The End of Truth and the Technology of Online Media

Peter Ayolov

Sofia University, Palo Alto, USA

This article is a part of a larger study called The Abstract Truth of Media focused on the topic of the fictional media content opinions presented and perceived as truth. It will explore the abstract nature of truth in online media and its different forms. These media truths are types of fictional stories with certain effects on the public rather than a truthful presentation of the facts. Thus, the end goal of mass media today is not to tell the truth, but to create moral communities based on common experience and beliefs. Articles, opinions, and news in media are seen as a narrative strategy that can be understood only through storytelling analysis. Here the focus is on the understanding of Truth and Untruth in online media as well as the connection of Internet media technology with the increase of disinformation online. The new media model creates hostile groups instead of generating consent for the nation-state, the new online media model within through, Pseudo-communication, manipulation, delusion, lies, propaganda, and deliberate causing of moral anger. "The end of the truth" means that the truth on the Internet is lost among the vast amount of information and the lack of regulation regarding the correctness of the published data. Instead of truth, media researchers formally talk about post-truth, fake news, and "alternative facts". Truth on the Internet is more like "Truthiness" or a belief that a statement is true based on the intuition or understanding of individuals, regardless of evidence, logic or facts. The subject of research is the connection between every new technology in mass media and the truth of the information and the effects on the consensus in society. Since the beginning of the 21st century, misinformation on the Internet has increased with the development of online media and social networks, and it is a problem of social peace and consent in every country.

Keywords: the end of truth, a complete meltdown of truth, abstract truth, post-truth, truthiness, fake news, misinformation, manipulation

Introduction: The End of Truth and the Emergence of Truthiness

In 2006, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* declared the word "truthiness" (Alfano, 2006) as the word of the year, and 10 years later the *Oxford Dictionary* formally declared "post-truth" (Editorial Board, 2016a) the word of 2016. The same year, one of the major topics in Western mass media was online disinformation and so-called "fake news". Prestigious media outlets, such as The New York Times and New Scientist, have published articles with warnings about the link between disinformation and Internet technology itself, such as "How The Internet Loosens Our Connection With the Truth" (Manjoo, 2016) and "Web of Lies: Is the Internet Making a World Without Truth?" (Baraniuk, 2016). Extensive research by the Pew Research Center (Anderson & Rainie, 2017), related to the issue of media trust and truthfulness in 2016, is called "The Future of Truth and Disinformation Online". The conclusion of the researchers and media professionals is that in the next 10 years technological

solutions will not be able to solve the problems of online disinformation, and the "Dark side of human nature" is more assisted than constrained by technology.

On the topic of the truth in online media, Marshall McLuhan's book *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*" 1989 becomes more and more up to date. McLuhan sees new media as a "universal environment of simultaneous electronic flow", instead of just as information transmission networks. In this unity of "Acoustic and Visual Space", new communities and identities are created. In the traditions of "media ecology", the effects of communication or "transformation" of humans are more important than the "transportation" of information from one group to another. In this approach the truth, the facts and the reliability of the information are of secondary importance. What matters are media effects on people. The abstract truth of media is just a common belief that unites a group of people for a certain time. The ultimate goal is to create a moral community within a given media space. The media as a virtual space create "imagined communities", through generalizing and addressing certain groups in a society. This concept was developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, to analyze the community of the nation state. A nation is a virtual community constructed with the help of national propaganda and state control over all media. In a liberal state with freedom of speech and lack of state control over online media new virtual spaces are created for new imagined communities. These new virtual communities ensure maximal disagreement, division, and diversity under the increase of the number of online media and social networks. The global village lacks the uniformity and tranquility of the traditional local village The old model for "Manufacturing consent" of the governed in the nation state is reversed in a new model of "Engineering dissent" between the increasing number of imagined communities created in the virtual space of the internet. These new cold wars are fought daily on the endless fields of online media. The difference is that this time the cold wars of propaganda are civil wars that are breaking the imagined communities of the state.

This balkanization of the traditional communities in the nation states is achieved most quickly by causing moral anger through accusations of alleged crimes and violations of public morality. Although fact-checking in online media is becoming easier and more accessible, the amount of false and misleading information on the Internet is constantly increasing. Online misinformation has led to shaking the belief in all media truths and the media at large, with the only truth which remains is the community. Internet sites allow for change and deletion of information backward, which creates preconditions for citation manipulation. Internet media technology itself enables objective truth to disappear and be replaced by multiple fictional narratives that serve the interests of different groups and individuals. In order to understand how Internet media manipulate the understanding of truth, the terms "truth in the media" and "Internet media" have to be clarified. "Media Truth" in this case will be understood as a message that is believed to be credible and in which a group of people believe regardless of facts and empirical evidence. "Internet media" mean all virtual spaces on the Internet, including sites and social networks, whose main purpose and activity is to disseminate information and create communities. Regarding the ironic title of the article, it refers to the systematic distortion of communication from any new media technology. "The end of the truth" and the increase of disinformation on the Internet show the need for new ethical rules, regulation, and media literacy education. This means rather a search for a beginning of truth on the Internet, rather than an end. The author of the article is fully convinced that the development of digital technologies gives the Internet a unique chance to become a network of trust and truth. Obstacles for this development are rather subjective than problems within technology itself.

