

Methodology of the combat platform against media disinformation Raskrikavanje.rs

In the methodology of work we will present the basic principles of the platform's work, including: the choice of content and media that are monitored and evaluated on the platform; how to evaluate individual media content and the media themselves; the use of research sources, the structure of fact-checking analysis, and the methodology for creating a list of media with questionable credibility.

1. Choice of media for monitoring and resources

a. Choice of media

Media that will be monitored for the needs of this platform are selected based on two criteria: 1) reading scope of media within territory of Serbia 2) placing and promoting articles and topics that point to disputable professional ethics and standards.

According to the first criterion, all media, which has significant reading scope in Serbia, will be monitored based on the available data (www.alexacom and similar sources). According to another criterion, all media will be monitored for which are found to possess some of the following characteristics by online searching sources as: not having a clear impressum and editorial; publishing content without mentioning the name of the author or a clear indication that it is transferred content; assertions in articles are not checked or corroborated by sources, instead they have already received some of the negative evaluations on the Raskrikavanje.rs website. During the research of some topics, the redaction of the Raskrikavanje.rs portal shall, according to the above mentioned criteria, narrow down or expand the list of the media that follows.

Apart from the media, profiles on social networks can also be monitored if their posts become, or pretend to become, a source of false news or some sort of disinformation that can be extended to the public.

b. Sources for analysis

Platform evaluations Raskrikavanje are based on checking the assertions published in the media and identifying relevant facts. A Fact-checking analysis is based on the use of credible sources and methods, and each Fact-checking analysis will have clearly identified sources and links to the same. Among the sources which will be used in the research, the following should be highlighted:

- Official data and statistics;
- Answers and data from official institutions;
- Relevant media sources;
- Official statements by relevant persons or institutions;
- Research of relevant institutions or individuals;
- Opinions of experts;
- Legal acts and official documents of a different type;
- Own research;
- Other confidential and relevant sources;

2. Structure of Fact-checking analysis

Fact-checking analysis presents an independent check of various media content. Each such analysis includes: clearly stated assertions from media announcements that are checked and evaluated; a clear explanation of the evaluations given on the basis of the determined facts and methodology of evaluations; evaluation; link to the original article or articles that are the sources of these assertions. One fact-checking analysis can handle multiple original articles, if they concern with the same topics and if they transmit assertions from one to another as well.

Each original article contains the following elements to ensure the permanent storage of the evaluated content in the enclosed form, in the case that is removed or modified by the author after the check:

- The original article on the media page saved in PDF, with the original URL of the article in the title of the document;
- Link to a copy of the article which is saved at webarchive.org.

Close-up of the elements of the fact-checking analysis in which the assertions from the media article are evaluated

1. The assertion which is being evaluated, published in the monitoring article of the media that is being monitored. One or more assertions can be taken from one article. For each of them a check performs.

In the case that the evaluated assertions are transferred by other media, in each analysis, beside the original article, shall be included also the ones which have transmitted one or multiple evaluated assertions. When more media has transmitted the same assertion without specifying the original source, it is identified by determining the time of publication of the content. The oldest publication is treated as the original article, which is later transmitted entirely or partly by other media, if it is possible to determine it using all available known sources. The extent and frequency of the transmission of the assertion is monitored from the moment of origination of the original content until the moment of publication of the analysis, which is clearly visible (date and time of the article publication). Therefore, if a need appears (re-launching of outdated news, continuation of the intensive spread of the news after the published analysis, etc.), the analysis shall be subsequently supplemented with new data, with a clear indication of when, for what reason and in what way the original content has been expanded.

Assertions that are being evaluated are primarily chosen due to their presentation as facts, and their evaluation has its aim to determine to what extent they are facts as well as how information is obtained in the context of professional journalism standards which should ensure an accurate informing. Since the platform deals with the media scene, the assertions that are evaluated are primarily coming from the journalists themselves, i.e., person who produce media content.

Exceptions are assertions which represent quoted or paraphrased statements given by third parties, which may also be subject to evaluation in the following cases:

- The assertions quoted in the article are evaluated when they represent the source of the controversial assertion, but these assertions **are not critically treated** by journalists. If the controversial statement is transmitted in an article which critically problematize it with respect to the standards of the profession, it shall not be evaluated.
- Uncritical treatment, means 1) that the statement is controversial from the point of view of defined facts, but it is treated as a fact, especially in cases where the author further elaborates the presented thesis without checking, examining her truthfulness and providing evidence for it;

2) in cases where the statement is potentially harmful to certain persons/groups, the statement is presented as a determined fact without contact with the other party; 3) in the case when it is about a subject related to a public hearing, a statement is presented as a determined fact without specifying other relevant information, specially if there are already known facts which do not support, or impugn the presented thesis.

