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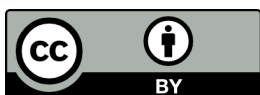
FAKE NEWS: IS IT MADE FOR MEN OR WOMEN?

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Fake news has become an integral part of modern life. It represents a distinct genre within news discourse, characterized by manipulation and the dissemination of deceptive information through mass media. Fake news is primarily defined by elements of 'falsehood,' 'deceit,' and 'manipulation,' which underlie its close connection with both misinformation and disinformation. Those who create fake news often tailor their content to exploit the potential interests and vulnerabilities of their target audience, including gender-related themes and stereotypes to generate heightened engagement.

This study aims to explore students' perceptions of gender-related aspects in fake news, such as the gender of fake news creators, readers, and the specific gender-related topics covered within fake news. The study involved a structured questionnaire designed to elicit responses that provide valuable insights into how fake news is perceived in connection with gender issues.

The results of the experiment highlight the participants' overall understanding of the relationship between fake news and gender. Young people generally believe that the creation of fake news is not inherently dependent on one's gender. However, some students do recognize a tendency in fake news production where female authors are seen as more involved in creating content for women, while male authors tend to target a male audience. These preferences appear to align with certain gender-related stereotypes associated with specific fake news topics. This suggests that despite the general perception of fake news as gender-neutral, stereotypical views can still influence how fake news is understood in relation to gender.

Keywords: *fake, gender-related news topics, fake news topics, fake news creators, fake news consumers*

Цапро Г.Ю., Грищенко О.В. Фейкові новини: створені для чоловіків чи жінок?

Фейкові новини стали невід'ємною частиною сучасного життя. Вони представляють собою окремий жанр новинного дискурсу, характеризуючись маніпуляцією та поширенням неправдивої інформації через засоби масової інформації. Основними складовими фейкових новин є "брехня," "обман," і "маніпуляція," які лежать в основі їх тісного зв'язку з дезінформацією та псевдоінформацією. Ті, хто створюють фейкові новини, часто використовують гендерно-зорієнтовані теми та стереотипи, щоб залучити увагу потенційної аудиторії та підвищити зацікавленість в таких новинах.

Ця стаття спрямована на дослідження сприйняття студентами гендерних аспектів фейкових новин, таких як статі авторів фейкових новин, читачів, і гендерно-зорієнтовані теми. Дослідження включало структуровану анкету з метою отримання відповідей, які надавали цінні уявлення про сприйняття фейкових новин в контексті гендерних питань.

Результати експерименту розкривають загальне сприйняття взаємозв'язку між фейковими новинами та гендером. Респонденти загалом вважають, що створення фейкових новин не залежить від статі людини. Однак деякі студенти визнають тенденцію в створенні фейкових новин, де жінки-автори сприймаються більш активними в створенні контенту для жінок, тоді як чоловіки націлені на аудиторію чоловіків. Ці вподобання схожі на певні гендерні стереотипи, пов'язані з конкретними темами фейкових новин. Це свідчить про те, що, незважаючи на загальне сприйняття фейкових новин як гендерно-нейтральних, стереотипи все ж впливають на сприйняття фейкових новин в контексті гендеру.

Ключові слова: *фейк, гендерно-зорієнтовані теми новин, теми фейкових новин, творці фейкових новин, споживачі фейкових новин.*

Introduction. Fake news is a genre of news discourse. It is a specific integrative type of media text which is aimed at manipulation and is represented and spread through mass media. The main constituents of fake are 'lie', 'deceit' and 'manipulation' which prove its close connection with misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation includes wrong and incorrect information which is spread without any particular intention to mislead. Whereas disinformation is usually spread intentionally; it is false and misleading information of a manipulative content related more to political and governmental discourse.

Fake news is created on a various number of topics: life of celebrities, politics, medicine, cosmetics, fashion, movies, technology, international events, interviews with famous people, education, business, pandemic issues, health, crime, sport, food, etc. Fake news includes both misinformation and disinformation. Those who create fake content pursue different goals depending on the topic of information. However, both the topics and the types of discourse they can be observed in contribute to the main aim of this type of news.

