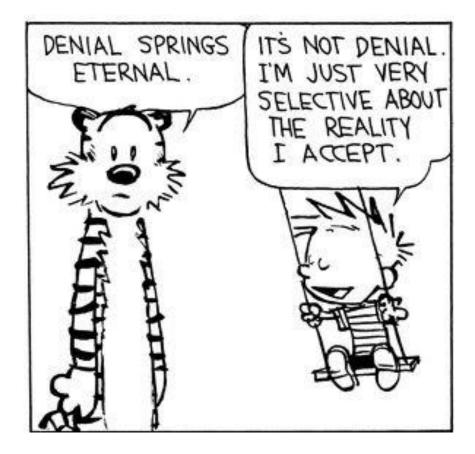# Tackling Disinformation: The European Way
TRUTH-TELLING IN A POST-TRUTH ERA
Political Communication & Management, CBS

Bekæmpelse af Desinformation: Den Europæiske Tilgang
SANDHEDSFORTÆLLING I EN POST-SANDHEDS TID
Politisk Kommunikation & Ledelse, CBS

Abstract

Mediekulturen har udviklet sig drastisk med ankomsten af digitale og sociale medier, og det moderne mediebillede er i dag ikke længere kun forbeholdt de professionelle medier, men er lige så spraglet og farverig som der er mennesker og holdninger til i verden, eftersom alt det kræver at få adgang til mediebilledet er en smart telefon med en tilknyttet social applikation. Sociale medier spiller i dag en stor rolle i hvordan samfundsborgere søger og finder samfundsrelevant information, og de seneste år bevidner om en øget interesse i at sætte fokus på hvordan det nye mediebillede påvirker offentlig dannelse. Interessen er især steget i kølvandet på bestemte begivenheder hvori det ofte siges at det nye mediebillede, og især sociale medier har spillet en afgørende rolle i hvordan relativt nylige begivenheder hvori offentlige diskurser er blevet udfordret. Indenfor sociologien er ovenstående fænomen blevet rationaliseret som en post-sandhedsbetingelse der stortrives i en viral modernitet. Det vil sige, post-sandhedsbetingelsen er ofte blevet rationaliseret i en intellektuel kontekst hvor post-strukturalismen har stået for skud i og med at tænkere såsom Foucault er blevet beskyldt for at have bidraget til en social post-sandheds attitude. Dog, en sådan beskyldning tager ikke den nye mediekultur i betragtning, som spiller en betydelig rolle i og med at nye normer såsom ukritisk at dele medieindhold mellem sociale netværker bidrager til en helt ny viral mediekultur.

Under alle omstændigheder, så er det relevant for social -og samfundsvidenskaben at sætte fokus på de pragmatiske effekter som følger i kølvandet på de praktiske interventioner som strategisk implementeres i samfundet som svar på de udfordringer som følger i kølvandet på nye medienormer. Det er med dette udgangspunkt dette speciale vælger at kigge nærmere på ovennævnte post-sandhedskontekst som studeres empirisk i sammenhæng med EU's desinformationsstrategi fra 2018. Specialet anvender en analysestrategi inspireret af Michel Foucault og Giorgio Agamben, og undersøger bl.a. hvordan man historisk kan anskue betingelserne for at tale sandt i det offentlige rum. Dette perspektiv anvendes derefter i en analyse af desinformationsstrategien, hvor det observeres hvordan EU sætter betingelserne for sandhedsfortælling i det offentlige rum. I specialet konkluderes det, at informationsvelfærden fremstår som den generelle udfordring, og at løsningerne til at sikre informationsvelfærden resulterer i en paradoksal ledelse idet EU organisere et faktatjekkende samfund som, til dels, arbejder i en undtagelsestilstand udenfor datalovgivningen. Derudover konkluderes det, at inddragelsen af sociale medie platforme som civile betjente udøver en totalmagt over den virale ytringsfrihed.

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Appendix A:

Tackling Disinformation: The European Approach

PART I

1.1. INTRODUCTION

A Transformed Media Landscape

The past decade have has seen the rise of a social media culture bring about changes to how information circulate in the media landscape and have, in doing so, radically transformed how citizens educate themselves on societal issues. Social media has by simplifying the technical complexity of media practices into user-friendly social media tools reduced the barriers restricting access to the media sector and democratised the means of mass communication further than ever before. In addition to increasing competition in the media sector, social media also adds a diverse sociality to the modern media landscape, with media landscape understood as the open space where information circulates, in that citizens can actively participate as producers and distributers of media content. Today, all it takes to create and share information is access to a smart device connected to a social media profile and it has, as such, never been easier to drive awareness about a social, political or commercial cause. As such, social media is said to have empowered the social with self-representation in the media landscape in the sense of no longer relying upon the professional media in order to have their voices heard and shared in a public forum (Thorsen, Jackson, & Luce, 2015).

Furthermore, since the journalistic profession is protected by a notion of freedom rather than law, everyone with access to a smart device connected to a social media profile can entitle themselves to journalistic privileges, resulting in the traditional press gradually having lost their monopoly on being society's sole critical watchdog. That is to say, social media allows for social dissatisfaction to organise into viral movements and voice critical opinions towards established discourses on equal terms with the established media in forms of civil journalism and may even act as catalysators of change, when challenging the semiotics dominating established discourses (ibid.). For instance, both the anti-vaccine movement and the #metoo-movement give evidence to how social media empowerment unfolds in that both movements used online platforms to mobilise supporting voices, that echo messages of change into the global and digital media. In other words, both movements have *gone viral* in the sense of transcending their genesis thanks to media users actively sharing posted information within their online social network. In the case of the #metoo-movement, the message of change succeeded in transcending not only geographical borders but also industry borders, resulting in a different awareness regarding gender diversity.

Both cases illustrate social media as empowering citizens to actively set the media agenda without depending on the established media to neither mediate nor shape the information presented by each movement to the general public, who actively participate in making stories go viral through new normative behaviours such as sharing. Therefore, both cases give significant evidence to how the advent of the social media culture represent a challenge to public policymakers insofar, as online technologies can be used strategically to encourage citizens to resist acting in accordance to existing discursive norms. For instance, the #me-too movement has successfully encouraged citizens to abandon silence and speak up against sexual misconduct, and the anti-vaccine movement has successfully persuaded vaccine-sceptics to openly discard scientific evidence and refrain from childhood vaccination programmes. However, although sharing similar modus operandi, the two cases constitute two distinct separate examples of how Western perspectives tend to rationalise the effects of the social media culture on public opinion, with the #metoo-movement generally portrayed in ways similar to the critical journalist who act as society's critical watchdog in the sense of uncovering hidden truths which corrode democratic processes[1]. The anti-vaccine movement, on the other hand, appears by contrast as blundering citizens with misinformation, or 'fake news', insofar as disputing the scientific evidence anchoring public vaccine discourse on vaccines, and is observed by the European Union to undermine democracy by constituting a threat towards the informative wellbeing of European citizens[2].

Fake News and Disinformation

All in all, social networking technologies and new media norms all contribute to information now proliferating and circulating rapidly in the modern globalised media landscape, thereby implicating new working conditions in regard forms of public education, formal as unformal. In this case, public education is used as a general term to reference the different manners in which public opinion shapes, or how the public becomes knowledgeable about worldly issues, with the educational sector, the media sector, and the political sphere acting as significant institutional actors when it comes to educating the public on the truths which anchor public discourses. That is to say, public opinion shapes in a complex relationship where scientific truths, meaning evidence-based truths, echo into societies by means of political interventions seeking to establish public discourses. Through formal education, the educational sector provides public truths by producing expert knowledge regarding how to disclose truths, and the professional media sector generally acts as a form of unformal education due to their pragmatic effect in shaping public

opinion. However, critical journalism follows the scientific trajectory when it comes to truth-telling practices insofar as media ethics denotes a specific ethical practice in journalised, generally obtained through formal education, instantiated so to guarantee objectivity and evidence-based news.

The easy access to vast amount of online media content results in the public opinion informing itself in a multiple choice, and the situation is generally said to contribute to a new validation-trend where information validates in accordance to personal belief systems, selected either by citizens themselves or by smart algorithms who learn about a citizens' personal belief systems by tracking their movements in the online media landscape, e.g. through interactions on social media. Political campaigns have in recent years benefitted from the possibility to include online technologies and social media interaction so to advance campaign communication. Against this background, notions like 'fake news', 'disinformation', and 'alternative facts' often appear in public debates as descriptive terms pointing towards specific events where new technologies and new media norms proves instrumental in persuading the general public opinion towards decisive actions conflicting with the established discourse, like in the case of the anti-vaccine movement. Brexit proves another case insofar as the joint opinion of the European Union considers the decision of the British people to Vote Leave as being corrode by disinformation campaigns (Bossio, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2017; Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

In 2017, the European Union initiated the organisation of a common strategic response to Brexit which it launched, at first, as the "fake news-initiative". In 2018, the initiative morphed into the "disinformation-initiative" with the publication of two distinct strategic communications containing the collected knowledge concerning the measures how needed to tackle disinformation: the 2018 April Communication "Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach", and the 2018 December JOINT "Action Plan against Disinformation". In other words, the European Union renders fake news intelligible as disinformation, which it considers to public harm insofar as *"Public harm comprises threats to democratic political and policy-making processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security".* (EC2018a, p. 4). In short, the disinformation-initiative delineates disinformation as strategic campaigns techniques that capitalise on social networking technologies so to dispute the scientific truths, which have traditionally been accepted by the public as common truths, bringing about commotion to public discourses on e.g. public health or transnational governance.

A Post-Truth Condition Thriving in a Viral Modernity

The socio-technological changes occurring in the media landscape constitute a significant topic in matters related to political communication, as it faces public policymakers with a different set of challenges in terms of sustaining public discourses with objective truth-telling practices. The challenge also comprehends as a *post-condition* thriving in a *viral modernity*, with post-truth referring to the aforementioned tendency of personal belief systems overpowering objective evidence when validating the true nature of any presented information. From this perspective, the challenges facing public policymakers translates as the pursuit of individual agendas disputing public discourses being into disorder, or as "*a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts*" (Cambridge University Press). In most cases, the post-truth condition is blamed upon the postmodern paradigm with poststructuralist thinkers, like Foucault, Rorty and Derrida, often standing accused of contributing to the aforementioned validation-trend insofar as having enlightened the world about truth being contingent and objectivity conditioned free will.

In short, the poststructuralist tradition understands all notions as contingent insofar as rejecting the existence of a fixed structural centrum, meaning that the notion of truth only exist as a true notion depending on how an observation decides upon the criteria needed to validate truth as true. As such, the post-truth condition is generally used to refer to truth having multiplied and, in doing so, enabled truth to be treated in consumer-like ways (Besley, Peters, & Rider, 2018, p. 218). However, as argued by Peters & Riders (2018), the postmodern accusation fails to also include the social media culture as a significant element in the post-truth condition insofar as changes to how information circulate in the media landscape transforms the conditions affecting public education. As such, Peters and Rider (2018) includes the notion of a viral modernity to the understanding of the post-truth condition in reference to new media practices and norms which disregard the fact-checking procedures and norms needed to ensure objectivity and critical thinking.

This thesis adopts the above perspective on the current fake news-phenomenon, thus taking on the analytical ambition of investigating the pragmatic effects of a post-truth condition thriving in a viral modernity. To so, the thesis analysis will first construct the two notions into a critical ontology, denoted as a post-truth era, so to identify certain challenges associated with contemporary public truth-telling. The pragmatics effects are then investigated within the

empirical context of the E.U. disinformation-initiative with the ambition of investigating the pragmatic effects as a matter of how the various strategic technologies employed in the disinformation-initiative delineates public truth-telling in Europe in certain ways with solutions that produce social effects. That is to say, the disinformation-initiative formalises a distinct European attitude, and political discourse, closely related to the observation of a post-truth condition and a viral modernity, with the European Union seemingly problematising citizens as currently lacking the intellectual capability and practical skills needed to validate the vast amount of information circulating in the current media landscape. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the pragmatic effects of the disinformation-initiative, correlating how the European Union observes the threat of disinformation to observations of a post-truth condition and a viral modernity.

Research Question

Based in the above preliminary points, the thesis adopts the following research question to guide its overall analytical gaze:

> *"How does the disinformation-initiative invent and propagate a common understanding on how to tackle disinformation, and what is the effect of the European approach on the constituent nature of public truth-telling?"*

The first part of the research question refers to how the European Union problematises disinformation as a specific threat towards democratic processes by delineating the criteria determining disinformation as harmful and the solutions needed to tackle disinformation. The second part of the research question is used to discuss how the solutions implemented into societies to tackle disinformation produces public truth-tellers in certain ways. In this case, the idea of public truth-telling is rendered intelligible with the inclusion of a preliminary analysis regarding a post-truth condition and a viral modernity to contextualise the disinformation-initiative within certain rationalities on public truth-telling and common challenges to public truth-telling in the contemporary. In short, the overall ambition of the thesis is to investigate how the disinformation-initiative becomes constituent for how European citizens can know themselves as well-informed citizens capable of participating in democratic processes with well-informed decisions.

The research question will be answered from a *post-structuralist position* through an *analytical strategy* based in the works of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. In short, an analytical strategy refers to a specific post-structuralist approach to the scientific truth-telling practice, generally articulated as a conscious shift from ontological rules of method to epistemological critique of method (Andersen, 1999, p. 12). The decision to situate the disinformation-initiative within a specific context denoted as a post-truth era results in a twofold analysis and consequently a split analytical gaze. That is to say, the analysis must first construct the post-truth era as a specific context to avoid applying automatic conclusions when analysing specific issues problematised in the disinformation-initiative. As such, the first part of the analysis constructs the post-truth era as a specific context based in an analytical strategic approach denoted as a *critical ontology of the present*, drawing upon the Foucauldian notion of a critical ontology and the Agambian notion of tradition as the applied concepts guiding the analytical gaze. The post-truth era is empirically based in a broad reading of essays collected in, or referenced by or in relation to, the anthology "Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education" published in the 2018. The purpose of the post-truth era is to act as a point of critical reflection in the second part of the analysis, where the disinformation-dispositive is observed with an analytical strategy constructed from the Foucauldian and Agambian notion of a 'dispositive', sometimes also translated into English as an 'apparatus'. In this thesis, the dispositive-analysis the analysis of pragmatic effect concluded upon in the post-truth era.

Working Questions

The thesis adopts the following working questions:

- What are the terms under which public truth-telling recognises as public truth-telling in the post-truth era? *Addressed in the critical ontology.*
- How is a viral modernity said to have impacted public truth-telling in the post-truth era, and which issues appear to be at stake in the post-truth era? *Addressed in the critical ontology.*
- How does the disinformation-initiative set the criteria and delineate disinformation as a specific challenge to European policymakers? *Addressed in the dispositive-analysis*
- How does the disinformation-initiative seek to produce citizens as well-informed citizens through pragmatic intervention? *Addressed in the dispositive-analysis*

1.2. THE ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The following section outlines the general purpose of the analytical strategy while simultaneously anchoring the thesis in the post-structuralist tradition, and it concludes by introducing how the chosen concepts from the Foucauldian and Agambian strategies aid the analysis by allowing the diagnosis of how power is at play in the disinformation-initiative.

A Post-Structuralist Approach

Briefly explained, post-structuralism refers to a specific epistemological tradition rooted in structuralism as a critique of closed structural centres, but choosing instead to open up the structural understanding by introducing an empty signifier (Esmark, Laustsen, & Andersen, 2005, p. 12). In short, both traditions approach any attempt to ascribe meaning to things as a positional effect manifesting in the symbolic order, where productive forces bring the real (being) into relation with the imaginary (mind) so to conjure up entities as meaningful (ibid., p. 14). However, post-structuralism differs from structuralism in its specific understanding of the symbolic order as incapable of systematic analysis insofar as it is a source of eternal commotion.[3] This does not mean the symbolic order has no order or meaning, but rather that the structural centre is occupied by an empty signifier, whose conditions are always at stake, as the open structure is equipped with a fundamental dynamic commonly referred to as *centring* (ibid., p. 27).[4] This dynamic centring translates into the post-structuralist approach as power and politics, with power understood as the productive forces conjuring things up and the political understood as strategic attempts to centre specific means of conjuring things up.

