44, 16.7% aged 45 to 54 and 40.8% aged over 55. There were practically equal numbers of male and female respondents.

One of the advantages of using these data in the News Sources and Trust in the DNR News module was the survey's representativity. After the *A Sociedade em Rede* reports ceased to be published in Portugal in 2013, the data are a new asset in the attempt to explore new dynamics in Portuguese people's online experiences.

7. Fake news in Portugal in the overall framework of trust in the news

Trust in the news can be a key indicator for understanding the scope and impact false news has on the relationship between news producers and news users. To begin with, it is interesting to ascertain the specificities of this relationship in different countries and their contexts.

The data from the 2017 Reuters survey show us, for example, that the impact that fake news had on the results of the last American presidential election campaign probably led to lower levels of trust in the news in the USA. As Figure 3 shows, only 38% of US Internet users who responded (n=2269) said they trusted news –one of the lowest values for any of the countries covered by the survey.

Basing ourselves on the idea that fake news is also a transnational phenomenon that is reflected at different levels of trust in news in different countries, it is important to have a more in-depth discussion of the different characteristics of a country like Portugal. Portugal reports high levels of trust in the news despite the fact that a substantial proportion of its Internet users come into daily contact with false contents and disinformation in their online experiences. In fact there is a particularity in the current Portuguese media landscape resulting from a moment of change. At the same time as the traditional media in general and television in particular play a central role in media consumer practices, social media are gaining more and more ground in daily routines (Silva *et al.*, 2017a, p. 195).

In Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classic work on media systems, Portugal appears alongside countries such as Italy, Greece and Spain under the polarised-pluralist model. This model is characterised by greater political control and state intervention in means of communication

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and the fragility of its media market. Having said this, Hallin and Mancini themselves later acknowledge that Portugal does not show the same degree of polarisation as other countries in the polarised-pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). What it does show is less intense political instrumentalisation.

> A less entrenched party culture, a more tenuous ideological differentiation between the mainstream parties, the aversion of journalists to political control and their desire to consolidate journalistic professionalism, and the small size of the media market all contributed to the fact that Portugal is not a typical example of the model" (Silva *et al.*, 2017a, p. 182).

In fact, other studies on media systems have shown that Portugal also shares similarities with Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland (Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014) and its media markets are more liberalised and deregulated than those in Germany or the Scandinavian countries. It also has characteristics in common with eastern European and former socialist countries as part of the peripheral cluster (Peruško, Vozab & Čuvalo, 2017). They show features such as less developed media markets or the merging of political and economic power and are also recognised as a hybrid media system, showing features of several models (Büchel *et al.*, 2016), having less political parallelism than the countries of the polarized-pluralist model and more press subsidies than the liberal media system.

In contrast, the United States is generally regarded as a paradigmatic example of the liberal model, with little state intervention and low levels of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Nonetheless, nowadays it has an increasingly polarized media environment, as shown by the 2017 Reuters survey. In terms of political parallelism, the current Portuguese context differs significantly from that initially described by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The authors themselves recognize this: "Portugal certainly did fit that model in the 1970s, after the revolution, when its media were highly politicized. In contrast to neighbouring Spain, however, the level of political parallelism seems to have declined significantly in subsequent years" (Hallin & Mancini, 2017, p. 6).

The small size of the Portuguese press market could threaten the ability of newspapers to withstand political and economic pressures but, again, Portugal is an unusual case. Despite its underdeveloped press market, economic and political pressures resulting in threats to press freedom have been negligible (Santana-Pereira, 2016, p. 786).

In terms of journalistic professionalism, Portugal ranks lower than the United States (Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014) but higher than Spain, Greece and Italy. This is "a relevant factor because of the impact it may have on the quality of information, and for its boosting effect in journalists' ability to resist pressures by political and economic agents" (Santana-Pereira, 2016, p. 792). In a report about Audiences and Media Consumption by the Portuguese media regulator (ERC, 2015), Portugal attributes journalists much more importance as a credibility source (70%) than the United States (53%), and is therefore more important in building trust in news. Also, according to the 2014 European Media Systems Survey (EMSS) data, the public perceives media outlets as actors that contribute positively to the quality of democracy (Santana-Pereira, 2016, p. 793).

