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### DEFINING THE TYPES OF «FAKERS» IN SOCIAL MEDIA

**Abstract.** Nowadays, internet users spend much of their time on social networks, where they share and generate content, support the causes and activities they like, get in touch with their peers, and generate audio-visual content. Besides, they also share their opinions with other users, thus producing User-Generated Content (UGC). The authors noted that UGC lacks proven scientific, professional, or academic quality. However, when content is generated massively in social networks, it can get viral and achieve the most significant engagement of users in the community. Furthermore, there is evidence that the content with the most significant impact on other users is the one that achieves the greatest engagement and support. The scientific review analysis indicated that usually, the content that achieves more impact and engagement in social media is related to fake news or published by fake users. In this context, the present study aims to theorize and define the concept of «faker» based on a review of previous studies. Main results show that a «faker» is a user who is not a real person, but pretends to be such. Based on the results of the exploratory analysis, the following 6 types of users classified as fakers were identified and analyzed: conspiranoid (users who share compulsive and self-taught content in which they share minimal details of the theory they support, have powerful firm beliefs, and always find a way to verify their hypotheses); proselytizing (users who try to gain followers by any means and convince other followers to follow them); narcissists (users who base their content on love and attraction to themselves and generate false content that reflects their own image as the main message); creators of chaos (users whose main objective is to generate chaos in social networks and base their arguments and theories on personal, professional, or political relationships among other users to generate conflicts that will increase the chaos within a closed community); satire humor (users who generate content focused on the satire targeting public, mythological, ideological, or other characters or entities and defame others by focusing on the actions of public characters); paranoid tyrants (users who focus on the analysis of the information overload, which makes it difficult to interpret the contents on the Internet today). In the frame of this paper, the authors provided a discussion of important theoretical and practical implications of obtained results for the marketing industry and digital marketing in social media.

**Keywords:** faker, fake content, social media, social network, UGC.

**Introduction.** With the development of new technologies in the last decades, the use of the Internet and social networks has considerably increased (Liulov et al., 2018; Talwar et al., 2019). Modern humans live in a 24/7 Internet-connected world. In turn, users could make purchases and communicate over the Internet anytime and from anywhere in the world (Yevdokimov et al., 2018; Aronson et al., 2008). Internet users spend a part of their daily time on using social networks. In this case, they share and generate content, support causes and activities they like, get in touch with their peers, generate audio-visual and text content to share their opinions with other users (Saura, 2020). It stands to mention that UGC frequently lacks proven scientific, professional, or academic quality (Apuke and Omar, 2020). Specifically, in situations where there is a lot of noise (defined as the massive generation of information in real-time to follow an event or activity (Balaanand et al., 2019), several users generate false or untruthful information. Herewith, the number of such users increases progressively (Palos-Sanchez et al., 2020).

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Furthermore, there is evidence that the content with the most significant impact on users is the one that achieves the greatest engagement and support from other users (for example, in the form of Twitter retweets or likes on Facebook (Purba et al., 2020)). In this study, engagement is understood as any action that increases the impact of content on the Internet or social networks. The generation of engagement includes actions or indicators such as comments, opinions, likes, shares, traffic, views, etc. (Mohammadrezaei et al., 2018).

According to Masood et al. (2019), when content goes viral, and users' political ideologies, tastes, or explicit public support of a public figure through social networks come into play, the amount of fake content also considerably increases. The followers and opponents of these public figures may come to confront the chaos generated on the net and, by doing so, influence the actions that these public figures develop in their professional strategies (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

In response to these trends, different social networks have activated algorithms to automatically stop fake content and block fake users registered by robots and automatic systems. These automatic systems and robots are in charge of generating new profiles that later share fake content to support a specific cause and generate noise on social networks (Lies, 2019). Notably, the noise is understood as all actions that can defame public figures or disorient other users, thus causing misinterpretation of the shared messages (Kaur et al., 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2020). In this context, there is an urgent need to establish typologies of fake users in social media Atodiresei et al. (2018) and Balaanand et al. (2019). Accordingly, the present study is an exploratory investigation that seeks to define the concept of «faker» based on a review of previous studies. In essence, a «faker» is a user who is not a real person but pretends to be such. At present, there is no clarity in the literature on what classifies as fake news (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019), fake profiles (Atodiresei et al., 2018) and fake users (Balaanand et al., 2019). For filling this gap in the literature, the present study proposes definitions of the different types of users defined as fakers based on the actions and type of User-Generated Content (UGC) (Saura et al., 2019) that they share on social networks and digital platforms. Following Webster and Watson (2002) and Stieglitz et al. (2018) who argued that before carrying out a scientific methodology of qualitative or quantitative research, the object of study must be correctly theorized, while a theoretical framework correctly justified. This exploratory study aims to define the concept of «faker» and outline its typologies. For achieving this aim, this study follows Stieglitz et al. (2018) who concluded that «an emerging issue would benefit from exposure to potential theoretical foundations before developing the research study».

