# The Fake News in the Digital Environment: From the Information Pandemic to Packaged Awareness in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War

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## Abstract

*Technological development has created a fertile space for circulating, exchanging, and disseminating information on the widest possible scale, embodying the essence of interactivity in its clearest manifestations. At the same time, it has opened the way for exploiting this openness and fluidity in employing such news for purposes ranging from ideological and psychological manipulation to disrupting audience choices and positions, as well as shaping public opinion. This pattern of "mechanizing" news may begin with a professional error, move through the fabrication of falsehoods and the falsification of information, and eventually lead to the formation of "packaged" awareness and the manipulation of minds. This is what we address through epistemic interpretation and in-depth analysis in this research paper within the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.*

**Keywords:** *fake news, Digital Environment, information pandemic, packaged awareness, Russian-Ukrainian war.*

## Introduction

There is no disagreement that the phenomenon of "fake news" has taken on multiple designations accompanying journalistic practice throughout its various stages of development. It has manifested in the dissemination of reports and data containing inaccurate information or those lacking sufficient precision, However, the acceleration of technology and the massive flow of information have multiplied both its impact and the variety of ways of "producing" it, according to objectives that range from political, economic, social, and cultural.

In this context, dealing with events, facts, and news transmission takes on specific dimensions that differ from one society to another, from one media system to another, and even within the same society and political system, the prevailing communicative context constitutes the main driving force behind this transformation in journalistic practices, shifting the role of media from simply reporting, educating, and entertaining to directing audiences toward a ready-made, pre-packaged mode of thinking. This type of information is consumed as is, without analysis or questioning, resembling canned food: "ready to use," yet often emptied of genuine value or distorted in content. It molds itself in the frameworks of modernity, openness, and cosmopolitanism, but in practice, it oppresses and deforms local cultures, while dominant cultures, empowered by communication technologies and media tools, impose themselves. In this purely digital context, characterized by the speed of information transmission and interactivity, algorithms play a pivotal role in guiding, containing, and shaping perceptions, with the inevitable outcome of diminishing the role of traditional institutions.

Amid these conflicting dynamics and overlapping concepts aimed at "reification," perpetuating "commodity fetishism," and mobilizing human thought for domination and control within the framework of the "instrumental reason" approach, it becomes an ethical obligation for researchers to place these propositions under scientific scrutiny and rational evaluation. This is precisely what we aim to explore, through a critical analytical approach, starting from a central question: **How does fake news turn into a tool for manipulating minds?**

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To address this question, we will examine: misleading news and its multiple terminologies, its spread, and the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war; then the information pandemic, focusing on its concept, the link between misinformation and the pandemic, its extensions, and the war context; and finally, the element of "packaged awareness" which includes the formation of awareness in the digital environment through media disinformation, sources of deception, mind manipulation, and the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

**Fake News:**

**Multiplicity of Terminologies:**

Regardless of the variety of terms in foreign languages, the Arabic language itself uses multiple designations for this phenomenon: misleading news, fake (or falsified) news, false news, erroneous news, deceptive news, incorrect news, and inaccurate news. In foreign dictionaries, the English term Fake News of Anglo-American origin prevails, while in French some still use the term **Intox.**

**Misleading News***:* The New York Times defines Fake News as "a type of yellow journalism and propaganda consisting of deliberate disinformation, deceit, or fraudulent news disseminated through print media, traditional broadcast media, or social media via the Internet." For its part, the Ethical Journalism Network defines fake news as news that is "deliberately fabricated with the intention of deceiving another party, persuading them to believe lies, or casting doubt on facts." Another definition holds that fake news are "stories made up from scratch, often deliberately, which are lies (..). They may not only mean exaggeration and sensationalism in reporting and handling news, but also represent a process of misleading public opinion, whether systematically and intentionally, or spontaneously as a result of misjudgment" (**Deleimi, 2018**)*.*

Thus, they are media contents containing false or distorted information, published intentionally or unintentionally, leading to misleading or confusing the public about the reality of a certain event.