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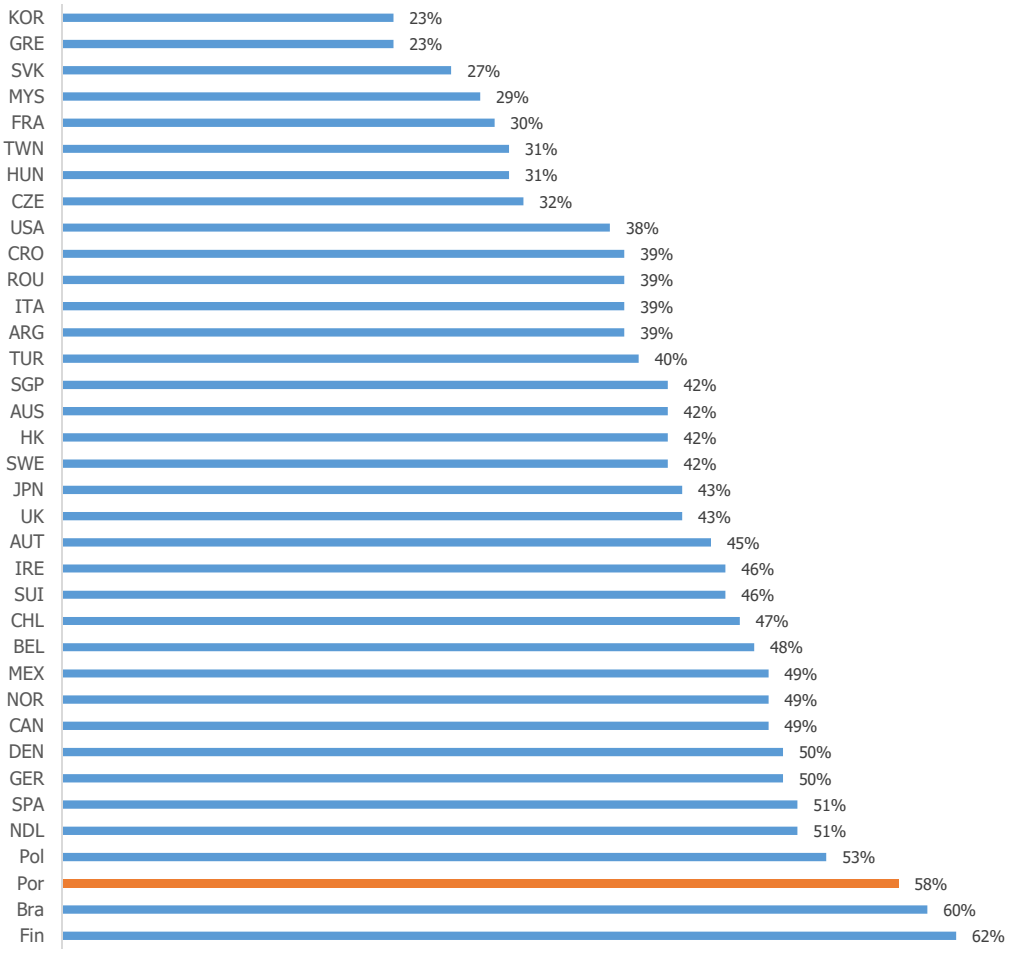
Figure 3: Global trust in the news media, by country in the study (ascending order).



Source: RDNR[11] 2017. Published by: Reuters Institute.

The multiple significances attributed to fake news by scholars and the business world make it possible to outline and structure the phenomenon, but often disregard the need to look at it from the point of view of its audiences, understanding how they perceive, characterise and position themselves towards false news, in a process that Zaryan (2017) defines as negotiation in the determination of fakeness.