The remainder of the manuscript is structured as follows: 1) the introduction is presented, followed by the definition of fakers in social media; 2) discussion on the typologies and characteristics of the fakers; 3) the paper conclusions with a discussion of the results.

**Literature Review.** A fake or faker user is known as a user who creates an account in a profile on a social network, digital platform or any online service to be someone who does not exist in real life. This type of account could be managed by the same user who creates the fake account or by third-party users who have access to generate content that will be passed on as an original source (Balaanand et al., 2019). Most of these accounts are created on the Internet and on social networks to develop or propitiate the actions and controversy to influence certain issues, such as politics, sports, events, and so forth. Thus, the aim of generating such fake accounts is to create content in the form of comments, opinions, and multimedia to support a specific cause. Furthermore, the primary goal of these accounts is to create untruthful content by people whose real identity is hidden. Such accounts are frequently used to, among others, denigrate other users or public figures, mislead on certain issues, share false news, and attack institutions and companies. The analysis of scientific review indicated that several models had been developed to identify false accounts on the Internet and social networks so that to denounce their illegal nature. Moreover, there is evidence of numerous users or influencers on social networks, who base their content marketing strategies on buying engagement. This strategy includes buying fake likes and

comments on UGC-type content published by these influencers (Saura et al., 2019a). These concerns have significantly influenced the marketing and digital marketing strategies of companies operating on the Internet, as they can generate false leads that companies subsequently collect in their databases or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (Saura et al., 2019). It worth noting that fake users also influence the real statistics of the engagement that clients have to develop social media marketing strategies (Fire et al., 2014). In this context, the challenge is not only to identify fake users but also to classify them based on the content they publish. The latter can be a determining factor to understand better how the content fakers publish affects the companies or other users (Gurajala et al., 2016).

**Methodology and research methods.** Following Saura (2020), a review approach has been chosen as the methodology in this study. For obtaining information on the different types of fake users on social media, searches were carried out in the main academic databases as follows: Web of sciences, Sciencedirect, Scopus and IEEE Explore. Based on the exploratory approach, this descriptive and narrative review chooses the main studies that deal with fake users on social media and, based on these results, raises the typologies of «fakers» indicated in the results section. In the first step of the review, the following search terms are used in the indicated databases: «Fake User» AND «Social Media» using bullet operators. In the second step, the title, abstracts and keywords are analyzed in-deep to select the relevant studies. In the third step, an in-depth reading of the content of the articles is carried out to understand the main factors that affect the proposed objectives. In the total of searches carried out in the databases, 89 articles were obtained that directly or indirectly dealt with the concept of false users on social media. The process of filtering and reading the articles resulted in a total of 9 articles included in the study (Table 1).

**Table 1. The selected articles for the analysis**

Authors	Journal	Category
Borges-Tiago et al. (2020)	Psychology & Marketing	Marketing, Psychology
Krombholz et al. (2012)	Journal of Service Science Research	Multidisciplinary, Management
Purba et al. (2020)	International Journal of Electrical and Computer Engineering	Computer Engineering
Masood et al. (2019)	IEEE Access	Computer Sciences
Gurajala et al. (2016)	Big Data & Society	New Technologies, Social Sciences,
Balaanand et al. (2019)	The Journal of Supercomputing	Computer Sciences
Atodiresei et al. (2018)	Procedia Computer Science	Computer Sciences
Wang et al. (2018)	International Symposium on Research in Attacks, Intrusions, and Defenses	Government, Management

Sources: developed by the authors.

**Results.** The summarization and systematization of scientific sources on false users and false news allowed establishing the classification of fakers and the type of content published by them on the Internet (Table 2). Thus, the core types of fakers were:

1. Conspiranoids.
2. Proselytizing.
3. Narcissists.
4. Creators of Chaos.
5. Satirists.
6. Paranoid Tyrants.

The explanation of each type showed in Table 2.

Type	Description	Characteristics
<b>Conspiranoids</b>	Users who share compulsive and self-taught content in which they share minimal details of the theory they support. They have powerful firm beliefs, and always find a way to verify their hypotheses. Conspiranoids believe that there is a group of powerful people driving world organizations and generate content based on these conspiracy theories.	Compulsive Strong beliefs Self-confident
<b>Proselytizing</b>	Users who try to gain followers by any means. They are users who try to convince other followers to follow them. These users gain followers by convincing other users not only by their political ideology or habits but also by the quality of the content they generate. Their actions are usually on the verge of the legal and moral, since what matters the most is getting followers, and the content generated is structured based on this principle.	Persuasive Amoral Egomaniacal
<b>Narcissists</b>	Base their content on love and attraction to themselves. They generate false content that reflects their own image as the main message. These profiles promote self-centeredness and vanity. These users posit themselves as always correct and valid in their opinions, which they vehemently defend in social networks.	Egotistical Self-worshipping Self-confident
<b>Creators of Chaos</b>	Users whose main objective is to generate chaos in social networks. This type of users bases their arguments and theories on personal, professional, or political relationships among other users to generate conflicts increasing the chaos within a closed community. Besides, they try to create chaos by sharing false news to gain followers and increase engagement in their content. Creators of chaos aim to unbalance the community and transmit chaos in their networks.	Amoral Compulsive False
<b>Satirists</b>	Users who generate content focused on the satire targeting public, mythological, ideological, or other characters or entities. Such users aim to defame others satirically and to increase other users' engagement with their accounts by focusing on the actions of public characters. They are not users who create conflicts, but they do generate false content with an unknown original source.	Slanderer Egotistical Comedian
<b>Paranoid Tyrants</b>	Users who focus on the analysis of the information overload, which makes it difficult to interpret the contents on the Internet today. Such users promote conspiracy theories based on deception and lies to prove their hypotheses. To defend their arguments, they generate content based on invented facts or links to unrelated facts to support their claims.	Compulsive Strong beliefs Self-confident Egomaniacal

