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Fake News Going Viral: The Mediating Effect Of Negative Emotions

ABSTRACT

In recent years, “fake news” has become a buzzword used to describe a variety of disinformation practices identifiable both in the traditional media, and in the digital environment. The goal of our paper is to investigate fake news, aiming at both clarifying the concept and discussing the possible integration of ideologically driven information under this large umbrella, as well as investigating conditions under which various types of fake news have the potential to go viral. In this study we consider ideologically driven news as a form of disinformation, by the mere reason that there is a clear intention to deceive behind this type of news. At the same time, we argue that, compared to no more than one-two decades ago, ideologically driven information is potentially much more harmful, by virtue of the potential of being shared, easily further disseminated within echo-chambers and with the help of filter bubbles. In line with recent studies, we contend that, at its core, the fake news problem concerns the economics of emotion, specifically how emotions are used and often abused to foster audience’s attention, engagement, and willingness to share content. In this context, and under the recent political circumstances in Romania (marked by anti-government protests and public opposition to the ruling political party), our aim is to better understand how people’s susceptibility to disseminate deceitful information is enhanced by various forms and valences of politically biased fake news, and what is the role of specific emotions in explaining this process. Building on Tandoc et al.’s classification of fake news, we propose a 2x2x2 experimental design, in which we manipulated intention to deceive, level of facticity and valence. The survey experiment (N=813) tests two positive (enthusiasm and contentment) and two negative (anger and fear) discrete emotions as mediators of the main effect of potential of viralisation effects (i.e. how likely users are to share fake news on a social network). Results show that negatively biased fake news enhances people’s willingness to share the news story, while positively biased fake news has no significant effect on the viralisation potential. Moreover, the potential for viralisation is mediated by negative emotions, but not by positive ones.

KEY WORDS

Discrete emotions. Experimental design. Fake news. Viralisation effects.

1. Introduction

In recent years, “fake news” has become a buzzword used to describe a variety of disinformation practices identifiable both in the traditional media, and in the digital environment. The concept and the practice of deceiving the public through falsified information are not new. However, the content and scope of the term changed dramatically in the new media ecosystem.

In present times, “fake news” gained the attention of the general public starting with the 2016 US electoral campaign, a context in which the term became highly weaponized in the political battle, and in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal. As a consequence, worldwide searches for “fake news” exploded in November 2016, at the end of the US presidential campaign, and have continued to increase ever since (according to Google Trends Timeline).¹ The preoccupation with the consequences of fake news reached its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, the first global event to be accompanied by an infodemic – the overabundance of true and false information on the coronavirus topic – and is widely spread in social media.² Academic research on fake news targets five main areas: conceptualization of the term,³ creation of deceptive media content,⁴ dissemination of and exposure to fake news,⁵ identification of effects,⁶ and identifying counter-measures to mitigate

¹ Google Trends. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=fake%20news>>.

² Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report-13. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf>>.

³ See: TANDOC Jr., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining “Fake News”. A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.; WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe Report, DGI(2017)09. [online]. [2017-09-01]. Available at: <<http://tverezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf>>; EGELHOFER, J. L., LECHERER, S.: Fake News as a Two-dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2019, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 97-116.; MOLINA, M. D. et al.: “Fake news” Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 2, p. 180-212.

⁴ See: BAKIR, V., MCSTAY, A.: Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 154-175.; NAEEM, S. B., BHATTI, R., KHAN, A.: An Exploration of How Fake News Is Taking Over Social Media and Putting Public Health at Risk. In *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 2021, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 143-149.

⁵ See also: ALLCOTT, H., GENTZKOW, M.: Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. In *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2017, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 211-236.; GUESS, A., NYHAN, B., REIFLER, J.: *Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the Consumption of Fake News during the 2016 US Presidential Campaign*. Technical report. [online]. [2018-01-09]. Available at: <<http://www.ask-force.org/web/Fundamentalists/Guess-Selective-Exposure-to-Misinformation-Evidence-Presidential-Campaign-2018.pdf>>; VOSOUGHI, S., MOHSENVAND, M. N., ROY, D.: Rumor Gauge: Predicting the Veracity of Rumors on Twitter. In *ACM Transactions on Knowledge Discovery from Data (TKDD)*, 2017, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 1-36.; ZHAO, Z. et al.: Fake News Propagates Differently From Real News Even at Early Stages of Spreading. In *EPJ Data Science*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 1-14. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00224-z>>; APUKE, O. D., OMAR, B.: Fake News and COVID-19: Modelling the Predictors of Fake News Sharing Among Social Media Users. In *Telematics and Informatics*, 2021, Vol. 56, No. 101475, p. 1-16.

⁶ See: BREWER, P. R., YOUNG, D. G., MORREALE, M.: The Impact of Real News About “Fake News”: Intertextual Processes and Political Satire. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 323-343.; BROWNING, N., SWEETSER, K. D.: The Let Down Effect: Satisfaction, Motivation, and Credibility Assessments of Political Infotainment. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2014, Vol. 58, No. 6, p. 810-826.; HAMELEERS, M., VAN DER MEER, T. G.: Misinformation and Polarization in a High-Choice Media Environment: How Effective Are Political Fact-Checkers? In *Communication Research*, 2020, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 227-250.; JANG, S. M., KIM, J. K.: Third Person Effects of Fake News: Fake News Regulation and Media Literacy Interventions. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018, Vol. 80, p. 195-302.; TSFATI, Y. et al.: Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 157-173.

the phenomenon.⁷ What the vast majority of studies have in common is acknowledging the role of the new communication strategies in amplifying the effects of fake news in all stages of the process, from the creation of content, to its distribution to a wider, more targeted audience, and to maximizing their peer-to-peer viralisation potential. The unprecedented contribution of digital, algorithmic and data-driven mass communication innovations and the prevalence of digital platforms in the lives of citizens dramatically reshaped the fairly traditional practices of disinformation.

In this context, it is the goal of our paper to investigate fake news, aiming at both clarifying the concept and discussing the possible integration of ideologically driven information under this large umbrella, as well as investigating conditions under which various types of fake news have the potential to go viral. We rely on an experimental design to study the potential for the viralisation effects of fake news, the effects of fake news on emotions, and the mediating effect of emotions on the susceptibility to share fake news.

We believe this study needs to first clarify some conceptual approaches about what fake news is (and is not), as well as providing empirical arguments about the role of emotions in the viralisation of various species of fake news. We are particularly interested in how political content could be manipulated and even falsified, in order to elicit emotional responses and by consequence be subject to viralisation effects. We argue that under the umbrella of fake news there are many species (and genres) of content, because fake news is a phenomenon that ranges on a continuum of two key dimensions, facticity and intention to deceive, to which valence can be added as a way of framing news in an ideologically driven manner.

2. Fake News: Typology and Effects

The term “fake news” has entered the public discourse to the extent to which it became “a much-used and much-hyped term in the so-called <<post-truth>> era that we now live in.”⁸ As is frequently the case with many buzz-words, the term suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and definitional rigour. As Nelson and Taneja⁹ note, traditionally, fake news was frequently used by scholars to refer to a specific television genre, namely infotainment: late night television shows that blurred the line between news and comedy (e.g. “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report”). Gradually, the term broadened its scope to refer to “false or misleading information made to look like a fact based news story.”¹⁰ The shift was prompted by recent-years events, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the alleged Russian propaganda influence during the 2016 US presidential campaign, and the tendency of political elites to use the term to discredit journalists, media outlets and hostile rumours.

As the majority of definitions suggest, the term is in fact used to define numerous forms of disinformation. In other words, fake news could be information that has been fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive the audience and to influence its opinions, attitudes

⁷ See: BAKIR, V., MCSTAY, A.: Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 154-175; A *Multi-dimensional Approach to Disinformation: Report of the Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation*. [online]. [2018-04-27]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>>; YADAV, K. et al.: Countries Have More than 100 Laws on the Books to Combat Misinformation. How Well Do They Work? In *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2021, Vol. 77, No. 3, p. 124-128.

⁸ MCGONAGLE, T.: “Fake news” False Fears or Real Concerns? In *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 2017, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 203.

⁹ See: NELSON, J. L., TANEJA, H.: The Small, Disloyal Fake News Audience: The Role of Audience Availability in Fake News Consumption. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 10, p. 3721.

¹⁰ NELSON, J. L., TANEJA, H.: The Small, Disloyal Fake News Audience: The Role of Audience Availability in Fake News Consumption. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 10, p. 2.

and behaviours¹¹ or a new form of political misinformation featured prominently in journalistic accounts of the 2016 U.S. presidential election.¹² As Vargo et al. note,¹³ other narrower definitions of the term describe completely false information that was created for financial gain. The main distinctive feature is, in this case, the fact that credible journalism is mimicked to attract a larger following/attention.

The concept of fake news became subject of multiple criticism, being considered rather inadequate to describe the complex phenomena of mis- and dis-information.¹⁴ Scholars have pleaded for more definitional rigour, since there is a constant shift in meanings, which is “muddying the discourse around fake news.”¹⁵

The first clarifying distinction, following the approach of Egelhofer and Lecheler,¹⁶ must be made between fake news as a genre, and as a label used to delegitimize news media. The latter use of the term, albeit damaging to journalism, is not the focus of our study.

To understand fake news as a form of deceitful content, we must differentiate between three related concepts: dis-, mis-, and mal-information.¹⁷ Disinformation is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country. Misinformation is information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm, while mal-information is based on reality, and used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country (e.g. hate speech).