The post-structuralist position becomes constituent for the scientific nature of the thesis insofar as it implies that the analyst is incapable of conjuring up true knowledge about the world through a set of methodological rules and norms. As such, traditional methodology does not merge with post-structuralism which considers diagnostic conclusions conditioned by the analytical choices decided by the analyst; different analytical choices would result in different analytical points and conclusions, and only through a discussion of the analytical-strategic choices are we able to regain sensitivity to the empirical and avoid automatic social descriptions (Andersen, 1999, s. 15; Esmark et al., 2005, p. 9; Andersen, 2003, p. 116). Thus, the analytical contribution of this thesis is not to produce definitive truths about post-truth, a social media culture, viral modernity or, importantly, the disinformation-initiative, as different conclusive points would present through different analytical-strategic approaches. Furthermore, the post-structuralist position suggests a discursive approach to the analytical object, that is, the fake news-

phenomenon, as post-structuralism is synonymous with discourse being understood as the open structure. In other words, a post-structuralist approach thus always has as its ambition to open up a structure and disrupt self-evident truths and universal explanations, but how the opening unfolds depends on the analytical-strategic choices (Esmark et al., 2005, p.8).

The Second-Order Perspective

Against this backdrop, an analytical strategy denotes the praxis in which analytical object and analyst emerge simultaneously as specific constructs in the analytical gaze (Esmark et al., 2005, p. 7; Andersen, 1999, p. 15). Based in the Andersen approach, the analytical strategy uses the notion of a *second-order observation* to denote a "specific epistemology and a specific concept of observation, which embraces a programme about observing observations as observations" (Andersen, 2009, p. 12). In short, the purpose of the second-order perspective is to enable an epistemological inquiry *about* categories, as opposed to an ontological inquiry *from* categories, to avoid "the indiscriminate use of preconceived categories and methods of first-order observations [which] creates immunity from the empirical" (Andersen, 2003, p. 116). However, the epistemological shift produces a complexity, namely, *analytical-strategic problems*, defined as "questions that can only be solved in relation to the empiricism or reality to which the analytical strategies seek to become sensitive" (ibid., p. 104). That is to say, because all observation is a matter of differentiation, including the analyst's own observation, the analytical strategy aims to address the analytical problems of *conditioning* the analytical gaze in a *guiding distinction*[5] and fixating on the *observation point* in order to render the analytical gaze *sensitive to the empirical* (Andersen, 1999, s. 15).

The analytical strategy constructs the analytical gaze as a second-order observation by constructing the analytical object as a first-order observation based on a set of conditional criteria set up by a set of selected concepts which, in this case, derive from the analytical work of Foucault and Agamben (Andersen, 2003, p. 104). As such, the analysis maintains an *empirical sensitivity* by presenting how specific concepts draw up distinct lines to determine what can and cannot be observed with the specific analytical gaze, with the unseen side of the distinction commonly referred to the blind side (Andersen, 1999: 15). A thorough introduction to the concepts also ensures transparency in the analysis by anchoring concepts in the empirical with the awareness of how each concept drives the analytical gaze towards specific empirical conclusions. The selection of concepts thus makes up a methodological toolbox that provides the analyst with the

powerful analytical language needed to denote and substantiate conclusions throughout the analysis.

Theoretical Point of Departure

As mentioned, the analytical strategy adopts an array of analytical points and concepts from the works of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben as the theoretical foundation supporting the thesis. Although Foucault and Agamben generally employ distinct analytical strategies, asking different questions to the empirical material using different methodical approaches, one could argue that the two authors share an analytical ambition common to the post-structuralist approach, that is, to disrupt the self-evident truths that dominate how the self and others are understood. For instance, both Foucault and Agamben generally inquire about the conditions of experiences in the present by inquiring about how they emerge in relation to the past, indicating the importance of historical inquiry. The key difference between the two authors can be understood in terms of the two points that they identify as the decisive historical moments at which things emerge as meaningful entities. Foucault anchors the emergence of modern Western government as the *discontinuation* of the sovereign discourse, while Agamben rejects the Foucauldian idea of a discontinued and treats history as a folding, thus arguing for the continued presence of the abandoned sovereign discourse (Dean, 2018a, slide 5).

As such, the Foucauldian and Agambian strategies generally result in different conclusions regarding power and rule in the Western governmental machine, because they inquire about conditions in the present with two fundamentally different attitudes towards historical inquiry. The differences between the Foucauldian and Agambian strategies are, of course, far more complex than this, and many strategic approaches can be constructed from each of their comprehensive and far-reaching bodies of work. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I present a short and precise introduction to the chosen concepts based on how they relate to the research question and apply in the analysis. All in all, the decision to compile Foucault with Agamben to constitute the general analytical approach is based on the premise that both authors generally question how forms of life are shaped into existence through forms of knowledge and forms of power. In relation to the research question, the general analytical task results in observing how the occurrence of specific links between knowledge and power in the disinformation-initiative become constituent for how European citizens are to understand themselves as either informed or misinformed beings.

Furthermore, Foucault and Agamben enrich the analysis due to their distinct perspectives on how power operates in the Western governmental machine. In short, the Foucauldian strategy provides a specific understanding of modern societies as governed through technical interventions which are entailed by the inclusion of freedom – a perspective contradicted by Agamben who, as mentioned, argues that the sovereign shadow has taken over the current political structure through the declaration of states of emergency. Combining Foucault and Agamben enables the overall analysis to oscillate between power manifesting as either liberal power or sovereign power, with the first playing out to empirical observation as self-technologies and the latter as sovereign, or totalitarian, technologies. This analytical choice enriches the analytical toolbox with a broad diagnosis of specific rationalities and instruments used to govern western societies; an analytical strategy based solely in the Foucauldian strategy, such as the governmentality-framework (Dean, 2010), would be blind to how the current political structure sometimes problematises societies from a state of exception in which freedom is banned.

Research Agenda

As mentioned, the thesis analysis is divided into two sections, each operating with its own distinct analytical strategy. The first part of the analysis employs an analytical strategy denoted as a critical ontology of the present, a notion derived from Foucault in his examination of the philosophical transition into modernity (Foucault, 1984). The critical ontology of the present refers to a particular way of being able to identify the conditions of how we become knowledgeable about the present and is used to give the thesis the descriptive power to put the disinformation-initiative into a perspective of the general challenges identified in the post-truth era regarding current challenges related to public truth-telling, with the latter generally referring to practices related to forms of public education. In this case, I adopt the notion of a post-truth condition to identify the criteria needed to validate truth as true, as well as the idea of a viral modernity so as to include an awareness of how the social media culture contributes to the post-truth challenge by bringing about radical changes to how information circulate in the modern media landscape, thereby affecting how citizens consume media. The empirical context is predominantly based on a broad reading of the compiled essays from the 2018 anthology *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education* (Peters, Rider, Hyvönen & Besley, 2018), and complimented by other scientific books and journals related to the topic.

The conclusions made in the critical ontology are then applied to the empirical context of the EU disinformation-initiative to investigate a set of specific pragmatic effects related to the observation of a post-truth era. The second part of the analysis thus observes how the EU constructs the post-truth challenge in the observation of disinformation, instantiating a need for strategic intervention because disinformation constitutes a threat to democratic processes. The disinformation-initiative is constructed as a dispositive, which derives from the Foucauldian strategy and refers to an all-encompassing strategic intervention deployed in the social to bring order to chaos. In short, a dispositive attempts to establish a continued discontinuity and appears at a moment of transformation where known and unknown elements are (re)organised to render uncertainty certain. In other words, a dispositive constitutes a specific technical intervention which enters a chaotic situation to (re)define and (re)position known and unknown elements (the chaos) into a new arrangement. This thesis constructs disinformation as a dispositive to explore how it re-structures a new order by delineating how information can know as well as empower certain technical interventions.

When constructed as an analytical strategy, a dispositive manifests empirically as the observation of a network of power relations which form a specific strategic logic, with power understood as a mechanism or as a productive force which appears under empirical observation as power being executed. As such, a diagnostic understanding power is intrinsic to a dispositive analysis. This thesis applies a twofold power vocabulary as a result of the analytical decision to base the understanding of the dispositive in the analytical works of both Foucault and Agamben. In his governmentality studies, Foucault used the term 'dispositive', sometimes translated as an apparatus, to describe how a security dispositive intervened in the social and (re)positioned known (disciplinary) elements with unknown (security) elements to (re)construct, and thus (re)define, a socio-political order, commonly referred to as biopolitics. The dispositive is often said to constitute one of the most decisive technical terms in the Foucauldian vocabulary insofar as it appears as the significant analytical moment of transformation from which Foucault could generalise particular diagnostics of power and government in modern western societies (Agamben, 2009a; Raffnsøe & Gudmand-Høyer, 2005).

Agamben has also adopted the dispositive, also sometimes translated as an apparatus, and used the dispositive to argue for a different understanding of power and rule in the modern western governmental machine (Agamben, 2009a). In general, Agamben disputes the general understanding according to which freedom is included in the execution of power. Thus,

Agamben re-opens the notion of power and re-introduces the execution of sovereign power into the vocabulary of how power manifests in the Western governmental machinery.

The following sections of the analytical strategy elaborate on the two distinct analytical approaches as well as anchoring the analytical gazes in the empirical material. First, the critical ontology of the present is outlined and anchored in the empirical observation of a post-truth era. Second, the theoretical background which underpins the dispositive analysis on power, government and rule in Western societies is presented. The aforementioned analytics of government is briefly elaborated, along with the notions of 'rationality' and 'technology', which are pivotal in the subsequent introduction to the different understandings of power relations in Foucault and Agamben. Third, the dispositive analysis is presented and empirically anchored as disinformation.

What is a Critical Ontology of the Present?
The notion of a critical ontology of the present stems from Foucault, who uses the notion to inquire about the emerging moment of modernity in the philosophical sense of the word (Foucault, 1984). It situates into a specific analytical strategy which inquiries about experiences in the present by inquiring about how the present introduces a difference with respect to the past. When constructed as an analytical strategy, a critical ontology of the present investigates the transformational conditions of modernity to explore how societies come to recognise their own history (Andersen, 2003, p.4).

According to Foucault (1984), the notion of modernity reflects more of an *attitude of modernity* than a historic epoch situated at a particular calendar date (p. 37), with 'attitude' referring to "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and present itself as a task" (ibid., p. 39). Thus, Foucault understands modernity as a specific relationship between man and his contemporary which is, importantly, characterised by *freedom*. He anchors this condition of the attitude of modernity, that is, man's relationship to the present, in the observation of how Kant perceives *'Aufklärung'* - also known as the Enlightenment. In short, Foucault argues that the key condition of modernity is the capacity of man to be free to reason his own relation to the present. In other words, man

has the capacity to reason the present without being subject to any authority dominating the ontology (ibid., p. 36).

In this context, *critique* refers to the ability of man to open up automatic descriptions and liberate himself from the fixated relations. It is, in other words, a critique which blends into the post-structuralist ambition of opening up structural fixations. Thus, the analytical object in a critical ontology of the present constructs as the observation of man's historical modes of relating, belonging and presenting himself at the given moment. Thus, it constitutes an analytical strategy which inquiries about the conditions of experiences in the present insofar as it projects a "historical critical ontology of ourselves" (ibid., p. 45). That is to say, the analysis questions how we come to understand a contemporary phenomenon, such as a post-truth condition and a viral modernity, by questioning man's historical relationship to the matters addressed by the contemporary phenomenon, which, in this case, generally appear as critical questions regarding public truth-telling. The critical ontology therefore inquires about the post-truth condition by questioning how man has historically understood himself, and others, in relation to public truth-telling, which it places into two significant empirical contexts, namely, the educational sector and the media sector.

The Agambenian notion of tradition is inscribed into the critical ontology to enrich the analytical vocabulary. Agamben uses tradition to describe how the self-evident truths conditioning our present modes of being succeed in becoming self-evident truths through 'canonisation' – which bars access to the original sources that gave to tradition the categories and concepts constituting the self-evident truth. When categories and concepts become canonised into tradition, we stop being critical to the sources and, as result, become captured in the automatic descriptions. Thus, the critical task consists of removing the veil hiding the sources to destroy tradition and gain critical insight into the present. Agamben employs an analytical practice, referred to as archaeology, to inquire about the historical emergence of conditions in the present, which "has to do, not with the origin, but with the question of the point from which the phenomenon takes its source, and must therefore confront itself anew with the sources and the tradition" (Agamben, 2009b, p. 217). To access the sources, the analyst must travel in time to the point at which tradition takes its source, denoted as the point of emergence. As such, Agamben contributes to the understanding of a critical ontology of the present as a specific historical inquiry of the source critique (Agamben, 2009b, p. 216). The purpose of the historical inquiry is to deconstruct the means by which tradition projects an ontology.

The critical ontology takes as its point of departure specific events which proved pivotal in transforming the manners of which we think and act in relation to truth-telling practices in science and mass media, identifying transformation by inquiring about history with the question: "[w]hat difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (Foucault, 1984, p. 34). The criteria for recognising change as change are based on identified events in which a knowing subject appeared in a changed state, which reflects as a changed attitude in man regarding how he understand himself as a knowing and acting being in his relationship to his contemporary. Thus, the analyst can recognise a change having occurred by recognising a different mode of how man becomes a knowing subject, meaning that the historical inquiry, denoted here as a critical ontology, is not a matter of identifying a split in time insomuch as it is identifying a split in how subjects come to know themselves as rational contemporary beings capable of rational action. We experience the present only insofar as we know ourselves to be contemporary beings in relation to the specific present experienced. As such, when a subject can be identified as existing in a changed state from yesterday, a historical moment of transformation, meaning the conditions of the present emerge, can be said to be identified. Specific modes of being, thinking and acting become self-evident truths when canonised into tradition, but the fixated relationship can be liberated by inquiring about the momentary events where man emerges as knowing himself vis-à-vis the specific mode of being.

Against this background, the purpose of the first part of the analysis is to critically deconstruct the different ontologies defining disinformation, post-truth, fake news and similar conceptions of the fake news-phenomenon as solely related to (Russian) propaganda, (Eurosceptic) populism and other automatic social descriptions commonly associated with current chaos. The critical ontology deconstructs such automatic descriptions while simultaneously constructing a critically ontology itself so as to challenge self-evident truths regarding "how we have come to understand ourselves and our identities and what can be changed and contested in the way we understand and act on ourselves and others" (Dean, 2018b, slide 7). In this case, the critical ontology is used to construct the post-truth era as a specific critical ontology in which the subsequent analysis can rationalise the challenges presented in the disinformation-initiative as a new media culture empowering subjective truths to overpower objective truths. As mentioned, the post-truth era constructs its empirical observation on the basis of the collection of essays provided in the anthology *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education* (Peters & Rider, 2018).

