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Disinformation and communicative intent: a proposal for fake news classification in professional journalistic environments

Desinformación e intención comunicativa: una propuesta de clasificación de fake news producidas en entornos periodísticos profesionales

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Abstract

This research analyses the impact that fake news has on the loss of journalistic credibility and the social alarm thereby raised. The aim is to contribute to understanding of the phenomenon by clarifying the responsibility incurred by journalists as professional news broadcasters. Exploratory research was conducted on news published in newspapers in recent years and subsequently unmasked as fake news. Accordingly, a classification model of disinformation phenomena from the journalist's intention as sender was established. In addition, a review of paradigmatic cases helping to systematise the distinctive features of journalistic texts containing fake news and, subsequently, not disseminating quality information, was performed. The lack of a repository of false news originating from, or disseminated by newspapers, limited the conclusions drawn. However, the proposed study paradigm helps to delimit the position of journalists in the phenomenon of disinformation, provides an alert to the presence of obvious signs of disinformation in texts not designed for this purpose and, hence, shows the need to expand the concept of disinformation itself to encompass unintended false news.

Resumen

La repercusión de las noticias falsas en la pérdida de credibilidad periodística y la alarma social que suscitan enmarcan esta investigación. El objetivo es contribuir a la comprensión del fenómeno dilucidando qué responsabilidad tienen en él los periodistas como emisores profesionales de noticias. Se ha realizado una investigación de tipo exploratorio sobre noticias publicadas en periódicos en los últimos años y desenmascaradas como noticias falsas, de la que se sigue la formulación de un modelo clasificatorio de fenómenos desinformativos desde la intención del emisor periodista, y la revisión de casos paradigmáticos que ayuden a sistematizar los rasgos distintivos de textos periodísticos que encierren noticias falseadas y, por tanto, no trasmitan información de calidad. Las limitaciones de este trabajo vienen dadas por la carencia de un repositorio de noticias falsas originadas o difundidas por los periódicos; no obstante, el paradigma de estudio que se propone ayuda a delimitar la posición de los periodistas en el fenómeno de la desinformación, alerta de la presencia de signos evidentes de desinformación en textos que no tienen por qué estar concebidos con tal fin y, por ello, plantea la necesidad de ampliar el concepto mismo de la desinformación para incluir noticias falsas no intencionadas.

Keywords

Credibility; journalists; disinformation; fake news; sender's intent

Palabras clave

Credibilidad; periodistas; desinformación; noticias falsas; intención del emisor

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1. Introduction

The impact of fake news on political events in 2016 prompted the European Commission to consult a high-level group of experts in January of 2018 regarding the policies needed to counteract the impact of so-called 'fake news', as well as other types of disinformation transmitted through digital channels. This action was joined with previous initiatives promoted by EU institutions as well, such as the creation of the East Stratcom Task Force in March of 2015 (European Council, 2015) to counteract the impact of disinformation campaigns launched mainly from Russia.

These kinds of operations have disclosed the fact that the phenomenon of fake news is a real and far-reaching threat to our societies. Institutional concern runs parallel to the feeling of uncertainty among European citizens, 83% of whom say that fake news is a threat to the stability of democracy (European Commission, 2018).

The most recent findings confirm this global concern regarding fake news, although considerable polarisation has been observed recently among countries with distinct contexts. For example, with regard to the ability to discern what is real and false on the Internet, this number reaches 85% of the citizens of Brazil, 70% in the United Kingdom, and 67% in the United States, but these figures drop to 38% in Germany and 31% in the Netherlands (Reuters Institute, 2019).

Measures to combat disinformation proposed by the group of experts that was consulted by the European Commission serve five purposes: 1. Improve the transparency of online news; 2. Promote media literacy; 3. Develop tools to empower users and journalists to deal with disinformation; 4. Safeguard the diversity and sustainability of the European media ecosystem; and 5. Promote continuous research on the impact of disinformation in Europe (European Council, 2018).

In line with the latter recommendation, this article aims to contribute to the investigation of this phenomenon and to counterbalance the dominant perspective, as the scientific research regarding fake news carried out in the United States is double that of the rest of the world combined (Blanco, García and Tejedor, 2019). Thus, this study attempts to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon by focusing on professional communication media in order to elucidate their responsibility in this matter. The large number of studies on fake news disseminated through social networks have diluted the cases that have occurred in professional journalistic settings, the latter of which are just as striking, once discovered, as those described in the following paragraphs.

On 22 December of 2018, the prestigious German magazine *Der Spiegel* published a special issue after having suffered one of the most notorious and recent journalistic frauds in the era of fake news (Carbajosa, 2019). However, this case can only be considered a recent example of a reality that seems to be increasingly rooted in the journalistic profession: the loss of quality in published information and the consequent deterioration of the credibility of the press.

For some experts (FAPE, 2016; Lepore, 2019), it seems clear that this loss of credibility is related to competition from social networks and other media such as television, but not because competition forces some of these organizations to reposition themselves while the press loses credit that others gain, but because some of the realities that inflict the most damage on journalism have found their breeding ground in the emotion of the screens, as well as in the speed and ease of access to networks.

