

C11 A Fake News Reporting Manual to the Elections

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some of the challenges related to the identification of posts on social networks and news distributed through messaging apps and their potential impact on elections.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a manual to help citizens report fake news propagated through social networks and messaging apps, allowing law enforcement to respond more effectively to complaints.

The advancement and democratization of the internet have made it easier for people to access various types of information. However, information obtained in this way can be false or distorted, and users can be presented with many difficulties in differentiating it from the truth.

With the increasing use of social networks, sharing all types of information has become very common, including the well-known “fake news.” The dissemination of fake news through social networks such as Facebook™ and Instagram™, for example, happens very quickly because the trust between people in these networks creates an idea of credibility that, in addition to influencing the recipient, also provides a greater chance for sharing. Furthermore, people use social networks as a source of news and, beyond that, messaging apps have been gaining ever more space as a source of news and information, which aggravates the problem.¹⁻³

Because of this power to transmit news to people, social networks and messaging apps have been heavily used to influence politics based on fake news, directly affecting democratic societies. There are several reports of cases in which fake news had influence on European and American elections.⁴

The strategies used to create fake news are diverse. These strategies range from contracting marketing agencies to create news and memes to denigrate a candidate’s image to technological ones, such as using robots to quickly propagate fake news and provide credibility to dubious posts on social networks. An attempt to curb the spread of such fake news can be made through denunciations by citizens or committees of political parties. Such complaints must identify the following posting artifacts to allow tracking: (1) content; (2) date and time; and (3) user name or other identification. Although these artifacts represent simple information, sometimes they do not contain all essential data for law enforcement, harming the identification of the post, its author, and even withdrawal from circulation, making tracking impossible.

To enable fake news reports to be forwarded to law enforcement with all the information necessary for the investigation of electoral crimes, a manual has been created to assist whistleblowers in reporting fake news propagated through the following social networks and messaging apps: Facebook™, Instagram™, YouTube™, Twitter™, WhatsApp™, and Telegram™. This manual was freely available to the Brazilian population on the websites of the institutions responsible for the elections.

Through this manual, it is possible for the complainant, even if unfamiliar with social networks or messaging apps, to collect the necessary information for proper tracking, such as post content, profile identification or user name, and dates, among other identifying data. The entire manual uses simple language and detailed illustrations of the steps required to obtain the relevant data in each of the most-used social networks or messaging apps in Brazil. Moreover, it suggests a better way of presenting the information obtained to law enforcement, whether in electronic or printed form.

With the use of the manual, the handling of complaints became faster and more effective, as law enforcement started to track posts and authors more quickly.

Reference(s):

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4. *Russian Disinformation Distorts American and European Democracy*. February 22, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/02/22/russian-disinformation-distorts-american-and-european-democracy>.

Fake News, Social Networks, Messaging Apps