WHY WE SHARE FAKE NEWS: COOPERATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND RESEARCHERS IN PRODUCING THE THEATRE PERFORMANCE "FAKE NEWS"

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Abstract

First, the article gives the analysis of the cooperation between artists and researchers in producing the theatre performance "Fake News". Artists of the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS invited young researchers of the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) to do a sociological study of the phenomenon of fake news, its conceptual borders and its characteristics historically and today. The research served as an informative and educational basis for the transformation of the fake news phenomenon into an artistic phenomenon that seeks to problematize the issue of fake news for a broader audience. Secondly, the article presents the findings of this study, revealing why people share fake news. We find this motivation is emotionally based and is associated with emotional attachment, anxiety, comicality, or trust. People fall for fake news and share the messages that they find to be (i) thematically relevant, interesting and exciting for them; (ii) the messages that concern some emergency or crisis situations; (iii) the messages that seem to be absurd and even comical; (iv) the news distributed by a reliable source of information.

Keywords: *cooperation, research, art, theatre, fake news.*

Collaboration between artists and researchers

The phenomenon of fake news was brought to the foreground both in the public space in Latvia and elsewhere in the world in connection with the election of the US President Donald Trump, as well as the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. Western media and the elites often linked the outcome of both votes to Russian propaganda. Although the uproar around the phenomenon of fake news seems to

be a contemporary phenomenon, Princeton University historian Anthony Grafton [Grafton 2019] points out that various kinds of deception have been an issue ever since the beginnings of Western civilization. In his book about falsification and deception, the American poet Kevin Young [Young 2017] describes numerous cases where writers have falsely claimed their books to be based on true stories and memoirs, and artists have forged the paintings of ancient artists to claim them to be genuine art findings. According to the art historian Mark Jones, "every society, every generation falsifies the things it wants most" [Jones 2018: 26]. In this way, we could look at the collective myths and folklore (various legends and stories) that exist in societies, as well as at the propaganda, which has been equally relevant at all times and in all societies. However, the difference between collective myths, folklore and propaganda is that myths and folklore symbolically seek to unite a certain community and society, whereas propaganda aims to divide a certain society for the purpose of power sharing. Moreover, truth and how we see seemingly objective facts may look different from different positions determined by different beliefs, socialization (values, norms and worldviews) and experiences. In today's digital capitalism, market communication tools are also an important source of fake news – advertisements, public relations news, as well as various narratives constructed by the clickbait digital business [Tandoc, Lim, & Ling 2017]. Thus, the phenomenon of fake news is extremely diverse both from the historical and today's perspective. The independent theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS wanted to reveal the diversity and multidimensionality of this phenomenon in their performance "Fake News", where the audience is exposed to a constant flow of news, in which the fake alternates with the seemingly true, propaganda with myths, folklore, advertising and fiction.

The performance "Fake News", which premiered in November 2019, was created with the aim to actualize and problematize the phenomenon of fake news currently so topical in society and in public space, revealing its diversity, absurdity and even comicality. The aim of the performance was underpinned to a large extent by the framework within which the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS created the performance, where the funding of the performance from the Goethe Institute required the communication of the idea of the performance to wider society. To create more resonance in society concerning fake news and the issues associated with it, the playwright Evarts Melnalksnis and the director of the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS Klāvs Mellis approached the 3rd year students of the bachelor's programme Cultural Sociology and Management of the Latvian Academy of Culture as researchers, with the request to help the creators of the performance research and understand the phenomenon of fake news both from the historical and today's perspective. The study conducted by students of the Latvian Academy of Culture

(LAC) on fake news not only provided "expansion of the idea space"[1] in the creation of the theatre performance, but also served as an informative basis for theatre artists in public and media discussions regarding the premiere of the theatre performance. The production of the performance and the first shows were accompanied both by interviews of the artists in the media and discussions organized by the artists themselves, in which the phenomenon of fake news was explained and problematized to the general public. Thus, the study carried out by the LAC researchers served as an informative and educational basis for the artistic transformation of the phenomenon and its communication to the society.

