

Fake news and education for enlightened citizenry

Fake news ed educazione per una cittadinanza illuminata

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ABSTRACT

The Fake News' topic is interesting because it is new and it is old at the same time. If we want to define "fake news" we cannot give it a unique meaning. Someone frames fake news only in the social media area, some others extend the meaning to newspapers, someone else to any kind of mass media (TV, Books, Radio, etc.). But it is sure that our students don't know how to detect them and how to fight them.

The extent of perceived realism of fake news depends also on the extent of hard-news exposure, with the result that individuals exposed to both hard and fake news find fake-news messages less realistic. So we also need to teach our students how become hard-news reader in order to know and detect fake news. In this article we see the "status" of the Fake News problem, how some national and international laws are going on, and some exercises that we can do with our students in order to be "more democratic".

L'argomento Fake News è interessante perché è nuovo e vecchio allo stesso tempo. Potremmo tentare di definire il termine "Fake News" senza però dargli un significato unico. Qualcuno infatti incornicia le Fake News solo nel settore dei social media, altri estendono il significato anche ai giornali, qualcuno altro a qualsiasi tipo di mass media (TV, libri, radio, ecc.). È sicuro però che i nostri studenti non sanno né come rilevarle né come combatterle.

L'entità del realismo percepito delle Fake News dipende anche dal grado di esposizione dei fruitori alle hard-news, infatti gli individui esposti sia alle Hard che alle Soft news trovano i messaggi delle Fake News meno realistiche. Perciò abbiamo anche bisogno di insegnare ai nostri studenti come diventare lettori critici delle news in generale, al fine di conoscere e rilevare le notizie false. In questo articolo presentiamo lo "status" del problema delle Fake News, come alcune leggi nazionali e internazionali siano in corso, e alcuni esercizi che possiamo fare con i nostri studenti al fine di diventare "più democratici".

KEYWORDS

Education, Fake News, Democracy, Echo Chambers.
Educazione, Fake News, Democrazia, Camere dell'eco.

Introduction

The Fake News' topic is interesting because it is new and it is old at the same time.

In 2017 Collin's dictionary named "fake news" as its word of the year¹ and when we recall that in 2016 another dictionary chose as its word of the year "post truth"² we realize that we may be in trouble (Sanders, 2018).

It is a new topic because the term reached public notoriety only after US President Trump spoke about it during his election campaign.

It is old because the dissemination of fake information (whether it is propaganda, misinformation or mystification) has always been used by human beings (especially in politics and in wars).

The digital evolution started important transformation, it realized a disintermediation with information operators who, previously, could boast a kind of oligopoly in the creation and dissemination of news.

Moreover, the press' invention had already expanded the scope of the subjects in a position to exercise, with writing, their right to speak and similar phenomena occurred at the birth of every further communication's device.

New media further widen the circle of subjects, reaching an almost universalistic recognition of the "right to freely express one's own thought with words, written and any other device of diffusion" (Italian Constitution, 1948, article 21). This may induces to marginalize the role of professional information operators who were previously responsible for monitoring news (where "monitoring" means the process of: production, verification and all complementary and related activities) (Bassini, 2017).

Already in the past (but even today) there were the "corridor voices" (rumors) which, however, remained confined to word of mouth among people. They remained confined to a narrow circle of people.

The so-called "rumors" are a very common human reality, but they find a great ally in the online universe, because it promotes its diffusion.

They are brief information, not confirmed but likely, and shared by reliable sources. Pujol (2018) says that: "using rumors as a disinformation strategy is despicable, but the fact that it is possible to win elections by manipulating the network, or earning money by moving the stock market with fake news is more disturbing.

This happened for example in 2013, when a hacker, using Associated Press's Twitter account, issued the fake news of an explosion in the White House that wounded Barack Obama. This news generated a 100-point drop in the Dow Jones in three minutes. The markets resumed as soon as the truth came out".

Even before the World Wide Web, several apologetic pamphlets and false historians have spread widely around Europe, and even outside, spreading fake messages.

