

## IN THE WEB OF LIES – THE EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS ON PUBLIC OPINION\*

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### Abstract

Fake news is one of the biggest problems of our time. The internet gives the casual user access to a myriad of information, but unfortunately they do not have the opportunity to check its authenticity one by one. This means that it is increasingly easy for disruptive information to achieve a viral reach, which can cause unprecedented damage to the public opinion. In my study, I will explore the difficulties of defining fake news by showing how forms of information disruption can occur. I will then give three typical examples of how the forms mentioned above appear in reality.

*Keywords: internet, social media, fake news, disinformation, misinformation*

### 1. Introduction

*„In Springfield, they’re eating the dogs, the people that came in, they’re eating the cats [...] they’re eating the pets of the people that live there.”* – stated by Donald Trump in a presidential debate organised by the American ABC Channel.<sup>1</sup> With these words Trump was trying to emphasize the bestial nature of the immigrants coming to the US and the danger they pose to ordinary American people. As an example, he cited Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, who he said regularly steal and eat the pets of the residents. During the presidential debate, ABC Channel debunked the presidential candidate's claims by contacting the Springfield mayor's office, who informed the network that they had not received any reports of immigrants abusing the pets of the residents. The presidential candidate responded by saying that the mayor's office may not have seen anything, but that the locals had reported the atrocities on television.

After the presidential debate, Trump's words swept the web. Predictably, the sentences, which bordered on the absurd, quickly became an internet meme,<sup>2</sup> producing several entertaining pictures and videos, but also bringing to the surface some deep-seated tensions. According to Emmanuelle Saliba, a senior reporter for ABC, there is a danger that fake news can easily translate into real violence in the real world.<sup>3</sup> The Haitians in Springfield have seen

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<sup>1</sup> Explaining Trump's false claims about immigrants eating pets in Ohio; <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/video/explaining-trumps-false-claims-immigrants-eating-pets-ohio-113628292> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>2</sup> Will OREMUS: How Trump’s pet-eating claim became a meme for right and left alike; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/09/13/eating-cats-springfield-ohio-meme-x-tiktok-campaign/> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>3</sup> Explaining Trump's false claims about immigrants eating pets in Ohio; <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/video/explaining-trumps-false-claims-immigrants-eating-pets-ohio-113628292> (15 April 2025.)

their sense of security significantly reduced because of the fake news being spread about them. This has resulted in them not daring to let their children go to school. Some have even considered leaving the city, despite having lived there for some time. According to Trump, the original source of the rumours about the dog-eating Haitians may have been a television programme in which a local resident was interviewed.

Disinformation is one of the biggest problems of our modern age, as it is now a well-established tool used by parties against each other in most elections. Since the consumer of news sooner or later becomes a newsreader, the pseudo-consumer of news can easily become a pseudo-newsreader.

My publication consists of two major chapters. In the first chapter, I would like to explore the concept of „fake news” in more detail, as I consider it essential for the content of the second half of my publication. I would like to capture this concept primarily through practical examples, as this is, in my view, the best way to understand the nature of fake news. In this chapter, I would like to present three variants of 'fake news'. I will discuss one, and perhaps the best-known variant, *disinformation*, and then *misinformation* and *malinformation*. In the second chapter I will look at three very different cases: *The Great Moon Hoax* (1835), *Pizzagate* scandal (2016), and the recent controversy around Iman Khelif to try and make sense of that pattern of disinformation.

The Great Moon Hoax was a series of reports published in *The New York Sun* in 1835 claiming that a famous astronomer had discovered life on the Moon. Not just moss or microbes—winged humanoid creatures, moon-beavers, sapphire temples. People ate it up. The articles looked „scientific”, used real names, and were written with such detail that they didn't seem fake. Obviously, they were, however by the time the truth came out, the story had already done its work. It had gone *viral*.