The collaboration of researchers and theatre artists in the actualization of various social phenomena is nothing new. This has already happened elsewhere in the world in various forms at different times [e. g., Cohen-Cruz 2010; Gallagher, Wessels, & Ntelioglou 2012; Schaefer 2012]. Jan Cohen-Cruz [2010] writes about an "engaging performance", where different actors and professionals, including researchers, are engaged in the creation of the performance to actualize some burning social or political issue. Usually, the interaction between theatre makers and other stakeholders and community representatives interested in the issue that the performance will actualize "happen at various points along the performance process: the early phases, especially research and devising, or perhaps a workshop not intended to lead to anything else; the duration of the play itself; and the period following, whether a talkback conversation, story circles, or more long-term actions that the production supports or inspires" [Cohen-Cruz 2010: 1]. Usually, the aim of such projects is to benefit the wider community and society, to actualize and tackle various social and political issues [ibid: 2]. For instance, Mark Beeson, the artistic director of Manaton and East Dartmoore (MED) Theatre, is a primatologist, who is also developing his theatre with the aim of combining research and art in to actualize painful environmental and climate issues in society in an artistic form [Schaefer 2012]. In this case, Beeson's knowledge as a researcher serves as the basis for the content of the performances. Toronto ethnographers, on the other hand, collaborated with theatre artists to highlight the social and psychological issues related to youth homelessness [Gallagher, Wessels, & Ntelioglou 2012]. In this case, the "*verbatim theatre*"[2] about young homeless people uses ethnographic research in creating a show so as to ensure

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[1] Evarts Melnalksnis. The presentation "Collaboration between researchers and theatre-makers: the case of KVADRIFRONS' performance". The 13th conference "Culture Crossroads", 31 October 2019.

[2] According to Gallagher, Wessels, & Ntelioglou [2012], verbatim theatre is based on the life stories of real people and uses direct dialogues of these people. In her master's thesis, Eva Mežaraupe [2013] defines verbatim theatre as "theatrical aesthetics that uses interviews with real people to create dramatic material".

the authenticity of the stories and thus more strongly highlight the problems of young homeless people in society. Ethnographic research continues even after the performance in discussions about the show with young people from less privileged schools, thus both continuing to research and actualizing the issues of poverty and exclusion among young people [Gallagher, Wessels, & Ntelioglou 2012].

In Latvia, the New Riga Theatre has also chosen the *verbatim theatre* approach in many of its performances, such as "Latvian Stories" and "Grandfather", but in these performances it is primarily actors that become researchers without creating specific forms of collaboration between theatre artists and researchers. The performance "Fake News" by the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS is different because the production of this performance is characterised by the collaboration of artists and researchers in the process of idea development for the performance. In this case, the specific nature of the collaboration was underpinned not only by the phenomenon of fake news and the need to feel its limits and essence, but also by the production schedule of the performance, which provided a relatively short time for the research. So that the creators of the performance could have faster access to the empirical research material, first the dramatist of the performance, but later also the director and the actors of the performance became researchers, familiarising themselves with and analysing the materials obtained during field research. The transcripts the researchers obtained from various informants (experts, the people who shared fake news and the creator of fake news) allowed the artists to "feel" the empirical material more deeply, thus both "expanding" and deepening the space of ideas in the production of the performance. The following section contains a more detailed description of the research.

The study of fake news
Methodology

The aim set by the authors of the study was to conduct a sociological analysis of the fake news phenomenon. Within the framework of the study, the authors not only theoretically examined the historical genesis and contemporary nature and classification of the fake news phenomenon, but also researched various cases of fake news both in Latvia and in the world as well as carried out some fieldwork[1]. Using the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews, the researchers interviewed six experts (journalists, the representatives of communication and political sciences, media literacy experts) and then, based on the interview material, analysed the experts' views in an integrated way to obtain an in-depth insight into the fake news phenomenon. The researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with five citizens

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[1] The full content of the study is available at the Latvian Academy of Culture.

about their experiences of sharing fake news and carried out an integrated analysis of these views. Besides, the researchers managed to gain a deeper insight in the considerations behind the creation of fake news based on the account of a fake news creator. Even though interviews were conducted with experts, a fake news creator, as well as individuals who have had experience of sharing (knowingly or not) fake news, the paper further will focus only on the latter.

