

# Sustainability of the Democratic System Versus Viral Disinformation Campaigns

Renaud de La Brosse  
Linnaeus University  
E-mail: renaud.delabrosse@lnu.se

Kristoffer Holt  
Linnaeus University  
E-mail: kristoffer.holt@lnu.se

Original scientific paper  
UDK 316.774:321.7  
070.16  
DOI 10.17818/SM/2024/1.1  
Paper received: 23. 10. 2024.  
Paper accepted: 15. 11. 2024.

## Abstract

Democracy as an experience of political organization is today undergoing multiple external attacks, and is the object of many internal criticisms. In this regard, one can imagine a City besieged by centrifugal forces, not least of which is the rise of the phenomenon of disinformation. There are many cities, like Kyiv or Dubrovnik, which are or have in the past been the target of disinformation campaigns that preceded and accompanied the assault of which they were the victims. Therefore, it seems necessary to review who are the actors and the vectors of disinformation today, to then examine who are the main targets and victims. Ultimately, this communication, in addition to the description of the phenomenon itself, also aims to review the responses that are provided by public actors to combat this scourge threatening the proper functioning of democratic deliberation.

**Keywords:** media, democracy, disinformation, deliberation, fake news, propaganda.

## Introduction / Uvod

Democracy as an experience of political organization is today undergoing multiple external attacks and is the object of many internal criticisms - which emanate in particular from populist movements that have prospered within it and taken advantage of the freedoms it offers, to question some of its values and constitutive principles.

In this regard, one can take the image of a City which would be besieged by centrifugal forces, one of the least of which is not the rise of disinformation campaigns: from Kyiv or Kharkiv today, to Dubrovnik, Vukovar, or Sarajevo yesterday, there are many cities that have recently been the target of disinformation attacks that preceded and accompanied the assault of which they were the victims. From this point of view, the Yugoslav wars at the turn of the 1990s in a way heralded the rise and devastating impact of disinformation campaigns on fragile societies. The world then witnessed how the Serbian President Milosevic took control over Serbian media in order to impose his nationalist propaganda and justify the political project of creating a Great Serbia - which would be home to all Serbian people. Dubrovnik,

as well as Vukovar, have then been priority targets, both victims of and subjects to propaganda war, where some media and journalists misbehaved during that period: they served as instruments of legitimization to the use of force against those who were depicted as enemies to the Serbian people at large. It has been demonstrated (de La Brosse, Brautović, 2017) how conspiracy paranoia, disinformation, manipulation, stigmatization, etc. have helped demonizing the non-ethnic Serbs populations, spread the fear among the public, and prepared perpetration of the worst possible atrocities.

In this first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, disinformation is also increasingly present in social media, sometimes also in traditional media, and it distorts the possibility of a reasoned and reasonable public discussion of the questions and issues facing any society. The undermining work carried out by those hiding behind has succeeded here and there in altering the sincerity of certain electoral processes or even sowing doubt among citizens as to the legitimacy of the authorities in place. Thus, securing elections against disinformation campaigns has become the number one priority for all democratic states, as in the case of Sweden for example (LaForge, 2020).

As pointed out by the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services-ERGA (2020, 2), « due to the hyper-fast viral distribution techniques and the limitless possibilities to adapt the information via algorithms to specific groups of recipients who often live in their own information bubble, the (potential) impact is unprecedentedly greater than before and the limits do not even seem to have been reached ». Thus, the manipulation of information that was for example possible in the 1990s in Yugoslavia could well be increased tenfold at a time when any actor (individual or not) has the possibility of publishing and spreading false information without any form of democratic control.

Researchers are nowadays faced with the following difficulty: the concept of disinformation remains largely elusive, as it intersects with different phenomena and realities. Considering the difficulties in qualifying what disinformation is, it is therefore no coincidence that, with a few rare exceptions, there are no specific legislative and regulatory responses to oppose it.

Moreover, it is not certain that the sole recourse to repression, through denunciation and sanction, is sufficient to combat it. Authors believe that its proteiform character must be underlined and analysed if one wishes to determine which tools and actors in a democracy are likely to face it most effectively. The main difficulty here lies in taking effective measures without compromising the superior principle of freedom of expression. In other words, how can disinformation be tackled without restricting rights to freedom of expression and media freedom and pluralism?

## **Disinformation as a concept difficult to grasp / Dezinformacija kao pojam koji je teško shvatiti**

The source and channel through which disinformation is disseminated has proven to be extremely varied. As for the effects or consequences it is likely to produce.