Media Experiment "The Complete Meltdown of the Truth on the Internet"

The reason for the title of this article is a media experiment exploring the model of hiding the truth on the Internet, which is possible because of the technology of online media. The media experiment is a method of studying media phenomena and processes, which is accomplished by observing changes in the subject of research under the influence of factors that control its development. This experiment involves searching for the source of a particular media post on the Internet through the Google search engine in English. This search is not limited in time and is available to the general public, allowing multiple replications of the situation and verification of results. The experiment compares a hypothesis about the relationship between online disinformation and the technological peculiarities of the Internet media with the objective reality. This is accomplished by the controlled impact on individual components of the site and variations in their combination. In the experiment, the researcher intervenes clearly in the natural course of events, and in this case, the commentary on Twitter.

The specific case is related to the coverage of events in the Syrian City of Aleppo since the beginning of December 2016 on the websites of Western mass media in English. At the heart of these media, the experiment is the discovery of the origin of the phrase "Complete meltdown of humanity in Aleppo", which was first published on the Internet on December 13, 2013. It has been quoted globally many times by online media and social networks, but the source of the original information is difficult to find. In this case, it is not intended to reveal a bias in the coverage of events, nor a manipulation or attempt at political propaganda. Such bias is present, and most media that reflect the Syrian conflict clearly and openly show their support either for the Syrian state or for the rebels. The purpose of the experiment is to check whether the general public can easily find verified information about the events described in English using the search engine Google. In addition, it will be checked whether this emotional description of civil war events corresponds to official records of human casualties and human rights violations in Aleppo. The question is whether after an unverified statement is published on the Internet, the audience is given the opportunity to verify the authenticity of the allegations and to gain access to official and verified data.

Google's search engine shows thousands of results with the specific phrase that appears for the first time in the article "Aleppo: A Fire Cut Transaction Is Achieved in a Syrian Embarrassing City, Rebels Say" (Jamieson, Bishop, & Siemaszko, 2016) on the NBC News website. The article, published at 2:12 pm on December 13 and edited at 6:54 am the following day, quotes a statement by UN spokeswoman Jens Laerke: "Jens Laerke, a Spokesman for the United Nations Humanitarian Office Said It Looks Like a 'Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo". It is not mentioned where Mr. Laerke made this statement, whether it is an official UN statement and on what sources it is based. After this publication the same quote by Jens Laerke has been copied repeatedly on the Internet sites of several of the world's largest media such as Reuters (Nebehay & Miles, 2016), The Washington Post (Editorial Board, 2016b), The New York Times (Barnard, 2016), Euronews (Editorial Board, 2016c), The Guardian (Shaheen, 2016), The Telegraph (Wilkinson, 2016), CNN (Pleitgen, 2016), and the BBC (Brown, 2016). On the same day, at 8:26 am on his Twitter page (which explicitly said that the publications were personal opinions and do not express the opinion of the UN (Laerke, 2016)), Jens Laerke publishes a link to NBC News (Laerke, 2016). In fact, it appears that in his Twitter account, Laerke quotes his own statement, but through the NBC News article. This magic trick is only possible on the Internet, and the "online truth" about the origin of the phrase "Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo" begins to melt into "truthiness".

It is noteworthy that in the specific case, the cited Internet media do not comment on true facts or testimonies related to possible crimes against humanity at Aleppo in early December 2016. Instead, the UN spokesperson's personal opinion is imposed as news and without clearly where and when it is expressed. The slogan "Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo" is quoted on the Internet multiple times, and in some media, it is presented as an official position of the UN. This suggests moral indignation in the global audience and uses the authority of the international organization to condemn alleged war crimes by the Syrian army. This is a typical case of "atrocity propaganda" and the induction of moral outrage to the enemy's actions through media manipulation. What's new in this case is that hiding the truth about real events is done through Internet technology that allows instantly citing a message from thousands of sites without verifying its authenticity. This is not about lying or fake news, but about turning truth into "truthiness" as a negative effect of Internet technology. As will become clear at the end of the experiment, Jens Laerke really talks about the melting of humanity in Aleppo, but that's just his non-factual assumption. For the average "reader" it is extremely difficult to get to the truth because Google's search for English is overwhelmed by thousands of online publications that copy the quote. The experiment shows that after a few hours of searching the Internet (through the Google search engine in English), there are no results indicating the source of the quote. Even if the time and place in which Jens Laerke makes his statement are revealed, the question remains whether the definition of "meltdown of humanity" corresponds to reality. The media experiment "ends with direct intervention in the course of events. On December 14, 2016, the author of the article commented on the publication by Jens Laerke on Twitter (Ayolov, 2016), warning of the ambiguity about the source of the phrase "Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo". Until the end of October 2018, on Twitter, there is no response from Jens Laerke, while the significance of the event in the world media was already negligible. In the above-mentioned NBC News publication, Laerke's statement also cites several other Twitter accounts of supporters of Syrian insurgents. They all support Laerke's words and claim that in Aleppo at that time are committed crimes against humanity. The NBC News publication ends with the warning that the information from these social networking accounts cannot be confirmed. This is, in fact, a recognition that there is a possibility that the information being published is not true, because it is not confirmed by independent and uninterested sources.