Empirical Anchoring: The Post-Truth Era

The empirical choice is based on how the anthology observe itself as "*concerned with the truth as a real problem, not a purely theoretical one*" (ibid., p. *5)*. As such, the essays appear to have been selected according to criteria which relate to the overall ambition of this thesis, that is to investigate the pragmatic effects of how the disinformation-initiative problematises the informative wellbeing of European citizens insofar as identifying certain challenges related to the post-truth era. In other words:

> *"The problems addressed here have to do with how we are to understand the pragmatics of truth in education and higher learning, with special attention to the political dimension, since what would appear to be the heart of the cultural convulsions we are undergoing is the sense that our modern institutions of truth-telling (the courts, the press, universities, and laboratories) no longer serve as a touchstone or a common understanding of the world, a universally acknowledged and hence binding store of reliable knowledge"* (ibid., p. 5)

As such, the essays constitute as a snapshot into a changed attitude towards how we public truth-telling practices which, in an important note, sees the practices placed "with special attention to the political dimension", seemingly suggesting public truth-telling being in need to protect of political protection to ensure the informative wellbeing of societies. In all cases, the analytical gaze splits into observing matters related to two distinct notions: the post-truth condition and the viral modernity, with observations regarding the *post-truth condition* being concerned with identifying the common set of criteria conditioning public truth-telling. Observations of a *viral modernity* is used to elucidate the emergence of the post-truth condition vis-à-vis the previously described modernisation of the media landscape, meaning that the viral modernity generally refer to the existence of a changed media landscape. Using the post-truth era as a reference point, the first part of the analysis elaborates on the present challenge in public truth-telling as question of how to validate truth when information circulates differently in the media landscape.

What is a Dispositive?

A generally dispositive refers to a specific understanding of generalising technologies which seek to establish a general social order. Thus, a dispositive denotes "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions -in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements". (Foucault, 1980, p. 194). Foucault consistently rejects the idea of universals, opting to question them by analysing how forms of power and forms of knowledge are related and invested in societies. However, the dispositive appears, according to Agamben, to take the place of the universalities in the Foucauldian strategy, insofar as it appears as a "general term that has the same breadth as the term 'positivity' had" (Agamben, 2009a, p. 6). Thus, the significance of the dispositive, in the Foucauldian strategy, is not a matter of identifying "this or that police measure, this or that technology of power, and not even the generality obtained by their abstraction" (Agamben, 2009a, p. 7). Rather, the dispositive constitutes an observation of the network of relations that can be established between a diverse set of elements, including "virtually anything, linguistic and nonlinguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on" (ibid., p. 2-3).

The dispositive has a certain dynamical character in that "a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely". (Foucault, 1980, p. 194-195). Thus, the 'network of relations' which constitute the analytical object in the dispositive analysis appears as a network of *power lines* insofar as elements are shaped into specific forms of being depending on how they relate within the network. In other words, any relational line between two elements constitutes a specific power line insomuch as power translates into the mechanism that specifies how elements can exist, how they can be known and how they can operate. The analytical task in a dispositive analysis is, therefore, to identify "the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements" (ibid., p. 194).

Nonetheless, Foucault himself was never particularly stringent in defining the concepts that guide his method, and his reflexive approach to his own analytical-strategic approach often

resulted in him having to define his method in retrospect (Andersen, 1999, p. 29). However, the task of defining the dispositive presented Foucault with "a difficulty which I haven't yet been properly able to get out of. I said that the apparatus is essentially of a strategic nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them, etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge". (Foucault, 1980, p. 196). As such, a dispositive analysis does not take its point of departure in a specific rationality or technology but in the strategic function, the strategic nature of the network that "appears as the intersection of power relations and of knowledge" (Agamben, 2009a, p. 3). For that reason, a dispositive is always located in a power relationship and "always has a concrete strategic function" (ibid., p. 3).

According to Foucault, the dispositive can be recognised by taking "two important moments" (Foucault, 1980, p. 195). First, there is a prevalent influence of a strategic objective in that the dispositive structures elements into a specific order with the objective of making certain outcomes more likely than others. In this way, the nature of the dispositive appears strategic in the sense that it appears selective and formative when structuring the elements towards specific ends (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thanning, 2008, p. 223). As such, a dispositive constitutes a specific space under which reason is legitimate insofar as it delineates what can be known, what must be done and what may be hoped for. In other words, a dispositive gives reason to a dogmatic scheme, recognised as a strategic logic, which makes reason visible as principles (Foucault, 1984, p. 38). The strategic nature of the power lines forms a *specific* strategic logic depending on how the dispositive arranges the elements into a *specific* relational order vis-à-vis how it reasons *specific* ends. Based in the introduction of Agamben and Foucault, the dispositive analysis is able to identify a strategic logic forming as either a liberal or a sovereign logic. However, to identify how the dispositive structures elements into a strategic logic, a dispositive analysis must, like the critical ontology of the present, position its point of departure in the moment of transformation.

The strategic logic becomes evident as a specific strategic logic in the observation of the moment of transformation where historical elements transfer into a different mode of being. Here, historical elements refer to "the set of institutions, of processes of subjectification, and of rules in which power relations become concrete" (Agamben, 2009a, p. 6). This gives the

dispositive a temporal aspect, meaning that the lines of formation, where the nature of the power lines becomes evident as forming a strategic logic, only give themselves to analysis in retrospect as they emerge (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thanning, 2008, p. 223). As such, the second moment of genesis appears as a site of a double process, where the dispositive transforms uncertainty into certainty by internalising the random elements into its structural order, thereby enabling a continued existence of the dispositive (Foucault, 1980: 195). The dispositive thus also emerges as an observation of problematic elements, which exist as unknown elements to the dispositive and threaten the continued state of the dispositive. The existence of the problematic elements prompts the dispositive to reformate itself by incorporating the unknown elements in a radical restructuring of its own existence. In this sense, the mechanism of the dispositive translates as a form of second-order strategy, in that it transforms the conditions of its own existence by observing how its present context constitutes a specific space of existence.

According to Foucault, the second moment of genesis appears as a site of double process in that, on the one hand, there is a process of functional overdetermination because each effect (positive or negative, intentional or unintentional) enters into resonance or contradiction with the other. This calls for a re-adjustment, or re-working, of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points. On the other hand, there is a perpetual process of strategic elaboration working towards the continuity of the dispositive's mode of being. The dispositive thus emerges as a reaction to a situation, or as a solution to a problem, giving it a strategic function and an aspect of *necessity* (ibid.). The necessity thus appears either as an urgent need, sometimes appearing as an emergency, to transform a negative into a positive by adjusting an existing structural order, that is, necessity to discontinue an existing mode of being by ensuring the existing mode of being. In this case, a dispositive can be said to execute power as sovereign power if it problematises the problematic event as an emergency, that is, if it calls upon a state of emergency where the dispositive can authorise initiatives from a sovereign position. A dispositive can also be said to execute power as liberal power if the decides on problematic issues in a strategic game of freedom.

A dispositive analysis thus performs as a second-order analysis in that a dispositive problematises the existence of random, and unexpected, social effects in relation to its own existence, giving up its own existence to reason and render uncertainty certain by internalising the unknown. In other words, a dispositive solves a problem by identifying a problem and rendering elements meaningful to secure a strategic end. How it identifies its strategic end depends on how it forms

a specific strategic logic, which, thanks to Foucault and Agamben, can be identified vis-à-vis two general strategic schemes. While a liberal dispositive reasons the strategic end to be the continued prosperity and wealth of the population, thus taking itself as the subject of transformation, a sovereign dispositive reasons its strategic end as the continued prosperity and wealth of itself, using the population as a mean. Nonetheless, a dispositive is, in all cases, recognised as strategic insofar as it gives reason to technical intervention which problematises by (re)structuring elements constituting its means. As an analytical object, a dispositive is observable as the network of power lines which, situated in the moment of transformation, passages elements of discontinuity into an organised structure with the aim of establishing a new continuity.

Rationality and Technology

I use the notion of *government* to refer to any strategic attempt to shape conduct insofar as attempting to affect how individuals behave by also shaping how individuals think. Thus, to govern societies is to govern the conduct of the population, and any technical action which guides conduct towards a specific goal always has a certain degree of reason behind it. Against this background, the notion of *rationality* refers to any form of calculative or systematic way of rendering things intelligent to action insofar as it identifies specific means and ends by knowing how to validate the integrity of things. Rationalities thus delineate understandings by conditioning how to validate the integrity of things, thereby conjuring them with distinct meaning. Forms of government entail forms of rationality which condition conduct in that they inform the appropriate way to reason; the reasons of government must respect rationality (Foucault, 2007). Specific forms of rationalities attach themselves to specific forms of pragmatic interventions, referred to as power technologies. A technology denotes a general imperative of power, in which the execution of power is observable in institutions, praxes and discourses.

In short, technologies employ tactics which combine varying proportions of an objective with means and can be seen as the strategies of normalisation which appear across institutions. When a technology which appears useful across a series of contexts can be said to have generalised, it is also referred to as a dispositive (Foucault, 1980, p. 195). When it comes to defining the term 'technology' itself, Foucault distinguishes among four major types based on how they entail a matrix of practical reasons:

> *(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or*
>
> *manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs,*
>
> *meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine*

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the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an

objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals

to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of

operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being,

so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness,

purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality". (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

The four technologies hardly ever function separately, but are associated with various forms of power. Each technology implies certain modes of training individuals in the sense of them acquiring certain skills as well as certain attitudes (Foucault, 1988). The first two technologies refer to the formalisation of discursive knowledge, whereas the latter two technologies refer to the actual subjectification of human life to a discourse. Like the previously mentioned distinction between subjective and objective reasoning, the above understanding of technologies, provided by Foucault, also becomes significant when distinguishing between power and rule in modern societies with a liberal and sovereign perspective. In short, *power technologies* denote a form of sovereign power technology in that they entail domination, whereas *technologies of the self* denote a liberal technology, entailing autonomous subjects.

Power Relations: Governance and Rule in Modernity

Foucault studied power and government in the west in terms of how government emerged as an art of government following a discontinued sovereign rule. In his governmentality studies, Foucault gradually moved towards a specific liberal perspective on how power is executed in the governing of modern western societies. He concluded that modern power is conditioned by freedom in that power can only be exercised over free subjects. Thus, Foucault rejects the view of power as states of domination or power exercised as violence. He also rejects the juridical language which problematises power as a question of legitimacy, arguing that power is, instead, immanent in all social relations. That is to say, "[m]echanisms of power are an intrinsic part of all these relations and, in a circular way, are both their effect and cause" (Foucault, 2007, p. 2). In other words, Foucault recognises the power relation shaping sociality into specific forms of being as a reciprocal movement intrinsic in the relation among actors, whose actions simultaneously affect each other in a strategic game of freedom. This gives the power relation a structure of action upon action, and governance becomes a game of actors affecting action rather than imposing action upon each other.

The nature of the power relation means that the art of governing societies is presupposed by the existence of free subjects, who are recognised as free subjects in that they are capable of reasoning against reason, resulting in the political appearing as an agonistic game of freedom (Foucault, 1984). Liberal forms of governing thus employ technologies which contain a rationality that reasons subjects as free beings capable of self-regulation and self-surveillance because they inhabit a certain degree of autonomy. Thus, liberal technologies govern on the free subject's capacity to reason and employ different ethical tactics such as the dialogue, for example, in forms of public education, to encourage the subject to self-transform into a better state. The relationship can become fixated into a dominant condition, but the condition of a free subject being capable of reasoning against reason results in power technologies only appearing as dominant, and never appearing as totalitarian in Foucault. Totalitarian techniques are considered to be discontinued in the Foucauldian strategy in that the sovereign discourse, the sovereign rule, is considered discontinued.

In Foucault, sovereign rule thus appears as a particular way of governing societies in which government appears in the form of a principality born with a legitimate right to rule. As such, government appears in a sovereign position which is external to the social insofar as it transcends the social (Foucault, 2007). In general, the sovereign rules over society with an inborn right to remove subjects from society, referencing any such decision back to his inherent right to rule. Therefore, sovereign technologies execute a form of power in which the status of the sovereign remains the same, whereas the subjectified subject is held captured in a desubjectified state: The subjectified subject is stripped of his inclusion in society because he is stripped of his right to reason against reason (Foucault, 1984, 2007, 2009). For that reason, the sovereignty rationality appears as a particular form of reasoning which, in contrast to the liberal rationality, takes the sovereign as its end and the population as its means. This constitutes a particular understanding of the task of political government in that "[g]overnment therefore has a purpose, it arranges things, in the sense I have been talking about, and it arranges things [for an end]. Here again I think from sovereignty" (Foucault, 2007, p. 98).

In other words, political forms of government are distinct from economic forms of government; the political decisively arranges 'things' into a specific space, thus governing in the juridical sense of the word, whereas the economic government, by contrast, executes power similarly to the pastorate in that it cares for the well-being of society, denoted as the ethnical element of governmentality. According to Foucault, the execution of sovereign power has become discontinued in modernity when a security dispositive reformed the governing model

into its modern form of government, namely, governmentality, where freedom is intrinsic to the execution of power. In short, the transition into governmentality transformed the above subjective *raison d'état* into a political economy, with the latter referring any form of governing which entails a rationality that reasons the continued prosperity of the population as the task of government (Foucault, 2009, p. 29). Against this background, the Foucauldian strategy, the governmentality strategy, constitutes a form of liberal governance, referring to attempts to govern conduct by governing on the element of freedom. Furthermore, liberal government is recognised as different from sovereign government in that it emerges as intrinsic to the social and moves to take care of the prosperity of the population, while entrusting man to prosper for himself. In other words, "we find at once a plurality of forms of government and their immanence to the state: the multiplicity and immanence of these activities distinguishes them radically from the transcendent singularity of Machiavelli's prince" (Foucault, 1991)

Agamben, by contrast, re-introduces the sovereign rationality and points towards the continued presence of sovereign rule as the included-exclusion in the juridical order denoted as the *state-of-exception*. In short, the sovereign has the power to declare the state of exception because he is born into his position, with the capacity to place himself at the threshold, suspending law and declaring a state of emergency while simultaneously guaranteeing the validity of the state of exception (Agamben, 1998, p. 18). Thus, the constitutional birth of modern societies, which guarantee citizens their freedom rights, is also the site at which the continued presence of the sovereign emerges, guaranteeing his right to re-emerge and rule over societies in cases of emergencies. The sovereign is never completely transcendent, because his position outside of law is guaranteed inside the law. This is the paradoxical state of the sovereign: He is present, yet absent. When he operates inside the law, the sovereign is decentralised, as he places himself in relation to the municipality, thus manifesting a liberal form of governance. When he places himself outside the law, meaning within the state of exception, the sovereign centralises into the subjective reasoning of the principality, exercising a form of power characterised by violence in the sense that freedom is removed.

Sovereign technologies are characterised as producing a form-of-life, which is included in society while also being excluded. For instance, the sovereign himself signifies a form-of-life insofar as he is born with a position in society that excludes him from society. In general, the sovereign power technologies appears as totalitarian technologies which suspend the element of freedom from the power equation when they remove a subject's capacity to reason against reason

with violence. The sovereign can, in the state of exception, ban citizens from society by removing their (constitutional) freedom rights, thereby capturing them in a zone of indistinction, where they exist as beings included in the world but excluded from the society.[6] As such, sovereign rule can be recognised when a technology appears to desubjectify subjects in a form-of-life, also known as *bare life* or *sacred life*, meaning that the technology employs techniques which strip subjects of their political rights. In short, one could say that Foucault understands power technologies as producing forms of life through the inclusion of freedom, whereas Agamben understands power technologies as producing forms-of-life through the exclusion of freedom.