We take note of the concerns expressed by Molina et al.¹⁸ that the current conceptualization of fake news is not useful for the design of automatic detection software. The authors plea for more rigor in distinguishing between characteristics and dimensions of fake news and propose a taxonomy of eight categories of online content suitable for operationalization (real news, false news, polarized content, satire, misreporting, commentary, persuasive information, and citizen journalism).

Apart from the basic distinction between information that is intentionally false and information that is false without being strategically designed to deceive, we need to clarify the case of satire and parody. Satire and parody do not meet the features of fake news as a genre, as proposed by Egelhofer and Lecheler:¹⁹ low level of facticity, journalistic format (“imitation of news”),

¹¹ See: ALLCOTT, H., GENTZKOW, M.: Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. In *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2017, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 211-236.; MCGONAGLE, T.: “Fake news” False Fears or Real Concerns? In *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 2017, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 203-209.

¹² GUESS, A., NYHAN, B., REIFLER, J.: *Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the Consumption of Fake News During the 2016 US Presidential Campaign*. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<http://www.ask-force.org/web/Fundamentalists/Guess-Selective-Exposure-to-Misinformation-Evidence-Presidential-Campaign-2018.pdf>>.

¹³ See: VARGO, C. J., GUO, L., AMAZEEN, M. A.: The Agenda-setting Power of Fake News: A Big Data Analysis of the Online Media Landscape from 2014 to 2016. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 5, p. 2028-2049.

¹⁴ WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe Report, DGI (2017)09. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<http://tverezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf>>.

¹⁵ TANDOC Jr., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining “Fake News”. A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 138.

¹⁶ See: EGELHOFER, J. L., LECHELER, S.: Fake News as a Two-dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2019, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 97-116.

¹⁷ WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe Report, DGI (2017)09. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<http://tverezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf>>.

¹⁸ MOLINA, M. D. et al.: “Fake news” Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 2, p. 181.

¹⁹ EGELHOFER, J. L., LECHELER, S.: Fake News as a Two-dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2019, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 99-100.

and intentionality to deceive. Satire is not low on facticity, although it includes deviations from the truth. Parody includes deliberately created false elements for humorous purposes. In both cases, there is no intention to deceive, since the audience is made aware of the type of content they are reading or viewing. Nevertheless, previous studies have operationalized satire and parody as a type of fake news.²⁰ Satire and/or parody, as borderline genres of fake news, have received extensive attention from scholars.²¹ Satire news programs have been studied as a form of soft news, with the end goal to entertain, as opposed to hard news, which primarily informs.

We support the operationalisation of satire as a form of fake news, considering three reasons in particular. Firstly, the humorous exaggeration of actual news usually implies the insertion of false elements/information/content to be successful. Secondly, satirical programs tend to be ideologically driven; in our view, the biased interpretation/contextualisation of news is one of the manifestations of fake news. The third and most important reason stems from the consistent evidence that satire and parody, although not harmful in the sense of intentionally deceiving the audience, does have significant negative effects, especially related to political attitudes and behaviours. The negative effects of parody and satire are numerous, ranging from impact on perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, thus generating politically relevant outcomes,²² to distrust in the efficiency of the government²³ or increased cynicism.²⁴

Another significant category are pieces of news that are intentionally fabricated, and carefully designed to look credible.²⁵ As Tandoc and his collaborators²⁶ emphasize, it is the case of articles that have no factual basis, but are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy. Fabricated items can be published on a website, blog or on social media platforms. They are frequently algorithm-driven, and rely on dissemination through fake accounts, fake bots, etc., to give the illusion that they are highly circulated.

Tandoc et al.²⁷ advanced one particularly comprehensive typology, mapping fake news according to two dimensions: level of facticity and intention to deceive. The first dimension, facticity, refers to the degree to which fake news relies on facts, while the second refers to the degree to which the creator of fake news intends to mislead. Building on Tandoc et al.,²⁸

²⁰ See: TANDOC JR., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining "Fake News". A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.

²¹ See: BALMAS, M.: When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism. In *Communication Research*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 430-454.; LITTAU, J., STEWART, D. R. C.: "Truthiness" and Second-level Agenda Setting: Satire News and its Influence on Perceptions of Television News Credibility. In *Electronic News*, 2015, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 122-136.; TANDOC JR., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining "Fake News". A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.; WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe Report, DGI(2017)09. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<http://tvrezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf>>.

²² See: BALMAS, M.: When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism. In *Communication Research*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 430-454.

²³ See: BAUMGARTNER, J., MORRIS, J. S.: The Daily Show effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth. In *American Politics Research*, 2006, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 341-367.

²⁴ See: BALMAS, M.: When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism. In *Communication Research*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 430-454.; BAUMGARTNER, J., MORRIS, J. S.: The Daily Show effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth. In *American Politics Research*, 2006, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 341-367.

²⁵ See: ALLCOTT, H., GENTZKOW, M.: Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. In *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2017, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 211-236. MCGONAGLE, T.: "Fake news" False Fears or Real Concerns? In *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 2017, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 203-209.; TANDOC JR., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining "Fake News". A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.

²⁶ See: TANDOC JR., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining "Fake News". A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

we argue that it is virtually impossible to create a typology of fake news, because one cannot delimit clear boundaries between low and high facticity; there is a continuous range of possible forms of disinformation, and, arguably, ideologically driven news falls somewhere on this continuum. To what extent does keeping the facts accurate but presenting them in a heavily (or more mildly) biased way (by means of equivalence framing, for example), mean being out of the fake news boundaries? Moreover, if disinformation is merely defined by the intention to deceive, then politically biased information should be by definition a form of disinformation.

In this study we consider ideologically driven news as a form of disinformation, for the mere reason that there is a clear intention to deceive behind this type of news. At the same time, we argue that, compared to no more than one-two decades ago, ideologically driven information is potentially much more harmful, by virtue of the potential of being shared, easily further disseminated within echo-chambers and with the help of filter bubbles. Even though there is no clear agreement among researchers, there are solid studies that identified ideologically partisan echo chambers on social media (see, for example Boutyline and Willer),²⁹ as well as partisan news consumption with the help of the technology, such as search engines.³⁰ Additionally, “*it seems apparent, then, that ideological polarization and homogenous partisanship generally have a measurable, negative impact on society and democracy as a whole.*”³¹

Conventionally, and only by reasons of making this study easier to read, we use the “labels” *manipulation* and *fabrication* in a slightly different manner than Tandoc et al.,³² as to underline the difference between ideologically driven information that keeps the facts accurate, but present it in a heavily ideologically driven way, and false information, that actually does alter the facts in order to deceive the audience. Both types could present information in an ideological manner, framing information either to support (positive valence) or to denigrate (negative valence) a political actor (party, institution, person, etc.). Therefore, in this study, we use valence as a type of framing ideologically driven news, to emphasize either political achievements or failure.

There is a growing body of research on the effects of fake news. In the public discourse, fake news is often “blamed for having a disruptive impact on the outcomes of elections and referenda and for skewing democratic public debate”, or “*fueling propaganda and <<hate speech>> and even violence*”.³³ Despite these accusations, the actual effects of online fake news on voter behaviour are still understudied.³⁴

The existing studies on fake news effects explore a wide variety of issues. In so far as the functioning of politics is concerned, studies explore the effects of political satire on distrust in the media,³⁵ political attitudes of inefficacy, alienation, and cynicism,³⁶ knowledge and opinion

²⁹ See: BOUTYLINE, A., WILLER, R.: The Social Structure of Political Echo Chambers: Variation in Ideological Homophily in Online Networks. In *Political Psychology*, 2017, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 551-569.

³⁰ See: FLAXMAN, S., GOEL, S., RAO, J. M.: Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption. In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2016, Vol. 80, No. S1, p. 298-320.

³¹ SPOHR, D.: Fake News and Ideological Polarization: Filter Bubbles and Selective Exposure on Social Media. In *Business Information Review*, 2017, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 152.

³² See: TANDOC JR., E. C., LIM, Z. W., LING, R.: Defining “Fake News”. A Typology of Scholarly Definitions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 137-153.

³³ MCGONAGLE, T.: “Fake news” False Fears or Real Concerns? In *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 2017, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 203.

³⁴ JANG, S. M., KIM, J. K.: Third Person Effects of Fake News: Fake News Regulation and Media Literacy Interventions. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018, Vol. 80, p. 295.

³⁵ See: LITTAU, J., STEWART, D. R. C.: “Truthiness” and Second-level Agenda Setting: Satire News and its Influence on Perceptions of Television News Credibility. In *Electronic News*, 2015, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 122-136.

