

Ngày nhận bài: 18/06/2024 | Ngày phản biện: 20/07/2024 | Ngày xuất bản: 25/10/2024

Tác giả: Thi Truong Giang NGUYEN (Academy of Journalism and Communication)

1. Definition of fake news

Fake news is an English term used widely in Vietnam as “tin gia mao”, “tin gia”, tin vit”, which mean disinformation and misinformation.

There are many definitions of fake news. According to Allcott, Hunt, Gentzkow, Matthew (Stanford University, New York University, National Bureau of Economic Research, USA), fake news is a term used to refer to news, stories that are not satirical, untrue in reality, but are believed to be true, originated online (social media, websites) or on traditional media.(1) Others say that fake news is a form of deception, or deliberate misinformation with the intention of causing financial or political confusion and different from normal satirical writings.(2) On CBS News’ 60 Minutes Overtime, the producers also gave definitions of fake news. Michael Radutzky defined “fake news” as the term used to “describe stories that are provably false, have enormous traction in the culture, and are consumed by millions of people.” Guy Campanile said that fake news are “stories that are fabricated out of thin air. By most measures, deliberately, and by any definition, that’s a lie.”(3)

According to <https://www.gcflearnfree.org/>: “Fake news is any article or video containing untrue information disguised as a credible news source. While fake news is not unique to the Internet, it has recently become a big problem in today’s digital world. Fake news typically comes from sites that specialize in bogus or sensationalized stories. It tends to use provocative headlines, like “Celebrity endorses not brushing teeth” or “Politician selling toxic waste on the black market”. These

headlines can seem suspicious or even unbelievable to the point of being silly".(4) Fake news is different from scams. Fake news often appears on fake websites that are designed to look like official websites. They may contain pictures and newspaper headlines that at first glance seem like the real thing. Scams are often difficult to uncover because they often contain part of the truth, a piece of information, event, or a quote that has been taken out of context. This type of information is often found in sensationalist headlines but without supplementing information.(5)

From the above concepts, we come to the conclusion that fake news refers to fabricated, untrue information, intentionally posted on traditional or social media, for some economic and political, etc. purposes, and has negative impact on many aspects of life and society.

2. Brief history of fake news

Jacob Soll in his book "The Long and Brutal History of Fake News" generalizes the history and development of fake news.(6) Fake news is not only a story of today – the era of information technology and social networks. It dated back from ancient and medieval times and caused negative effects. For examples, Octavian launched the fake news campaign against Roman general Mark Antony and consequently led to his death.

In the 15th century, fake news became widespread. On Easter Sunday 1475, in Trent (Italy), Simonino, a two and half year-old boy went missing. Bernardino Da Feltre, a Franciscan preacher said in his sermon that the local Jewish community murdered, drained and drank the child's blood to celebrate the Passover. Rumors quickly spread. Da Feltre also said the boy's body was found in the cellar of a Jewish home. The Bishop and Duke of Trent, Johannes IV Hinderbach, immediately ordered the arrest and torture of the entire Jewish community of the city. Fifteen people were found guilty and put on the pyre. Later, the Pope intervened and tried to stop the spread of the fake story and the murders, but it was impossible. Centuries have passed, but this

fake story has not been quashed. This shows how serious, persistent and powerful fake news was.

In the 17th century, fake news appeared a lot in the press, including unbelievable stories. For example, when the earthquake occurred in 1755 in Lisbon, Portugal, a lot of fake news about the cause was spread quickly, even published in pamphlets.

Before the French Revolution, various political factions had distributed leaflets about the budget deficit of the monarchy with completely different figures, making the public confused and did not know what was true.

In the 1800s, when the conflict of ideas about black slaves was at its height, fake news in the United States focused on this issue, by saying that black people turned white after one night; or spreading stories of the slave's uprising and crimes. Those kinds of fake news all targeted the African-Americans.

In the early 19th century, the modern press contributed to the widespread of fake news that influenced and attracted a large number of people's attention, impacted on many aspects of social, political life and religions of the world's leading powers. Moreover, many fake news in the press were sensational, customer- oriented, including fictional, shocking, strange stories created by "extremely" rich imagination of reporters and editors.