Next, as an example from the study, we offer a unique analysis of the data obtained in the research on the reasons why people engage in the spreading of fake news. An in-depth study of people's experiences related to fake news sharing has not been carried out so far. Although the number of in-depth respondents is small, an integrated analysis of the views of these respondents reveals a range of motivations and considerations that underpin their sharing of fake news. It should be noted that it was not easy for the researchers to recruit people who were ready to tell them why they shared fake news because the phenomenon of fake news is associated with stigma, and people do not always want to talk openly about the reasons why they have shared fake news. Initially, the researchers posted a message on the LAC website and on their own *Facebook* pages with a call for people who had shared fake news. However, only one person responded to the call in that way. Then, the researchers followed their friends' and acquaintances' timelines through their *Facebook* pages and, as soon as they noticed that fake news was being shared, they approached their friends and acquaintances with the request to talk about their motivation and experience related to sharing fake news. There is a concise analysis of these views below. The analysis of such opinions gives the readers of the article an opportunity to look into the dramaturgy of people's everyday choices.

Why we share fake news
Motivation behind sharing fake news
Fake news reflects topics and opinions that are interesting to the informants.

One of the informants had shared a false message claiming that "*never before in history have Christians been subject to such oppression as they are today*".[1] This message is a fabrication because the information supporting the claim is not based on verifiable sources and is partly true. It is stated in the article that "*80% of all discrimination on the grounds of religion is directed against Christians*", but there is no reference in the article to who conducted such a study and obtained these results and when. The article also reflects the explosion in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday 2019,

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[1] The news portal "Focus.lv". "Pasaulē nogalina tūkstošiem kristiešu – kas to dara, un kāpēc Rietumi to neredz?" (14.06.2019.) Available: http://focus.lv/news/pasaule-nogalina-tukstosiem-kristiesu-kas-to-dara-un-kapec-rietumi-to-neredz?26534 (viewed 21.06.2019.)

which was a real event and killed 259 people. The narrative of the article suggests to the reader that the victims were Christians, which is not true, because there were people of different faiths among the victims. Besides, the terrorist suicide bombers blamed for the assault were members of the Sri Lankan Islamist movement, which had previously targeted both Buddhists and Sufis. The motivation behind this event is not perfectly clear, and, accordingly, it cannot be unequivocally confirmed that the explosion was directed against Christians. The portal *focus.lv*, where the fake news was published, presents itself as a news portal, but the low quality of the news reports published on the portal, e. g. articles do not have authors, suggests that the portal has been designed to make a profit for advertising purposes.

The informant stated that he had shared this fake news because the message conveyed by the article resonated with informant's own feelings and observations that people are being oppressed and discriminated against because of their religious beliefs. The informant had shared this news because, in his opinion, the media did not adequately cover this phenomenon. By sharing this article, the informant did not so much want to provoke a discussion about Christians being oppressed, but to support the opinion that people in general may be oppressed because of their religious beliefs.

> *What appealed to me was the fact that I had not seen it, and I had absolutely no doubt that it was true. I really knew that people are being killed for their faith all over the world. It seemed so obvious to me. It seemed very unusual to me that such news never appears anywhere and does not emerge, but this time it appeared, which is why I shared it. That was my motivation.* [..] *It seemed important to me that the fact about people being killed for their faith is brought up. I find that pretty awful.* (Informant No. 1)

Another informant had shared a fake message in which the opinion about the role of women and men in today's society and contemporary social values in general was falsely attributed to actor Keanu Reeves. On 28 July 2019, Uģis Kuģis, a Vedic philosopher, relationship consultant and a lecturer, published a post on his *Facebook* profile with a picture of the American actor Keanu Reeves and a quote about today's world attributed to Reeves:

> *I cannot be part of a world where men dress their wives as prostitutes by showing everything that should be cherished. Where there is no concept of honor and dignity, and one can only rely on those when they say, "I promise." Where women do not want children, and men don't want a family. Where the suckers believe themselves to be successful behind the wheel of their fathers' cars, and a father who has a little bit of power is trying to prove to you that you're a nobody. Where people falsely*

declare that they believe in God with a shot of alcohol in their hands, and the lack of any understanding of their religion. Where the concept of jealousy is considered shameful, and modesty is a disadvantage. Where people forgot about love but are simply looking for the best partner. Where people repair every rustle of their car, not sparing any money nor time, and themselves, they look so poor that only an expensive car can hide it. Where the boys waste their parents' money in nightclubs, aping under the primitive sounds, and girls fall in love with them for this. Where men and women are no longer identifiable, and where all this together is called the freedom of choice, but those who choose a different path get branded as retarded despots. I just can't accept it.