- It is certain that during the evaluation of quoted statements, into account should be taken **statements that pretend to present factual assertions**, without those that represent personal opinions and interpretations of the occurrences, i.e. statements that are clearly formulated as the subjective ones.
- A statement can also be considered when it comes to a person **whose credibility has already been questioned by previous checks or on the basis of already known facts**. The credibility of the source is considered to the extent that it is relevant for the analysis of the presented assertions. In particular, that are cases where for the primary and uncritically treated source persons are taken for whom it is found to abuse the public by presenting proven false assertions about the subject being processed; to be falsely represented as experts for a particular topic or area in which they have no expertise; to falsely represent their position or status related to a specific subject or area (cases where persons are presented as independent experts, even though they have a clear and proven personal interest related to one of the opposing parties in the story).

2. Assertion check includes the use of methodological criteria for evaluation used on the platform as well as determining whether (and which) evaluation is related to a separate assertion. When it is determined the potential applicability of the predefined criteria, each individual assertion shall be reviewed in accordance with the methodology. Examples of checks for some evaluation include:

- In the case of a false news, under investigation will be determined whether the presented information in a separate assertion is a fact or it is an incorrect allegation. All the facts determined under research as well as their relation to the presented assertion, shall be stated in the explanation.
- In the case of **biased reporting**, it will be determined and stated how the presented assertion is contextualized with the neglect or distortion of other relevant information, or in which way a certain narrative is favored in relation to other which is opposed to it (failure to contact the other party; omission of known facts which do not support the presented/stated assertion). Also, if the article serves anonymous sources, but: does not provide any evidence for its allegation, it is not explicitly emphasized that the other party has been contacted for verification or if the information has been verified from any other source, such procedures shall be treated as a form of biased reporting.
- In the case of **manipulation of facts**, the check determines what is wrong in the manner of representation, or the interpretation of information which in itself does not have to be incorrect.
- In the case of **spin**, the check establishes the connection between the assertion being announced and any other event or news, which may include a review of other reports of the same medium on the subject, occurrence, or participants who appear in such connection. For instance, cases where there is an actual topic or report that is unfavorable to certain participants, who are completely ignored on a given medium, or whose significance is targetly reduced; while at the same time, the content and reports with the reverse sign are placed (favorable to certain participants, unfavorable to the opposite side).

All the findings that are made by the check, which are relevant to the evaluation of the verified assertion, are clearly, minutely and precisely presented in the analysis of the processed content. All additional information (cognition of new facts, publication of denials by the analyzed media, observed changes in the original content after the publication of the analysis, new data on the spread of the original assertion, etc.) shall be clearly indicated as additional content in the text of the analysis.

3. Types of false news given on the abovementioned check

Based on the above indicated check, each separate assertion is classified into one of the categories defined under methodology i.e. it is given to it the appropriate mark as a type of false news. One article may have more evaluations, depending on 1) how many assertions are evaluated therein 2) how many disputable procedures have been identified.

3. Methodology of evaluations

Designations that one assertion or media article may receive by the Rakrikavanje.rs portal are the following as:

Propaganda

The designation "Political Promotion" gets a media report that clearly propagates one opinion or one position due to some question and where the media clearly indicates that it is the promotion of an individual, an organization, a political party, or similar. Media reports with such evaluation are the least problematic from the perspective of this methodology.

Satire and humor

The designation "Satire and Humor" gets a media content that uses fictitious news for the purpose of satirical reality display. It shall be another example of not problematic media report, if the media clearly indicates it is about satirical content. The aim of including this category in the methodology is to point out this type of content in situations where it can make it seems like a true media report and becomes potentially harmful in case of further transmission without a check and a clear indication that it is about satire. In our methodology, this designation gets only the content for which medium i.e. which author of the same one clearly emphasizes that it is a satire.

Clickbait

The designation "Clickbait" gets a media report whose title does not have a basis in the text that follows. These texts and attachments have intent to attract the consumer's attention by the sensational title, promising content that does not actually exist. They are mostly created for financial interest i.e. for increasing reading scope.

Hidden advertising

The designation "Hidden advertising" gets a commercial which is presented as editorial content. Such reports look like journalistic/authorial texts, although they are mostly sponsored content. This designation is given in cases where such content is not clearly marked as advertisements or sponsored articles, what requires the profession regulations. This designation does not necessarily imply violation of any law of the Republic of Serbia, above all the Law on Advertising.