It can come from the highest representatives of executive power regularly elected through the ballot box:

- in the United States, the Washington Post<sup>1</sup> has thus calculated that during his mandate, 30,573 false allegations or lies were disseminated by President Donald Trump (mainly via his Tweeter account);
- in Brazil, a Supreme Court judge on Wednesday 4 August 2021 ordered the opening of an investigation against the Brazilian president for disseminating false information<sup>2</sup>. Judge Alexandre de Moraes made this decision following a request from the Higher Electoral Tribunal (TSE), which had announced that it was opening an investigation against the Head of State for "(...) his attacks on the system of electronic voting and the legitimacy of the 2022 elections";
- in Slovenia, on 14 October 2021, while European parliamentarians were on an official visit there to examine possible shortcomings in terms of democracy and freedom of the press, the country's Prime Minister, Janez Janša, tweeted a conspiracy theory that American-Hungarian financier Soros controls much of the European Parliament.

Disinformation campaigns may also emanate from foreign powers wishing, for example, to influence the course of electoral operations to favour one candidate or even harm another: in France, Russia Today France television and Sputnik radio (two Russian state-owned media) spread false news during the 2017 presidential campaign, with the intention of harming candidate Emmanuel Macron. According to Tenove and al. (2018, 2), « State actors are particularly dangerous (...) as they have the human and financial resources to use these techniques at large-scale, as seen in Russia's interference in the 2016 US elections ».

In fact, there are many actors other than states - political parties, political figures and other powerful figures or companies supported by armies of trolls or public relations firms - that make use of new technologies in order to produce content aimed at spreading lies and sowing discord for political, ideological, or commercial purposes.

Disinformation as a social phenomenon is not as recent as one could think. The novelty lies in the fact that digital technology has made available to various actors the means to produce, disseminate and amplify misleading or biased information for political, ideological, or commercial purposes on a scale and speed and with an unprecedented audience (Khan, 2021). Although disinformation still represents only a small portion of the total amount of information in circulation, it thrives in an online environment that promotes amplification and reduces access to plural and diverse sources of information.

Online disinformation, which primarily relates to political, social, and economic grievances expressed in the real world, can thus have serious consequences for democracy and human rights. This has been seen in recent elections, in the fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic (Mota and al., 2020; Mach and al., 2021) and in attacks against minority groups. It creates political tensions, hinders the effective exercise of their rights by people and can result in destroying their

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/usa/presidentielle/donald-trump/desintox-etats-unis-petit-bilan-des-fake-news-enoncees-par-donald-trump-durant-son-mandat\\_4274817.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/usa/presidentielle/donald-trump/desintox-etats-unis-petit-bilan-des-fake-news-enoncees-par-donald-trump-durant-son-mandat_4274817.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/08/05/dissemina...lsonaro-vice-par-une-enquete-de-la-cour-supreme\\_6090570\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/08/05/dissemina...lsonaro-vice-par-une-enquete-de-la-cour-supreme_6090570_3210.html)

trust in government and institutions. The spread of disinformation can be traced to growing legitimacy problems in a huge number of democracies worldwide (Morgan, 2018, 39).

Addressing disinformation appears complex for the researcher as it is true that it involves conceptual and contextual difficulties. When it comes to disinformation, the definitional effort appears still unfinished, which is not the case for « fake news » (Klein, Wueller, 2017). Schematically, disinformation thus refers to anything that can be “...intentionally false or deceptive communication, used to advance the aims of its creators or disseminators at the expense of others” (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017). These authors have showed that many democratic nations are experiencing increased levels of false information circulating through social media and political websites that mimic journalism formats. Quite often, the disguising of information responds to the desire of right-oriented radical actors (political groups, militias, etc.) to achieve objectives such as to mobilize supporters against centre parties and the mainstream press that carries their messages (Larsson, 2020). Paradoxically, according to some authors, defining disinformation is not without risk and could even lead to counter-productive effects, by applying to too broad legislative frameworks (Ó Fathaigh and al., 2021).

Of course, disinformation has always been an ingredient in society – not to say a constant companion of any attempt at allowing free deliberation and democratic governance. The world and the international community have quite recently become aware of the implications of this phenomenon on the governability of societies and institutions.