One well-known example is "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", within it was precisely described the plan of conquest of the world by the Jewish community, which should have been realized through the control of the centers of modern Western societies, such as finance, press, economy, military armies, morals

1 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty>

2 <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>

and culture. This book was committed by the Zar and written by Sergei Nilus and it is dated between 1903 and 1905, the libellus was translated into many languages by Russian and originally from French and still circulates despite evidence of falsification and the detailed demolition of all the contents of the book, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion continued to be considered by the anti-Semites of the whole world as an important and reliable proof of the will to a reversal of the world order by the Jewish people.

If we want to go closer in time we could also mention Orson Welles.

Its history is known as the biggest media hoax of our century (radio fake-news). A farce capable of throwing into the panic thousands of Americans from every social stratum. A radio drama that definitely changed not only the career of its creator, but all the sociological study on mass media exposure's effects.

We are talking about the radio transposition of the "War of the Worlds" science fiction novel by H.G. Wells.

Welles decides, to 'give flavor' to that dish (the simple reading of the book). He decided to set the transmission as if it were a normal musical program interrupted, at a certain moment, by a fake news announcing an alien invasion and its dramatic developments. During the transmission, Welles included fake citations of apparently authoritative sources, such as the 'Museum of Natural History' or 'Professor Gray, head of the Astronomical Division', to give it further credibility.

The cleverly designed detachments between the radio broadcast and the commentary of the attack of the aliens came to a climax when the first radio silences arrived (as to increase the tension), occasionally taken from some sporadic and confused chronicle, until it arrived to an apparent transmissions cessation's.

From that moment, panic broke out.

Thousands of completely confused people poured into the streets and allowed themselves to behave with serious irrationality. Numerous traffic jams were reported in the main streets of many cities in the United States, while communication lines became overloaded until collapse.

Someone abandoned himself to episodes of violence, others begged not to be involved in the attack. In San Francisco, a woman came to the police with torn clothes claiming to have been attacked by aliens, while in New York it took weeks to convince some of those who had escaped to return to their homes (Pensieri, 2018a).

We can say that from the world wide web's birth there have arisen several "wounds" related to the Internet. The first is the massive increase in pornography, followed by the propagation of spam and the spread of computer viruses and now the spread of fake news and misinformation.

Internet has the problem of the reliability of information sources. We can remember the waves of messages in which it was said that the Emeritus Pope Ratzinger was close to death and asked to pray for him. This fake news was given through Facebook and WhatsApp several times in 2017. This fake news was so widespread that the head of the Vatican Press Room had to stop the rumors and tweet a photograph of the pope emeritus in the Vatican gardens (Pujol, 2018).

This example is just one of many others that still happen everyday. Someone could remember the "pizzagate", in 2016, a man of 35 years after read a fake news on Facebook entered a restaurant in the suburbs of Washington (the Comet Ping Pong). He had an assault rifle and fired a few blows in the air fortunately without injuring anyone. Comet Ping Pong was the fictitious center of an equally fake scandal that emerged during the 2016 US presidential campaign: Pizzagate. This case-study revealed how disparate sets of rumors can combine to shape public

discourse and, at times, potentially lead to dangerous behavior (Rainie, 2017 p. 3).

But also healthcare's fake news are now spreading.

Fake news about health seems to be more pervasive and harder to weed out.

It flourishes today because increasingly we're getting our news from social media where it's hard to check whether a story is fact, fiction or fantasy. It works, because the human brain is sensitive to threats of danger, so it's easy to spread paranoia. Confirmation bias, leads us to believe stories that confirm our prejudices. By the time truth emerges, the lie has already done its harm.

If all we have is individuals pursuing self-interest, people will deceive whenever it's in their interests to do so and can get away with it. It is our moral responsibility in healthcare to ensure that we lead by example and that "truth prevails" (Sanders, 2018).

1. A tentative definition of "fake news"

If we want to define "fake news" we cannot give it a unique meaning.

Someone frames fake news only in the social media area, some others extend the meaning to newspapers, someone else to any kind of mass media (TV, Books, Radio, etc.).

Surely it is interesting to note that immediately after the emphasis given by President Trump, Google Trends has recorded an incredible growth in searches related to the word "fake news", in fact in November and December 2016, Google has recorded a number of searches over 15 months previous combined together (Vargo 2018).