Creators of fake news often tailor their content to the perceived interests and vulnerabilities of their target audience, which can include gender-related interests. This customization is done with the intention of maximizing the impact and reach of their misinformation or disinformation. In some cases, creators may exploit gender-related themes and stereotypes to generate more significant engagement. For example, fake news may take on a sensationalized or exaggerated tone when addressing topics traditionally associated with a particular gender, such as beauty and fashion for women or technology and sports for men. This strategic use of gender-specific elements is just one of the many tactics employed by those behind fake news, highlighting the need for critical media literacy and discernment in today's information landscape.

The **aim** of the article is to explore students' perspectives on gender-related aspects of fake news including the gender of fake news creators, the gender of fake news readers, and specific gender-related topics covered in fake news.

Theoretical Background. Research shows that fake is created for many reasons but manipulation is the main one (Medlen & Medlen, 2022). Fake news in the media influences an incredibly large number of people (readers, users) within minutes, and consequences of it are unpredictable. Some researchers state that young people are most impacted by the spread of fake news as they have access to digital devices and use social media actively. Fake news can have a significant and negative impact on “students’ political views, education, and mindset” (Plaza, 2023, p. 716). Fake content can “negatively impact politics, society, and business”. Moreover, propaganda, disinformation, deep fake and false description “can encourage violent extremism, despise speech and frame people’s opinion, which undermines democracy and reduces trust in democratic approaches” (Chopra & Verma, 2023, p. 243).

Various factors influence the ways people perceive fake, accept or reject it. Five most influential cognitive biases “(herd, framing, overconfidence, confirmation, and anchoring)” impact on the believability of fake news (French et al., 2023).

Different fake news detection methods, approaches and algorithms are used to detect fake and to distinguish between fake news and real news (Amjad et al., 2023). A “hybrid fake news detection system” which combines linguistic-based and knowledge-based approaches has been introduced (Trivedi et al., 2023).

Researchers focus on linguistic indicators and deceptive cues in the scope of linguistic-based detection of fake news. Qualitative and quantitative linguistic

analysis is used to study the content structure and style of news articles in order to identify linguistic indicators which can help to differentiate false and authentic texts (Mahyoob et al., 2021).

The study of four web-based media influencers (celebrity-influencers, consumer-influencers, micro-influencers, content-influencers) which are used in fake viral videos uncovers the processes and ways of establishing credibility of the content that can appeal to a large audience (Chopra & Verma, 2023).

Some scholars state that gender-focused aspect of study can contribute to a better understanding of how fake news may influence young generation (especially college students) differently based on their gender. College students whose responses were collected for the study emphasized the presence of gender differences which were observed in the topics of false information that they received. Male participants mainly encountered fake news in terms of political issues, while female participants more frequently were offered false information concerning celebrities (Plaza, 2023, p. 718).

Media coverage often reflects and perpetuates societal stereotypes about the different social roles of men and women (Murphy, 2011). Men are often portrayed as socialized into the breadwinner role, emphasizing success in formal labor force participation. This portrayal suggests that men are taught to exhibit characteristics deemed "more rational, masterful, accumulative, and competitive" compared to women. These stereotypes place expectations on men to excel in their careers and exhibit assertiveness and competitiveness.

On the other hand, women are often portrayed as being socialized into caregiving roles. These roles emphasize traits associated with nurturing and caregiving. Women, particularly those engaged in roles as homemakers or mothers, may be expected to exhibit a "motherhood mentality," characterized by a strong focus on caring and nurturing (Strapko et al., 2016). This perception may lead to the stereotype that women are more environmentally concerned than men because caregiving roles may be linked to an increased awareness of environmental issues and sustainability.

These stereotypes, perpetuated by media representations, can have profound impacts on society by influencing societal expectations, behaviors, and even career choices (Ha et al., 2016). It is important to recognize and challenge these stereotypes to create a more inclusive and equitable society where individuals are not limited by rigid gender-based roles and expectations.