³⁶ See: BALMAS, M.: When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism. In *Communication Research*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 430-454.

on political issues,³⁷ elections,³⁸ and policy-relevant beliefs.³⁹ Other studies consider the outcomes of fake news for businesses and consumers,⁴⁰ and on health-related beliefs and behaviours.⁴¹ There is no scholarly consensus on the severity of the effects. Some observational and experimental data incline towards the identification of limited effects of fake news apart from increasing beliefs in false claims,⁴² while go as far as to identify unconscious effects on behaviour.⁴³

The effects of mainstream media coverage about fake news are also under scrutiny. Well-intended media coverage about the incidence of fake news may have negative effects on the audience by making them less certain of the truth or by overexposing them to the wrong information instead of its correction.⁴⁴

Other studies focus on viralisation, contagion effect, opinion polarization and echo chambers⁴⁵ or on the capacity of the audience to assess message credibility.⁴⁶

- ³⁷ See: BREWER, P. R., YOUNG, D. G., MORREALE, M.: The Impact of Real News About “Fake News”: Intertextual Processes and Political Satire. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2013, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 323-343.; LITTAU, J., STEWART, D. R. C.: “Truthiness” and Second-level Agenda Setting: Satire News and its Influence on Perceptions of Television News Credibility. In *Electronic News*, 2015, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 122-136.; CHOI, J., LEE, J. K.: Confusing Effects of Fake News on Clarity of Political Information in the Social Media Environment. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, p. 1-19. [online]. [2021-03-24]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1903971>>.
- ³⁸ LEYVA, R., BECKETT, C.: Testing & Unpacking the Effects of Digital Fake News on Presidential Candidate Evaluations & Voter Support. In *AI and Society*, 2020, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 970.
- ³⁹ DRUMMOND, C., SIEGRIST, M., ÁRVAI, J.: Limited Effects of Exposure to Fake News about Climate Change. In *Environmental Research Communications*, 2020, Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 1.
- ⁴⁰ See: DI DOMENICO, G. et al.: Fake News, Social Media and Marketing: A Systematic Review. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, Vol. 124, No. C, p. 329-341.
- ⁴¹ See: MELCHIOR, C., OLIVEIRA, M.: Health-related Fake News on Social Media Platforms: A Systematic Literature Review. In *New Media & Society*, 2021. [online]. [2021-08-18]. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14614448211038762?casa_token=HrR_XkYmxcMAAAA%3ApcnLTSphwIVwqlbomykiWKfYkZ-wcqvom6fWhNqeFrT6P4dU7mm39mKZgbDMUEGp_tibVlL2ZzeB>; GREENE, C. M., MURPHY, G.: Quantifying the Effects of Fake News on Behavior: Evidence from a Study of COVID-19 Misinformation. In *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 2021, p. 1-12. [online]. [2021-06-10]. Available at: <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2021-55332-001>>.
- ⁴² See: GUESS, A. M. et al.: “Fake News” May Have Limited Effects Beyond Increasing Beliefs in False Claims. In *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 2020, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1-12. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-004>>.
- ⁴³ BASTICK, Z.: Would You Notice if Fake News Changed your Behavior? An Experiment on the Unconscious Effects of Disinformation. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2021, Vol. 116, p. 106633. [online]. [2021-06-10]. Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563220303800?via%3Dihub>>.
- ⁴⁴ See: TSFATI, Y. et al.: Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 157-173.
- ⁴⁵ See: TÖRNBERG, P.: Echo Chambers and Viral Misinformation: Modeling Fake News as Complex Contagion. In *PloS One*, 2018, Vol. 13, No. 9, p. 1-21.; VOSOUGHI, S., MOHSENVAND, M. N., ROY, D.: Rumor Gauge: Predicting the Veracity of Rumors on Twitter. In *ACM Transactions on Knowledge Discovery from Data (TKDD)*, 2017, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 1-36.
- ⁴⁶ See: PENNYCOOK, G., RAND, D. G.: Who Falls for Fake News? The Roles of Bullshit Receptivity, Overclaiming, Familiarity, and Analytic Thinking. In *Journal of Personality*, 2020, Vol. 88, No. 2, p. 185-200.; TANDOC Jr., E. C., LING, R., WESTLUND, O., DUFFY, A., GOH, D., ZHENG WEI, L.: Audiences’ Acts of Authentication in the Age of Fake News: A Conceptual Framework. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 8, p. 2745-2763.

The effects on the audience are explored through the lenses of the uses and gratifications theory,⁴⁷ agenda setting,⁴⁸ and the third person effect.⁴⁹ For the purposes of this study, we are particularly interested in the viral potential of fake news. Viral content is online content that spreads fast and wide, due to remarkable features such as positivity, social significance, novelty, information utility, and humour.⁵⁰

3. Fake News Going Viral. An Overview

The viralisation potential of online dis- and mis-information is linked to the affordances of social media and mobile apps, related to the easiness of forwarding messages to many receivers,⁵¹ a potential for highly-shared information to be shared even more,⁵² the emergence of deceptive practices such as clickbait titles and headings,⁵³ the formation of online echo chambers which are, in fact, opinion and network polarized clusters,⁵⁴ the contribution of bots (automated accounts) in the spread of mis- and dis-information,⁵⁵ the lack of rigorous control over the quality of the information in social media,⁵⁶ etc.

Furthermore, there are studies that suggest fake news is shared more than true information, spreads faster, or has a greater reach,⁵⁷ even after debunking/ fact-checking.⁵⁸ King and Wang⁵⁹ examined the spread of authentic news and misinformation on Twitter during Hurricane Harvey, and concluded that users are prone to retweet misinformation more than authentic news. Furthermore, users are more likely to engage with negative tweets as opposed to positive ones.

⁴⁷ See: BROWNING, N., SWEETSER, K. D.: The Letdown Effect: Satisfaction, Motivation, and Credibility Assessments of Political Infotainment. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2014, Vol. 58, No. 6, p. 810-826.

⁴⁸ See: VARGO, C. J., GUO, L., AMAZEEN, M. A.: The Agenda-setting Power of Fake News: A Big Data Analysis of the Online Media Landscape from 2014 to 2016. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 5, p. 2028-2049.

⁴⁹ See: CORBU, N. et al.: "They Can't Fool Me, but They Can Fool the Others!" Third Person Effect and Fake News Detection. In *European Journal of Communication*, 2020, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 165-180.; JANG, S. M., KIM, J. K.: Third Person Effects of Fake News: Fake News Regulation and Media Literacy Interventions. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018, Vol. 80, p. 295-302.; ȘTEFĂNIȚĂ, O., CORBU, N., BUTUROIU, R.: Fake News and the Third-Person Effect: They are More Influenced than Me and You. In *Journal of Media Research*, 2018, Vol. 11, No. 3, p. 5-23.

⁵⁰ See: AL-RAWI, A.: Viral News on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 63-79.

⁵¹ See: CHEN, X. et al.: Why Students Share Misinformation on Social Media: Motivation, Gender, and Study-level Differences. In *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 5, p. 583-592.

⁵² See: HA, L., PEREZ, L., RAY, R.: Mapping Recent Development in Scholarship on Fake News and Misinformation, 2008 to 2017: Disciplinary Contribution, Topics, and Impact. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2019, Vol. 65, No. 2, p. 290-315.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ See: TÖRNBERG, P.: Echo Chambers and Viral Misinformation: Modeling Fake News as Complex Contagion. In *PloS One*, 2018, Vol. 13, No. 9, p. 1-21.

⁵⁵ See: SHAO, C. et al.: Hoaxy: A Platform for Tracking Online Misinformation. In BOURDEAU, J. et al. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 25th International Conference Companion on World Wide Web*. Montréal, Québec, Canada : ACM, 2016, p. 745-750. [online]. [2021-08-10]. Available at: <<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/2872518.2890098>>.

⁵⁶ See: CHEN, X. et al.: Why Students Share Misinformation on Social Media: Motivation, Gender, and Study-level Differences. In *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 5, p. 583-592.

⁵⁷ See: SHIN, J. et al.: The Diffusion of Misinformation on Social Media: Temporal Pattern, Message, and Source. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018, Vol. 83, p. 278-287.

⁵⁸ See: CHUA, A. Y., BANERJEE, S.: Intentions to Trust and Share Online Health Rumors: An Experiment with Medical Professionals. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 87, p. 1-9.

⁵⁹ See: KING, K. K., WANG, B.: Diffusion of Real Versus Misinformation During a Crisis Event: A Big Data-Driven Approach. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2021, Vol. 102390, p. 1-14. [online]. [2021-07-22]. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0268401221000839?casa_tok en=aoVKE5apvbYAAAAA:H44S5JGnvpocLhfGds4I16SRfl2foKpS-Jbjr-TVQ2dsMBK2A1qYUGt9VRE8g6b78NNPY0Q>.

The reach of fake news is unintentionally extended through attempts to disclose and rectify the false information,⁶⁰ and through coverage in the mainstream media.⁶¹

In the realm of politically-themed fake news, a study on the dynamic communication processes of political disinformation on social media showed that disinformation tends to return multiple times after the initial publication, while facts do not.⁶² One of the most comprehensive studies to date⁶³ investigated the veracity of fake and true information within ~126,000 stories tweeted by ~3 million people, leading to intriguing results. Falsehood diffused “significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth”,⁶⁴ with the strongest effects in the case of false political news. Notably, fake news was spread not only by broadcasting, but also by peer-to-peer diffusion.

By studying real and fake news propagation in actual social media contexts on Weibo (from China) and Twitter (from Japan), Zhao et al.⁶⁵ conclude that fake news spread differently than real news in social networks. For example, the number of layers (re-postings whose re-posters have the same distance from the creator of the message) in fake news is larger than that of real news. In the case of fake news, late adopters of the message play a significant role in its virality, while in the case of real news it is the early adopters who are the main spreaders. Additionally, fake news circulates to longer distances than real news.

Given existing evidence that fake news tends to become more viral than true information, especially in the case of political and medical information, we hypothesize that people’s willingness to share news is enhanced by various forms of fake news (viralisation effects) (H1).