At the end of the experiment, the original source of Laerke's statement was found on the UN's audiovisual archives website. Rupert Colville, spokesman for the United Nations Human Rights Department, and Jens Laerke, spokesman for the United Nations Humanitarian Office, held a press conference on 13 December 2016 in Geneva (UN Audiovisual Library, 2016). The statement is not an official UN statement, but a simple description of the events in Aleppo, based on unconfirmed data. The statement warns of possible civilian executions in Aleppo, but uses words such as "supposed", "current data shows", and "it looks like". In online media, Jens Laerke's words are removed from the context of his warning of possible crimes and are presented as a formal UN message. He himself does not share the UN website as the official source of his words but instead quotes NBC News on his own Twitter account. It is this account on the social network Twitter that is given as a source for the quote in many online publications. The statement is published on the UN website, but cannot be found in Google Search with the keywords "complete meltdown of humanity". This makes the discovery of the source, hence the truth, difficult for the general public. Moreover, none of the online media mentions the UN website as the source of the quote.

The media coverage of the events in Aleppo is causing serious political reactions. John Kerry, US Secretary of State at the time, called the Aleppo "massacre" (Torbati, 2016) by the Syrian army and called for

more serious interference by the international community in the conflict. According to French Ambassador to the United Nations, François Delattre (Editorial Board, 2016d), the events in Aleppo are one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies of the 21st century, and Amnesty International (2016) claims there are reports of war crimes in Aleppo. Other media reach out to define the events in Aleppo as a "genocide" (Woolf, 2016) and publish allegations that "Aleppo Women Prefer Suicide Rather Than Being Raped" (Weiss, Roy, & Rowell, 2016). Undoubtedly, media coverage of Western media on the Internet describes a picture of "Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo" and suggests an investigation into the Syrian army for committed war crimes. Despite these media publications and accusations, to date, there are no implications and reaction of the international community. The truth about accurate information about the victims and victims at Aleppo in early December 2016 cannot be found on the Internet. By October 2018, there are no published official, independent, and confirmed data on the deaths or injuries in Aleppo. Existing online information is based on studies by biased political organizations that openly take a side in the conflict in Syria. One of these is the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC), an anti-government center, according to which 74 civilians (Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) were executed by the Syrian army from December 1 to December 2016 in Aleppo (Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) including four children. On the other hand, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on December 26 that mass graves of killed Syrian soldiers were found (Editorial Board, 2016e), with some of the bodies having traced to torture. On December 25 the Syrian news agency Sana (SANA) quotes an investigating pathologist from Aleppo, Dr. Zaher Hajo (Editorial Board, 2016f) who found the bodies of 21 people killed by rebels, including five children and four women. The accusations of mass murders on both sides are the only type of information that can to be found openly in Google's search engine in English. This is a piece of openly biased information and war propaganda that cannot be trusted. This means a complete meltdown of the truth in the case, and today there are two truths on the Internet about the events in Aleppo in December 2016.

The "Engineering Dissent" Model on the Internet

The motivation of this kind of media manipulation, as well as its negative effects, is not the subject of research in this article, but they are part of the "Engineering dissent" model on the Internet. The hypothesis of this communication model is that in the existing political system, government and corporate power have the greatest gain when there is disagreement in a national society. Leaders have no interest in imposing a system for regulating the truth of information and incite disagreement through disinformation. The technology of the Internet media contributes to this as well as the lack of clear rules for regulation and responsibility for the truthfulness of published facts. Online media have the ability to digitally manipulate sound, video, images, and text, and to delete posts retrospectively. Even reputable global media can impersonally manipulate information on their online pages simply citing disinformation posted on social networks. Rules are needed to regulate online media that are impartial to motives and interests for manipulation. The goal of such future regulation should be to reduce disinformation online. Only in this way, legal instruments for regulating and controlling the truth in the online media and social networks can work. Under US law (in particular Article 230 of the Communications Decency Act, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act), Internet distributors are not treated as publishers or authors and are not responsible for the content, which is published in their controlled virtual space. This law is similar to the legislation in Germany, the UK, and the European Union under Directive 2000/31/EC (Eur-lex, 2000). This virtually exempts global corporations such as Facebook and Twitter that trade information on the

Internet from its verification. So, the responsibility for enhancing online misinformation should be shared between government institutions who do not regulate it and technology corporations who benefit from it.