There is no doubt that media convergence has brought about a cultural change (Jenkins, 2008). According to Emily Bell (2016), the main consequence of this change has been the loss of news distribution control by the professional media, which has been an advantage for Facebook. This loss of control in social mediation by journalists is one explanation for the general distrust of information, but not the only one. According to the latest Digital News Report, the average level of trust in news dropped two points in 2019 to 42%; only 49% of respondents say they trust the media they consume, a figure that drops to 23% when it comes to news found on social networks (Reuters Institute, 2019).

We can infer from these data that even though the loss of credibility of the media is relevant, journalists continue to retain much of their influence in the public sphere, even doubling the level of trust by the public in their information compared to news disseminated on social networks, despite having lost the monopoly on news distribution.

The new reality that demoscopic research starkly reveals would be at the base of the informational disorders that are driving the digitised society. None of the phenomena that undermine journalistic credibility is new: neither the so-called fake news, nor sensationalism, nor even the tendency to 'show off', but let us say that they all seem to be living through a golden age at the hand of social networks.

The identification of fake news on social networks has become an emerging line of research, which is gaining the attention of much of the scientific community, as noted above (Shu et al., 2017; Blanco et al., 2019). However, for the purpose of this article, we will depart from this concept and proceed with two correlated phases: firstly, we will delve into the very concept of fake news and the typologies studied up to the present time in order to know exactly what we mean when we speak of fake news; Secondly, we will direct our research toward the analysis of fake news produced in professional journalistic settings in order to construct a paradigm of these informational disorders from the perspective of the context in which messages are created as well as the intention of the sender.

2. State of the issue: moving toward a definition of fake news

The consumption of news through digital media is a two-sided coin: advantages such as access to content that is free, immediate, ubiquitous, permanent, and unlimited (García Avilés, 2017), coexist with risks such as the proliferation of fake news.

However, as previously pointed out, fake news is not characterised by its novelty, but by the virtual context that has allowed it to become more widespread. In fact, in her book entitled *La Noticia* (The News), Mar de Fontcuberta as early as 1993 defined "non-event" as the construction, production and dissemination of news based on events that had never happened. In her book entitled *21 Lecciones de reporterismo* (21 Lessons of Reporting), Bezunartea (1998) presented the typology of this "non-event", which today could be considered a typology of fake news, as follows: 1. Invented news: based on elements, declarations, or hypotheses that do not exist in reality, and which are not subsequently corrected by the media; 2. Erroneous news, built on data that has been revealed as true yet turns out to be false and recognised as such (the error may come from insufficient information, incorrect interpretation of available data by the journalist, or an attitude of deliberate disinformation by the news source); and 3. News based on speculation. This is news built upon unproven hypotheses or unconfirmed rumours.

By reviewing 34 scientific articles published between 2003 and 2017, the most recent work by Tandoc, Limand and Ling (2018) has identified a typology of fake news based on two levels: the level of fact (truth), and the level of deception. Next, they established five types of fake news: satirical, parody, fabrication, manipulation, and advertising/propaganda.

Likewise, Ruchansky, Seo and Liu (2017) have established three common elements in fake news: the user or source promoting it, the text, and the response of the user receiving it. These three elements are the starting point for a classification of fake news that makes a distinction between news based on the interests of the source, sponsored content, and fabricated stories (Thompson Rivers University Library, 2018; Shu et al., 2017).

Shariatmadari (2019) treats language as a characteristic element of fake news. Based on this factor, Fatemeh Torabi Asr (2019) discovered that on average, fake news utilizes more words related to sex, death, anxiety, as well as overly emotional language. By contrast, authentic news contains a higher proportion of words related to work (business) and money (economy).

Along the same lines, another group of researchers (Rashking et al., 2017) analysed the relationship between several grammatical categories and fake news in the political context. They concluded that words used for exaggeration are most often found in deliberately misleading news stories. These included superlative expressions such as "the majority", and "the worst", and so-called subjective expressions (qualifying adjectives implying appraisal or subjectivity), such as "brilliant" and "terrible". They pointed out that propaganda tends to use abstract generalities such as "truth" and "freedom", and showed that the use of the second-person pronoun "you" was closely related to fake news.

Authors such as Derakhshan and Wardle (2017) follow along the same lines as Ruchansky, Seo and Liu (2017) in establishing the three elements of what they call information disorder: 1. Agent: Who were the "agents" that created, produced and distributed the content, and what was their motivation; 2.Message: What kind of message was it? What format did it have? What were its features? and 3. Interpreter: When someone received the message, how did they interpret it? What actions did they take? From these elements, they established seven categories of content: 1. satire or parody, 2. Misleading, 3. fraudulent, 4. fabricated, 5. false connection, 6. false context, and 7. manipulated content.

As for the receiver, Vosoughi et al. (2018) started from a set of 126,000 rumours published on Twitter between 2006 and 2017, reaching about three million people. They concluded that fake news reached an audience of between one thousand and one hundred thousand people, while real news on rare occasion reached one thousand. Falsehood also spreads faster than the truth. According to these authors, the degree of novelty and the emotional reactions of the receivers could explain the size of these numbers, or in other words, fake news appears to be fuelled by the individual prejudices or emotions of the users (this is the third element described by Ruchansky et al., 2017).