Women and men are differently shown in news. Recent studies (Rohrbach et al., 2022), which quantify the presence and absence of gender differences in news representation, contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding persistent gender disparities in media. These gender disparities can perpetuate and reinforce existing stereotypes that influence the public's perception of politicians, particularly women. Media coverage that accentuates candidate traits, appearance, and family, especially when it takes on a negative tone, can disproportionately harm women politicians. This coverage not only upholds traditional gender stereotypes but also erodes the perceived competence of female candidates, ultimately affecting voting preferences. On a more encouraging note for women in politics, it is worth noting that when the news focuses on scandals and candidate attacks, its adverse impact on their electoral support is somewhat less pronounced compared to their male counterparts. These findings highlight the intricate interplay between media portrayal, gender stereotypes, and political outcomes. It is important to recognize that, in some cases, fake news is deliberately created to tarnish the reputation of politicians, further complicating the dynamics of media influence on political campaigns.

Methods. The participants of the experiment are 108 university students (aged 19-25) whose major is Linguistics (English), 17 of male and 91 of female gender. The students were offered a questionnaire with controlled responses to elicit possible reactions and answers that will bring considerable insight into perception of fake and its connection with gender issues. Here are the questions:

1. *Who is most often the author of fake news and fake information?*
2. *Who more often creates fake information for men?*
3. *Who more often creates fake information for women?*
4. *For whom is fake news created?*
5. *If you claim that fake news is created more often for men, please explain why.*
6. *If you claim that fake news is created more often for women, please explain why.*
7. *Who reads fake news and fake information more often?*
8. *Who is quicker to determine that a text is fake?*
9. *In what subjects is fake information created for men?*
10. *In what subjects is fake information created for women?*

Results and Discussion. The data from the questionnaire (Questions 1-3) reflects a diverse set of perspectives regarding the creation and target audience of

fake news. Notably, 78.7% of the students believe that both men and women can be authors of fake news, indicating a recognition that fake news creators are not restricted by gender. Nevertheless, there are nuanced perceptions when it comes to the intended audience. While 62% of respondents think that both genders create fake news for men, 55.6% believe that both genders produce fake news for women. A portion of students, 20.4%, perceive that men primarily create fake news for men, and 14.8% think that men specifically target women with fake news. In the case of women authors, 17.65% of students believe they write more for men, while a larger 30.6% consider that women predominantly create fake news for other women. These findings highlight a complex interplay of gender perceptions in the creation and target audience of fake news. Despite the general understanding that both genders can create fake news for both men and women, there is still a significant subset of students who believe that men are more likely to write for men, and women for women, underscoring the persistence of gender-based assumptions in the context of fake news.

Despite everything said above, it's worth noting that a substantial 96.3% (see Fig.1) of students in the survey hold the belief that fake news is created for both genders, indicating a prevailing recognition that the target audience of fake news is not inherently gender-specific (Question 4). This overwhelming consensus suggests a broad understanding that the creation of fake news transcends gender boundaries and is intended for a diverse readership. However, there remains a subset of students who maintain gender-based assumptions, underscoring the persistent complexity of gender perceptions in the context of fake news.