Sources: developed by the authors.

**Conclusions.** Social networks and digital platforms are places where content generated by some users can influence other ones. This study presents the exploratory analysis of users known as fakers, classified them based on their characteristics. This resulted in a typology of 6 types of fake users that were described in terms of their typical actions, aims, and other salient features. Overall, an overarching goal of all fake users is to increase engagement with the content of other users in social networks and on digital platforms. The more engagement fake users obtain, the greater their credibility among other users is, and the more impact they could achieve in their respective user communities that comprise their followers. As argued by Webster and Watson (2002) and Stieglitz et al. (2018), any quantitative or qualitative in-depth

investigation with any methodological approach should be preceded by a rigorous definition of the object of study and its characteristics. Accordingly, the present study outlines a theoretical framework for further research on fake users and their typologies. Future studies could use these results for an in-depth investigation of fake users from different perspectives. For instance, based on the findings, one can explore the patterns in fake users' profiles or analyze the content of their publications. Implications for the Industry. Understanding different types of users in social networks and on digital platforms could help marketing agencies and professional institutions to elaborate appropriate content strategies. Concerning fake users, marketing agencies and professional institutions can elaborate and introduce appropriate content plans that would help to avoid this type of users or to minimize their impact on corresponding communities. Besides, such a plan could help companies and organizations to prevent crises caused by the activities of fake users and to avoid reputational damage or loss associated with the content published by fake users. Finally, agencies and companies could use the results of the present study to identify fake users in their networks of contacts and online communities. Moreover, it would allow them to establish relevant communication protocols to control and monitor fake users' actions in social media.

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#### **Основні типи «Фейкерів» у соціальних мережах**

Сучасний розвиток цифрових технологій та проникнення Інтернету у всі сфери суспільного життя обумовлює стрімке зростання загального часу проведеного інтернет-користувачами соціальних мережах, де вони створюють контент та обмінюються ним, спілкуються з друзями, об'єднуються у групи за інтересами тощо. При цьому висловлюючи власну думку в соціальних мережах, інтернет-користувачі генерують споживчий контент. Авторами відмічено, що масове створення користувацького контенту в соціальних мережах набуває вірусного характеру та підвищує рівень залученості користувачів до спільнот. Доведено, що контент з найбільш значним впливом на інших користувачів, досягає найвищого рівня залученості та підтримки. Однак, за результатами аналізу наукового доробку з досліджуваної тематики встановлено, що фейкові новини чи пости фейкових користувачів мають високий рівень залученості та впливу в соціальних мережах. Метою статті є узагальнення та визначення поняття «фейкер» на основі аналізу наукового доробку. Авторами встановлено, що особа, яка видає себе за іншого є «фейкером». У ході дослідження виявлено та проаналізовано шість типів фейкових користувачів, а саме: 1) змовники (інтернет-користувачі, які діляться суб'єктивним контентом з мінімальним теоретичним підґрунтям та власними нав'язливими переконаннями); 2) агітатори (інтернет-користувачі, які намагаються у будь-який спосіб переконати інших слідувати за ними); 3) нарциси (інтернет-користувачі, які створюють фейковий контент про свій стиль життя, імітуючи почуття любові та прив'язаності до своєї особистості); 4) творці хаосу (інтернет-користувачі, головним завданням яких є створення конфліктів та хаосу в закритих спільнотах, а також побудова власних аргументів та теорій на особистих, професійних та політичних взаємовідносинах між іншими інтернет-користувачами); 5) сатирики гумору (інтернет-користувачі, які створюють сатиричний контент щодо дій публічних, міфологічних, ідеологічних та інших персонажів або суб'єктів); 6) параноїдні тирані (інтернет-користувачі, які зосереджені на аналізі інформаційного переважанню, що ускладняє інтерпретацію інтернет-контенту). Результати дослідження мають теоретичне та практичне значення і можуть бути прийняті до впровадження у сфері маркетингу та, зокрема, цифрового маркетингу в соціальних мережах.

Ключові слова: фейк, фейковий контент, соціальні медіа, соціальні мережі, користувацький контент.

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