

CHAPTER 4

FAKE NEWS AS A POST-FACTUAL REPRODUCTION OF THE POSTMODERN DIGITAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses a part of postmodern digital society characterized by unbridled communication on online social networks, the spread of disinformation, fake news, alternative facts and post-truth. In the context of globalization, which transformed the distinction between public and private, political and commercial, social and market, in digital society we are also witnessing the processes of digital commodification and mediatisation of everything as a result of prevailing neoliberal ideology. This is manifested using technologically advanced forms of constructing personal biographies, online staging of an individual's public in private image, the individual's Potemkin villages. More than truth and credible facts, it seems that this digital age is constructed of interpretations of reality dependent on the context and falsified news which we become aware of only after the disclosure of the truth; that is 'post-truth'. Strongly diverse ideas, which in the context of the gradual shaping of the often-incoherent term 'postmodern society' have been in process of development by a wider scientific discourse for almost sixty years now, contain the tendencies of 'post-factual' in many elements. Although postmodernism first positioned itself as an emancipatory way of freeing people from oppressive narratives and abuse of power, the mediatisation of society and of the world in a digital society, and the emergence of media populism in the form of counterfeit, fake news, alternative facts and the post-true, is a typical example of reverse process, the gradual and persistent farewell of reality, which is not emancipatory at all. Through the prism of post-modern escape from objective truth, reality, language games and the attitude to freedom, we explain why fake news is, actually, the post-factual reproduction of a postmodern digital society. The facts in a postmodern society are in fact social constructs, and only relative truth exists, because objective truth is a serious ambiguous concept.

Keywords: Postmodernism, digital society, fake news, post-truth, post-factual, language games, freedom, individualism, commodification

“Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions make one truth”
(Huxley, 2016)

In Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, a totalitarian state is created based on the principles of stability and happiness, which is maintained using synthetic drugs. Children are produced in laboratories, people are divided into classes according to intelligence, families no longer exist, brain washing happens during sleep, sex is free, and emotions are excluded. In 1984, Orwell not only foresaw the future, but promptly warned us about what could happen to us. His big brother keeps on watching all the time, all ambiguous words are deleted from the vocabulary, the police monitor citizens through the screening screens, the Ministry of Truth publishes lies, and newspapers write about the successes of authority, sports, crimes and astrology. Anthony Burgess in his *A Clockwork Orange* speaks of a dystopic future, which has already come in today’s world of violence, banality and indifference. Burgess’s literary hero Alex should not shock anybody today. Just like Orwell’s Big Brother or Huxley’s *Brave New World*, “we are well on our way to fulfilling that dark vision, where truth is the first casualty in the establishment of the authoritarian state” (McIntyre, 2018, p. 1): we live in a world of false and fake news,¹ alternative facts,² disinformation³ and misinformation⁴, in the post-truth⁵ world and the post-factual digital society.

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- 1 The Australian Macquarie’s Dictionary defined *‘fake news’* as ‘disinformation and hoaxes published on websites for political purposes or to drive web traffic; the incorrect information being passed along by social media’ (Macquarie Dictionary, 2017). A review of relevant literature used the term *‘fake news’* reveals six types of definition: (1) news satire, (2) news parody, (3) fabricated and distorted information, (4) (photo) manipulation, (5) advertising and public relations, and (6) propaganda (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2017; Wardle, 2017). We conceptualize fake news as distorted signals uncorrelated to the truth. Fake news is fabricated information that appropriates the look and feel of real news and media content: from how the websites look like to how the articles are written, etc., and by trying to appear like traditionally trusted content, it takes on a certain form of credibility.
 - 2 *‘Alternative facts’* are nothing more than another euphemism hiding the insinuation, falsification of objective facts and truthfulness.
 - 3 The deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false; false information that is purposely spread to deceive people (cf. Lazer et al., 2018).
 - 4 The inadvertent sharing of false or misleading information (cf. Lazer et al., 2018).
 - 5 *‘Post-truth’* is an expression that includes distortion and falsification of facts that have been repeatedly posted or repeatedly shared on online social media. The Oxford Dictionaries defined *‘post-truth’* as an adjective “*relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*”, less often also used as “*occurring after or resulting from a disclosure of the truth*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). The prefix “post” is meant to express that the truth is irrelevant; or, as Kalpokas (2019, p. 2) state: “post-truth does signal something that is both ‘post’ and a return, a re-legitimation of arguments based on their emotional appeal and symbolic value and subjective rather than impersonal truth”.

Fake news is nothing new: people have been spreading it and complaining about it for centuries. Fake news, alternative facts and post-truth did not start with the elections for 45th US President or the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign. For example, false scientific assertions about the usefulness of spinach due to the high degree of iron, or the denial of scientific facts about smoking, evolution, vaccines or climate change mean a widespread denial of fact. The sociology of science has for a long time called into question the principle of absolute truth as an independent entity on the basis that other scientific networks, infrastructures and validation structures could well produce other forms of verifiable knowledge. Historians of science have found that attempts to dispel myths by expert knowledge may only have the contrary effect of increasing the emotional commitment to an unshakable and unfalsifiable core belief (see Law, 2017). It is not only a credulous public that takes emotional satisfaction in myths. But today, the growth of online news has prompted a set of concerns. The focus of concern has shifted to social media. With the Internet and social media, controlling media content (through propaganda, manipulation, spinning, etc.) has become much easier as individual responsibility is deficient while we are using mainstream media, tweeting, posting pictures, commenting or creating yet another website for spreading messages in public (Trajkoska, 2018). Content on social media platforms can be spread among users with no significant fact-checking or editorial judgment. Social media, which increase the speed and breadth of spreading information, have become extraordinarily powerful in a very short time, and have a dramatically different structure than the previous media technologies. Twitter, founded in 2006, has more than 300 million active users worldwide, and Facebook, founded in 2004, has more than 2 billion. Those platforms have become a primary source of news for many people (cf. Pivec & Maček, 2019). The spread of falsity online is a serious concern for the democratic process.

The European Communication Monitor notes only a small number of practitioners (12.3%) dealing with fake news as a major issue for communication management, and the European countries with the strongest impact of fake news are the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia and Russia (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič, & Moreno, 2018, pp. 16–18). Among the respondents of the European Communication Monitor, every second communication expert reports that misleading news in mass or social media influence the public sphere in his or her country. However, only a quarter of them feel that dealing with fake news is relevant for the daily work of their communication department or agency. This is striking as 22.5% of European organisations and their reputation have been affected by fake news in the past few months. Russia, Serbia, Slovenia and Poland report the strongest impact. The main sources of misleading content are social media (81.3%), but mass media (59.6%) also play a huge role.

Despite these challenges, only 12% of the affected organisations have already established advanced routines to identify (potential) fake news (Zerfass et al., 2018).

We are living in a post-truth digital world, where fake news and post-truth replace the truth, alternative facts replace real facts, and feelings have more weight than evidence. Regardless of whether the fake news, post-truth and alternative facts are a result of political spin, mass delusion or a bold-faced lie, this is all about disinformation by which its practitioners try to force someone to believe something, regardless of the evidence. Taking into account the decline in conventional media, the growth of online media and, in particular, social networks, the ideal conditions for post-truth are created if we add fake news to the wired-in cognitive biases that make us feel that our conclusions are truthful even when they are not. As in McIntyre (2018), we also argue that the post-factual digital society is borrowed from postmodernism - more specifically, the idea that there is no such thing as objective truth - in its attacks on science and facts.