There are articles on the origin of this quotation on various fact-finding sites, explaining how it originated. This text has been travelling on the internet since 2016, and shortly after its publication it was clarified where it came from. An article has been published on the website *politifact*, which deals with the rebuttal of false facts, the author of which has traced the origin of the quotation. It originated on one of the *Facebook* pages of Keanu Reeves' fans (most likely on the fan page *"Keanu Reeves – the actor")* and afterwards appeared on other websites, too. A video was also created with subtitles in Russian that appears to show him saying this text, although in the original video the actor talks about Paul Gaugin's creative work. Keanu Reeves' PR manager has categorically denied that the actor has anything to do with these sites and fan pages and has stated that the text has been fabricated and falsely attributed to the actor.

One of the informants had shared this opinion because the message resonated with informant's own spiritual search and reflections on the order of things in today's world.

> *Well, most probably, it was because there were included some morals of life, the values of life, because I don't like those posts where everything is bad, where it is contemptuous, everything is negative; in real life, you can encounter it on the street, anyway, but it doesn't make you think, it's just negative. But what I shared is the thing that makes me wonder if I'm where I want to be, whether I have [..] or I like, or whether I have what I want because [..] Okay, I may not know if he really was the author of the article, but at least the text as such attracted me [..] Because it seems to me that the article contained values that people have lost in this world. Well, what was written there is that it's just looks, just material values, just, I don't know, some trophies and so on. Some human values are a rarity.* (Informant No. 3)

On the one hand, the informant points out that it was not so important whether the author of the opinion was Keanu Reeves, Uģis Kuģis or someone else. At the same

time, however, she emphasizes that the relevance of the opinion had been reinforced by the fact that it had been shared by Uģis Kuģis, a well-known opinion leader or influencer in Latvia.

> *It didn't change anything for me. I read the post and saw the author's name at the end. I thought, yes, interesting, okay. I thought, well, it could definitely be so that he wrote it, but, if it had been written by Uģis Kuģis himself or written by another actor, I don't know, it wouldn't change anything.* (Informant No. 3)

> *I guess Uģis Kuģis posted it onto his profile, and therefore I also trust him as a person, because, after all, he has his own speciality, all his wisdom. And I follow his posts, and maybe that's why I* [*shared*] *it to make other people think.* (Informant No. 3)

Nevertheless, the informant who had shared the fake news spread by Uģis Kuģis points out that, generally, she tries to pay attention to the credibility of news in her daily life:

> *I would have thought more about it if there had been some fact written there, I don't know, atomic bombs, clashes, accidents, some political decision.* [..] *Because, if I am interested in politics or business, for example, there are websites where you can read it. You know that you will find the truth there – lsm.lv, this is where I read something most often.* [..] *I won't pay any attention to some mystical websites, not to mention sharing or looking into comments and so on. Oh, well it's not worth it, it's not worth spending your time on it at all. Yes, so there were no really specific facts in this post, it was like a review of life, something like that...* (Informant No. 3)

Another informant states that she got caught by some fake news about police inaction. The informant explains that this news report attracted her attention because she had encountered a situation where she was not satisfied with the work of the police and, therefore, focused her attention on *similar* news around her.

> *Let's say, where people are missing or have been killed. Or, let's say, about police inaction, because I myself have suffered from one such thing. And the police didn't solve my case, so I'm very attached to the things I hear, similar* [*things*] *around me.* (Informant No. 4)

It has also been pointed out that at the election time all the news related to election candidates seems to be important, and that there is a greater risk that fake news aimed at defaming a candidate will be perceived as true:

Knowing me, I was only sharing things about politics at that time. It was a pre-election time. For the first time in my life, I had decided to deliberately gather information and understand it, to make a conscious decision for whom I will then cast my vote. So, it could certainly have been about politics, about some Lembergs' ploys or something else. (Informant No. 4)

The informant admits that, generally, she has posted various messages on her *Facebook* page that she found to be interesting or important, but which she did not have time to read immediately. Thus, before publication the informant did not pay attention to whether the respective message was fake news.