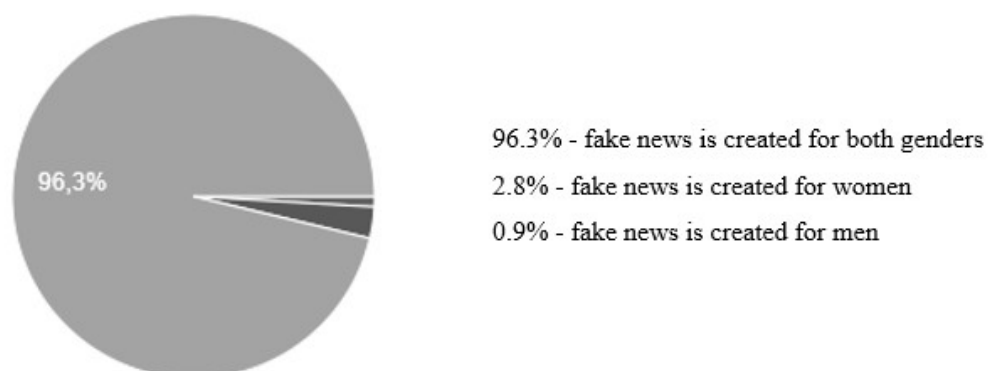


Figure 1. Target audience of fake news

Questions 5 and 6, in some way, constrained students' responses regarding the reason why fake news is created for specific genders. This limitation was imposed

as they were required to select from provided options, including: 1) they are more susceptible and vulnerable; 2) they are easily deceived; 3) they do not analyse what they read; 4) other. The following bars demonstrate students' answers (see Fig.2 and Fig.3).

