ERUM – General Report: Controversial Topics represented in Medial (University of Vienna)

Content

- General Introduction

- Misinformation, Disinformation, Fake news

- Aims of ERUM

- Methodological approach

- Dimensions of Analysis

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General Introduction

- not all information that reaches us through the media is based on facts

- false information can be distributed relatively easily and quickly, especially through new communication channels online (Broadbent, 2019; Colliander, 2019; Mintz, 2012; Napoli, 2019)

- ERUM intends to tackle this issue by proposing new methodologies and learning material to students and lifelong learners to equip them with transversal skills to improve their resilience towards misleading media content

General Introduction

- Media as means of communication for disseminating content to the public, (analogue, audio-visual and digital media)

- The case studies focus on mainstream media, i.e. mass media, which have the highest number of readers

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General Introduction

- The term "fake news" itself is highly political and as such contested

- mis- and disinformation "as two sides of the same coin" (Cooke 2018, p. 7)

- misinformation as "information that is incomplete" or "information that is uncertain, vague, or ambiguous" but still contains a kernel of truth

- disinformation as "the dissemination of deliberately false information" (Oxford English Dictionary)

- "Real news" as "information that is recent, relevant, reliable, historically framed, hegemonically hip, and multi-perspectival" (Williams 2018, p. 56)

General Introduction

- Incorrect information can invent facts, misinterpret, completely twist or manipulate them, or pull them out of context, ranging from smaller falsehoods and untruths to the spreading of conspiracy myths (Brodnig, 2017; Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2018; Sachs-Hombach & Zywietz, 2018)

- Disinformation must be seen as a major threat to democracy

- targeted dissemination of disinformation can fuel fears and resentments and increase the dynamics of exclusion (Brodnig, 2017; Sachs-Hombach & Zywietz, 2018)

General Introduction

- "post-truth era": media consumers are more likely to believe information that matches with their emotions and personal beliefs, rather than looking for verified facts

- filter bubbles and echo chambers, algorithms suggest similar content

- "journalists are not just bystanders watching an evolving avalanche of disinformation and misinformation" (Ireton & Posetti 2018, 9)

- journalists have to face major challenges (ever-faster production of content, the pressure to generate clicks in online media)

- important role of journalists in containing the spread of false information and contributing to raising awareness for critical media use

General Introduction

- task of science communication: effectively translate scientific facts and research results into statements understandable for the general public

- science communication as well as science journalism: crucial role in the transfer of scientific knowledge to counteract mis- and disinformation

- important to strengthen people's information and media literacy, understood as the ability to select, evaluate and process information from a variety of (online) sources independently, confidently, responsibly and in a targeted manner (Goering & Thomas, 2018; Himmelrath & Egbers, 2018)

- ethical and responsible use of information is an important prerequisite for the democratic functioning of society

General Introduction

- the ERUM project aims to develop a transversal educational offer on the topic of "quality of information between mis- and disinformation today"

- improve the educational offer on the topic of quality of information in higher education and equip students with transversal skills that are necessary for the exercise of democratic citizenship

- foster structured collaboration between higher education and media and contribute to the policy discussion about the role of universities and media in the knowledge and information society

- improve the quality of information regarding research-based communication.

General Introduction

- five case studies identified questions about media representation gaps investigating mis- and disinformation in the media coverage of different topics ranging from the 5G technology, the Covid-19 virus and climate change to reporting on refugees.

- Several partners of the ERUM consortium have been involved in the development of this general introductory report (UV: Critical Discourse Analysis, VMU: Media policies and journalism, AUTh: data visualisation, CUT: Content Analysis, UAH: Discursive News Values Analysis)

Methodological approach

- the methodological framework, which guided the five case studies, has been driven by the concepts and ideas of different approaches: **content analysis, discourse analysis, discursive news value analysis, data visualisation** and considerations about **democracy and media policies** as well as scientific practice and experience

- Sample: all case studies screened at least 300 articles, selected 30 controversial articles regarded as representative of a specific form of reporting

- A template suggested about ten dimensions of analysis, reaching from the authorship of the selected articles, the language, the visualisation to the use of evidence-based research/science and missing facts

Dimensions of analysis

- the methods mentioned influenced the development of the template of the dimensions of analysis and coding sheet, the individual dimensions were informed by the methodological framework and the template was designed based on this preliminary work

Dimensions of analysis

Based on the considerations of the **content analysis**, questions regarding the quantitative evaluation of the material were developed:

- How many articles have been screened altogether, and how many articles have been selected for the analysis?
- From how many different papers have they been chosen and how many of them have been published in national/international papers?
- How long havhe the articles been? Which types of articles (commentary, report, …) have been analysed in the case study?
- How many articles have been identified as misrepresenting the chosen topic?

Dimensions of analysis

The theoretical consideration regarding the connection between **media policies and journalism in democracy**:

- Who are the authors of the articles?
- Are they mainly journalists, researchers, teachers, politicians…?
- Are the authors taking a side or are they neutral?
- Is their position transparent?
- Who is being addressed in the articles?
- What point of view is stated in the article, if any?

Dimensions of analysis

Based on the theoretical and methodological findings of the **critical discourse analysis** as well as its power critical perspective, the language used in the articles was also placed at the centre of the analysis:

- How can the language used in the articles be described?
- Did the selected articles include metaphors, comparisons, special explanations or linguistic peculiarities and if yes, which ones?
- What is being said, what is not being said?
- Do the articles contain a critical perspective and are current power relations being mentioned and critically questioned?
- Do the articles rather reproduce or question common perspectives on the respective topic?

Dimensions of analysis

DVNA aims to provide new insights into journalistic texts based on semiotic considerations such as which semiotic means are used to determine certain message values of controversial topics

- How are the controversial ideas presented?
- Is it mentioned in the articles that they deal with a controversial issue?
- What means are used to explain the different perspectives?
- Do they highlight the topic from different points of views or is only one side presented?
- How do the journalists position themselves regarding controversiality?

Dimensions of analysis

The approach of **data visualisation** inspired the questions surrounding the visual representations of the analysed articles and led to the following dimensions of analysis:

- Are the articles accompanied by caricatures, images, photos…?
- What is the relationship between the visualisations used and the content?
- What is/are the message(s) conveyed through the images?
- How can the relationship between text and visualisation be described?
- Do the articles rather work with static or interactive data?
- How are data and facts processed visually?

Dimensions of analysis

According to the central questions of the ERUM project, further analysis dimensions focused specifically on the **use of scientific sources**.

- Do the articles use research, researchers, academics to prove their arguments?
- In which ways do they use scientific sources?
- Are they using different sources or just one?
- Which kinds of experts are being quoted?
- Do the articles offer links to other related (scientific) articles/material like statistics, surveys, research centres…?

Conclusion: Teaching and Learning Strategies

1) (Prospective) journalists should **strengthen their media skills particularly about the identification of mis- / disinformation**.

2) Students' abilities to **critically examine opinions, explanations or comments published in the media** and to include scientific sources (studies, expert statements, statistics etc.) in their media use should be strengthened.

3) The **cooperation between journalists, scientists, academics and researchers** to counteract the lack of implementation of scientific or evidence-based research in journalism should be increased.

4) Students should **focus more on the subject area of science journalism** and the questions and strategies of science communication that arise from the genre