For a second-order observation to declare a first-order observation declaring a state of emergency, it must be able to observe the observation of a situation describing a problem as drastically different from normal – a chaos in need of an emergent intervention, one which internalises the random chaos by including it in the juridical order (Agamben, 1998, p. 16). As such, based on the state of emergency, sovereign rule can be identified as sovereign rule, and distinguished from the liberal rule identified in the Foucauldian strategy, when the social problem becomes an object of law. This results in the task of governing appearing to be political in the juridical sense of the word, as it takes on the task of placing the chaotic problem inside a juridical order. According to Agamben, the state of exception has become the rule in the modern governmental machine, which increasingly operates from within a zone of indistinction, making public governance paradoxical. Thus, today, the state of exception constitutes the fundamental political structure, as it has increasingly been incorporated into societies as a valid norm thanks to the continued suspension of law (ibid., p. 18). As such, citizens are captured as forms-of-life, life in its bare form, in that the population is objectified to the end of sovereign government, which takes its own prosperity, or survival, as its mean. In a retrospective view to the critical ontology, modern societies have forgotten how to reason against reason insofar as they have, willingly, accepted that they remain captured in silence in the dispositives, which captures life into form-of-life.

Foucault and Agamben enriches the analysis conducted in this thesis with two distinct perspectives on how to observe and distinguish power relations in a dispositive analysis – as either forming a liberal logic or a sovereign logic. Rather than relying solely on the Foucauldian strategy, which illuminates only the liberal logic, the inclusion of Agamben embodies the dispositive analysis with the descriptive power to identify both strategic schemes. A dispositive analysis, outlined in the following section, concerns itself with identifying a specific strategic logic which,

thanks to Foucault and Agamben, can now be conditioned as either a liberal logic or a sovereign logic depending on how the different dispositive empowers it with different techniques. Using the language of Luhmann, one could say that the sovereign logic enters into the 'traditional' governmentality framework as a re-entry. The liberal perspective can be identified as a liberal insofar as it distinguishes itself from a sovereign one, and thus the liberal perspective actualises, becoming knowledgeable of its existence as liberal, only by excluding sovereignty. Although canonised into oblivion, sovereignty remains immanent to the liberal observation and, by deactivating the ban, Agamben reactivates the sovereign notion into the liberal observation as a re-entry of the difference which made the difference. The re-entry constitutes a paradox in that the two differences are different, yet identical, to each other. When the excluded element, which makes the difference in bringing forth the included element as meaningful, re-enters the observation, it consequently constitutes a difference in how the thesis can reason (Andersen, 2014). In this case, it results in the capacity of the dispositive analysis to oscillate between two forms of strategic scheme, from which it can identify the formation of a strategic logic.

The Purpose of the Dispositive Analysis

The purpose of the dispositive analysis is to explore how a dispositive tries to establish itself as a generality. The purpose of a dispositive is to establish itself as a general category of validation insofar as it constitutes the spaces from which speech and action become possible. A dispositive analysis represents an analysis of government in that it analyses the power relations which affect how the dispositive (de)subjectifies the social to those spaces. It does so by analysing how heterogenous elements are organised into a general scheme and how that general scheme projects a particular strategic logic – appearing either as liberal or as sovereign. Thus, the solutions implemented by a dispositive can either suggest a liberal self-technology or a sovereign power technologies which strips citizens, or civil actors, from the freedom rights. In the case of the European context, the disinformation-dispositive deploys an array of strategies, or techniques, into national politics, each of which constitute a specific space for how member states can govern the respective areas. That is to say, disinformation establishes a general category for validating public truth in Europe, thereby conditioning how member states can intervene in discourses and practices related to public truth-telling. As such, the dispositive analysis has analytical relevance insofar as it provides the analytical gaze which can identify general conditions of a second-order strategy related to the areas touched upon by disinformation. Furthermore, it can contribute to

a general discussion about the strategic nature of how disinformation conditions public truth-telling – a matter of increasing relevance in the perspective of freedom rights.

Empirical Anchoring: Disinformation

The second part of the thesis analysis installs the dispositive analysis in the empirical context of the European Union and constructs the Disinformation-initiative as a dispositive in order to investigate, how the implemented solutions to tackle disinformation induces pragmatic effects on public truth-telling within the European political sphere. In short, the first part of the analysis, namely, the post-truth era, suggests the general post-truth challenge as growing disinterest for accuracy in media presentation, which has significant implications for the education of public opinion, or, in other words, the general informative welfare of societies. According to the European Union, disinformation captures as *"an evolving challenge, with high potential to negatively influence democratic processes and societal debates."* (EC2018b).

The past decade has witnessed the European Union undergo a radical transformation with many recent disruptive events, such as Brexit, related to a constitutional rebirth in 2009, where the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaty of Rome were amended into the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) to form a different constitutional basis[7]. In addition to aggrandise the Union with foreign diplomacy and new positions, the treaty also enabled member states to exit the Union legally, insofar empowering to Eurosceptic movements to legally contest the position of the Union in national politics with democratic elections. However, Brexit still came as an unexpected shock to the established political Europe who, in the aftermath, demanded an organised response so to prevent future uncoupling from the unified community. As such, the European Union tasked the European Commission to address the chaotic situation, who set up a "Fake News"-initiative proclaiming that: *"Fake news and online disinformation are an increasing, global and concrete challenge for the functioning of our democracies."* (EC2018b). The early stages of the initiative included a public consultation, a multi-stakeholder conference, as well tasking a High-Level Expert Group to gather *"opinions on what actions could be taken at EU level to give citizens effective tools to identify reliable and verified information and adapt to the challenges of the digital age."* (EC2018c).

It is important to notice that the Fake News-initiative's initial ambition in 2017 was *"to define the boundaries of the fake news phenomenon, assess the effectiveness of the solutions already put*

in place by social media platforms and to agree on key principles for further action" (EC2017). In other words, the initiative was, first and foremost, in need of an intelligent rendering of the chaos in order for the High-Level Expert Group to consult the Commission on the action needed. The observation plays a decisive role in the constructing the dispositive insofar as the ambition suggests a need to define boundaries, to delineate the how to understand issues associated with the fake news-phenomenon, a characteristic trait of the dispositive. These boundaries were defined at the multi-stakeholder conference (informed by data from the public consultation) and given to the High-Level Expert Group of representatives from social media organisations, traditional media organisations, journalists and academia[8]. The group was tasked to advise the Commission on the development of an EU-level strategy and Fake News"-initiative resulted in formal communication "Tackling Disinformation: a European Approach" published by the European Commission in April 2018.

The communication draws similar conclusions as the post-truth era in identifies a modernised media landscape as having radically changed how the information circulate. Likewise, the challenges can be identified as a matter upholding public discourses in a viral modernity in which individual agendas overturn political orders. Furthermore, it considered disinformation to undermine democratic values as elaborated on the Communication's associated website:

> *"Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional media*
> *and harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take informed*
> *decisions. It can polarise debates, create or deepen tensions in society and*
> *undermine electoral systems, and have a wider impact on European security. It*
> *impairs freedom of opinion and expression, a fundamental right enshrined in*
> *the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union."* (EC2018b)

As seen in the above quote, the European Union considers disinformation as having a *wide impact* resulting in the challenge to secure European values, such as the freedom of expression, and democratic processes require a *wide action area*. Such observation is evident in the following statement:

> *"The Commission is working to implement a clear, comprehensive and broad set*
> *of actions to tackle the spread and impact of online disinformation in Europe*
> *and ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems. [...]*

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Fighting disinformation in the era of social media and online platforms has to be a coordinated effort involving all relevant actors, from institutions to social platforms, from news media to single users. " (ibid.)

The above quote suggests disinformation acting as an all-embracing political intervention in the form of a complicated network employing various initiatives and institutional positions. In fact, the April communication on "tackling disinformation: a European approach" has since been accompanied by an election package, a code of conduct and, in an important note, a joint Action Plan. The latter sees disinformation related backwards to another strategic framework launched by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2015 in response to "hybrid threats"[9]. The "broad set of actions" also include an election package launched prior the European election to propose measures to *"bolster European democracy and protect free and fair elections in Europe"* (EC2019) as well as a Code of Conduct in which civil actors such as Facebook and Google promise to tackle disinformation with different means. As such, the European Union uses the notion of disinformation to strategically render the chaos intelligible for different political action, which is structured into a rather complex network of political actions performed from different positions. In other words, disinformation can be observed to act as a *dispositive* that manages to structure various initiatives together into a strategic network.

PART II

2.1. THE POST-TRUTH ERA

The critical ontology takes on the following agenda: firstly, it observes the post-truth condition as a matter of public truth-telling, which can be distinguished as employing different tactics. The criteria determining the tactics as being either sovereign or liberal are supported with empirical observations of two distinct archaic notions, namely, 'aletheia' (Corazzon, 2016; Rider & Peters, 2018, p. 3) and 'parrhesia' (Foucault, 2001; Peters, 2018, p. 83), presented in the 2018 anthology *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education* (Peters, Rider, Hyvönen & Besley, 2018). Both notions denote particular forms of truth-telling activity, albeit employing different power mechanism insofar as aletheia imply sovereign capture whereas parrhesia is conditioned by freedom. Nevertheless, both observations are relevant to how the post-truth era constructs post-truth as a matter of public truth-telling. The observations of the two truth-telling practices are then correlated with the observation of a viral modernity in order to conclude on a specific set of characteristic post-truth challenges. These challenges are then applied to the

subsequent analysis on disinformation when rationalising certain challenges identified by the disinformation-initiative.

Telling the Truth: Promising Honesty or Free Speech.

According to Corazzon, modern conceptions of truth trace back to the Greek word *Aletheia*, which he argues appeared in the archaic era as a particular truth-telling ritual entailed by a poet giving an oath to the public to tell the "whole story" as the "whole truth". He bases his conclusion on the Homeric use of a specific ritual sentence, repeated throughout the Odyssey as a particular promise of truth, namely, "Then verily, child, I will tell you the truth" (Corazzon, 2016, p. 1). Corazzon observes the promise of truth as marking the emergence of a specific public truth-telling practice in which a public oath necessitates the validation of true information, arguing that this specific validation-scheme remains evident in modern societies insofar as "[t]he Homeric notion of Aletheia which emerges from examining its uses is precisely the same, with the same force and flavour, as that enshrined in the traditional oath or solemn affirmation required of a witness in court proceedings: to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (Corazzon, 2016, p. 1-2). In all cases, the aletheian oath suggests the inclusion of a public truth-teller, validated through the oath as a true truth-teller, who engages with the ritual of discovering and presenting true stories to the public by enrolling himself in an ethical relationship with his own conduct – conditioned by criteria provided by the oath. In this case, the aletheian poet reflected upon the methods of disclosing truth vis-à-vis the moral standards characteristic of that specific time and place, which, at that time, resulted in the poet often reciting God-given knowledge when presenting the public with true stories (ibid., p. 17), sometimes even dedicating his poetic work to the Gods with a hymn (ibid., p. 7).

The aletheian poet experiences truth in a personal, and privileged, encounter with divine *muses*, who exist in the threshold between heavenly and earthly matters so as to inform poet as to how to convey divine truths to the public, thereby removing the aletheian poet himself from truth in his role commanding authority over truth. In other words, divine truths echoed into society through the poet, trusted by the public as capable of experiencing truth through a personal relationship to the muses. As such, the Homeric use of aletheia was based in the idea of myth, with myth referring to the process of becoming acquainted with truth in a personal experience and contrasted to Aristotelian logos, also known as rhetoric (ibid., 3). The rhetorical tradition generally refers to the strategic use of techniques and tactics to cover up true intentions in public speaking and differs from the aletheian truth-telling practice in that the poet speaks

"fully in mind [of] what really happened and wishes to speak it forth honestly and fully; the speaker's knowledge and good intentions are equally essential" (ibid., 14). This observation implies honesty as a determining criteria regarding how the aletheian poet was to perform as a public true-teller insofar as the poet was required to be "truthful and open in one person's dealings with another, so that what is said can be taken by hearers as reliable and trustworthy" (ibid., p. 2). In all events, the link between aletheia and myth results in the aletheian oath denoting a specific sovereign validation tactic regarding public truth-telling, because the oath only actualises the poet as a trusted truth-teller by depriving him of his freedom. The work of the poet is dictated by the codes given to him by the muses, who speak from a state of exception, transcending the social.

The oath captures the public truth-telling in a paradoxical state, producing the truth-teller as a form-of-life deprived of his own voice in the sense that any decision to speak truth opposing the codes given to him by the muses would see him expelled from his position in society as a public truth-teller. Against this background, the aletheian truth is concluded upon, in this thesis, as performing a sovereign tactic in regard to public truth-telling. However, it must be noted that the decision to construct the aletheian oath as a sovereign tactic differs significantly from how Corazzon concludes on the oath. Corrazon constructs his ontology with a synchronic approach and chooses to draw conclusions from the oath based on observations made by a later aletheian poet, Pindar. Aletheian poets themselves began, at some point, to reassess the honesty of the poet by questioning reliability, which Corazzon outlines, in detail, as a general dispute between various poetic traditions concerning how to separate facts from fiction. In this case, Corazzon concludes on the oath, through the eyes of Pindar, as a mean used by the poet to remove any aspect of mythical dishonesty from aletheia, suggesting that the oath intended to vouch for the sincerity of the poet and his personal knowledge of the validity of his stories (ibid., p. 15). In other words, the oath guaranteed truth by giving evidence regarding the honesty of the poet and, in doing so, banned myth and logos from aletheia.

Nonetheless, both the conclusions on aletheia share the observation that public truth-telling includes a truth-teller capable of speaking truth insofar by embodying the virtue of honesty – a criterion also evident in how Foucault constructs *parrhesia* as a truth-telling activity in Roman culture. In short, *parrhesia*, which translates as 'free speech', as opposed to aletheia which translates as 'form of truth', denotes that truth itself occurs as a speaking activity in which *parrhesiastes* used *parrhesia* to speak truth. In this context, parrhesiastes were capable of speaking truth because they possessed the virtue of frankness, which, in similar ways to honesty, refers to

the truth-teller being truthful to his words insofar as what he said clearly represented what he believed (Foucault, 2001; Peters, 2018, p. 83). In other words, parrhesia truth-telling activities entail transparency as a criterion of how to validate truth, thus differing from the aletheian oath, which, as concluded by this thesis, appears in ways similar to the rhetoric tradition of a disguising tactic. In this case, rhetoric also refers to any technical devise used to help a public speaker cover up their own beliefs when attempting to sway public opinion (Peters, 2018, p. 83).

However, in contrast to the aletheian truth-teller, the Foucauldian understanding of freedom presupposes the parrhesiast in the sense that he engages with speech activities as a free subject capable of reasoning against the moral codes of societies. That is to say, parrhesia is an activity conducted in the community, in that the truth-teller engages with truth through a personal relationship with his community (Foucault, 2001, p. 107-108), as opposed to the aletheian poet, who engages with truth in a personal relationship to the muses, invisible to the social. Thus, parrhesia occurs in the context of individual personal relationships and "can be seen in human relationships occurring in the framework of public life" (Foucault, 2001, p. 108). First, the relationship between parrhesia and community life brings forth the parrhesian truth-teller in the form of a public educator, who engaged with truth in a public forum in which citizens could actively participate and question the truth presented by the truth-teller. In other words, the parrhesian truth-telling activity appears in the form of a liberal dialogue conditioned by subjects free to reason against reason. Furthermore, the parrhesian truth also suggests objective reasoning in that the truth-teller takes truth as his object only by taking himself as the subject to be studied.

In both cases, the truth-teller appears as a significant public educator. In the archaic era, poets had a prominent role as public truth-tellers, as their words could shape public opinions if they were recited and echoed in society. That is to say, poetry, which is a generically denotes all forms of cultural traditions, was recited either in public arenas, such as by Pindar, who recited odes of praise at the Olympic, or through word of mouth. There was thus power in poetry, similar to the power held by modern mass media over public opinion today, in that it could mould and shape the attitude of the public (Grube, 1995, p. 46-47). Thus, the poets were considered teachers of men, reinforcing the moral standards regarding the conduct of man, which granted the poet a significant role in public education and a powerful role in society (ibid.).