According to the author of the 2012 book *Network Delusion, the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (2012) Evgeni Morozov, the Internet is an instrument that can be used by both revolutionaries and authoritarian governments, corporations, and media monopolies. Despite all the expectations of the power of the Internet as a means of democratizing societies, for example, regimes in Iran and China are as stable and repressive today as ever. Social networks and online media have been used to reinforce authoritarian regimes and endanger dissidents, making it more difficult to promote democracy. In his 2017 article "Moral Panic About False News Conceals True Enemies—The Digital Giants", Morozov points out Facebook and Google as the main culprits and winners of spreading false news about the US presidential election in 2016 and the Brexit Referendum in the UK in 2016. But traditional media are also benefiting from the "engineering dissent" and the fake news that provokes it. CNN has recorded record profits in 2016-2017, precisely because of the open feud and media war with Donald Trump. The New York Times article from 2017 "CNN Had a Problem and Donald Trump Resolved It, the Strange Symbiosis Between Jeff Zucker and the President He Helped" (Mahler, 2017) shows the "warm relationship" between CNN president and presidential candidate of the United States. The public feud between CNN and Trump brings them mutual gain, with CNN winning a rating and money, and Trump winning ratings and, accordingly, the election. There is a serious danger that large media corporations and digital companies on the Internet will encourage online polarization and disinformation in the name of greater financial profits. If the providers of information on the Internet are not responsible for the truth of the facts presented, this allows for "complete meltdown of the truth" and "engineering of dissent".

The end of truth in the Internet media means an end to understand the truth as something that is born in a discussion between two conflicting sides and based on proven facts. The old maxim of propaganda "Truth is what works" is one of the principles of these new media spaces, where reliability, fact-checking, journalistic ethics, or the common good are not important. There are many truths on the Internet at the same time, each of which "works" for a particular community of people. Internet media and social networks enable the creation of an infinite number of media spaces that create such communities with their own truths. The very technology of the Internet permits the constant production of new and new media spaces without limitation. The goal of the information presented as true on the Internet is the creation of hostile moral communities or so-called "filter bubbles". This is at the expense of manipulation, lie, hate speech, xenophobia, racial hatred, ideological, ethnic and sexual intolerance, and other methods of propaganda, based on the principle of provoking moral anger.

The end of truth also means an end to history as a related story or worldview, disseminated in the national states from the government-controlled mass media and educational system. Since the Internet is a truly global network that covers almost the entire globe, this applies both to liberal democracies with free media and in some degree to the authoritarian regimes in which the media and the Internet are controlled by the state. Truth is becoming more accessible, but it is not always the better choice. In the age of Internet and lightning access to information from everywhere on earth, the responsibility to seek and spread the truth falls on every person. For the passive person who seeks a comfortable life of delusion in the community, the truth has no value, because it leads to responsibility, duties, and uncertainty, and he easily exchanges it for the predictable security of the collective lie. The masses of people choose the fabricated truths and myths that create moral communities and identities rather than the ugly truth of facts and empirical data. The "Engineering dissent" model is not only imposed by the great power of mass media but also accepted by choice from millions of people on the Internet.

This leads to an atmosphere of constant doubt and deconstruction of officially accepted public truth in traditional societies of the national states. The new moral dissent includes a review of historical events and media myths, with any information from the past being questioned. Undoubtedly, any verified and scientifically proven information in public space becomes extremely difficult. There is an opportunity to disseminate pseudoscientific theories and hypotheses that are "sold" to different audiences and communities. Thus, globalization and Internet media technology lead to division and neo-tribalism, instead of unification of information and consent.