4. News Framing Effects and Emotions

Among current trends and developments in framing research, the investigation of the effects of news framing on *emotions* and of how the latter mediate political attitudes and behaviour started to gain momentum. In this context, citizens’ emotional reactions to political reporting are thoroughly analysed, since exposure to news framing in general and to certain frame types (e.g. conflict, valenced, episodic) in particular is seen as highly effective in sparking emotions which may further influence how individuals’ political opinions and responses are formed and challenged.⁶⁶ Having this in mind, our aim is to look at emotions as *mediators* of *fake news effects*, particularly at how specific discrete emotions enhanced by exposure to deceitful information correlate with individuals’ subsequent tendency towards disseminating that specific information on their social media platforms.

⁶⁰ MURAYAMA, T. et al.: Modeling and Predicting Fake News Spreading on Twitter. In *PLoS One*, 2021, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 1-24. [online]. [2021-04-22]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250419>>.

⁶¹ See: TSFATI, Y. et al.: Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 157-173.

⁶² See: SHIN, J. et al.: The Diffusion of Misinformation on Social Media: Temporal Pattern, Message, and Source. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2018, Vol. 83, p. 278-287.

⁶³ See: VOSOUGHI, S., ROY, D., ARAL, S.: The Spread of True and False News Online. In *Science*, 2018, Vol. 359, No. 6380, p. 1146-1151.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 1147.

⁶⁵ See: ZHAO, Z. et al.: Fake News Propagates Differently from Real News Even at Early Stages of Spreading. In *EPJ Data Science*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 7. [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00224-z>>.

⁶⁶ See: AARØE, L.: Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Framing. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 207-226.; HOLM, E. M.: *Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Aarhus : Forlaget Politica, 2012.; LECHELER, S., BOS, L., VLIEGENHART, R.: The Mediating Role of Emotions: News Framing Effects on Opinions About Immigration. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2015, Vol. 92, No. 4, p. 812-838.; LECHELER, S., SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 189-209.

The definitions and conceptualizations of what a news frame stands for are, literally, uncountable, and very often quite different in terms of the aspects they underline.⁶⁷ This leads to confusion and considerable disagreement over what this “catch-all” term is and what it is not. In this context, some recent studies⁶⁸ call for more conceptual and terminological clarity with respect to how we understand news frames and use them further in our empirical designs to explain their effects in relation to behavioural or attitudinal outcomes. Thus, instead of fueling the already enormous ambiguity around the *frame* notion, the authors invite scholars to distinguish between two different concepts, stemming from two largely unrelated traditions of thinking: *equivalence* and *emphasis* framing. While equivalence framing refers exclusively to how an information is presented, thus “manipulating the presentation of logically equivalent information,”⁶⁹ emphasis framing goes beyond the equivalence notion of framing and defines news frames as means of suggesting *what* an issue is about and *how* people should make sense of it.

In our study, a combination of equivalence and emphasis frames will be used to construct variants of a neutrally framed piece of news, as to reflect some of the various “species” of fake news we have already discussed in the previous section. We will explain these in more detail in the Methods section. More recently, the role of *emotions* in news framing effect theory has been acknowledged as fundamental, mainly in relation to political topics or events that are traditionally associated with emotive language in the media and a susceptibility to cause public dispute and controversy.⁷⁰ In this literature, emotions are usually defined as “mental states” that express short-lived, intense, subjective “evaluative reactions” to events, agents or objects.⁷¹

What seems to be undebatable so far is that individuals respond emotionally to news frames,⁷² and that some frames (e.g. episodic) are more influential than others in eliciting emotions and/or emotional reactions in individuals, mainly in terms of the emotional relevance

⁶⁷ See: CAPPELLA, J. N., JAMIESON, K. H.: *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997.; DE VREESE, C. H.: News Framing: Theory and Typology. In *Information Design Journal + Document Design*, 2005, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 51-62.; DE VREESE, C. H.: Framing the Economy: Effects of Journalistic News Frames. In D'ANGELO, P., KUYPERS, J. (eds.): *Doing Framing Analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. New York : Routledge, 2010, p. 187-241.; ENTMAN, R. M.: Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. In *Journal of Communication*, 1993, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 51-58.; SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2000, Vol. 3, No. 2-3, p. 297-316.

⁶⁸ See: CACCIATORE, M. A., SCHEUFELE, D. A., IYENGAR, S.: The End of Framing as we Know It... and the Future of Media Effects. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2016, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 7-23.; NABI, R. L. et al.: Can Emotions Capture the Elusive Gain-Loss Framing Effect? A Meta-Analysis. In *Communication Research*, 2020, Vol. 47, No. 8, p. 1107-1130.; SCHEUFELE, D., IYENGAR, S.: The State of Framing Research: A Call for New Directions. In KENSKI, K., JAMIESON, K. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication Theories*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 619-632.

⁶⁹ CACCIATORE, M. A., SCHEUFELE, D. A., IYENGAR, S.: The End of Framing as we Know It... and the Future of Media Effects. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2016, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 3.

⁷⁰ See: LECHER, S., BOS, L., VLIEGENHART, R.: The Mediating Role of Emotions: News Framing Effects on Opinions About Immigration. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2015, Vol. 92, No. 4, p. 812-838.

⁷¹ See: LECHER, S., SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 189-209.

⁷² See: AARØE, L.: Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Framing. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 207-226.; LECHER, S., BOS, L., VLIEGENHART, R.: The Mediating Role of Emotions: News Framing Effects on Opinions About Immigration. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2015, Vol. 92, No. 4, p. 812-838.; LECHER, S., SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 189-209.; HOLM, E. M.: *Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Aarhus : Forlaget Politica, 2012.; NABI, R. L. et al.: Can Emotions Capture the Elusive Gain-Loss Framing Effect? A Meta-Analysis. In *Communication Research*, 2020, Vol. 47, No. 8, p. 1107-1130.; OTTO, L. P.: Beyond Simple Valence: Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Political Communication Effects on Trust in Politicians. In *Studies in Communication and Media*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 364-391.

each person attaches to a particular event.⁷³ However, despite the emotional underpinnings of people's political beliefs, evaluations or judgements, the extent to which their political behaviour (political news sharing for instance) is driven by their affective responses to news frames needs further empirical investigation.

Research studies so far showed that exposure to *certain* frames *might* generate emotional responses that are *likely* to influence how political perceptions and attitudes are shaped. This, however, has been empirically tested in a small handful of studies.⁷⁴ Moreover, the available research strongly suggests that not all emotional reactions are expected to have the same effects on political opinions/participation/(voting) behaviour and so forth, revealing that different emotions mediate different effects.⁷⁵ Yet, despite the limited insight provided by the current studies into which affective states (e.g. fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, hope, happiness, pride, contentment, etc.) *mediate* what effects, in very general terms, *positively* framed news are presumed to lead to positive emotional responses, whereas *negative* frames are expected to foster negative emotions and reactions.⁷⁶ Likewise, *discrete negative* emotions (e.g. anxiety, threat, anger, fear) have a negative impact on political attitudes and behaviour⁷⁷ whilst *discrete positive* emotions (e.g. hope, empathy, enthusiasm, contentment) trigger positive attitudes and participation.⁷⁸ Along this line, the effects of news frames on people's emotions and opinions have to do with the frame's valence (i.e. the capacity of a frame to impact on opinion formation and support for an issue by emphasizing either its positive or its negative dimensions).⁷⁹ Stemming from the research on equivalence framing, we consider *valence* to be a key-concept

⁷³ See: AARØE, L.: Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Framing. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 207-226.; GROSS, K.: Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion. In *Political Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 169-192.

⁷⁴ See: GROSS, K.: Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion. In *Political Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 169-192.; HOLM, E. M.: *Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Aarhus : Forlaget Politica, 2012.; NABI, R. L.: The Case for Emphasizing Discrete Emotions in Communication Research. In *Communication Monographs*, 2010, Vol. 77, No. 2, p. 153-159

⁷⁵ See: BRADER, T., MARCUS, G. E., MILLER, K. L.: Emotion and Public Opinion. In EDWARDS, G. C., JACOBS, L. R., SHAPIRO, R. Y. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 384-401.; EBERL, J. M. et al.: What's in a Post? How Sentiment and Issue Salience Affect Users' Emotional Reactions on Facebook. In *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 2020, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 48-65.; LECHERER, S., SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 189-209.; MCKASY, M.: A Discrete Emotion with Discrete Effects: Effects of Anger on Depth of Information Processing. In *Cognitive Processing*, 2020, Vol. 21, p. 555-573.; OTTO, L. P.: Beyond Simple Valence: Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Political Communication Effects on Trust in Politicians. In *Studies in Communication and Media*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 364-391.

⁷⁶ See: HOLM, E. M.: *Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Aarhus : Forlaget Politica, 2012; NABI, R. L.: The Case for Emphasizing Discrete Emotions in Communication Research. In *Communication Monographs*, 2010, Vol. 77, No. 2, p. 153-159.

⁷⁷ See: VALENTINO, N. A., et al.: Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2011, Vol. 73, No. 1, p. 156-170.

⁷⁸ See: BRADER, T., MARCUS, G. E., MILLER, K. L.: Emotion and Public opinion. In EDWARDS, G. C., JACOBS, L. R., SHAPIRO, R. Y. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 384-401.; GROSS, K.: Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion. In *Political Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 169-192.