1. Digital Society: Postmodern Escape from Interpretation in Objective Truth or Reality

A postmodern interpretative and mediatized society is an era of boundless individualization and the ever-presenting of new 'post-istic' terms (which, like the old ones, point to the threat of the survival of the fundamental Western civilizational values): post-moral, post-democratic, post-factual, post-truth, etc. Numerous examples of post-truth euphemisms as examples of postmodern linguistic creativity are listed by Keyes (2004, p. 33): 'neo-truth, soft-truth, faux truth, lite truth, poetic truth, parallel truth, nuanced truth, imaginative truth, virtual truth, alternative reality, strategic misrepresentations, creative enhancement, non-full disclosure, selective disclosure, augmented reality, nearly true, almost true, counterfactual statements, fact-based information'. As we have already determined (Sruk & Ašanin Gole, 2018), in the postmodern digital society everything is vanishing into unbridled heterogeneous randomness, which no longer represents the search for the truth, certainly not a unified one, and also not a partial one, but only follows unscrupulous insinuation and profiteering, which is creating its post-factual 'truth' as 'alternative facts' every day, while degrading the truths of others from the position of power in a post-democratic context as fake or false news; in the end, a post-true always appears. The mechanisms of the global economic flows of a modern society generate unscrupulous devaluation of life (symbolic or true) values or mercilessly transform them into market ones (Varufakis, 2015a; 2015b), thus undermining the last bulwarks of individual self-determination and social solidarity. According to Keyes (2004), lies have stopped being

treated as something inexcusable and have started to be viewed as something acceptable in certain situations, which has supposedly led to the beginning of the post-truth era.

A postmodern society, just like postmodernism, is a diverse metaphor rather than a defined concept. Even though this term has been discussed for decades in intellectual discourses of various artistic disciplines, scientific sciences and other practices, this notion is rather inconceivable as various interpreters try to circumvent it and mark many divergent phenomena in such a way that there are content and explanatory overlaps with a variety of sketches or concepts. As a metaphor, the term *postmodernism* has been used in a completely non-uniformed and inadequately articulated way since the middle of the second half of the 19th century (Vester, 1993; Welsch, 1987). However, these metaphors hardly have anything to do with today's discourse on postmodernism. The actual discussion on postmodernism began to develop in the American literary debate in the 1960s by rejecting any criteria of the classical *modernism*, a postmodern (literature) should now be distinguished by '*fleeing from interpretation*', rejecting all meanings and praising direct, non-intellectual experiences; so the elite and mass culture should be coming closer together. And this is a kind of 'democratization' which the American architect Charles Jencks also had in mind when he urged that the new architecture should equally address both the elite and the ordinary street person. In the mid-1970s, the concept of postmodernism was transferred to the domain of architecture, which is considered to be the most obvious core demonstration of this phenomenon in practice, as the contrast between *modernism* and *postmodernism* explicitly expresses here. The transparency of steel-glass-concrete buildings, unified tower-like buildings propagated by Le Corbusier – that is of functionalistic uniformity – confronts postmodernism and the principle of plural design, eclectic playing with shapes and stylistic elements. All kinds of style and fashion are allowed.⁶ They compete, they are combined as well as complementing, commenting, denying and reinterpreting each other. The plurality of codes and taste cultures governs; it is in fact 'double encoding'. A 'dialogue of language without meta-language' is emerging (Welsch, 1987, p. 119). In the 1970s and 1980s, Ihab Hassan expanded the term of postmodernism to the general-cultural, broadly diversified concept of '*postmodern episteme*'. In a distinctive cognitive theory, he articulates the starting points, which still define the postmodern discourse today: the tendency towards pluralization, decentralization and the formation of differentiation. These tendencies allegedly consist of sub-tendencies, which can

6 The scientific and idealistic approach of *modernism*, facing a direction of high technologies of the future, is replaced by the *postmodern* perspective, which is borrowing from the past. According to Harvey (1990), the examples of postmodern architecture include the "imitation of medieval markets and fishing villages, conventional or folk houses, renewed factories and warehouses, and the return to landscapes of all kinds" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1999, p. 915).

be associated with terms such as openness, heterodoxy, plurality, eclecticism, non-orientation, un-naturalism, revolt, deformation. Already the latter allegedly contains a dozen terms used in annulation: decoration, disintegration, transmission of the focus, differentiation, discontinuity, etc. (Hassan, 1983)⁷.

1.1. Digital Liberation of Man Through Language Games in Public Discourse

In French philosophy, postmodernism is reflected in the ideas of the post-structuralism thinkers Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, as well as so-called anonymous postmodernists (as named by Eickelpasch (2000), since they had never set themselves in the context of the terminology concerned): Michael Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida. For Lyotard, *postmodernism* is more *the state of mood or spirit* than an era (Welsch, 1987). The totality and unified *modernism* programs are now replaced by the irreducibility of a variety of local and heterogeneous language games, forms of action and ways of life. Affect is opposed to the general. Lyotard (1988) notes that postmodernism undermines the meta-stories of human liberation, self-fulfilment and social progress. He connects the development of post-industrial society and post-modern culture in the 1950s with technology, science and certain social developments, and especially with changes in language. One of the central concepts of his analysis is a ‘language game’ that serves to justify or legitimize the behaviour of people in a society. Through his statements, the discourse participant tries to achieve the acceptance of his individual version of what is supposed to be true or correct. Although since the Age of Enlightenment, language games have largely been replaced by scientific *marking games*, where it is no longer important who speaks, and where only the statement, verified by evidence and rational arguments, is the objective reality, Lyotard concludes that a parallel knowledge of the subject still exists while science is trying to distance itself from it. Science is based on meta-stories and together they have established the faith in progress and self-actualization of the individual as well as various total ideologies.

In the postmodern age, all of these become obsolete. We have already established (Sruk & Ašanin Gole, 2018) that it is characterized by two aspects: abandoning the search for truth on the one hand, since *marking language games* are discredited and knowledge is fragmented to such an extent that diversity prevents the search for one great truth, which would cover and legitimize the whole knowledge. On the other hand, technical linguistic

⁷ In the context of his epistemology, he created a table of differences between *modernism and postmodernism*, which clearly illustrate the opposition of the central terms of the two paradigms (Hassan, 1987).

games are being enforced and do not assess the claim according to its correctness anymore, but according to their effectiveness and usefulness, the sole aim of which is merely the usefulness of knowledge in terms of its marketing (Haralambos & Holborn, 1999, pp. 916–917). In the category of language games, we included the established phenomena of modern media communication such as ‘fake news’ or ‘alternative facts’, which are perceived as a reflection of the enforcement of such declarations as potential guarantors for obtaining a general social, political, moral, perhaps even legal verification, as well as an expression of the confirmation of the status, position and influence of individuals and various groups not only in a public discourse, but in a modern ‘post-factual’ society in general. Modern possibilities of various forms of Internet communication provide the individual, as well as various groups or organizations (chosen political elites as well as illegal terrorist formations), with an optional, practically unlimited and actually relatively anonymous spreading of half-truths and falsehoods. By their own semantics of language games, they reflect their position in society and confirm, consolidate and build it by actively acting in a direction of realizing their ambitions or goals, whether it be a relatively innocent implementation of one’s own fantasy dreamlike image in the form of a Facebook profile (as a kind of ‘post-factual’ constructed biography in Beck’s (2009) sense), or whether it be a more or less perfidious militaristic incitement and recruitment of a terrorist youth. It is important to gain acceptance in a certain addressed group. Here, a discursive situation of communion is not only constitutive, but also a belief about the importance of the media in determining the truth of information plays a great role. The mediation of the position through the electronic media (formerly in the form of oral traditions and direct communication, and after that in a written form which gave the matter additional weight due to the high cost) inevitably guarantees them their legitimacy, credibility and truthfulness. In this context, the functioning of these social (partly psychologically dependent) structures seems ironic, but “every man has a right to his own opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts” (Brodnig, 2017, p. 55).

Post-structuralists deny the possibility that the above-individual structure of a certain communication context can be understood as a theoretically transparent and completed system, and consequently manage it. They strongly reject the modern philosophy of the subject as well as any opinion committed to the intellect and order of humanistic sciences, which consider structuralism to be the last bastion.

