

Game Essence of Alternative Reality: Methodological, Philosophical and Culturological Aspects

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Abstract: Fake news is seen as creating a parallel reality by the media. The spread of fake news is associated with the worldview transformation of society, where truth has ceased to be a harmonious whole. Fake news in the context of an alternative reality presupposes unconditional faith in the information presented to people, which is typical for games. The authors of this study came to the conclusion that the playful nature of fake news explains the accompanying phenomena of this issue: the non-critical perception of information, the unwillingness of the media to suppress fake news, and the involvement of a large number of people in this process.

Keywords: alternative reality, fake news, game, hoax, mass media

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘alternative reality’ is now widespread. The multifaceted development of mass culture has led to the fact that the alternative reality can be understood as different categories. From utopia, fantasy, fiction to alternative history (a reality that could exist if history, under the influence of any event or coincidence of circumstances at any particular point, would have gone a different path), and alternative reality as a kind of metaphysical space, which the characters of a novel or a film create in order to find each other, emerging from their reality

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(for example, after death or in a dream). The popularity of the genre of alternative history that has increased since the end of the 20th century, according to a number of authors, was determined by the rejection of the results of the largest geopolitical catastrophe (Putilo 2020; Rylshchukova & Khudjakov 2011), as well as the desire of the authors to simulate a more favorable and beautiful alternative history, in which the heroes, the nation, the state are destined for a better role than in objective reality.

The common thing that today unites all ideas into one concept ‘alternative reality’ is the concept of what is not in the objective reality surrounding us. These concepts can also include game spaces (in all the variety of manifestations of games), ‘fake news’, certain manipulative techniques, the suppression of significant facts, as well as symbolic reality and mythological consciousness (Harmash et al 2019).

The purpose of the study is to analyse the concept of ‘alternative reality’, to find out the boundaries of its use, to study the essence of this phenomenon. The object of this research is the modern worldview tendencies manifested in the mass media. Fake information as a phenomenon is the subject of ongoing research.

The relevance of the study is associated with the spread of fake news in the media, with a change outlook in the modern society, in which truth has ceased to be a harmonious whole (Nevelska-Hordieieva 2019). Fakes are varied, they are found in scientific research, in medical diagnoses, in medical procedures, in newspaper news, in the Internet, which is a consequence of denying the existence of absolute truth.

A fake is a specially created news, event or journalistic material containing false or distorted information that discriminates against a certain person or group of persons in the eyes of the audience (Ershov 2018).

According to the method of distribution, fakes are divided into mass media fakes, which are created specifically for the media and spread through them, and network rumours, when someone's inventions are spread through social networks (Suhodolov 2017, 87). By form, fakes are subdivided into photo fakes, video fakes and fake journalistic material – fake articles in the media (Mudra 2016, 185). Fakes can be directed against one person, against a group of people, against a certain region, and even a state and nation. The purposes of creating fake news are varied: ensuring the popularity of an individual, group, project,

organization, work, or, conversely, discrediting an individual, group, project, organization, or work.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The facts of manifestation of alternative reality, the manifestation and essence of fake news in the issues studied by the subject of the article are analysed; methods used: logical, systemic and structural, comparative analysis, synthesis.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

‘Fake news’ is the realm of dreams, fantasies, fiction, one of the oldest dictionaries in the English language, defines them as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Collins 2020). The phrase ‘fake news’ has become a popular term in journalistic publications in recent years, so popular that Collins has recognized the term as an expression of 2017 (Anonymous 2017). The widespread flood of fake news in the media space demonstrates the fact that it generates more interest and response from the audience than the real headlines of the mainstream news agencies (Silverman 2016).

Initially, the word ‘fake’ existed as a slang word and was used in the criminal environment to describe falsification of money or documents. When the tendency for a large number of false messages and news to appear in the media increased, the term ‘fake news’ moved into the social and political lexicon, and now media experts offer classifications of fakes (Mudra 2016, 184–188). Fake news has become so commonplace that the term ‘parajournalism of fake news’ is introduced (Sarkisianz & Ryabova 2019; Ryabova 2017).