Vosoughi (2018) has conducted a research in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Media Lab in order to analyze the differential diffusion of true and fake news, verified and published on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. Data includes about 126,000 stories tweeted by about 3 million people over 4.5 million times. The news is classified as true or false using information from six independent organizations (Snopes.com, Politifact.com and other independent fact-finding institutions) that controlled 95-98% of the classifications. This research shows how fake Twitter news spread twenty times faster than traditional media. In addition to the speed of diffusion, a crucial fact for the topic of this section is that the guilty of this effect are not bots but people. As the author says in the research results: "we conclude that human behavior contributes to a greater extent to the diffusion of falsehood and truth in front of automated robots" (Vosoughi, 2018).

This study shows that the problem of fake news is not just a problem derived from social networks as a technological ecosystem, but that it is also a problem created by human behavior (Pujol, 2018).

In the social media world, the Fake News term sometimes means: "viral posts based on fictitious accounts made to look like news reports and are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017) and they add that they are "news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as news" (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017: 5). Others narrow the definition to include only "completely false information that was created for financial gain" (Silverman, 2017) and which resembles credible journalism in order to maximize attention (Hunt, 2016, but also see Mustafaraj and Metaxas, 2017).

If we think at the social media world, every post (also fake news) that has lots of "Like", shares or comments has a higher possibility to attract attention of other surfers so it is more likely that other people re-like, re-shares, or re-comments that post (Thorson, 2008).

Popularity on social media is therefore a self-vivacizing cycle, which well lends itself to the propagation of unverified information. Nowadays we have also witnessed the development of so-called “bots” (and social “bots” that automate this cycle of self-vivacization, they share fake news from fake accounts) (Lokot, 2015).

We can also say, now, that Fake News are completely invented or modified news that are spread.

Some of them are true but exaggerated, some are really but distorted, while others are completely invented. We must also consider “intentionality”, that is, at the basis of the fabrication of fake news. There is the precise will to condition others’ will.

Many people believe that “fake news” has become a powerful and sinister force in the online media environment, with dire consequences for democracy (Glaser, 2017, Zengerle, 2016).

As a result, journalistic organizations and technology companies have taken steps to minimize the production and dissemination of fake news (Owen, 2016).

The theoretical foundation on which they are based, presumed that fake news reaches a broad and sensitive audience, which does not compare these stories with other sources.

Instead, according to Nelson and Taneja (Nelson 2018), it seems that the public of politician’s fake news is only a limited number of frequent Internet’s users, while most of the readers continue to stick to the most known news agencies.

As we said, the meaning of the term fake news derives from a confluence of events leading to the Donald Trump’s. It is also due to the increasingly central role of social networks for the news consumption (Gottfried 2016), the Russian propaganda effort to produce and spread fake news during the 2016 presidential campaign (Timberg 2016) and the habit of some political elites to legitimize fake news stories by passing them to their followers using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Flood 2016).

These circumstances helped to create a media environment in which sensational titles are easier to find than those verified. As a result, two out of three US adults now believe that fake news causes confusion and problems about current events (Barthel 2015).

Moreover, one of the Fake News’ serious problems is that the public (who stumbles and believes this news) is often not exposed to the real news. Real news that could push them to ask questions about what is true and what is false. Nelson and Taneja (Nelson 2018) say that fake news audience is small and includes a subset of the most immersed and assiduous Internet users.

Other authors such as Wardle (2017) - First Draft News director, an international network on the verification of online sources - has proposed a clear distinction between Disinformation and Misinformation.

The Disinformation is the creation of false news, a deliberate creation and diffusion of false information.

Misinformation, on the other hand, is the involuntary spread (by individual citizens or by newspapers) of false information believed true.

While for misinformation there is not a law that can punish people, for disinformation it exists.

Leaving aside the fake news that can generate an unjustified alarm in the population (alarm) or trying to direct the financial markets (that are regulated by Italian Code of Criminal Procedure), we can say that the false information is defamatory news that in addition to being false are, in fact, also defamatory and that is aimed at damage others reputation.

We could therefore say that fake news is a “social-lie” (socially) problem that is relevant because above all is “social” and than is “lie” with lying intention.