There are authors who start with the purpose of fake news as a variable for its classification, thus following the approach of Derakhshan and Wardle (2017) regarding the motivation of the receiver. Kalsnes (2018) identifies three main motivations for the publication of fake news: political, economic and social. Political disinformation, often referred to as propaganda, is intended to influence public opinion, while economic disinformation attempts to make a profit. Social motivation refers to variables such as status, fame, attention, identity-building, entertainment, or acceptance among an online community.

It is well-known that two communicative processes converge in journalistic information: the first one is established between the source and the journalist, where the former takes the role of sender and the latter is the receiver; the second process is carried out between the journalist and the public, in which the former plays the role of sender and the latter is the receiver. However, as noted by Chen, Conroy and Rubin (2015), the boundaries between the production, creation and exchange of information are gradually becoming blurred in the digital media context, producing what might be considered an alternative to the traditional information flow in which the source comes directly to the receiver without the mediation of professional journalism.

By reviewing the role of sources in the complex world of disinformation, the idea appears that sometimes the source is the origin of fabricated or manipulated news that is disseminated with or without the collaboration of the journalist. However, beyond the intention of the source, our proposal analyses the intent of journalistic issuers in their dual role of being the receiver of information from sources and the issuer of information to the public.

The effect that fake news is having on the press has led us to pose the first hypothesis, which states that the phenomenon of disinformation manifests itself differently in the well-established media where its presence is reduced to isolated cases, contrary to what is observed on social networks.

Having knowledge of fake news in which the origin has been verified allows us to observe its characteristics and describe its structure. From here, a second hypothesis has been formulated that will guide the research: by analysing fake news produced in professional journalistic settings, it is possible to infer the psychological attitude of the journalist who created it, as well as his or her role in the disinformation.

It is important to emphasise this professional profile, since the fact that a fake news item produced by a journalist multiplies exponentially its possible damage. All protocols for the containment of fake news point to the identification of the source as the first step in verifying the authenticity of the news. In this sense, when the source is a journalist, the detection of fake news becomes highly complex, as it emanates from a professional news channel. At this point, a third hypothesis of this investigation can be inferred: the detection of fake news produced in professional journalistic settings is more complex, and its detection is only possible when there is a specific complaint that unmasks the falsehood.

3. Methodology

Empirical research on the nature of fake news presents a methodological difficulty: the lack of a repository of fake news published in reference journals. At the present time, there are two well-known fact-checking agencies operating in Spain: *Newtral* and *Maldita.es*. Both agencies were contacted by the authors, and even though neither of them has a systemised inventory of fake news produced by professional journalistic media, their collaboration facilitated access to their databases in an attempt to obtain a list of news items with these characteristics that would have appeared in one of the daily newspapers with the largest circulation in Spain.

The fact that these platforms do not classify fake news according to the medium where it is published makes the search difficult. Moreover, as pointed out by the people in charge, their way of proceeding consists of interacting with large communities of followers who feed their knowledge base with suspicious messages seen on social networks, and consequently, the routine work of verification is determined by the very virality of the hoaxes and falsehoods that flood the public digital space. In other words, these agencies do not systematically verify the content published by the media. Perhaps for this reason, the tracking they carry out using the names of the newspapers themselves as key words, along with the concept of fake news, provided only a dozen cases in which the publication was not actually used as a means of disseminating fake news, but simply repeated the fraud.

Therefore, this lack of a systemised repository of unmasked fake news, and more specifically, false news emanating from professional journalistic settings, as well as the impossibility of directly verifying the published news, forced us to revise the search and limit it to the tracking of cases revealed by the media themselves, establishing an ad hoc system for their selection based on the two following criteria: 1. That these news stories would have been published in the press, and 2. That they would have been unmasked as fake news, either by the same medium that broadcast it or by another medium. In order not to limit the analysis, in this first study the decision was made not to introduce restrictive variables that were geographical, time related or linguistic in nature.

With these assumptions, exploratory and explanatory research was carried out. Exploratory was selected because it aims to study a phenomenon that is not yet clearly defined due to its novelty. In this sense, the conclusions can serve as a starting point for further research to verify or refute the paradigm proposed herein. Explanatory was also chosen because it consists of research that tries to describe the causes that give rise to certain events (Del Río and Velázquez, 2005), such as fake news produced by professional journalists. Thirty-two journalistic texts related to fourteen cases in the news were reviewed, which ranged from fabrication to a lack of contrast, and even to an obvious attempt to manipulate in some of them.

We reiterate the fact that the novelty of this study lies in the object of analysis, or in other words, journalists as transmitters of fake news, an area that has in fact been studied only slightly up until the present time, as most of the current knowledge about this phenomenon comes from studies of fake news disseminated through social networks by unknown issuers.

The results of the empirical research and the very dynamics of the cases analysed have led to the formulation of a paradigm not initially foreseen: The DMI paradigm, an acronym that means Deceive, Manipulate, and Inform. This relates to the three intentions we have identified in the process of creating a journalistic message. From a methodological point of view, the analysis of fake news based on the DMI paradigm has been very practical, given that the intellectual attitude of the issuer can only be inferred by a third party *a posteriori* based on the published content.

