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**Review of #FAKENEWS. Noua cursă a înarmării
[#FAKENEWS. The new arms race] by Alina Bârgăoanu,
Bucharest: Evrika Publishing, 2018, 252 pages**

“Fake news is neither fake, nor news” – Alina Bârgăoanu bluntly states in her latest book focusing on the overhyped phenomena of fake news and disinformation. An awful lot of public discussion and publications, both academic and popular literature, have been generated, during the last five years or so, by the fake news mania worldwide. However, significantly fewer efforts have been made to dissect and clarify the nature and, more importantly, the political, social and even psychological implications of fake news and disinformation exponentially increased spread. Alina Bârgăoanu, in *#FAKENEWS*, makes a substantial contribution to the way in which fake news is conceptually understood: she takes ‘fake news’ out of the journalism realm and place it (where it rather belongs) into the new digital ecosystem, which is driven by new technologies, social networking platforms, algorithms, big data.

An experienced and renown communication scholar, Alina Bârgăoanu quickly spots shortcomings of public conversation of fake news and disinformation, which focuses almost entirely on journalism-based approaches to these complex phenomena. The established dichotomies, such as fact versus opinion or fact versus lie, true versus false, rational versus emotional, objective versus biased reporting, that motivated journalistic endeavors seem to be outdated, misleading and no longer appropriate to explain the production and circulation of news and information, in general. The explosion of social media has transformed news production and distribution. The ubiquity of smartphones and easy, uninterrupted access to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc. have redefined the way in which people engage with news. The term ‘fake news’ is not quite the best choice to describe and cover the complexity and many-sidedness of this global phenomenon. A member of the European Commission’s High-Level Expert Group (HLEG) on Fake News and Online Disinformation, the author is an avid supporter of the use the more encompassing and accurate term ‘disinformation’ to account for the wide range of information disorders fueled by technological amplification. In *#FAKENEWS*, Alina Bârgăoanu remarks that “under the umbrella of “digital disinformation” or “disinformation 2.0” one can find different amounts of both true (verifiable) and false information. The finer the dosage, the less noticeable the falsity” (p. 138).

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The book comprises six refreshing and interesting chapters, to which add an introduction and a concluding section. Each chapter addresses a topical aspect of how the new digital environment has transformed the way in which we perceive the world we live in and the reality surrounding us. I'll briefly review three major ideas that Alina Bârgăoanu's book discusses at length: the unfathomableness of digital technologies, the exacerbation of digital polarization and segmentation, the virality of emotions.

"Technology is destiny", acknowledges the author, and we are all baffled by the digital technologies that define the digital revolution or the 'industrial revolution 4.0' that is currently re-shaping the way we live our lives. We cannot not be impacted by the ongoing technology-driven transformations of the world we live in and it wouldn't be smart of us to resist the technological developments that will define the future: our future, but mostly our children's future. Alina Bârgăoanu proudly admits that she wrote this book thinking of her teenage daughter, Iulia, and her peers unimaginatively dubbed "generation Omega" in a post on the

Medium platform. These are digital natives, heavy users of social media networks from a very early age for whom the ubiquity of digital technologies, computers, algorithms, online platforms are "science facts" not science fiction! However, despite being highly technologically literate and despite constantly juggling online with offline presence and activity, these teenagers are not safer from disinformation and other information disorders. The digital natives may be able to flit between LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, YouTube, Tinder or Twitter (not necessarily Facebook, because "that's for old people"), but when it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, they are as easily duped as any other individual in the world, unwitting consumer of online content. Alina Bârgăoanu warns that these children are the ones that will have to ponder at least three serious problems in the near future. These are questions about mankind's relationship with the environment, with the technology and, perhaps most importantly, its relationship with itself (p. 22). They, and anybody else who reflects on such crucial issues, will have to accept and embrace the digital world in which we all live to be able to work out the solutions and to avoid that "the future slips through their fingers" (p.22).

Second, another important aspect of the impact of digital technologies on the information production and circulation is the amplification of group polarization and segmentation. In her book, Alina Bârgăoanu reminds us that in the era of informational overload, "there are so many facts and these facts could be used to support everyone's opinions, they can meet expectations and fit preoccupations that are so diverse, sometimes irreconcilable" (p. 85). The "discursive polarization" is amplified by the echo chambers created by the digital platforms. It is the capacity of digital technology to fine-tune the instruments used to target and coordinate people holding similar opinions over a variety of subjects of political, social, economic, cultural, etc. nature that has become an increasingly sensitive topic culminating with the Cambridge Analytica scandal. The author considers that this scandal "has actually shed light on the characteristics of the new information ecosystem dominated by technology, big data, algorithms and search engines" (p. 179). In this new context, fake news, disinformation and fine-tuning segmentation are intrinsically linked to the digitalization of the information ecosystem, through online platforms and algorithms.

Third, substantial consideration is given, throughout the book, to the emotional dimension of the digital ecosystem. With the digital era, the primacy of reason over feeling, which started with the scientific revolution, has come to an end. Emotions draw people to echo chambers and make them susceptible to fake news and disinformation amplified by these content

production and dissemination mechanisms. People express less emotional skepticism in social media and in echo chambers, in particular. Network homophily help increase the virality of fake news and disinformation, especially when these are the combined with emotional persuasive appeals. In the book, Alina Bârgăoanu advocates for the need of an ‘emotional literacy’ of the end user of digital platforms, and idea also promoted by other scholars preoccupied with disentangling the digital information ecosystem. She boldly affirms that “reason doesn’t go viral, but anger does!”

Finally, a few remarks on the style of the writing. As the author herself describe it, *#FAKENEWS* is not necessarily an academic book, having not been intended as such in the first place. However, it is a thoroughly researched books whose arguments are supported by solid references to literature and by relevant examples and case studies. The relaxed, laid-back writing seasoned with humor establish a desirable connection with the reader. The original drawings, hashtags and highlighted in-text comments make *#FAKENEWS* a multimodal book and create an exciting reading experience.

Alina Bârgăoanu’s book reads easily but is not an easy read. It is a must read for anyone interested in the complexity of the digital world which we all live in, be they Facebook and Instagram addicts or not. Clearly, the readership is limited to speakers of Romanians, but the ideas expressed in the book are not in the least confined to the Romanian realities. An unsurprising suggestion would be that the book be translated into English, the *lingua franca* of the technological and information development. Nevertheless, a translated version would run the risk of containing ‘old’ news, given the rapidity with which technology and technology-related information evolve. I’d dare to make another suggestion, motivated partially by my knowledge of Alina Bârgăoanu’s interest and passion for the topic: a brand-new book, written in English, would make for another interesting reading. Also, a reminder of a possible title, mentioned about year ago, during an academic event, by the author herself: *Digital forever*.