As reported by Anderson (2017), young people are known to be technology experts compared to their parents, but when it comes to the ability to figure out if a news item is fake or not, they look as confused as the rest of the company and 44% is confirmed by a Common Sense Media³ research. The same research also indicates that 31% of boys between the ages of 10 and 18 shared at least one piece of news online which they later found to be inaccurate or fake.

This situation raises a new dimension of concerns related to digital literacy that goes beyond the simple ability to access and manage technology.

Finally, we have to remember that there are two reasons why for the Fake News creation (Allcott 2017):

1. **Economic reason:** fake stories often become viral (and as a virus spread in the infosphere) and provide content producers with convertible clicks in advertising revenue. It is a nowadays news that Facebook has deleted more than 837 million fake accounts.
2. **Discriminatory reason:** on the other hand, other suppliers of fake news produce them to promote particular ideas or to advertise people they prefer, often discrediting others, defaming people or companies.

Finally, we can see that the “fake news” term is an oxymoron (Tandoc 2018).

In the journalistic field a “news” indicates a news that refers to an actual event (Kershner 2005) whose “facts” should be mentioned, so if it is false “it is not” a “news”.

In order to better explain my idea I can say that in the journalistic field a widespread motto is that: “a dog that bites a man is not a news, but a man who bites a dog yes”. This is a definition that emphasizes the fact that an event must have a certain extraordinary nature to be a news. Furthermore, the kind of news could be “hard” and “soft”.

“Hard news” defines news and current affairs, but also political, internal, foreign: everything that happens at that moment in the world, and that needs to be communicated immediately.

“Soft news” refers to “light” themes, such as in-depth articles on the subject, news stories, curiosities. The events and the topics of which the soft news are dealt with do not require timely communication: for this reason they can also be useful for packaging the CDs (“Cold pieces”).

Personally I think that fake news can be defined only social media ones, because for a newspaper disinformation is liable to legal actions while misinformation is a sign of lack of reliability of the newspaper that over time will pay losing customers/readers.

While for social networks it is often impossible to trace the primordial source of the news but it navigates in the infosphere, without an author to blame and quickly reaches millions of people (Figueira 2017) who watch it and actively participate in its dissemination.

Dans (2018) says that in a short period, “we have created a system that enables

3 <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/our-new-research-shows-where-kids-get-their-news-and-how-they-feel-about-it> Accesso del 17.05.2018.

and encourages us to share information, while at the same time renouncing any responsibility for formally educating people in its use”.

Dans says: “If we see something that attracts our attention or that coincides with our world view, we share it, usually without checking it first. And of course, if everybody is sharing something, then it must be true.” (Dans 2018). If something has been shared by many people, it certainly becomes a sort of absolute truth. This vulnerability of truth created and shared on the net by peers’ system, has been exploited in a clear way by those who have learned a great polarization progress (Pujol 2018).

2. Educational Issues

Dans (2018) says: “the real culprits are not bots and fake accounts managed in the Balkans or Russia, but our collective naivety [...]. Technology isn’t going to help us solve the root problem of our willingness to share fake news. It will only come through education [...]. It is only by adapting our education systems, and now, to the changing times we live in that we will stop the spread of fake news”.

The researchers at Stanford’s Graduate School of Education (Wineburg, 2016) have spent more than a year evaluating how well students across the country can evaluate online sources of information. Middle school, high school and college students in 12 states were asked to evaluate the information presented in tweets, comments and articles. More than 7,800 student responses were collected.

In exercise after exercise, the researchers were “shocked” by how many students failed to effectively evaluate the credibility of that information.

The students displayed a “stunning and dismaying consistency” in their responses, the researchers wrote, getting duped again and again. They weren’t looking for high-level analysis of data but just a “reasonable bar” of, for instance, telling fake accounts from real ones, activist groups from neutral sources and ads from articles.

More than 80 percent of middle schoolers believed that ‘sponsored content’ was a real news story. Many high school students couldn’t tell a real and fake news source apart on Facebook.

They didn’t ask where it came from. They didn’t verify it. They simply accepted the picture as fact.