In 2016, days before the U.S. election, a conspiracy theory spread online claiming that powerful politicians were running a paedophile network out of a pizzeria. No evidence. No logic. But it went viral. It ended with a man showing up armed, ready to „rescue” victims that didn't exist. This time, it wasn't a newspaper, but social media that helped the lie spread—and it spread faster than *The New York Sun* could have dreamed of. Algorithms rewarded the outrage.

Last but not least, there's the most recent case of them all: Questioning the qualification of Iman Khelif, the Algerian boxer in the Olympics after her disqualification from the World Championship under vague circumstances, supposedly for „medical reasons.” The official silence around the case left a vacuum—one that was quickly filled by online speculation, gender-based conspiracy theories, and frankly, a lot of hate. Unlike the Moon hoax, this wasn't a centrally planned lie. And unlike *Pizzagate*, it didn't need a group of orchestrators. It just needed enough clicks, assumptions, and an internet hungry for controversy. Suddenly, everyone had an opinion—even if no one had the facts.

The goal of this paper is to explain the disinformation phenomenon through putting these three above mentioned cases side by side. In my opinion this phenomenon isn't just about bad actors or gullible readers. It's about something more human—and more systemic.

## 2. The difficulties in defining „fake news”

The term „fake news” has become irreversibly embedded in the everyday vocabulary. Today, these words can be found in the print press, in the linear media and on any website of the internet that contains an expression of opinion. Nevertheless, defining them is extremely difficult. As Attila Zoltán Kenyeres and Zoltán Szűts put it in their study, „the term itself is difficult to grasp

and interpret with a single clear and all-encompassing definition”.<sup>4</sup> This is made considerably more difficult by the fact that these terms are also often used vaguely and or by speakers with the intention of defusing the more unpleasant news and information associated with them. Despite these obstacles, in this chapter I will attempt to capture the conceptual scope of „fake news”. As I mentioned in the Introduction, an understanding of the nature of „fake news” is essential for understanding the coming chapters

In the cited study by Kenyeres and Szűts, the authors have tried to summarize<sup>5</sup> the various attempts to define „fake news”. As a summary they gathered the common characteristics of these attempts: „fake news,, contains false information, which can appear in the form of news articles, pictures or videos, is linked to current events or public figures, presents itself as reliable, unchecked background, specific intentions behind its creation, and is mostly spread on social networking sites. To summarise the above, fake news is a communication presented as news, which contains untrue information and is created with the intention of potentially causing various disadvantages or benefits.

The above definition is nuanced by the fact that „fake news” can also be considered from the perspective of information disruption. There are three main types of information distortion:<sup>6</sup> *disinformation*, *misinformation* and *malinformation*.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, *disinformation* is the easiest of the above to define, but I would like to point out here that both *disinformation* and *misinformation* are frequently used as synonyms for „fake news” in everyday speech, so I will put a strong emphasis on distinguishing characteristics between the two. According to the European Democracy Action Plan (shortly as EDAP),<sup>8</sup> *disinformation* is misleading content that is disseminated with the intent to deceive or for economic or political gain, and which may cause harm to the public. *Disinformation* is therefore created with specific harmful intentions, primarily for political or economic gain.

*Misinformation*, on the other hand, is defined by EDAP as false or misleading content that is shared without a harmful intent, but which can still have harmful effects, for example when people share false information with friends and family in good faith. In the case of *misinformation*, the intent to share the information is not explicitly harmful, but rather that the person, who shares the false information has been deceived into believing it to be true. From the above, it can be deduced that the most striking difference between *disinformation* and *misinformation* is that while the intention behind the sharing of *misinformation* is *bona fide*, there is always a malicious intention behind *disinformation*.