Media Ecology and the Laws of the Internet

At the beginning of the 21st century, new media on the Internet are still looking for its new theory, and the ideas and data for it still accumulate. One of the media theories, which is interested in the effects of society on the advent of new technologies, is called "Media Ecology". This discipline addresses the issue of how mass media affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and values, and how our interaction in the media space makes it easier or harder for our survival chances. The word "Ecology" in "Media Ecology" is used in the sense of "house", "home", "space", and "environment" (from Greek: οἶκος, "house", or "environment"; -λογία, "study of"). According to Neil Postman (1970), "media ecology" deals with the study of the media as a familiar space and as the "home" for our perceptions, understandings, sensations, and values. The media are the space that constructs what we see and say, and therefore what we can do. The media as space not only assign us social roles but also insist on playing them publicly. It tells us what is allowed to be done and what is not. This in practice equalizes the role of the media and the public opinion. The mass media are the mass form of public opinion and morality, and the mere presence in the media space is determined by their rules. In cases where mass media are used as a form of social control with a negative effect on society, the task of media ecology is to reveal that behind the illusion of public opinion is only one machine for manipulation. Media ecology is trying to understand what roles we are forced to play in the media, and why the media make us feel and act in a certain way. That is why media ecology is suitable for exploring the "Manufacturing consent" model.

One of the creators of this new type of communication theory is Marshall McLuhan, who created the term "media ecology" in his book *Understanding Media* in 1964. As a leading specialist in this area, McLuhan was invited by UNESCO as a member of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, which is tasked with studying the problems of mass communication and the need for a new global information order. Unfortunately, he could not get involved in the commission's work because of a serious illness that led to his death in 1980. In 1988, his son Eric McLuhan published their book called *Laws of the Media* (M. McLuhan & E. McLuhan, 1988), which presented the main effects of new media or "Tetrad of Media Effects". This, according to McLuhan, is the four major effects of any new technology and media on society. These effects are the answers to the questions about any media: "What Enhances?", "What Obsoletes?", "What Reverses?" and "What Retrieves?". A quick attempt to apply McLuhan's "Tetrad of Media Effects" to the Internet as a new media can give such answers:

Internet enhances (increases): decentralization, criticism and dissent, access to information, facilitate interpersonal communication, facilitate associative quests, freedom of choice, self-expression, ability to publish, links with global media, media ties, global concern, instantness, time savings, virtual communities, e-commerce, and more.

Internet obsoletes (disposes): borders between countries, direct links between people, information and history, monopolies, official propaganda, censorship, the press, etc.

Internet reverses (overturns and leads to extremes): isolation, information overload, lack of real people and stories, lack of absolute truth, life in virtual worlds, insensitivity, nervous disorders, moral panic, the pattern of tribal culture disagreement. (The general consensus in the large society, supported by the democratic propaganda by the press, radio, and television, is now becoming a constant disagreement created on the Internet.)

Internet retrieves (takes out of oblivion): tribes and villages in the form of small virtual communities, anarchy, chaos, writing and correspondence, local activism, and others.

According to McLuhan and the famous expression "The media is the message", the media themselves change not just the message but also us and the way we live. This means that the intermediary has an interest in every message it transmits, and so it conveys its point of view on the recipient. Absolute truth is not possible on the Internet and is replaced by many opinions and beliefs presented as "truthiness" and built on emotions and faith, instead of facts. In connection with public opinion theory, it means that the use of one or another media (in terms of media as space for the community) subconsciously determines the individual's opinion. The politician who uses the radio as a media is quite different from the one who uses the television. Today, more and more politicians use the Internet and social networks as media, and this changes the political system altogether. The media effects of the Internet are yet to bring about changes in all areas of life in national states, especially in the creation of human communities and identities. McLuhan predicts the future of virtual communities on the Internet and calls it a "Global Village". It is composed of small interconnected communities without limitation of geographic location with individuals from different countries, united by some common principle. These virtual communities evolve in parallel with local communities, but they are not limited by distances and national boundaries. On the Internet, they grow and multiply in a constant disagreement between themselves and do not need to produce a unified public opinion. The new virtual space offers an endless place to express all the opinions and realizations of individual desires, as the eternal shortage and the territorial constraints of the material world seem to be overcome. In virtual worlds, disagreement is a creative force that prompts individuals not happy with the status quo to create new and new space. However, this can be used by various state, ideological, commercial, and political organizations to shake the trust and consent in a given government and to deliberately cause division and disagreement in a national state.

The Future of Truth and the Digital Democracy

The development of the Internet and digital information technology has an increasing impact on national politics and development. Ideas are being put on the use of machinery and artificial intelligence in the regulation of human relations and even the creation of an "e-government". In practice, this means that computing machines will have the task of regulating the authenticity of official information in future states. The hope is that this would improve confidence and save many resources and energy lost in communication channels and intermediaries. E-government should create the conditions for a direct democracy in which relations between citizens are regulated with a minimum of mediators. The economy always is first to respond to technological changes, and there are already positive examples of the effects of the internet economy of network sharing. This kind of electronic communication and digital organization in human groups uses the information and resources in the best way for the common good. These new networks gradually exclude media as intermediaries and welcome media as a network that connects directly all individuals. A future fairer system for the distribution of information, goods, and services will be regulated independently of a computer algorithm. The idea of the "Global Village" in the age of the Internet is to bring back the proximity and unity of the rural community, but into a global interconnected

network. People want to feel the proximity of the people around them and at the same time be linked through personal information channels with the whole world. This model of a future "digital democracy" and "e-government" is the most optimistic view of the future not only for the democratic countries but for the world as a whole. The entering of WEB 3.0. or the so-called "Semantic Web" and "Internet of things" (IoT) clearly show these new directions for social and mass communication. Trends in Internet development are directed towards a global network of trust that unifies economics, culture, education, politics, and finance. This is the dream of Internet creator Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who said in 1999:

