



Published in the Slovak Republic
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Has been issued since 2005
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2020, 60(2): 238-245

DOI: 10.13187/me.2020.2.238
www.ejournal53.com



Pseudo-Chomsky or Media Manipulation in the Scientific Area

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Abstract

Having analyzed a number of published research papers, the authors of the article come to conclusion that manipulations in the scientific world can, inter alia, manifest themselves in the following forms:

- substitution of the authorship, that is, replacement of the surname of a little-known author with the surname of a scientific celebrity (manipulation technique "appeal to an authority") subsequently distributing the now false scientific text on the Internet. This manipulative technique, in the absence of an authenticity check obligatory in such cases, causes a whole loop of citations and references in scientific journals of different countries, since scholars who cite the fake are mistakenly convinced that they are dealing with a genuine article from a respected author; the purpose of this manipulation is not to derive direct benefits for the manipulator, but a kind of scientific trolling: to prove to the academic audience that by falsely attributing the name of an author authoritative in the scientific world to someone else's mediocre text, it is possible to make other scientists take this fake for genuine scientific work;

- the use of scientific works written in a foreign language (without correct references and citations) in their publications (manipulative technique of direct plagiarism) for gain purpose of appropriating another person's piece of writing, passing it off as their own.

The present study has revealed an urgent need both for researchers and for academic journals' editors – to carefully verify quoted sources that may be false. Representatives of the scientific world, traditionally considered to be the most informed community, must not become victims of manipulative influences.

Keywords: media manipulation, disinformation, fake news, media literacy, society, media, audience, analysis.

1. Introduction

The traditional model of media exposure assumes that the audience shares fake messages, not only for profit or personal gain, but also because they are misled by manipulators. The worldview of the audience is formed by its social, cultural, and political perspectives and beliefs, which are often very different or even conflicting. However, today manipulative media texts are part of the media environment, therefore, it is necessary to explore which algorithms and marketing techniques promote or stimulate manipulative content. In order to unravel the problem of false media information used for manipulative purposes, effective models and technologies are needed. False information is not just a problem of the polarized audiences, they have existed

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before, too. It is caused not only by the erosion of traditional journalism's credibility, but also by the transition to receiving the bulk of information via the Internet (in particular through social networks). Looking into these complex processes can mitigate the effects of media manipulation processes (Marwick, 2018: 509-510).

2. Materials and methods

Materials of our research are academic books and articles on media manipulation, as well as Internet sites. Methodology is based on theoretical framework on the relationship, interdependence and integrity of the phenomena of reality, the unity of the historical and the logical in cognition, the theory of the dialogue of cultures. The research is based on a content analysis and comparative approaches.

The following methods are used: data collection (monographs, articles, reports) related to the project's theme, analysis of academic literature, theoretical analysis and synthesis; generalization and classification.

3. Discussion

Today, in the scientific world, great importance is attached to research aimed at developing technologies for detecting media manipulations and false media texts (Bakir, McStay, 2018; Born, 2017; Bradshaw, Howard, 2018; Dentith, 2017; Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017; Farkas, Schou, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Flintham et al., 2018; Gelfert, 2018; Grachev, Melnik, 1999; Janze, Risius, 2017; Kara-Murza, Smirnov, 2009; Lazer et al., 2018; Levy, 2017; Marwick, 2018; Nielsen, Graves, 2017; Pocheptsov, 2015; Pocheptsov, 2019; Rushkoff, 2003; Sadiku et al., 2018; Tambini, 2017; Tandoc Jr. et al., 2018; Van Dijk, 2006 and others).

We believe that The Open University, which in 2014 developed the PROMPT anti-manipulation critical assessment technology for media information (the name is an acronym for: Presentation, Relevance, Objectivity, Method, Provenance, and Timeliness), has made significant progress in this direction. (The Open University, 2014).

M. Kunovskaya applied this anti-manipulation technology to the text with the carrying great weight title "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010–2020).

Presentation (Is the information presented and communicated clearly? Consider the language, layout and structure) (The Open University, 2014).

Here M. Kunovskaya comes to the conclusion that as far as the English grammar is concerned, the text looks correct, but there are some problems with the clarification of the viewpoint, since a clear message should answer the question: who does what, but the analyzed text gives a vague answer to this (Kunovskaya, 2017).

Relevance ("Is the article relevant to the topic you are researching? Look at the introduction or overview to find out what it is mainly about") (The Open University, 2014).

M. Kunovskaya suggests that most readers who have reposted a link to the pseudo Chomsky's article may not have specifically been seeking information on how to direct the mass opinion, but were attracted by a headline that responded to some hidden aspirations. The points of view coincided, and further the author could argue whatever (Kunovskaya, 2017). Moreover, the pseudo-Chomsky's article contains neither specific references to any scientific works, nor a review of them.

Objectivity ("Is the article biased, or motivated by a particular agenda? Is the language emotive? Are there hidden, vested interests?") (The Open University, 2014).