1.2. Individualism, Risk and Threat Instead of Postmodern Society Unity

As a reaction to *postmodern criticism*, the paradigmatic core of the classic theory of society is called into question, with four aspects that should be pointed out.

The self-evidence of presupposition of the *totality and objectivity of a society* (which, for example, functionalism and Marxism are based on) and the idea of a *centre of society* become unsustainable from the viewpoint of postmodern deconstructivism and are replaced by the concept of the ‘desalvation of a social’ (Giesen, 1991).

Postmodern philosophy, which abandoned the idea of eternally valid foundations, also denies the *term of the individual subject* and Weber’s concept of *subjectively meaningful sense*. From a postmodern standpoint, culture and society consist of a multitude of free-floating differences without the centre and without any limits, and above all without being linked to a subjective sense of action or superior intelligence. The idea of a freely floating universe of codes resembles the autopoiesis of Niklas Luhmann (1984; 1988; 1992). In this context, the concept of his system theory could also be interpreted as a transformation of modern thinking into postmodern thinking (Vester, 1993) as the predecessor of the post-realistic digital society with fake news and alternative facts. A postmodern critique of the *continuity and progression thinking*, as is the case in the philosophy of history, leads to a radical *unwitching of the future* and eliminates the utopian core of classic social theory. The future as a free field of progress and emancipation is transformed into the future of risk and threat, into a digital online society.

The image of *sociological criticism* also changes due to the loss of utopian fundamentals of social theory. With the multi-perspective and multi-culturalism of postmodernism, the current assumption of the Archimedean point, which allows a critical distance to social structures and processes, becomes questionable. Giesen (1991, pp. 777-779) notes that sociological critiques in postmodernism are no longer interested in “the progress and unity of society, but the promotion of differences, the preservation of diversity and breaking the law.” And what is the spread of disinformation in the online sphere in the form of post-factual alternative facts and fake news, if not exactly that? Based on the general postmodern assumption of this *radical plurality*, a change in the sociological social analysis is noticeable. The social processes of pluralization and diversification of life forms, styles and personal biographies are at the heart of interest, while the structures of unification and cohesion are pushed to the margins of interest. By using *postmodern cognizance* to focus on specific,

local and heterogeneous, and taking into account the multiplicity of divergent forms of life and knowledge, it draws attention to the shortcomings of the classical instrumentation of social analysis, and thus “sharpens our sensibility for differences and strengthens our ability to transmit incommensurable” (Lyotard, 1986, p. 16). It is a constant game of ambivalence, polysemy, and multiplicity of meanings.

A postmodern discourse of a digital society with a tendency to eliminate the borders between theory and ideology, reality and fiction, and to one-sided condemnation of conceptual thinking – while simultaneously unbridled emphasis of the mythic, imagery and rhetoric – creates a rather problematic Counter-Enlightenment mood. Postmodern science can also be described as a state characterized by a complete decomposition of any interconnected structures. Analytical concepts are abandoned in favour of the game with metaphors and imprecise linguistic expression, logically discursive argumentation is replaced by irony, meta-language games and masquerades. Habermas (1985) and Honneth & Joas (1986) have warned against uncritical irrationalism and Counter-Enlightenment withdrawal into the mythic as propagated by certain streams of postmodernism. The sense and purpose of this kind of understanding of postmodern sociological science becomes questionable in the context of acceptance of these radical ideas. If a theory of society actually followed this paradigm, it would lose all the scientific features, and consequently itself.

The original motive of the enlightenment era was to enable an analysis of the world by separating reality from divine authority. Since science adopted the interpretation of reality and truth, philosophy became more antirealistic in order to preserve the space in which it could still play an important role. Thus, postmodernism also first positioned itself as an emancipatory way to free people from oppressive narratives and from the abuse of power we are constantly exposed to. In the late 20th century, the postmodernists went a step further and claimed that ‘*there is nothing outside of the text*’ and that all our ideas about the world are derived from the models of power that have supervised us. With the interpretation that knowledge is a (repressive) power, postmodernism has deprived the very ground on which it could oppose power. However, the appearance of media populism in the form of counterfeit, fake news, alternative facts and post-truthfulness is an example of a farewell from reality that is not emancipatory at all.

In the last thirty years late postmodernism has moved into the media from the academic world and then to everywhere else. Counterfeit, fake news, alternative facts and post-reality, which we are witnessing in a digital mediatized society, unintentionally remind us of Lyotard’s language game, which serves to justify or legitimize the behaviour of people in

society, and means that every participant in public discourse, through his or her statements, tries to achieve the acceptance of his or her individual version of what is supposed to be true or correct as well as the acceptance of his or her interpretation of facts and the real world and of his or her Potemkin village. This Lyotard game is marked by two aspects: abandoning the search for truth, since *marking language games* are discredited, and knowledge being fragmented to such an extent that diversity prevents the search for one great truth that would cover and legitimize the whole information.

1.3. Postmodern Digital Society

A postmodern digital society denotes a modern society in which a specific transformation or adjustment of phenomena and processes has occurred through digital technology, as had already been partially identified by postmodernism. It is marked by a special form of individualization that manifests itself through the use of technologically advanced forms of personal biographies design, online staging of an individual's public and private image, by abandoning any kind of privacy and, to a large extent, ethics as well, and by creation of digital tribalism, with the ideological and axiological positioning of polarized social groups in web echo-chambers of conformity information cascades, where new optional parallel realities are created. As a result of progressive consumerism, axiology leans towards egoistic attitudes perpetuating hedonism at all costs.

Postmodern digital society is an online society with digital citizenship in which the Internet is the dominant communication tool. Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008) argue that the benefits of online society are economic opportunity, civic engagement and political participation; digital citizenship is the ability to participate in society online, the inclusion in prevailing forms of communication through regular and effective use; the impact of Internet use on the ability to participate as democratic citizens; and the effects of Internet on the equality of opportunity in the marketplace (Mossberger et al., 2008, pp. 1–2). In the *‘Going Digital: Shaping Policies, Improving Lives’*, the OECD (2019) notes that digital technologies have caused us to live, interact, work and produce differently than in the past, and identifies seven policy dimensions that allow us to shape digital transformation and improve lives: (1) communications infrastructures, services and data; (2) effective use of digital technologies and data; (3) data-driven and digital innovation; (4) good jobs for all; (5) social prosperity and inclusion; (6) trust, and (7) market openness in digital business environments.

As we have already noted (see Sruk & Ašanin Gole, 2018), the facts in postmodern society are in fact social constructs and only relative truth exists, because objective truth is a

serious ambiguous concept. Typically, journalistic news is usually interpreted as a journalistic construction or production of reality, as content traditionally meant reliable, accurate and realistic reporting of recent, interesting and socially important events. This should ensure that the general human right to freedom of expression and information, the right to visibility and, consequently, the public's right to the public is enforced.

In the context of globalization and digitalization, which in the digital society transformed the distinction between public and private, between political and commercial, and between social and market, we are now witnessing the processes of commodification and mediatization of everything: individuals, often physically proximate, communicating through social media on their smart mobile phones, organizations expressing themselves in all kinds of media, from print magazines to websites, from images on Instagram to video on YouTube or storytelling using images or video on Facebook, or Twitter (cf. Hjarvard, 2008; Ihlen & Pallas, 2014; Verčič, 2016; Zerfass, Verčič, & Wiesenberg, 2016). Mediatization characterizes changes in practices, cultures and institutions in media-saturated societies, thus denoting transformations of these societies themselves.