**False News:** This term is *"*used interchangeably with the term disinformation or other types of disorder within the ongoing information system. It has become a broad term used to describe inaccurate or fabricated news. However, the term 'false news' does not accurately capture the distinction between disinformation, misinformation, or the misuse of information. It is often used by authoritarian abusers and others to undermine genuine discourse they dislike by mixing it with false narratives." (**institute**, 2011)

Accordingly, it is a general term used to refer to entirely fabricated or misleading news, deliberately spread to achieve specific objectives, such as influencing public opinion, gaining profit, or achieving political advantages. Its usage became widespread after the 2016 U.S. elections won by Donald Trump.

**Fake News (Zā'ifa):** Defined as *"a* type of yellow journalism or deliberate propaganda composed of misleading or deceptive information disseminated through traditional print and broadcast media, or through digital social media*"* It is also defined as *"*information that imitates the production of media content in form, but not in intent or organizational process for instance, lacking editorial rules and processes that discard falsehood in favor of truth. Thus, fake news is a subcategory of the broader class of misinformation-false information about the state of the world." (**Rand,** 2018, p. 3).

**Fabricated News:** These are news stories built upon falsification of reality, aimed at misleading and distorting, most often with political objectives. They are difficult to detect and spread rapidly for example, when an image of detainees being abused by soldiers in one country is circulated as if it happened in another, in order to harm its reputation.

It is essential to note that fabrication does not merely mean lying, but rather creating an event or statement that never happened in the first place, such as publishing an article about a presidential decree that never existed.

What distinguishes fake news is its ability to capture readers' attention through sensationalism, bypassing the traditional gatekeeping function. Its forms vary: the content may be entirely fabricated or partially falsified. Moreover, it relies on emotions and the concealment of evidence to guide and mislead audiences, while producing a false context by adding links, images, and headlines around the fabricated content to give it a sense of credibility.

Fake news often spreads when there is a shortage of verified information from original sources, Promoters of fake news typically depend on new and unofficial media platforms to avoid restrictions and information verification procedures.

Recent studies indicate that the multiplicity of terms in the field of misleading news reflects the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon in different contexts, whether in form or intent. According to research conducted by **Wardle (2017)** in the framework of UNESCO's "Guide to Classifying Misleading News", different types of media deception can be distinguished, including fake news, deliberate disinformation, misinformation, and others something that requires precise awareness among audiences to understand the subtle differences between these concepts.

Similarly, **Lazer (2018)** explains in their study that fake news is characterized as media products deliberately created to mislead, often aiming to influence public opinion in complex political and social contexts.

**In summary**, the concepts related to misleading news differ according to intent and type of information: **Misleading news** refers to inaccurate information circulated without the intent to cause harm, But **False news** is produced and disseminated with the explicit aim of deceiving the public and achieving certain gains, **Fake news** consists of false information deliberately broadcast for negative influence, often linked to targeted campaigns, and **Fabricated news** means creating entirely fictitious events or statements that never actually happened but are presented as fact.

The fundamental difference between these types lies in the intent to deceive: misleading news is often spread in good faith, while the others rely on deliberate lies. Fabricated news lacks any factual basis, unlike misleading news which may contain elements of truth. Understanding these distinctions is essential to combat media disinformation. Thus, audiences must always verify sources before believing or sharing news.

**The Spread of Misleading News:**

**The spread of misleading and false news between traditional and digital contexts:**
The spread of misleading and false news differs between the traditional and digital contexts in terms of production mechanisms, dissemination, and regulatory tools, In the traditional context, mass media such as newspapers, radio, and television were the main sources of news transmission, Although some cases of misleading or false news did exist in this context, their spread was relatively limited due to strict professional standards and editorial institutions that enforced fact-checking and source verification before publication. The long time required to produce and publish news also acted as a natural barrier against the rapid spread of false information. Moreover, media institutions were subject to legal and ethical accountability, which significantly restricted the widespread dissemination of false news (**Allcott,** 2017, pp. 211-235).

In the digital context**,** the landscape has changed dramatically with the emergence of the Internet and social media platforms. Publishing news has become easy and instantaneous, and any individual can act as a producer and distributor of information without editorial oversight or adherence to professional standards.