4. Results: the DMI paradigm

Claire Wardle, a world-renowned expert in fact checking and the creator of First Draft (2017), establishes three components of the disinformation process: the type of false content published, the method of dissemination, and the motivation of the creators. This research herein has used the third element, the motivation of the one who creates the message, as the starting point in constructing the DMI paradigm: Deceive, Manipulate, and Inform.

The aim of this taxonomy is to help in arranging the complex labyrinth of disinformation and to clarify the journalist's responsibility in the situation. In many cases, the place occupied by a certain disinformation phenomenon in this continuum of falsification or deterioration of information depends on the attitude of the issuer.

According to this paradigm, fake news produced in professional journalistic settings may result from three different intellectual attitudes of the journalist- deceptive, manipulative, and informative. Each attitude masks an intention included in the DMI paradigm with different results: 1. the journalist tries to deceive: invented or fabricated news; 2. the journalist tries to manipulate: biased or inaccurate news; and 3. the journalist tries to inform: news that is erroneous or mistaken.

A common element in these three types of fake news is that they result from professional malpractice. From the Journalist's Creed, published in 1915 by the University of Missouri School of Journalism (Farrar, 1998), to the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists (June 2019), to the *FAPE* Code of Ethics (approved in 1993 and updated in 2017) in Spain, or to the European Code of Ethics for the Journalistic Profession (Núñez Encabo, 1993), the requirement of accurate and verified information has established the duty of the professional journalist in transmitting the truth, in not concealing data, and even in exercising caution with regard to the way in which information from social networks should be handled. There is even a warning included in the latest code, which insists that neither urgency nor immediacy justify the lack of verification of data to be published.

Bearing in mind what has been established by these four deontological documents, it is now possible to presuppose a list of news that deviate from information and feed disinformation: fabricated news, rumours, slanted news in headlines and texts, news that mixes opinion and information, partial information (hides versions that are necessary for knowing the whole truth about something), news that has false or erroneous data, and news with unclear and imprecise expressions.

Therefore, since we could only obtain an inventory (never finished) of false news depending on the type of error involved, we have proposed the DMI paradigm in order to solve this methodological problem, since by examining the three journalistic attitudes regarding this inventory of fake news, the vision of the phenomenon is simplified. Let us look at them one by one.

Table 1. DMI Paradigm

	Intention of the journalist	Action	Information disorder	Type of fake news
D	Deceive	Conscious alteration of the truth	Fictional stories resulting from the journalist's deception	Invented or fabricated news
M	Manipulate	Conscious alteration of the truth	Narratives corrupted by biased and slanted intentions of the editor	Biased or manipulated news
I	Inform	Unconscious alteration of the truth	Erroneous narratives in which the journalist had the honest intention of informing	Inaccurate or imprecise news

Source: Created by the authors

4.1. D for deceive

The meaning of the word 'deceive', found in *DRAE* (2019), is very clear: "To give the lie the appearance of truth", and "to induce someone to believe something is true when it is not, by using words or deeds that only seem credible, or are feigned". From this premise, the journalist's intention would be to deceive the reader, offering him or her a fabricated news item; the reporter wants to pass off something as true when it is not. The news that emerges from this information disorder is invented or fabricated, and because it is the most striking and daring, it is the easiest to detect and the one that causes the most stupefaction.

Therefore, in this category we include fake news composed of stories belonging to the realm of fiction rather than fact, which include testimonies that did not occur, interviews that were not conducted, sources that did not exist, and so on. This is the case of star reporter Caarl Relotious of the prestigious German magazine *Der Spiegel*, previously mentioned, who fabricated data and testimonies in at least fourteen of his own investigations (Carbajosa, 2019). This is a journalistic practice that has affected other pillars of international journalism, such as *The New York Times*, whose reporter Jayson Blair published at least thirty-six fake news articles (Piquer, 2003).

Examples in which the journalist deliberately lies are the most scandalous, because "the first ethical commitment of a journalist is to respect the truth" (FAPE, 2017). This type of deception involves making someone believe that something false is actually true. One can speak of journalistic fraud (Sehat, 2017), or even informational shamelessness, and we can also distinguish two types of information: 1. That which is deliberately false, and 2. That which combines true elements with false content. Both types are often low-cost information produced without any on-site reporting, and originates from the fantasy of the journalist who tries to reach a large audience, and in the two cases involving Blair and Relotius, this swells in an unrestrained spiral until they are discovered. The result of combining false data with true data is just as far from the truth as the one that gathers only false data.

The intention to deceive was also evident in the conviction of *El Mundo* journalist Javier Negre in a story that was published in the newspaper *diario16.com* on November 13, 2019 with the headline, "Javier Negre (*El Mundo*) sentenced for fabricating an interview with the ex-girlfriend of the murderer from Cuenca, Morate". As explained in the article on 21 February of 2016, the *El Mundo* journalist published an interview with a young woman who had been the killer's partner, in which the reporter described in detail the house where the interview was held and revealed information regarding the ex-girlfriend's relationship with the killer, and even the killer's relationship with his victims. However, due to a court ruling on 10 November of 2019, the newspaper *El Mundo* was forced to publish an article saying that no such interview ever took place, nor was it true that the woman had been tortured or had known Morate's victims, nor that she had consented to the use of her photo from her Facebook profile, among other retractions.