Error

The designation "Error" gets a media report in which the media editorial board makes a mistake by publishing inaccurate information or transmitting unverified news from another source without the

obvious intention of misinforming the public. Such report can be very harmful in some cases and after repeat of transmitting news from unreliable sources, we may talk about the intention of some media to affect the public by transmitting incorrect content.

Bias

The designation "Bias" gets a media report that can be clearly identified to favor facts, attitudes and conclusions that fit a certain narrative, often without respecting the rule of contacting the other party when it comes to assertions that are harmful to someone's reputation, or which shows certain participants in a negative light. One of the forms of biased reporting is the selective presentation of facts, where the facts that support a certain thesis are highlighted, while facts that do not confirm it are tentatively omitted. These media reports are usually accompanied by a very emotional and passionate way of writing. They may or do not have to be incorrect, but often they do not show the whole picture and all parts of story, but they represent only those facts that correspond to the preferred narrative.

Conspiracy theories

The designation "Conspiracy theory" gets a media report that gives a false or unverified description of some occurrence, event or person, presenting them as part or the result of a hidden plan ("conspiracy"). For such content, it is characteristic to present a series of assertions presented as facts, among which the cause-and-effect relationships are being determined, without offering any credible evidence.

Pseudoscience

The designation "Pseudoscience" gets a media report that attempts to present certain opinions, attitudes, values or findings, which are gained by unscientific methods, as scientific discoveries or facts. Such reports often wrongly and manipulatively interpret current scientific research, or call upon researches that are not in accordance with scientific verification and fact-checking.

Manipulating with facts

The designation "Manipulating with facts" gets a media report that uses familiar and accurate facts, but interprets them in a misleading way. These reports mostly use accurate information to make incorrect conclusions or assertions, which course users' conclusions of media content in the wrong direction in relation to the real meaning of the presented facts.

Disinformation

The designation "Disinformation" gets a media report that contains a "mix" of facts which includes inaccurate or semi-truthful content. The media intention can be informing of the public, but at the same time they are not aware of inaccurate information. Also, by this evaluation shall be treated reports that have false attributions or headings that do not reflect the text due to accuracy of the information.

False news

The designation "False News" gets an original media report (made entirely by the media which has published report as well) that contains factually incorrect assertions or information. For contents that are evaluated as false news, it can be reliably determined that they are created and expanded with the intention to misinform the public i.e. to represent an assertion that is completely false as a fact.

Censorship

Media contents that appear to be censored, either altogether or in parts, are marked by designation "Censorship". Most often, such content is removed shortly after publication, and without clear editorial board explanation. That means that the distinction between stylistic and other types of updates has to

be made, which primarily relates to texts and other formats that deal with politically sensitive issues and topics of public interest, which are mysteriously and without reason "disappeared".

Groundless

By the designation "Groundless" are marked media reports which are not based on a clear source as well as media reports for which assertion sources are not determined under research.

**Raskrikavanje Journalists have developed this categorization of evaluation based on "EAVI - The European Association for Viewers Interests".*

4. Lists of media sources with questionable credibility

In addition to evaluating individual content, the Raskrikavanje platform will automatically create media lists and media sources with questionable credibility based on all recorded evaluations.

The aim of making such lists is to establish a reliable, independent and methodologically grounded source that allows media content users to check the credibility of the media that follows. In this way, by following media lists, users may make a distinction between media that report professionally and with high quality, and those media that are found to publish unreliable or inaccurate information, or their credibility is compromised in any other way, all in accordance with the Raskrikavanje criteria.

In that purpose, platform Raskrikavanje shall continuously update two media lists by entering new content, as follows:

1. "Red List" i.e. list of the media that publishes false news;
2. "Risky media list" i.e. list of media where there is a reasonable doubt that they could publish the contents of the questionable truth.

The red list is a list containing the media that has been published and for which it has been proven as the authors of the false news, in the way as the methodology defines false news. Every medium, whose media report gets the designation "False News", automatically appears on this list.

Once the medium is found on this list, it will be removed from it within two months after the last such evaluation, if does not receive any new evaluation as "False News" for any of its media reports i.e. if it does not publish any false news in the period of two months. In the case that the media publishes a denial for false information according to the standards prescribed in the methodology, the information shall be removed from the list after such that denial.

Risky media list is a list containing the media that, for a maximum of two months, publishes at least three articles that had some of the elements of misinformation as defined by the methodology. Therefore, any medium, whose at least three media reports receive any evaluation except the "False News" evaluation within two months, shall become part of this list.

Once the medium is found on this list, it shall be removed from it if it does not receive a new evaluation from the methodology (beside the evaluation "False News") for some of its media reports within two months after the last evaluation.