> I have a dream for a network where computers are able to analyze all the data on the web—the content, connections, and transactions between people and computers. There is not yet such a "Semantic Network" that makes this possible, but when that happens, the everyday mechanisms of trade, bureaucracy, and everyday life will be handled by machines that talk to machines. "Intelligent agents" that people have been searching for centuries will eventually materialize. (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 1999, Chapter 12)

The third generation of the Internet or the "Semantic Web Stack" is based on the principle that information is hierarchically ranked in the so-called "stacks" or Semantic Web Stacks. This model illustrates the architecture of the semantic network that is geared to transform the current Internet network dominated by unstructured documents into a "data network". The future of the internet depends on how the information will be organized to ensure its credibility without a doubt. This shows the enormous power of reliable information about human communication. It is no coincidence that at the top of the Web Stacks of the Semantic Network hierarchy is the "Trust" layer, which is above the "Proof" layer and the "Logic" layer. This clearly shows the goals and principles for developing future communication systems, which must be built on trust between individuals as a supreme social value. The sad truth is that the best way to guarantee this trust between humans is the nonhuman factor of artificial intelligence. Human history shows that the development of communication technologies always outstrips social progress and the development of the general moral principles of humanism. One of these universal principles is trust between individuals and the tendency to create communities that are born of it. This principle of trust is also valid on the Internet and the development of the Semantic Network is an attempt to apply this principle. The aim of researchers in this area is to develop a Web of Trust that brings together the technology with ethical ideals and principles of humanism. In 2018 with his article "A Little Step for the Network …", Sir Tim Berners-Lee (2018a) announced the launch of an initiative to decentralize the Internet and protect personal information called Solid.

> I've always believed that the Internet is for everyone. That's why I and the others are struggling to defend it. The changes we have brought have created a better and more connected world. But despite what we have achieved, the network has become the driving force of inequality and division; waved by powerful forces who use it for their own programs. (Berners-Lee, 2018b)

The reality of the development of Internet communication is very different from technological utopias and the hopes of solving human problems with the help of computing machines. The problem of online misinformation is a problem for people who use the Internet and will increase as the number increases. Online media and social networks are increasingly turning into space for the war of ideas, "Engineering dissent", disagreement and division. One reason is the growing inequality in the world, which is no longer just an economic but informational one. When a communications network such as the Internet brings together people with different social status and culture of communication, this leads to constant conflicts and produces disagreement. In every communication system, most people mean more disagreement. Such is human nature.

Conclusion: Human Nature and Disinformation on the Internet

The final findings of the Pew Research Center study, "The Future of Truth and Disinformation Online" from 2017, are that the fake news ecosystem reveals some of our deepest human instincts. According to the opinion of the specialists quoted in the study, disinformation is not a temporary problem but a lasting social condition to which society needs to constantly adapt. The new challenge in reporting in news is "the new form of truth", as the truth is no longer dictated by the authorities, but is created between equals; for each fact, there is a counter one and both seem identical online, which is confusing to most people. The truth is becoming more and more a clash of biased opinions presented as facts. According to the experts, the primary aspirations of people for success, leverage, and power and their instinct for survival will continue to worsen the online information environment over the next decade in the following areas:

• More people on the Internet mean more problems and the continuous growth of the internet means the growth of disinformation.

• People naturally trust firstly things that seem familiar, and that allows for manipulations and delusions on a huge scale.

• Manipulators will use new technologies for their own purposes.

• The increasing speed, scope, and effectiveness of the Internet will increase these human trends and technological solutions will not be able to overcome them.

• In the future information landscape, false information will outweigh reliable information.

• Corporate and government leaders make the most of when there is disagreement in society. They have no interest in imposing a system for regulating the truth of the information.

• Only privileged segments of society will have access to information from trusted and quality sources. Outside these segments, information inequality and division will increase.

In the end, it can be said that technology and even artificial intelligence cannot win the battle for truth, because lying, myths, fiction, and emotional storytelling were always more human than cold facts and empirical data of machine languages. The first goal for the international community is truly to wish, fund, and support the creation and exchange of objective and accurate information. Billions of people on the Internet need to increase their information and media literacy, and this must be the main purpose of future education. If a person cannot easily find a reliable fact about the world at a certain time and place, what is the use of any other knowledge and skills? The ability to discover the truth and the verification of information is the responsibility of every responsible individual and has both personal and public value. A new insight into the issue of disinformation is the words of media researcher Tom Rosenstiel, a participant in the Pew Research Center study "The Future of Truth and Disinformation Online", from 2017.