Following the development of online platforms and the rise of social media, the whole of society has become mediatized; anyone can become their own media and part of citizen journalism and digital citizenship. All we need to become a medium is a smartphone, as everyone can create their own media and publish their own truth, their own news, their own story, regardless of whether it is a story supported by facts or a complete fiction. Rational argumentation simply replaces the creation of news that does not need to be justified but must simply be appealing. The news as a truth thus replaces storytelling and narration. Online social networks allow the mediatized 21st century entity to directly target the users who are likely to accept the entity's own truth-telling news and share it, as it is a 'trusted' circle of virtual friends, supporters and followers. When a mediatized person on his or her own medium shares misleading or cleverly manipulated news, his or her virtual 'friend' sees it, trusts him or her and then shares the news with his or her own 'friends' and 'supporters'. Online social media thus enable everyone to communicate with a wide audience at any time. It seems that the 11th thesis of the Cluetrain Manifesto has come true: "People in network markets have found that they get much better information and support from one another than from sellers" (Weinberger, Levine, Locke, & Searls, 2000).

By making online social media the primary means of accessing news in a digital society, traditional media revenue falls, and if they want more advertising revenue, they need more clicks on their content. It is important that content is attractive (and not necessarily true,

since the attractiveness and non-truthfulness are bringing clicks, cheering, commenting and sharing news.) The new criterion of value has also become viral, but not truthful or of high quality for many classical media, and thus the classic media follow the example of the new online social media.

2. Post-Factual, Fake news and Post-Truth as the Heritage of Postmodernist Thought

Social media has changed the way society communicates, learns, and conducts business. The deepening crisis of the diffused society, which is generated in the face of new as well as old fears, seems uncatchable and is persistently evading our cognitive apparatus, which desperately tries to circumvent and name which seems to be indescribable. The current state has become obsolete, while the new one cannot be determined yet.

As in any war, the first casualty is truth. Most types of dissembling of information have taken the form of *mathswash*, presenting vague estimates as firm predictions with nary caveat or error bar in sight. Other claims are misleading but catchy – designed to spread faster than efforts to debunk them. In any case, it's about the culture in which public discourse is framed largely by appeals to emotions (as a cultural-cognitive institutions) by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. Post-truth means ignoring facts and expert opinions - this is of secondary importance relative to the appeal to emotion.

On the one hand, postmodernism has brought many 'destructive' ideas that have ruined all scientific and theoretical as well as real-political absolutization; on the other hand, it has brought the very promising buds of plurality of living, perceiving and expressing - an unimagined freedom of thought and a multitude of democratic possibilities of articulating and operating. This liberating anti-elitism, even anti-intellectualism and cultural-political pluralism has seemingly announced the fight to a total rational-scientific paradigm, as well as to social inequalities and rigid political, religious, racial, sexual and other prejudices - practically to any discriminatory social limitation. By tearing down the ruling views and structures, and by giving space to a new, partially anti-rational paradigm of methodological non-claustrophobia, associativity, unbridled optionality, fantasy, individualism, and diversity, it has spread the spirit of 'freedom'. It has quickly become clear to certain thinkers that this freedom or optionality and incompleteness may endanger, perhaps even undermine the fundamental values of modern rational science and soon lead to a culture breakdown. Plurality or optionality, that has embodied itself in deviational formations of certain postmodernist branches and has begun to demolish the foundation of what we call objective and true, should

quickly turn out to be counterproductive, even more if it turns from the mental experiment into a program.

In these views, postmodernists have conceptually indicated and clearly presented a highly flexible view of truth and information which should be considered as facts and which have quickly come to power in modern digital society with the help of new technologies, thus opening the door to lies (a more appropriate term in the spirit of time) or untruths and manipulations throughout the public sphere. Whether talking about disinformation, fake, counterfeit, distorted or alternative facts, it is always intimidating when realizing that easily verifiable truths or facts in everyday discourses are increasingly subject to arbitrary manipulations. The use of fake news is absurd in the time of the not-so-recently-unimaginable technological zenith of humanity, when the world is legally and politically globally regulated, and in which virtually everyone is enabled to digitally get as much credible information as possible from a wide variety of alternative sources. They are used for a wide variety of purposes through various tools and platforms by all public service agents, political and economic elites, secret services, terrorists, governments as well as private individuals. Thus, the postmodern idea of the relativity of everything has led to a ubiquitous ideology that, whenever necessary, adapts the facts and therefore reality. Thus reality, becoming an individual creation according to the desired, and depending on the technical and scientific possibilities of being falsified, according to financial and authority's possibilities to exercise one's will, is often legitimized through democratic positions. For example, Washington Post states that the 45th US President published (mainly on Twitter) a total of 9,451 items of fake news in the first 800 days of his presidency, according to The Fact Checker's database that analyses, categorizes and tracks every suspect statement of the president (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2019). It also raises concerns that his supporters justify his actions saying that other US presidents before him also made untruthful claims, as if this relativizes or justifies his wrongdoing in some way. All means of personal morality, professional ethics and social responsibility are publicly and formally stepped on every day and degraded into empty phrases. By using and misusing algorithms (the Cambridge Analytica case), by referring to supposedly scientific statistics, by arbitrarily supporting the pre-taken stands based on constructed alternative facts, the invisible totalitarianism of flexible manipulations is constituted – the manipulations in the form of data and fact abuse, which takes place in all segments of modern society and achieves its (current) climax with the help of promptness, flexibility and prevalence of the most important media of the digital society – the social networks.

The current debate on fake news should therefore be monitored in the broader context of the neoliberal economy, and a political discourse growing from it in the context of globalization, which has, in the view of the progressive evolving digitization, basically invasively moved the boundaries of communication and of entrepreneurial and political practice of in-cultural and cognitive relations. Neoliberal capitalism is the only ideology in the history of mankind that has succeeded globally. Based on excessive consumerism, with its own non-consequentness when it comes to freedom and responsibility in business (see Stiglitz, 2009; 2010), by the tireless undermining of non-market values and apparent democraticness (see Varufakis, 2015a; 2015b), neoliberal actors – using modern electronic, mostly online, media – have finally managed to achieve information control and ideological unification, which authoritarian and totalitarian systems of the past could only dream of. The electronic media revolution – global digitalisation and the accessibility of social networks participation has facilitated ideological manipulative activity and the spread of diverse falsehoods to various populists within ideological and legal democratic and autocratic systems, to economic elites all the way to individuals of different kinds of motivations, which largely agitate uncontrollably through aggressive online social networks and other benefits of digital society. The constitutionally guaranteed ‘freedom of speech’ of modern democracies is a fundamental human right, used for the attempts to undermine confidence in this very democratic system in a digital society.

Fake news is the news that paints an unrealistic image of reality and is spread by people who lack reality, actuality, credibility. Thus, fake news is supposed to be a creation of ‘*liars and bullshitters*’⁸ who – in the postmodern, post-factual era of constructing diverse arbitrary ‘realities’ – irresponsibly and carelessly use the possibilities offered by the new online media. These actors are supposed to be systematically exploiting psychological mechanisms⁹ that

8 The syntax ‘*liars and bullshitters*’ referring to a distinction introduced by the one of the world’s most influential moral philosophers Harry G. Frankfurt from Princeton University in his book *On Bullshit* (2005). The bullshitter ‘*lack of connection to a concern with truth*’ (Frankfurt, 2005, p. 33) and an ‘*indifference to how things really are*’ (p. 34). It is for this reason we should fear the bullshitter more than other sorts of liars. Frankfurt argues that bullshitters misrepresent themselves to their audience not as liars do, that is, by deliberately making false claims about what is true; in fact, bullshit need not be untrue at all. Rather, bullshitters seek to convey a certain impression of themselves without being concerned about whether anything at all is true. They quietly change the rules governing their end of the conversation so that claims about truth and falsity are irrelevant. Frankfurt concludes that bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are.