The third form of information disruption is *malinformation*, which Dávid Horváth describes as „one of the most harmful in terms of motivation, since it involves the dissemination of real information with malicious intent”.<sup>9</sup> In the case of *malinformation*, therefore, the dissemination of information is motivated by explicitly harmful motives. It differs from the previous two categories in that the source of the information is not false but entirely real and credible. The malicious intent is primarily that this real information is not communicated as its

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<sup>4</sup> KENYERES Attila Zoltán – SZÜTS Zoltán: Az álhírek (fake news) definíciós kísérletei és nyelvi jelei; Magyar Nyelvőr, 148., 2024, 203.; <https://nyelvor.mnyknt.hu/wp-content/uploads/148203.pdf> (15 April 2025.).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>6</sup> Dezinformáció és az információs zavar 7 gyakori formája, <https://www.nonprofit.hu/tudastar/Dezinformacio-es-az-informacios-zavar-7-gyakori-formaja> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>7</sup> HORVÁTH Dávid: Az álhír fogalma és helye a hibrid hadviselésben; Nemzet és Biztonság 2023/1.; 25.; <https://folyoirat.ludovika.hu/index.php/neb/article/view/6541/5578> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>8</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: On the European democracy action plan <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0790> (15 April 2025 4.)

<sup>9</sup> HORVÁTH Dávid: Az álhír fogalma és helye a hibrid hadviselésben; Nemzet és Biztonság 2023/1.; 26.; <https://folyoirat.ludovika.hu/index.php/neb/article/view/6541/5578> (15 April 2025.)

original content, but that, for example, extracts are placed in a new context to mislead the reader, listener or viewer. In my opinion, this is the most insidious and harmful form of information distortion, since the news created with a peculiar malicious intent, and fabricated from real information, which may further increase the uncertainty of the news consumer vis-à-vis the press.

There are other forms of information disruption, but they are not nearly as damaging to society as those described above. Perhaps the most significant of these is the press genre of *satire* or *parody*. There are many „news portals” that report world events in a funny and slightly distorted form, but in these cases the aim is not to deceive the consumers, but primarily to entertain them. In my view, such 'news' is not even a matter of fact, but rather a form of opinion behind a particular guise. In Hungary, the best-known example of this is the website called „Hírcsárda”.<sup>10</sup> The most important conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that, in identifying pseudo-news and the various types of information distortion, great emphasis must be placed on examining the intent. On this basis, we can determine which „news” is either a particularly high risk (disinformation, malinformation), a medium risk (misinformation) to public opinion or not at all dangerous (satire, parody) to public opinion. In the following section, I would like to illustrate the different types of information distortion and how their characteristics, as explained above, are manifested in practice, by means of three practical examples.

### 3. Notable examples for „fake news”

#### 3.1. *First of Many: The Great Moon Hoax*

In August 1835, the New York Sun had reported a revolutionary scientific discovery in its pages. The newspaper published the results of a research allegedly made by Sir John Herschel and Andrew Grant, observed in an observatory in South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The timing of the article was also flawless, because the first article was published on the very day that American astronomers first spotted Halley's Comet.<sup>12</sup> The comet's appearance – which was last seen in 1986 and will be next in 2061<sup>13</sup> - was predicted for that year, making it a real astronomical sensation. The New York Sun exploited this sensation successfully.

In a six-part series of articles, The New York Sun focused on the different life forms, which can be found on the surface of the Moon.<sup>14</sup> The „life on the Moon” fantasy world was slowly unfolding article by article. Initially, various buildings and obelisks were 'spotted' on the surface of the Moon, which the article said were difficult to make out. The reason for this was explained by the dense cloud layer above the Moon - which cloud layer belongs to the Earth in reality. The biggest subsequent discovery was related to the Moon's topography. At the heart of these rumours was the so called 'Lake of Death', an area surrounded by volcanoes, which were thought to have been inspired by the craters of the Moon.

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<sup>10</sup> Hírcsárda, <https://hircsarda.hu/> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>11</sup> Kevin, YOUNG: Moon Shot: Race, Hoax, and the Birth of Fake News; <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/moon-shot-race-a-hoax-and-the-birth-of-fake-news> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>12</sup> Halley's Comet, Britannica.com, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Halleys-Comet>

<sup>13</sup> 1P/Halley; <https://science.nasa.gov/solar-system/comets/1p-halley/> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>14</sup> Kevin, YOUNG: Moon Shot: Race, Hoax, and the Birth of Fake News; <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/moon-shot-race-a-hoax-and-the-birth-of-fake-news> (15. April 2025.)