What has emerged in recent years are websites dedicated solely to propagating fake news (Vargo, 2018). Unlike Painter and Hodges’ (2010) notion of press accountability, these fake news websites are financially motivated (Dewey, 2016) and generally fabricate information to stir controversy (Maheshwari, 2016). Content on these sites is sensationalized in intentional ways to drive up the volume of clicks and shares (Mustafaraj and Metaxas, 2017; Silverman and Alexander, 2016).

In a meta-analysis, researchers have found over 100 websites that regularly publish false information and remain active today (Shao et al., 2016).

Cost reduction, easy website activation and easy contents sharing have led to an almost unconditional opening internet contribution in which each user, once a mere recipient of information, can now become a producer, even if he does not have the baggage of expertise and experience that should be in a professional journalist (Bassini, 2017).

These transformations stimulate our need to reflect on the persistent relevance of the principles and rules of liberal derivation.

We must reflect on the need to revisit some fixed and consolidated points in order to react to the development and diffusion on the web of a phenomenon that is profoundly different from those that have been known up to now.

In other words, we must ask ourselves whether the differences between traditional media and new media are so deep that they demand the elaboration not only of new standards but also of new paradigms.

Although today IT companies are working on innovative algorithms that allow fake news recognition and deletion, the topic is not yet well managed and has its roots in the morning of world wide web.

Bassini (2017) says that several years ago, when the 56 Kbps modem was still used and the network had not yet been pervaded every segment of the social and professional dimension of business, came to light an “anti-fake service”, which still exists and works today.

That time this service mostly served to disavow an improper use of e-mail: “St. Anthony chain’s”, that were the requests for help, fake fundraising or magical wealth multiplier.

The Italian’s online “antibufala” (anti-hoaxes) services, the medium familiarity and the increased digital literacy allowed to overcome this phenomenon.

We wonder if even today, because of this new wave of “hoaxes”, the development of a greater capacity for discernment by users does not promise an equal overcoming of the problem of circulation of fake news.

After all, the parallelism seems to be confirmed: while the circulation of the first “St. Anthony chain’s” was entrusted to an imprudent and elementary use of electronic mail, the fake news spreading feeds the “participatory web”, in which not only it is possible to activate channels or sharing platforms, which formally present themselves as counter-information sites but represent a repository of completely approximate, untrue or biased news, and at the same time it is given to users the possibility to interact actively with the contents, sharing them, commenting on them and contributing, in some cases, also to “viral” forms of fake news spreading (Bassini 2017).

Cinque (2018) says that “the huge Internet asset represents an incredible opportunity but also a challenge, in didactical terms. Kids do not imagine that there can be research strategies and qualitative differences between their internet searches”. Search engines always improve by providing in the shortest possible plausible answers to the questions that students ask themselves. “This seems to make any form of education superfluous”. However “the ability to” search “for something appropriate, in this huge amount of data, is more problematic than what search tools like Google do perceive” (Cinque, 2018).

By this way, Colglazier (2017)⁴ believe it is his professional responsibility - his civic duty - to teach students the democratic ideals necessary for an enlightened citizenry. “I can’t lament my students’ inability to decipher fake news if I haven’t given them a chance to practice doing it”. By teaching students how to decipher credible information, educators can empower them with “civic online reasoning” skills.

The expert, the teacher and the educator in the Italian socio-cultural system is no longer the unique holder of the information as traditionally always hap-

4 Colglazier W. is a history teacher to 11th-graders at Aragon High School in the San Mateo Union High School District in California. He has been an educator for 12 years.

pened.

It is a doubly critical fact: for the teacher because since it involves a radical re-definition of his tasks; for students, because in the deluge of information from which they are overwhelmed it is very difficult to distinguish reliable information from those that feed misconceptions (Rivoltella, 2017).

Rheingold (2012), in the “*crap detection*” chapter describes how to find and distinguish information sources that are not just texts but, above all, people who make up the “personal learning network” (PLN) in which people play the tutor role of critical thinking.

The recipe for PLN in 8 points is:

1. explore
2. seek
3. follow
4. step up
5. feed
6. engage
7. interest
8. answer.

Criteria and guidelines for evaluating the results of internet searches were already elaborated, they involved various parameters:

- usability evaluation: design, accessibility, ease of retrieval of information (if the website has an internal search engine, an alphabetical index, a subject index);
- content evaluation: target, update’s frequency, contents’ care editing, editorial plan, user feedback management;
- credibility assessment: reliability of the information provided and used sources; author/website authoritativeness, authoritativeness of organizations connected to it.

