

## **SCIENTIFICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF MISINFORMATION**

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*Analysis shapes, types and degrees, specific information and systems, structures, procedures and information shows the penetration paths to misinformation. From generation to generation, information may provide very different meanings and messages.*

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The need for information reached now a substantially equal share with the other vital needs, without which the human beings cannot exist. It is manifested both by curiosity for the events that occurred, and especially for those that will occur. Their selection is deliberate. The selected event is presented, interpreted and commented. With these operations, it occurs, inevitably, willingly or not, data leakage or additions which lead to a moving off the reality. Therefore, the usage of modern data acquisition and processing technologies is designed to make the information process more objective.

If we understand that the same information is received, sometimes in different ways, unpredictable even for those who want to misinform, it becomes difficult to explain the adherence, sometimes instantly, without prior analysis, to the subsumed messages of that information.

One explanation could be that the information responds to human curiosity, to the desire for knowledge, to be aware of what is happening in the organization to which the peoples belong and outside it. In general, however, human curiosity is manifested more for „can-can" type of events, than for the ideas embedded in the message disseminated.

Then, bear in mind that the information, once it has been generated by a source, is the subject of multiple interpretations, that most often distort the original message.

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Seen from this perspective, misinformation appears as an inevitable fact. But often there is intent to deceive those who receive the specific information, taking advantage of its imperfections that occurred during the processing.

Multitude of ways and means to disseminate information, events and themes presented in these messages lead to an informational aggression rather than to proper information. The individual wishes to satisfy his state of knowledge, he wants to be in the middle of timeliness and share his opinion on a particular condition or event idea. In doing so, he rather made an intimate connection, which becomes a ritual, with some support, which gradually turns into everyday object of manipulation than with the broadcaster of the messages.

The circulation of the messages is a function of directing nerve to the society in physiological meaning of the term. The comparison suggests the possibility of an existing information disease, similar to sensorial and motor dysfunctions such as paralysis, anesthesia. Misinformation is poison that spreads into our circuits of knowledge. It seeds confusion to make knowledge useless. A single error of judgment can cause unpleasant consequences, but permanent misinformation insidiously weakens the individual's ability to think correctly. Slowly, misinformation makes the world, the reality to become fragmented, confusing, non-malleable. The individual loses his confidence, he used to live in error and abdicate to the disorder of which he fails to overcome; he abandons himself to the irrational and the impulsivity. Finally, invaded by specious and repeated contradictions, even the guy who tries to remain the most careful critic, finds himself unwittingly, deprived of the autonomy of thinking and the freedom of judgment. Misinformation in itself is a real attack on mental integrity of victims. Misinformers' intention is clear, „Why do not substitute yourself to the gods, to madden the one that you want to lose?<sup>1</sup>”.

To be immune to disinformation, to annihilate its persuasive effects, we must look to the facts, to the events, to the situations, no matter how reliable the vectors seems to be, with some caution, making an effort to examine carefully the source of information, its content, the moment or the context in which it was launched and when it is possible, even a confrontation with reality to which it refers.

The analysis of the information path, from the source to the beneficiary, illustrates three important ideas<sup>2</sup>:

a) Information never contains one hundred percent of truth. The errors creep in throughout, even if none of the chain information members, from informant to the informed person, has bad intentions;

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<sup>1</sup> H.P. Cathala, *Age of misinformation*, Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> V. Volkoff, *A treatise of misinformation*, Bucharest, Antet Publishing House, 2009, p. 15.

b) Whatever we might think, not only that in terms of information there is no objectivity, but any alleged objectivity should be treated with suspicion;

c) It is natural that each witness to have its own impression on event they attended to. If the impressions fit too well with each other, it is something suspect in the middle.

Objectivity cannot exist - even more so – but only in the scientific information, when the same experience performed by several scientists always lead to the same results. The scientists assumptions are objective only if they are confirmed by the facts, and their facts are indisputable, meaning that any observer could substitute to the person who collected the discernible data, which are usually noticeable by the coincidence between a meter and what it measures(assuming a margin of error).

It is noted that the information is itself a distorted commodity. There will never be a lack of temptation to be distorted it any further. Not to mention the vanity or the interests that make us, more or less consciously, to change the truth in thousands of circumstances of our private life. We have to be aware, however, that for everyone who has the opportunity to manipulate public opinion, the slipping, from the truth about to the blatant falsehood, by going over all intermediate stages, is very enticing.

There is a temptation to believe that certain subjects are less exposed to the consequences of misinformation. Nothing else is less true! Even peoples intellectually well trained, who believe that they are save from misinformation, are particularly vulnerable to it, this way becoming an important contingent of deceived, much higher than those who know less and, due to indifference, are not in the middle of the debate of ideas. The wisdom give rises to the doubt, which is usually becoming the rule of good thinking, but also allows the possibility that the partner to be right about it.