⁷⁹ See: DE VREESE, C. H., BOOMGAARDEN, H.: Valenced News Frames and Public Support for the EU: Linking Content Analysis and Experimental Data. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 261-281.; LECHERER, S., SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Framing Effects. In *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 189-209.; LEE, B., MCLEOD, D.: Reconceptualizing Cognitive Media Effects Theory and Research Under the Judged Usability Model. In *Review of Communication Research*, 2020, Vol. 8, p. 17-50.

for understanding framing effects.⁸⁰ From most of the literature on equivalence framing effects, we know that negative and positive frames affect people's judgements/options/preferences in different ways, and that some authors argue that negative framing tends to have some superiority over positive framing,⁸¹ while more recent studies suggest that in the new media landscape positive emotions might have higher impact.⁸² Since economic growth (the topic of the news story we manipulate in the experimental design) may be framed/interpreted as both positive (an accomplishment of the Government) or negative (an artificial growth, based solely on consumption, and thus a failure of the Government in the long run), we expect the effects of positive versus negative economic news framing to be contingent on whether or not the *valence* is positive or negative. This expectation incorporates previous knowledge from equivalence framing in the research on emphasis framing, bringing together the two main approaches of framing as both individual-level and macro-level phenomenon, as recent scholars argue for. Building on these findings, one of the main objectives of this paper is to dig deeper into these aspects in order to see how various forms and valences of political fake news that is framed positively or negatively influence people's willingness to disseminate deceitful information and what is the role of specific emotions in explaining this process.

Moreover, studies investigating the role of emotions in news effects research in East-European contexts are scarce; some studies could be found in the vicinity of the topic.⁸³ We believe that the mechanisms behind news effects, via emotions, are context-dependent. This study looks at the way ideologically driven information elicits emotions, in the social media environment, in Romania. Thus, we hypothesize that positive emotions are elicited by positively framed fake news (H2), while negative emotions are elicited by negatively framed fake news (H3). Additionally, we investigate the *mediating* role of emotions of one particular effect of political news: going viral. As previously shown, emotions are increasingly depicted as a powerful force in contemporary news media framing and often assumed to play a role "over and above individuals' cognitive evaluations" of politics, politicians or political events.⁸⁴ Following this line, many scholars see the investigation of the emotions that are triggered by news media exposure as a reliable starting point in order to understand political processes in general and media effects on people's political (re)actions and decision-making in particular.

Likewise, as current studies show, emotions may substantially influence how people process and deal with the information they encounter, independent of whether that information is true or *false*.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ See: DE VREESE, C. H.: Framing the Economy: Effects of Journalistic News Frames. In D'ANGELO, P., KUYPERS, J. (eds.): *Doing Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*. New York : Routledge, 2010, p. 187-214.; SCHUCK, A. R. T., DE VREESE, C. H.: Between Risk and Opportunity: News Framing and Its Effects on Public Support for EU Enlargement. In *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 5-32.

⁸¹ See: CAPPELLA, J. N., JAMIESON, K. H.: *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997.; DE VREESE, C. H.: Framing the Economy: Effects of Journalistic News Frames. In D'ANGELO, P., KUYPERS, J. (eds.): *Doing Framing Analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. New York : Routledge, 2010, p. 187-214.

⁸² See: AL-RAWI, A.: Viral News on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 63-79.; BERGER, J., MILKMAN, K. L.: Emotion and Virality: What Makes Online Content Go Viral? In *GfK Marketing Intelligence Review*, 2013, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 18-23.

⁸³ See: BURGET, R., KARASEK, J., SMEKAL, Z.: Recognition of Emotions in Czech Newspaper Headlines. In *Radioengineering*, 2011, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 39-47.; VESZELSZKI, Á.: Linguistic and Non-linguistic Elements in Detecting (Hungarian) Fake News. In *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Communicatio*, 2017, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 7-35.

⁸⁴ See: LECHLER, S., BOS, L., VLIEGENHART, R.: The Mediating Role of Emotions: News Framing Effects on Opinions About Immigration. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2015, Vol. 92, No. 4, p. 812-838.; OTTO, L. P.: Beyond Simple Valence: Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Political Communication Effects on Trust in Politicians. In *Studies in Communication and Media*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 364-391.

⁸⁵ See: BAKIR, V., MCSTAY, A.: Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 154-175.; KILGO, D. K., LOUGH, K., RIEDL, M. J.: Emotional Appeals and News Values as Factors of Shareworthiness in Ice Bucket Challenge Coverage. In *Digital Journalism*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 267-286.; VOSOUGH, S., ROY, D., ARAL, S.: The Spread of True and False News Online. In *Science*, 2018, Vol. 359, No. 6380, p. 1146-1151.

In today's digital media ecosystem, emotional stories (often of uncertain provenance or accuracy) are widely circulated and frequently accepted as facts by the people.⁸⁶ This happens not only because emotional language is more attention-grabbing,⁸⁷ but also because the so-called "empathic media"⁸⁸ use a wide range of online technologies (from facial coding and voice analytics to biosensors and sentiment analysis, etc.) in order to assess and record the emotions one displays on one's social media platforms. This content further alludes to what the literature terms "personally and emotionally targeted news"⁸⁹ which often incorporates (deliberately) misleading elements too.

In conclusion, the fake news phenomenon concerns the *economics of emotion rather than the economics of knowledge, specifically how emotions are used (and often abused) to foster audience's attention, engagement, and willingness to share content.*

Under these circumstances, the present paper focuses on how specific emotions enhanced by exposure to deceitful information correlate with individuals' subsequent tendency towards disseminating the news story on their social media platforms. More exactly, we aim at exploring how several key discrete emotions (e.g. anger, fear, enthusiasm and contentment) are likely to influence the viralisation potential of ideologically driven (and counterfeit) fake news (which we define as news spreading information that has the potential to mislead). Drawing on recent research concerning the mediating role of discrete emotions in the political information processing, attitudes and behaviour, we presume that both negative and positive emotions mediate the viralisation effects (H4).

5. Method

Experimental Design and Stimuli

To test our hypotheses, we rely on a 2x2x2 between-subjects experiment (see Table 1), with one control group and 6 manipulated conditions relevant for political communication (as the other two remaining combinations of the three dimensions are to be found in the realm of advertising or public relations). In fact, this could be considered a 2x2 experiment in which we manipulated level of facticity and valence, which accounts for the disinformation dimension (that is information with a clear intention to mislead or deceive the audience), to which parody and satire as possible additional genres were added. The stimuli were constructed as news stories manipulated based on a control condition (N=120), a neutrally written news item on an economic subject, but politically focused. The story presents the (real) fact of a 7% economic growth in Romania, in 2017, as compared to 2016. The facts were presented as either an accomplishment of the Prime Minister, Viorica Dăncilă, and her Government (positive manipulation, N=115), or as artificial and dangerous growth based solely on consumption (negative manipulation, N=132). The fact was altered in the low facticity conditions as to present it as either a 14% growth (positive fabrication, N=116), or as a negative growth of 7% (negative fabrication, N=115). The satire (N=107) and parody (N=108) conditions used easily recognizable irony which addressed repeated mistakes the Prime Minister of Romania made in her public discourse in the last few months prior to the data collection, keeping the facts accurate (satire), or altering them in the same negative fashion as in the negative fabrication condition (parody).

⁸⁶ SILVERMAN, C., SINGER-VINE, J.: *Most Americans Who See Fake News Believe It, New Survey Says.* [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/fake-news-survey>>.

⁸⁷ See: BRADY, W. J., GANTMAN, A. P., VAN BAVEL, J. J.: Attentional Capture Helps Explain Why Moral and Emotional Content Go Viral. In *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 2020, Vol. 149, No. 4, p. 746-756.

⁸⁸ See: MCSTAY, A.: Empathic Media and Advertising: Industry, Policy, Legal and Citizen Perspectives (the Case for Intimacy). In *Big Data & Society*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 1-11.

⁸⁹ See: BAKIR, V., MCSTAY, A.: Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 154-175.

In constructing the stimuli we used a combination of emphasis and equivalence frames, in the sense that, for the high facticity conditions, the content of the news item was just framed positively or negatively as either a success or a failure of the Government, but all information was kept identical, whereas for the low facticity conditions we changed the information about the size and direction (positive or negative) of the economic growth, keeping all other information identical, but also framed positively or negatively.

	Facticity High		Facticity Low	
	Valence positive	Valence negative	Valence positive	Valence negative
Intention to deceive High	Positive manipulation (2)	Negative manipulation (3)	Positive fabrication (4)	Negative fabrication (5)
Intention to deceive Low	N/A	Satire (6)	N/A	Parody (7)

+ control condition (1)

TABLE 1: Overview of the experimental conditions

Source: own processing, 2021

The topic and source of the message were held constant in all conditions. The stimuli were presented as news published on a news website, news.com. Each story was accompanied by a photo of the Prime Minister and a title, both manipulated to reflect the specific manipulation of each condition (see Appendix 1, including English translation of the stimuli). The photos reflected either a positive portrayal of the Prime Minister (for the positive fabrication and manipulation), a negative one (for the negative fabrication and manipulation), or a very specific negative portrayal with hints to the lack of taste and elegance of the way the Prime Minister dresses and her peasant origins (satire), and the altered picture of her specific hairstyle, but with the recognizable face of the president of the incumbent party at the time (Liviu Dragnea), suggesting the fact that in the public debates there has been discussions about the Prime Minister being a mere puppet in the hands of the president of the governing party (parody). (see Appendix 1) The title was also manipulated to reflect identical framing as the text and photos, using both equivalence and emphasis frames, with different valence for the high facticity conditions, and different comparison year, to reflect a greater either performance or failure than the real data suggested.

