

**Título** The Age of Disinformation

---

**Tipo de Producto** Divulgación

---

**Autores** Rubbi, Lautaro

---

Publicado en: The Bubble

## Código del Proyecto y Título del Proyecto

---

A17S28 - Ciberseguridad, Ciberguerra y Deep Web, las nuevas amenazas del Siglo XXI. Aproximación al caso chino 2010 - 2016

## Responsable del Proyecto

---

Rubbi, Lautaro

---

## Línea

---

Agenda Internacional

---

## Área Temática

---

Ciencias Políticas y RRH

---

## Fecha

---

Marzo 2018

---

**INSOD**

Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Disciplinas  
Proyectuales

**UADE** 

## The Age of Disinformation

By Lautaro Rubbi, research professor at the  
Institute of Social Sciences of UADE Foundation - CONICET

*O' Brien: "How many fingers do you see here, Winston?"*

*Winston: "Four."*

*O' Brien: "And if the party says that it is not four but five --  
then how many?"*

*George Orwell, 1984 (1948)*

According to the latest report released by Freedom House, governments around the world are stepping up their efforts to manipulate information on social networks, undermining the foundations of democracy and creating a general decline in internet freedom. According to the report, which assesses the situation in 65 countries accounting for 87% of Internet users, online manipulation and disinformation tactics played an important role in at least 18 elections during the last period, including Russia's resounding eruption into the US elections. The use of paid commentators and automated campaigns to spread government propaganda was pioneering in China and Russia, but has now become global. The report presents in numbers a reality that we already perceive on a daily basis: We live in the era of disinformation, where impact and dissemination has become more important than truth and where manipulation of facts is commonplace.

According to the report, the irruption of social networks by states and privates damaged citizens ability to choose their leaders on the basis of objective news and genuine debate. Already in 1971 the political scientific Robert Dahl established that informed comprehension was a necessary requirement to achieve an adequate standard of democracy. In other words, citizens should be able to access broad and equitable opportunities to know and affirm the choice best suited to their interests. In its conception of democracy as a utopia, objective and credible means of information were a fundamental prerequisite for the civil organization to get as close as possible to democracy.

However, it is unlikely that when the author referred to the need for alternative sources of accessible information, he was referring to Russian agents, radical fanatics or websites that deliberately write false stories for further repercussions and followers. Dahl did not imagine that societies could move from a relative mistrust on the media to a total disbelief about the self-concept of truth. Nowadays emotions and beliefs are the most important standard for truth, rather than facts. The main problem is that emotions are more related to dictatorial kinds of governments rather than to democracies.

Traditional media have lost their monopoly on the dissemination of information to the great social platforms of the Internet. As a growing proportion of the world's population accesses social networks to learn about news, several studies indicate that the overload of information

spurred by these platforms reduces the ability to discern between truthful and deliberately false news. They are the perfect channel for spreading disinformation campaigns.

Thus, if the media are the fourth power of democracy, guardians of freedom of opinion, social networks have become a fifth power, with enormous influence on society and governments, but much more difficult to control. The debate is even more intense with regard to the latter, since the question is no longer whether they should be regulated, but how to do so, given the widespread dispersion of false news creators. Attempts by the state and private sector, such as fact-checking sites that circulate on the Internet, have not yet achieved results.

The techniques that social platforms themselves have tried to counter the wave of false news, such as labeling them as such under the verification of independent institutions, have failed. Studies indicate that less than 5% of readers change their minds about the veracity of a news story once they have assumed a position, even if all the clues say it is false. Moreover, these labels only reinforce the belief in other news stories: "those that are not labeled as false must certainly be true", they think. There have already been many regrets for creating "a monster that we couldn't control," according to statements by several recently retired Facebook and Twitter executives who regret having participated in the creation of tools "that destroy society from inside".

The reasons for writing and disseminating false news are varied. On one hand, we find deliberate interventions in national and international policies by governments and private sectors, as the mentioned report points out. On the other hand, the advertising system that allows to obtain higher revenues as the number of visitors to a website increases has led to the need to generate permanent impact to attract followers. Creating and sharing false news is good business for some people. Added to this is the vulnerability of human psychology to the need for social validation. The goal is to get followers, no matter how. Thus, the original concept of an open web that would serve to raise the standards of information and education of the great masses has vanished, or at least can be discussed.

Even the very concept of false news has lost its veracity, as it has become a common use to denounce news and facts as false just because one does not support them. Donald Trump is already a classic example of using this technique. The false news is no longer just the one that does not coincide with reality, it is also the reality that does not please. "What is the truth?" Pontius Pilate wondered in a passage from the Gospel according to John. At least the ruler of that time was questioning the truth, not denying it.

In 1948, taking the Soviet system as a model, George Orwell already imagined a world where truth was manipulated to the point that reality lacked verifiable facts. "Whoever controls the past controls the future, whoever controls the present controls the past." The subjectivation of reality in its maximum expression. The effects of these fast-moving techniques on democracy and civic activism are potentially devastating.

Fortunately, Argentina continues to be part of the small group of countries that continue to consider itself "free" in its use of the Internet, with only a few attacks, scandals and manipulation techniques recorded by the report. However, in the face of a phenomenon that has become global, we must constantly be aware of new developments. The best advice is to be attentive and not forget that we are already living in the age of post-truth and disinformation.