9 The Swiss *Das Magazin* published a text entitled ‘*Ich habe nur gezeigt, dass es die Bombe gibt*’, which - at a time of a general non-understanding of how someone who calls Mexicans “the rapists” and evidently uninvited grabs a woman’s “pussy” could have been elected president of the United States – shocked the public when offered an answer saying that big data as well as personality analyzes contributed to the election victory of the 45th US President. The article specifically describes the methods of British consulting company Cambridge Analytica, which advertised its offering of so called psychograms of citizens. Based on the identified personality structure of the individual that can be targeted online or on social networks with appropriate political propaganda messages, the individual concerned is more likely and predictably to respond to (Brodnig, 2017, p. 131). Even if it later supposedly appeared that this psychologically-based marketing using psychograms was not used in

seduce people to believe fake news or at least pass them on (spread) (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, p. 81). This phenomenon is not new but has reached its climax in the digital age of the present day, because “our psychic mechanisms work interactively with the specific structure of the media in an unfavourable way” (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, p. 77).

Fake news in the context of the ‘*attention economy*’ (originally in German: *Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie*) works much better than complexly and controversially formed serious news. Its evolutionary-developmental ‘*negativity base*’ and the individual’s preferences of simple content that fit well into his or her other beliefs and worldview are perfect for the launch and grateful reciprocation of fake news. When this news starts to circulate, it encounters the appropriately structured and motivated perception of many people. Today, due to today’s media of hyper production and distribution of information, which in their composition and abundance are practically uncontrollable, people tend to voluntarily believe messages that confirm their already existing beliefs and do not irritate them by generating *cognitive dissonance*¹⁰. Any subsequent corrections and contradictory evidence should be ignored, and thus, on the basis of a *confirmatory error*¹¹, it is possible to explain what is the “connection between fake news and the way of thinking that forms conspiracy theories: they are both mutually encouraged” (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, 72). It is quite evident in the social media which opinions are in line with our worldview and which are opposed to it. Thus, the Internet is the ideal place for ‘digital tribalism’, as publicist Michael Seemann calls this phenomenon of the simplest and most effective grouping with *tribal epistemology* within the digital environment. He refers to fake news as a “food for fastening the hungry tribe” and adds that in this case, the “*demand determines the supply, and not vice versa*” (as

the 45th US President election campaign, it appears that, in view of his online election fight and the functioning of the agency in question (for example, in case of Brexit), a careful observation of the further development of such activities and ethical issues, imposed by the accelerated digitization of political campaigns, should by no means be ignored (Brodnig, 2017, p. 132).

- 10 If the information is not in accordance with the individual’s belief system, usually a rather unpleasant confrontation with the situation arises and consequently psychical stress occurs, often caused by the conflict between contradictory ideas, beliefs or values in the individual’s axiological system or worldview. Psychology then speaks of cognitive dissonance (cf. Festinger, 2012).
- 11 We accept the information, which is in line with our assumptions easier than those that undermine our view of the world. From the 1960s on, psychologist Peter Wason carried out a number of studies showing that people tend to selectively collect and memorize information and interpret them one-sidedly in a way that best suits their already existing beliefs and expectations (Wason, 1968, pp. 273–281). This, the psychology calls it the confirmation bias, was initially, from an evolutionary point of view, quite beneficial since it is important for our survival to compare new information with the existing one and to select the appropriate one from an endless mass that is coming in on a daily basis. If we want to survive, we need to select the information successfully. Selective perception is indispensable for our survival. It is the least stressful to take the information that is not contrary to our beliefs, attitudes or behavioral patterns. As a rule, it happens that in this case we see what we want to see because it matches our expectations, desires and fears, and not what actually is (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, pp. 56–57).

cited in Jaster & Lanius, 2019, 76). Fake news is a tempting offer for polarized social groups created with the help of informational and conformal cascades in echo-chambers. Professors Kahan and Braman from Yale University believe that our cultural identity is the one that determines which opinions we form and articulate (Kahan, 2006; Kahan & Braman, 2006). It seems interesting that in groups with a strong group identity, it is considered that their members often do not believe what they say they believe to be true in relation to conformity cascades. The opinions or beliefs in these cases are extremely important because they signal belonging to a group, where the reality of the message is of secondary significance. With the help of cascades and echo-chambers, progressive polarization of these groups occurs and, consequently, loyalty to the group overrides the truth, therefore “*fake news in such tribal biotopes offers a welcome opportunity to people to position themselves with the group or within the group*” (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, p. 78). Social media functions as an echo chamber that reproduces the predispositions of group ideology. When a network settles on an agreed account, collective memory becomes relatively impervious to alternative accounts, even if more factually accurate. Yet while collective memory shores up the group identity of insiders and insulates them from the perspectives of outsiders, it can also become more expansive and inclusive if collective fears, threats and tensions are sufficiently reduced.

All forms of fake news or un-truths are found in online media as well as in classic media due to the rapidly growing diversity and anonymity of the new media, and even more to their price advantage. Only a small part of the new media is subject to traditional journalistic standards, which are also gradually dying off in classical media. The online media also offer a perfect cover and easier operation possibilities for secret services, fanatics and fools. It is easier than in traditional media to publish the results of spying (counter-intelligence) activities and hackers, which are then taken over by the classical media, but it is easier to hide the traces of the source of information on the Internet (Unterberger, 2017, p. 41).

The enforcement of fake news in recent years has undoubtedly been based on digitization and consequent democratization of mediatized news-providing. Nowadays spreading news is unprecedentedly cheaper than it was twenty years ago; all public and private institutions, companies, public and private individuals are almost uncontrollably able to communicate their ‘tweets’ to the public or advertise themselves via a YouTube channel, and thus use content marketing to directly address the consumer basically in real time (Jaster & Lanius, 2019, p. 48).

In spite of the fake news enforcement in its most diverse content and design appearances, it is necessary to investigate the way conversational language, propaganda, marketing communications and public relations influence our thinking, the way they form and shape

our social reality, and influence the opinions and views of individuals as well as public opinion (Brodnig, 2017, p. 107).

2.1. Fake News, Advertising Psychology and Post-Truth

Accusations about the decisive influence on Brexit by launching disinformation and falsehood, especially in the final stage before the referendum, have raised the question of legitimacy of the referendum outcome. The fact that a 'democratic' decision was largely voted in on the basis of influencing emotions using untrue data, the impact of which is indubitable, but unfortunately its actual scope cannot be definitely determined, let alone proved, relativizes the decision of Great Britain to leave the EU, if not in a legal, then certainly in a moral sense, all the more so because of the scant majority. Fake news, therefore, has decisively influenced our political reality, and in spite of the paralyzed English Parliament regarding the adoption of exit modalities and consequently the impeded activities of the European Parliament, interest is still high to reveal the backgrounds of the processes and actors that have caused this political crisis, of the economic elites that financed the advertising referendum campaigns based on 'junk news' and misinformation, as well as scientific and technological approaches that have enabled such manipulations. The election of the 45th US President using fake news, his constant counterfeiting of the truth using alternative facts and self-crediting of the term of fake news, while effectively using this term to characterize all the media, journalists and news that are not in his political, economic or personal line (cf. Brkan, 2019; Broadnig, 2017; Jaster & Lanins, 2019; Kalpokas, 2019; Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2019; Kuhla, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2017). It has to be acknowledged: the media basically enthroned the 45th US President. The Internet is especially important to his identity as a politician, as it has been formed in particular through online social media, which represent the dominant form of his communication (see Issenberg, 2013). It is not so important how many people actually follow the 45th US President on Twitter, it is more important that classical media report about his Twitter statements, and actually force the discussions and direct the public discourse (Brodnig, 2017, p. 137).

Fake news is often based on greed¹². Even more problematic and dangerous, because of being far more far-reaching, is fake news, frequently as more or less targeted *disinformation* serving for political propaganda in the game of power and thus in achieving ideological goals. Of course, it is not to be forgotten that visible and invisible actors are involved, driven by materialism.

12 Unterberger (2017, p. 62), for example, collected some essential facts about the limitless corruption of party-political influencing.

