Fake News and its Impact on the US Election Campaign of Donald Trump

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Abstract: *In the paper "Fake News and its Impact on the US Election Campaign of Donald Trump", my aim is to study the timeline of the 2016 elections in US and the impact of the fake news on the conclusive results, ending with Donald Trump winning. "Fake news" became a very popular term at the beginning of 2017. Even if it was already pretty popular among internet users, people did not pay too much attention to it. However, things changed quickly after Donald Trump won US elections in 2016. Before going deeper with the overly sensitive subject, it is important to understand the concept of "fake news". This concept refers to the spread of misinformation either via news media or via social media, its purpose being to win something financially or politically. Fake news usually appears on Facebook newsfeed, as the easiest way to click on the appealing headlines. The fake news process may involve just an eye-catching headline or an entire invented story which tells everything except the truth, but it is based on clickbait and earning revenue from advertisement and number of visitors on their page. In this paper I will focus firstly, on the arguments brought by each side as part of the conflict, on one hand Donald Trump and on the other hand Hilary Clinton and her people involved in the issue. Secondly, I will use a quantitative analysis by creating an online questionnaire addressed to people who intensely use social media, trying to find out what is their opinion with regard to the social media effect on electoral campaigns and how they*

think we can be protected against fake news that are published during a campaign period. In my opinion, this subject is of great interest as there are involved powerful names who are now leading the world. Moreover, it is more than present as the mediatic scandal is still in a continuous evolution.

1. Introduction

My paper has focused mainly on the scandal between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton competing in the 2016 US electoral campaign, which is based on the fake news published on social media and not only, leading to Trump's success. With the increasing usage of social media in electoral campaigns, the fake news spread plays a significant role in the ultimate results. There were important names in media industry that published stories, many of them considered fake news. Contrary to people's belief, there were not only fake news which directly helped Donald Trump, but there were also false memes and quotes which appeared related to Trump, bringing him image damage.

My research has focused mostly on the idea that people using internet and social media are likely to face the fake news spread and it is very important to find a way of protection against it. In addition, the future of a country and even of the entire world depends on people's beliefs or choices.

2. Research method
2.1. Media analysis

The research in this part of the paper involves the analysis of the media posts, articles, published stories and mass-media attitude towards 2016 US electoral campaign. My aim is to find out which news organizations have mostly published during the campaign, what type of information they have provided, with regard to which candidate, people's reactions

and arguments from both of the sides, either Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton.

In this research, using analysis as a research method, I will look for:

- media posts names;
- frequency of posts;
- number of posts between campaign days (September 1 – November 8);
- posts categories;
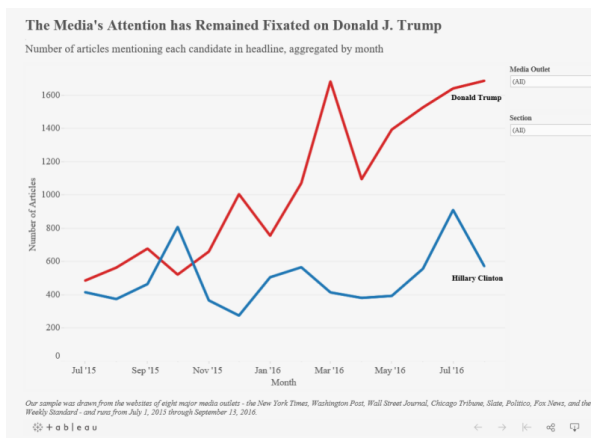- keywords in usage;
- traditional media vs. online media.

Following the things described above, I will see the impact of the information provided online on people's opinions and choices, how social media and other online technologies brought fake news to much popularity among users, what subjects were of great interest for big publications such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, HuffPost, CNN, and Politico and much more related things. One of the media posts with the most impact and implication in the campaign run, was *The New York Times.* I will study the number of posts, the subjects approached and the posts considered *fake news.*

2.2. Quantitative analysis

As a research instrument, I will use the questionnaire consisting of a number of questions (around 15), which will be addressed to a group of people who intensively use social media. With this questionnaire, which will be built on open-ended and close-ended questions, I will try to find out people's opinion about the social media impact on electoral campaigns and how fake news affect us, but moreover, how they expect to be protected against them. After following the paths described above, analyzing 2016 US campaign and people's attitude towards social media versus campaigns, I will try to suggest a theory of how we can protect ourselves against fake news, but moreover, I will try to give people a better overview on social media and its usage in electoral campaigns.

