

Research on the Causes of Fake News and Governance Countermeasures in the New Media Era

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Keywords: New media era, fake news, news authenticity

Abstract: In the era of new media, the sharing and openness of the Internet have attracted many parties to participate in it, and the publication of news is no longer the right of traditional media only. The view that “traffic is wealth” has been increasingly recognized, therefore, attention resources have become valuable resources pursued by all parties. Some news publishers have abandoned the basic principle of news authenticity to attract attention and pursue profits. With the interplay of various factors, fake news is created and proliferated in the new media era. This paper discusses the causes of fake news in the new media era, and proposes feasible and effective countermeasures for producers, new media platforms, and audiences respectively.

1. Introduction

On March 21, 2022, the MU5735 aircraft of China Eastern Airlines crashed into the city of Wuzhou in Guangxi, and the important data of the crashed aircraft was stored in two built-in black boxes. Two days after the incident, the first black box was found, and on the 25th, China Civil Aviation News and China Newsweek released back-to-back news that the second black box had been found, however, the report was debunked by Xinhua News Agency 30 minutes later. In recent years, we have witnessed the emergence of fake news and the hot debate, and the public attitude has shifted from trust to suspicion, and these conditions have led to a series of hazards.

2. Overview of Fake News

2.1 Definition of Fake News

Fake news is “news” that is factually false and is often associated with or even equated with inaccurate news, so a distinction needs to be made between them. False news is news in which some parts of the news are missing, but people can still grasp the general picture of the facts according to the content presented in the news. False news is news that lacks objective facts, and the “news facts” presented are the product of the news producer's subjective imagination. Since the truth of specific news is a process of recognition, most of the inaccurate news is not intentional on the part of the producer, but rather because it is difficult for the producer to ensure the completeness and absence of bias in all details of the news while pursuing timeliness. However, false news is usually the product of deliberate efforts.

2.2 Changes in the Way of Realizing Fake News

Fake news is not a new concept. It emerged with the rise of mass media, and in the 19th century in the United States, there was a genre of reporting known as “yellow journalism”, one of its typical features was fabricated news reporting. But in the new media era, the way fake news is achieved has undergone structural changes. The Internet has broken through the limitations of time and space, dismantled the barriers between different new media platforms, and given audiences more diversified ways to access information, they can obtain news independently from a wealth of communication channels. Audiences who have frequently witnessed the phenomenon of news reversal are already wary of primary fake news. They will not affirm or deny an event in its entirety just because they have read one news report. Those who are willing to know the truth of an event will engage in a “jigsaw puzzle”. They obtain reports from various media from different sources, compare and piece together the news, and then restore the truth of the incident according to their judgment.

As the saying goes, “the troops will come, the water will come”, and the publishers of fake news are constantly pushing for changes in the way fake news is realized to deal with the “savvy” audience as much as possible. From the perspective of the means of realization, they can be divided into two parts: news production and news dissemination. In terms of news production, news producers used to use fake text and images to enhance the authenticity of fake news reports as much as possible. Fake pictures are mainly divided into pictures stolen from other events, pictures that were purposely taken in conjunction with reports, and pictures faked using PS or other techniques. Although fake text content and fake pictures are less expensive to fake, they are not easy to gain high trust from the audience now. And with the continuous development of machine learning and algorithms, deep forgery technology has become an important technology for news producers to produce fake audio and fake video. This is an artificial intelligence learning technology, specifically implemented by using machine learning to analyze the samples provided. By using this technique, fake audio and video of public figures can be faked, and audiences who do not have certain recognition abilities can easily believe these materials. From the aspect of news dissemination, fake news changes from publishing single fake news to weaving a network of fake news, spreading from point to point. In addition to writing the original fake story, fake news creates a series of “fake evidence” to increase trust, so that the public can use deliberately falsified materials to support each other when restoring the truth. For example, if a news media is driven by money to write a report to smear enterprise A, it will report that enterprise A has been exposed by a website to a series of bad practices, and attach some faked screenshots for public “verification”, then a large number of paid Internet trolls swarmed to comment. The public seems to restore the truth on their own through various channels, but in fact, they are slowly convinced of the false reports through these means of mutual corroboration.