M. Kunovskaya argues that a text, written by an author who is trying to be objective is usually written in an impassive, rational manner. In the subjective, on the contrary, there is expressive vocabulary, metaphors, exaggeration and understatement (Kunovskaya, 2017). In the text of pseudo-Chomsky this affecting style is present. For example, there is the following emotional phrase: "Go to the public as a little child. Most of the advertising to the general public uses speech, argument, people and particularly children's intonation, often close to the weakness, as if the viewer were a little child or a mentally deficient" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010–2020).

Method ("Is it clear how the data was collected? Were the methods appropriate and can you trust it?") (The Open University, 2014).

In the pseudo-Chomsky article (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010–2020) there are no references to any scientific methods, data collection procedures or authoritative sources.

Provenance ("Is it clear where the information has come from? Can you identify the author (s) / organization (s), and are they trustworthy? Are there references / citations that lead to further reading, and are they trustworthy sources?") (The Open University, 2014).

None of these logical questions are answered in the article, and the text itself can be read (in all major European languages) on hundreds of non-academic or infotainment sites (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010-2020). Moreover, this text is published there without a date and without reference to an initial source. None of these Internet sources can be called reliable.

However there is a genuine interview of N. Chomsky with the journalist M. Nevradakis (Nevradakis, 2012).

In this interview, M. Nevradakis asks the famous scientist a question regarding this particular text, "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010).

In response, N. Chomsky states the following:

"I should add a cautionary note here. You may be referring to something that circulates on the internet called, I think, "10 strategies of manipulation by the media", which is attributed to me, but I didn't write it. There have been many efforts to correct it, to get it off, but once something's on the internet, it's hopeless. So if that's what you mean, it's not mine" (Chomsky, 2012).

Thus, in this case, we have a direct statement by N. Chomsky that a popular text entitled "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" is a fake that has nothing to do with his scientific works.

Timeliness ("How up-to-date is the material? Is it clear when it was written? Does the date of writing meet your requirements, or would it be obsolete?") (The Open University, 2014).

The pseudo-Chomsky's article (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010-2020) features no concrete and accurate examples of how manipulation strategies are applied. It is also completely incomprehensible from this text exactly when it was written.

Thus, M. Kunovskaya, based on the application of PROMT technology, draws a reasonable conclusion that the text "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010-2020) is not trustworthy (Kunovskaya, 2017).

To try and detect the source of fake information, we decided to use the Google search engine and first find out how many links to the text "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" are on the Internet.

In response to this phrase, the Google search engine produces 14.500 pages in all major languages of the world. It turns out that before 2002 there were no links to it at all, but we managed to find a French text, posted on one of the popular sites about medicine, "Stratégies de manipulation" (Timsit, 2002), which completely coincides with the English-language article of the pseudo-Chomsky (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010).

Meanwhile, the francophone author S. Timsit, in his article, posted on the popular science site Syti.net, never mentions or refers to N. Chomsky, his article's title does not contain number 10, although it does list ten manipulation strategies.

Our further search for the text "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" showed that from 2002 to the first half of 2010 there was no text titled like that on the Internet. However, in September-October 2010, various Internet sites posted the text "Stratégies de manipulation" (both in French and English) under the name "Noam Chomsky – "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010), and in subsequent years it began to multiply in different languages on hundreds of sites.

The emergence of unverified information on the Internet, unfortunately, is far too common today. However, the case with the text fraudulently attributed to N. Chomsky turned out to be much more complicated: it started to be actively quoted – as a genuine academic source – in scientific articles, monographs, research reports and dissertations.

For example, a reference to this fake is contained in the report on the scientific project "Noam Chomsky – Theorist", carried out by three American scientists (Aguilar et al, 2012: 3) in Texas University in 2012. Another reference to the pseudo-Chomsky was made by French scientists who published their article in the academic journal *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* (De Visscher, Latinis, 2015: 101).

References to the text of pseudo-Chomsky penetrated the monograph of Dr. E.E. Rumyantseva "The Truth Against Deceiving the Population, Distorting Reality and Replacing Concepts: expert commentary on media news in 1997-2017" (Rumyantseva, 2017: 6), the book of F.O. Bogachev on a positive way of thinking (Bogachev, 2011: 179-182), in dozens of articles

(Farafontova, 2012: 54-55; Fedotova, 2015: 417, 419; Gogol, Protopopova, 2014: 231; Kanataev, 2014: 11; Kipyatkova, Torgovanova, 2016: 76-78; Larionova, 2015: 1083; Orekhov, 2019: 142, etc.).

Moreover, Ph.D. dissertations were defended, the authors of which (together with their supervisors) (Shikhaliyeva, 2014: 105-106; Trokhinova, 2019: 236, 335) seriously consider the text "Noam Chomsky - "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Pseudo-Chomsky, 2010) as a real scientific source.

These facts indicate that a fake launched into mass Internet rotation and scientific circulation using the classical manipulative technique of "appeal to an authority" can be uncritically accepted as genuine not only by the mass audience, but also by scientists who have not questioned the source and correctness of this information. Paradoxically, in this case, quite a few authors of research papers on media manipulations themselves became victims of media manipulation using a false article on this topic.