This transformation has led to a tremendous increase in the speed of spreading misleading and false news, especially with digital platform algorithms that privilege sensational, emotionally resonant content, which boosts its shareability at the expense of credibility. Moreover, *filter bubbles* and *echo chambers* have reinforced false beliefs by repeatedly presenting news aligned with users' pre-existing convictions, making the correction of misinformation even more difficult. Thus, while the traditional context largely confined

misleading news within limited channels, the digital context has provided it with an open, accelerated space, increasing the complexity of confronting it (**Pariser**, 2011, pp. 311-312).

It can therefore be said that the traditional context possessed stronger mechanisms for ensuring news credibility through professional and institutional tools, while the digital context has facilitated the spread of misleading news due to its openness, rapid information flow, and limited regulatory controls.

False news often spreads among closed-minded individuals, who reject ideas contradicting their own and avoid engaging in open dialogue or exchanging opinions, These individuals tend to have lower cognitive capacities**:** people with higher intellectual abilities or advanced reasoning skills are better able to detect inaccurate or contradictory information, Age is also a factor some older individuals are less capable of eliminating related but false information from their working memory, making them easier victims of fake news.

The quality of media content plays a significant role as well. In an information-saturated network, low-quality content is often more likely to spread widely than high-quality material. Additionally, *the* illusory truth effect *shows* that when background knowledge about a topic is shaped by cognitive or ideological bias, or by information that supports entrenched beliefs, individuals are more likely to share and disseminate such content on a broad scale, Emotional factors should not be overlooked either people often interact with and share news out of emotional motivations rather than factual accuracy.

With the growing spread of misleading news in the digital age, recent studies confirm that digital algorithms play a major role in amplifying fake news circulation**.**

A study by **Vosoughi** (2018)**,** published in Science, revealed that false news spreads both faster and more widely than true news on social media platforms due to its emotional appeal and ability to spark controversy. Furthermore, **Flanagin (2020)** emphasizes the importance of media literacy as one of the most effective tools for combating the spread of misleading news, by strengthening individuals' ability to critically assess sources and accurately understand content.

**The Information Epidemic (Infodemic):**

**The Concept:**

The term information epidemic refers to the overwhelming flood of information circulating both online and offline, It encompasses deliberate attempts to spread false information with the aim of undermining public health responses while serving alternative collective or individual objectives, Such misinformation and disinformation can harm people's physical and mental health, intensify stigmatization, threaten vital health achievements, and encourage non-compliance with health measures.

The infodemic a translation of the English term infodemic describes the excessive volume of information surrounding a particular problem, making its solution increasingly difficult. Although COVID-19 was not the first pandemic to hit the world, it triggered the first true *infodemic* in the digital sphere. For instance, during the SARS outbreak in 2003, the world had not witnessed such a rapid and massive flow of false information. In contrast, nearly 4,000 new websites on COVID-19 were detected, about 3% of which served as platforms for fake news about the virus (Houari, 2022)

The term infodemic was first coined by **David Rothkopf** in 2003 in an article published in The Washington Post during the SARS outbreak, In that article, Rothkopf argued that the danger posed by the spread of misleading information about the disease was as significant as the virus itself. The flow of false and exaggerated news fueled public panic and disrupted health response efforts, Rothkopf defined the information epidemic as: "an excessive and rapid spread of a mixture of facts, rumors, fears, and speculations, which amplifies the effects of real or imagined crises and exacerbates them" (**Rothkopf**, 2003). Thus, he established a new concept that has since been widely adopted in media and communication

studies to describe situations where information spirals out of control, creating social, political, or health-related chaos.

**Misleading News and the Information Epidemic - Extension:**

The transformation of misleading news into an *information epidemic* occurs through several interconnected stages:

-**Inflated information production:** With the development of digital communication technologies, the ability to produce information has become available to everyone, increasing the volume of published news without strict editorial oversight. This overproduction of information is a modern phenomenon resulting from the ease of digital publishing and the diversity of communication channels. Such information overload makes it difficult for individuals to distinguish between truth and lies, leading to cognitive fatigue that weakens the public's ability to make informed and balanced decisions. This excessive production does not concern news alone but also includes scientific studies, news reports, and social media posts.

-**Rapid spread through digital platforms:** Social media algorithms contribute significantly to amplifying content that triggers emotional reactions regardless of its accuracy, thus creating an ideal environment for the spread of misinformation (**Gordon Pennycook**, 2020, pp. 770–780).

