

*Fake news and gender: the influence of fake information in the public
opinion about gender*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 2017 the Collins Dictionary declared *fake news* as word of the year. Not only had its use increased by 365% over the previous year, but both the term and its meaning had spread rapidly among the general public. Today we find ourselves in a postmodern society where language and symbols are part of the political process; they go beyond their mere function as the medium of a message. For this reason, a post-truth emerges, a culture in which discourse roots its structure on the appeal to emotions. The truth is being constructed, not defined as objectively as possible. Bearing in mind that this performative aspect of post-truth encompasses all kinds of discourses, gender is not excluded. While it is true that a great deal of gender misinformation has spread, this same postmodernism has also helped to analyse the basis of the current public conception of gender. Its critical engagement offers a conceptual tool for emancipatory practice, as well as an opportunity for self-exploration and the deconstruction of the socially imposed policies and behaviours.

Considering that the only study that links both topics was published a few months ago and does not use a clear methodology, the present study is one of the precursors. The main objective is the analysis of the consumption of false information to check if it favours the creation of erroneous beliefs about gender discourse. Likewise, the study also opts for specific objectives such as the characterization of the main variables that make up the false information, the public opinion and their informative consumption habits in order to find the key characteristics and check whether there is a direct relationship between the formation of a false opinion and the consumption of false information. This is proven by a content analysis of 40 misleading information sources and a survey to 190 residents in Catalonia.

The combination of both analyses has made it possible to state that the strong emphasis of the media on gender issues in recent years has led to a general understanding of the correct statistical data, but not to the root of the problem or its emergence. Fake news work not so much according to the extreme spread of lies, but according to rhetoric and the creation of doubts. A definition that is not completely correct is formed and this ambiguity is used to create doubts in a user who, for sure, will not go to scientific studies nor carry out a subsequent search based on what he has consumed —e.g. less than a 10% decided to check the information in the main source. In addition, this ambiguity is used to avoid appealing to the social constructions that support the issue at hand, thus eliminating a radical analysis that, on more than one occasion, could explain and justify the essence of the problem. Even so, knowing the existence of sources of false information does not prevent the user from incorporating it into his speech. More importantly, it's not the time spent consuming news what matters, but the time spent verifying them.