But in the past, I both made posts and shared news on Facebook for the sole purpose of building my message board so that I could look back and remind myself what had been interesting to me. I used it as a kind of a warehouse. This is an interesting topic. And later I could go deeper into it. It could be said that this was one of the most important reasons why I shared the news at all, and I was not sure whether this news was fake news or not... (Informant No. 4)

Fake news reflects an emergency or a traumatic event.

One informant, who admits that she occasionally shares some fake news messages on *Facebook,* perceived the fake news about a fire at the *Alfa* shopping centre as true. On 15 July 2018, a fabricated message that the *Alfa* shopping centre had collapsed was published on the Internet site *redzams.net*. In the headline of the article, the name of the shopping centre was written with two letters "f". Several people were reported to have been injured and hundreds killed. The news spread rapidly on the *Facebook* social network. When reading the news, the informant experienced vivid memories and emotions associated with the tragedy of the supermarket *Maxima* in Zolitūde. Although the informant did not share the message, she admits that she regarded it as true.

What I remember very vividly is one particular message that appeared at one point, it said that Alfa had collapsed. The name Alfa was written with two "fs" there, of course, but our subconsciousness works in the way it does, and it generalizes everything quite well. And, of course, it took me a while to realize that there were those two "fs". In the meantime, I was already going through powerful emotions. In fact, those emotions actually stem from the subconscious, and they cannot be controlled. Of course, all those feelings reading this after the tragedy of that Zolitūde Maxima, the emotions were very strong. Oh, my God, it is so unsafe to live in this world! (Informant No. 4)

The content of fake news as a parody to laugh at.

One informant shared an article posted on the portal *izklaidetv.lv* which said that Kristīne Kandere, a well-known businesswoman and the owner of a restaurant (the name of which was not mentioned) had had her car (*Audi Q7*) stolen, together with some important documents, including the restaurant documents[1]. It is mentioned in the article that Kandere appeals to all readers to share the message, and everyone that shares it will be paid 100 euros, but whoever informs her where the car is will get 5000 euros. In addition, when you open the article, a message with a *messenger* image pops up, where Kristīne allegedly writes asking the readers whether they have shared this article and promises to transfer 300 euros for that. At the end of the article, it is also mentioned that there is new information from Kristīne; now everyone who shares the message will get 300 euros, and, to get the latest information about the car, the reader must follow the next article. It is important that the article has several hundred comments; dozens of them saying that the money has been transferred, expressing gratitude for the cooperation and wishing good luck in finding the car, and other comments say that there is no need to transfer the money, what is important is good intentions and good luck in finding the car.

Nobody knows who Kristīne Kandere is and what restaurant she owns. Based on various factors, it can be concluded that the information posted on the portal *izklaidetv.lv* has been fabricated and should be qualified as fake news. Searching for information about Kristīne Kandere, it is not possible to establish in any source that such a person really exists and what restaurant she owns. On the social network *Facebook*, a workplace in a cafe (which was called the cafe *Heilops*) was added to Kristīne's profile on the day when the car was stolen, and the profile for Kristīne's blog was created on the same day. The picture posted on the portal next to the aforementioned article belongs to a woman about whom no information is known, except for what has already been mentioned in the *Facebook* profile, which, most probably, does not belong to Kristīne Kandere herself, if such a person exists at all. The picture is an obvious photoshop, because the hair is long on one side and has been cut short on the other side, where the shoulders touch the man standing next to her in the picture. Moreover, the most important factor is the site that publishes such information and the quality of the information as a whole. No legitimate news portal publishes appeals to share news to earn money. In fact, the car is not described at all; there are no photos of the car or its licence plate; there is only a headline

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[1] The news portal "Izklaidetv.lv".; "Latvijā apzagta visiem zināmā uzņēmēja! Katram par share tiks pārskaitīti 100 eiro (uzreiz)!" (30.06. 2019.) Available: https://izklaidetv.lv/latvija-apzagta-visiem-zinama-uznemeja-katram-par-share-tiek-parskaititi-100-eiro-uzreiz/?fbclid=IwAR29W7xOwu9DeL_FVjR-7KYYqZr-LNxXA2m77FaREdXC5PDA1KBuOhLZoCA (viewed 03.07.2019.)

claiming that the money will be transferred immediately. This website contains many advertisements for fast loans and lottery winnings as well as articles about Kristīne Kandere's car saga and other provocative and false news, e. g., about refugee arrests in Germany or details of Andris Kivičs' intimate life. This is a vivid example of news fabrication to build popularity and bring profit for the aforementioned "news portal". This case perfectly corresponds to the mechanism of creating fake news for the purposes of business and profit – the more views and clicks, the higher the profit.