-**Narrowing of cognitive neutrality:** Individuals tend to believe information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, even when false, leading to the recycling of misleading news within opinion bubbles.

-**Impact on social behavior:** Continuous exposure to misinformation directly influences both individual and collective decision-making, as witnessed during the spread of false news about COVID-19 vaccines, which fueled widespread vaccine hesitancy.

-**Information noise (disorder):** The simultaneous flow of massive amounts of accurate and inaccurate information creates information noise, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to separate truth from falsehood (**Cook,** 2017, pp. 353–369).

-**Erosion of trust in official sources:** The infodemic undermines public trust in the media and in health or governmental institutions, aggravating social and political crises.

In conclusion, misleading news transforms into an information epidemic (infodemic*)* through the convergence of multiple intertwined factors that accelerate the spread of disinformation and intensify its social effects, **Chief** among these is the ease of digital production, which enables any individual or group to create and disseminate media content without traditional editorial or fact-checking processes, thereby generating an unprecedented information surplus, **Secondly**, the speed of dissemination through interactive media such as social networks and search engines allows misleading news to reach mass audiences in a very short time, amplified by algorithms that favor sensational and emotionally charged content over accuracy and objectivity, **The Third Critical Factor** is the psychological readiness of individuals to accept information that aligns with their inclinations, ideas, perceptions, and prior beliefs a phenomenon known in cognitive psychology as confirmation bias, This natural tendency makes people more likely to repost misleading information without verifying it, which reinforces its persistence and circulation within societies. Moreover, the dense flow of both accurate and false information produces what is called cognitive noise, in which information overlaps in the recipient's mind to the point that it prevents them from distinguishing truth from falsehood.

Over time, this state of informational chaos evolves into a structural crisis that threatens societal stability: public trust in official sources weakens, conspiracy theories are fueled, and faulty individual or collective decisions are made, In such an environment, false news ceases to be a marginal phenomenon and instead becomes an active factor influencing public health, policymaking, and social security.

Accordingly, addressing the information epidemic (infodemic) is not limited to correcting false information but requires multi-dimensional approaches, including: media literacy awareness, teaching critical thinking skills, developing more responsible digital algorithms, and enacting regulations that balance freedom of expression with combating disinformation. Understanding the mechanisms by which misleading news transforms into an infodemic is thus a crucial step toward building a more conscious information society, resilient against future crises.

## "Packaged" Awareness

Amid the sweeping tide of globalization, the concept of **"packaged awareness"** has emerged strongly to describe the condition of commodified and directed mental consumption. It refers to awareness that is manufactured and pre-packaged by media and cultural institutions, then circulated among individuals without critical thought or personal reflection.

The receiver thus becomes a consumer of ideas and values rather than a producer or critic of them. This phenomenon, born out of the continuous flow of ready-made information, weakens the capacity for independent analysis. Individuals become trapped within predefined intellectual and cultural frameworks, limiting the diversity of perspectives and the richness of human experience.

"Packaged awareness" reflects a crisis in self-identity formation and conscious decision-making ability. Hence, the need to strengthen critical thinking skills grows more urgent as a means of liberating awareness from these pre-fabricated molds.

## Shaping Awareness in the Digital Environment:

Awareness encompasses imagination, memory, reflection, emotions, comparisons, and reasoning, with the capacity to solve problems and make decisions. It does not mean that the mind becomes absent during sleep, but rather that it is oriented toward external goals. Awareness is both the evidence of the mind's existence and its perception at the same time. It can be defined in two ways: one concrete and the other conceptual, **As Brentano** (1997, p. 29) noted: "Awareness has different uses: almost metaphysical, to represent something that is uniquely human, described as empirical substance", Awareness plays an essential role revealed through its development: it is necessary for handling new and complex matters, enabling both short- and long-term planning before making real-world decisions. It has limited capacity in organizing and processing external stimuli at a given moment. Certain processes such as intrusive thoughts, fantasies, or explicit content may fail to reach awareness if the mind learns to block or suppress them.