In theory, when journalists write with this attitude, the interest does not seem to come from third parties, as the deception would not be intended to manipulate the audience into becoming socially or politically inclined in one direction or another, nor would it increase the profit of a certain media organization or company. Instead, the aim is personal benefit that is more or less immediate (sometimes as simple as continuing to meet expectations they feel they have created).

4.2. M for manipulate

We start by differentiating between deception and manipulation. Deception occurs in a fictional story; Manipulation is revealed in a factual story. In other words, the manipulator takes the truth (the data or statements of the news) and creates a story that distorts the facts in order to achieve some previously planned objective.

The Royal Academy of Spanish (2019) specifies that manipulation serves particular interests: "Intervention with skilful and sometimes devious means in politics, the market, information, etc., by distorting the truth or justice, at the service of specific interests". Therefore, the manipulation of information would consist of intervening with skilful and sometimes cunning means in the collection and transmission of news.

According to the definition, the journalist who intends to manipulate the reader distorts the truth by various means: hiding and twisting the information collected from sources, giving a biased version of the facts, and exaggerating certain data while minimizing or ignoring others. Moreover, they do so in order to serve particular interests, either their own or those of third parties.

In the context of fake news, an interest in manipulation can result in the following: 1. A change in the behaviour, attitude, or way of thinking of the audience, 2. Economic interest or gain (e.g., clickbait), and 3. Political interests (e.g. propaganda). The news that results from this type of disinformation is manipulated or biased.

A paradigmatic case of viralized information resulting from clickbait can be found in *Mediterráneo Digital* with the headline, "Why are feminists uglier than average women"? The article crossed all the red lines of political correctness and caused a chain reaction in the totality of public opinion. It was criticized by politicians, journalists, advertisers' boycotts, and even intimidation protesters. The information was duplicated in the press as well as on radio and television, and the news was reproduced by more than 200 media outlets around the world. The director in charge of the publication stated that they were given a global marketing campaign of incalculable value (Navascués, 2019). The novelty is not in the sensationalistic nature of the headline, but in the speed with which this content went viral on all types of channels (Llaneras and Pérez, 2017; Navascués, 2019).

However, returning to the mainstream press, recent history offers one of the most complex cases of disinformation: coverage of the terrorist attack on the Atocha train station. An article published in El País in 2014 (Fernandez, 2014) reviewed the lies of the media ten years after the incident, which included a labyrinth of false data and manipulation at the service of spurious interests.

Even though the article offers a comprehensive view of the mass deception, one small detail can serve as an example of the variety of resources for falsification that a manipulative process of this magnitude can have: *El Mundo* linked part of a sticker found in a van to the Mondragon Business Group of the Basque Country in order to suggest that *ETA* was responsible for the attack ("The 11 March [*11-M*] Kangoo van used in the attack had a Mondragon Group card on the dashboard", 2006). However, in reality, the sticker was from a tape of the Mondragon Orchestra ("The police found a tape recording of the Mondragon Orchestra on 11 March in the Renault Kangoo," *El Pais*, 2006)

Reports of the attack contained biased news in which some media allied themselves with certain political sectors and catered to their interests. This perfectly illustrates the political disinformation described by Kalsnes (2018), which is used to influence the public's perception of an issue. This case violates all ethical principles of journalism, even beyond what had been observed a year and a half earlier in the treatment of the Prestige disaster, where government sources were the ones most responsible for the disinformation reflected in the media (Blanco, 2017).

Less complex reporting of the news can also be influenced by a dubious attitude. Here we offer a case for review that is simpler than those previously mentioned (the case did not involve a set of texts but rather a single text), and much more recent. It was a report published on Sunday, 20 October of 2019 in the *Crónica* supplement of the newspaper *El Mundo*, with the headline, "The Civil Guard of October 1 (*1-O*) will take Franco out of the Valley by helicopter".

The inaccuracy of the data contained in the article was denounced by the person affected in a letter to the editor of the newspaper: "In relation to the article published on 20 October in its print edition... referring to me, I would like to make the following clarifications: Most of the information referring to me is not true..." (Pérez de los Cobos, 2019). The interested party then denied some of the information contained in the report, ranging from false information to the mention of a non-existent captain, according to his testimony.

In his letter, Diego Pérez de los Cobos denied being born in Yecla in 1964, rebuked that his father was a Falangist, and negated that his grandfather was killed by the Popular Front. He also denied having intervened in the liberation of Ortega Lara, and therefore having boasted about it or having been sent to Ecuador as an alleged prize for that intervention. Moreover, he even denied the existence of one of the sources mentioned (a captain from San Lorenzo de El Escorial), in addition to an error in the report that mentioned 2019 as the year in which the colonel assumed the command of the Civil Guard in Madrid, when he actually did so in 2018.