Aletheia and parrhesia each appear to validate public truth-telling differently by conditioning the work of the truth-teller differently. The aletheian oath captures the poet in a form-of-life deprived of his freedom to reason against reason, whereas the parrhesiast maintains his right to

speak frankly without risk of losing his discursive position. The two observations can be situated within the post-truth era as two distinct validation tactics, with the aletheian tactic representing the sovereign perspective and parrhesia the liberal perspective. Each tactic therefore suggests different attitudes towards how the truth reveals itself to the truth-teller, with parrhesia sharing a historic link to more modern conceptions of scientific truths, understood as truths revealing themselves through scientific experiments to an expert witness, who obtains the expert position through formal education. The emergence of the scientific truth-telling tradition is often correlated to the scientific and technological revolutions that occurred in the early modern period and marks a specific moment in the trajectory of public truth-telling in which truth itself embarks on the problematic journey towards the post-truth condition.

Truth is subjected to scientific problematisation in early modernity as a matter of extracting the God-given truths, considered to be secretly hidden in nature, though new technical innovations provided by the technological revolutions (Fuller, 2018, p. 15). In other words, scientific truth-telling placed nature on trial through scientific experimentation so as to reveal its hidden secrets to scientific experts, who became knowledgeable on the measures needed to extract true evidence through formal education. According to Fuller, the experimental emphasis resulted in scientific truth-telling moving towards a fact-based conception of how to experience and present truth as evidence-based findings, thus commencing the modern standard in scientific methods of producing facts as "conventions" (ibid., p. 14). However, scientific truth-telling paradoxically produced evidence-based truth as forms-of-truths because it inquired about nature by targeting nature with the irrational standpoint of believing that tangible nature entailed hidden signatures that gave evidence to a source transcending the tangible. As such, scientific experts instigated the academic tradition of evidence-based truths with a dispute regarding how to attribute fidelity to the event placed on laboratory trial. This changed the direction towards objectivity, represented by the decision to adopt the Roman word 'troth', which translates as faithfulness to the *target*, thus referencing the target rather than the source (ibid.).

This decision marks a transformative moment in terms of including objectivity and evidence as criteria validating scientific truth-telling. Furthermore, the decision places truth into a philosophical relationship with the idea of fidelity, meaning that scientific truth-telling shares the same ethical element described in regard to parrhesia, indicating that the scientific truth-teller is capable of remaining faithful to the target so as to disclose truth evidence with frank honesty.

However, scientific truth-telling solely treated truth as the end result of the experiments, and 'theories of truth', "in the academic philosophical sense, are of a much later vintage, most of them first formulated in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century" (Peters & Riders, 2018, p. 4). Against this background, theories of truth appear as a changed attitude towards how to problematise truth and occur simultaneously with the formal inclusion of expert entitlement:

> *"The concept of the 'expert', a late nineteenth-century juridical innovation based on a contradiction to the participle 'experienced', extended the idea of 'direct acquittance' to include people with a specific training by virtue of which are licensed to inductively generalise from their past experience to the matter under dispute" (Fuller, 2018, p. 13-14).*

The above observation of the idea of scientific truth-tellers being formalising into 'experts by experience' takes place within a specific transformative context regarding formal education in which political acts such as the University Act, which replaced religious entry requirements with strategies favouring new metrical norms and techniques, radically changed the conditions of student enrolment at European universities. Student enrolment was thus liberated from the religious tradition through various political acts aimed at opening up universities to common access by introducing new innovative calculative measures to evaluate a set of required scientific skills. As such, universities embarked upon the modern discourse of governing student enrolment through formal registration and examination processes. In this way, universities reformed, into a new mode of being, by cutting away the religious tradition, taking on a more modern identity as fully scientific institutions governing themselves according to the coded norms outlined by the political acts. Against this background, the modern exam paper constructs as a validation technique which gives evidence to the sincerity of the scientific truth-teller insofar as it materialises trained scientific virtues as licenced virtue, thus suggesting that the scientific truth-teller is delineated through formalising law. That is to say, the aletheian oath translates into modernity as a form of validation tactic necessitating a lawful positioning of the expert witness so as to protect the criteria needed to ensure evidence-based truths.

Scientific truth-telling plays a significant role in terms of public opinion insofar as western politics generally favour problematising societies based on evidence-based truths provided by formally educated truth-tellers, regardless of the sectorial employment of the truth-teller. That is

to say, scientific truth-telling generally refers to all practices which can be said to produce truths as evidence-based insofar as the truth-teller is capable of remaining faithful to the target rather than the source, meaning that scientific truth-telling aligns with the liberal self-technology in that the truth-teller targets objects faithfully only insofar as he also targets his own ethical self. Against this background, traditional media ethics also constitute a form of scientific truth-telling in the sense that they denote a set of trained media virtues applied by media producers, such as journalists, to ensure the objectivity of the truth-teller and that stories are evidence-based. However, the educational sector typically takes on the task of providing the western governmental machine with scientific truths inscribed into public discourses which echo the common-knowledge truths in societies.

However, what is at stake in the post-truth era is not just a matter of distinguishing true facts from lying fiction; rather, it is a matter of how public opinion comes to accepts specific truths insofar as they know how to validate presented truths. In other words, forms of public education, understood as the elements included in shaping public opinion, appear to be the issues at stake in the post-truth challenge – a rationality also present in the disinformation-initiative. This means of problematising the post-truth challenge is also evident in an observation made by Corazzon, that "[t]ruth is not a matter that pits fact over fiction, but solely a matter of what poetry has the power to make appear convincing through its particular charm" (Corazzon, 2016, p. 16). Against this background, viral modernity generally applies to issues related to how public opinion shapes and the political measures taken so as to guarantee critical abilities through knowledge of the proper validation tactics.

Scientific Truth-Telling, Mass Media, and Public Opinion

The media sector, in particular, the news media, has historically played a role in shaping public opinion as well as in setting the public agenda by directing public attention towards certain issues (McComb, 2004). As such, the traditional media represents a significant actor when it comes to how the public educates themselves on worldly issues by acting as an important source of information. Media actors thus appear as public truth-tellers capable of both uncovering and presenting true stories to the public. The media sector can set the political agenda by bringing forth issues as particular concerns to the public and can by those means also contribute to creating crisis. For instance, West German newspapers contributed to the intensification of the oil crisis in 1973 by letting the negative commentary about the available supply of petroleum outweigh the positive commentary (McComb, 2004, p. 23). As such, the media influences public opinion

by raising awareness about issues as matters of public interest in distinct ways, for example, bringing attention to crime rates and producing fear or raising awareness about drug use and producing concern, meaning that the mass media creates social effects (ibid.).

The social effects of mass media, which manifest as social norms or as forms of conduct, has long been a general concern in the media-politic relationship, with forms of media regulations commonly used to regulate possible effects of the mass media on issues such as promiscuity, violence, and so on. That is to say, the term mass media is not restricted solely to the idea of the organised news media, press and broadcast, but generally refers to all forms of organised social and institutional norms and cultures structured around forms of mass media, with new media referring to digital and online media. In this case, media ethics constitute an internal media regulation and refer to a set of agreed-upon norms considered to be essential values within the journalistic tradition, norms which ensure accuracy and trust that the journalist is capable of self-governance in his work, and thus, "the question of objectivity or neutrality ultimately involves the issue of how journalists are trained, since they produce narratives that shape the public realm" (Lăzăroiu, 2018, p. 114). The journalistic tradition discloses truth to the public in ways similar to scientific truth-telling, and the journalistic task contributes to providing truths to public discourses, as "in and through journalism, a society disputes how to restructure its organisation" (Lăzăroiu, 2018, p. 113).

As in scientific truth-telling, the journalist experiences truth by gathering facts from various sources and subjects the information to critical assessment, and "the mechanism of truth-seeking works to separate fact from insinuation, detect bias, and focus on what is factual and relevant for the audience" (Lăzăroiu, 2018, p. 117). As such, critical thinking appears to be the journalistic virtue which validates a true journalistic truth-teller. However, one of the challenges observed in the post-truth era sees media ethics increasingly neglected due to drastic changes in the working conditions presented to the journalist. In short, the abundance of information and the scarcity of attention results in increased media competition and, as already mentioned, everyone can entitle themselves with journalistic privileges. Furthermore, the armada of social networking technologies results in an explosion of information channels, meaning that "not only have the experts and agencies involved in producing facts multiplied, so have the communicative fora for their dissemination. In a 'mediatised society', the growing importance of the media, old as well as new, in circulating facts and thus shaping opinion and perceptions, has a considerable impact on other institutions. Private as well as public organisations and institutions are involved in a constant struggle to get people's attention" (Hyvönen, 2018, 122-123). In other words, the

post-truth era recognises a specific media challenge conditioned by post-truth, in which conditions people's attention has become a commercial good due to its scarcity and to high competition, with media ethics being overpowered by the produced marketing effect.

The media challenge can be rationalised in similar ways to how the educational challenge presents in the anthology as educators not trusting the autonomy of the student. The critical abilities of modern media users, who also act as media producers, are thus not to be trusted, because users lack training in the virtues needed to know how to validate the information presented to them. This observation proves relevant in the disinformation-initiative as it indicates a specific need for intervention in regard to public education so as to promote the currently lacking social media skills needed to validate information. Furthermore, certain aspects of the educational challenge also appear similar to how the disinformation-initiative constructs a specific journalistic challenge in relation to new media business models. The post-truth educational challenge is observed to be closely linked to benchmarking techniques, which constitute the current normative behaviour in terms of quality control. Against this perspective, the ethical norms ensuring quality journalism corrode due to the emphasised attention placed on branding, introduced into the current management mentality due to the heightening of competitive conditions.

The challenge can be summed up as "[the] devotion of attention and resources to branding and media benchmarking weakens traditional academic values, criteria, and structures of quality control, which are usurped by the principles and practices of corporate management" (Hyvönen, 2018, 124). This rationality also appears as platform models in the disinformation-initiative. What is at stake appears to be ethical criteria, in this case, ensuring quality journalism, attracting attention, the marketing taking over, the focus on image and on branding to attract attention. All of these create a particular atmosphere in the modern media landscape, one in which quality is measured in numbers; in other words, there is a problem of 'metricality' (Hyvönen, 2018, 125). In the disinformation case, the metricality mentality is closely linked with click-bait techniques, which are then included within the dispositive as a disinformation technique, and platform models, which appear in the dispositive as the materiality in which the metricality mentality can be observed.

Clickbait as a New Media Rhetoric

Against this background, it is important to also include a few notions on how new social media norms have contributed to changed working conditions affecting the journalistic tradition. In

short, modern tech-savvy media consumers now prefer to consume information about worldly issues through digital and social media, with younger generations generally favouring social media platforms as their preferred media source (Jørgensen, 2018; Ammori, 2014, p. 2266). However, due to the multiple state of the media landscape, modern media consumers are faced with a multiple choice in the decision of which headline to click on. Traditionally, people "used to buy a newspaper, read it from cover to cover while scanning headlines, and reading articles that they thought were interesting" (Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters, & Marx, 2017, p. 1300). However, the selective criteria regarding how media consumers decide upon which headline to click have changed in more ways than one, meaning that the existence of more media does not constitute the only changed criteria. People now consume media differently by also consuming media content outside the original publication – media users commonly to decide to read "this article because it was shared on social media or some other internet platform" (ibid.). As such, the competition for media attention can be seen as materialising in click-bait techniques, also referring to the idea of employing 'effective headlines' so as to attract attention, manifesting as measurable clicks, which does not deliver the content promised by the headline. A click-bait technique thus appears as a rhetoric tool in that it lures a reader to click on a hyperlink to generate clicks, which are then used by the media outlet to market itself to advertisers so as to ensure its own prosperity. All in all, click-bait techniques appear to be a sovereign technique insofar as they objectify truth, or the issues presented as being of public interest, to ensure its welfare and prosperity.

The Postmodern Blame

The post-truth condition is frequently blamed upon the postmodern paradigm, which is said to have familiarised societies with a cynical attitude towards facts, in this case, translating into an attitude towards fact-checking, understood as validation techniques, which is poor of critical thinking. The blame on postmodernism is illustrated in the following quote from an interview with philosopher Daniel Bennet, published by *The Guardian* in (2017): "I think what the postmodernists did was truly evil. They are responsible for the intellectual fad that made it respectable to be cynical about truth and facts" (Peters et al., 2018, p. 218). It goes without saying that the blame on postmodernism takes on many directions in regard to the pragmatic results, but the general blame can be summarised as postmodern thinkers having disputed the understanding of truth, placing it in an open state, thanks to the post-structuralist understanding of contingency. The subsequent surplus of truth is then said to have enabled a 'truth

consumerism' in the sense that people select among the multiple truth in consumer-like ways (Besley, Peters, & Rider, 2018, p. 218). Against this background, the aforementioned sceptical attitude results in people choosing to validate information presented to them based on personal belief systems, also referred to as a confirmation bias, meaning that the capacity of man to know himself as a critical being, capable of critical thinking and practical validation skills, appears as the overall issue at stake in the post-truth era. Such a conclusion is evident in how the anthology reflects upon the post-truth condition in its afterword on a viral modernity.

> *"The assertion that Foucault (or Derrida, or Rorty) is responsible for the post-truth condition is false, and fatuously so. In ignoring the complexity of the cultural context in which ideas are formed, propagated, integrated, and transformed as well as the historical facts, of the matter with regard to relevant occurrence and developments which give those ideas substance, the claim itself fits neatly into the post-truth format of oversimplification, falsification and appeal to visceral reason rather than reason and deliberation" (Besley, Peters, & Rider, 2018, p. 218).*

The postmodern blame is observed as a misrepresentation of the post-truth condition, also stated as a "fake intellectual history" (ibid.), in that it concludes regarding the post-truth condition with claims which cannot be said to be evidence-based. Thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida are blamed for having instantiated a social norm of not trusting evidence-based truths, which, according to the above observation, rejects the truth of the work of parrhesiast truth-tellers. As such, the postmodern blame itself is an example of the post-truth challenge in that it concludes opinions on post-truth, fake news and more and is publicly shared in the public sphere without undergoing the proper scientific truth-telling procedures needed to validate the statement as evidence-based. In other words, everyone can claim themselves an expert in the modern media landscape and share opinions and thoughts, which are then reaffirmed when shared by social media. The postmodern blame, with its sole focus on intellectual traditions, thus also neglects a pragmatic perspective to the post-truth condition

Concluding on a Viral Modernity as a Point of Discussion
The pragmatic perspective condenses into the idea of a viral modernity, which generally refers to the changes affecting how the public inform themselves on worldly issues in the public media landscape. As mentioned, public truth-telling is seen in this thesis as a complex relationship

among forms of public truth-tellers, trained by virtue to have critical assessment skills to validate and present evidence-based truths; the political domain, which problematises societies through scientific truths; and the media sector, which, in addition to being capable of producing truth, serves as the most notable public speaker. Although the scientific domain generally produces the truths used to anchor public discourse, the actual presentation of truth is traditionally linked to the media institutions, which, as such, act as public speakers in public truth-telling. It is against this background that the technological innovations of the mass media, meaning new communication channels and devices, play a significant role in that they contribute to innovating how to speak publicly – and truthfully.