Sociological studies show that in 2017, compared to 2016, the frequency of use of this concept increased by 365% (Anonymous 2017). Based on Google Trends data, in 2018 the interest of Internet users in the term ‘fake news’ increased even more than in the previous year (Anonymous 2019a).

Today, fake means falsification, cheating, forgery, a situation when one is passed off as something else. When using fake as a verb, the word acts as an action – to cheat, pretend to be, forge, falsify, fabricate, etc. (Ershov 2018). Fake news can be defined as an information product, which is partially or completely missing true information (Ibid.). A number of journalists consider the term ‘fake news’ as synonymous with the concept of ‘hogwash’ or ‘celebrity

gossip’, but if newspaper gossips were spread in the yellow press as scandalous information, fake news appears in modern respectable media. Some journalists are inclined to argue that fake is not a gossip or false news; modern fake news is not just a lie, it is a lie that is true for a certain subculture, it is a different reality that people believe in.

Fake news is viewed as the creation of a parallel reality, as a fantasy, which is akin to false information, distorted, untrue consciousness associated with a change in worldview in a society. Fake news is defined as an informational product, which partially or completely lacks truthful information. At the legislative level, governments are forced to take measures, but media resources have a negative attitude to legislative initiatives to limit the spread of fake news. This fact indicates a significant change in the worldview in society, which is a consequence of the denial of the existence of absolute truth.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Traditionally, humanity believed in absolute truth, in its existence. Scientific activity was associated with the search for absolute truth. “The word ‘*university*’ is based on the concept of the unity of truth, which is *one in many ways*,” asserted N. Geisler and P. Bokkino (2003, 31), and absolute truth has been studied by various sciences. Scientists believe that the university is unity in diversity: “This attitude to truth was based on absolutes, but in the postmodern period this way of thinking was not popular, and university turned into plurality. Diversity turned into pluralism, and truth ceased to be a harmonious whole, which was sought and discovered among the many views of the world. Now they think that belief in such a truth is akin to scientific heresy” (Ibid.).

The departure from the search for truth was not at the same time but proceeded gradually. M.A. Gusakovsky (2007, 57) is inclined to believe that the present is the result of constellation, a combination of the new and the structures of the past. The reason for leaving the search for truth is a unidirectional objective process, which is based on worldview changes prevailing in society, and, as a result, the appropriation by a person of appropriate views, under which personal worldview structures are built (Nevelska-Hordieieva 2019). Thus, the alternative reality reflects the disclosure of worldview changes in society.

At the everyday level, there has been a long-term departure from the truth. Let's turn to the Russian classics – the A. N. Ostrovsky's play *Without a Dowry*. Larisa, the main character, agreed to marry a worthless person named Karandyshev, since her lover left her for a rich bride. She asks her fiancé:

Larisa: When do you think to go to the village?

Karandyshev: After the wedding, whenever you want, even the next day. Only to get married is certainly here; so that they do not say that we are hiding, because I am not your fiancé, not a couple, but only that straw that the drowning man grabs at.

Larissa: Why, the latter is almost true, Yuliy Kapitonitch, that's the truth.

Karandyshev: Now you know this truth about yourself! (Ostrovsky 1950, 244)

Here the reason for the phenomenon lies in the psychological structure of the personality: the manifestation of pride, vanity, self-exaltation, egocentrism.

In addition to psychological reasons, economic, material, and mercantile reasons are manifested. For example, the news of September 4, 2018: employees of a medical health centre in Yekaterinburg made non-existent diagnoses to patients, and then prescribed ruinous treatment (Anonymous 2018b). Such cases are not isolated: on August 16, 2018, the media wrote about a similar situation in Kirov: “The cosmic level of cynicism was demonstrated by fraudsters in the city of Kirov in relation to pensioners” (Eshmuhamedov 2018). Elderly people were invited to free examinations, as a result of which they discovered non-existent serious ailments and were convinced of the need for expensive treatment. The poor people in the same medical centre were given loans (Ibid.). Despite the massiveness of such cases, the media do not seek to generalize the material, to study the trends and causes of the observed phenomena, but only state a single fact and casually indicate that we have already reported about a similar case, what is being done to ensure the transition to the indicated with link. Rare analytical articles criticizing these phenomena - such as “Do not believe the diagnoses: It can cost you your life!” by journalist Natalya Meleshchuk (2005) - disappear from the original website, and only copies remain.