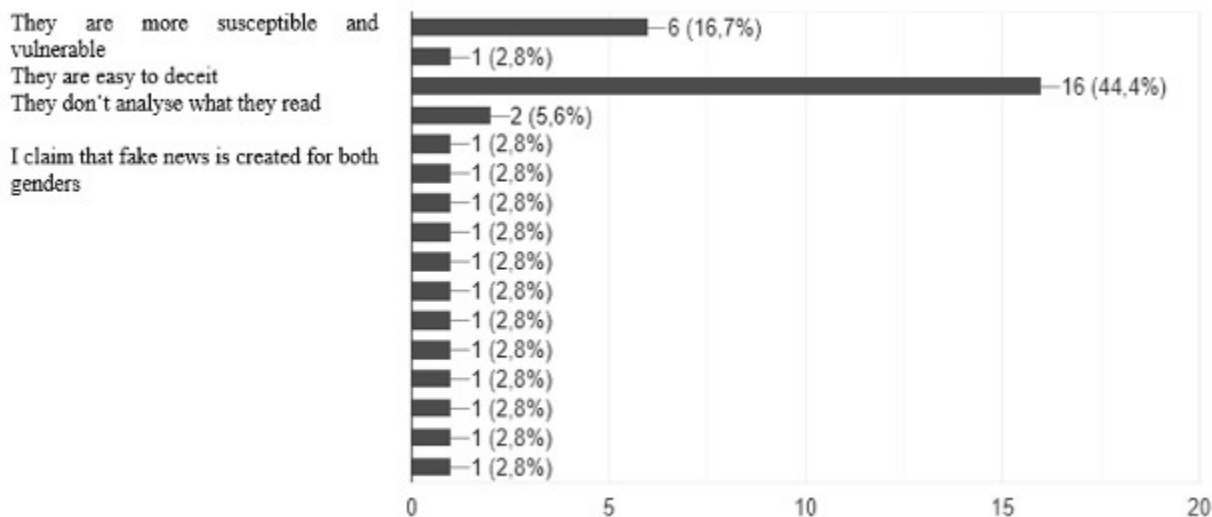


Figure 2. Why fake news is made for men

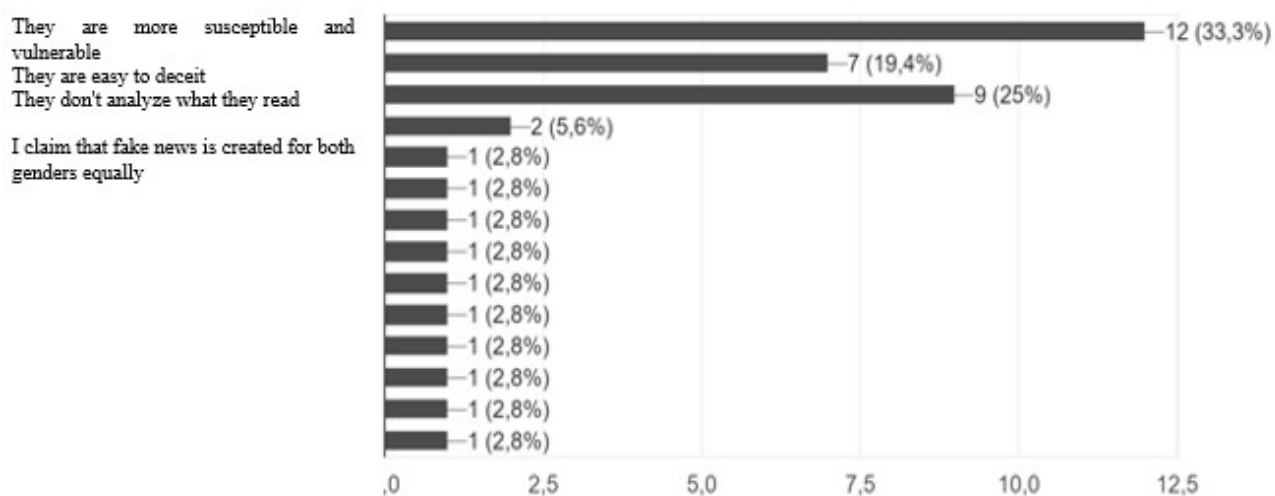


Figure 3. Why fake news is made for women

While analysing the questionnaire data, it becomes evident that stereotypes about specific genders play a role in students' perceptions of fake news. 33.3% of students believe that fake news is created more often for women due to the perceived traits of susceptibility and vulnerability, implying a harmful stereotype. Similarly, 19.4% think that women are targeted because they are easy to deceive, reflecting a misconception about their critical thinking abilities. Additionally, 25%

of the respondents feel that women are the focus of fake news because they do not analyse what they read, an unfair portrayal of their intellectual engagement.

In contrast, 16.7% of students think that fake news is often created for men based on the notion that men, too, are susceptible and vulnerable, challenging the assumption that susceptibility is gender-specific. Only 2.8% believe that men are easy to deceive, a significantly lower percentage compared to the stereotype directed at women. A significant 44.4% feel that men do not analyse what they read, highlighting a stereotype similar to the one perceived about women. These responses underscore the presence of unfounded stereotypes, not only regarding women but also regarding men.

According to the responses to Question 7, 72.9% of the participants state that both genders read fake news and fake information whereas 23.4% of the students think that only women do it and 3.7% suppose that men are fake news consumers.

The answers to Question reveal the fact that both genders (56.5%) are equally capable of spotting fake. However, 27.8% of the participants are sure that men tend to detect fake quicker than women, while 17.6% of the respondents name women to be the first to recognise fake.

The last two questions (9-10) focus on gender-related topics of fake information. Students had to select among a variety of topics offered to consider to appeal more to men or women.

The questionnaire offers the topics widely spread in the media. The following bar graphs reflect the students' understanding of particular topics of fake news created for men (see Fig.4) and for women (see Fig.5).