Responsible citizens, the holder of the portion of the power conferred by the right to vote, are likely to become a gregarious element obedient to the wishes and the whims of „Big bad wolf"<sup>3</sup>. On long term, misinformation tends to cause the backlash of the society, of this organized system driven by systematic laws fit for differential functions, towards an uncertain state of aggregation, acting only in case of gravity and total depending only on external factors. We do not have to underestimate the great danger which threatens a human society which was prejudiced for a long time by its own functional dynamics. Intention to misinform, when is sustainable and concerns the entire population, is similar to a crime because, apart from the desire to deceive or manipulate, represents an aggression against a

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<sup>3</sup> H.P. Cathala, *Age of misinformation*, Bucharest, Antet Publishing House, 2004, p. 34.

fundamental function of the social system. Information is not simply an action to notify news; it is also, apparently primarily, a process of structuring of human groups.

There is a constant concern for the future. It is manifested, especially by the knowledge of their own destiny as well as by the knowledge of macro-group and group development perspective, to whom individual belongs. In other words, information is needed not only to know, but to succeed in the effort of survival, by eliminating or reducing the action of the factors that might endanger the individual and/or group security. Multiplicity and diversity of the existing sources of information are the assumptions that could provide a good knowledge of the various natural and social phenomena. Paradoxically, the man often remains confused and annoyed by the content and meaning of information provided from different sources, but which refers to the same phenomenon. He has not always patience and/or time to discern and also he is not has sometimes the necessary thoroughness of making value judgments about information signals. Even he watches the evolution of the political, economic, military occurrences, their complexity determine him, in most cases, to limited himself to the simplistic conclusions, to the incidental, peripheral or conjecture images. The following of these conclusions is the formation of misconceptions and unfounded beliefs to the peoples, that will undermine their understanding of future development of phenomena from the environment. Naturally, there are specific manifestations of these attitudes and constraints. Therefore, such information directs and manipulate man to handle actionable solutions that are contrary to the reality. So you might say that this type of manipulation it is made by producing opposite effects of a proper information which are specific to misinformation.

Misinformation is regarded as a kind of message, more or less explicit, a kind of special type of communication between the misinformer and his target. It may takes the form of a declaration, of a significant gesture or of an attitude<sup>4</sup> adopted.

Usually it does not occur to form a necessarily belief, but to prevent an individual or a group to assess fair and free a phenomenon.

From the perspective of misinformation definitions, in the specific literature more often, it appeals to three of them:

1. „Intermittent or continuous action – by using of any means - which is confusing an opponent, or promote the subversion in its ranks in order to weak it<sup>5</sup>”.

2. „The ensemble of dialectical processes staked intentionally, in order to achieve the perfect handling of individuals, groups or entire societies, for

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> French Academy through Le Figaro from 24.02.1984.

deflecting the political conducts, to dominate their thinking or even enslave them. That involves concealing the real sources and targets, and the intention to harm through a distorted representation or a biased interpretation of the reality. It is a form of aggression that seeks to go unnoticed. It is a part of the subversive psychological actions<sup>6</sup>.

3. „The disinformation is a manipulation of the public opinion for political purposes using information treated with diverted resources. It involves three elements: a manipulation of public opinion; diverted resources; political aims, internal or external<sup>7</sup>.

### **The characteristics of the misinformation**

The key feature of the misinformation is the obvious intention of doing harm, which distinguishes it from the simple useful lie or the fable. So, to be called disinformation choice it must exist the deliberate choice, the intention to exercise influence or manipulation. Forged message is nothing but the tool that searches a selected subject in order to make him act in the desired direction. I have to point out that there are some considerable differences between misinform an individual or a small group and misinform nation (or a substantial part thereof). In the first case it is used the psychology of the individual or the subgroup dynamics; in the second case, public opinion or mass psychology it will be used.

Misinformation currently has the following characteristics:

- it uses a methodology based on psycho-sociology findings;
- it uses the mass-media facilities efficiently;
- it is designed and developed by bodies created for this purpose;
- is carried out through actions more and more unknown or impossible to detect;
  - it is designed both, for intellectually well formed people, and for those who know less and so they are outside the issues covered by the actions;
  - it is hides, under a false appearance of objectivity, the willingness of a person to unilaterally make a profit, by forcing an adhesion which is the prelude of the enslavement;
  - it is directed, in particular, to the sphere of decision, which makes that the decision-makers protection, become increasingly difficult to achieve;
  - it tends to become a convenient excuse for the decisions whose consequences lead to failures;
  - it is adopted, sometimes even by the bodies designed for protection against this type of attack; it has, in some cases, adverse effects, thus

<sup>6</sup> H.P. Cathala, *Age of misinformation*, Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> V. Volkoff, *A treatise of misinformation*, Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, p. 25.

misinformers are misinformed, they are the victims of some intellectual comfort, of certain habits of some circles to whom they require the approval of their actions;

- it causes, to those who were not misinformed in a previous situation (being aware of this fact), mistrust and suspicion towards the real information process;

- when it materializes in large operations, they have longer durations and they takes place gradually, focusing on the impact on public opinion;

- when it is held for hijacking public opinion or for acting on a large groups of people, its effects are long-term and serious; there are changes of the mentalities and of the attitudes that are installed progressively and insidious; peoples accept myths; they are questioning their own values;

- it takes place easily in environments where the sources of information are different and in large numbers, but also where there are no principles, norms and rules, for the information work to relate.

No matter what the area where it operates, a conclusion is certain: the misinformation is a psychological acting lever for routing opinions and ideas, moods and human behavior. It is a form that prohibits the right to clear thinking for its subjects.

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