In the digital environment, shaping awareness has become one of the most significant features of the modern age, Digital platforms profoundly influence how individuals perceive the world around them: "The digital environment does not merely transmit knowledge but reshapes patterns of thought and the sense of self" (**Hayles**, 1999). Interaction with digital media gradually transforms patterns of mental perception and behavior, shaping new identity conceptions based on virtual experiences rather than real ones.

The digital environment thus redefines the relationship between humans, their bodies, and their surroundings, making human awareness the outcome of the interplay between technology and digital culture.

The constant flow of online information contributes to constructing a new virtual reality, where boundaries between truth and representation blur, Digital networks are no longer just communication tools but social structures that shape collective awareness through control over discourses and circulating content.

At the same time, the digital sphere reinforces identity politics: individuals engage in virtual communities that reproduce their perceptions of themselves and of others, These environments do not foster neutral awareness but rather construct directed awareness, guided by preferential algorithms that impose certain cognitive and behavioral priorities (**Couldry,** 2012).

Consequently, awareness in the digital environment is the product of complex interactions between technology, culture, and media politics, which necessitates developing critical skills to comprehend the ongoing process of its formation.

**Media Disinformation and Its Characteristics:**

If deceiving the enemy has been a well-known strategy since ancient times discussed by the Chinese strategist **Sun Tzu** in The Art of War three centuries B.C., applied skillfully by **Alexander the Great** and **Genghis Khan**, and famously used by **Amr ibn alAs** the specific term media disinformation first appeared in Russian as (Dezinformatsia) in the early 1920s. It became widespread in the former Soviet Union after World War II. The English term (Disinformation) only appeared in the 1960s, referring to "the intentional leaking of misleading information" In France, the term first appeared in 1974 and entered the French dictionary in the early 1980s, with mainly political connotations, As defined by **Ignatius Ramon**, it is a form of media crime meaning "the deliberate intent to mislead public opinion and keep it completely ignorant of a serious issue, or insufficiently informed about critical matters."

Media disinformation includes all methods and techniques used by governmental or non-governmental actors political parties, institutions, or individuals aimed at presenting information, news, or data designed to mislead, confuse, or deceive audiences, Its purposes include altering public interests, shifting ideas, positions, and beliefs, flattening cultural awareness, or diverting attention toward selected issues, ultimately serving the goals of those orchestrating the disinformation, It employs all forms of media broadcast, print, and digital such as newspapers, magazines, television channels, websites, especially social media, and other tools of information dissemination like pamphlets and posters,In essence, media disinformation is the process of deliberately presenting false or misleading information to the public with the intent of shaping perceptions or influencing attitudes toward specific issues or actors. It does not only mean spreading lies, but also manipulating context, omitting essential information, and employing framing techniques that alter how recipients interpret events (**Jowett**, 2018).

Discussing media disinformation also involves critically examining media practices especially Western media that present themselves as models of freedom, independence, and objectivity, while in reality sometimes serving as tools for manipulation and disinformation, particularly during conflicts, crises, and wars, given their influence in shaping local and international public opinion.

The main characteristics of disinformation include:

- **Deliberateness**, where the intention is to influence, not an innocent mistake.

- **Selectivity**, focusing on certain aspects of reality while ignoring others.

- **Repetition**, reinforcing false messages by broadcasting them multiple times until they stick in public memory.

- **Emotional resonance**, appealing to fear, anger, or hatred to push recipients into unconsciously adopting the message.

Techniques include framing, presenting information within a specific mold that shapes interpretation; information flooding, releasing massive amounts of contradictory data to create confusion; omission, leaving out essential elements of a story; manipulation of images and videos, using editing or misleading visuals to strengthen certain messages; and finally, **f**abrication of stories, inventing events or news that never occurred.

**Sources of Media Disinformation:**

Media disinformation cannot succeed without relying on strategic, high-value information, similar to that used in psychological operations and information warfare. This stems from the principle that controlling

information means controlling power, For example, the United States actively collects qualitative information through various networks studies, research, conferences, seminars, scientific reports, publications, and exchanges. It then gives these data an aura of scientific credibility by contracting with leading universities and research centers, and by employing renowned professors and highly skilled experts. This demonstrates its serious investment as a global power in leveraging disinformation as a strategic tool.