Other statements contained in the *Crónica* publication were corrected by the person alluded to above, and in the best of cases, they could best be understood as differences in the interpretation of the data, or if one prefers, as the journalist's interpretation of the data rather than a literal reflection of reality. For example, when the writer points out that Pérez de los Cobos was sent by the Rajoy government to prevent the October 1 referendum, omitting an initial indication that the order came from the Attorney General of Catalonia, or when the writer concludes that the Supreme Court did not take into account the testimony of Pérez de los Cobos when the court decided that what had happened in Catalonia was a crime of sedition, and not one of rebellion.

On the one hand, if a comparison is made between the journalistic text, the letter to the editor, and other publications that reported the events that occurred on different dates, and on the other hand, if the article's discourse is analysed, this leads to the next question: What is the intention of a journalist who combines a series of erroneous statements in his article that are difficult to explain through carelessness or to justify through haste, especially when the portrait of the colonel referred to in the headline is painted in a derogatory light?

This vision is forged by means of rhetorical procedures of an argumentative nature through the use of certain so-called distorted figures, recourse to the meticulous detail of scenes that the journalist reconstructs with no mention of information sources, evocation of facts and actions carried out by the protagonist of the report whose balance is always negative, assessments brought to the pages of the newspaper by the speeches of others who are always anonymous, and even by the journalists themselves.

It is precisely the sources cited in the journalistic text itself that are elements that might question its credibility. Of the ten sources cited, only two have been identified completely, which is the lawyer for the Franco family and Colonel Pérez de los Cobos himself, not as a direct source of the report but as an indirect source (words taken from his appearance before the Supreme Court). According to the letter written by Pérez de los Cobos, the partially identified source is a person who never existed, simply a fabricated source, whom the text states is the person who provided the information about the express order of the colonel, the content of which supposedly appears in quotation marks. A fourth source is more specifically identified, yet equally undefined: a Professor of Constitutional Law at Complutense University of Madrid. For the rest, the journalist uses expressions such as the following: people who knew him, those who know him, those who have worked with him, his critics, and so on. The journalist uses professional confidentiality to explain these vague references.

It may be difficult ascertain in detail what the journalist was trying to achieve with a clearly interpretative profile interspersed with false data, supported for the most part by anonymous sources and embellished with resources that may have inclined the reader toward a particular opinion, but the combination of all these elements inevitably leads to disinformation, and it would even be difficult for this story to be included in the following section.

4.3. I for Inform

The third attitude is the one that must preside over any journalistic coverage: Inform. The same definition found in *DRAE* (2019), which is "to notify or give news of something", includes the other key term: News. According to the same dictionary, news is "information about something considered of interest in disclosing". The second meaning that appears is "reported facts". Futhermore, we must not forget that this implies the veracity of what has been disclosed. In and of itself, a fact is something that has happened; therefore, it is something real, not invented.

When a journalist intends to inform, one expects to find news without qualifiers, because the following should be qualities inherent to the concept of news: true news, rigorous news, and quality news. Even when the journalist tries to inform, the result can be false, erroneous or mistaken news, or in other words, news that contains misprints, errors in the transmission of certain data, flaws in evaluating the relevance of the data collected, and errors resulting from the so-called "compositional bias" (Mezo, 2017).

Of course, it is possible to find false or falsified news here as well, even the most extreme, but this is not a result of the journalist's own actions, such as those in the two preceding sections. In the worst-case scenario, the journalist is a victim of his or her sources. The source is the one who deceives or manipulates the journalist, using his or her own authority as the source, or their prestige in spreading false information. Apart from this supposition, sometimes adulterated or falsified news is a consequence of a work situation, precariousness, urgency in transmission, ignorance, or inexperience.

In this category, we must also include rumour, which is repudiated by deontological codes and stylebooks, even when the passage of time makes it an obvious truth. However, it cannot be inferred from its disclosure that the journalist intends to deceive or manipulate the audience. Moreover, once a rumour is spread, there is often nothing more than a reprehensible rush to get ahead of the rest, or an interest in being the first to break the news.

Setting a malicious rumour in motion is usually the result of interested sources and an indication of what was noted two paragraphs above, or in other words, that the intention to deceive would not proceed from the journalist, but from his or her source. This can be illustrated by a situation that occurred in 2008 when a Moroccan newspaper seemed to be suggesting that Spanish politician José María Aznar was the father of the child being carried by Rachida Dati, who was a French minister at the time. Aznar himself denied this in a statement issued by the Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis (*FAES*). Everything points to the newspaper having spread the rumour, and in fact, it did not explicitly mention the name of the alleged father, but it provided data that pointed unequivocally to the former president of Spain.

At this point, we can agree that fabricated news is fake news, but not all fake news is fabricated news in the strict sense of someone having consciously created something false. Thus, it follows that fake news is a consequence of fabrication, or the result of a conscious or unconscious alteration of the truth. Alternatively, in the words of St. Augustine in his *Tratados sobre la mentira* (Treatise on Lies), "Not everyone who makes false statements is lying if they believe, or are of the opinion, that what they are saying is true", from which it follows that lying implies an intent to falsify the truth.