The highlight of the series of articles was undoubtedly when The New York Sun also reported that life had been found on the Moon.<sup>15</sup> By far the biggest discovery was the Vespertilio-Homo – a human-like being with large bat wings –, which later became a kind of mascot for the article series. The Vespertilio-Homo was described as a caricature of various people living around the 19th century, and the articles made several references to their physical characteristics<sup>16</sup> – which was eerily similar to African people –, and their infantile and over-sexualised nature. Looking back from the present, as the author of the article quoted writes, the description of the Vespertilio-Homo seems to have been an amalgamation of all the stereotypes about minorities at that time.

For obvious reasons, many did not believe the content of the article. One of these was the poet Edgar Allan Poe,<sup>17</sup> who, while acknowledging Locke's rhetorical skills, was amazed that so many people could believe the absurd stories outlined in the articles. Poe's underlying intention, however, was not to uncover the truth, but rather a suspicion that Locke had plagiarised one of his own hoaxes and published it in the pages of the The New York Sun.

After a while, of course, it became obvious that the articles published in The New York Sun were fabricated from the beginning to the end. However, it did not have a particularly negative impact on society, as their content made the articles more like a grotesque caricature. In my view, the most offensive aspect of these articles is not their content, but rather the fact that the name of a real living researcher was misused in them by attributing authorship of the article to him. This could have been seriously undermining the scientific reputation of the said researcher.

According to the typology discussed in the previous chapter, I would put The Big Moon Hoax in the category of either parody/satire or, at worst, misinformation. While the articles were created with the aim of gaining more popularity for their hitherto little-read newspaper, I would not think they were conceived with any explicitly malicious intent or with the aim of destabilising public opinion. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the following two examples.

### 3.2. *The Pizzagate-scandal*

In 2006, James Alefantis and Carole Greenwood decided to buy the Thai restaurant building next to their shared restaurant on Connecticut Avenue, Washington D.C.<sup>18</sup> The biggest reasoning behind their decision was that they would rather compete with their own restaurant than wait for a stranger to take over the property. Several different concepts for the restaurant were considered, but in the end, they decided to open a pizzeria called Comet Ping-Pong.<sup>19</sup> If one were to tell Alefantis and Greenwood, that they would be world-famous within ten years, the owners would probably have thought sooner that they will be known for the excellence of their food, not for being the headquarters of an alleged paedophile network.

The 2016 presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was full of various conspiracy theories, and this campaign introduced the concept of „fake news” to the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, and see more: The Great Moon Hoax, <https://airandspace.si.edu/multimedia-gallery/service-pnp-pga-02600-02667rjpeg> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, and see more: Batman and unicorns: inside the original moon hoax, 17 November, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/batmen-and-unicorns-inside-the-original-moon-hoax-149216> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>17</sup> Meg, MATTHIAS: The Great Moon Hoax of 1835 Was Sci-Fi Passed Off as News; <https://www.britannica.com/story/the-great-moon-hoax-of-1835-was-sci-fi-passed-off-as-news> (15. April 2025.)

<sup>18</sup> Tom, SIETSEMA: Game for Pizza, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/05/AR2007070501270.html> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, and see more: The saga of 'Pizzagate': The fake story that shows how conspiracy theories spread, [bbc.com.,](https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-38156985) 2 December 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-38156985> (15 April 2025.)

public as well. The campaign was dominated by the so-called „Pizzagate” scandal, which centred around Comet Ping-Pong. The scandal was triggered by the hacking of the email account of John Podesta, who was Hillary Clinton's campaign manager. Following the hack, several emails were leaked, the contents of which many believed to contain allegations of child pornography and other paedophile crimes. Although this conspiracy has been debunked, it has certainly been politically successful.<sup>20</sup> Half of Trump voters and even 15% of Clinton voters believed that the presidential candidate of the Democrats was part of a satanic and paedophile dark circle.<sup>21</sup>