The informant who shared this post on her *Facebook* page gives the absurdity that such a post had been published as the main reason for sharing it. Basically, the news is so untrue that it's just worth laughing at and not taking it seriously, hoping that other people on *Facebook* will understand it and laugh at it.

> *It was this absurdity and the absolute impossibility that caught my attention, how funny it is that something like this exists, it's like a hoax.* [..] *I know it can't be trusted that you will get the money, so I find it funny in general. I shared it because of the absurdity. I was hoping my friends would catch it as sarcasm, so I didn't comment on that link. Because the joke explained is not so funny.* (Informant No. 2)

The informant admits that, by looking at the published message more closely and analysing it, it is possible to realize that the message is fake news.

> *The headline, the comments and the fact that the car cannot be seen clearly at all; specific details are missing; there is no licence plate, no pictures with the car. There's only one picture with the car, which does not make sense. The car is not the focus of the news at all. I didn't think about that at that moment. I figured it out a bit later. The purpose of the message is not a car, but money and sharing.* (Informant No. 2)

The informant says that she received this message via her *Facebook* news feed from a friend who had shared it, but whose sharing motivation the informant does not know, assuming that the motivation might have been similar to hers. The informant says that she "would never ever have opened" the address where fake news is published "if it had not appeared on [her] *Facebook page*."

Trust in publicly recognized media.

On April 1, when the world celebrates April Fool's Day, the portal *Satori.lv* shared a prank claiming that a sequel to Alise Zariņa's film "Nearby" was to be made.[1]

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[1] The news portal "Satori.lv". "Taps Alises Zariņas filmas "Blakus" turpinājums." (01.04.2019.) Available: https://www.satori.lv/article/taps-alises-zarinas-filmas-blakus-turpinajums (viewed 02.04.2019.)

Some people working in the film industry, whom one informant was following, had shared this message on her *Twitter* timeline, and she did the same. Just like in the situation of other informants, the sharing of the message took place because it seemed important and interesting to the informant; besides, its distributors were legitimate.

> *The news was on Twitter, and it was shared. [..] By a director if I'm not mistaken. No, it wasn't the director herself, but it was about the film industry, and it was shared by people in the film industry, and the news portal where I saw it was quite serious, in my opinion, and significant, and I didn't expect them to do anything like that. [..] The news report said that the filming of the second part [of Alise Zariņa's film "Nearby"] had started, and it seemed quite interesting to me because that film was really successful, in my opinion, and the fact that yes – they were already filming the sequel so quickly, I found it very interesting and something like that. [..] I shared it because it seemed very cool that finally young Latvian directors could get funding for the second film right away. It seemed like a success story, hah.* (Informant No. 5)

Only after sharing the news did the informant realize that it was the day of jokes, and that the purpose of this message was probably to make fun of people.

> *I didn't notice it at that moment, but, actually, if you look at it with such a critical eye, I understand that the information contained in the article couldn't be put into life so quickly, and the way the message was presented wasn't reliable. [..] It took me a while to realize that.* (Informant No. 5)

Even though this is not a typical instance of fake news, this case shows that people do not evaluate information critically in their daily rush, especially in the situations where it is found in respectable and recognized media. Although respectable media generally do not claim to be the creators of fake news, the experts and journalists interviewed in the study point out that journalists themselves can also create fake news, sometimes without realizing it, and that journalists only try to get closer to the truth but cannot guarantee it.

Reactions revealing that fake news has been shared
nformants' feelings after realizing they had shared a fake message.
The informants point out that they generally felt awkward realizing that they had perceived fake news as true. One of the informants laughed about her awkwardness, while another felt shame that she had not been able to distinguish a true message from a fake one. It is a problem that it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify the truth today.