Lots of evaluation grids for these parameters already exist.

For usability we usually refer to the Jakob Nielsen’s (2000) “heuristic rules”, by which in many of his contributions has always recalled the need for clarity, consistency, simplicity and effectiveness of navigation that, even before the characteristics aesthetics and ‘special effects’, make the difference between a good site and a mediocre one.

Regarding the website’s content and credibility, some useful criteria are McGovern (2003) and the Stanford Guidelines for Web Credibility (Fogg, 2002) ones which are directed to webmasters.

In the following table, Cinque (2018) has reshaped the objectives for students (Table 1).

Content quality (Mc Govern 2001)	Credibility of content - Stanford Guidelines (Fogg 2002)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the published content suitable for readers? (is it useful for who? who is the target audience of the site?) - How often is the website updated? - Contents are well prepared? - Is a precise editorial plan respected? - How are the authors and the Webmaster managed? - Are the metadata of sufficient quality? - 7. How are user feedback managed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was it easy to ascertain the accuracy of the information provided? - Is the organization behind the publication of the site visible (transparency)? - The professionalism and knowledge present in the organization and the content and services offered are highlighted? - Are the honesty and seriousness of the people involved in the organization highlighted? - Is it easy to contact the website editor? - Does the site appear professional (in relation to the purposes of the site)? Why? - Is the website useful and easy to use? - Is the website content updated? - Is the website adopting restriction for promotional material (advertising, offers)? - 10. Are there any errors (syntax, grammar, content, graphics, etc.)?

Tab 1 - Website's quality and credibility evaluation

Student's ability to know how to evaluate the quality of the contents and to ascertain the credibility of the information, searching the site for news on the sources of origin of the contents, is a fundamental competence in the post-truth era.

But when we talk about fake news we have to know that they have important features like: strong titles, fascinating images (including memes), captivating videos and infographics, also often refer to fraudulent websites.

It is not easy for computer algorithms to distinguish text/images/video appropriateness.

There is also an important detail that distinguishes fake news target from paper magazines or traditional TV ones.

The reader who reads the newspaper or sees the Television news is a subject that passively accepts the information and based on its own processing (critical sense). He can spread it in the community in which he lives, in the working and social environments in which he is inserted with a very slow process.

In the digital world the reader is no longer a passive subject, he becomes active because he has several tools that allow him to spread the news.

With the social media sharing possibilities he can rapidly expand his range of fake news diffusion within his circle and much beyond.

Qiu (2017) shows that the particularity of the social networks' structure and the human limited attention are the two factors that make possible the fake news rapid diffusion.

To educate our students on the recognition of fake news we must keep in mind some characteristics (Pensieri, 2018b):

1. the overload of information we receive every day;
2. our limited attention;
3. strong emotional reactions they activates;
4. strong titles;
5. fascinating images (including memes);
6. interesting videos;
7. captivating infographics;

8. references to fraudulent websites;
9. little facticity: it is not often respected the basic journalistic scheme of the 5W (Who? What? When? Where? Why?);
10. students must pay attention to the Echo Chambers: it is a sort of bubble where people live with exposure only to their own opinions and those who subscribe to the same ideas. Fake news often bounces around echo chambers with no one to dispute its veracity. A quick Google search often verifies whether something is real or a hoax. The answer lies in our brains and a little-known phenomenon called “confirmation bias”. When we see new information, we try to decide whether or not to believe it. Generally, if the new information confirms existing beliefs that we hold, we buy into it automatically (and hence retweet and share). But if the new information is contrary to what we already know, we’re most likely to discard it in order to maintain cognitive consistency. When information agrees with students beliefs, it takes no time to confirm it; when information disagrees, it takes many, many contrary facts before they even consider changing their minds.

Khosravinik (2017) - University of Newcastle - warns that these Echo Chambers amplify fake news by strengthening existing opinions rather than giving access to information that could challenge them.

Those who attend these groups and webpages find themselves in a situation in which information, ideas or beliefs are amplified and reinforced thanks to their transmission and repetition in a “closed” system, and in which different or competing points of view are censored.