3. Reasons for the Persistence of Fake News in the New Media Era

It has been more than twenty years since Journalist magazine first launched its annual fake news review report in 2001, but fake news is still prohibited under the attention and regulation of various social parties. Based on the original research of scholars, this article discusses the causes of fake news in the new media era and proposes countermeasures to deal with them.

3.1 Audience Psychology and Perception Level

In the post-truth era, appealing to emotions and personal beliefs can influence public opinion more than objective facts, thus reversing news happens. The rational and critically thinking public

gradually develops the ability to discern fake news after witnessing such phenomena frequently. However, according to the data released by CNNIC, the size of Internet users aged 6-19 accounts for 15.7% of the total number of Internet users. The media literacy of this group of Internet users is generally low, which means they cannot discern false news. Compared with an objective and impartial report, an article with “breaking points” is more likely to get clicks. Lazarsfeld and Merton have suggested that the media has a “narcotic function”. This function refers to the fact that the rich content of the media shifts the public from active participation in events to a negative perception of the world, reducing and weakening people's ability to act. In the new media era, information overload makes people lack the habit of thinking before deciding, and the thinking ability of the public, who are satisfied with the passive accumulation of knowledge, is weakened, and they tend to accept the content released by the media in its entirety without seeking to understand it. Most people trust the news released by the authoritative professional media, and on this basis, people's motivation to investigate the truthfulness of the news is weakened. When professional media publish controversial and false news, they tend to get more clicks, and this phenomenon encourages the spread of false news.

From the perspective of interpersonal communication, sharing is a human instinct, which means that there is no lack of motivation for spreading false news. In the era of new media on the Internet, everyone has a microphone, and some members of the public are more concerned about how many “likes” they receive for the content they publish or reproduce than the truth. The misleading and biased news contained in false news can attract people's attention more than an unbiased report, and for this kind of news, some publics are willing to become disseminators to gain more traffic. In addition to the act of re-dissemination through microblogging, Xiaohongshu, and other self-media platforms, the WeChat group is also the main dissemination channel of fake news. For forwarding news to those in need, netizens will spread false news they believe to be true through WeChat groups. The China New Media Development Report No.11 (2020) points out that Internet users have the highest trust in WeChat group news information and less trust in traditional media. When the news comes from sources with higher credibility, people give higher trust in the news, and more people fall into the quagmire of false news as a result. When more and more people reproduce the same news, group pressure may make people prefer to follow the group's opinion rather than trust their judgment, even if that judgment is undoubtedly correct and the group's opinion is wrong.

Combined with the analysis of current events, the outbreak of the new crown epidemic in 2020 has triggered panic throughout China and the world, coupled with the frequent occurrence of tax evasion and sex scandals of entertainment stars in recent years, the netizens have witnessed the events from impossible to the fact, which not only makes the public's fear of the unknown higher and higher, but also makes the public rely on the information. This not only makes the public's fear of the unknown higher and higher, and their reliance on information stronger and stronger but also makes the public's negative emotions accumulate. Under such information asymmetry, fake news with timeliness and catering to the negative emotions of the audience is more likely to be spread.

3.2 News Producer Perception and Media Platform Level

In the traditional media era, the main media are newspapers, TV, and radio. The “gatekeepers” play a very important role. Take paper media as an example, from the perspective of “gatekeeper” quality, the role of gatekeeper is mainly assumed by journalists and editors, who have received professional training and have a high level of professionalism. From the point of view of gate-keeping time, traditional media is mainly “prior gate-keeping”. In terms of gate-keeping procedures, a news report needs to be screened by reporters, editors, editors-in-chief, and editors-in-chief before it is presented to the public. All of the above makes the spread of false news from the source can be

curbed to a certain extent. In the new media era, the Internet has blurred the boundaries of the news industry, lowered the threshold of participation in the news, and diversified the media subjects. However, the media literacy and knowledge level of various subjects vary, and the authenticity of news is difficult to guarantee.

