

Scientific verification methods based on Reuters, USA Today

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Abstract. The article is intended to study the current forms of fact-checking in a linguistic aspect. The relevance is caused by the outbreak of coronavirus infection, which gave impetus to a new stream of information noise and the circulation of lies both in the media and on social networks. Quarantine measures have limited many areas of life, including journalism, and access to verified information is difficult.

Keywords: *fact-checking, semantics, verification, factoid, fact, coronavirus infection, fake.*

Against the background of mass hysteria of the population, a record amount of disinformation has appeared on the Internet; both in domestic and foreign media space. For many readers, navigating the media environment is harder now than ever before, with some actively avoiding much of the news stream altogether. It is no secret that the media space has always circulated in conditions of manipulation and all sorts of lies, but the scale of this information pollution has turned into infodemia.

Coronavirus infection and its spread (COVID-19) is the first pandemic in history to use technology and social media on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive and connected. At the same time, the technology we rely on to stay connected and informed is fostering and reinforcing the infodemia that continues to undermine the global response and threaten the response to the pandemic. Infodemia is an overabundance of information both online and offline. The phenomenon includes various attempts to spread false information, undermine the credibility of the

measures taken by health structures to combat the pandemic, and promote alternative control programs¹.

According to N.B. Berdigulova, Fact checking is the verification of the information received in order to verify its reliability or falsity². Fact, unlike opinion and subjective perception, must be provable and irrefutable in order to be called a fact. In the context of the circulation of information on COVID-19, direct verification - the search for the truth on the basis of recognized information - remains little common among the reader. This gives rise to conspiracy theories.

Let's consider the main methods of the fact checker in manual mode - without the use of automatic databases and data journalist tools³.

First of all, it is necessary to refer to the primary source of information - this is the author of the original messages (newsmaker or directly the generator of the statement or phenomenon, deed). In the absence of such an opportunity, the fact checker is obliged to provide an analysis of the organization of this information, looking back at how it was processed by different channels from the original source.

Secondly, it is necessary to provide expert opinions and two-way coverage of the situation. A one-sided view of the phenomenon, as we noted above, is unacceptable for objective journalism.

Thirdly, you need to pay attention to the details: factual errors, incorrect spellings of names, addresses and positions, insufficient reputation of the author/media/social media may indicate the spread of fake news.

Finally, the fact checker should pay particular attention to the flashy, sensational headlines and information on social media. Recall: large platforms for providing media and social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) provide their own algorithms to combat fakes and prevent their appearance. So, an effective campaign was launched by the Twitter short messaging platform, due to the creation of a mechanism by the appearance of an abundant number of fakes on the topic of coronavirus and American politics. Any publication that contains information about COVID-19 is posted with a hyperlink to WHO-verified information about the virus⁴.

Let's turn to examples of specific publications to consider ways of linguistic verification.

¹ Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation // World Health Organization [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation> (appeal date: 02.03.2021).

² Berdigulova, N.B. Factchecking - a new kind of information space // Ilimiy-pedagogical zhana methodicaly journal. – 2019. – № 3-4. – P. 25-28.

³ Marzak, A.S. Fact-checking as the competence of media and information literacy of a modern journalist / A.S. Marzak // URL: <http://mic.org.ru/3-vyp/669-faktcheking-kak-kompetentsiya-medijno-informatsionnoj-gramotnostisovremennogo-zhurnalista> (appeal date: 12.05.2021).

⁴ Petrova, E. N. Algorithms of protection against fake information in social networks // materials of the IV international scientific-practical conference. – SPb: HSJMC SPbU, 2021. – P. 224-230.

Thomson Reuters news agency is known for quality investigative journalism, which the audience predominantly trusts.

The factcheck by Reuters is one of the most crucial for infodemics¹. During this period, several interviews were published with the famous figure David Icke, who claims that the coronavirus pandemic is a new stage in the world order. Consider the lexemes and syntactic units used in Hayk's rhetoric². "More and more people all over the world - it's increasing all the time in country after country after country - are realising that they're part of a scam. They've been had. And the scam is to transform human society using the excuse of this fake virus".

In this context, we see the use of the fake virus token. Indeed, the conditions of the coronavirus infodemic have transformed the media and even the scientific landscape so that neologisms associated with coronavirus are common. The message generator is based on this, semantically combining the words "fake" and "virus" - seemingly opposite in meaning. Fake is associated in the modern information field with something reliable: the reader gets satisfaction when he learns about the refutation of what he did not believe in. The phrase "more and more people" refers the reader to an uncountable, collective confirmation of his thesis. Of course, the following text does not provide statistics: neither about who supports the thesis, nor about how many there are.

In his opinion, in countries around the world, restrictions were imposed to "destroy the global economy" to ensure the destruction of local businesses, as well as so that governments can support citizens with guaranteed income.

Reuters immediately focuses on the characteristics of the author: it was revealed that David Icke had already participated in conspiracy theories that were refuted empirically or other scientific method³.