It is like: “the more I think of something in a certain way, the more that idea will be strengthened, because it is corroborated by contents that come to me from the digital network in which I am inserted and in which dissonant opinions fail to enter”.

4. Laws

The German Parliament has approved a law that regulates the tasks and responsibilities of social networks, especially in the hate speech’s cases (Codiglione, 2017). The German model focuses on the repression, of hate speech rather than fake news, but does not fail to offer a cross-section of the problems that any measures control on content determines with respect to the platform operators’ physiognomy and business model.

Also European Union fight the manifestations of illicit contents on the Internet.

It is interesting also, for the issue of fake news, the Communication on the fight against illegal online content (European Commission, 2017) which, in September 2017, the European Commission transmitted to Parliament and Council.

This text aims at enhancing the “proactive” role of intermediaries. It is based on the postulate that online platforms must exercise greater responsibility for content control.

It provides guidelines and principles for online platforms to fight illegal content, in collaboration with national authorities, Member States and other stakeholders, especially in relation to incitement to terrorism and hate speech.

In particular, it identifies common tools to prevent, quickly identify, remove and avoid the reappearance, through the deactivation of account, of illicit content. From this point of view, network operators are required to act quickly in the removal of content, in some cases even after individuals report.

Sajo and Tsotsoria, two judges of the Grand Chamber of the European Court, in the *Delphi Vs Estonia*⁵ case have communicated a dissenting opinion on the decision of the Strasbourg's Court, which had judged no disproportionate the interference with the art. 10 of the ECHR deriving from the sentence for "compensation for damages" caused by the non-timely removal by an online portal of comments of a defamatory nature.

This was the first case in which the Court had occasion to examine the responsibility of an on-line news portal for comments posted by its readers.

Two contradictory realities lay at the heart of this case. On one hand, the benefits of the Internet that we all appreciate, especially the fact that it is an unprecedented medium for the exercise of freedom of expression, and on the other, the risks that it presents, and in particular the danger of its being used for hate speech or calls to violence, reaching a worldwide audience instantly and remaining on line perhaps indefinitely (Raimondi, 2016).

In short, if Internet service providers were obliged to remove content or otherwise they'll be held responsible for them, they could implement private censorship strategies for fear of incurring penalties, which would likely produce a downward effect in the circulation of information on the We⁶.

On closer inspection, every reflection focused on the repression of the fake news phenomenon, as well as, of hate speech, intercepts a theme that is at the roots of the liberal-democratic state and calls into question the interpretation of constitutional principles and, in particular, freedom of expression.

This discourse also concerns the concepts related to the model of democracy ("open democracy" or "militant democracy") (Loewenstein, 1937) and perhaps the optimistic (or pessimistic) view of citizens' ability to critically submit messages conveyed on new and old information platforms.

We should also remember that in the Italian penal code, for defamation in the press, in the advertising (which also includes social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or in public act provides for imprisonment from six months to three years or a fine of not less than 516 euro⁷.

In Italy there is currently a new draft law that contains "provisions to prevent the manipulation of online information, it should ensure transparency and encourage media literacy".

It seems that the sanctions will be very severe: fines of up to 5 thousand euros. Moreover, if the "hoax" should generate public alarm or harm to the public interest, in addition to the pecuniary sentence, the imprisonment will not be less than 12 months

5. Training

Below, we describe some strategies employed by fact checkers and how educators can adapt them to help their students become savvy web users (McGrew, 2017).

5 Online: http://www.portolano.it/pcc_newsletters/delfi-vs-estonia-la-liberta-della-rete-e-davvero-in-pericolo/.

6 We have to wait the new Copyright Law that the EU is discussing in 2018.

7 Art. 595, comma 3, The Italian Code of Criminal Procedure.

Teach students to read laterally

College students and even professors can approach websites using checklist like behaviors: they scan up and down pages, they comment on site design and fancy logos, they can note “.org” domain names, and they examine references at the bottom of a page, open new tabs, and investigate outside the site itself.

They should leave a site in order to learn more about it.

This may seem paradoxical, but it allowed fact checkers to leverage the strength of the entire Internet to get a fix on one node in its expansive web.