We pretested the stimuli and questionnaire on a diverse sample of 66 respondents, and only minor changes in the wording of both the questionnaire and the stimuli have been added to the initial design.

Sample

The questionnaire was completed online by a diverse sample of Romanians aged more than 18 (N=1016). The data was collected by Survey Sampling International from July 31st to August 10th, 2018, using a quota sampling on age, education and gender. A sample of N=813 respondents was kept for analysis after cleaning procedures using completion time and straightlining on manipulation checks variables were applied. The final sample had the following characteristics: gender (52% males), education⁹⁰ (M=5.97, SD=1.40), age (M=40.17, SD=13.02), political interest (M=4.26, SD=1.95),⁹¹ political ideology (M=6.03, SD=2.43).⁹²

⁹⁰ Measured on a scale from 1 (no education at all) to 8 (graduate studies).

⁹¹ Measured on a scale from 1 (not interested at all) to 7 (very interested).

⁹² Measured on a scale from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right).

Procedure

The questionnaire used in the experiment was structured in a typical experimental design: the first part included the informed consent, then the second part consisted of demographics, and control variables. The third part was the random assignment to one of the seven conditions (exposure to one of the online news item, which was visible for at least 15 seconds), while the fourth (post-test) part contained the dependent variables, mediators, and the manipulation checks. Randomization was successful for age ($F_{6,657}=2.07, p=0.06$), gender ($F_{6,801}=1.46, p=0.19$), education ($F_{6,804}=1.98, p=0.07$), political interest ($F_{6,804}=0.50, p=0.81$), and political ideology ($F_{6,657}=1.41, p=0.21$). At the end of the questionnaire participant could read a debriefing and thank-you message.

Measures

Viralisation potential was measured as one item, asking people how likely they were to share the news item on a social networking site (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), using a Likert scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). *Emotions* were measured discretely (anger, fear, contentment, and enthusiasm) as self-reported emotions (adjusted from Harmon-Jones, Bastian, & Harmon-Jones, 2016), using the following wording – “Thinking of the statements mentioned in the newspaper article, please state to what extent you think it made you feel... angry/ fearful (concerned)/content/enthusiastic” – on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (Completely disagree) to 7 (Completely agree).

Manipulation Checks

Five manipulation check questions were used to assess whether or not the stimuli were perceived as intended. Conditions manipulated using facticity low differed significantly from the rest of the conditions in both manipulation-check variables constructed to this end: one tested whether people agreed that the story reported on a 7% positive economic growth ($F_{1,691}=205.01, p=.000$), and the other whether or not the story presented the growth as the results of consumption volume ($F_{1,691}=40.61, p=.000$). Conditions in positive valence significantly differed from the others with respect to the story being presented as an accomplishment of the Government ($F_{1,691}=27.05, p=.000$). At the same time, the satire and parody conditions were perceived as being ironic at the expense of the Prime Minister, and thus different from the others ($F_{1,691}=139.67, p=.000$). Overall, the manipulation was successful and generally the stimuli were perceived as intended.

6. Results

Our data show evidence that negatively biased fake news that keeps the information accurate enhance people’s willingness to share the news story ($b=.626, SE=.270, p<.05$), thus validating H1 for negative manipulation.⁹³ (see Appendix 2 and 4 for Regression output and Descriptives of sharing effect by condition) No other type of ideologically driven fake news has a significant effect on the viralisation potential. However, looking at the results, they suggest that (potentially with stronger stimuli), the positive conditions decrease the willingness to share, if compared with the control condition (Appendix 2). The surprising fact is that neither satire nor parody had a significant impact, which is probably because people tend to share those kind of *genres* only if they come in any format that is not perceived as proper news story. In short, people might have perceived the stimulus as mainly news, and not as humour.

As far as emotions are concerned, a first significant result shows that valence plays an important part in eliciting/enhancing emotions, mostly in a negative direction. (see Appendix 5 for Descriptives of discrete emotions elicited by various types of fake news). Considering

⁹³ Controlling for vote intention for the governing party does not significantly change results (see Appendix 3).

valence, positive emotions are not enhanced by positively framed fake news, as expected, but they are attenuated by all types of negatively framed fake news. Thus, contentment is significantly lower for people exposed to parody ($b=-1.09$, $SE=.21$, $p<.01$), negatively fabricated news ($b=-.79$, $SE=.20$, $p<.01$), satire ($b=-.77$, $SE=.21$, $p<.01$), and negatively manipulated news ($b=-.79$, $SE=.20$, $p<.01$). At the same time, people's enthusiasm significantly reduces when exposed to parody ($b=-.85$, $SE=.20$, $p<.01$), negatively manipulated news ($b=-.60$, $SE=.19$, $p<.01$), negatively fabricated news ($b=-.50$, $SE=.19$, $p<.01$), and satire ($b=-.44$, $SE=.20$, $p<.05$). Even though, strictly speaking, H2 is invalidated, our results suggest that the direction of the effects on emotions is the one we have foreseen: positive emotions are significantly reduced by negatively framed fake news.

When looking at negative emotions both anger and fear are enhanced by all types of negatively framed fake news (H3 validated). Thus, anger increases when people are exposed to parody ($b=.94$, $SE=.30$, $p<.01$), negatively fabricated news ($b=.89$, $SE=.29$, $p<.01$), satire ($b=.88$, $SE=.30$, $p<.01$), and negatively manipulated news ($b=.79$, $SE=.29$, $p<.01$). Negatively biased news influences people in a similar manner, namely fear increases significantly when people are exposed to parody ($b=1.24$, $SE=.30$, $p<.01$), negatively fabricated news ($b=1.20$, $SE=.29$, $p<.01$), negatively manipulated news ($b=.85$, $SE=.29$, $p<.01$), and satire ($b=.72$, $SE=.30$, $p<.05$).

Summing up, regardless of the type of negative valence in which a piece of (fake) news is framed, exposure to any of it enhances negative feelings: it either worsens people's fear or anger, or reduces people's contentment or enthusiasm.

Mediation analysis showed that the effects of viralisation potential in negatively manipulated fake news are mediated by negative emotions (both anger and fear), but not by positive ones, thus only partially validating H4. To test the mediation effects, we used PROCESS macro for SPSS, developed by Andrew F. Hayes (using a number of 5000 bootstrap samples). For fear, in the first step we found a significant effect of exposure to negatively manipulated news on people's willingness to share the news story ($b=.67$, $t(753)=2.40$, $p=.017$). The second step tested the effect of exposure to negatively manipulated news on fear (mediator), which also proved significant ($b=.85$, $t(753)=2.97$, $p=.003$). A third step showed that the mediator (fear), when controlled for exposure to the negative news item, was significant ($b=.11$, $t(752)=3.23$, $p=.001$). Step 4 of the mediation process revealed that, when controlling for fear, exposure to the negative news item score remained a significant predictor of people's willingness to share the news, but the power of the effect lowered ($b=.57$, $t(752)=2.06$, $p=.040$). The indirect effect size was .0968, with a 95% confidence interval which did not include zero (effect significantly greater than zero at $\alpha=.05$).

Similarly, the mediation process for anger showed significant (and even stronger) effects. Applying the same procedure, in the first step we found a significant effect of exposure to negative news on the viralisation potential (willingness to share) ($b=.58$, $t(749)=2.08$, $p<.038$). Secondly we found the effect of exposure to negative news on anger (mediator) to be significant ($b=.79$, $t(749)=2.71$, $p=.007$). Steps 3 and 4 showed that, controlling for exposure to negative news, the mediator (anger) was significant ($b=.11$, $t(748)=3.18$, $p=.002$), and that, controlling for anger, exposure to negative news was not a significant predictor of people's susceptibility to share the news any longer ($b=.59$, $t(748)=1.77$, $p=.078$). The size of the indirect effect was .0879 (effect significantly greater than zero at $\alpha=.05$). We found that anger fully mediates the relationship between people's exposure to negatively manipulated news and their willingness to share the news to which they were exposed.

Summing up, the potential for viralisation of negatively framed fake news, not only proved higher than for neutrally framed news (control), but the effect is mediated by anger (and to some extent fear) elicited by the content to which people were exposed.

7. Discussion

This study focused on the potential to go viral of politically valence framed fake news (compared to neutrally framed news), and the role that emotions, both positive and negative, play in this context. We found that there is a significant effect of viralisation potential only for negative manipulation, that is negative news that scores highly on both facticity and intention to deceive. We could document no effect for fabricated news, which might be due to a sort of boomerang effect, in the sense that people might perceive the intention to deceive, or might have had an idea about the real facts discussed in the stimulus, and were not inclined to share the content to a greater extent than the control material. Additionally, satire and parody might have been perceived as humour and not as news, people thus judging them as not particularly worthy to be further shared on social networks. This finding is particularly relevant not only for political communication in general, but at the same time to understand what are the real dangers associated with fake news: it might be the case that the real problem is rather the negatively framed news than the (grossly) fabricated content, thus raising the problem that fake news has the potential to create or amplify a highly polarized media ecosystem, which could be further addressed by fact-checkers (see Hameleers and van der Meer).⁹⁴

As far as emotions are concerned, this study shows that negatively framed news (in all four types of framing covered in this experimental design: manipulated content, fabricated content, satire and parody) has a significant effect on both positive and negative emotions. However, positive emotions are not enhanced by positively framed news, but are lowered by negatively framed ones. Both anger and fear are enhanced by all negative news frames. The most powerful effect for both anger and fear are registered for the type of news low on facticity (parody and negative fabrication). This is particularly important from two points of view. On the one hand, maybe the academic debate about what fake news is should include forms such as satire and parody as legitimate genres of fake news, given their potential to elicit powerful negative emotions. On the other hand, findings show that intention to deceive might not be the one most important denominator in the discussion about fake news effects, as people might be influenced in ways still to be determined by content both intended and not intended to deceive in the first place.