In 1835, the New York Sun claimed that they discovered life on the moon through a giant telescope, and there's another civilization on the moon. The article spread virally throughout the domestic and foreign press, making the New York Sun become the most popular and profitable newspaper of the time. However, just a week after it was published, the newspaper claimed that it had made up the whole thing, and surprisingly, this fake news did not harm the newspaper.(7) The Morning Journal issued made-up events that led to the outbreak of the Spanish-American war. When a

correspondent for the newspaper in Havana telegraphed that there would be no war, its owner William Randolph Hearst replied: "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war". Hearst later posted fake pictures of Spanish officials in Cuba stripping American women's bodies for search.(8) In 1933, when Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in Germany, they established the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda under the control of Joseph Goebbels, which published many fake news in print, radio and television to create political influence.(9) At this time, fake news was a successful and dominant sensational business model in society, and appeared with many faces in the press. Its first purpose was to attract readers to follow, and to more or less influence directly on political, social aspects of life, causing widespread negative impacts. Fabricated stories were still popular, creating the interest and stirring the public opinion.

On April 1, 1957, the BBC issued a fake report about an annual spaghetti crop in Switzerland. The program broadcasted images of farmers harvesting spaghetti from trees and dry them. After this news, BBC received thousands of calls from viewers asking about how to grow spaghetti like that. In fact, this was an April Fool's joke, but the consequences were quite serious.(10) In brief, fake news is not a new phenomenon, it is an issue that dated back to the ancient time, the Middle Ages, and the concept was well-defined five centuries ago in Europe. But recently, with the help of digital technology, fake news has gone viral. Every day there are trillions of fake news appearing on social networks, and it has really become a global topic since the 2016 US presidential election. Many have assessed that fake news is undermining America's longstanding democracy and now spreading to Europe.

In early 2017, a piece of fake news said that a 13-year-old German Russian girl named Lisa F was gang-raped by refugees from the Middle East in Berlin (Germany). The police quickly investigated and pointed out that this was fake news, but before that, many German and Russian newspapers had republished and shared this fake news on social networks, hundreds of people protested on the streets with the support of far-right and anti-Muslim groups. This incident nearly led to a diplomatic incident between Berlin and Moscow.(11) The Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps a "fertile

ground” for fake news to erupt on an unprecedented scale in the world and in Vietnam. Such fake news included the intentional or unintentional spreading the news of infectious cases here and there; some extremely silly statuses but still attract a lot of shares about the government’s spraying medicine into the sky to fight the epidemic or having to eat 6-12 boiled eggs to prevent the virus; information causing confusion and panic for society, such as the announcement that black cats in Vietnam are being “collected, killed and crushed into a cure for corona virus”, urging people to hoard food and medicines, misrepresenting the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam, etc.

Is this the golden era of fake news? Fake news abounds and often deals with political issues, celebrity stories, sensational news, and strange stories. Fake news is contagious like virus, and therefore become highly influential. The situation became more serious as more and more people assumed that fake news was accurate. A study on BuzzFeed showed that fabricated stories, fake news attracted more interactions than news of famous mainstream news agencies. Easy access to news media makes it easier than ever to create fake news today. And social media channels have made these fake news stories accessible to the masses.(12)

3. Reasons and solutions to prevent fake news from going viral on the mass media

If in the past, the press was the main source of information, now social networks have become a big stakeholder of the media. According to a survey by the Reuters Institute for Journalism under Oxford University, “44 percent of respondents in 26 countries around the world said they consider Facebook their primary source of news”.(13) We can see the number of users of social networks is overwhelming compared to the traditional newspapers. And the loss of the world’s press agencies and their revenue to Facebook, Google and other social networks is increasing unpredictably.

In the boom of the Internet and social networks, newspapers really fell into the fast track and harsh competition with other newspapers on how to attract as many readers as possible. Therefore, when getting information from the public, intermediary or social networks sources, reporters and editors have to follow the race and update so quickly that they do not spend enough time to verify the news. As a result, they themselves contributed to spreading fake news in the press. Besides, the control over the editing and publishing process in many press agencies is weak, or even ignored.

Over the past time, many press agencies in Vietnam have been fined for publishing false information from other newspapers. Because of subjectivity, inadequate verification, and the copy of each other's news, many newspapers have unwittingly "abetted", spread fake news to the masses.

Moreover, the number of websites posting fake news is increasing on the Internet and social networks. Many fake news websites look like official websites by using sophisticated tricks and this confused the public and journalists. Unlike fake products in the market, we do not have standards to distinguish fake news and real news.