The problem of the digital election fight and advertising in general is clearly apparent in the description of concrete Cambridge Analytica activities during recent US presidential elections. The leading data scientist of a British company, David Wilkinson, explained in April 2017 in Vienna how it works. Cambridge Analytica were allegedly combining big data that was, especially in the US, easily obtained at an individual level, through surveys, using research that revealed how people think. They connected data science and behavioural psychology to understand what directs and drives people on the inside, who they vote for in a certain way, or why they think about things the way they do. The last step is a targeted action: to address the right person at the right time. This is called micro targeting in advertising. Campaigns try to accurately identify the users relevant to them, therefore they belong to a group of potential buyers of their product or voters of their candidate. "Digitization has enabled these types of targeted ads as the users leave many traces online - and companies deduce certain conclusions based on it" (Brodnig, 2017, p. 133). Targeting is much more effective than classical advertising that addresses everyone, and many of the addressed ones will never opt for a promoted product or candidate, while the detected addressed ones will - thanks to the espionage preferences - react to the targeted suggestions as they were intended to do¹³. The fact that information or disinformation can be adjusted to the interests, worldview, political orientation of a digitally disguised individual or group, etc. and an indispensable fact that the repetition of a message generates its credibility and thus the 'reality', as well as the readiness of the individual to accept the information in accordance with his beliefs, to certain extent explains the individual's receptiveness towards fake news.

The problem with targeting is the fact that "it can convey a distorted image of the candidate to the voter and is often non-transparent" (Brodnig, 2007, p. 137). Especially dangerous

13 Data scientist David Wilkinson exposes two groups of voters to be mobilized in the US presidential election campaign: those who still haven't decided and those who clearly preferred the Republicans or the current 45th US President, but their physical participation in the elections seemed questionable. They were supposed to be targeted: the first ones by receiving very individual and separate election promises tailored to the previously identified priority interests of individuals based on their Internet activities; only those topics were launched online that were relevant to the candidate's portfolio. In the second case, the messages were emphasizing the historical importance of these elections and how important it is to support the 45th US President and exercising the right to vote. This 'get out the vote' group was also provided with the electronic help to find their polling location so that the rain or a bad mood wouldn't deter them from voting. To manipulate and gain even more delicate groups of voters - those who in principle prefer the Democrats - required a special strategy which might be in our European understanding of democracy, unlike the American, described as illegal. Thus, by using targeted 'dark posts', they addressed certain subgroups of the population and launched disinformation, statements out of the context or even falsehoods. The targets of the Republicans' cyber manipulation were two groups of the population: young women and African-American women. In order to sabotage the win of the competitor Hillary Clinton as a candidate for the 45th US President, the first group was provided with statements of women allegedly sexually harassed by Bill Clinton, and the other group was targeted with Hillary Clinton's statement describing African-American criminals as 'super predators' (her statement from twenty years ago - 1996 she had already apologized for) (Brodnig, 2017, p. 134).

digital tools are those that allow political parties or businesses to send often dubious targeted messages to a small part of the population. These are so-called dark posts. They can only be seen by the addressed persons. Thus, the general public knows nothing about them, and journalists get these advertisements only if they happen to end up in a certain target group.

3. Commodification of Social Capital and Trust in a Digital Society

The essence of the societal and social networks as well as mutual relations in general is social capital. People connect into networks, just like into organizations in order to achieve more than if acting alone (cf. Stinchcombe, 1986). Not only the relations and progress of society, but also the position of an individual and any other entity within a society depends on the bonds, on the social capital. Bourdieu (1985) defines social capital as an aggregate of actual and potential resources associated with the possession of lasting networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition in a form of a membership in a group. This ensures each member a support of collectively owned capital, a 'recommendation' that gives them the right to trust in the various meanings of the word (p. 248). Social capital therefore exists as a social role only in connection with the recognition of the entity, which is a part of society and is created by interaction between individuals of the entities, regardless of the position of the individual entity within the society. Social capital created this way is crucial for the successful functioning of the entity within a society, work process, and also the interaction of the individual and the capital (OECD, 1998, p. 9).

Any interaction and any cooperation are conditioned by trust. The higher the level of trust in the network or society, the greater the likelihood that the entities will cooperate with each other. Trust in other people or entities is - besides cooperation - crucial for the level of social capital. Building trust is linked with the likelihood of others acting in a trustworthy manner; trust therefore determines a level of risk for individuals entering into social interactions and is directly related to the established social institutions (norms, rules, standards, customs, habits). The moral attitude of an individual as an entity is thus a reflection of the established interpersonal relations in a society and is based on reduced expectations regarding mutual loyalty, affection and belonging. In stable and traditional societies where institutions are supported by legal order (allowed - sanctioned) or professional standards (desirable, recommended, standardized), trust among the entities is much larger than in new-emerging societies, such as a digital society where the old institutions are no longer in force, and the new ones have not yet been developed to the extent that they would be supported by a legal and professional order. So only a third pillar of institutions remains

- the cultural-cognitive institutions. For the purpose of strengthening trust, the key is a stable system with the functioning of all three institutional pillars - regulatory, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions (Scott, 2014) that enable, restrict and ensure the existence and functioning of a stable social, economic and political life (North, 1990). Meanwhile, a non-traditional digital society creates a social situation where people themselves develop the motivation for socializing in order to establish affiliation with the same collective identity, which raises solidarity and an initial level of a generalized confidence.

However, with the rise of a globalized digital society, the process of commodification is becoming more and more extensive. We understand commodification as a process that concretizes the goals of marketization and represents a transformation of nature, things, people, relationships, meanings and non-material resources into the goods in the market. Thus, the entire human life is a commodity in the digital society market, becoming and being an experience that should be paid for. The development of technology, logistic connections, the expansion of the advertising industry etc. have in a globalized world led to the constant emergence of new products, regardless of whether they have a direct use value or serve only to satisfy the individual entities' desires to fill-in the abundance of time, and slowly displace existing products. A similar truth applies to the services, knowledge, entertainment, personality traits, talent and ultimately social relations that embed a person as an entity in this world. All these products and services are being commodified in the globalized digital world; they become marketable goods that individuals and other entities are willing to pay for. Probably one of the first forms of commodification of a person is his ability to make what he offers to the market work, where he gets paid for the work done and where it provides him with survival. Another form is that an individual, as a social entity, offers personal characteristics, talent, knowledge, experience, including its social relationships and networks to the market, creating added value by selling them, a surplus to use in seeking of the new market opportunities in order to commodify what has not been commodified (Goldman, 1992). So, everything is subject to a commodification process to generate profit in a digital society: sharing posts on social networks, drawing Potemkin villages with extreme - only good, beautiful, or just bad, frightening - self-designed news and photographs to influence the emotions of the followers, and online 'friends'. In a digital society, it is about realization of the universalization of the Western liberal postmodern society, additionally driven by neoliberal: the purpose is not merely the exchange of goods to satisfy the needs of the entities, but a complete marketization of everything with free trade (Wallerstein, 2006) and the maximization of profits, consequently eliminating any restrictions in capital creating and ensuring it with

a freedom to commodify almost everything - even the most intimate part of a human being's life. The announced greenhouse gas reduction coupons bring emissions trading, air pollution trading; not only a man - his image or trust, but also the air in a globalized digital society, becomes merchandise that needs to be commodified.

Moreover, the digital society - even more than ever - allows the feeding of an individual's ego. As Holiday (2017) notes, it has never been easier to explain yourself and to boast. We can brag to millions of fans and followers about our achievements, which only rock stars and cult leaders were able to do before. We can follow our idols on Twitter and talk to them, read books and watch TED Talks lectures, pick up inspirations as never before (there is a smartphone app for everything). We can announce great news on social networks and then observe the greetings pouring in. Commodification of the image thus evolves into the commodification of feelings and senses that are reflected through that image. As the image of each individual is unique, its universalization and standardization are not possible. Thus, the performance of a digital individual on social networks is measured by the amount of applause, likes, comments that become a para-standard of a dehumanized digital society of social media.