"Disinformation is not like a water pipe problem to decide. This is a social state, like the organized crime that you must constantly watch and adapt to".

This means that state institutions and their officials in democratic states are responsible for regulating the truth in mass communication. Instead, most Americans, for example, want technology corporations to regulate the truth on the Internet instead of government agencies. This shows the results of another study by the Pew Research Center (Mitchel, Grieco, & Sumida, 2018) of April 2018, called "Americans Prefer Protecting Information Freedom Instead of Government Steps to Limit False News Online". This is a democratic paradox in which the majority of citizens voluntarily give up their rights by themselves and through their representatives

to regulate what is true and prefer private organizations to do it instead. Instead of public control in the age of lightning access to information from anywhere on the earth, the responsibility to seek and spread the truth falls on every person. This informational freedom means that each person has the choice and responsibility to be the author of his truth, to impose it freely and convince others. At the end of the day, the truth online depends on how powerful or popular the person who imposes it is. Truth and facts are becoming more accessible, but they are not wanted and sought by most people who prefer to trust others. Just as in the other media before the Internet, the masses of people will continue to choose fabricated truths and myths to the truth of facts and empirical data. Technologies facilitate the preference for "truthiness", disinformation and lying, and truth melts in endless digital vertigo. The case with the United Nations Humanitarian Office spokesman Jens Laerke and the mystical media slogan "complete meltdown of humanity in Aleppo" is a sad testimony to this. The end of the truth, in this case, is tragic, because behind the empty words on the Internet are an unknown number of casualties. With so many media publications and huge revenue from internet traffic advertising, until the end of 2018, there are no published independent and official data on those killed in Aleppo. According to the New York Times article "How the Number of People Killed in Syria Was Lost in the Fog of War" (Specia, 2018), the international community stops counting the dead in 2016, and even the UN does not publish accurate data.

This article is about the effects of online media technology on truth rather than media ethics and moral responsibility for online disinformation. However, the international community's indifference to the "Complete Meltdown of the Truth" in the coverage of the war in Syria cannot be overlooked.

References

Alfano, S. (12.12.2006). The truth of truthiness. *B: CBS News*. Retrieved from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-truth-of-truthiness/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Amnesty International. (13.12.2016). Syria: Reports of execution-style killings in Aleppo point to war crimes. *Amnesty*. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/12/syria-reports-of-execution-style-killings-in-aleppo-point-to-war-crimes/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Anderson, J., & Rainie, L. (19.10.2017). The future of truth and misinformation online. *B: Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/10/19/the-future-of-truth-and-misinformation-online/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Ayolov, P. (14.12.2016). @peterayolov. Replying to @JensLaerke. @NBCNews: Thousand of websites are quoting you saying: "A complete meltdown of humanity" and you are just quoting NBC...Newsloop! Retrieved from https://twitter.com/peterayolov/status/808960327643762690 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Baraniuk, C. (17.02.2016). Web of lies: Is the internet making a world without truth? *B: New Scientist*. Retrieved from https://www.newscientist.com/article/2077405-web-of-lies-is-the-internet-making-a-world-without-truth/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Barnard, A. (13.12.2016). Battle over Aleppo is over, Russia says, as evacuation deal reached. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/world/middleeast/syria-aleppo-civilians.html (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Berners-Lee, T., & Fischetti, M. (1999). *Weaving the web*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

Berners-Lee, T. (29.09.2018a). A little step for the network ... Retrieved from https://solid.inrupt.com/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Berners-Lee, T. (29.09.2018b). One small step for the web… *Medium*. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@timberners_lee/one-small-step-for-the-web-87f92217d085 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Brown, L. (13.12.2016). People in Aleppo are tweeting their final moments. *BBC*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/38301458/people-in-aleppo-are-tweeting-their-final-moments (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (2016a). Oxford dictionaries word of the year 2016. Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (14.12.2016b). The bloodbath in Aleppo will haunt humanity. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-bloodbath-in-aleppo-will-haunt-humanity/2016/12/14/ffe0d646-c22a-11e6-9a51-cd56ea1c2bb7_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e7427feb307c (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (13.12.2016c). Aleppo: "A complete meltdown of humanity". *Euronews*. Retrieved from https://www.euronews.com/2016/12/13/aleppo-a-complete-meltdown-of-humanity (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (13.12.2016d). France calls for emergency meeting of UN Security Council on Aleppo. *France24*. Retrieved from https://www.france24.com/en/20161213-france-calls-emergency-security-council-meeting-aleppo (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (26.12.2016e). Russian military report mass graves of civilians in Syria's Aleppo. *DW*. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/russian-military-report-mass-graves-of-civilians-in-syrias-aleppo/a-36914959 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Editorial Board. (25.12.2016f). Bodies of 21 civilians killed by terrorists discovered in Aleppo. *SANA*. Retrieved from https://sana.sy/en/?p=97081 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Eur-lex. (17.07.2000). Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament. Retrieved from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0031:EN:HTML (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Jamieson, A., Bishop, M. W., & Siemaszko, C. (13.12.2016). Aleppo: Cease-fire deal reached in besieged Syrian city, rebels say. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/aleppos-children/aleppo-civilians-killed-complete-meltdown-humanity-u-n-n695286 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Laerke, J. @JensLaerke: Spokesperson for United Nations humanitarian office @UNOCHA in Geneva. Tweets are my own. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/JensLaerke (last visit 20.11.2018)