The „Pizzagate” scandal is still seen as a prime example of a conspiracy theory aimed at political discrediting, as it illustrates all the defining characteristics of the phenomenon. A finding that is also relevant to my research is that the post that triggered the scandal was itself published on a social media portal. The first post on Pizzagate appeared on Facebook the day after the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced that it was reopening a file investigating Clinton's use of a private email server that she used while she was Secretary of State during the previous administration.<sup>22</sup> The FBI was investigating the server because data from it was found on the electronic devices of former Congressman Anthony Weiner. Anthony Weiner, who is the husband of Huma Abedin, one of Clinton's closest advisers, was previously caught exchanging sexually explicit conversations with a minor. In his post, the Facebook user conflated Weiner's case with Clinton's, claiming that Weiner's devices contained data suggesting that Clinton was part of an international trafficking network in which children were sold as sex slaves.<sup>23</sup>

In my opinion, the „Pizzagate” scandal is a good example of *disinformation* in that sense how social media can exaggerate such conspiracy theories. In my opinion, “fake news” is a dangerous tool because it almost always starts from a factual and almost indisputable position. The „Pizzagate” scandal is also rooted in reality, as it was based on the ongoing court case involving one of Clinton's closest confidants in her campaign. This case has been intertwined with later fictional elements, the myth of a satanic-pedophile circle under the control of the Democrats. Weiner's ties to the Democratic Party and his court case have also given rise to the pedophile Democrat horror image. It was also reinforced by the special circumstances of the case: the heightened emotions during the election campaign and the fact that this fake news was spread primarily through social media. On social media sites, users have access to myriads of information in a short time, which does not allow for a thorough investigation, so these messages based on false information are immediately fixed in the mind of the user. I would also like to mention the name of the scandal. The name „Pizzagate” immediately links this fake news to the Watergate scandal, which led to the resignation of President Nixon. The damaging effects of the scandal on public opinion are also clear. On the one hand, Donald Trump's popularity has risen, while Hillary Clinton's has fallen, and on the other hand, the news about the paedophile Democrats has created tensions in society. The most striking example of the latter is the case of

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<sup>20</sup> Kim, LACAPRIA: Is Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria Home to a Child Abuse Ring Led by Hillary Clinton?, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/pizzagate-conspiracy/> (15. April 2025.)

<sup>21</sup> HANULA Zsolt: A Trump-szavazók fele szerint Hillary Clinton egy sátánista pedofil, [https://index.hu/kulfold/2016/12/30/a\\_trump-szavazok\\_fele\\_szerint\\_hillary\\_clinton\\_egy\\_satanista\\_pedofil/](https://index.hu/kulfold/2016/12/30/a_trump-szavazok_fele_szerint_hillary_clinton_egy_satanista_pedofil/) (15. April 2025.)

<sup>22</sup> Sari, HOROWITZ: FBI Director James B. Comey under fire for his controversial decision on the Clinton email inquiry, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbi-director-james-b-comey-under-fire-for-his-controversial-decision-on-the-clinton-email-inquiry/2016/10/28/fbad009c-9d57-11e6-a0ed-ab0774c1eaa5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbi-director-james-b-comey-under-fire-for-his-controversial-decision-on-the-clinton-email-inquiry/2016/10/28/fbad009c-9d57-11e6-a0ed-ab0774c1eaa5_story.html) (15. April 2025.)

<sup>23</sup> Amanda, ROBB: Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbi-director-james-b-comey-under-fire-for-his-controversial-decision-on-the-clinton-email-inquiry/2016/10/28/fbad009c-9d57-11e6-a0ed-ab0774c1eaa5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbi-director-james-b-comey-under-fire-for-his-controversial-decision-on-the-clinton-email-inquiry/2016/10/28/fbad009c-9d57-11e6-a0ed-ab0774c1eaa5_story.html) (15. April 2025.)

a 29-year-old man who broke into the Comet Ping-Pong room with an AR-15 rifle and fired three shots with the weapon.<sup>24</sup> The man broke into the backrooms of the pizzeria to see for himself the workings of the Democrat-controlled dark circle and to free the child slaves held captive there. When confronted with the fact that nothing of this sort was happening in the restaurant, he surrendered himself to the police.