In this case, the gradual opening of the media sector has historically contributed to social movements contributing to setting the political, scientific, and media agenda by gaining the attention of the public through media representation. For instance, the media culture which emerged with the invention of global broadcast media (mainly, television) played a significant role in establishing new directions in the public environmental discourse in the 1970s. The high level of media attention given to environmental movements in the 1970s, and the ability of global dissemination thanks to broadcast media and satellites, contributed to creating a social context for the scientific truth on the greenhouse effect to escape its confinement to academic discussions. In other words, the media attention "provided a social context, a space within the broader political culture, for biochemists, ecologists and other natural scientists and engineers to educate the public about environmental issues educators could educate" (Jamison, 2010, p. 2). However, more media outlets also enables other social environmental movements to voice contradicting opinions, and act as "self-proclaimed 'sceptics', who, for various reasons question the importance of dealing with climate change as opposed to other issues, and have actively challenged the dominant position, primarily by questioning the truth value of the scientific knowledge claims that have been made in its behalf" (ibid.). Thus, this period also marks the beginning of a sceptic discourse. In all cases, the public awareness of environmental issues in the 1970s contributed to setting the political agenda by influencing how institutions in the political domain intervened to direct a common discourse on environmental issues.

The above example shows how radical innovations of the mass media often result in reforming the relationship between the social and political order, as these innovations contribute to new media cultures which, in this case, refer to new normative ways of becoming a knowing and acting being in relation to the contemporary. With this in mind, viral modernity constitutes a new media contemporary in the sense that digital and online media, or social networking

technologies, constitute a new mass media – and a new media culture – in the sense that they have given birth to new institutional and social ways of interacting and communicating with oneself and others. In this case, the observation of a post-truth era places this understanding of a viral modernity in relation to the already delineated post-truth condition to construct the post-truth challenge in a distinct way, namely, the existence of a challenging tendency to consume and disseminate information uncritically. The challenge translates into a post-truth rationality, which is also evident in the subsequent analysis of the disinformation-initiative, in which societies are problematised as having poor 'fact-checking' skills. In other words, the issue at stake in the post-truth rationality appears to be the informative welfare of society.

In the anthology's afterword, where viral modernity is introduced briefly, an example of the challenge is showcased based in how the Guardian's editor-in-chief reflects on "the circumstances surrounding the news of David Cameron's alleged intimate involvement with a part of a pig's anatomy while a student at Oxford" (Besley, Peters, & Rider, 2018, p. 218). In short, the story's source was an anecdote from a bibliography which did not present any solid evidence to validate the event as fact. Yet, despite the lack of evidence, the story went viral – and only afterwards was the story subjected to the traditional ethical practice of fact-checking through source critique. In other words, only afterwards did the editor-in-chief stop to think, "does truth even matter anymore?" (ibid., p. 221-221).

The first part of the analysis concludes on the issues at stake in the post-truth era, construed as the post-truth condition thriving in a viral modernity, with the observation presented in the anthology itself:

> *"We have up to this point argued that the idea that the post-truth condition has been created by a certain 'postmodern' strain of philosophy is 'fake news', and 'alternative fact', at least from the historical perspective. The issue at stake, however, is not merely of intellectual history, but also of political economy. The crux of the matter is what we have, in the title of this book, referred to as 'viral modernity'"* (Besley, Peters, & Rider, 2018, p. 221).

In other words, the issue at stake in the post-truth era concerns the pragmatic effects of how new media norms brings about challenges to the domains performing task of public truth-telling. The subsequent analysis on the disinformation-initiative takes this into account in

observing how the European Union rationalises the pragmatic effects of disinformation. Furthermore, the emphasis on educating scientific truth-telling skills and the media sector is also emphasised in the following analysis, meaning that some aspects of the disinformation-initiative are not detailed in the analysis. For instance, detailed insight into elements such as the electoral system and cyberwarfare with foreign disinformation actors, also referred to as hyper-threats, are placed within the blind side of the analytical gaze.

2.2. TACKLING DISINFORMATION: THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

Most of the knowledge of how to understand and how to tackle disinformation was presented to the world in the first official communication published by the European Commission in April 2018 based on finding provided by the Expert Group, where the expert consisted of mostly of educator and professional media actors, such as journalists and media outlets. The April Communication is used in the following analysis as the primary empirical source used to provide the analysis with different observations of how the disinformation-initiative includes and excludes elements into a common understanding of the problematic nature of disinformation (the challenges), its causes, and the technical interventions needed to tackle the continued spread of disinformation.

The Occurrence of Disinformation

In general, the term 'disinformation' itself appears problematised throughout the initiative in two distinct ways; firstly, disinformation articulates in materialistic ways as an object produced by social networking technologies which, for that reason, appear in the initiatives as new forms of production technologies and sign systems (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Secondly, when the initiative problematise the pragmatics in regard to the occurrence of disinformation, the needed means to tackle disinformation appears as solutions implemented to prevent the spread of disinformation. Although the Communication itself does not present such distinction itself, it does manifest implicitly in the selected empirical quotations presenting in the following. Against this background, following analysis will start by presenting how the initiative rationalises the occurrence of disinformation:

> *"The proliferation of disinformation has interrelated economic, technological,*
>
> *political, and ideological causes. First, the spread of disinformation is a symptom*

of a wider phenomena that affect societies facing rapid change. Economic insecurity, rising extremism, and cultural shifts generate anxiety and provide a breeding ground for disinformation campaigns to foster societal tensions, polarisations, and distrust... Second, the spread of disinformation takes place in the context of a media sector undergoing profound transformation... Third, social networking technologies are manipulated to spread disinformation..."
(EC2018a, p.5-6)

First and foremost, the above observation give evidence to the before mentioned suggested way, in which the initiative problematises the disinformation challenge as 'the proliferation of disinformation'. Furthermore, the observation also give evidence to how the initiative rationalises the moment of transformation through three perspectives, which also constituent in how elements are problematised into the dispositive. Firstly, disinformation is said to have proliferated in response to rapid socio-technological changes occurring in societies which, in this case, refers to changes occurring in regard to socio-political issues such as migration and economy, as well as changes occurring in relation to the media sector. In this case, the initiative understands the occurrence of disinformation proliferating as a social symptom to change, which it considers to manifest as a fearful response to change. Against this background, disinformation campaigns appear as strategic communication harnessing on social networking technologies to capitalise on social anxiety to "foster societal tensions, polarisations, and distrust" (ibid.).

Secondly, the occurrence of disinformation and disinformation campaigns are said to occur in the context of a "media sector undergoing profound transformation", meaning that the initiative significantly places itself with the pragmatic context presented in the post-truth era concerning certain media challenges, and includes elements linked to the media sector. Thirdly, the spread of disinformation is observed as closely related to social networking technologies which, throughout the initiative, portray in ways similar to a new mass media. Social networking technologies are observed as introducing new ways of communication in regard to the media sector, meaning that societies face disinformation differently today insofar as existing in a different media context. The analytical gaze will remain mindful of these perspective throughout the analysis, as their rationalising of how disinformation occur is significant to how known and unknown elements are problematised into the dispositive. The dispositive generally include socio-technological elements by problematising them in respect to how they relate to disinformation being spread in the media sector, and disinformation campaigns fostering social tensions, polarisations, and distrust.

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In the light of the above, and from the perspective of the post-truth era, the dispositive seemingly rationalises the profound changes occurring in the media sector by contextualising the socio-technological changes to how the Internet "has not only vastly increased the volume and variety of news available to citizens but has also profoundly changed the ways citizens access and engage with news" (EC2018a, p. 1). The new media culture presented in the first part of the analysis is said to establish a new information, environment in which digital and social media constitute a new mass media and information source. However, although the situation is considered a "potential to make democratic processes more participatory and inclusive", it also presents a challenge insofar as "new technologies can be used, notably through social media, to disseminate disinformation on a scale and with a speed and precision of targeting that is unprecedented, creating personalised information spheres and becoming powerful echo chambers for disinformation campaigns" (EC2018a, p. 1).

In other words, the disinformation-initiative seemingly consider new media a potential to further realise democratic values insofar as digital and social media further notions of media plurality and media freedom in terms of opening up the media market to diversity, understood as more media outlet, more media formats and channels and open access to media consumption. However, social networking technologies also constitute a challenge, as they present themselves to disinformation campaigns as more prominent tools, which public awareness can be raised in regard to a political message. New technologies are significantly observed as capable of generating echo chambers, which generally refer to citizens informing themselves on worldly issues in enclosed personal algorithm-based information spaces, which support their personal belief systems. All in all, the issue at stake in disinformation-initiative appear closely related to the one concluded in the post-truth era, namely, the informative wellbeing of societies.

The Threat of Disinformation

In general, disinformation appears articulated as a threat towards democracy, when it is linked to campaigns, which support radical and extremist ideas and activities considered to erode trust in institutions, including the traditional media.

> *"Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional*
> *media, and harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take*
> *informed decisions. Disinformation also often supports radical and extremist*
> *ideas and activities. It impairs freedom of expression, a fundamental right*
> *enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*

(Charter). Freedom of expression encompasses respect for media freedom and pluralism, as well as the right of citizens to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas "without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers"." (EC2018a, p.1).

In this case, disinformation is said to erode trust in both institutions and in the traditional media, and significantly linked to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which enshrines the freedom rights adopted and protected by the European Union. It is worth noticing how media freedom and pluralism links to the freedom of expression, as it provides a distinct perspective on the role of the state politics in the media, namely to protect the right of the media, as well as citizens, to work "without the interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers". With this latter quote, which derives from the Charter itself, the dispositive successfully includes two significant elements, when it comes to problematising disinformation; to protect the freedom right of citizens to receive information not contaminated by public authorities – internal as well as external. In other words, the task of the initiative is to clean information by removing unwanted contamination. Based on the above statement, and in the perspective of the viral modernity, disinformation is anchored within the context of new media norms transforming, how citizens become educated on societal issues.

The Role of The Media

The observation of disinformation occurring in the media landscape should be contextualised in the how the disinformation-initiative places itself within the context of the free media:

"In Europe, traditional media is subject to a wide range of rules on impartiality, pluralism, cultural diversity, harmful content, advertising and sponsored content. Democracy in the European Union rests on the existence of free and independent media." (EC2018a, p. 1).

In short, European media traditionally subject to forms of media regulation, whereas the new media, especially social media, exclude from traditional media regulation. This observation is significant insofar as it provides an understanding of how the European Union tends to consider its approach to media regulation, that is, it places emphases on impartiality, pluralism, cultural diversity, preventing harmful content, advertising and sponsored content. In order words, it includes elements associated with the liberal perspective while excluding elements related to government-sponsoring or other element considered as not of public interest. In all cases, the

media appears as traditionally subjected to media regulations, meaning that media regulation in Europe is significant in the relationship between the media and the public as political elements needed to protect democracy. These elements appear in the above as rules regarding impartiality (in reference to the third-parties hindering objectivity), pluralism (related to e.g. more media formats), cultural diversity (a notion generally linked to strategic attempts to sustain and develop unity through knowledge of cultural diversity), harmful content (existing regulation on e.g. child pornography, hate speech and more), advertising and sponsored content.

However, it must be mentioned that both the April Communication and the Action Plan place themselves "without prejudice to the applicable legal rules at Union or national level relating to the issues discussed, including disinformation containing illegal content" (EC2018a, p. 4). The April Communication and the Action Plan, which together constitute the general disinformation-platform, engage with the abovementioned legal issues by largely constructing the disinformation-initiative as a reflective space, where legal disputes can validate decisive actions. In other words, the disinformation-initiative seemingly constructs itself as an ethical point of reference for lawful practices tasked to protect the prosperity of societies, including the informative wellbeing of citizens.

What is Disinformation?

In view of the above context, the analysis will now start to identify the certain ways, in which the disinformation-initiative problematises the socio-technological elements and includes them into construct the dispositive. To do so, the analytical gaze takes the formal definition of disinformation, first stated in the 2018 April Communication, as its point of departure. Conclusions drawn from definition will be supported by additional observational points during throughout the analysis. The definition is as follows:

> *"Disinformation is understood as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic political and policy- making processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security. Disinformation does not include reporting errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary." (EC2018a, p. 3-4).*

Media Literacy: Verifiably Truth-Telling

First and foremost, the definition observes disinformation in ways similar to the aforementioned objectifying understanding of disinformation in that disinformation is viewed as "verifiably false or misleading information" (ibid). This understanding is important in terms of how the initiative identifies the technologies entailed in the creation and dissemination of disinformation, as they are included into the dispositive as part of the solutions needed to tackle disinformation. In this case, the creation of disinformation entails social networking technologies performing as creative disinformation tools, such as social media tools, capable of creating producing fake information. The technologies also are considered entailed in the dissemination of disinformation, understood as the ways in which disinformation spreads, as the initiative links them to a specific understanding of a technology-enabled business model, which occur in the media sector, also linked to the understanding of disinformation campaigns. However, the dissemination of disinformation is also rendered intelligible in ways similar to the post-truth era, as the social uncritically disseminating information due to poor verification skills, which it comprehends the social sharing as "indiscriminate sharing of disinformation" among social media users. The observation elaborates in the following description concerning how disinformation entails "*dissemination by users*":

> ""*Users themselves are also playing a role in disseminating disinformation, which tends to travel more quickly on social media due to the propensity of users to share content without any prior verification. The ever-increasing volume and speed of content flowing online increases the risk of indiscriminate sharing of disinformation.*" (EC2018a, p. 6)

Above all, social media users appear, in the perspective of the post-truth era, as constituting public speakers, as disinformation occur in the context of the media sector and entail a "dissemination by users". However, as seen in the above observation, the initiative problematise media users as lacking the proper validation skills to truly act as public speakers capable of critically assessing information before sharing it with the public. The initiative identifies a need to educate the social in truth-telling practices. In this connection, the above problematisation links to another significant observation made by the initiative regarding a generational shift in how the public consume media. In short, the Eurobarometer survey, which was launched as part of the initial Fake News-initiative, gave evidence a generational shift in trusted information sources: "Younger respondents are more likely to trust news and information they access online"

(EC2018a, p. 15, note 46). The initiative seemingly problematises the relationship between media users and the media sector, in which the also the social media industry places, based in this evidence-based truth as a question related to 'trusted information sources'. This perspective has a significant, albeit implicit, presence throughout the initiative, as younger generations play out as a significant object of concern in regard to the informative wellbeing of societies.

In other words, one of the problematic elements identified in the April Communication appears as "Younger users, in particular, now turn to online media as their main source of information" (EC2018a, p. 1). As such, the dispositive includes social media users into the dispositive as constituting a distinct disinformation-challenge in regard to public policy-making concerning public education, formal as informal, by problematising the capacity to assess information critically. The initiative includes public education into the dispositive by identifying poor verification skills as posing a challenge for educators and students alike, arguing "the urgent need to develop digital skills and competences of all learners, in both formal and non-formal education" (ibid, p. 13).

The observation of poor media literacy, construed as practical digital skills, ties together with the pragmatic pillar, which comprises strategies aimed at tackling disinformation by "Fostering education and media literacy" (EC2018a, p. 13). In this respect, media literacy problematises as a need to foster digital well-being by promoting digital awareness and digital skills, "that aim at fostering a critical awareness of citizens – in particular, young people – of the digital environment, which in return helps strengthen digital media literacy" (EC2018a, p. 14). One of these initiatives is the "The Digital Education Plan", launched in January 2018, which the initiative also ties together with a general "Digital Competence Framework for Citizens" with the ambition of developing a "wide mix" of digital skills "needed by all learners, from information and data literacy, to digital content creation, to online safety and well-being" (ibid., p. 13). In other words, the verification tools required for critical thinking or critical assessment of information equals, according to the initiative, trained virtues composed of digital tools and data analytics, meaning that the disinformation-initiative reinforce the tendency to emphasise online technologies as tools of social progression. The inclusion of technology-enabled and algorithmic-based tools also sees the dispositive finding strength by incorporating problematic elements into its own solution. In this case, this solution sets up the "Media Literacy Expert Group", which also connect to "The Audiovisual Media Services Directive", also suggesting the focus on media literacy aimed "at strengthening the monitoring of actions undertaken by Member States on media literacy" (EC2018a, p. 14).