What is it that audiences consider to be false news in online news media in accordance with the different dimensions in the broadest definition of fake news? How do they involve themselves –or not– with this false news? What impact does fake news have on audiences' trust? And what role does the dimension of trust play in the concept's definition?

We now use an analysis of the results of the online survey of a stratified representative sample of the Portuguese population to look at in this respect in Portugal.

- In general terms, and if we look at the 2018 results, 71.3% of the respondents in the survey said they were concerned about what was real and what was false on the Internet.

- The vast majority (67.8%) of the respondents said they were very or extremely worried about the existence of poor-quality journalism in Portugal. Only 6.5% said they were not bothered about this possibility.

- A vast majority (70.1%) of the respondents proved very or extremely worried about stories that were distorted (spun) to benefit a specific agenda.

[11] Reuters Digital News Report.

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- Around 70% of the respondents said they were very or extremely worried about stories invented for commercial or political purposes.

- Approximately 51% of the respondents said they were worried about contents that appeared to be news but proved to be advertising. 36.1% were reasonably worried about this type of content.

- The satirical dimension of news as false content was one that clearly troubled fewer respondents. 40.3% of the sample said they were not at all worried about stories that were invented to make people laugh. Only 29.6% said they were very or extremely worried about the existence of such contents.

- Around 49% of the respondents said that in the week prior to that of the survey they had come across news that fitted into the category of poor-quality journalism, such as factual errors, simplistic news coverage and misleading headlines.

- About 42% said they had noticed headlines that suggested news but were in fact adverts. 37.7% had come across news in which the facts were manipulated to serve specific agendas, 25.1% encountered use of the term 'fake news' to discredit news conveyed by news media, 20.2% found satirical news contents that might represent one of the dimensions of fake news and 19.2% came across false news intended for political or commercial purposes.

- Only 9.6% of the respondents said they had not encountered any types of news that counted as fake news –a result that suggests that false news and disinformation, or the interpretation thereof, are widely present in people's daily lives.

- When asked about their main source of news, the respondents also tended to put television above the other media. TV was the first choice of a considerable majority (55.3%) of respondents. Having said this, it is important to note that the printed press is positioned as the medium that is losing most ground to its competitors –especially new online channels. The collated results quite clearly demonstrate that the printed press is playing a secondary role to the Internet in general and social media in particular. From this, we can deduce that social media are now quite an important source in the Portuguese news diet and more or less deliberate consumption of news. However, the low levels of printed press consumption habits are not a new phenomenon. They are rather the result of the late development of both the mass media and capitalist system, industrialisation and democratic traditions in Portugal (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

- The vast majority (91.2%) of the 2018 *Reuters Digital News Report* survey respondents tended to access news in some format at least once a day, with about 43% saying they did so two to five times a day.

- Around 69% said they felt very or extremely interested in news, whereas only 3.2% said they had no interest in information contents.

- As mentioned earlier, there were a substantial number of respondents who said that the social media were their primary means of accessing news. The most frequently mentioned social media were Facebook in first place and YouTube in second.

-We can also see that the proportion of all Facebook users who view news on the platform is quite large, at 70.2% (respondent Facebook users who use it to access news as a percentage of all respondent Facebook users).

- As to trust in news, the central dimension of our analysis, a considerable majority of respondents tended to trust not only in the news they viewed (62.3%), but also in virtually all the news produced in Portugal (62.1%). These results are higher than those for any of the other countries in the study (with the exception of Finland).

- An analysis of the data obtained to cross-reference 'trust in the news' and 'main source of news' highlights two interpretations: 1) Regardless of their main source of information, the majority of respondents tended to trust the news in general. 2) Those for whom online channels (social media and Internet) were the main news sources are less represented in the overall universe of respondents who trusted in news. The number of respondents who trusted

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in news and whose primary news source was television was 13.7 percentage points higher than that of those who trusted in news and whose main source of news was the social media.

