

# ***About Journalism – Sobre jornalismo – Sur le journalisme***

## ***Revue scientifique internationale***

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### **Call for papers**

Starting date: 15 September 2018

Deadline for paper submission: 15 February 2019

## **Social media, fake news and journalism in election campaigns**

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Disinformation is not a new phenomenon. Since the early days of mass media and even the first periodicals (Conboy, 2004), the circulation of rumours or incorrect information, either to political ends (Aldrin, 2005; Taïeb, 2005), for commercial or simply malicious purposes has raised concerns (Froissart, 2002). But for many observers, the digital environment seems to accelerate and amplify the dissemination of false information, of conspiracy theories, of propaganda and of pseudoscience, as well as the formation of communities (Sustein, 2012) and networks dedicated (at least partly) to circulating such content. The current debate was ignited after the Brexit referendum<sup>1</sup> and the U.S. presidential election in 2016: political campaigns appear to be particularly favourable to the proliferation of “fake news” (Bloch, 1999). In Latin America, the 2018 elections in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia appear as a special moment to study the effects of misinformation. In the case of Brazil, these threats are all the more worrisome because the strong political polarization of the 2014 elections has flooded social networks with ideologically biased sites, sites that can be decisive in the contamination of political information circulating on the Internet, influencing thus the electoral battles.

“The Pope supports Trump” ; “Macron refuses to shake hands with workers” ; “Refugees cost Canada more than retirees” ; “94% of Brazilians support a military coup” ; etc. All of these fake news stories were shared thousands, possibly millions of times on social media and may have, in some cases, influenced electoral choices. In some cases, the results confounded pollsters and other expert observers. The election of Donald Trump on

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<sup>1</sup> On July 12 2016, a few days after the Brexit vote, the editor-in-chief of *The Guardian*, Katharine Viner, published an article entitled « How technology disrupted the news » in which she accuses Facebook of being partly responsible of the success of « fake news » which hindered electoral judgment.

November 8, 2016, intensified the controversy. After his victory, Facebook was once again charged with facilitating the circulation of fake news, and made some changes to its commercial policy<sup>2</sup> in response to its critics. In January 2018, Facebook announced changes to its algorithm to reduce visibility of commercial content and to heighten visibility of content shared by “trustworthy” friends in users’ newsfeeds. The social network also has agreements with fact-checking agencies in 14 countries, including Brazil, to reduce suspicious content<sup>3</sup>. Political actors have also seized the debate about the rise of online rumours, such as French president Emmanuel Macron, who announced in his New Year’s wishes to the press a law to fight fake news during election campaigns.

This circulation of false information online raises concerns in a context where young people are using traditional media less for news than previous generations; users as a whole are turning more and more to digital news sources. In a survey of 36 countries in 2017, fully one-third of respondents aged 18-24 said social media were their main news source, nearly two-thirds (64%) mostly obtained news from digital sources in general (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017, p. 11). In March 2016, a study conducted for the Pew Research Center placed social media at the same level as traditional news websites for news consumption habits (35 and 36%), whereas search engines accounted for 20 %<sup>4</sup>. However, a more recent study indicates that use of social media and especially of Facebook for news has begun to decline, especially among young adults in the United States (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018, p. 10). It is possible that this decrease is due to the “fake news” controversy, to the changes introduced by Facebook to its algorithm, or to a combination of these two factors.

The proliferation of inaccurate information also raises questions about how they circulate. The success of fake news does not mean that all who propagate it are duped: indeed, one can share a message without being convinced that it is true. Paul Veyne (1983) showed that our views regarding a narrative are not limited to the binary alternative believe/disbelieve, rather, that there is a plurality of belief regimes (to believe possible, to believe probable, momentary suspension of critical judgment, diffuse doubt...). Psychoanalysts have also highlighted the importance of thought formations such as “What if it were true?” and « I know it isn’t quite true, but still, it could be » (Mannoni, 1985), that can play a significant role in the circulation of false information, whether online or offline.

Faced with these changes, what can journalists do to counter the massive circulation of fake news? Can professional journalism rebuild its image and its democratic mission? Can new practices contribute to fight fake news? Specifically, could fact-checking (Graves, 2016; Bigot and Nicey, 2017), as an “exemplary” professional practice, restore trust in journalism and in the media? What are the limits of fact-checking produced by news organizations? Can the fight against fake news be limited to fact-checking?

In France, the first journalists’ Charter (1918, revised in 1938) considered “calomny, unfounded accusations, alteration of documents, distortion of facts, and lies as the most

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<sup>2</sup> « Facebook accusé d’avoir fait le jeu de Donald Trump », *Le Monde*, 16 novembre 2016. [http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2016/11/16/facebook-accuse-d-avoir-fait-le-jeu-de-donald-trump\\_5031937\\_4408996.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2016/11/16/facebook-accuse-d-avoir-fait-le-jeu-de-donald-trump_5031937_4408996.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/como-combater-a-influencia-de-bots-e-fake-news-nas-eleicoes>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.journalism.org/2017/02/09/how-americans-encounter-recall-and-act-upon-digital-news/>

gross forms of malpractice”. Clearly, journalists should not report assertions without previous verification and should avoid at all costs the propagation of rumours. The professionalization of journalism — through the creation of journalism schools, degrees, professional organizations and the accreditation system (Delporte, 1995; Ferenczi, 1996; Chupin, 2008; Ruellan, 2015) — has confirmed these ethical imperatives. Rumour is thus compared to a “black market” of news (Kapferer, 2010). The professionalization of journalism was meant to regulate practice, but the proliferation of news amateurs and the claim that “we are all journalists” (Tredan, 2007; Aubert, 2009; Mathien, 2010) seem to have eroded these rules. Indeed, professional news workers have lost their monopolistic status as gatekeepers of the public sphere and of mass media (Antheaume, 2013). The confusion of roles is manifest. Anyone on the Internet can call themselves a journalist and produce news stories via their blog posts (Tredan, 2010) or even on Facebook. The financial crisis of the media industry, and the pressure to get the story first in the social media age contribute to the proliferation of opinions, of approximations and other unverified assertions.

This special issue invites scholars to question the role of journalists, but also of sources, audiences, media organizations, regulators, and other authorities regarding the supposed rise of fake news and of disinformation, both in the evolution of professional practices and in discourses related to this industrialization of rumours. Election campaigns are a key moment, because of the stakes involved and the higher public attention to political issues, as well as the apparently intensified production of deceptive or manipulated content.

Proposed manuscripts may address one or more of the following themes:

- Historical aspects of false information and its political uses
- Conceptual issues and defining “fake news”
- Analysis of modes of consumption of news (among young people or in general) during election campaigns and possible effects of fake news
- Strategies, issues and regulation of digital platforms’ (GAFA) contribution to online dissemination of fake news
- Economic issues of circulation and control of fake news (“click economy”)
- Modes of construction, circulation and dissemination of fake news
- Modes of control and of verification of information (ethics, fact-checking, legal framework, new GAFA policies)
- Professional discursive construction and political falsehoods in the rhetoric of social and professional actors.

This call for papers welcomes research from any of the following disciplines or a combination thereof: information science and communication, management, sociology of professions, political science, anthropology, and computer/data science.

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**The deadline for submitting the final manuscripts** (30 to 50,000 characters, including notes and bibliography) is **15 February 2019**, at:

<http://surlejournalisme.com/rev/index.php/slj/about/submissions>

Manuscripts may be written in **English, French, Portuguese or Spanish**.

**Double blind** review.

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