Emotions playing an important mediation role in the ongoing viral phenomenon was to be expected, and was confirmed in this study. However, there are important nuances to this statement. Positive emotions do not mediate the effect of negatively manipulating news (the only significant main effect) on viralisation potential. Negative emotions, especially anger, mediate this effect, which is to say that people are actually more willing to share negative news because it elicits feelings of fear and anger, which in turn make them more willing to share. This finding suggests that probably not only negative fake news is powerful in eliciting people's emotions and thus making them actors of a viralisation process, but also that negativity in news in general that has the potential to make people angry might have an important potential to influence the various forms of political engagement, which is somewhat not in line with recent studies showing an increased potential for positivity in news to become viral.⁹⁵ This should be further tested in future research.

These findings are particularly important both for the recent academic interest for in fake news phenomena and the relatively scarce body of evidence regarding its effects (with the exception of studies focused on parody and satire), but also in the large discussion about

⁹⁴ See: HAMELEERS, M., VAN DER MEER, T. G.: Misinformation and Polarization in a High-Choice Media Environment: How Effective Are Political Fact-Checkers? In *Communication Research*, 2020, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 227-250.

⁹⁵ See: AL-RAWI, A.: Viral News on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 63-79.; BERGER, J., MILKMAN, K. L.: Emotion and Virality: What Makes Online Content Go Viral? In *GfK Marketing Intelligence Review*, 2013, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 18-23.

the potential of news framed in emotional ways to more effectively influence opinions and attitudes.⁹⁶ Additionally, this is consistent with research showing that, among discrete emotions, anger has the potential to influence news effects, already proven with regards to various other topics, such as message processing (time spent consuming news and detail recognition levels),⁹⁷ political trust,⁹⁸ polarizing effects,⁹⁹ etc.

At the same time, the recent concern about fake news in political contexts has raised public concern about fighting the phenomenon. The report of the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation¹⁰⁰ has outlined the need for “*independent evidence-based research on problems of disinformation.*” The general plea should be for comparative and replicable research, across platforms and types of fake news. However, research on fake news effects in the new media ecosystem is still in its infancy, and we believe this study to be a contribution to the field, especially in the East-European region, where systematic research in this area is almost entirely missing. Even though bound to one cultural context, this study shows, if nothing else, the potential for effects related to fake news viralisation phenomenon, which is, arguably, one of the most dangerous risks associated with fake news, in political context.

As any experimental study, ours too comes with limitations. One is related to the fact that the results are to be considered in the Romanian political context. It might be possible that effects should be dependent on both the context, but also the content of the news. The news story used as stimulus is only representative of political news about economic issues in Romania. However limitative these results, they are also filling a gap in the literature, as data concerning Romania as a case study for effects of news in general (fake news in particular) is almost entirely missing. At the same time, one should keep in mind that these are the results of a onetime exposure, and very specific for short time effects. Nonetheless, both potential for viralisation and emotions are short time effects by definition, which makes the setup relevant for the subject matter. Despite such limitations, this study addresses a very important topic in the literature about fake news: effects on the viralisation potential (which is key for various other types of effects) and their relationship with discrete emotions. Generally speaking, this study showed that negative discrete emotions have more potential for effects in general, and negatively biased news is more likely to lead to viralisation effects.

8. Conclusion

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on fake news and its effects on the audience. It was the goal of our research to provide empirical evidence in three ways: by exploring viralisation potential of ideologically framed fake news, by studying the effects of fake news on emotions, and lastly, by measuring the mediating effect of emotions on the susceptibility to share fake news.

⁹⁶ See: AARØE, L.: Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Framing. In *Political Communication*, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 207-226.; GROSS, K.: Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion. In *Political Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 169-192.

⁹⁷ See: DE LOS SANTOS, T. M., NABI, R. L.: Emotionally Charged: Exploring the Role of Emotion in Online News Information Seeking and Processing. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2019, Vol. 63, No. 1, p. 39-58.

⁹⁸ See: OTTO, L. P.: Beyond Simple Valence: Discrete Emotions as Mediators of Political Communication Effects on Trust in Politicians. In *Studies in Communication and Media*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 364-391.

⁹⁹ CLIFFORD, S.: How Emotional Frames Moralize and Polarize Political Attitudes. In *Political Psychology*, 2019, Vol. 40, No. 1, p. 75-91.

¹⁰⁰ *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation: Report of the Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation.* [online]. [2021-10-21]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>>.

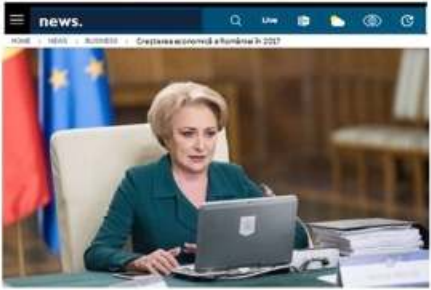
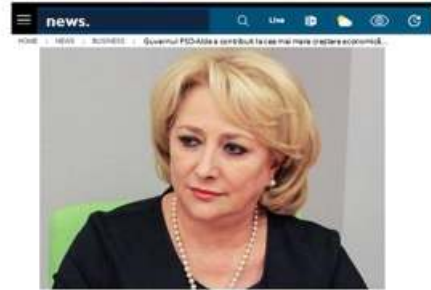
Our findings show that there is one variant of fake news in particular that has a significant viralisation effect: news that is factual in nature, but involve negative manipulations designed to deceive. The fact that we could not find any significant effects for completely fabricated news, which are low on facticity and high in intention to deceive, as well as for the humorous genres of satire and parody, suggests that we may be putting too much emphasis on grossly faked pieces of news. The subtler “species,” negatively ideologically driven news might actually impact the audience to a greater extent. While blatantly fake news stories could be compelling for a smaller fraction of the audience, positively or negatively framed news has the opportunity to be distributed more widely and more deeply and to amplify the polarisation of the media ecosystem.

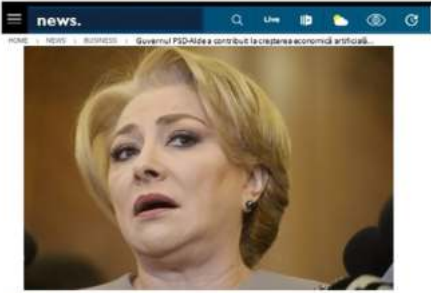
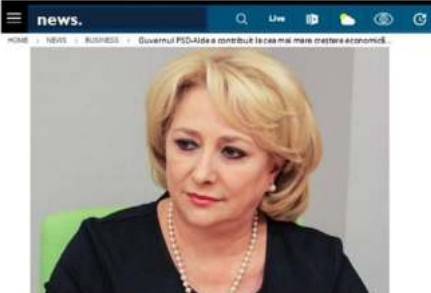
The second key finding is that all types of negatively biased fake news decrease positive emotions and enhance anger and fear in the audience; somewhat unexpectedly, satire and parody showed great effects in this regard, despite the fact that the main effect of viralisation was not confirmed. Given this insight, we propose that future studies pay greater attention to the effects of these two types of fake news, especially since they proved to be impactful even without being intentionally deceitful. Despite the fact that there is a tacit agreement between the source and the audience on the pretense nature of these so-called news, their potential to elicit powerful negative emotions is not negligible.

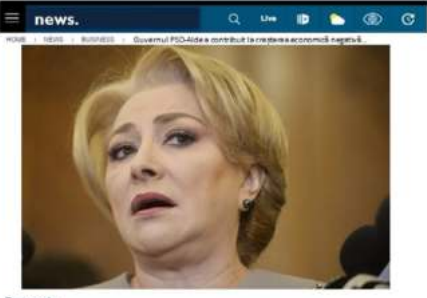
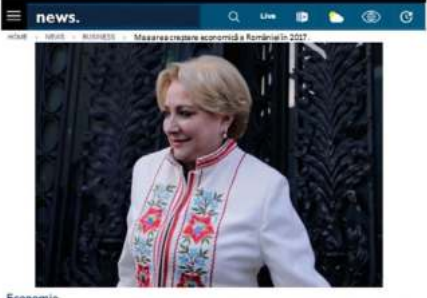
Lastly, the expectation that emotions play an important mediation role in the viralisation of fake news was confirmed, with the caveat that only negative emotions have the capacity to make people more willing to share negatively manipulating news. This result contributes with empirical evidence to the argument that one of the consequences of political online disinformation is making the audience more fearful and angry, thus more engaged in the dissemination of negative fake news in a vicious circle of distorted political communication.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Experimental conditions (stimuli)