One key focus is the psychological susceptibility of audiences and societies. Conditions that may lead to revolutionary movements, civil unrest, or violent uprisings are closely studied. In this domain, Orientalists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists are employed to analyze symbols and arguments most effective in changing attitudes within certain cultures. Even elements such as magic, superstition, and myths are studied for their mobilizing power whether to influence minorities, ethnic groups, students, urban elites, entrepreneurs, trade unions, political parties, or even military circles. (**Boumaiza, 2004)**

On the basis of such strategic data, specialists design mathematical models and scenario simulations for intervention, These resources are then mobilized for media disinformation during wars as in the Second Gulf War, the Iraq War, the Arab Spring uprisings in Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, and Syria, and most recently in the war on Gaza. However, it later became evident that much of the information gathered by U.S. agencies and the justifications offered by those behind such interventions lacked the accuracy needed for effective management of the new realities. This explains the multiple complications faced by occupying forces.

Ultimately, all forms of disinformation aim at influencing public opinion, justifying political or military decisions, distorting the image of opponents, and diverting attention away from core issues.

**Manipulation of Minds:**

Recent studies indicate that packaged awareness is the result of sophisticated media strategies that employ artificial intelligence and big data analytics to tailor media messages precisely according to users' characteristics and behaviors. For instance, **Tufekci (2018)** shows that social networks are not merely conduits for news dissemination but actively shape attention and influence public opinion through hidden mechanisms, thereby exposing collective awareness to manipulation and reconfiguration.

Similarly, **Marwick (2017)** discusses how media manipulation practices create distorted informational environments, making it difficult for users to distinguish truth from falsehood, thereby reinforcing the spread of packaged awareness. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, numerous analyses reveal that digital disinformation campaigns have been employed as effective psychological tools to reshape public consciousness in affected societies and to intensify political polarization.

Perception itself becomes one of the main instruments employed by ruling elites to maintain social control. Such manipulation whether cognitive or ideological involves influencing individuals or groups in ways that conceal the true intentions behind the ideas presented.

From a historical perspective, **Ibn Khaldun** highlighted how claims of noble lineage influenced the allegiance of the masses: granting leaders religious legitimacy that strengthened their authority, increased public obedience, nurtured tribal solidarity, and consolidated group cohesion thus ensuring political stability (Khaldoune, 2004, p. 260)

The sociologist **Herbert Schiller** was among the first to apply the concept of packaged awareness .

"The media apparatus in America establishes the foundations for processing and controlling the circulation of images and information, These are refined and carefully managed to determine our beliefs, attitudes, and ultimately, our behavior, When media directors advance ideas and orientations that diverge from social realities, they become true mind managers," chiller further noted that the variety of disinformation tools all converge on one fundamental point: controlling information and images across all levels is a central means of manipulation. Achieving this is facilitated by the principles of market economics: ownership of media

institutions radio stations, television networks, newspapers, magazines, film industries, and publishing houses rests in the hands of global corporations and conglomerates, Consequently, the media apparatus becomes fully prepared to play a decisive role in systematic deception (**Schiller**, 1999, pp. 11–12).

In a similar vein, **Paulo Freire (1970)**, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, explained that media manipulation is a tool of oppression used by elites to subjugate the masses and serve their interests, Concentrated ownership of media outlets whether television networks, newspapers, magazines, or publishing houses turns these platforms into instruments aligned with elite agendas, reinforcing their dominance.

The culture industry, as theorized by **Adorno and Horkheimer** (1994, original work 1944), illustrates this point, It operates as a productive system based on standardized and tested models, through which cultural and media products are manufactured to guide audiences both inside and outside the United States, The repetition of such cultural products generates a form of habituation, which can result in psychological and cognitive harm to audiences.

In the American context, news is treated as a competitive commodity, delivered as quickly as possible to secure exclusivity, often at the expense of accuracy and professionalism. The case of journalist **Jack Anderson**, who sacrificed credibility for the sake of a scoop, is a telling example (**McChesney**, 2004).

Additionally, studies such as **Douglas Kellner's Media Spectacle (2003)** highlight how media coverage of crises often tends toward hysteria and sensationalism, undermining the public's ability to evaluate the varying significance of events. This in turn creates unnecessary panic and further erodes rational public discourse.