8. Conclusions

It is important to realise that studying fake news and trust in the news in Portugal basically means using national particularities to go deeper into what is actually a global phenomenon, using the overall conceptual framework that shapes these two phenomena to determine specific considerations on the framework in this country.

Although there is no basic typology for defining the concepts (which we tried to resolve by suggesting a new definition of fake news), scholars tend to represent their understanding of fake news, disinformation and mal-information in terms of the dimensions of fictitious, slanted and propagandist news of a kind that seeks to manipulate and condition its recipients' opinions and behaviours. This aspect of the question is dominated by a dimension of intentionality or premeditation on the part of the author of the content with regard to their relationship with its audience.

However, theoretical assumptions that limit the definition of the phenomenon also presume that fake news can exist as the result of both intentionally and unintentionally imprecise and careless journalism. This journalism is generally associated with misinformation. There are also satirical contents which, although they possess some intrinsic misleading potential, are not intended to cause harm.

We also conclude that fake news is regarded ambivalently in academic discourse. Sometimes it is considered a great opportunity for journalism to use the value provided by the specialised, expert nature of accredited practice to establish itself once and for all as the nerve centre in the fight against disinformation. Other times it is regarded as the cause of the bankruptcy of professional practice brought about by perceptions that news is generally being discredited, which is in turn leading to the deterioration of democracies.

We first ascertained what had been done in terms of regulation and measures to combat fake news on the basis of the ground-breaking measures taken by the EU. We then endeavoured to understand how the phenomenon fitted in with the discussion about trust in the news, based on the Reuters Digital News Report Portugal. The report clearly showed the different results for the general impact of the global fake news phenomenon on degrees of trust on the part of the Portuguese population compared to that in other countries. Assuming that it was possible to draw lines of differentiation sustained by the data, we then suggested some explanatory scenarios.

Contrary to the overall European context (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017) and although the vast majority of Portuguese Internet users come across at least one of the types of news that fall within the broader concept of fake news, they still display high levels of trust in both the news in general and the news they choose. The trust levels were higher among respondents who chose traditional formats as their main news sources and slightly lower among those who preferred the Internet or social media.

One of the explanations for this discrepancy between trust in news in Portugal and in other European countries may lie in the unique features of its media system, making the country the least polarised of the polarised-pluralist countries (Santana-Pereira, 2016). We must not overlook the fact that the low levels of polarisation in the Portuguese media organisations' political orientations are reflected in a scarcity of ideological projects in the form of news agendas, unlike what is currently happening in the United States. Secondly, the weakness of Portugal's media market does not necessarily translate into threats to press freedom, despite existing political and economic pressures. Thirdly, in spite of its rather low levels in Portugal, the growing consolidation of journalistic professionalism may again move the country away from the "classical" polarised-pluralist model and explain resistance to political control and instrumentalisation. Fourthly, the public's perceptions of journalists and

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the media is highly positive in terms of credibility, trust and role in democracy. In fact, recent qualitative studies of media consumer practices in Portugal have concluded that users "prefer normative and institutional ideas of news produced by journalistic professionals and in which the media organisation's reputation stands out as an important criterion in the majority of media repertories" (Silva *et al.*, 2017a, 2017b). This may also be linked to the high levels of trust in the news in Portugal.

In short, the great majority of Portuguese respondents said they often come across false news, though contrary to other European countries (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017), this encounter does not result in generalised distrust of news. However, the high level of trust in the news by the majority of respondents, which was embodied in a generalised interest in news, did not prevent most of them from worrying about what was not real on the Internet. They were particularly concerned about the existence of poor-quality journalism and stories that were constructed from distorted facts in order to benefit specific political or commercial agendas.

It is therefore possible to define the Portuguese respondents as really quite attentive Internet users who are aware of the dimension and scope of fake news, but do not allow their trust in news to be shaken, while still remaining attentive to the phenomenon's characteristics.

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