In the traditional media era, journalism put social benefits in the most important position, but with the continuous maturation of the market economy system, the trend of industrialization, conglomeration, and marketing of mass media has become more and more obvious, and the economic consciousness of media people has developed. On the one hand, multiple entities enter the media market, market competition increases, media profits decline, and media compete for attention resources in pursuit of profits. In the past, the media's usual technique to attract public attention was "headline party", and over time the public became immune to such reports, and some media used the popular deep-fake technology to produce fake news video materials, thereby making it more difficult for the general public to identify fake news. The "breaking point", catering to the public's curiosity psychology has become the keyword for news to gain audience attention and harvest traffic, several media in order to develop, only take care of effect, subjectively abandoned the authenticity of the news. Creating something out of nothing and falsely quoting experts is the usual way for media to attract public clicks and create false news. To pursue the timeliness of news, some media use and manipulate the cognitive bias of human beings to fill the "cognitive hole" of the public in news reports with fake news. It is also worth mentioning that there is a group of media that "follow the trend". When a matter of public concern is first reported by one media outlet, some media outlets, in order to quickly gain traffic, mechanically reproduce the story without verifying the authenticity of the media report, making the false news more and more intense. On the other hand, some journalists are influenced by money-grubbing and comparisons, so they are driven by interests to write false news to cater to the capital, such as to save the image of the exposed enterprises with an "impartial" perspective.

The media platforms are also to blame for the spread of fake news. Although the media platforms set certain sensitive words in the review of content, the intelligence of the review is not high enough. When the fake news gains popularity on the platform. The platform's algorithm mechanism will also push the news to more users and expand the influence of fake news.

3.3 Political Level

From the international perspective, the world is facing a "great change unprecedented in a century", the international pattern and the international system are undergoing changes and adjustments, and the strategic game between the major powers has intensified comprehensively. Unilateralism and trade protectionism is on the rise, anti-globalization is on the rise, and the international multilateral trading system is facing serious challenges. At the high-level meeting to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, UN Secretary-General Guterres pointed out that the world is facing five major challenges: the most serious global geostrategic tensions in years, the existential climate crisis, deep and deepening global mistrust, the dark side of the digital world and the global spread of new epidemics. From China's domestic perspective, we are in a golden period of development, and we are closer than at any other time in history to achieve the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but challenges and opportunities coexist. At a time when the Party and the government are facing several tests, hostile forces inside and outside the country have taken the opportunity to increase their efforts to penetrate China ideologically. The Internet, which has broken through the limitations of time and space, has become the ring of ideological struggle with its convenience and low threshold. The structural contradictions in the Western political system are gradually highlighted, and the power gap between the East and the

West is gradually narrowing. The Western media has to some extent “weaponized” false news, intending to use this relatively low-cost way to fight other countries. To divide China, hostile forces are always aiming at major events, and when the right moment comes, they will quickly create fake news in order to provoke internal struggles among the people.

4. The Study of Countermeasures for Fake News

The rise of social media has brought more and more subjects into the process of news production, but its impact on professional media is limited because although they provide a lot of news information to the public, they are unable to cross the threshold of “credibility”. Due to the limitations of money, energy and power, the authenticity of the information provided by non-professional media to the public is yet to be verified. However, if some professional media publish false news in order to get more traffic and bigger profits, the credibility of the professional media as a whole will be undermined, which is extremely unfavorable to the Party and the government. The mass media has a great influence on society and plays a major role in guiding public behavior. Fake news violates the principles of journalism, and although the number has decreased in recent years, it is extremely harmful and should not be taken lightly. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully study the strategies to deal with fake news. In this section, we would like to discuss how to manage fake news from three key subjects: fake news producers, media platforms, and audiences as the landing point.

4.1 Fake News Producers

Producers are the first link in the chain of false news, and if we could kill the idea of producers, then false news would cease to exist, which we know is almost impossible, but we should still explore strategies to curb producer behavior as much as possible.

The Internet has demolished the barriers of time and space, and more and more people are involved in it, which makes the subjects of news dissemination more and more widespread, and thus it is almost impossible to make everyone implement the norms of news publication voluntarily, but professional media cannot slacken the professional quality education just because the Internet environment is in a relatively impetuous stage. Professional quality education can help communicators establish the right moral values, firm ideals, and beliefs, and remember social responsibility and commitment. The phenomenon of media mechanically reproducing news is often seen in social media today, both because the media pursue timeliness and may lose a large amount of traffic if they invest time in the investigation, and because of the weakened professionalism of journalists and other industry practitioners. Therefore, even if the traditional media are in a critical stage of transformation, we must not ignore the relevant training and education. Secondly, professional media that take into account social interests and economic benefits in the fight against fake news should be resolutely resisted internally and should properly play an exemplary role externally. To maintain the authority of the professional media itself, the media should internally optimize the regulation of news production, resolutely combat false news, and provide a model role for other media. For false news published by other entities, if it involves the interests of the public and society, the professional media should be the first to speak out and do something based on the facts. The relevant government departments, as a channel for regular information release, should also improve the information disclosure system as much as possible, so that the truth can run ahead of rumors.