All in all, media literacy results to the entwinement strategies directed at the media sector as well as public education, suggesting again the close connection between people needing to know how to navigate the contemporary media landscape in order to distinguish between trustworthy information sources. Furthermore, it should also be mentioned, that the emphasis on media literacy also extends to the media sector, as the initiative actively intervenes into the journalistic tradition by suggesting and sponsoring the skills identified as needed in order to work as a contemporary journalist. The disinformation-initiative includes journalistic work, identified as constituting a form of journalistic public truth-telling, into the dispositive by problematising how the media sector undergoing profound transformations also entails a transformation of the working conditions needed to produce 'quality journalism'. In other words, part of the challenges presented construed by initiative identify, in perspective to the post-truth era, as the erosion of trustworthy journalistic truth-telling. The ways in which the initiative targets the journalistic work will be elaborated when presenting, how the initiative problematises professional media sector.

Disinformation Campaigns: A Third-Party Situation with New Technologies and No Transparency

Secondly, the understanding of disinformation being "created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm" (ibid. p. 3) correlates to the aforementioned observation of disinformation also construed as 'disinformation campaigns', when the elements associated with disinformation (social anxiety, online technologies and the media context) are seen hijacked into strategic communication models to achieve certain objectives associated with fostering "societal tensions, polarisations, and distrust" (ibid.). In short, disinformation campaigns generally are said to persuade public opinion towards social tension, as they harness on online technologies and online media practices, such as big data practices or social media strategies to raise awareness about a cause, identified as causing public harm and, in an important note, not presenting evidence-based truths. In the light of this, the strategic objectives are distinguished as either seeking to raise a financial income (economic gain), or to raise public awareness about a cause, related to public goods, such as health issues, with disinformation. Against this background, the identification of disinformation campaigns connects to a notion of 'advertisement', which consequently position into the dispositive as associated with disinformation campaigns.

As such, the disinformation-initiative takes the task of deploying different strategies targeting advertising regulations, including political advertising, as they occur in the context of the media sector. In this case, the ways in which advertisement elements connect in the dispositive, presents the disinformation challenge as a problematic third-party situation between public opinion, media outlets, and hidden advertisement. This is evident in the following statement presented in the Action Plan in that "The actors behind disinformation may be internal, within Member States, or external, including state (or government *sponsored) and non-state actors.*" (EC2018b, p.3). The understanding of domestic, foreign and non-state actors generally refers to the three-party situation, in which the third-party contributes to the spread of disinformation, often in the form of undisclosed advertised content. However, the manners, in which this three-party situation is handled, differs significantly, depending on how the third-party actor identify as internal, external or non-state.

However, in all cases, the three-party situation tie together with problematic online technologies in the sense of disinformation campaigns link to the occurrence of a new business model circulating in the context of the media sector, construed by the initiative as 'platform models', which identifies as 'technology-enabled', 'algorithm-based', and 'advertising-driven'. These three criteria are said to contribute to the "amplification through social and other online media [of disinformation]" (EC2018a, p. 5). For instance, the dispositive includes algorithmic operations as techniques capable of spreading disinformation, considering automated services, also referred to as 'bots', especially problematic as they facilitate disinformation disseminating through "simulated profiles (fake accounts), which have no authentic user behind them, sometimes orchestrated on a massive scale (referred to as 'troll factories')" (EC2018a, p. 5). In other words, "algorithm-based" techniques appear as rhetoric tools as they are used to hide the true intentions of posted content, which correlate with the understanding stated in the definition, namely that "Disinformation does not include reporting errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary" (EC2018a, p. 4).

Observations on platform-model tie closely together with how the initiative problematises the disinformation challenge in regard to the media sector. In short, the existence of more media outlets results in a notable proliferation in available public information sources, and the steady supply of free information currently outweighs the existence of media consumers, meaning that media consumers having unprecedented high bargaining power in the media market. The imbalance radically transforms the competitive conditions and is observed as having forced the traditional media to adopt new business models to ensure an essential income. The

competition for media attention has prompted media outlets to adopt technology-enabled practices, algorithm-based techniques and an advertising-driven mindset to adjust to the social media culture. "The rise of platforms active in the media sector has deeply affected journalists and professional news media outlets, which are still generally seeking to adapt their business models and find new ways to monetise content" (EC2018a, p. 4). In other words, the new competitive conditions are observed as having necessitated a need in the traditional media to innovate themselves with the incorporation of online media elements to ensure a continued existence in the contemporary.

Against this background, the professional media sector is considered to contribute to the spread of disinformation by means of technology-enabled platform models, which deploy specific algorithmic-based techniques capable of creating "personalised information spheres", which produces citizens as misinformed, subjecting them to the aforementioned "echo chambers for disinformation campaigns" (EC2018a, p. 1). In this case, backend algorithm-based techniques denote calculative schemes, deployed by disinformation campaigns to track social movement online, collecting the digital footprints as big social data, which smart algorithms install into predictive models used to target individual media users with personalised content. However, the manners, in which these algorithmic-based techniques operate, are said to reflect an advertisement-driven mentality, whose mentality appear in ways similar to the metricality-mentality presented in the post-truth era:

> *"The criteria algorithms use to prioritise the display of information are driven by the platforms' business model and the way in which this privileges personalised and sensational content, which is normally most likely to attract attention and to be shared among users. By facilitating the sharing of personalised content among like-minded users, algorithms indirectly heighten polarisation and strengthen the effects of disinformation." (EC2018a, p. 5).*

Based in the above, which derives from the overall problematisation of the media sector, the 'advertising-driven'-mentalities generally appear as a changed mindset towards media ethics, in which the criteria ensuring journalistic quality are benched in marked clicks rather than in traditional criteria such as source critique. Furthermore, the journalist himself are now to reflect upon matters of public interest in criteria, which "privileges personalised and sensational content" (ibid.) to attract media attention. As such, the main role of the truth-telling journalist is no longer to act as society's critical watchdog but to entertain the public with information

affirming certain belief systems to contribute to the marketing strategy ensuring the media outlet's existence. This metric-mindset towards journalistic practices ties together with click-bait techniques, including tracking and suggestive algorithms, which contribute to 'heighten polarisation' resulting in the construction of personalised information bubbles, poor of diversity, where citizens only consume information affirming personal belief system. In all events, disinformation campaigns ties together with platform models, in which the advertising-driven mentality sees traditional truth-telling, understood as evidence-based, overpowered by personal agendas as objectifying truth as mean to personal prosperity. That is, advertising-driven mentalities works to ensure its own continued existence which it ensured through economic gains.

All in all, the unbalanced competitive state in the media sector appears to the dispositive to have induced a need in media outlets to monetise content, and the event is problematised as having negative effects on the working conditions ensuring journalistic quality. The initiative appears to consider the traditional criteria ensuring journalistic quality insofar as ensuring media ethics based in scientific truth-telling, enslaved by advertising-driven mentalities. In this case, the economic objective driving the platform models play out as sovereign in the sense of objectifying truth, and matters of public interest, to ensure the prosperity of the media outlet itself. Furthermore, the critical journalist is observed to have his critical capacities banned insofar as subjecting to new media practices entailed with rhetoric tactics, such as click-bait, in which the journalist works in inauthentic ways by being dishonest to himself, which manifest in his produced work. Against this backdrop, the disinformation-initiative includes traditional media ethics into the dispositive by identifying a need to provide "Support for quality journalism as an essential element of a democratic society" so to ensure "a pluralistic and diverse media environment" by providing the conditions needed for the traditional media truth-telling to "uncover, counterbalance and dilute disinformation" (EC2018a, p. 15). In other words, the observation of the professional media contributing to the spread of disinformation necessitates "a need to rebalance the relation between media and online platforms" (ibid.). According to disinformation-initiative, the traditional media plays a significant role in ensuring the informative wellbeing of citizens, stated in the following:

> "Our open democratic societies depend on public debates that allow well-
> informed citizens to express their will through free and fair political processes.
> Media have traditionally played a key role in holding public authorities to
> account and in providing the information that enables citizens to form their own

views on societal issues and actively and effectively participate in democratic society." (EC2018a, p. 1).

In other words, the dispositive adopts a traditional liberal perspective on the media as objective truth-tellers performing as society's critical watchdog by being capable of disclosing evidence-based truths. However, in order for the media to perform the public task of ensuring the informative wellbeing of citizens, the critical journalist is observed as being lacking the needed digital truth-telling virtues to work in accord with the current digital media environment. That is to say, "In an evolving digital environment, there is a need to invest in high quality journalism, reinforce trust in the key societal and democratic role of quality journalism, both offline and online, and encourage news media to explore innovative forms of journalism" (EC2018a, p. 15). In other words, the support for quality journalism sees emphasis places "the production and dissemination of quality news content on Union affairs through data-driven news media and to explore increased funding opportunities to support initiatives promoting media freedom and pluralism, and modernisation of news rooms" (EC2019b, p. 11). In this case, the Union has since, and is currently, investing funds in various initiatives, such as the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, which main task is to "support investigative journalists, via the allocation of grants for investigative cross-border journalistic work" (ibid.). In all cases, the journalistic truth-telling virtues recognised in the initiative emphasises data-driven journalism as a significant verification tools needed to ensure quality journalism, suggesting that "Journalists and media professionals should also further embrace the opportunities offered by new technologies and develop the necessary digital skills to enable them and us data and social media analytics, with a view to enhancing fact-finding and verification" (EC2018a, p. 15).

The fact that journalists are encouraged to embrace new technology links together with the overall emphasis on online technologies, which seemingly construe as a new form of mass media and significantly links the beforementioned online platform models, in which online disinformation campaigns are born as inflicted by the silent presence of a third-party. In this light, it is important to notice, how the observation of 'technology-enabled' and 'algorithm-based' disinformation campaigns link to another significant criteria, namely poor *transparency*. Disinformation campaigns are said to hijack online technologies with the purpose to deceive the public by presenting them with undisclosed advertised content or with manipulated technology-enabled 'deep fakes', explained as:

> *"a powerful and inexpensive – and often economically profitable – tool of influence. To date, most known cases have involved written articles, sometimes complemented by authentic pictures or audiovisual content taken out of context. But new, affordable, and easy-to-use technology is now available to create false pictures and audiovisual content (so called 'deep fakes'), offering more potent means for manipulating public opinion." (EC2018a, p. 5).*

All in all, the disinformation-initiative places significant emphasis on online technologies as being powerful rhetoric tools capable of persuasive deception as they are capable of manipulating elements out of their original context, and are also referred to as capable of creating 'deep fakes'. In most cases, these powerful editorial tools are available for social use in the form of free and user-friendly editorial applications. Thus, the initiative places, once again, disinformation in relation to the rapid growing tech-industry, which continuously enrich the world with knowledge on digital and online solutions and easy access to the aforementioned tools capable of creating disinformation. Against this background, the dispositive places the task of preventing the dissemination of disinformation onto online platforms, and significantly incorporates the tech-industry into the dispositive as pivotal civil actor tasked to ensure online accountability by overseeing a transparent online information environment.

Code of Practice: A Civil Promise to Protect Transparency and Empower Truth-Telling

In this context, online platforms or social media appear as new form of mass media operating from a position outside existing media regulations, suggesting the need to intervene with new forms of media regulations, which consider the problems presented by new technical means of mass communication. In this context, social media platforms such as Facebook. Therefore, one of the main issues circulating the disinformation-initiative, seems to be the problem of how to safeguard the media sector from the technology-enabled spread of disinformation, regardless of whether the dissemination originates as a social share or from strategic communication models. Against this background, social media platforms, whose foundation is based in the platform model itself, are enrolled into the dispositive as new media outlets:

> *"Moreover, some platforms have taken on functions traditionally associated with media outlets, entering the news business as content aggregators and distributors without necessarily taking on the editorial frameworks and capabilities of such outlets. Their economic incentives lead them to capture a large users' base by*

exploiting network effects and to maximize the time users spend on their services

by privileging quantity of information over quality, regardless of the impact."

(EC2018a, p. 4-5)

Unlike the traditional media, online platforms have not subjected to forms of traditional formal regulations, which traditionally install measurements into the European media-politico relationship to ensure quality journalism of public interest, also referred to as forms of public service. As such, the disinformation-initiative launched a Code on Practice, which enrols online platforms as new media actors. In short, online platforms sign into the dispositive as civil actors tasked to ensure "A more transparent, trustworthy and accountable online ecosystem", and takes on the responsibility "to act swiftly and effectively to protect users from disinformation" (EC2018a, p. 8). For instance, in the Code of Practice, platforms generally agree to tackle disinformation with algorithmic-based solutions to combat disinformation techniques, such as false profiles. Furthermore, platforms also sign onto "Ensure transparency about sponsored content, in particular political and issue-based advertising" (EC2018a, p. 9), meaning that platforms agree to forms of advertisement regulation with a promise "improve the scrutiny of advertisement placements". For instance, platforms agree to reduce their own prosperity insofar as reducing revenues for purveyors of disinformation, as well as restricting targeting options for political advertisers, thus ensuring "transparency about sponsored content, in particular political and issue-based advertising" (ibid.).

Furthermore, platforms also promise to "facilitate users' assessment of content through indicators of the trustworthiness of content sources" (EC2018a, p. 9), which also translates the disinformation-initiative as platforms empowering social media users with validation tools, meaning that they enter into the dispositive as significant actors in regard to informal education. All in all, online platforms sign onto the public service of "[f]ostering online accountability" (EC2018a, p. 11). The voluntary Code of Practice constitute liberal technology which, in similar ways to traditional media practice, encourage social media platforms to be mindful about their own practices to prevent the spread of disinformation. In other words, platforms take the responsibility of reflecting upon their own business models, as well as contribute actively to tackle disinformation by tracking down disinformation techniques, such as bots, and, in an important note, supply *meaningful* data to the fact-checking community. The the disinformation-initiative setting up a fact-checking community, composed of civil actors from the academic domain and media sector, who are tasked to tackle disinformation through the supply of evidence-based truths detecting and debunking disinformation), as well as expert knowledge on of the best

practices and measures to tackle disinformation. These tools are harnessed from online technologies and sponsored by "[t]he Commission [who] will make full use of the Horizon 2020 work programme to mobilise these technologies" (EC2018a, p. 12).

According to the disinformation-initiative, the establishment of a "dense network of strong and independent fact-checkers is an essential requirement for a heathy digital ecosystem" (EC2018a, p. 10). The fact-checking community consist of data analysts, generally situated in the academic domain, who employ data analytical tools and social media data to continuously monitor the scale, and potential impact of disinformation identify, and map the mechanisms, which contribute to the spread of disinformation, so to contribute to develop "fair, objective, and reliable indicators for source transparency... [and] share knowledge with news media, platforms and public authorities to enhance public awareness about disinformation" (EC2018a, p. 10). Against this background online platforms sign onto "[s]trengthening fact checking, collective knowledge, and monitoring capacity for disinformation" (EC2018a, p. 10). However, most of these tools and initiatives are based in big data practices,[10] which, generally, appear as the most common validation tool throughout the disinformation-initiative, realising as the needed digital skills in both journalistic truth-telling and, as seen here, academic truth-telling.

In the light of this online platforms engage with the fact-checking community as data suppliers, that is "[p]latforms should also give meaningful access to data to the research community, in line with personal data protection rules" (EC2019c, p. 5). As suggested by the statement, EU citizens have their personal and sensitive data, including social media data, protected by the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation. Yet, the regulative itself includes the possibility of a state of exception in article 6(1), which gives lawful basis for "processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller" (Information Commisioner's Office, 2018, p. 76). In other words, the data-driven solutions, which are significantly emphasised throughout the entire disinformation-initiative, sees the fact-checking community work from the state of exception. Online platforms are requested to take action to prevent situations similar to the Cambridge Analytica Scandal, where social media data was exploited for economic gains and political gains, while simultaneously suppling the data to the scientific fact-checking community, who, seemingly, stands outside the law. The situation constitutes a paradox in the sense, that decisions regarding how to "give meaningful access to data to the research community" (ibid.) may result in the General Data Protection Regulation de-activating, and the data-driven public truth-telling machine operating from the state of exception.