3. Results

In my dissertation paper, I will try to analyze the whole electoral scandal. However, in the current paper, the next lines represent a short analysis regarding the mediatic posts in the electoral campaign of Donald Trump versus Hilary Clinton. Many of them were considered fake news created by Russian sources, going viral with the help of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, also the mainstream media have created a split between voters. The big names in the media industry have created a real phenomenon by publishing scandalous, tabloid and also political subjects, which eventually lead to Trump's victory. Media is said to be the most important aspect in Trump winning the electoral run. A survey created by a research center lead to the conclusion that information about the 2016 presidential election was mostly received by US people via social media through posting and re-posting articles on this subject. Even the filmmaker Michael Moore posted on his Facebook after the victory

The Media's Attention has Remained Fixated on Donald J. Trump
Number of articles mentioning each candidate in headline, aggregated by month

Our sample was drawn from the websites of eight major media outlets - the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Chicago Tribune, Slate, Politico, Fox News, and the Weekly Standard - and runs from July 1, 2015 through September 13, 2016.
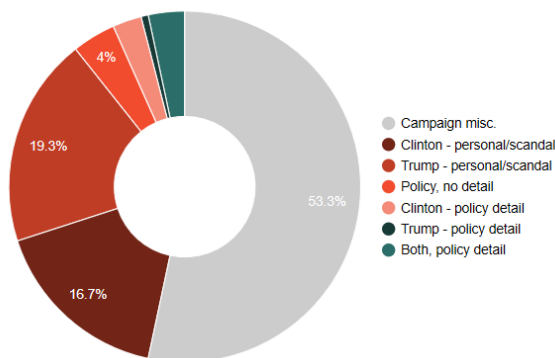
claim that: "Trump's victory is no surprise. He was never a joke. Treating him as one only strengthened him. He is both a creature and a creation of the media and the media will never own that". It is obvious that the greatest attention was on Donald Trump.

One of the big names in the industry that has intensely approached subjects during the electoral campaign is *The New York Times.* I have chosen *Times* as a representative for media source because it is considered to be the most trustworthy news source and also the most interested in delivering the newest subjects on an on-going big event, in this case 2016 US electoral campaign. At the end of the campaign,

after 69 days, it is reported that *Times* had 399 articles on the front page of the printed newspaper and 13,481 articles published online (between September 1 and November 8) relevant for the 2016 US electoral campaign.

All the articles relevant for the two candidates were divided into scandal subjects and policy subjects. However, there were also randomly touched subjects without focusing on a specific outcome.

Total of front-page NYT campaign stories by focus

- Campaign misc.
- Clinton - personal/scandal
- Trump - personal/scandal
- Policy, no detail
- Clinton - policy detail
- Trump - policy detail
- Both, policy detail

It is more than obvious that the source media has touched subject with focus on Trump, but that was also because the main issue of great interest for Hilary Clinton was the e-mail scandal. *Times* had 10 front pages in just 6 days (from October 29 through November 3) dedicated to Hilary Clinton and her e-mail scandal. Rumors have it that these 10 front pages and the e-mail scandal have brought a dropped down in voters' number for Clinton, leading to the well-known result, in favor of Trump.

On the other side of the battlefield, for Trump's attention there was the Affordable Care Act (known previously as Obamacare). The most interesting fact is that the ACA subject was barely touched in the pre-election period. However, it took a great step ahead in the post-elections. Still, the only four front-page stories between September 1 and November 8, during the campaign, were not fully accurate and did not focus on the most interesting facts of the issue. In fact, they focused on the negative aspects, in spite of the Medicaid expansion, the most valuable part of the bill.

Despite the fact that *Times* approached various subjects and different beliefs, the personal scandals were of much greater interest and less focused on policy issues.

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, clouds and some sunshine, breezy, milder, high 63. Tonight, mostly cloudy, low 56. Tomorrow, cloudy, afternoon showers, high 69. Weather map appears on Page D8.

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NEW EMAILS JOLT CLINTON CAMPAIGN IN RACE'S LAST DAYS

F.B.I. Looks at Messages Found During Inquiry Into Weiner's Texts

By ADAM GOLDMAN and ALAN RAPPEPORT

WASHINGTON — The presidential campaign was rocked on Friday after federal law enforcement officials said that emails pertinent to the closed investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email server were discovered on a computer belonging to Anthony D. Weiner, the estranged husband of a top Clinton aide.

In a letter to Congress, the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, said the emails had surfaced in an unrelated case, which law enforcement officials said was an F.B.I. investigation into illicit text messages from Mr. Weiner to a 15-year-old girl in North Carolina. Mr. Weiner, a former Democratic congressman from New York, is married to Huma Abedin, the top aide.

Hillary Clinton with a top aide, Huma Abedin, the estranged wife of Anthony D. Weiner, aboard the campaign plane on Friday.

With 11 Days to Go, Trump Says Revelation 'Changes Everything'

By AMY CHOZICK and PATRICK HEALY

Decision Pulls F.B.I.'s Leader Back Down Into Political Fray

This article is by Eric Lichtblau, Michael S. Schmidt and Matt Apuzzo.

WASHINGTON — James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director, faced a dilemma on Thursday when deputies briefed him about the discovery of a new trove of emails that might be connected to the dormant inquiry into Hillary Clinton's private email server.