When the aim of the issuer is to inform, yet content is used that does not conform to reality, one could speak of journalistic malpractice, which culminates in a false story, but in most cases without the intention of deceiving or manipulating. Journalists transmit fake news for several reasons: the source has lied; the journalist did not understand the story or the source; he or she ignored some of the facts or erred in its selection (giving weight to what is unimportant, or less important, from a journalistic point of view); or the journalist made mistakes in the transmission.

All of this can lead to three different types of fake news: 1. News invented by the source, 2. News falsified by the source, and 3. Erroneous news due to a lack of professional rigour. In all three cases, it can be said that the journalist does not intend to deceive or manipulate. He or she intends to inform, but this objective is not achieved because the sources have intentionally mislead or manipulated the information, or there has been unintentional mishandling by the journalist. We have illustrated each type of fake news with specific cases below.

1. News invented by the source: On 11 September 2019, *El País* published news of the trial against Eliseo Gil, an archaeologist accused of falsifying remains found at the *Iruña Veleia* site. In 2006, Mr. Gil announced the discovery of remains that would change the history of linguistics and Christianity, supposedly a discovery of worldwide significance (Gorospe, 2019). A report by a commission of experts uncovered the fraud, which resulted in a scandal: on 20 November 2008, the headline of the newspaper *El Diario Vasco* read, "*Iruña Veleia* scandal erupts due to false findings" (Carrero, 2008). This case clearly illustrates the type of fake news invented by the source, whose prestige as an expert and authority as the person in charge of the site explains why the journalist did not question the veracity of the information.

2. News falsified by the source: In 2013, *El País* published a photo, allegedly of Hugo Chávez in an operating room, which was removed within half an hour from the digital edition, but the news was inevitably spread through its print edition ("The photo that *El País* should never have published", 2013). In 2016, the newspaper *La Razón* published a photo of a Canadian journalist who was allegedly a suspected terrorist in the Paris attacks, a mistake that was also repeated by the Antena 3 television network. The *BBC* denounced the story, and the newspaper *Público* reproduced the following: "*BBC* journalist calls *La Razón* 'stupid' for publishing a fake photo of a suspected terrorist" (2015). Both of these are good examples of news that is falsified by the source and then disseminated by a newspaper without taking the appropriate measures of verification.

3. Erroneous news due to a lack of professional rigour: The lack of professional rigour was more evident in the case of the fake news about the alleged interest on the part of the Moroccan government to profit from ticket sales of the *Alhambra*, which was echoed on 10 August 2011 by the newspaper *ABC de Sevilla*, as well as other media: "Morocco asks Spain for half of the revenues of the *Alhambra*" (2011). The next day, the newspaper *El Diario de Sevilla* (Vallejo, 2011), explained what had happened with the following headline: "False news about the Alhambra opens an emotional conflict with Morocco". Below we have reproduced the first paragraph of this news item, as it summarises the events very well:

   > "Morocco to demand half the profits of the Alhambra". This surprising headline made international news yesterday for a few hours, enough time to revolutionise the media as well as the Spanish and Moroccan authorities in view of the impact this possible heritage claim would generate. Finally, it was discovered that it was all a lie, and it was purely "manipulation" and "invention" in which the social networks, internet, news media and websites of the two countries were involved.

Even though the origin of this false information was apparently *Alerta digital*, which had launched a news item allegedly published by a Moroccan newspaper (this was later verified), the various media that echoed the news story without checking the information committed malpractice in which at least one, and probably more of the ethical principles of the profession was violated (not verifying the version of the source of information that may result in serious consequences, letting prejudice allow for the acceptance of false facts, and falling into the trap of confusing likelihood with truth). The invention of the news story by the first media that spread it illustrates the intention to deceive, and probably to manipulate by seeking a certain public perception of the illegitimate claim of a foreign country, while the behaviour of the other media that echoed the story demonstrates a lack of rigour in the treatment of the news story.

5. Discussion

One of the main consequences of the phenomenon of fake news is that citizens are beginning to distrust honest news. What is at stake is nothing less than the stability of the democratic system, which is based on the existence of a free citizenry capable of making political decisions on the basis of truthful information.

Thus, if the media loses its credibility, public trust in these institutions will be weakened. Citizens do not always find it easy to distinguish the channel through which they receive news items. This informational cacophony is exploited by pseudo-journalistic media to their advantage in setting up their businesses, while at the same time it undermines the prestige and credibility of the entire profession.

However, as we have seen, even the allegedly rigorous press sometimes inflicts this type of villainy on the health of the democratic system. Fictitious stories published as news, information built on biases and slanted interpretations of reality, false information disseminated without verification of accuracy, and a series of other misadventures described above have all resulted in corruption of the public arena by certain journalists who have issued information that should never have reached the public.

Nevertheless, such damage becomes blurred if its origin is uncertain. The DMI paradigm allows this to be clarified by categorising fake news produced in professional journalistic settings according to a variable located at the origin: the intention of the issuer. From such intentions, three types of news are produced: firstly, invented or fabricated news, which are fictitious stories resulting from the deception of a journalist; secondly, manipulated or biased news, which are factual accounts that have been corrupted by the slanted, biased intentions of the editor; and thirdly, erroneous or inaccurate news, in which the journalist had the intention of giving an honest report but was the victim of deception by the source, or malpractice, or the misinterpretation of reality. In all three cases, truth was the first victim of the information process, but as one can see, this happened for very different reasons.