**In conclusion,** the close relationship between economic power and the media becomes evident, as major corporations strive to preserve their own interests even when these conflict with the public good, This dynamic confirms the propaganda model presented by **Herman (1996)** in his analysis of media monopolization and its influence on public opinion.

In moments of crisis whether real or fabricated an atmosphere of feverish hysteria emerges, one that is completely detached from rationality, The false sense of urgency created by the insistence on instant updates inflates the significance of events. As a result, the ability to distinguish between different levels of importance weakens.

 In reality, understanding truly important events requires sufficient time for reflection. This becomes even more difficult as satellites transmit news flashes every few seconds, creating an obsession with the "moment." Such fixation destroys the essential links to past, present, and future, and undermines the mind's ability to make wise decisions errors that only become apparent when it is too late **(TR, 2024)**

Moreover, information withholding has become one of the most powerful tools of control. A large portion of government activity has been centralized within the White House, shielded from scrutiny by the mechanism of executive privilege, This creates significant obstacles to obtaining accurate and reliable information.

In a reality structured by various consciousness-shaping institutions, whether in schools or families, individuals' answers in surveys lose their genuine value. They emerge from a reduced epistemic framework that does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the issues being addressed, Consequently, relying on such surveys to construct an objective picture of public opinion becomes highly problematic and misleading.

**The Russian-Ukrainian War and Its Impact on the Digital Environment and Media Awareness**

In recent years, the world has witnessed a radical transformation in the nature of wars and international conflicts. Battles are no longer confined to traditional military confrontations; rather, war has taken on

multiple forms under the concept of **"hybrid warfare"**, which combines conventional military operations with information, psychological, and cyber campaigns.

Within this framework, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has emerged as one of the clearest examples of how the digital environment shapes public awareness and reproduces media narratives in complex and targeted ways, leaving truth subject to distortion and manipulation according to each side's objectives.

### The Evolution of the Conflict in the Digital Environment

The origins of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict date back to 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, escalating dramatically in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. From the outset, social media platforms and digital channels were used as primary spaces for disseminating information and news about the war.

However, these platforms quickly evolved into arenas for the circulation of misleading and false information, making fake news a central tool of the conflict. Such news has been strategically employed to distort facts, create competing narratives, and sow confusion among both domestic and international audiences.

A study by **Europol (2023)** confirms that this war represents a clear model of hybrid warfare involving not only military operations but also information warfare strategies. Information, whether true or false, has become a weapon of war, used to weaken adversaries by undermining public morale and exploiting internal divisions, ultimately eroding trust in official media institutions.

### Methods and Techniques of Disinformation in the Digital War

Recent research, such as **Frenkel (2022)**, reveals that digital campaigns in the Russian-Ukrainian war have employed advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics to tailor targeted media messages for specific audience segments. Through these technologies, conflicting parties craft media content that may take on diverse forms but remains unified in purpose: to mislead audiences, stir emotions, and overwhelm them with narratives that distort or completely fabricate facts.

Tools like bots and fake accounts on social media networks are deployed to disseminate such content on a massive scale and at high frequency, making it difficult for ordinary users to distinguish between authentic and fabricated news. Furthermore, platform algorithms amplify the spread of content that elicits strong emotional responses such as fear, anger, or a sense of belonging. This dynamic strengthens filter bubbles and echo chambers, where individuals remain surrounded by information aligned with their pre-existing beliefs, making it increasingly challenging to correct false narratives.

### The War's Impact on Media Awareness and Audiences

This war demonstrates how the digital environment can generate a state of **"packaged awareness"**, in which media content is offered in a ready-made, emotion-laden format designed to provoke audience behavior without allowing space for critical analysis. As a result, the recipient becomes highly vulnerable to manipulation and reshaping through digital media serving specific political and strategic agendas, According to **Weiss (2022)**, the conflicting parties deliberately use digital media as tools to reshape societal awareness by broadcasting contradictory narratives that foster doubt and uncertainty. This weakens communities' capacity to make informed decisions or to build social consensus. Moreover, systematic disinformation in this conflict has exacerbated political divisions not only within Ukraine itself but also among its international supporters and critics.