### 3.3. *The case of Imane Khelif*

The 2024 Paris Olympics women's boxing event was not about the best results in the contest, but about a scandal the likes of which the sporting world has not seen for a long time.

At the centre of the scandal was Algerian professional boxer Imane Khelif (or Helif). Following her match against Angela Carini - which the Italian competitor conceded after 46 seconds – a wild rumour began to spread on social media that she was born a man and therefore unfairly competed among the other women at the Olympics with her stronger physique.

The only real information at the time that gave rise to the fake news was that Khelif had been disqualified from the 2023 World Boxing Championships in Delhi for failing to meet certain criteria established by the International Boxing Federation.<sup>25</sup> In addition to Khelif, another boxer, Lin Yu-ting from Taiwan, was also disqualified from the tournament. The reason given in both cases was that they were found to have XY chromosomes in their bodies, which meant that they were not allowed to compete in the women's league.<sup>26</sup>

I wanted to highlight the example of Imane Khelif's case of information distraction for two reasons. One of these is that this case quickly became a public issue, as several politicians and international organisations spoke out. Since the scandal started with the defeat of an Italian boxer, the first substantive reactions to it were also linked to Italy. Giorgia Meloni said that people with masculine characteristics should not be allowed to compete in women's competitions. But the Italian Prime Minister also stressed that the reason for this is not discrimination, but the desire to give all women competitors an equal chance to compete. The United Nations (UN) Commissioner on Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem, also spoke out in support of Carini's decision to withdraw from the match, prioritising her physical integrity, and said that no woman should have been put at such risk. Helif's opponent following Carini was Luca Hámori of Hungary, and both the Hungarian Olympic Committee<sup>27</sup> and the Hungarian Boxing Federation<sup>28</sup> protested against the bout.

The second aspect is linked to foreign interventions, which in some cases also threaten the sovereignty of the state. There are speculations that a Russian disinformation campaign<sup>29</sup> may have been behind the rumours, since the current president of the International Boxing Federation has links to Russian government and that the alleged transgenderism of Imane Khelif

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<sup>24</sup> Grace, HAUCK, CNN: 'Pizzagate' shooter sentenced to 4 years in prison; <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/22/politics/pizzagate-sentencing/index.html> (15. April 2025.)

<sup>25</sup> Richard, LOUGH: Who is Imane Khelif, the boxer in Paris Olympics gender debate?; <https://www.reuters.com/sports/olympics/who-is-algerian-boxer-imane-khelif-2024-08-03/> (15. April 2025.)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> KRASZ, Emil: A MOB is reagált Hámori Luca következő, megosztó algériai ellenfelére; <https://index.hu/sport/2024/parizs/2024/08/02/parizs-2024-olimpia-okolvivas-boksz-hamori-luca-mob/> (15. April 2025.)

<sup>28</sup> „Ez vállalhatatlan és felháborító” – a Magyar Ökölvívó Szakszövetség tiltakozik Hámori Luca negyedöntős ellenfele miatt; <https://24.hu/sport/2024/08/01/olimpia-2024-boksz-hamori-luca-imane-helif-magyar-okolvivo-szakszovetseg-tiltakozas/> (15 April 2025.)

<sup>29</sup> David, KLAPPER: Russian disinformation slams Paris and amplifies Khelif debate to undermine the Olympics; <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2024/russian-disinformation-slams-paris-and-amplifies-khelif-debate-to-undermine-the-olympics/> (15. April 2025.)

was initially spread by Russian news portals.<sup>30</sup> These people included J.K. Rowling,<sup>31</sup> author of the Harry Potter book series.