4.2 Media Platforms

Although media platforms are not “speakers,” as operators and profit-makers, they cannot avoid their responsibility in managing false news. Intelligent algorithms are important “gatekeepers” for news, and platforms use them to screen information, but the profit-seeking nature of platforms makes the algorithms they use to deviate from the principle of news authenticity. The “Regulations on the Administration of Algorithmic Recommendation of Internet Information Services”, which came into effect on March 1, 2022, proposes that fake news and fake news cannot be personalized and recommended, and platforms should promptly adjust their algorithm logic to match the regulations and raise the importance of the current situation that the governance of fake news lags behind technological development.

In addition to the management of the published content itself, the online platform also needs to manage the accounts. Compared with ordinary accounts, the public always trusts the content published by authoritative accounts. There are two easiest ways to make accounts appear more authoritative: setting ID names and applying for the Big V certification. Nowadays, most of the public is not yet aware of the reduced difficulty of applying for large V certification and the smaller crackdown on “high-fashion numbers” by the platform. Therefore, when an account ID is xx official, xx group, xx limited company, or avatar hanging with a large V certification logo, the public's first impression of its published content is that the news source has a high degree of credibility. To promote the health of the network environment and its sustainable development, the platform should promptly clean up the high-fake number, strictly apply for the conditions of big V certification, and upgrade the relevant regulatory technology. There are also positive lessons to be learned from foreign experience on how to use online platforms to curb the publication and spread of false news. If multiple users flag a story as inaccurate, Facebook will add a warning label to the story to alert other users that the news is of questionable authenticity. Although domestic social media has given the public a convenient reporting channel, most of them think that direct reporting is overkill and therefore not conducive to the public's initiative. Domestic online platforms can consider giving the public similar flagging power to reduce the power of false news.

4.3 Public Level

The public can be divided into two types: those who only read fake news without following up, and those who liked, commented, or retweeted the fake news, and only the latter type will be discussed here. The act of liking and commenting may not seem to have any effect on spreading false news, but there is a phenomenon on the Internet: if a piece of news is published for a long time without a certain size of likes or comments, people will think that the news is not too valuable to explore, and then reduce their willingness to participate. On the contrary, if the public likes or comments on the fake news, as the size increases, more people will be attracted to participate in the discussion of the fake news for social reasons, thus amplifying the effect of the fake news. The platform does not have too much power to restrict the public's liking and commenting behavior. It is difficult for the platform to define the degree of “bad” for the public to forward and share false news, so the feasibility of using legal measures is low, and it is suggested that the platform adopt some technical means to control it. For example, according to the length of the news, set the minimum viewing time for the public, the public reading time beyond the length indicates that the public has at least a certain understanding of the overall content, then the public is allowed to forward. However, such means are only applicable to the act of forwarding after viewing only the headline or a small part of the content.

For the public, it is more important to develop their media literacy, such as schools considering setting reasonable courses to develop critical thinking in the process of dynamically adjusting and

updating their curricula, and the government could consider public service courses to help gullible seniors identify fake news. These are effective in the long run, but the downside is that the results are too slow, and more discretion and thought are needed for any development of short-term initiatives.

5. Conclusion

Fake news is not a problem of a certain country, but an important issue for every country in the world, and each country should take a special path of governance according to its national conditions. The Chinese constitution provides that citizens enjoy the freedom of speech, but fake news as a kind of rumor deliberately spread does not belong to the scope of freedom of speech, for the sake of clear cyberspace, we must take strong means to carry out multi-angle and deep governance.

Acknowledgment

Many people have offered me valuable help in my thesis writing. I would like to thank Mrs.Wen and Mrs.Xiong for tutoring me.

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