### The Importance of Combating Disinformation and Fostering Critical Awareness

Studying the Russian-Ukrainian war through the lens of digital media underscores the urgent need to develop effective mechanisms to counter the spread of misleading news and infodemics in contexts of war

and conflict. While social media platforms play a positive role in the rapid dissemination of information, the absence of rigorous oversight and verification processes often turns them into powerful instruments of covert media manipulation, The World Health Organization (2020) emphasizes the importance of enhancing digital critical literacy, by equipping audiences with the skills to verify news sources, understand the nature and objectives of misleading information, and distinguish truth from falsehood. This empowerment reduces the impact of disinformation. Additionally, there is a pressing need for regulatory bodies and digital platforms to play a stronger role by enforcing transparent policies, ensuring the verification of news, and imposing sanctions on entities that deliberately spread fake content.

**General Findings:**

The findings reveal that the digital environment has become a fertile ground for the rapid spread of massive amounts of false, fabricated, and misleading information, thereby significantly amplifying the phenomenon of the information epidemic. This reality undermines individuals' ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood and disrupts their perception of facts, mainly due to the nature of digital platforms whose algorithms prioritize sensational and emotional content over accuracy.

Individual awareness in the digital sphere is shaped through the intensive circulation and repetition of misleading messages, resulting in distorted and erroneous perceptions of reality. Within this context, the digital environment produces what is known as **"packaged awareness"** where audiences are fed ready-made opinions and stereotypical thought patterns without critical examination. This contributes to the reinforcement of simplistic and directed convictions about complex issues, fueling polarization and division within societies. Furthermore, misleading news amplifies feelings of fear, panic, or hatred, making audiences more susceptible to irrational behaviors. Under the pressure of the infodemic, the digital space becomes a platform for mind manipulation rather than a sphere for free dialogue and sound knowledge, leading to an erosion of trust in traditional media and a weakening of critical thinking when faced with the flood of misinformation.

In such circumstances, the shaping of collective awareness becomes a process remotely controlled through precise digital tools, posing a threat to the independence of individual free thought. The Russian-Ukrainian war stands as a model that deepened these phenomena, as digital platforms were exploited to spread rapid, organized disinformation campaigns aimed at forming a "packaged" awareness serving the interests of the conflicting parties. This war has further complicated the digital media landscape, fueling polarization and political and social fragmentation, thereby highlighting the need for deeper studies on the impact of digital wars on media awareness, particularly in light of the growing reliance on disinformation as a key strategic weapon in modern conflicts.

**Conclusion:**

The major health crises that struck the world in recent years have given rise to new forms of epidemics that primarily affected the realm of news, information circulation, journalism, and media practices, Alongside the pandemic came a parallel outbreak the *infodemic* marked by the unprecedented spread of false and misleading news across social media platforms. This phenomenon not only complicated the fight against the health crisis itself but also highlighted the role of internet algorithms in amplifying misinformation, targeting users with content that reinforced their pre-existing beliefs.

Such dynamics have led to the formation of "packaged awareness": a closed form of consciousness shaped by stereotypical and ready-made perceptions. This type of awareness makes individuals more vulnerable to blind belief and rumors, while reducing their willingness to accept scientifically verified information. Psychological and cultural factors play a significant role in reinforcing this behavior, as individuals seek information that soothes their fears regardless of its credibility. The result is a distorted collective understanding of crises and resistance to public health policies such as vaccination and social distancing.

In this context, the urgent need arises for effective strategies to combat the information epidemic by strengthening critical thinking and enhancing information verification skills, while also demanding greater ethical responsibility from digital platforms. Addressing packaged awareness requires reforms in both media

and education, focusing on building independent awareness capable of resisting disinformation. This becomes even more crucial in the age of modern wars, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, where the digital environment has been used as a central weapon of information warfare. The accelerated spread of fake news and disinformation in this conflict has further complicated the information landscape, deepening divisions and fueling conflicts both locally and internationally.

Therefore, what can be emphasized is the importance of **collaboration between researchers, media professionals, and policymakers** in order to build a healthy information environment that strengthens societies' resilience against future epidemics—whether health-related, informational, or warfare-related.

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