Laerke, J. (13.12.2016). @JensLaerke: Civilians killed in "complete meltdown of humanity" in #Aleppo: U.N. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/jenslaerke/status/808709666041696256 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Mahler, J. (04.04.2017). CNN had a problem Donald Trump solved it, inside the strange symbiosis between Jeff Zucker and the president he helped create. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/magazine/cnn-had-a-problem-donald-trump-solved-it.html (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Manjoo, F. (02.11.2016). How the internet is loosening our grip on the truth. *B: New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/technology/how-the-internet-is-loosening-our-grip-on-the-truth.html (last visit: 20.11.2018)

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media*. New York: Mentor.

McLuhan, M., & McLuhan, E. (1988). *Laws of media*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mitchel, A., Grieco, E., & Sumida, N. (19.04.2018). Americans favor protecting information freedoms over government steps to restrict false news online. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from www.journalism.org/2018/04/19/americans-favor-protecting-information-freedoms-over-government-steps-to-restrict-false-news-online/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Morozov, E. (2012). *The net delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom.* New York: PublicAffairs.

Morozov, E. (08.01.2017). Moral panic over fake news hides the real enemy—The digital giants. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/08/blaming-fake-news-not-the-answer-democracy-crisis (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Nebehay, S., & Miles, T. (13.12.2016). Syrian army, Iraqi militia accused of "slaughter" of civilians in Aleppo. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-un/syrian-army-iraqi-militia-accused-of-slaughter-of-civilians-in-aleppo-idUSKBN1420ZX (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Pleitgen, F. (2016). "Complete meltdown of humanity" in Aleppo. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2016/12/14/ebof-aleppo-today-pleitgen.cnn (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Postman, N. (1970). The reformed English curriculum. In A. C. Eurich (Ed.), *High school 1980: The shape of the future in American secondary education* (pp. 160-168). New York: Pitman.

Shaheen, K. (13.12.2016). Children trapped in building under attack in Aleppo, doctor tells UN. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/13/red-cross-urgent-plea-to-save-civilians-aleppo-syria (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Specia, M. (13.04.2018). How Syria's death toll is lost in the fog of war. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/world/middleeast/syria-death-toll.html (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Torbati, Y. (15.12.2016). Kerry accuses the Assad government of "massacre" in Aleppo. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kerry-idUSKBN1442NU?il=0 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

UN Audiovisual Library. (13.12.2016). Geneva/Aleppo executions. Retrieved from https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/1795/1795459/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC). Retrieved from http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/martyrs/1/c29ydGJ5PWEua2lsbGVkX2RhdGV8c29ydGRpcj1ERVNDfGFwcHJvdmVkPXZpc2libGV8ZXh0cmFkaXNwbGF5PTB8cHJvdmluY2U9Nnxjb2RNdWx0aT0zLDQsNiw3LDgsOSwxMCwxMSwxNXxzdGFydERhdGU9MjAxNi0xMi0wMXxlbmREYXRlPTIwMTYtMTItMTN8 (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Weiss, M., Roy, G., & Rowell, A. (12.13.2016). The daily beast: Women in Aleppo choose suicide over rape, rebels report. Retrieved from https://www.thedailybeast.com/women-in-aleppo-choose-suicide-over-rape-rebels-report (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Wilkinson, M. (13.12.2016). Syria's "meltdown of humanity": Emergency commons debate as Aleppo civilians executed, children trapped under bombardment. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/13/syria-aleppo-mps-emergency-debate-live/ (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Wikipedia. The Communications Decency Act of 1996 (CDA). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_230_of_the_Communications_Decency_Act (last visit: 20.11.2018)

Woolf, C. (14.12.2016). Does the killing in Aleppo amount to genocide? *PRI*. Retrieved from https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-12-14/does-killing-aleppo-amount-genocide (last visit: 20.11.2018)