*And then I laughed that I had done it. Well, I laughed with other people. [..]
Well, I felt a little stupid. [..] I had fallen for an April Fool's Day's joke. (Informant
No. 5)*

*I was terribly ashamed to realize that I had shared this fake news. At one point,
the information emerged that it was a fake news website. My feeling of shame was
really strong. Now I do not understand at all what was reality and what was not
reality. At one point, I had even gone so far that I was looking at some Delfi.lv news
report and could not understand any longer whether the news could be real or not.*
(Informant No. 4)

The informants highlight the problem that it is especially difficult to identify
a false message in situations where the informant is not interested in the topic, the
situation or context and is not an expert in the area.

*I do not really distinguish whether it is fake news or non-fake news; for the
most part, all of it is something like the yellow press. This case also concerns a person
about whom I don't have the slightest idea who she is, just as I have no idea about
all those influencers or public figures in Latvia, so can't see how much of it is a lie or
not because I'm just not interested in these topics. (Informant No. 2)*

**Informants' accounts of their friends' reaction to the fake news spread
by the informants.**
According to the informants, their friends' reactions to the fake messages
published by the informants have been different. Some friends have identified these
posts as fake news and have asked for them to be removed. Others just tend to press
"like" and share the message with other people. In this case, it is difficult to identify
whether these friends are aware that it is fake news.

*It was very interesting because I have a friend, and he is engaged in the
European Youth Parliament, and he has a lot of experience with articles. He
immediately told me: "Wait a bit! There are no references here! Respectively, there
are no sources at all." And I really hadn't noticed it and hadn't paid any attention.
Then we had a little discussion about whether it is good to publish and share such
articles. (Informant No. 1)*

The informant who is ashamed of having shared fake messages says she would
have liked it if her friends had helped her to understand that the messages she had
shared, were fake news.

*Well, unfortunately [the Facebook friends] didn't react much. There were some
who shared it further. I even find it hard to remember. It seems to me that no one*

even commented on such news. But I'm sorry that no one reacted. If someone had warned me, "Listen, this is fake news," I would have been really grateful. (Informant No. 4)

The informant who shared a fake message to laugh about its absurdity also points out that some friends understood the falsehood of the news and laughed together with her, but one friend displayed his anger. However, the informant admits that she cannot tell unequivocally why the friend was angry.

Yes, guy X responded with the angry emoji, which I didn't fully understand. [..] *I didn't understand the angry reaction of guy X and wanted to ask him why he had done it, or whether he had understood me. But the very first reaction of the people was exactly what I wanted – let's laugh about this case, it's so funny that I want to laugh at it, and that's what I wanted to achieve.* (Informant No. 2)

On the other hand, there is an informant who has never paid attention to the fact whether anyone reacts to the news he has shared.

I don't pay any attention to who and how many [*people*] *share or like it.* (Informant No. 3)

Conclusions

The article dealt with the analysis of the collaboration between the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS and researchers of the Latvian Academy of Culture in developing ideas for the theatre performance "Fake News". During the production of the performance, the LAC researchers carried out a sociological study aimed at analysing the limits and nature of the fake news phenomenon historically and today. The study conducted by the LAC researchers at the initial phase of the performance production served as an informative basis for the artistic transformation of the phenomenon and its communication to the public. At the same time, it should be noted that this collaboration was beneficial not only to the artists of the theatre troupe KVADRIFRONS, but also to the young researchers of the LAC, for whom participation in the creation of a theatre performance served as a strong motivator for doing research work. Their motivation to participate in this project resulted in obtaining unique data.

Based on in-depth study of people's experiences and opinions, the researchers identified a range of reasons why people share fake news and how they feel on discovering that it is fake news. We find this motivation is emotionally based and is associated with emotional attachment, anxiety, comicality, or trust. People fall for fake news and share the messages that they find to be (i) thematically relevant, interesting and exciting for them; (ii) the messages that concern some emergency or

crisis situations; (iii) the messages that seem to be absurd and even comical; (iv) the news distributed by a reliable source of information. Regardless of the motivation for sharing, when discovering that they have shared fake news, the informants have mostly felt ashamed or perceived it as a comical situation.

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