Fake news itself is often shocking, fascinating stories that provoke the imagination and curiosity of the public, while the percentage of the public who are "media savvy"(14) is still low; most of people are curious and naïve, easy to be deceived, and always believe in the news that they read. Therefore, fake news is easy to spread and easily accepted by a large part of the public. According to CNN, the current trend of information sharing clearly reflects the bias of fake news. When people share news, it means that they agree and share the same views with that information. It serves as an identity marker, a way of declaring your relationship with a particular community. This is true to both real news and fake news, even the latter now has stronger effect. When a story is posted, no matter how real or fake it is, as long as it fits with the opinion of the community, your relationship with the community will increase.(15)

This can easily be seen in the public's tendency to receive fake news. Even though the news is confirmed to be fake, it causes a controversy in public opinion and many

groups of people defend their views and conclude based on their own perception. Despite the large number of people being fooled by false news stories, a recent Pew report found that the majority of respondents believed in their ability to detect fake news. But that trust was misplaced.(16) When users are subjective, and consider the information they read to be true, they are too confident to verify the information.

Former US President Obama considered fake news a threat to democracy: "We are increasingly withdrawing, and starting to accept information that is appropriate to our own opinions, whether they're right or wrong, instead of thinking based on verified evidence".(17) Thus, the easiness, improper information verification among journalists and press agencies; the chaos of websites posting misinformation; the innocence and curiosity of the majority of the public; the easiness in spreading and disseminating information, and such have contributed to creating a fertile ground for fake news to exist, creating a "new online news ecosystem" where, as Barack Obama said in an op-ed by The New Yorker on November 26, 2016, "everything is real and nothing is real."(18)

In brief, fake news all over the media is a global problem that seriously affects many aspects of socio-political life. Fake news causes troubles for news agencies, the public, and Internet giants. Facebook and Google have constantly taken some preventive actions to cope with fake news.

In 2015, Facebook introduced the option to report: "It's a false news story" in News Feed. In 2016, it tested the algorithm to identify the accuracy of stories on the Internet; In March 2017, it launched the feature "Mark as spam". In April 2017, Facebook released the function "Guide to recognize fake news".

Google also exerts great effort to fight against fake news. In November 2016, in a statement sent to Reuters, a Google spokesperson said that they would ban ads on pages that contain disinformation, misinformation and conceal information about publishers, their contents or the primary purpose of the pages. This policy also applies

to fake websites, where Google has previously banned sites promoting violent, pornographic and hatred videos and images by using the AdSense program. In April 2017, Google announced Fact Check feature available in Search and News to identify news reports published by news outlets.(19) Those are certainly not the last moves of Facebook and Google in eliminating fake news, in order to provide users with trusted platforms.

Governments around the world have taken drastic actions to combat fake news by placing extremely strict sanctions on the crime of producing and spreading fake news.(20) In early April 2020, President Vladimir Putin signed amendments to the Administrative Offenses Act (CAO), which will impose a maximum fine of 10 million rubles (equivalent to about 126,000 USD) on legal entities who distributed life-threatening information, including epidemics via mass media and the Internet. While Germany and France have passed laws against fake news on social networks, the British Government has set up a "false information control team" to identify fake news about Covid-19 and require media companies to remove. The US government has asked technology companies to work together to prevent false information about Covid-19 on social networks, using artificial intelligence to early detect and remove the information before it is widely distributed.

In Asia, Singapore is one of the pioneer countries to control the spread of fake information about Covid-19 with the "Fighting Misinformation and Online Manipulation Act", which defines a prison sentence of up to 10 years. The Thai government has set up an Anti-Fake News Center and has imposed fines of more than \$3,200 and/or imprisonment for up to five years. In 2018, Malaysia defined the spread of fake news online as criminal, considering the act of spreading false information about the origin, scale and extent of the epidemic as a threat to public safety. According to China's Criminal Law, the act of fabricating false information about the epidemic situation and spreading such information through the media, causing social disorder will be sentenced to 3-7 years in prison in case of serious consequences, or under criminal detention or public surveillance. In South Korea, the authorities also strictly handled the act of spreading fake news about the epidemic

after President Moon Jae-in declared that the fabrication and distribution of false information about the Covid-19 epidemic was "serious crime."