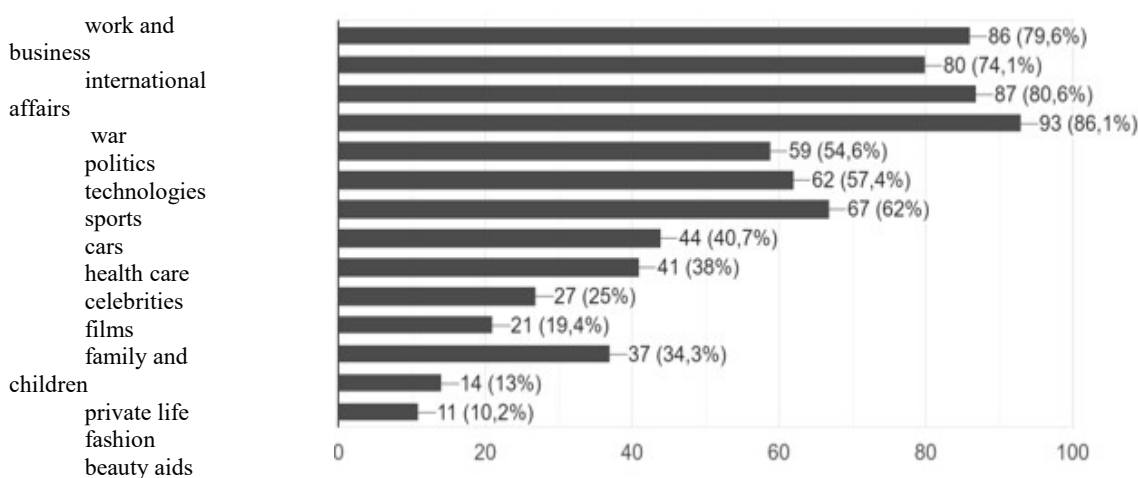


Figure 4. Male-related fake news topics

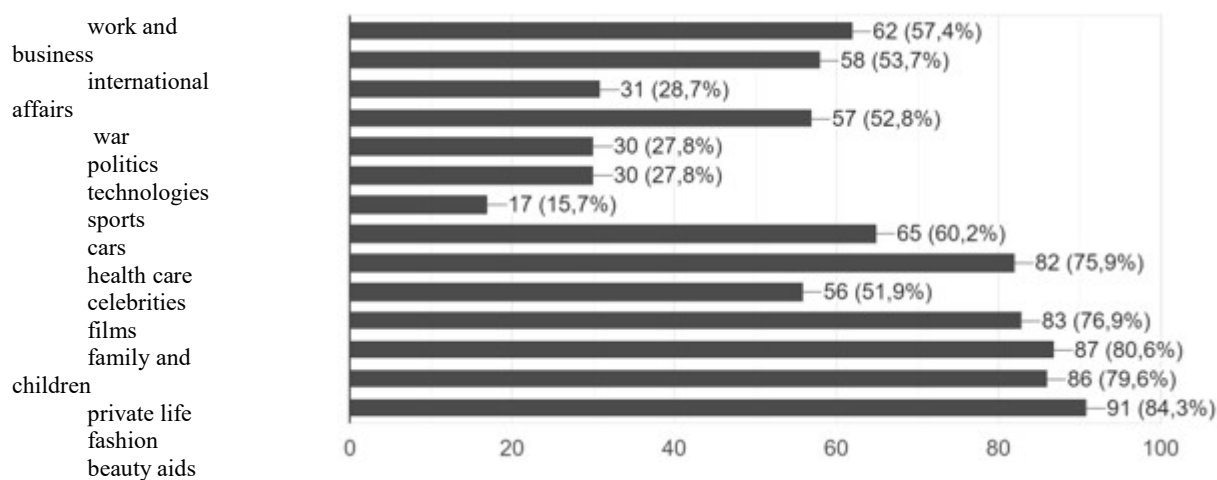


Figure 5. Female-related fake news topics

The participants' answers demonstrate stereotypical expectations about gender interests, with men more engaged into politics, war, technologies, business and international affairs, and women being more interested in beauty aids, private life, fashion, family and children.

Conclusions and Perspectives. The experiment's results shed light on the participants' overall perception of the relationship between fake news and gender. In general, young people believe that the creation of fake news is not contingent on one's gender. There's a prevalent conviction that fake news is crafted for and can be disseminated to both genders, and both men and women are equally capable of discerning fake information. However, some students do highlight a tendency in fake news production, where female authors are perceived to be more involved in creating content for women, and conversely, male authors produce content aimed at a male audience. These preferences seem to align with certain gender-related stereotypes that participants have associated with the topics of fake news. This indicates that despite the overall understanding of fake news as gender-neutral, some stereotypical perceptions still influence how fake news is perceived in relation to gender.

The limitations of the study include that the experiment was conducted before February 24, 2022. It is assumed that the results may differ, particularly concerning topics related to war, which could be a focus for future research.

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