The transition of a human from a natural state to the social world is characterized by his acquisition of fundamental freedoms, independence and the right to the disposition of his own body, which is a key step in commodification of a man as an individual, as a social entity. Already in a traditional postmodern society, an individual in the fashion industry commodifies his or her image and body, which becomes a piece of merchandise in the market; the image and the body have a potential value both in the market and within economic relations. In a digital society, however, the independence of an individual with rights and freedoms becomes reduced through his unlimited commodification, that is with a transformation into a merchandise, through marketization, using social networks. An individual as a social entity becomes a commodity that produces a commodity. He commodifies his knowledge, personal qualities, image, experience, mental impressions in order to create an innovative invention of goods - intellectual property with a potential market value, and only those who are willing to pay a certain price for its further use have access to it (Suarez-Villa, 2001). For example, accumulated knowledge is transformed into merchandise that in the globalized digital society becomes accessible only to those who own the capital. Knowledge makes it possible to transform the shaped mental impression into a product with high added value, if there is enough interest in the market for this transformation of the mental impression of course. Another typical example of creating a mental impression is the commodification of a man's image, which in a traditional postmodern society was in fact a by-product of

the entertainment and fashion industry, and only flourished in a digital society with social media used to become a primary goal of the entertainment industry and the waste of time. The images of individuals are commodified and transformed into commercial goods that co-create a spectacle, and the core of this industry is a man (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Thus, digital society is actually a spectacle society; we become lonely individuals who are satisfied with the spectacle. However, the spectacle is not only a collection of images (on Instagram for example), but a social relationship among people connected into social networks, transmitted through commodified images on those social networks. This produces alienated individuals who strive to be a part of this spectacle that is becoming a dominant way of life, and at the same time the means to ensure the legitimacy of a digital society, driven by the commodification of the man's image (Debord, 1999). Social and political reality is also perpetuating so many outrageous spectacles, self-righteous tantrums, opinionated absurdities and outright lies that political satire simply struggles to compete with reality. Facts have become a stake in adversarial political contests rather than a generally agreed aspect of a shared reality (Law, 2017).

The basis for any kind of commodification of an individual is personal freedom of the individual and trust. We are free only as much as we don't impose our freedom on someone else because then we restrict the freedom of another and consequently ourselves. The individuals in a digital society of social media, who don't like imposing a freedom of another that affects their freedom, seem to have a fairly easy choice: they 'unfriend' their 'friend' on Facebook or Instagram, or a Twitter follower whose posts they believe to be limiting their personal freedom. Nevertheless, there is always the possibility of an unplanned view of the public posts of that 'friend' or a 'follower' even if it is fake news.

The sense of freedom in mutual relations is a constant effort to establish ourselves in relation to what is expected. To be the right one, to meet expectations, is an inclination of man, it is the socially required role of a person who wishes to feel accepted, to feel whole, involved, confirmed, desirable, respected. But to be the right one also has a very narrow frame and one should fit into this frame. Social expectations undoubtedly limit the freedom of the individual or any other entity. At least to a certain extent, we all need this restriction to be able to survive, not to be rocking back and forth all the time as a boat in the open restless sea; we - the individuals, organizations and societies - need it. And yet, we are ready to give up a small part of our freedom every day especially on social networks, just to avoid further revealing and loss of trust. And so, in fact, we are increasingly commodifying our own trust.

According to the OECD (2019), “trust fundamentally underpins digital transformation and digital society. Almost 30% of Internet users do not provide personal information to social networks because of security or privacy concerns; only 17% of peer platform (e.g. home-sharing) users read the terms and conditions in full, suggesting that more effective measures are needed to protect consumers online.” It is therefore necessary to better manage the risks of digital security and privacy, and to improve the protection of consumers online.

4. Conclusion

The current crisis of facts is part of a much longer process of communication shift from facts to data. According to Law (2017, p. 4), a concern for factual information beyond subjective interpretation emerged with modern accountancy practices, followed by developed statistical methods in science, administration and economics. Market research surveys and opinion polls began to be deployed around a century ago to manipulate political outcomes. All this provided government policies with an air of objectivity beyond the reach of ideological dispute. However, a different kind of post-truth consensus is being constructed by the corporate, governmental and ideological manipulation of big data, algorithms and bio-psycho-social profiling. Using artificial intelligence on the social networks of a digital society can reveal everything about an individual, even the most intimate matters of his or her private life and also how to persuade him or her with what sort of advert. Politicians and citizens are beginning to come to terms with big data techniques for manipulating behavioural change.

Postmodernism is certainly one of the intellectual roots of a post-factual (or post-truth) digital society. Even before it was possible to anticipate the scope of the digital media impact over the last decade, the post-factual disassembling of moral and cultural-political underlying rationale of the society began to appear in the ideological experiments of the postmodernists¹⁴, who widely opened the door to relativity, inconsistency, arbitrariness, and experimentation. The postmodern relativization of individual domains (literary genres, scientific disciplines, etc.) suggested a dangerous disintegration of a rational paradigm and classical values, and a sliding into a modern-age anarchy of a flexible and irresponsible relativization of all criteria.

14 Thus, American neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty (1989) stems from the rejection of any kind of universalism, whether it is truth, reason or morality, and calls for the recognition of radical contingency that is the dependence of knowledge and morality on language games, which proves him to be an ‘anonymous’ postmodernist. Rorty propagates poetic culture of a new self-ironic liberalism that replaces rational argumentation with the creation of new descriptions, which are not to be justified, but made attractive: “I’m singing you – democracy.” The utopia of poetic culture is based on one of the central motifs of postmodernism, on elimination of the boundaries between science, art and politics. This results in the negation of all rational structured typing, which existed until then. A spiritual relationship with postmodernism declared by Lyotard, which celebrates multitudes and differences, is declared by the German philosopher Manfred Frank (1984) saying: “Every sense, every meaning and every worldview is in the stream, nothing escapes the game of differences” (p. 85).

Then, the unbridled freedom of arbitrariness and egalitarianism does not necessarily mean the freedom of an individualized individual, but a multitude of new, complex and rather opaque forms of *un-freedom*. The truth as such is not a priority value from now on, but a placative phrase that is filled with any content depending on the need.

There is a mixture of fictitious and scientific as well as the misrepresentation and arbitrary interpretations of data, information, facts occurring. It is not all that relevant whether something is based on objective facts, but the relevant matter is the publicity, attractiveness and effectiveness of the communicated content; the scope of, for example, clicks, likes, sharing and commenting of posts on social networks.

There are undoubtedly *multiple truths* in our digital society within a single public discourse that can be constructed, communicated, updated, and perpetuated with omnipresent digital technology. Of course, the whole of history is full of the creations of the *truths* (religious, political (party, national), aesthetic and finally scientific), which over time have been constantly exceeding and upgrading in terms of advancement of cognitive possibilities and new discoveries. Freedom of expression as one of the fundamental democratic rights - together with the effective technological options - supported a play of arbitrarily possibilities of the truth and reality. Thus, there are many 'truths' in the social space, especially in the media space (the use of the plural form of the term shows a postmodernist paradigm), even if the facts that legitimize a certain 'truth' can be objective and "are never a matter of point of view or personal opinion – but are the facts, which can be clearly identified" (Kuhla, 2017, p. 131). When Kellyanne Conway, the former spokesman of the 45th US President, speaks about 'alternative facts', she creates a new meaning of the word 'truth' as she doesn't even mean the facts, but an image of another reality for which there is no evidence at all, but the post-truth sense exists. Such practice involves people who do not comply with argumentation based on rational rules and supported by the facts (Kuhla, 2017, p. 132). Naturally, there are many shades of truth even in the pursuit of argumentation committed to reality in journalistic reporting; the efforts for factual truth are rather delicate matter and are always connected to freedom. Thus, as expressed in the German Constitution, "the goal of journalism is not the truth, but freedom" (Schneider, 2017, p. 127).