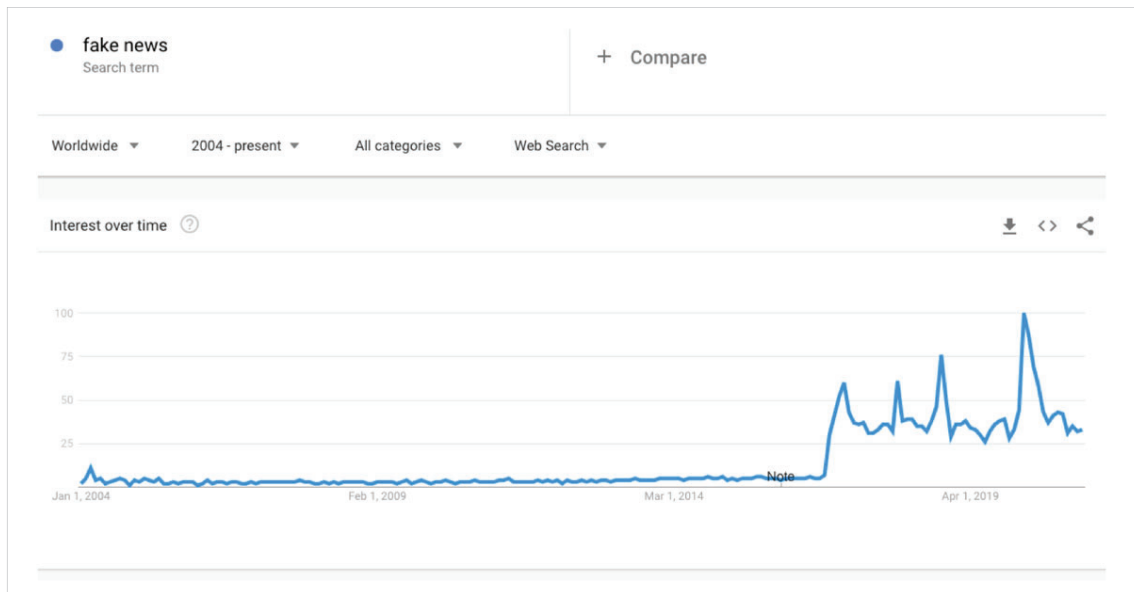
It suddenly became focus of attention for politicians, researchers, and journalists in 2016, when « the ‘Fancy Bear’ hacker group (...) released Clinton campaign emails during the US elections » (Bennett, Livingstone, 2018, 130) - possibly influencing the results of the ballot and the election of Donald Trump.

Some even consider that the notion of disinformation is not sufficient in itself to account for the complexity of the phenomena at work (Petricone, 2021,17), particularly since the emergence of social media and their role in this matter and prefer to refer to the notion of post-truth, endowed according to them with a superior heuristic significance. European Broadcasting Union argues on its side that disinformation is only the most visible element of a much broader and deep-lying problem: the “information disorder” (2018, 3).

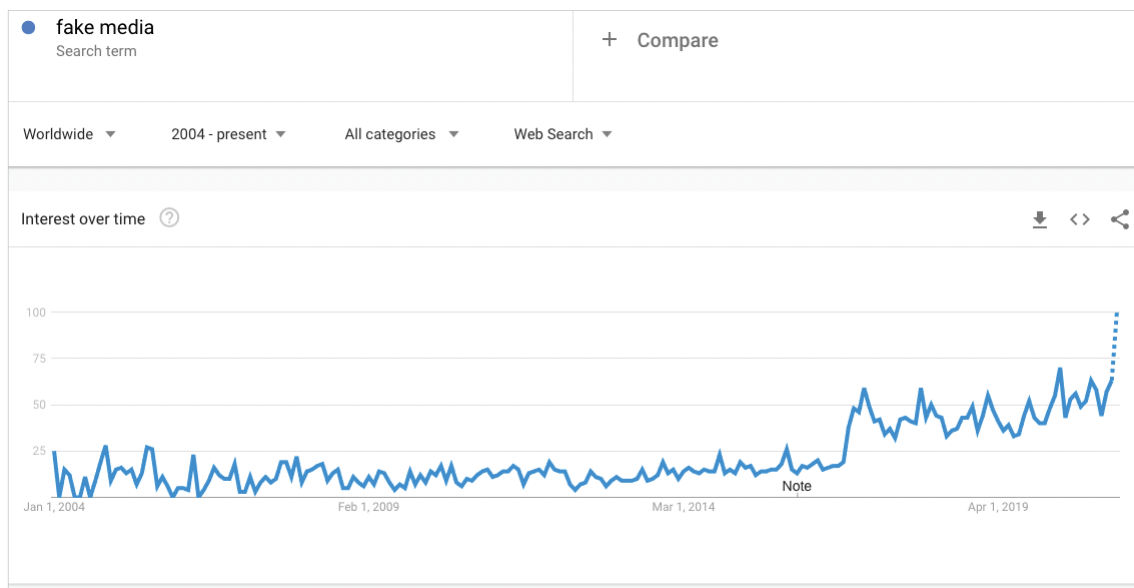
Beyond the difficulty of managing to find a consensually accepted and operational definition, as evidenced by scientific production, it is remarkable to note how the interest in this question is not losing steam. A simple search on Google Trends<sup>3</sup> with the keywords “fake news” or “fake media”, is enlightening on this point, as the graphs below show. The same applies for a Google search for scientific papers with the search words “fake news”.