In the fight against fake news, the press agencies or mass media play the role as a "gatekeeper". On February 28, 2017, nearly 40 media units in France and many countries around the world announced a joint project called "Cross Check" in verifying the truth, in order to screen fake information. The public is encouraged to participate by submitting questions and links to content for Cross Check to examine.

On April 3, 2017, the Alliance for Information Transparency Initiatives (an international project with the cooperation of many press agencies including: Arizona State University (USA), Center for International Journalists, The Building Institute of Aarhus University (Denmark), European Press Center (Netherlands), Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced a cooperation plan to combat "fake news" as well as promote public understanding about journalism.

In Indonesia, the initiative to establish a communication barcoding system is being highly appreciated by the Indonesian Press Council because it contributes to preventing and stopping fake news that is spreading in this country. Accordingly, the idea of communication barcodes will be applied to Indonesian mass media (including social networks), and will also make unfair business activities (in the increasingly fierce competition for advertising) have to adjust to avoid piracy.⁽²¹⁾ In Vietnam, in 2019, the Vietnam Journalists' Association issued a regulation on the use of social networks by Vietnamese journalists. Accordingly, journalists have the responsibility to proactively detect, actively fight against fake news and malicious news on websites and social networks, especially those of their own colleagues online.

Many solutions have been proposed, including technological solutions, with the world's joint efforts in combating the problem of fake news in all media. However, in the end, the root of the issue is the human, ethics, conscience and responsibility before society and the public of those who create information, especially the role of

journalists.

Tài liệu tham khảo

- (1) Allcott, Hunt; Gentzkow, Matthew (2017), Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election, Stanford University, New York University, National Institute of Economics.
- (2) Hunt, Elle (2016), What is fake news? How to spot it and what you can do to stop it, The Guardian.
- (3) 60 Minute Over time, What's "fake news"? 60 Minutes producers investigate, CBS News cbsnews.com.
- (4) Shan Wang (2017), Getting to the root of the "fake news" problem means fixing what's broken about journalism itself , retrived from www.gcflearnfree.org
- (5) D.Kim Thoa (2016), Skills to distinguish fake news on the Internet, Tuoitre Online. Issue 10-2021 25
Political theory and communication
- (6) Jacob Soll (2016), The Long and Brutal History of Fake News, retrieved from politico.com.
- (7) Omaha world herald (2017), 6 fake news stories in real history, retrieved from Omaha.com
- (8) Hai Minh (2017), Fake news: a brutal history, retrieved from cuoituan.tuoitre.vn (9) PBS, American Experience - The Man Behind Hitler, retrieved from pbs.org
- (10) Omaha world herald (2017), 6 fake news stories in real history, retrieved from Omaha.com
- (11) Vietnam + (2017), Responsibility of journalists in the "heyday" fake news, retrieved from special.vietnamplus.com
- (12) Hong Yen (2016), The fight against fake news on the Internet, Vietnam +
- (13) Vietnamplus (2017), Which strategy for the press when the social media grows fast, retrieved from special.vietnamplus.com
- (14) "Media savvy" is a term to define the ability to access, evaluate, analyze to understand the information on the mass media and social networks. (Source: [http:// thanhvien.vn/the-gioi/no-luc-chong-tin-that-thiet-o-dong-nam-a-820882.html](http://thanhvien.vn/the-gioi/no-luc-chong-tin-that-thiet-o-dong-nam-a-820882.html))
- (15) Judith Donath (2016), Why fake news stories thrive online, cnn.com.
- (16) My Nguyen (2017), The global issue of fake news demonstrated in 5 figures, vietnamplus.vn
- (17) Mai Nguyen (2017), "Masterpieces" of fake news in the US Presidential election, vietnamplus.vn
- (18) Nguyen Ha (2017), The world media in 2016: Chaos between false and true, truyenhinhthanhhoa.vn
- (19) Le Kien (2017), Facebook, Google and the unceasing fight against fake news, www. ictnews.vn
- (20) Le Quoc Minh (2020), Fake news and the press's responsibility

Online Journal of Propaganda, retrieved from <https://tuyengiao.vn/cung-suy-ngam/tin-gia-va-trach-nhiem-cua-bao-chi-128965>

(21) Thanh Long and Q.Viet (2017), The world press joins hands to fight against fake news, www.baophapluat.vn