To draw attention to fake scientific research, a group of British scientists set up an experiment: for a year they wrote articles in which

they covered non-existent research (Voronin 2018). James A. Lindsay, Peter Boghossian, and Helen Pluckrose admitted that during the year from August 2017 to August 2018, they deliberately wrote “completely meaningless and even frankly absurd scientific articles in various areas of the social sciences to prove that ideology in this area took prevail over common sense” (Ibid.). The authors used fictitious names, but fake articles were successfully peer-reviewed in scientific journals. And one of the most absurd articles received a special award. Of the 20 pseudoscientific papers written, at least seven have been reviewed by leading scientists and accepted for publication. At least seven because seven more articles were under review and peer review at the time the scientists reported the experiment. “Science aims to establish truth, the authors insist, but in the field of social research, truth has long been of little interest. The main thing is compliance with ideological norms” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, it is precisely the exposing activities of British scientists that the media call unethical - journalists are not against the fakes, but firmly against their exposure.

Physicist Alan Sokal became the author of the twentieth-century hoax, writing the article “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity”, which is satirical in essence, meaningless, overloaded with scientific terminology and references to postmodern concepts. Although the reviewers considered the article a debutant, it was published in the academic journal *Social Text* of Duke University in 1996. When Sokal decided to disclose the hoax, he had to do it on the pages of another journal, *Lingua Franca*, since *Social Text* did not accept the refutation of the article (Barbizon. 2018). Essentially, Alan Sokal played science with a satirical parody. Sokal’s work in this area culminated in a remarkable book, *Fashionable Nonsense*, co-authored with Jean Bricmont. Similar game experiments with pseudoscientific publications were carried out in Ukraine, where one of the academic journals, having received and recognized a fake scientific article, joined the game and put together a fake version of the journal with this article (Krugljak 2019). The game has no boundaries; as soon as you get involved in the game, the field of game possibilities immediately grows exponentially. The game captures new layers of possible actions. In this context, the term ‘pseudo-article’ is introduced (Ibid.).

Fake information may concern non-existent cities and countries, for example, a British resident discovered on Google Maps a phantom town of Argleton in Lancashire in the north-west of England, although

in reality there was an open field (Anonymous 2009). Fake news is often found in the modern information space. For example, false reports about the death of famous singers or popular actors periodically appear in the Internet news (Anonymous 2016; Anonymous 2018d). Fake web pages appear on the networks that publish fake news. For example, the fake Guardian website copied the visual design of the website of the British newspaper Guardian, but its address differed from the URL of the real website by one letter – the Latin “i” was replaced by the letter “ı”, which is used, for example, in the Turkish alphabet (Voronin 2017).

Donald Trump has repeatedly accused journalists of publishing materials that do not correspond to reality, and of the fact that journalists provide links to non-existent sources. In January 2018, U.S. President named the winners of his own *Fake News 2017 Award*, for which 11 American information publications were nominated. Trump stressed that he supports freedom of speech, but at the same time, said that the dishonest media are “enemies of the American people.” However, 2018 remained just as rich in fake news, which actually became the norm for a number of media outlets (Anonymous 2018c). In 2020, Trump announced that the Pulitzer Prize should be taken away from the American media, which received it for fake articles. Trump said the articles for which the Pulitzer Prize was awarded contained false information. At the same time, there is an idea that fake news in the United States is a part of modern political culture, regardless of who and for what purpose the phenomenon is used (Kljuchnikova 2019).

The phenomenon has become so widespread that governments are forced to take action. For example, in Germany in October 2017, a law came into force on imposing a fine on social networks for systematic violation of the rule for untimely removal of fake news or messages inciting hatred (Maslova 2017). The decision on disputable situations will be made by a special department created by the Ministry of Justice. The reaction of the media is extremely negative: “The law will not help solve the problem of hatred – the German government is thus simply trying to shift the responsibility for solving it onto social networks” (Ibid.). The media sharply criticize the law: concerns are expressed that the new law will restrict freedom of speech; they insist that this law will not help in overcoming such an important social problem.

