2. Почепцов Г. Феномен нацистської пропаганди. *Главком.* 5 серпня, 2015.

3. Гілберт Г. М. Нюрнбергський щоденник. URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=74235&p=1

4. Потебня О. О. Думка і мова. Київ : Синто, 1993. 192 с.

5. Lasswell, Harold Dwight (1948). The Structure and function of communication for society. The Communication of Ideas: Harper and Brothers. P. 215–228.

6. Островська Н. В. Прикладні соціально-комунікаційні технології [Електронний ресурс] : навчальний посібник / Н. В. Островська. Електрон. дані. Запоріжжя : ЗНТУ, 2017.

FACT-CHECKING CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL POPULISM IN THE "TRUTH DECAY" ERA

Garaschuk D. V.
*Ph. D student at the Department
of International Relations and Political Management*

Serhieiev V. S.
*Doctor Habilitated in Political Science,
Professor at the Department of International Relations
and Political Management
Zhytomyr State Technological University
Zhytomyr, Ukraine*

The rise of digital populism has significantly reshaped the landscape of political communication. This shift has been facilitated by social media, which enables direct engagement with supporters, bypassing traditional media filters [1]. At the same time, the phenomenon of "truth decay" – the diminishing reliance on facts and rational discourse – has undermined the public's ability to discern accurate information, posing challenges for fact-checking efforts [2]. This essay explores the challenges associated with fact-checking digital populism within the context of truth decay, examining the roles of misinformation, echo chambers, cognitive biases, and public distrust in fact-checking entities.

Digital populism thrives on the rapid dissemination of information, often leveraging social media to create direct connections between populist leaders and their audiences. This direct access enables populist leaders to bypass gatekeepers of information such as traditional media outlets, which they often portray as corrupt or biased, thereby reinforcing the populist narrative of "the people versus the elite" [3]. The use of emotionally charged rhetoric, catchy slogans, and simplified messages makes populist content particularly appealing and easy to spread.

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram serve as the primary tools for these leaders to communicate directly with their supporters. Such platforms allow for real-time interaction, enabling populists to address current events and public concerns instantly, thereby increasing their perceived responsiveness. Furthermore, social media algorithms prioritize engagement, and populist content, being emotionally provocative, often outperforms factual and nuanced content in terms of reach and visibility [4].

Misinformation plays a crucial role in the success of digital populism, as false or misleading information can be used to shape political narratives and amplify populist rhetoric. Populist leaders exploit moments of crisis or public uncertainty, such as economic instability, public health emergencies, or cultural anxieties, to introduce narratives that resonate emotionally with the public. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation related to health guidelines and vaccine efficacy became widespread, leading to increased polarization and distrust in government institutions [5]. The rapid spread of misinformation on social media is exacerbated by algorithms that prioritize engaging content – often emotionally charged or sensational – over verified information [6]. This creates an environment in which misinformation can spread more effectively than attempts at fact-checking.

Fact-checking in the digital age faces significant challenges due to the volume and speed of information dissemination. Populist messages are often designed to be simple, memorable, and emotional, making them more likely to be shared and believed compared to the more complex, nuanced rebuttals provided by fact-checkers [7]. Fact-checkers must operate in a reactive mode, often attempting to counteract false claims long after they have gained traction. The temporal gap between the spread of misinformation and the response from fact-checkers means that false information often has an irreversible impact on public perception before a correction is issued.

Another challenge lies in the limited resources available to fact-checking organizations. Fact-checkers are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of misinformation, especially during events like elections or crises, where the influx of false information is overwhelming. While automated fact-checking

tools are being developed to aid in this effort, these tools are still in the early stages of development and can be prone to errors, particularly when dealing with sophisticated disinformation campaigns that blend true and false information [4].

Cognitive biases also pose a significant challenge to fact-checking efforts. Confirmation bias, in which individuals favor information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, and motivated reasoning, where people actively dismiss contradictory information, are particularly relevant in the context of digital populism [8]. Populist supporters, who are often deeply distrustful of mainstream media and fact-checking organizations, are more likely to perceive fact-checks as politically motivated or biased. This skepticism towards fact-checkers allows misinformation to persist and even strengthens the cohesion of populist movements, as their supporters rally against perceived external threats.

Digital echo chambers, which are environments that reinforce pre-existing beliefs through selective exposure to like-minded content, significantly hinder fact-checking efforts [9]. Social media platforms' algorithms, which prioritize content based on users' previous interactions, contribute to the creation of these echo chambers, ensuring that individuals are predominantly exposed to information that aligns with their existing views. As a result, fact-checks are less likely to reach the people who need them the most – those who have already formed their opinions based on misinformation.

The amplification of populist rhetoric within these echo chambers leads to a cycle in which falsehoods are continuously reinforced, while contradictory evidence is either ignored or actively dismissed. For instance, studies on the spread of misinformation during political campaigns have shown that individuals within echo chambers are significantly less likely to be exposed to fact-checks that contradict their preferred narratives [9]. This dynamic not only reduces the efficacy of fact-checking but also contributes to the polarization of society, as different groups become increasingly isolated in their informational environments.