Donald J. Trump at a rally in Manchester, N.H., on Friday.

THE SATURDAY PROFILE

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, morning clouds and fog, sunshine later, a shower, high 73. Tonight, an evening shower, mostly cloudy, low 59. Tomorrow, damp, high 66. Weather map, Page A24.

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Staten Island Confronts Rise In Overdoses

A Story of Struggle in an Addict's Diary

By MICHAEL WILSON

The man entered the Red Robin restaurant inside the Staten Island Mall two minutes after 6 p.m. on a Friday. He walked straight past the booths and tables and entered the men's room.

A manager would find him there seven minutes later, lying on the floor with a needle and foaming at the mouth.

His name was Jonathan Ayers, 27, and he was declared dead within the hour that evening, Sept. 9, of an apparent heroin overdose.

NEXT PRESIDENT LIKELY TO SHAPE HEALTH LAW FATE

CHANGES SEEN AS NEEDED

Troubles in Insurance Marketplaces Draw Divergent Plans

By ROBERT PEAR

WASHINGTON — The fierce struggle to enact and carry out the Affordable Care Act was supposed to put an end to 75 years of fighting for a health care system to insure all Americans.

Supporters of a peace agreement that had been years in the making watched referendum results on Sunday in Bogotá, Colombia.

Colombia Vote Overturns Deal To End Its War

By JULIA SYMMES COBB and NICHOLAS CASEY

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — A Colombian peace deal that the president and the country's largest rebel group had signed just days before was defeated in a referendum on Sunday, leaving the fate of a 52-year war suddenly uncertain.

Trump, the Tax Code and a Loophole for the Rich

Now we know: Donald J. Trump racked up losses so huge in the early 1990s that he wouldn't have had to pay federal or New York State income tax on nearly a billion dollars in income.

JAMES B. STEWART

COMMON SENSE

None of this seems to have made the slightest dent in Mr. Trump's opulent lifestyle over the years.

Campaign Struggles to Move Past Tax Revelation

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The conclusion of this small part of the research is that media sources were likely to focus on personal stories and scandals of the candidates, more than on actually policy subjects. Throughout the electoral campaign, fake news played a significant role in changing people's minds. Even though the impact of fake news is not measurable, it is believed that many of the posts published or spread by people on social media have contributed to deciding the new US president. Many studies done after the election, have proven that the fake news is everywhere, and we might know, or not which media post is a truth or a fake. Therefore, we need to focus on studying this issue and on finding ways to protect ourselves against it.

4. Expert sources consulted

In this paper I have focused more on the fake news circulating on social media or media in general and on the 2016 US electoral campaign story. I have had at my disposal some resources from social media field, but most of the bibliographic resources I have used were written post-election on various subjects and questions of how Trump won the US election back in 2016. Moreover, I have used different online resources that have given me the possibility to have an overview of the whole campaign run with numbers and statistics regarding media coverage.

Mark Dice described how the fake news intended to make money, more than influencing people's decisions: "Most fake news and satire websites simply want to make money from the web traffic their articles bring to the sites. The way most website advertising works is that Google Ad Sense (or other ad companies) pay them per page visit, so if the site can create sensational headlines and get lots of people to post links to their articles on Facebook it will drive a lot of traffic to their site and they get paid." (Dice, 2017).

However, the subject in cause still starts discussions on how Trump won the election back in 2016 and there are many printed books and online sources that approach it. My mainly used sources are

online, different sites or media posts that describe the plot of the most debated electoral campaign in the history. Columbia Journalism Review has published an analysis of media posts about Trump and/or Hilary, getting to the conclusion that scandalous subjects and posts were of greater impact and interest rather than the policy based ones.

In addition to valuable and well-known names in the media industry, there are also fake websites or posts that have circulated through social media, especially Facebook and in spite of critics beliefs, are considered to have great impact on the outcome of the campaign.

Therefore, having all the sources at one click, we can find interesting facts as well as important research on various aspects of the 2016 US electoral campaign. Trump's victory was a surprise for a lot of people and for that reason, a lot of theories started to circulate on the internet. Now, with the modern times and technology usage, it is clear that social media can influence people, can change beliefs and even greater, can change history.

5. Conclusion

Having a large number of sources that speak about the electoral campaign mentioned, I could do a lot of research on media posts and reportedly fake news that have driven to Trump's victory. I could make a research as well as an analysis based on arguments from both of the candidates, especially on the scandalous subjects approached in the online media and not only.

In the dissertation paper, I will conduct a larger research and I will focus more on the social media usage and on people posting articles that drove their attention from both of the candidates' side. I will analyze the posting statistics in more detail, with focus on fake news and how these are said to have had the greatest impact on the elections. Moreover, I will create a questionnaire that will help me in finding out people's opinion on fake news as the decisional factor in electoral campaigns. Based on the results from the analysis and the

questionnaire, I will focus on proposing ways of protecting ourselves against fake news.

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