Help students make smarter selections from search results

In an open search, the first site we click matters. Our first impulse might send us down a road of further links, or, if we're in a hurry, it might be the only venue we consult. Like the rest of us, fact checkers relied on Google. But instead of equating placement in search results with trustworthiness (the mistaken belief that the higher up a result, the more reliable), as college students tend to do, in the McGrew research (2017) 11 fact checker students understood how easily Google results can be gamed. Instead of mindlessly clicking on the first or second result, they exhibited click restraint, taking their time on search results, scrutinizing URLs and snippets (the short sentence accompanying each result) for clues. They regularly scrolled down to the bottom of the results page, sometimes even to the second or third page, before clicking on a result.

Teach students to use Wikipedia wisely

Fact checkers' first stop was often a site many educators tell students to avoid. What we should be doing instead is teaching students what fact checkers know about Wikipedia and helping them take advantage of the resources of the fifth-most trafficked site on the web.

Students should learn about Wikipedia's standards of verifiability and how to harvest entries for links to reliable sources.

They should investigate Wikipedia's "Talk" pages (the tab hiding in plain sight next to the "Article" tab), which, on contentious issues like gun control, the status of Kashmir, waterboarding, or climate change, are gold mines where students can see knowledge-making in action. They should practice using Wikipedia as a resource for lateral reading. Fact checkers, short on time, often skipped the main article and headed straight to the references, clicking on a link to a more established venue. Why spend 15 minutes having students, armed with a checklist, evaluate a website on a tree octopus (www.zapatopi.net/treeoctopus) when a few seconds on Wikipedia shows it to be "an Internet hoax created in 1998"?

McGrew (2017) suggests these activities to try in classrooms.

Model Lateral Reading

Show students an article on minimumwage.com (we recommend "Denmark's Dollar Forty-One Menu"). Ask them to spend a few minutes deciding whether it is a reliable source of information on the minimum wage, and tell them they can use any online resources to help them. Then, model how you would approach the site by demonstrating lateral reading. Based on our experience, students will be surprised at what you find — and at how their favored methods of evaluation fail them.

Compare Search Results

Begin by asking students how they decide which search results to click (some students may admit to always clicking on the first one!).

Tell students that many people erroneously think search results are ranked entirely on the reliability of the websites. Explain that a better strategy is to quickly scan the URLs and snippets of search results to decide where to click first. Then, ask students to work in groups to analyze the results of different searches: they should investigate both the website that comes up first and another site using the strategy you taught them. Have them compare the sites and share what they learned with the rest of the class.

Analyze Wikipedia

Pick a topic that you have covered in class - something that you're confident students have knowledge about. Ask students to read both the Wikipedia entry (or part of it) and an encyclopedia's description of the same topic.

Then, lead a class discussion to compare the texts. Support students in considering multiple factors, including the depth and quality of coverage, authority of the authors, references, and opportunities provided by the texts to learn more. Finish by asking students to reflect on what they learned about Wikipedia and whether anything about the comparisons surprised them. Share with students the results of a study that appeared in the prestigious journal *Nature*, which found that the average Wikipedia scientific entry contained four errors. Let them know that the same study showed that *Encyclopedia Britannica*, considered the world's top reference authority, contained, on average, three errors per entry.

Conclusion

The web is a sophisticated place, and all of us (students and teachers) are susceptible to being taken in.

Like hikers using a compass to make their way through the wilderness, we need a few powerful and flexible strategies for getting our bearings, gaining a sense of where we have landed, and deciding how to move forward through treacherous online terrain.

Rather than having students slog through strings of questions about easily manipulated features, we should be teaching them that the World Wide Web is "a web, and the way to establish authority and truth on the web is to use the web-like properties of it".

This is what professional fact checkers do.

It is what we should be teaching our students to do as well.

It was also demonstrated (Balmas, 2012) that the extent to which fake news is perceived as realistic is greater among individuals with high exposure to fake news and low exposure to hard news than among individuals with high exposure to both hard and fake news. This means that the extent of perceived realism of fake news depends on the extent of hard-news exposure, with the result that individuals exposed to both hard and fake news find fake-news messages less realistic.

So we also need to teach our students how become hard-news reader in order to know and detect fake news.

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