Public trust in fact-checking entities plays a pivotal role in the effectiveness of combating misinformation. Research indicates that perceptions of fact-checking organizations are heavily influenced by political affiliations, with those who support populist agendas more likely to distrust these entities [5]. This distrust is rooted in the populist narrative that presents mainstream media and fact-checking organizations as part of the "elite" that is out of touch with or actively opposed to the interests of "the people" [3]. Such distrust makes it challenging for fact-checking initiatives to penetrate echo chambers and alter established narratives [10].

Moreover, the presence of a fact-checking label itself can discourage some individuals from sharing false information, but this effect is not uniform across different demographic groups. For example, individuals who hold anti-establishment views may perceive these labels as attempts to control public discourse, thereby making them more resistant to corrections. To increase the impact of fact-checking, it is essential to address these trust issues by promoting transparency in fact-checking processes and incorporating multiple perspectives in assessments.

The use of multiple, independent fact-checking sources has been proposed as a potential solution to counteract the perception of bias. By presenting corrections from a variety of sources, including those that may be viewed as more ideologically aligned with target audiences, fact-checkers may be able to reduce resistance to their messages and increase their credibility. This approach could help bridge the gap between different segments of society and mitigate the effects of echo chambers.

The relationship between truth decay and populism is a mutually reinforcing one. Truth decay, characterized by a blurred distinction between fact and opinion, has facilitated the rise of populism by undermining the credibility of traditional information sources [2]. Populist leaders exploit this erosion of factual discourse to promote alternative narratives that resonate with the public's fears and grievances, further contributing to societal polarization.

The role of digital platforms in this process cannot be understated. These platforms provide the tools necessary for the rapid dissemination of populist messages, enabling populist leaders to bypass institutional checks and balances and connect directly with their supporters [1]. This direct communication is often framed in stark, moralistic terms that simplify complex issues into binary oppositions – good versus evil, the people versus the elite – making it difficult for fact-checkers to provide effective counter-narratives.

Furthermore, the erosion of trust in expert knowledge and factual discourse has implications for democratic governance. As populist leaders continue to promote skepticism towards established sources of information, the ability of democratic institutions to make informed decisions is compromised. This deterioration of public trust in fact-based discourse contributes to an environment where misinformation can flourish, unchecked by institutional authority or public accountability [2].

Fact-checking digital populism in the "truth decay" era presents significant challenges, including the rapid spread of misinformation, the impact of cognitive biases, and the public's distrust in fact-checking entities. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including enhancing media literacy, promoting diverse viewpoints, and improving the

transparency and neutrality of fact-checking efforts. To counteract the influence of echo chambers, fact-checking must be coupled with efforts to diversify the information landscape, ensuring that individuals are exposed to a broader range of perspectives. Moreover, fostering an informed and critical public is essential to mitigate the negative impacts of digital populism on democratic discourse, thereby upholding the principles of transparency and accountability in political systems.

References

1. D. V. Garashchuk, "FROM HASHTAGS TO HIGH OFFICE: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING IN POPULIST MOVE-MENTS," in *Трансформація українського суспільства в цифрову еру*, Liha-Pres, 2024, pp. 31–37. doi: 10.36059/978-966-397-389-0-8.

2. D. V. Garaschuk, "'TRUTH DECAY' AND POPULISM: ERODING DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY," *Int. Polit. Stud.*, no. 37, pp. 65–78, 2024, doi: 10.32782/2707-5206.2024.37.6.

3. D. Mahl, J. Zeng, M. S. Schäfer, F. A. Egert, and T. Oliveira, "'We Follow the Disinformation': Conceptualizing and Analyzing Fact-Checking Cultures Across Countries," *Int. J. Press.*, p. 19401612241270004, Aug. 2024, doi: 10.1177/19401612241270004.

4. L. Dierickx and C.-G. Linden, "Journalism and Fact-Checking Technologies: Understanding User Needs," vol. 10, Dec. 2023.

5. H. Habib, S. Elsharawy, and R. Rahman, "'I don't trust them': Exploring Perceptions of Fact-checking Entities for Flagging Online Misinformation," 2024, *arXiv*. doi: 10.48550/ARXIV.2410.00866.

6. Iden Martin Maphosa, "PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF FACT-CHECKING IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CASE OF CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY," 2024, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.18571.30245.

7. I. Larraz, R. Salaverría, and J. Serrano-Puche, "Combating Repeated Lies: The Impact of Fact-Checking on Persistent Falsehoods by Politicians," *Media Commun.*, vol. 12, p. 8642, Sep. 2024, doi: 10.17645/mac.8642.

8. M. Soprano *et al.*, "Cognitive Biases in Fact-Checking and Their Countermeasures: A Review," *Inf. Process. Manag.*, vol. 61, no. 3, p. 103672, May 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.ipm.2024.103672.

9. D. V. Garaschuk, "Digital echo chambers: amplifying populist rhetoric in the age of social media," *Curr. Probl. Philos. Sociol.*, no. 46, pp. 152–157, 2024, doi: 10.32782/apfs.v046.2024.26.

10. D. V. Garaschuk, "Quantitative dimensions of populism: trends, challenges, and applications," in *GLOBAL MODERN TRENDS IN RESEARCH*, Baltija Publishing, 2024, pp. 192–195. doi: 10.30525/978-9934-26-446-7-49.