<sup>3</sup> Google Trends is a website by Google that analyzes the popularity of top search queries in Google Search across various regions and languages. The website uses graphs to compare the search volume of different queries over time.

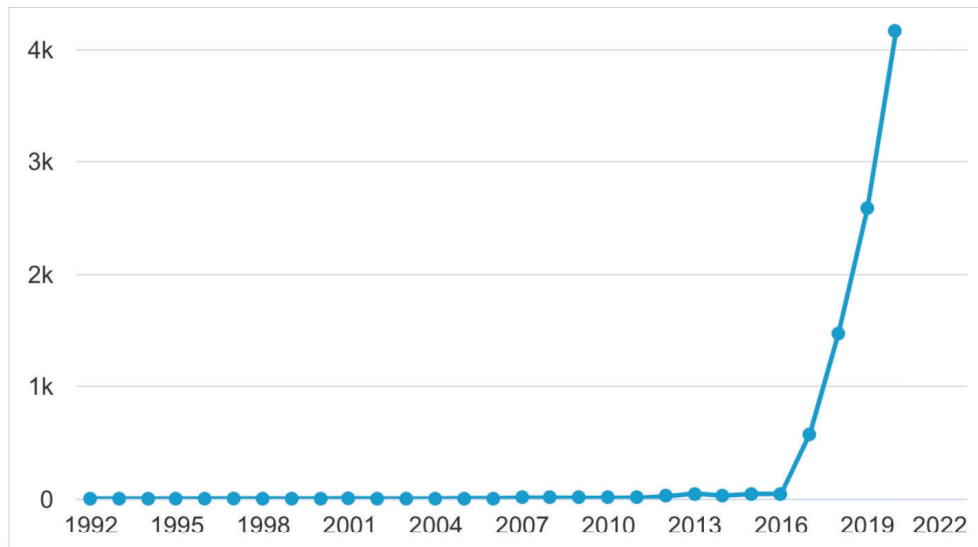
Google Trends: "fake news" / Google Trends: "lažne vijesti"  
Peak November 2016 / Vrhunac Studeni 2016



Google Trends: "fake media" / Google Trends: "lažni mediji"  
...also peak November 2016 / Vrhunac Studeni 2016



Scientific Papers: “fake news” / Znanstveni radovi: “lažne vijesti”  
 ...also peak after November 2016 / Vrhunac Studeni 2016



## An attempt to address disinformation: the French experience / Pokušaj rješavanja problema dezinformacija: francusko iskustvo

Faced with such findings, one can ask the question whether what public policies can be put in place to fight against disinformation?

The case of France may be interesting to highlight here, since it is one of the very few countries to have a specific regulatory framework in this area. The actions of private actors (associations of journalists, etc.) are certainly also important, but public policies must retain our attention insofar as they are binding on all actors and participate in the structuring of the media landscape and the sanctification of freedom of expression.

The context of Russian attempts to influence the presidential elections in France in May 2017 convinced the newly elected president, Emmanuel Macron, against whom they were directed, to equip France with specific tools better able to counter the disinformation campaigns in France in the future.

This is why the Law of 22 December 2018 on the manipulation of information<sup>4</sup> was adopted (Mouron, 2019). According to the explanatory memorandum to the bill tabled in the National Assembly, “if the civil and criminal liability of the authors of this false information can be sought based on existing laws, these are however insufficient to allow the rapid removal of online content in order to avoid its spread or reappearance”.

The text defines false information: “Any allegation or imputation of a fact without verifiable elements likely to make it plausible”. This definition thus rules out false information disseminated for humorous, satirical, or erroneous purposes. The law creates a new referral, during the three months preceding an election, to stop

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000037847559/>

the dissemination of “inaccurate or misleading allegations or imputations of a fact likely to alter the sincerity of the upcoming ballot [...] broadcast by in a deliberate, artificial, or automated and massive manner by means of an online communication service to the public”.

The law intends to fight sponsored content and robotic systems conveying this false information and doing so knowingly, knowing that the information is false. A candidate, a party or a political group can therefore apply to the referral judge to stop the dissemination of this “false information” when they consider themselves to be victims. The judge rules within 48 hours. The text also proposes to strengthen the financial transparency obligations imposed on platform operators so that they make public, beyond a certain threshold, the identity of the advertisers who paid them in return for the promotion of content from information.

It establishes a duty of cooperation between platforms and the obligation for them to put in place measures to fight against false information (transparency of algorithms, promotion of reliable information, fight against accounts that massively propagate false information) and to report them publicly. The law also confers new powers on the Superior Council for Broadcasting (CSA), which becomes the guarantor of the platforms’ duty of cooperation (Watin-Augouard, 2019). Endowed with the power of recommendation to facilitate the self-regulation of platforms, it establishes in its annual report the results of the actions carried out by the platforms.