On the other hand, this study asserts that technological advances are not the only factors capable of causing a proliferation of something that has always existed as an undesirable phenomenon: fake news. This is even truer if we consider the various degrees of falsification that can affect a news item, as falsehood can undoubtedly range from the most innocent mistake in a single piece of information to the deliberate invention of an entire story. The latter come to light because they are news items that are striking and massive. It is that simple. The former are much more difficult to detect, yet they have proliferated in recent times as well, possibly due to the fact that even when they confirm the veracity of news, novice journalists often write without understanding what they are writing about, as stated by Iñaki Gabilondo (2011) in his book entitled, *El fin de una época* (The End of an Era).

However, the evidence of fake news in the press is so scarce that it allows for verification of the initial hypothesis, despite the circumstances that might mask it and prevent its discovery. It is precisely this difficulty of detection that largely determines only partial verification of the second hypothesis: although it can be concluded with relative ease that a false news item, once discovered, leads to a deceptive attitude, the same does not apply to news items that contain errors or false data mixed with true data when deducing whether they are the result of a manipulative attitude or simply a lack of news rigour, because the textual resources used in either case could be exactly the same.

In a certain way, verification of the third hypothesis explains the futility of fully complying with the second, as it has been proven that the detection of false news and false data in professional journalistic settings is more complex because of the inexistence of simple mechanisms to verify the accuracy of the news. Moreover, as falsification is more subtle and generally affects only partial aspects of the information, cases of disinformation pass through this stage unnoticed until some of those involved in the communicative process report them. This would reinforce the idea that we cannot take action against professional discredit only *a posteriori*. Instead, our actions should be directed toward prevention by maximizing precision and rigour in media coverage.

6. Conclusions

The DMI paradigm makes it possible to delimit the responsibility of journalists in disinformation, which could contribute to preventing disinformation phenomena in routine professional activity. Based on a review of the intellectual attitudes of the transmitter at the time of message creation and of the cases derived from such attitudes, it is necessary to expand the very concept of disinformation. It is not only intentional disinformation that caters to interests outside the legitimate interests of a media outlet, but also unconscious disinformation resulting from the loss of precision and rigour in the professional performance of journalism that would distance the profession from serving the public interest.

Of the various types of false news, the most complex and difficult cases to uncover are those arising from harmful collusion between source and journalist. The non-existence of identifiable sources and the lack of verification that covers up the diffusion of erroneous data demonstrates certain negligence in the search for information and its validation before publication.

With regard to redefinition of the journalist's role and his or her responsibility in disinformation, what has emerged from the analysis of newspapers has allowed us to once again highlight the need to have journalists in the post-truth era, because the presence of false or falsified news in this environment is much lower than in the digital environments, where non-journalistic sources have direct access without the filter of the communication professional. On the other hand, if it is more difficult for newspapers to create and disseminate false news, it is also more difficult to detect it when it occurs.

The procedures, or simply the signs of disinformation and falsehood, are not exclusive to a particular intention. They do not have a distribution of use according to the intent to deceive or manipulate through the news, but instead, the repertoire of actions is shared even by falsified news that had the intention of informing. In other words, an unbalanced headline or a biased composition may have been aimed at intentional disinformation, but it could be the result of an error (due to haste or ignorance) of a journalist who only intended to inform. Only by safeguarding the intention to inform can an explicit retraction by the media or journalist be understood when an error has been made, as expressly required by style guides.

In order to stop the loss of quality and credibility this entails, verification initiatives inside and outside the media must be encouraged, but the training of journalists must also be reviewed (from technological knowledge to language skills), as well as professional practice, in order to maintain a self-critical and transparent attitude toward methods of obtaining data. Moreover, procedures that may contribute to disinformation must be banished from journalistic texts, as neither haste nor professional secrecy, nor the understandable limitations that a journalist may have, can free him or her from suffering the discredit that has affected the profession in recent years.

Many of the cases of disinformation detected by verification and fact-checking platforms such as *Maldita.es* and *Newtral* have come from users who were suspicious about information they had received through social networks or instant messaging services like WhatsApp. In this way, users might play a role similar to that of people who read the traditional press and send messages to the Letters to the Editor section. One of the cases explained in this article supports the parallelism and appropriateness of considering the 'Letters' section to be the basis for searching for journalistic texts in the future with errors that would be brought to light by readers.

Likewise, attention should also be paid to the traditional media in order to avoid the re-dissemination of false data by this sector. This aspect once again takes on much greater importance in online media, but it also needs to be addressed offline in order to stop the decline of journalism. The disinformation produced by a false, biased or inaccurate news item is multiplied if the errors it contains feed indiscriminately into new texts, a situation that is happening right now.

When the responsibility that journalists have in the spread of disinformation has been established, and when their loss of credibility has been regained, it will then be necessary to investigate what is occurring within the media, and what role media companies play in generating disinformation, as well as in confronting it. In other words, it will be necessary to discover the way in which the quality of published news is being diminished by job insecurity, a lack of correction and editing tasks, as well as business interests, and the degree to which this is taking place.

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