It is good that Professor N. Chomsky directly asserted that he has never written the text "10 strategies of manipulation by the media" (Chomsky, 2012). But if an Internet troll tries to launch a false text attributing it to a famous scientist who passed away, it will be much more difficult to expose such a fake.

3. Results

We have applied the PROMPT anti-manipulation technology (The Open University, 2014) to an academic article on media education "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" published in the scientific journal "Proceedings of the Belarusian State Technological University" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78).

The analysis of this article shows the following:

Presentation

The article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" is quite logical, information on the state of affairs with media education of Belarus schoolchildren and students is given in a scientific style.

Relevance

This article is fully consistent with media education topics, it has a review of the scientific literature on this topic.

Objectivity

This article does not seem biased, it is written in a standard scientific language, devoid of a bright emotional coloring. Gain interests are not visible.

Method

Seemingly, the data for the article was collected and analyzed in the traditional way for a scientific article (collection and comparative analysis of scientific literature on the topic), but the question of the methods' validity will be disclosed below.

Provenance

Using the Internet search engine and the anti-plagiarism software program, we discovered that the following scientific monographs and articles became real sources for the article:

- "Media Education of Young Audiences" (Zhilavskaya, 2009);
- "Research and practical implementation of media educational projects in modern Belarus" (Chelysheva, 2012: 42-52);
- "The discourse of media education research as an articulation of the challenge of the cultural situation" (Sharko, 2012).

Meanwhile, the above sources are neither correctly cited in the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78), nor present in the *References* section after the article.

The plagiarism control check of the text of the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78) shows that it contains almost 90 % plagiarism and is a compilation of large paragraphs from the above scientific works (Chelysheva, 2012 : 42-52; Sharko, 2012; Zhilavskaya, 2009).

The text "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78), excluding the list of references, consists of 31.045 characters (including spaces). Of this volume, the text, fully "borrowed" from the monograph "Media Education of Young Audiences" (Zhilavskaya, 2009), makes up 3.782 characters (12.2 %). The main body of the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017:

71-78) almost entirely consists of a text "borrowed" from the article by I.V. Chelysheva (16.893 characters, i.e. 54.4 % of the total text that A. A. Bogdanov and L.I. Petrova ascribed to themselves), and the conclusion is taken from the article by O.I. Sharko (6.859 characters, i.e. 22.1 %).

In total, a borrowed text without attribution and without quotation marks constitutes 27.534 characters in the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78), i.e. 88.7 %.

Thus, not only the (stolen) information's origin is revealed, but it is also proved that the "authors" of this article are not trustworthy, and the existing links/quotes available in "their" text are not reliable, since they do not refer to the three real sources which A.A. Bogdanova and L.I. Petrova unethically took advantage of.

Returning to the *Objectivity* criterion, it can be argued that behind the plagiarism in the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78), there are apparently some vested interests: an imitation of scientific work, an attempt to manipulate academic audience by passing off texts from other people's works as their own.

Timeliness

The article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" (Bogdanova, Petrova, 2017: 71-78) was published in 2017, however, the list of references includes academic sources dating from 1989 to 2011. The absence of more recent sources from 2012-2017 is explained by the fact that the list was also not compiled by A.A. Bogdanova and L.I. Petrova, but it was directly taken from the scientific works mentioned above (Chelysheva, 2012 : 42-52; Sharko, 2012; Zhilavskaya, 2009), which, logically for *their* publication time, could not contain references to books or articles later than 2012.

Thus, the issue of the timeliness of the article "The system of youth media education in the Republic of Belarus" is not applicable because of the plagiarism case.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, manipulations in the academic environment can, among other, take one of the following forms:

- substitution of the authorship, that is, replacement of the surname of a little-known author with the surname of a scientific celebrity ("appeal to an authority" technique) subsequently distributing the now false scientific text on the Internet. This manipulative technique, in the absence of an authenticity check obligatory in such cases, causes a whole loop of citations and references in scientific journals of different countries, since scholars who cite the fraud are mistakenly convinced that they are dealing with a genuine article from a respected author; the purpose of this manipulation is not to derive direct benefits for the manipulator, but a kind of scientific trolling: to prove to the academic audience that by falsely attributing the name of an author authoritative in the scientific world to someone else's mediocre text, it is possible to make other scientists take this fake for genuine scientific work;

- the use of scientific works written in a foreign language (without correct references and citations) in their publications (direct plagiarism) for gain purpose of appropriating someone's work and intellectual property, passing it off as their own.

The present study has revealed an urgent need both for researchers and for academic journals' editors – to carefully verify quoted sources that may be false. Representatives of the scientific world, traditionally considered to be the most informed community, must not become victims of manipulative influences.

6. Acknowledgements

The reported study was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) according to the research project № 20-013-00001 "Media education of pedagogical profile students as a tool to resist media manipulation".

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