In my opinion the case of Imane Khelif is the best example of information distortion, including disinformation, because in this case as well it can be seen that there were malicious intentions behind the spread of false information, and it also shows how effectively this news is spread through various news portals and the posts of famous people who also use social media. Moreover, in some cases, this scandal can also be a domestic political advantage, as it can determine the direction of public opinion in the countries concerned for weeks.

#### 4. Summary

In my study, I have tried to give an insight into the main types of information distraction and to give examples of them to better understand their nature.

In the first part of my study, I tried to define the concept of „fake news”. „Fake news” consists of two main components. Fake news is an untrue information that is deliberately spread with the intention of causing harm. Although the definition of „fake news,” is not so simple, there are several types of information disorder. In this chapter of my study, I have taken these into account. I have highlighted three main types of information disruption. The first of these was *disinformation*, which is synonymous with fake news: it is the dissemination of false statements of fact with explicitly malicious intent. The counterpart of *disinformation* is *misinformation*, which differs from it in several important respects. In terms of intent, *misinformation* is not harmful and usually occurs when someone unwittingly passes on a fake news story without knowing that it is fake. The third type of confusion is *malinformation*, which is the deliberate distortion of true information. I have also mentioned the genres of satire and parody as fourth examples of information confusion, which are not harmful to society.

In the second part of my study, I gave examples of the information failures outlined above. The first of these was the Great Moon Hoax, a series of pseudo-scientific articles in an American newspaper about the discovery of life on the Moon. These articles seem almost harmless compared to the other two. The „Pizzagate” scandal, which rhymed with the Watergate scandal, became one of the defining events of the 2016 presidential election and contributed significantly to the mainstreaming of „fake news”. The case was, in short, about the Democratic Party running a secret society based on satanism and pedophilia, run out of a Washington pizza parlour. This allegation was almost immediately disproved, but the marked change in support for the presidential candidates suggests that the scandalmongers may have achieved their aim. The last example I cited was the case of Imane Khelif last year, when at the Paris Olympics, rumours began to circulate that she was not actually a woman, but a man.

In the age of the internet, credible information is becoming as rare as the white raven, and its value is likely to grow. The COVID-19 epidemic has shown how information overload can cause immeasurable damage to society and can be a fertile breeding ground for the spread of fake news. The almost uncontrolled spread of fake news should make us cautious, because destabilising society has never been easier.

Given the above-mentioned examples, future frameworks should be grounded in the following directions in my opinion. First of all legislation should define „fake news” in terms of intentional dissemination of verifiably false information with the potential to cause public harm. This excludes mere opinion, satire, or unintentional. Lawmakers will have to elaborate a system, that punishes individuals indiscriminately. Legal regimes should distinguish between

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

creators, amplifiers (e.g., bots), and platforms. Content creators acting in bad faith should be held more accountable than unwitting sharers. Then Online platforms should be mandated to establish transparent and fair content moderation systems. Legal duties could include prompt labeling or demotion of fake news, while right of the users to contest such decisions. Special attention should be paid to fake news that threatens democratic processes or endangers lives, such as vaccine misinformation or incitement to violence. Given the global nature of digital communication, international cooperation is essential. Legal standards and enforcement mechanisms should be developed through international bodies such as the UN, the Council of Europe, or other regional cooperation. Last but not least, legal reform alone cannot solve the crisis, that disinformation means to our society. A comprehensive public education reform—emphasizing critical thinking and media literacy—should accompany regulatory measures. Support for quality journalism and independent fact-checkers is equally vital.

Fake news undermines trust in institutions, polarizes public debate, and threatens the integrity of democratic decision-making. While freedom of expression remains a cornerstone of the democracy, it cannot serve as a shield for malicious disinformation campaigns. The challenge lies in crafting nuanced, proportional, and flexible legal responses that mitigate harm without silencing legitimate voices. The law must not wage war on information, but to defend the conditions under which truth can arise from the noise.