Finally, other provisions concern the strengthening of media and information education, to enable the acquisition of genuine digital citizenship, particularly in the context of moral and civic education.

What conclusions can be drawn from the new legislative framework for the fight against disinformation in France? The fact is that the post-law elections held in France - notably the departmental and regional elections of June 2021 - were not marred by significant disinformation campaigns. However, with a view to the next key electoral deadlines in 2022 - namely the presidential and legislative elections, France has created a national agency - Vigilance and Protection Service against Foreign Digital Interference (Viginum) - to fight against the manipulation of information from abroad aimed at to “destabilize the State”. This service attached to the Secretary General of Defense and National Security (SGDSN), which should eventually mobilize up to 60 people, was set up in the summer of 2021 in anticipation of the presidential and legislative elections which will take place in Spring 2022. Viginum’s missions are to detect and characterize any phenomenon of suspicious propagation of misleading or hostile content on digital platforms, orchestrated by foreign actors with the aim of harming France and its interests (Bouillon, 2021).

Viginum’s activity is organized around protection operations, targeted on a particular theme for which a posture of vigilance is necessary: institutional, democratic, political, societal, historical, known, and planned events or news. In order to guarantee that the latter will work in full transparency, an «Ethics and scientific committee » has been set up, which is composed of a member of the Council of State, a member of the Audiovisual and Digital Communication Regulatory Authority (Arcom) – former Superior Council for Broadcasting (CSA), a magistrate, an ambassador, journalists, and researchers to oversee the activities of this new agency.

As everyone knows, disinformation can also come from actors from inside the City that is the democratic regime, and try to take advantage of its weaknesses for their own political objectives.

## **Populist movements and disinformation: the case of Sweden / Populistički pokreti i dezinformacije: slučaj Švedske**

The Swedish debate has been gravitating more towards the issue of “hate” than “disinformation”, although the two are often conflated and discussed together. This is perhaps related to the comparatively high resistance-level to disinformation in Sweden compared to other countries, most notably the USA, that scores much lower in comparative studies (Humprecht, de Vreese, van Aelst, 2020). Sweden is also characterized by a long history of media self-regulation - and a strong tradition of freedom of speech. Therefore, there is a long-standing reluctance to address issues that are or could be relate to press freedoms through legal framework. Sweden is also generally in a good position compared to other countries in terms of both access to internet connection and the habit of using digital tools, even if there are spots in access as well as groups of citizens for whom the use is more limited (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2016). For the most part, Swedes still prefer and trust traditional and established media sources, such as public service radio and tv, as well as legacy newspapers. On the other hand, a striking tendency in Sweden over the last decade, is the rise of several alternative news-providers, with a specific political project and agenda: immigration critical alternative media (Holt, 2016). In the wave of populist sentiment visible in Trumps election victory in 2016, the Brexit referendum 2015 and the electoral success of populist parties in many European countries, this tendency was visible also in Sweden, a country which previously had not seen such developments. After the refugee-crisis of 2015, however, there has been a dramatic change in public discourse in the country, and the relative success of immigration critical alternative media must be understood with this context in mind. A substantial part of the population, unhappy with elite condescension and disregard for worries about the consequences of a high influx of culturally diverse immigrants, became more and more vocal, both in terms of voter turnout for the populist party, but also in terms of media voices, publishing news and views from this perspective (Holt, 2020). In this context both disinformation and hateful rhetoric have been key issues in the debate, but as stated above, there is generally more concern about the expression of xenophobia and anti-immigration prejudice, than disinformation and propaganda.

In the research literature, the term “alternative media” is used in a broad sense about media that challenge the established channels and that in various ways present alternative views and perspectives in opposition to what is often described as a hegemonic or dominant discourse (Holt, Figenschou, Frischlich, 2019; Atton, 2015; Leung, Lee, 2014). In the Swedish debate, however, the term in recent years has often been associated more specifically with both immigration-critical and xenophobic “alternative media” that have emerged as critics of both the political and the media establishment. These are very different both in terms of tone, reach and ideological orientation (everything from individual blogs or infamous discussion forums to sites



with editorial staff and employed writers) who call themselves “alternative media”. There is thus a clear line of conflict between the established media and what in Sweden has come to be called alternative media - where the parties are very far apart in terms of how reality should be described and what considerations should be considered in describing it (Holt, 2020; 2019). Professional journalists have a training that aims to create conditions for following established principles and practices to work out a neutral and fact-based description of reality. The descriptions that are produced and published within the framework of “alternative media” vary greatly in quality and approach, and among these are also actors who spread untruths and propaganda. There are examples where people in the alternative media criticize the traditional news media for withholding facts for political reasons. This illustrates a gap between the established media and the “alternative media” in the interpretation of what journalistic work entails and often the fact that certain facts are sometimes omitted in journalistic texts is incorrectly interpreted as evidence that systematic and deliberate blackouts take place.