Control condition (RO)	Positive manipulation condition (RO)
 <p>Economie Creșterea economică a României în 2017</p> <p>Premierul Viorica Dăncilă a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat creșterea economică a României cu 7% în 2017, față de anul 2016. Datele arată că această creștere se datorează în principal cheltuielilor pentru consum final al gospodăriilor populației. În 2017, volumul importurilor a depășit volumul exporturilor.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>	 <p>Economie Guvernul PSD-Alde a contribuit la cea mai mare creștere economică a României de după 2008</p> <p>Premierul Viorica Dăncilă a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat creșterea economică a României cu 7% în 2017, față de anul 2016, cea mai mare creștere economică după 2008. Meritul este fără îndoială al Guvernului PSD-ALDE, care a luat măsuri inteligente, deopotrivă benefice economiei țării și oamenilor în general. Datele arată că această creștere se datorează în principal cheltuielilor pentru consum final al gospodăriilor populației, dovadă a faptului că oamenii au dus-o mult mai bine în ultimii ani sub Guvernul PSD-ALDE.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Control condition (ENG)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>Romania's economic growth in 2017</p> <p>Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the official figures reflecting an economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016. Data shows that this growth is mainly due to an increase in household consumption. In 2017, imports exceeded exports.</p> <p>Read more...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Positive manipulation condition (ENG)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>The PSD-Alde government coalition contributed to the highest economic growth in Romania since 2008</p> <p>Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the official figures reflecting an economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016, the highest growth rate recorded since 2008. Undoubtedly, this is credited to the PSDE-Alde government, which took intelligent measures to the benefit of the national economy and the Romanian citizens. Data show this growth is mainly due to an increase in household consumption, proof that people's economic situation improved under the PSD-Alde rule.</p> <p>Read more...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Negative manipulation condition (RO)</p>  <p>Guvernul PSD-Alde a contribuit la creșterea economică artificială și periculoasă a României în 2017</p> <p>Premierul Viorica Dăncilă a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat creșterea economică a României cu 7% în 2017, față de anul 2016, o creștere extrem de periculoasă, din cauza naturii sale artificiale, bazate pe consum. Aceasta este consecința măsurilor economice dezastruoase luate de Guvernul PSD-ALDE în ultimii ani, măsuri care au consecințe profund negative deopotrivă pentru economia țării și pentru oameni în general. Datele arată că această creștere economică artificială se datorează în principal cheltuielilor pentru consum final al gospodăriilor populației, ceea ce poate duce la o criză economică puternică de tipul celei din Grecia, iar vina este exclusiv a Guvernului PSD-ALDE.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Positive manipulation condition (RO)</p>  <p>Guvernul PSD-Alde a contribuit la cea mai mare creștere economică a României de după 1989</p> <p>Premierul Viorica Dăncilă a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat creșterea economică a României cu 14% în 2017, față de anul 2016, cea mai mare creștere economică de la Revoluție până acum. Meritul este fără îndoială al Guvernului PSD-ALDE, care a luat măsuri inteligente, deopotrivă benefice economiei țării și oamenilor în general. Datele arată că această creștere se datorează în principal volumului producției, știut fiind că acest tip de evoluție este unul sustenabil și robust, ceea ce arată performanțele deosebite ale Guvernului PSD-ALDE.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Control condition (ENG)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>Romania's economic growth in 2017</p> <p>Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the official figures reflecting an economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016. Data shows that this growth is mainly due to an increase in household consumption. In 2017, imports exceeded exports.</p> <p>Read more...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Positive manipulation condition (ENG)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>The PSD-Alde government coalition contributed to the highest economic growth in Romania since 2008</p> <p>Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the official figures reflecting an economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016, the highest growth rate recorded since 2008. Undoubtedly, this is credited to the PSDE-Alde government, which took intelligent measures to the benefit of the national economy and the Romanian citizens. Data show this growth is mainly due to an increase in household consumption, proof that people's economic situation improved under the PSD-Alde rule.</p> <p>Read more...</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Negative fabrication condition (RO)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Guvernul PSD-Alde a contribuit la creșterea economică negativă a României în 2017</p> <p>Economie</p> <p>Premierul Viorica Dăncilă a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat creșterea economică negativă a României cu 7% în 2017, față de anul 2016, o scădere extrem de periculoasă, cea mai gravă de la Revoluție până acum. Aceasta este consecința măsurilor dezastruoase luate de Guvernul PSD-ALDE în ultimii ani, măsuri care au consecințe profund negative deopotrivă pentru economia țării și pentru oameni în general. Datele arată că această creștere economică negativă se datorează în principal scăderii dramatice a volumului producției, ceea ce poate duce la o criză economică puternică de tipul celei din Grecia, iar vina este exclusiv a Guvernului PSD-ALDE.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Satire (RO)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Maaarea creștere economică a României în 2017</p> <p>Economie</p> <p>Viorica Vasilica a prezentat datele oficiale care au confirmat o maaare creștere economică a României cu 7% în 2017, față de anul 2016, ceea ce ne dorim și în douăzeci douăzeci. Datele prezentate arată că această creștere se datorează în principal cheltuielilor pentru consum final al gospodăriilor populației, a mai declarat premierul, în meoșă limbă a strămoșilor săi uitată pe plaiurile bruxelleze. Orice om îi a frică de schimbările comerciale, dar se pare că, în 2017, volumul importurilor a depășit volumul exporturilor.</p> <p>Citește mai mult...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Negative fabrication condition (RO)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>The PSD-Alde government contributed to the negative economic growth in Romania for the year 2017</p> <p>Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the official figures reflecting a negative economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016, a very dangerous decrease, and the most severe since the Revolution. These are the consequences of the disastrous economic measures undertaken by the PSD-Alde government in recent years, with extremely negative consequences for the national economy and for Romanian citizens. Data show that this negative growth is mainly due to a dramatic decrease in production; this may lead to an economic crisis mirroring the Greek crisis in proportions, and we have only the PSD-Alde government to blame.</p> <p>Read more...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Satire (RO)</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>Biiiiig deal: Romania's economic growth in 2017</p> <p>Viorica Vasilica announced the official figures reflecting a "stupendous" economic growth of 7% in 2017, compared to 2016, a prospect we hold dear for the year twenty-twenty*) as well. Data show that this growth is mainly due to an increase in household consumption; the Prime Minister added in the native tongue of her ancestors, she completely forgot during her stay in Brussels. Any regular Joe is afraid of trade**), but it looks like imports exceeded exports in 2017.</p> <p>Read more...</p> <p>*) Contextual irony related to one of the Prime Minister' well-known statements</p> <p>**) Contextual irony referring to one of the most ridiculed statements of the Prime Minister, both for its incorrect grammar and choice of words.</p>

Parody (ENG)



Parody (RO)

Economy

Romania's economic growth for the year 2017 remains a mystery, since the PM has no clue how to read

Viorica Vasilica would have liked to announce the official figures reflecting the 2017 economic growth, compared to 2016, but her native tongue was too confusing, especially the numbers, since she'd been staying in Brussels as much as she can. Finally, the Prime Minister managed to say a few words in English (proficiently spoken in hand gestures) on the fact that household consumption is accountable for Romania's economic growth. Any regular Joe is afraid of trade*), but it looks like imports exceeded exports in 2017.

Read more...

**) Contextual irony referring to one of the most ridiculed statements of the Prime Minister, both for its incorrect grammar and choice of words.*

Appendix 2: OLS Regression predicting willingness to share the news item

	B	SE	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	2.617	.195		.000
Positive manipulation	-.391	.279	-.063	.162
Negative manipulation	.626	.270	.107	.021
Negative fabrication	.254	.278	.041	.362
Positive fabrication	-.199	.279	-.032	.475
Satire	.056	.284	.009	.843
Parody	.031	.284	.005	.912

Appendix 3: OLS Regression predicting willingness to share the news item, controlled by vote intention for the governing party

	B	SE	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	2.531	.203		.000
Positive manipulation	-.315	.281	-.052	.263
Negative manipulation	.680	.271	.119	.012
Negative fabrication	.160	.282	.026	.572
Positive fabrication	-.111	.284	-.018	.697
Satire	.072	.286	.012	.801
Parody	.041	.285	.007	.885
Vote intention PSD	.087	.167	.019	.600

Appendix 4: Descriptives of people's willingness to share the news story

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Control	2.62	120	2.12
Positive manipulation	2.23	115	1.87
Negative manipulation	3.24	132	2.35
Negative fabrication	2.87	116	2.29
Positive fabrication	2.42	115	2.00
Satire	2.67	107	2.15
Parody	2.65	108	2.13
Total	2.68	813	2.15

Appendix 5: Descriptives of emotions elicited by the various types of politically biased fake news

		Anger	Contentment	Enthusiasm	Fear
Control	Mean	3.59	2.52	2.27	4.13
	N	113	109	109	112
	SD	2.20	1.65	1.52	2.34
Positive manipulation	Mean	4.04	2.60	2.48	4.41
	N	109	108	108	109
	SD	2.31	1.87	1.75	2.29
Negative manipulation	Mean	4.38	1.82	1.68	4.97
	N	116	115	114	119
	SD	2.10	1.34	1.30	2.05
Negative fabrication	Mean	4.49	1.71	1.75	5.35
	N	111	110	110	112
	SD	2.10	1.27	1.37	2.07
Positive fabrication	Mean	4.12	2.40	2.11	4.53
	N	108	106	107	108
	SD	2.32	1.80	1.56	2.27
Satire	Mean	4.47	1.75	1.83	4.85
	N	98	97	98	99
	SD	2.10	1.28	1.40	2.10
Parody	Mean	4.53	1.44	1.42	5.38
	N	101	101	101	101
	SD	2.24	0.93	1.04	2.03

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