The fact-checking community provides data-based evidence truths to the rapid alert system, which provides a predictable regulatory environment for the online cross-border use. In other words, the rapid alert system constructs as a technology-enabled and algorithmic-based information platform comprising all the online technology-harnessed validation tools and knowledges, that *"facilitate the investigation of malicious online behaviour"* (ibid.) Most of the verification tools results in 'authentication means', enabling the 'electronic identification' needed to ensure transparency and disclose disinformation, referenced in the above as 'malicious behaviour'. In this case, online platforms have regulated themselves in accordance to the Code on Practice by ways of removal, as seen in the following:

> *"From January to May, online platforms have taken action against inauthentic behaviour … Google reported to have globally removed more than 3.39 million YouTube channels for violations against its spam and impersonation policies. Facebook disabled 2.19 billion fake accounts… Twitter challenged almost 77 million spam-like or fake accounts globally"* (EC2019c, p. 4).

In other words, the platforms appear to tackle disinformation with sovereign forms of regulations in the sense of removing accounts judged as disinformation, as meeting the already described criteria. However, although some profiles may have been bots, it is not say for certain, that all were algorithmic-based identities. The accounts were removed for so-called misleading behaviour, which refers to "impersonation, spamming, misrepresentation of identity, links to 'ad-farms', and/or imposter websites" (ibid. p. 11)

In all cases, platforms seemingly perform the job of tackling malicious online behaviour as a virtual public executor, as profile or posted content meet the already described criteria for disinformation campaigns. In all cases, many of the solutions constituting the rapid alert system ties together with other EU-initiatives targeting Cybersecurity, meaning that the disinformation-initiative attributes itself with a security status – a status also evident in another significant targeted pillars, namely to "Secure and resilient election processes" (EC2018a, p.12).

The Disinformation Threat: Securing Democracy by Protecting the Informative Welfare

Lastly, the overall disinformation threat construes in the definition as disinformation causing public harm, which "comprises threats to democratic political and policy-making processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security." (EC2018a, p. 4). In this case, the threats construe as damaging "democratic political and policy-

making processes" as targeting "public goods", which refer to established public discourses concerning public services such as health, environmental issues and security. As such, disinformation campaigns are observed as challenging public policymakers, meaning they deliberately aim at disrupting democratic processes by manipulating public opinion into a sceptic and misinformed mindset, which in return become constituent for how they participate in democratic processes. The (already) described challenge regarding diminished trust in scientific truths anchors in the following:

> *"The spread of disinformation also affects policy-making processes by skewing public opinion. Domestic and foreign actors can use disinformation to manipulate policy, societal debates and behaviour in areas such as climate change, migration, public security, health, and finance. Disinformation can also diminish trust in science and empirical evidence." (EC2018a, p. 2).*

All in all, the above observation seemingly affirms the conclusion presented in the post-truth era of the challenges, facing public policymakers in the post-truth era results to public opinion being skewed away from the traditional trust in evidence-based truths. Secondly, the observation also illustrates, how the initiative associates disinformation campaigns to specific third-party political actors, distinguished as either domestic or foreign, who contribute to the proliferation of disinformation by adopting disinformation tools to erode the informative welfare of societies.

> *"Mass online disinformation campaigns are being widely used by a range of domestic and foreign actors to sow distrust and create societal tensions, with serious potential consequences for our security. Furthermore, disinformation campaigns by third countries can be part of hybrid threats to internal security, including election processes, in particular in combination with cyberattacks. For example, Russian military doctrine explicitly recognises information warfare as one of its domains." (EC2018a, p. 1-2).*

The correlation between discourses on security and disinformation being a threat towards democratic processes resulted in the 2018 April Communication, from which the above quote derives, launching the strategies meant to protect democracy. The April Communication significantly identifies a need to "[s]ecure and resilient election processes" (EC2018a, p. 12), which it subsequently attached to various strategic solutions to secure election processes, which include into the dispositive as significantly exposed to disinformation campaigns with political objectives. With this recognised need, the 2018 April Communication set up 'The Colloquium

on Fundamental Rights', which took place in November 2018 and 'democracy' was the focal point, as a forum for public policymakers to discuss the "[k]ey ingredients for inclusive and healthy democratic societies" (EC2018a, p. 13). The event subsequently resulted in the disinformation-initiative, splitting its formal foundation into two distinct strategic documents where the Colloquium resulted in the publication of the JOINT Action Plan in December 2018.

In short, the Action Plan is "answers the European Council's call for measures to "protect the Union's democratic systems and combat disinformation, including in the context of the European elections" (EC2018d, p. 1). As such, disinformation strategies with political objectives are meaningfully construed as targeting the European Union itself, which also renders evident in the following observation stated by the Action Plan:

> *"Constant targeted disinformation campaigns against the Union, its institutions*
> *and policies are likely to increase in the run up to the 2019 European Parliament*
> *elections.* ***This calls for urgent and immediate action to protect the Union,***
> ***its institutions and its citizens against disinformation"*** *(EC2018d, p. 4).*

In this context, the Action Plan places the disinformation-initiative within the European Union External Action Service, the institution extending the Union into foreign affairs, and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell overseen by the Strategic Communication Task Services, which performs the task of reinforcing the Union's visions in the Eastern neighbourhood (EC2018d, p. 3). As such, disinformation is significantly linked to the idea of cyberwarfare. With the Action Plan, the disinformation-initiative places itself in a complex legal position as existing within the internal market through the April Communication, and as a diplomatic service through the Action Plan which, however, also launches initiatives into the internal market. In all cases, disinformation appears in the Hybrid Fusion Cell as an element of the Hybrid Threats, commonly said to link to Russian disinformation campaigns working to devalue the European project. In this light, the disinformation-initiative considers the European Union itself as being a common target of disinformation campaigns, meaning that the most important democratic process threatened being the electoral system:

> *"In view of the 2019 European Parliament elections and more than 50*
> *presidential, national or local/regional elections being held in Member States by*
> *2020, it is urgent to step up to secure free and fair democratic processes. Threats*
> *affecting democracy in any Member State can harm the Union as a whole.*

Moreover, disinformation often targets European institutions and their representative and aims at undermining the European project itself in general" (EC2018d, p. 2).

As such, the disinformation-initiative includes an election package as part of its solutions to protect the European elections, while recommending suggestions to Member States regarding national elections. In all cases, there is a focus on protecting democracy with securing means. These securing means are significantly linked to all the strategic solutions launched by the disinformation-initiative, which can be split into the following: "measures taken in regard to the media sector, which refers to internal media actors" and "measures taken to combat disinformation on foreign ground, which for instance results in a complex form of information warfare, in which journalism becomes a foot soldier fighting for the informative well-being from internal soil". Furthermore, the scientific domain is enrolled into the information army to ensure the validation techniques needed to expose disinformation technically. Disinformation campaigns are recognised as significantly based in online platforms, algorithms and bots. The task becomes to use the same technologies to tackle disinformation. Furthermore, the educational sector is enrolled into the solutions to educate the public on digital skills, which also are offered to the media sector, insofar as digital skills now are construed as a criteria in the contemporary truth-teller.

PART III

3.1. CONCLUSION AND DISCISSION

The thesis ambition was to investigate, how the E.U. disinformation-initiative invented and propagated as common understanding regarding how to tackle disinformation. To do so, the thesis first constructed a critical ontology of present, denoted the post-truth era to identify a set of criteria, under which public truth-telling seemingly identifies as such. In this case it was concluded, that public truth-telling entails a complex relationship between scientific truth-telling practices, producing evidence-based truths, the mass media, public opinion, and state politics. Public discourses are generally anchored in evidence-based truths, which produce as end results of scientific truth-telling practices, which echo into societies as common knowledge and common practices. Against this background, the media sector, namely, the news media, contributes to public truth-telling as anchoring stories of public interest in evidence as well, and has historically played an important role in shaping public opinion by acting as public speakers and raising awareness about certain issues in certain ways. However, the advent of a new technology-enabled, algorithmic-based, and advertising-driven media culture has significantly changed the working conditions for those tasked with forms of public truth-telling having subjected to a radical opening of the media sector. Today, everybody can participate as public truth-tellers.

As such, the amount of information available to public consumption has proliferated in unprecedented ways, meaning that modern citizens become knowledgably about worldly issues differently, than they did ten years ago. Furthermore, the social itself now participate actively with the production and dissemination of information, and new social media norm is generally considered to present public truth-tellers with new challenges in regard to establishing, presenting, and maintaining public discourses. The post-truth era specifies the challenge as a post-truth condition thriving in a viral modernity, which have resulted in public opinion no longer acting critically mindful, when sharing information between their vast social networks, meaning that stories can go viral with little regard to the importance of prior fact-checking. However, the sharing-trend is not restricted solely to a social share as the professional media itself, who traditionally have a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, also contribute to the post-truth condition thriving in the viral modernity. All in all, the issue at stake in the post-truth era concludes as a general trend occurring in the media landscape, where personal belief systems overpower scientific validation schemes.

In all events, the proliferation of information and new social media like 'sharing' contribute to information circulating *differently* in the modern media landscape and provide citizens with a multiple choice of possible truths to inform decisions on societal issues. Social media also empowers new campaign techniques to capitalise on the changed (social) media norms and actively employ social media in their attempt to persuade public opinion towards a favoured agenda – which may contradict an established public agenda. Social media is now an essential element in a modern communication strategy working to persuade public opinion, and social media has played a pivotal role in recent events, where public discourses were disrupted. In 2018, the European Union launched its approach to tackle disinformation, which is said to have proliferated due to social anxiety towards rapid changes and technology-enabled disinformation campaigns which combine social fear with algorithmic-based techniques to foster social tension. In all cases, disinformation is said to occur in the context of a media landscape undergoing profound transformations, and the initiative can be seen problematising the social as lacking proper media literacy and digital skills to validate truth in the contemporary. In short, new online technologies present as a new form of mass media changing, how people educate themselves on worldly issues.

In the light of this, the disinformation-initiative include the new social media elements into a dispositive by problematising them in regard to how disinformation campaigns, new business models and new social norms contribute to the dissemination of disinformation. All in all, the threat appear as European citizens consuming information about worldly issues in personalised information chambers lacking diversity, which are targeted by disinformation campaigns to further social tensions, distrust in scientific truths and polarisations. As such, the threat of disinformation appear as disinformation producing citizens as misinformed citizens, who participate in democratic processes such as electoral processes with misinformed decisions. With this in mind, the disinformation-initiative takes the societies' informative wellbeing as its object of concern, while launching solutions aimed at tackling disinformation through various means, most of which focus on data-driven validation skills, tools and knowledge. The key solution to tackle disinformation is to foster technology-enabled and data-driven truth-telling practices. In this case, the social media tech-industry include into the initiative as a pivotal actor alongside the traditional media and the educational sector, who all contribute to the task of educating public opinion. All in all, the technology-enabled and data-driven mentality is emphasised throughout the presentation of the different solutions, suggested to both the professional media as a pivotal skill in contemporary truth-telling.

Citizen Oath

The research presented in this thesis shows, how the pragmatic solutions deployed into European societies by the disinformation-initiative becomes constituent for public truth-telling in Europe. In addition to intervening with strategies suggesting the decisive practical skills needed in order to perform the task of public truth-teller, namely, data-driven digital skills, it has a significant impact on how citizens are allowed access to social media platforms.) Through the Code on Practice, the online platforms have sworn an oath to erase profiles judged as spreading disinformation. Although it seems obvious, that such profiles refer to algorithm-based profiles, such as bots and spam, it is not unlikely, that human-based profiles also may be executed if the shared content loses the validation trial due to arguing in opposition to the public goods, decided upon by the disinformation-initiative. In that case, citizens can be said to enter into social media platforms as public truth-tellers, who give a public oath, when they sign onto the platforms' conditions of use. Regardless of whether or not the opinions shared are evidence-based, it removes the freedom to have a different opinion and have a public voice to share the opinion. The disinformation-initiative appear paradoxical in the sense, that it seeks to protect the democratic freedoms rooted in European societies but, in doing so, it removes the from sceptics.

Possible Outcome

The situation may prove problematic in the future for the European Union itself. Due to the Union identifying disinformation, as commonly targeting the European project itself, it may come across as a form of self-defence, when opposing opinions are deflected as disinformation. The situation becomes problematic if, and only if, the opinions targeting the European Union can, in fact, be validated with evidence-based truths. For instance, some cases in which the fact-checking community have validated information as false and misleading, suggest that "stories about the irrelevance of the European Parliament's legislative powers, and its control by lobbyists aimed to suppress the vote" (ACTIONPLAN, p. 3) constitute disinformation. Without going into details, the European Union has within the past year undergone profound transformations in regard to the legislative system. In fact, research into the legislative nature of some of the strategies, deployed by the disinformation-initiative, has been complicated by the changes concurring with the writing. As such, these thesis suggests, that future research would benefit from exploring the factual relationship between actual claims, made by disinformation campaigns, in regard to how they 'attack' the European project and the actual decisions made in regard to the legislative changes occurring at the moment. It appears to be an event taking place

currently in regard to the "special competencies" which "enable the EU to play a particular role or to go beyond what is normally allowed under the treaties" (European Union, n.d.), which especially implicates Common Foreign and Security Policy – where the disinformation-initiative places within. In all cases, the information warfare between the European Union and disinformation campaigns targeting the institutions itself should pay attention to future backfire if the disinformation claim can, in fact, be validated with evidence-based truth reasoned from perspectives, such as the one provided by Agamben.

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NOTES

[1] The general 'positive attitude' towards the metoo-movement is based in how the European Union itself has implemented it is as a to speak up. For instance, the European Union itself has started to re-organise its own structure. A way to see that it is positive is in the following quote from the EU Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly: *"What is needed above all is a cultural change and this is never easy. But by continuing to name abusive behaviour – to end its normalisation – and to put rules and procedures in place to deal with it, the EU institutions can encourage that cultural shift"* (O'Reilly, 2019)

[2] *"The decrease in certain diseases incidence together with action undertaken by anti-vaccination activists, have led to a shift of focus from the dangers, and even risk of death, posed by unseen diseases towards fear of unproven side events. In addition, the rapid spread of disinformation, understood as verifiably false or misleading information, through online media make sifting science facts from unfounded claims a real challenge for those seeking trustworthy information on vaccines."* (EC2018e, p. 3). The quote derives from the Union's vaccine intervention.

[3] In structuralism, the structural centre is occupied by a theme which simultaneously begins the structure while placing itself outside the structure as the inherent precondition and hidden premise of the structure itself (Esmark et al., 2005, p. 28).

[4] In the PKL-framework, this translates as being the political place. That is to say, the open structure is what makes the political possible.

[5] *"All concepts are fundamentally coloured by the choice of guiding distinction, which means that there's no 'true' definition of 'discourse', 'system', 'meaning' and so on, since the criteria for 'true' and 'real' are simply construed through the choice of guiding distinction"* (Andersen, 2003, p. 104).

⁶ Agamben has anchored his observation of such continued presence of the presence in his work on homo sacer.

⁷ The two former treaties are now updated as the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

⁸ The list of representatives can be found at: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/experts-appointed-high-level-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation

⁹ Hybrid threats are identified as combining *"conventional and unconventional, military and non-military activities that can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific political objectives."* ⁹ (European External Action Service, 2018). https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-1672_en.htm

¹⁰ For instance, the reveal project is data-based (https://revealproject.eu/) and so is the Computational Propaganda Research Project (COMPROP)