The content of these pages is interesting to study: Here, posts are published in the public debate on issues that are perceived as particularly important by its users. Here, the news journalists do not put the agenda in the major newsrooms, but topics and opinions that are perceived by these people as insufficiently represented in the mainstream media are given space and discussed. At the same time, the content on these pages is to a various extent, often school-book examples of the problematic of content created and disseminated outside the framework of journalistic professionalism: disinformation and misinformation occur, one-sidedness, polarization, suspicion, emotionally driven agitation, racism, etc.

Although proper studies in this area are lacking, there are indications that a small, but nevertheless important number of citizens turn to these media for information about society (Newman et al., 2021). They clearly constitute a phenomenon in today's diverse media landscape that needs to be studied in more detail. In the Swedish debate, the arrival of new immigration critical alternative media has been linked with the broader public debate about disinformation and propaganda. While Sweden has seen some, but limited, attempts from foreign powers to interfere in election campaigns (notably in 2018, for example), these attempts (performed by Russian agents), were limited in scope and in terms of results, inconsequential. For a while, Sputnik News operated a Swedish language edition, but it was soon closed down and is now obsolete (Kaati, Akrami, Cohen, Schroeder, 2018). As in the USA, there is robot traffic that shares information from known Russian channels, but only to a limited extent. Automated robot traffic on Twitter accounted for about 11% of all accounts in the survey and they share more information from the domestic immigration-critical alternative media than ordinary users do, a trend that also increased during the 2018 election campaign. Even Swedish accounts that are not robots share more news from domestic alternative media than any other European country (Hedman, Sivnert, Howard, 2018). Slightly more than one-fifth (22%) of all posts under important hashtags before the election contained links to various immigration-critical alternative media. Of these, 87 percent could be traced to one of the three largest. The picture is thus complex, but it illustrates how the alternative media are linked to the broader debate about fake news and disinformation in the Swedish context.

The most interesting aspect here is perhaps the reaction from politicians and the media establishment, who is clearly challenged by the emergence of alternative media players who criticise them fiercely. Proposals have been mixed but are generally cautious about dealing with this type of content in a way that would not respect the long tradition of freedom of the press in the country. A report commissioned by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), for example, proposed to collaborate with the advertising sector to take away economical gains related to disinformation, a response to immigration-critical alternative media's negative descriptions of the situation in Sweden (Colliver, Pomerantsev, Applebaum, Birdwell, 2018). The government funded Media Inquiry (2016) proposed a democracy clause aimed at limiting financial media support to actors with values that can be classified under the arbitrary wording "characterized by the principle of equal value for all human beings and the freedom and dignity of the individual (p. 331, our translation), however, this proposal became highly criticised by several instances and not implemented. A new initiative by the Swedish government is the The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency, a government run public agency with the specific task to "identify, analyse and respond to the impact of undue information influence and other misleading information directed at Sweden or Swedish interests." (Myndigheten för Psykologiskt Försvar, 2022). But the most prominent feature in the Swedish debate about how to counter disinformation and hateful content, is the call for education and media literacy (MIK, Media and Information Knowledge), especially in relation to younger citizens. So far there is not talk about far reaching measures like the French example, described above.

### **Conclusion: are democracies asleep in a media consent? /**

### **Zaključak: jesu li demokracije zaspale u medijskom odobravanju?**

One could argue that the success of fake news of Russian or other origin in many democracies is not to have influenced an uneducated part of their public opinion, but to have called into question their model of open societies. In the USA, for example, the fragmentation of the public space and the system of national values has made it possible to corrupt the democratic debate from within, replacing it with a radical internal conflict mechanism. Gradually, by allowing a previously open society to close down, one could say that the Americans suffered a structural strategic defeat (Chauvancy, 2021).

An open society legitimizes in principle any dispute and accepts, even values criticism, at the very cost of its internal cohesion. What is more, it demonstrates an unparalleled capacity to absorb contradictions. A functional and healthy democracy even feeds on systematized criticism which allows political alternations and a relative social balance. It takes note of its odds and knows how to question itself without undermining its foundations.

Democracy as a system of political organization can react in order to counter, but also to overcome attacks on the information front.