In a world where it is difficult to distinguish between what is truth and what is false and fake news, science should remain faithful to finding the truth. But various disinformation has moved from the fringes of digital society to the centre of the public discourse, assisted in part by a new technology. Current digital society is a post-real world, a society of post-facts, fake news, perpetuated post-truth, post-factual world (Coughlan, 2017; cf. Pomerantsev,

2016). As information becomes more and more available to be accessed online, as ‘research’ has been opened to anyone with a web browser, the opportunities for countering accepted truths also multiply (Kahn-Harris, 2018), for example, anthropogenic (human-induced) climate changes are a myth, measles vaccine causes autism, Aids either does not exist or is unrelated to HIV, evolution is a scientific impossibility, etc. As climate changes rush towards the point of no return, as once-vanquished diseases threaten to cause pandemics, the task of facing our digital society becomes urgent and difficult. Humans are not only reasoning beings who disinterestedly weigh evidence and arguments. Fake news as unemotional post-factual reproduction of the postmodern digital society and as a part of a post-modern assault on truth offers a dystopian vision of a world unmodified, in which nothing can be taken for granted and no one can be trusted.

Media digital integration and interaction with its flexible understanding and dealing with the truth (whether it is a private or business domain) is closely connected to accelerated commodification, and increasingly more of those domains of human life that are not subject to market laws and striving for profit. Clear boundaries of social acceptance should be set to the digital society market as it expands into the spheres of life¹⁵ where previously *non-market values* (at least declaratively) are being replaced by *market values* now (cf. Sandel, 2012), which “deepens the gap between the poor and the wealthy, builds up social inequality, kills the sense of justice, a common good and public interest, replacing the idea of civic duty and destroys the quality of life” (Stefančič, 2014, p. 155), thus changing social morality. It is about a triumph of *conversion values* over *life values*, where the non-market values from the *goods* that should not be for sale are transformed into *commodities* due to (neoliberal) market ideology and thus are morally devalued (see Varufakis, 2015b, pp. 24–41). By society transforming itself from *the society with the market economy* into a *market society*, commodification has burst out to such an extent that it has led to the social-moral dehumanization of the individual and the community. With the help of digitization and web formats, a public destruction of personal, spiritual and physical integrity of the individual has effectively started on the Internet, especially on social networks, undermining genuine interpersonal relations based on acquaintance, opened and deepened communication, and social solidarity in general. Under the guise of individualism as a free self-actualization, digital society has broadly opened the doors to individuals and other entities for publicly

15 Along with all the absurdities of trading with blood, organs, other person’s womb, insurance policies of strangers, waiting in line, excuses, protected animal species, emission licenses, etc., online formats enable the parents with the profitably marketing of a daily intimate sphere of their minor children, where time engagement and professionalism is certainly a violation of the prohibition of child labor, not to mention the total loss of privacy, public exposure to arbitrary attacks by the ‘followers’.

celebrated exhibition and at the same time a paradoxical isolation of the new-age individual within the electronic parallel reality of billions of participants. An individual awkwardly exposes himself as well as cleverly faking, while sinking into isolation, into actual (not digital, viral, virtual, seeming) isolation, in which he is virtually connected with thousands of ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ of his digital imprint, while he loses contact with the real life while delivering himself as a ‘glass man’ to the profit exploitation of various global concerns, and permanent more or less justifiable critics of a planetary cyber-audience.

The Internet as a main useful acquisition of digital society is less controlled and regulated than the rest of the media space, so new systems solutions and instruments will be needed as soon as possible to enable the public concerned to control such activities. According to Brkan (2019), the massive and brisk spreading of online disinformation, through social media, targeting vulnerable parts of population and (technical) difficulties in recognising their fake nature poses an ever-increasing threat to democracy and fundamental human rights in our digital society, mainly during election periods. The (non)regulatory responses to these challenges have been remarkably diverse. On the one hand, the EU is hesitant towards making immediate regulatory solutions and currently fosters self-regulatory approaches as pointed out in the European Commission Communication on tackling online disinformation (European Commission, 2018b), in the Report of the High-level Group on Online Disinformation (European Commission, 2018c) and in (a non-binding) Code of Practice on Disinformation (European Commission, 2018a). The Communication outlines the key overarching principles and objectives which should represent the guidelines for actions to raise public awareness about disinformation and tackle the phenomenon effectively, as well as the measures which the Commission intends to take in this regard.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB, 2019) is one of the few organizations that has published a handbook for communicators on countering information influence activities, based on the extensive research report of the Lund University (Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, & Fjällhed, 2018). The same team from Lund University (Pamment, Tewtman, Fjällhed, Nothhaft, Engelson, & Rönngren, 2019) has prepared a Counter Disinformation Toolkit for the United Kingdom Government Communication Service to support communicators in identifying and countering threats to democracy. The toolkit is based on a RESIST model: Recognise; Early warning; Situational insight; Impact analysis; Strategic communication response; and Track outcomes. This counter disinformation toolkit includes examples and case studies.

The current revolutionary overthrows of the entire communication and media space in a post-fact, and postmodern digital society can only be compared with the consequences of the invention of the press. It is a complete change of spiritual, social and political framework conditions in global terms. With the help of the Internet, “the whole mankind became the potential author of all mediatized texts, without - as it was in the entire history of the past - a limited number of gatekeepers” (Unterberger, 2017, p. 55). Are citizens becoming immune to fact-based reasoning? Law (2017, p. 4) says that “traditional media struggles to staunch or counter the online circulation of misinformation; indeed, it often reproduces it under editorial pressures. Peer to peer online transmission of misinformation undercuts professional journalism. Sources recommended by a friend are less likely to be challenged or ignored than journalistic sources. Instead they are rapidly re-tweeted or ‘liked’. Pseudo-democratic intimacy is supplanting hierarchies of impersonal expertise.” Politics, governments, organizations and individuals will have to accept the fact that, this time, it is not possible to stop the wheel of time. At several levels, however, systemic corrections, technological, legal, moral and other concrete measures will have to be considered, by means of which it would be possible to at least partially monitor the reality of information and direct the development of entities in a digital society. A partial engagement of individual organizations with individual challenges brought about by a digital society (as we have mentioned in the preceding paragraphs as examples) is not sufficient. We need to get to know cognitive, psychological and neurological predispositions of human understanding, communication, perception, selection, processing and interpretation of information and the postmodern world. We also need to know the functioning and traps of modern digital technology and constantly creatively and socially-critically monitor the social reality of the public sphere and creatively face the emerging social problems arising from the specifics of digital media and the phenomena generated by it.

The digitalization of the emerging digital society is not yet at its peak, but we are somewhere in the beginning, therefore many new things await us. The role of social media in a society as the most visible external sign of a developing digital society is changing, and the social media themselves are in the middle of transformation due to the constant technological and social, probably also regulatory control and the rise of the Y generation, and especially of the Z generation, where there is no loyalty anymore, at least not in the sense we know from the previous generation, when you were ready to support someone for better or worse (a brand, organization, product, politician, friend). People are simply not ready to pay for something just because something is named as it is, so it would be wise for organizations to listen to their stakeholders, develop and implement listening strategies, and adjust to their stakeholders more

than ever before, otherwise those stakeholders will pass these organizations. Even though populist policies over the past decade, due to the speed of the disinformation transmission (regardless of whether they are called fake news, false news, alternative facts, post-truth or otherwise), facilitated by modern technologies of a globalized mediatised world, have shaken the modern society by attempting to break the trust in institutions, the Internet and social media have reduced the world since we can all talk simultaneously, through several communication channels. The emergence of digital communications channels has surmounted the physical and emotional distance between politicians and citizens. At the same time, they have contributed to the democratization of the media space and the public sphere in general, since instead of the one medium communicating with a mass audience, basically all of them can now communicate with many audiences, talk to them and not only share their impressions. Therefore, it is all the more important to maintain the supervisory role of journalism in a digital society – the journalism that should reproduce facts and information.

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