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G. Terzis, D. Kloza, E. Kużelewska, D. Trottier (eds.)

Disinformation and Digital Media as a Challenge for Democracy

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Deceit as a phenomenon endures as a pesky aspect of our routine, as old as human communication itself and surely used by corrupt rulers since the first state emerged and long before *propaganda* entered the English language. Yet the research interest for the essence and tools of telling lies have sky-rocketed since the notion of 'fake news' was born. The monograph edited by Terzis et. al. presents an ambitious interdisciplinary study focused not only on the concept of disinformation and the variety of its forms but also the possible solutions to the problem that stem from technology, public policy and legal framework. While most authors leave the complex legal dilemmas of the so-called post-truth era behind the brackets, the present work offers to look at the sensitive questions in the field, e.g. is all scientific research (as defined by the GDPR) *good* research? While Singapore takes effective legal action against online manipulations, will the EU develop a comparable injunction in the nearest future? And, if enacted, would the latter violate the freedom of expression?

The book begins with several takes on the concept of disinformation: its origins, history and possible threats to representative democracy as a 'rational project' largely dependent on a free press. In the first chapter, *Papakonstantinou* defies the novelty of 'fake news', which is hard to disapprove of, while the semantic analysis of the term as an obvious oxymoron can be questionable, if the reader understands the element of 'news' as a sort of media product, not a set of facts. The following

chapters scrutinize the historical parallels with Nazi Germany, borrow from the elite theory and build their prognoses for democracy with diverse amounts of optimism. Referring to the modern history of the Netherlands, *Lukkassen* asserts that nowadays an 'honest and sincere representative democracy is impossible' due to the massive impact of digital technology in the public sphere and the sectoral monopoly of the key players in certain areas, i.e. internet search. This conclusion goes in line with another fundamental explanation of the post-truth era origin offered by Francis Fukuyama in his *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment.* Indeed, in 2016 the conservative voices resonated better with the *identities* of the voters, especially in the economically deprived regions of the US and the UK, but it is also true that a reboot of the participatory democracy is slowly taking place with digital media being an effective means to mobilize grassroots movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo.

The second part of the book is dedicated to country case studies of spreading and countering disinformation collected from across the EU and the US. The selection of the chapters provides the reader with a not-so-typical overview of stories from post economic crisis Greece, deeply divided Northern Ireland and the US under George Bush Jr.'s administration, coupled with an empirical study on the matrices of fact-checking instruments by *Pavelska et al*. Within the setting of vicious info-attacks on the EU, it is extremely compelling to look at the instrumentalization of anti-fake news policy within the Union in the last part of the book. *Hanych & Pivoda* follow the evolution of the ECHR's position on the thin line between the freedom of expression and fighting against falsehood. In the respective summaries, the contributors propose an array of the traditional 'cures' for the malfunctioning democracies – information hygiene, modified legal framework as opposed to e.g. automated filtering of content.

Disinformation and Digital Media as a Challenge for Democracy is a comprehensible and straightforward piece of work, which is definitely of interest for political scientists, lawyers, media researchers and anyone interested in better understanding how the digital media is intertwined with political power in the twenty-first century. Maybe some readers would question the relevance of G. Bush Jr's 'war on terror' to the contribution as it took place before the massive digitalization of media or wonder why the impact of disinformation has not been assessed from the standpoint of e.g., climate change deniers or in the countries of Global South. As the book aimed rather for deep insight from political philosophy and theory of law, the scarce cultural perspective does not harm the overall great research value of the volume.