The French National Assembly in July 2018 approved a bill to combat fake news: “Never before lawmakers in France defined fake. Oppositional politicians criticized the options proposed by the authorities. However, the majority in the lower house did not take objections into account. Any ‘inaccurate or false statement and accusation’ was decided to be considered fake regardless of the context” (Anonymous 2019b). Now the media in France depend on a court decision, which will determine whether the message is “fake” or “reliable information”. The reaction of the media is extremely negative: a dictatorship of judges awaits us; the new legal norm is extremely vague and is directed primarily against certain media.

On September 20, 2018, parliamentarians in Russia adopted in the third, final reading a bill on increasing liability for libel on the Internet (Anonymous 2018a). In reality, this is a package of amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses and changes to Article #315 of the Criminal Code: now you can go to jail for a public lie. Legislators are trying to counteract fake news and the spread of false information on the Internet: the court believes that fake news must be removed (Ibid.). The reaction of the media is rather negative: this legislative initiative is called “law on libel”, “law on social networks”, “law on censorship”, etc.

Media resources are extremely negative about legislative initiatives to limit the spread of fake news. This fact testifies to a significant change in the worldview in society, which is a consequence of the denial of the existence of absolute truth. Nowadays, fake news is an alternate reality that people is interested in.

The fact of the negative attitude of the media to legislative initiatives aimed at combating fake news testifies to both a significant change in the world outlook in society, which is a consequence of denying the existence of absolute truth, and the specific essence of fake news. This essential nature of fake news is connected not only with lies, disinformation, manipulation, the fight against which has a certain motivation. The essence of fake news is determined by the game nature of the phenomenon. It is the game sense that allows you to believe fake information as really existing in an alternative reality.

Game activity is inherent in a human being along with work, educational, cognitive activities. Psychologists have established the presence of the game essence of the personality. The playing person was considered both in the cultural (Huizinga 1997), in the individual (Berne 2003), and in the social aspects (Carnegie 2019).

The methodological movement of G.P. Shchedrovitsky, and the implementation of a special type of games – organizational and activity games within the framework of this movement, made it possible to evaluate the game as a mass sociocultural phenomenon that involves large groups of people in the game process: “The experience of games convinces us that self-determination is the game largely depends on how much the participant in the organizational-activity game manages to divide in the attitude the plans of the necessary and the plan of the possible” (Shchedrovitsky 1987). But, if for the organizational-activity game success depends on the separation of these plans, the success of the game in fake news, on the contrary, depends on the combination of layers of the necessary and the possible.

A.A. Tertychny (2017) distinguishes game as a special genre of periodicals: “Game as a type of publications belongs to artistic and journalistic genres. This is due to the fact that any game is fully the fruit of the artistic fantasy of its creator. The author of the game usually completely invents its plot, rules, develops various situations, problems that are proposed to be solved by the readers of such works. This genre is most actively used on the pages of mass publications”.

Within the framework of organizational-activity games, the following classification of games was proposed: a game with strictly established rules; a child game; improvisation, where the rules can change painlessly during the game; performance (Shchedrovitsky 1987). The ontology of fake news lies in the nature of *play* – it is a game without rules, an improvisation that allows for any changes, this game is considered real. And it assumes a special life within the game. It cannot exist without the belief of the participants in the game reality. Hence the negative attitude of the media representatives to legislative initiatives aimed at combating fakes, the favourable attitude towards fake news among the mass media audience, and the real life of a person in an alternative reality. The playful nature of fake news logically explains the existence of this phenomenon as consequences arising from its essence.

CONCLUSION

The human playing activity extends the gaming process to the mass media, which allows the latter to offer various types of gaming products, one of which is fake news. Understanding the game nature of fake news allows us to explain the accompanying phenomena: the

negative attitude of the media representatives to legislative initiatives aimed at combating fakes, a favourable attitude towards fake news among the mass media audience, and personal stay in an alternative reality.

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