Reuters resorts to comparing data with expert opinion. The leading trend in infodemic, we note, is the reliance on influential medical structures and their research. Thus, WHO has confirmed the existence of the virus since the moment of its fixation in China⁴. The editors also focus on their other fact checks: for example, on refuting the hypothesis that the Google search resource reports the non-

¹ Fact check: COVID-19 is not a 'scam' being used to 'destroy the global economy' for a new world order // Reuters : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-icke-idUSKBN27P25X> (appeal date: 10.06.2021).

² David Icke: "IT'S A SCAM!" // Facebook : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.facebook.com/MrCharlieCheswick/videos/153222773205170/> (appeal date: 10.06.2021).

³ Fact check: Face masks do not cause "terrible damage" to the brain by depriving it of oxygen // Reuters [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-oxygen-check-face-masks-do-not-cause-terrible-damage-to-the-brain-by-depriving-it-of-oxygen-idUSKBN2761ZW?edition-redirect=uk>

⁴ Naming the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the virus that causes it // WHO : [Electronic resource] – URL: [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-2019\)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-2019)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it) (appeal date: 10.06.2021)

existence of a virus¹. Thus, the accumulated investigations during the period of the pandemic allowed Reuters to more effectively respond to disinformation in statements on the Web and even in media publications. The argument confirms the hypothesis put forward, according to which the search and verification of fakes should be modernized taking into account the huge size of the media field; the accumulated base creates a foundation to simplify this process.

Let's turn to another fake of global influence - hoaxes around 5G cell towers. So, in the study, Reuters cites the following refutations: reminds the reader of what a virus is and how it is transmitted, focuses on 5g radio waves and the degrees of their influence (do not cause symptoms of the virus) and cites scientific research. Further, the authors of the fact-check provide confirmation of the thesis that a vaccine containing an RFID chip does not exist. Finally, Reuters summarizes the rationale with the argument that countries without 5G also get sick.

The hoax, according to this plan, has been consistently refuted. Verification consists in articulating the semantic parts of one, sometimes small, message. In this case, each component of the abstract message "COVID-19 is caused by network towers in order to then chip the population under the guise of a vaccine" is divided into micro-plots for subsequent analysis using verification technologies (including data analysis).

In April 2021, USA Today posted on its website a rebuttal to the hypothesis of users on social networks and some obscure social media that vaccination against the virus increases the number of miscarriages - allegedly by 366%².

First of all, the fact checkers turned to the commentators and authors themselves in order to find out the details and the original source of the information. the words of the recipient in this case are the secondary text of the media system.

The primary source turned out to be several news publications on the Instagram social network. Presumably, the semantics of such a message grew out of the lack of data on the reaction of pregnant women and young mothers to vaccinations. Moreover, during the investigation, journalists became aware that the first information with this news message appeared several weeks before the actual first vaccination. USA Today reached out to the MHRA and jointly produced a statistical report where the arithmetic proved the falsity of the statement³.

¹ Fact check: Google search results are not evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic is a hoax // Reuters : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-google-search-covid-19-hoax/factcheckgoogle-search-results-are-not-evidence-that-thecovid-19pandemic-is-a-hoax-idUSKBN25H20F>

² Fauzia M. Fact check: No evidence of miscarriage surge since vaccine rollout // USA Today : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2021/04/12/fact-check-no-evidence-surge-miscarriages-since-vaccine-rollout/7062549002/> (appeal date: 11.06.2021).

³ Ibid.

A closely related fact-checking investigation is USA Today's denial of the death of a child from the Pfizer vaccine during a drug trial¹. When contacting the author of the application, it turned out that the news semantics of the message was formed on the VAERS (Vaccine Side Effects Reporting System) records from the FDA, and the resource allows you to send an application to anyone. The author cited Natural News as a source, and fact checkers, in turn, turned to the Factcheck MediaBase resource. The resource was recognized by them as pseudoscientific after a number of publications on conspiracy that were exposed². Then the CDC was brought in, which performed arithmetic calculations: checking medical records and death certificates using database tools³.

Let us summarize the patterns in verification methods: in Western verification, using the examples of Reuters and USA Today, we find the frequent use of various own or third-party databases. Thus, modern fact-checkers replenish the resource bases where publications are displayed, in particular, social media and narrow-profile ones (the "pulp" press also gets there). Thus, when the primary source of information is found on such a resource, it is checked more thoroughly. For a modern fact checker, the reputation of the primary text generator in the media nest is of great importance.

Western verifiers pay attention to the basic principles of information objectivity: the linguistic-semantic shell and content of the media text, comparison with other representations in the information field. The presented publications have their own staff of fact checkers, and they also actively turn to other recognized groups and companies involved in the identification of fakes. For Reuters, a fact check is based on a consistent refutation of each semantic unit of a media message or text: one conspiracy or manipulative hoax is refuted on a planned basis, on the point of each semantic part. USA Today is based on contacting authors and even pre-authors before the original source is fully established (for example, a commentator is interviewed who made a misleading statement on a social network). We see an active trend that exists in the Russian media field, but in the West it is more widespread: a person and a citizen are a direct participant in the verification process.

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² Natural News // MediaBias : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/natural-news/> (appeal date: 11.06.2021).

³ Reported Adverse Events // U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention : [Electronic resource] – URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html> (appeal date: 11.06.2021).

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