A first response can come in reaction to these viral and multifaceted attacks. Democracies, for example in the European context, must indeed be proactive and not hesitate to launch liberating information attacks, which are based on verifiable and proven facts and strong political and moral values. These could have both an active and a deterrent effect on their enemies, who still too often enjoy virtual impunity today.

The art of influence is based on invisibility. An informational attack therefore loses its force if its methods are revealed to the public. It only takes a spotlight on the methods and intentions of its initiator to bring down the best-built informational offensive. Like any manipulation, they expose their transmitters and relays to a critical loss of credibility and legitimacy if they are exposed.

Regarding attacks from state actors (Russia, China, etc.) most often hiding behind private structures such as foundation or firm, highlighting their inconsistencies, their weaknesses and their shortcomings towards their own people could do much more harm than their attempts to destabilize democratic societies.

The success of populist alternative media and external attempts to manipulate information aimed at destabilizing and weakening democracies is in our view largely due to the steady decline in qualitative media pluralism since the end of World War II (Schwartz, 2010). Over the past decades, the reduction of the information offer to a range of consensual media formatted on the same model has not made it possible to consider the requests emanating from the various strata of society that feel distant from the dominant political discourse, nor the consideration of their specific needs in terms of freedom of expression.

For the process of informed public deliberation to fulfil its role in a truly effective way in the democratic system, the second response must be to take all necessary measures to:

- promote the presence in the media of political, philosophical, ideological, cultural, religious currents, etc. irrigating a given society;
- guarantee the representation of the various cultural, linguistic, religious and other minorities living in a given territory;
- promote equal representation of genres (among journalists, at the level of target audiences, in the choice and treatment of the content broadcast).

Paradoxically, the doubt cast by fake news on information and public speech is perhaps an opportunity that dormant democracies in media consent needed to revitalize themselves. Insofar as the manipulations are now known, citizens are more inclined to cross-check information to verify it, to ensure the credibility of sources. Facts may regain their centrality and ideas may become strengths again. Will the substance take precedence over the form in the future? Indirectly, fake news could turn out to be an opportunity for open democratic societies. They could contribute to revitalize the public space by rehabilitating critical reason, as long as qualitative media pluralism becomes a democratic priority again.

## Bibliografija / References

- Atton, C. (ed.) (2015). *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*. Routledge, London, New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717241>
- Bennett, W. L., Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European Journal of Communication*, 33 (2), 122-139. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323118760317>
- Bouillon, S. (2021.) Le concept de défense et de sécurité nationale: un outil pertinent face à la complexification du monde?. *RDN*, 845, 7-10. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rdna.845.0007>
- Chauvancy, R. (2021) Plutôt que de censurer les fake news, lançons des offensives informationnelles. *Le Figaro*, 8. 6. 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/medias/plutot-que-de-censurer-les-fake-news-lancons-des-offensives-informationnelles-20210608>
- Colliver, C., Pomerantsev, P., Applebaum, A., Birdwell, J. (2018). Smearing Sweden International Influence Campaigns in the 2018 Swedish Election. Retrieved from: [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Smearing-Sweden\\_International-Influence-Campaigns-in-the-2018-Swedish-Election.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Smearing-Sweden_International-Influence-Campaigns-in-the-2018-Swedish-Election.pdf)
- De La Brosse, R., & Brautović, M. (eds.) (2017). *Reporting the Attacks on Dubrovnik in 1991, and the Recognition of Croatia*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge.
- European Broadcasting Union (2018). "Fake news" and the Information Disorder (Position Paper, Brussels). Retrieved from: <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2018/04/fake-news-and-the-information-disorder>.
- Fernquist, J., Kaati, L, Akrami, N., Cohen, K., & Schroeder, R. (2018). Botar och det svenska valet. Automatiserade konton, deras budskap och omfattning (MEMO 6458). Retrieved from: <https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI>
- Hedman, F., Sivnert, F., Howard, P. N. (2018) News and Political Information Consumption in Sweden: Mapping the 2018 Swedish General Election on Twitter. COMPROP DATA MEMO 2018.3. Retrieved from: <http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2018/09/Hedman-et-al-2018.pdf>
- Holt, K. (2016). Journalistik bortom redaktionerna?. In: Westlund, O., *Människorna, medierna och marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring Stockholm* (pp. 403-428). Wolters Kluwer, Stockholm.
- Holt, K., Ustad Figenschou, T., & Frischlich, L. (2019). Key Dimensions of Alternative News Media. *Digital Journalism*, 7 (7), 860-869. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1625715>
- Holt, K. (2019). Externa utmaningar för journalistiken. In: Nygren, G., & Wadbring, I. (eds.), *På väg mot medievärlden 2030: Journalistikens villkor och utmaningar*. Studentlitteratur, Lund.
- Holt, K. (2020). Populism and Alternative Media. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845297392>
- Humprecht, E., Esser, F., & Aelst, P. (2020). Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. DOI: 10.1177/1940161219900126.
- Kahn, I. (2021). Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression). Human Rights Council of the United Nations. Retrieved from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3925306?v=pdf#files>.
- Klein, D., & Wueller, J. (2017). Fake News: A Legal Perspective. *Journal of Internet Law*. Retrieved from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2958790>
- LaForge, G. (2020) Sweden defends its elections against disinformation (2016-2018). Global Challenges, Election Disinformation. Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. Retrieved from: <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/sweden-defends-its-elections-against-disinformation-2016---2018>
- Larsson, A. O. (2020). Right-wingers on the rise online: Insights from the 2018 Swedish elections. *New Media & Society*, 22 (12), 2108-2127. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819887700>

- Leung, D. K. K., & Lee, F. L. F. (2014). Cultivating an Active Online Counterpublic: Examining Usage and Political Impact of Internet Alternative Media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19 (3), 340-359. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214530787>
- Mach, K. J., Salas Reyes, R., Pentz, B. et al. (2021). News media coverage of COVID-19 public health and policy information. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8, 220. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00900-z>
- Morgan, S. (2018). Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy. *Journal of Cyber Policy*, 3 (1), 39-43. DOI: 10.1080/23738871.2018.1462395
- Motta, M., Stecula, D., & Farhart, C. (2020). How Right-Leaning Media Coverage of COVID-19 Facilitated the Spread of Misinformation in the Early Stages of the Pandemic in the U.S. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 53 (2): 335-342. DOI: 10.1017/S0008423920000396
- Mouron, P. (2019). Du Sénat au Conseil constitutionnel: adoption des lois de lutte contre la manipulation de l'information. *Revue européenne des médias et du numérique*, 49, 9-11.
- Notions of Disinformation and Related Concepts (2020). European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services. Retrieved from: <https://erga-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ERGA-SG2-Report-2020-Notions-of-disinformation-and-related-concepts-final.pdf>
- Ó Fathaigh, R., Helberger, N., & Appelman, N. (2021). The perils of legally defining disinformation. *Internet Policy Review*, 10 (4). Retrieved from: <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/perils-legally-defining-disinformation>. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.4.1584>
- Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021. Retrieved from: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3873260](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3873260)
- Schwartz, E. C. (2010). Conflicts of interest: How media pluralism protects democracy and human rights. State University of New York. Retrieved from: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/188a531ecdb8506e5a2bb020499bbe46/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Statens offentliga utredningar, En gränsöverskridande mediepolitik: för upplysning, engagemang och ansvar: slutbetänkande (Wolters Kluwer, Stockholm, 2016).
- Tenove, C., Buffie, J., McKay, S., & Moscrop, D. (2018). Digital threats to democratic elections: how foreign actors use digital techniques to undermine democracy. Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, University of British Columbia. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3235819>
- Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017) Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking. Retrieved from: <http://tverezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf>
- Watin-Augouard. M. (2019). La loi n° 2018-1202 du 22 décembre 2018 relative à la lutte contre la manipulation de l'information. *Les Notes du CREOGN*, 36.

# Održivost demokratskog sustava naspram viralnih kampanja dezinformacija

Renaud de la Brosse  
Sveučilište Linnaeus  
E-mail: renaud.delabrosse@lnu.se

Kristoffer Holt  
Sveučilište Linnaeus  
E-mail: kristoffer.holt@lnu.se

Izvorni znanstveni rad  
UDK 316.774:321.7  
070.16  
DOI 10.17818/SM/2023/1.1  
Rukopis primljen: 23. 10. 2024.  
Rukopis prihvaćen: 15. 11. 2024.

## Sažetak

Demokracija, kao iskustvo političke organizacije, danas je suočena s brojnim vanjskim napadima i predmet je mnogih unutarnjih kritika. U tom kontekstu možemo zamisliti sliku grada opkoljenog centrifugalnim silama, pri čemu jedna od njih nije zanemariva – porast fenomena dezinformacija. Brojni gradovi, poput Kijeva ili Dubrovnika, bili su ili su još uvijek meta kampanja dezinformacija koje su prethodile i pratile napade čije su žrtve postali. Stoga se čini nužnim preispitati tko su današnji akteri i vektori dezinformacija, a zatim analizirati tko su njihove glavne mete i žrtve. Konačno, ovaj rad, osim opisa samog fenomena, ima cilj razmotriti i odgovore javnih aktera na ovu pošast koja ugrožava pravilno funkcioniranje demokratske deliberacije.

**Ključne riječi:** mediji, demokracija, dezinformacije, deliberacija, lažne vijesti, propaganda.