

# Mie Gundertofte Vestergaard og Laura Mølhavé Nielsen:

## The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration's Fight against Fake Nutrition News on Digital Media

### RESUMÉ

Denne artikel undersøger fake nutrition news på digitale medier, og hvordan Fødevarestyrelsen modarbejder denne udvikling. Gennem en kritisk diskursanalyse af fire cases ønsker vi at belyse Fødevarestyrelsens taktik til at modvirke fake news fænomenet og diskutere, hvordan udviklingen af digitale medier har påvirket spredningen af fake news samt alternative metoder til at bekæmpe fake news. Artiklen konkluderer, at Fødevarestyrelsen bruger ansvars- og troværdighedsdiskurser til at bekæmpe fake news og promovere deres strategi ved at fastsætte dem selv som en troværdig kilde, som forbrugere bør stole på.

### ABSTRACT

This article examines fake nutrition news on digital media and the steps the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (DVFA) are taking to counteract this development. Through a critical discourse analysis of four cases, we aim to shed light on the DVFA's tactics to counteract the fake nutrition news phenomenon and discuss how the development of digital media has affected the spreading of fake news and alternate methods to combat fake news. The article concludes that the DVFA use discourses of responsibility and credibility to combat fake news and promote their strategy by establishing themselves as a credible source who consumers should trust.

### EMNEORD

Fake news, Ernæring, Regeringen, Troværdighed, Digitale medier

### KEYWORDS

Fake news, Nutrition, Government, Credibility, Digital media

## **Introduction**

During the past few years, there has been an increasing tendency towards people posting nutritional advice on digital media concerning which foods to eat and how to live a healthier life. Much of this advice is given without any scientific knowledge or evidence to support the claims being made. Therefore, it can be difficult for consumers to know if an article is based on legitimate research conducted by experts or if it is simply based on personal beliefs and unsubstantiated knowledge.

The Danish government in the form of the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (DVFA) have unanimously chosen to do something about this trend. In a new official strategy, the DVFA have detailed how they intend to fight fake news on digital media to give consumers critical tools to assess online news content.

However, this may prove to be a difficult task. The Ministry of Environment and Food's primary idea is to hire more people to create a social media team who can monitor different platforms and catch individuals spreading harmful information. In these cases, they will attempt to be more active and visible in the debate while making sure that it is easier to find relevant information based on the government's recommendations.

We will approach the matter by giving an account of the emergence and development of digital media and the term fake news with particular focus on fake nutrition news, before outlining the DVFA's new strategy. Through an analysis of four cases in which the DVFA have responded to fake nutrition news, we aim to shed light on their tactics to counteract the fake nutrition news phenomenon. Finally, we will discuss how the development of digital media has affected the spreading of fake news, different methods to combat fake news, and if the Danish government's current strategy interferes with the democratic right to freedom of expression.

## Background

### *Development of Digital Media*

The shift from a society based on traditional mass media to digital communication through the Internet has resulted in a cultural transformation (Castells 2010, xviii). Seife (2014, 9) describes the switch to digital information as a milestone on a par with the advent of the printing press. This is attributable to the unique properties of digital information: it can move around the world at the speed of light, be copied and shared freely, and stored without filling up any real space and without fear of decay. These properties make the rapid spreading of digital information possible, affecting all corners of society while becoming more and more difficult to control (Seife 2014, 9).

In *The Rise of the Network Society* (2010, xviii), Castells states that the network society is defined by a new social structure where society is made up of networks in all the key dimensions of social organization and social practice. Digital information and networking technologies, characteristic of the Information Age, have removed the previous limitations on networking and allowed the expansion of social and organizational networks (Castells 2010, xviii). Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are examples of the Network Society, as they allow networking between individuals through digital communication platforms across time and space. Digital media in general have developed rapidly over the last few years and are drastically altering the way in which we communicate.

Digital media are also changing the way we consume and share news online. Any given news item can be distributed across societies and discussed by people around the world within minutes via social media platforms (Lee & Ma 2011, 331). As Rowe & Alexander (2017b, 180) explain, the rise of the Internet has allowed the formation of an infinite number of websites carrying opinions, accusations, and outrageous claims that play on our individual worries and concerns. Moreover, digital information and media have increasingly challenged what Rowe & Alexander call the gatekeepers of portals of information, such as scientists, health experts, dietitians and nutritionists (2017b, 181). Scientific arguments over global concerns such as climate change or nutrition are now taking place in real time online, while the discussions are

progressively being driven more by factors such as politics, emotion, psychology, and ideology rather than by science itself (Rowe & Alexander 2017a, 153).

### *Fake news*

Even though it's hard to establish when or where the term first originated, Fake News has increasingly been integrated into our speech, mind and media. However, it seems everyone has different ways to define the concept. Hendricks and Vestergaard (2019, 63) describe fake news as "invented material that has been cleverly manipulated so as to come across as reliable, journalistic reporting that may easily be spread online to a large audience that is willing to believe the stories and spread the message". This definition partly mentions journalism as a constitutive factor in fake news, whereas others define fake news as having to do exclusively with news articles. Such is the case with Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who define fake news as, "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers". Going forward we will use Hendricks and Vestergaard's definition to define the term fake news.

In light of the fake news phenomenon, the value of information has dropped steeply (Hendricks & Vestergaard 2019, 2). We have access to information through endless numbers of platforms, which means more information is produced than ever before. The work of journalists used to be intended for papers printed the following day, and as a result there was better time to fact check sources and choose stories. Nowadays journalists need to upload in real time or they will lose clients (Hendricks & Vestergaard 2019, 9). A lot of texts being produced today are translated from others, which can result in the spreading of unintended fake news. However, this development doesn't just affect journalists, but anyone who communicates to an audience. Being uninformed or having misinformation can lead to the generation of fake news, which is most often believed by the audience when it is a mixture of truth and lies (Hendricks & Vestergaard 2019, 54-55).

Fake news can also create a belief echo. Even after an alleged political scandal or rumour is over and established to be false, a belief echo can cause an individual's negative perception of the given subject to linger (Hendricks & Vestergaard 2019, 59-60).

### *Fake nutrition news online*

Fake news is primarily discussed in a political context. However, the concept of fake news can also be applied to information concerning other topics such as nutrition (Lazer et al. 2018, 1094). Using Hendricks & Vestergaard's definition as a point of departure, fake nutrition news can be defined as invented material concerning the broader topic of food and nutrition, shared online and often on digital media to a larger audience willing to believe the stories and spread the message.

Rowe & Alexander (2017b, 180) show that fake nutrition news is extremely prominent online, and in their article they found that a Google search for "dietary supplements and disease" turned up more than 13 million hits; "nutritional disease cures" returned nearly 2 million pages, and "nutritional cancer cures" garnered 640,000 links. Furthermore, information online regarding nutrition is often inconsistent and at times contradictory (Caulfield, Clark, McCormack, Rachul & Field 2014, 5). This brings up the issue of how scientists and nutrition communicators are to ensure that the general public not only receive and understand but also trust messages based on science, especially when competing against fake news circulating on social media (Rowe & Alexander 2017b, 181). One issue is that too much nutritional advice and information is circulating online for the general public to navigate easily. However, another thing entirely is when the advice is potentially dangerous and can cause people harm.

A lot of fake nutrition news stem from advertisements and paid promotions, while the great majority can be considered fake news with no real scientific basis. As mentioned above, the shared information often has an emotional or ideological appeal, which makes it all the more challenging for science communicators to be a part of the online discussion (Rowe & Alexander 2017a, 153).

*DVFA's strategy*

In August of 2018, the Danish government presented a new strategy for food and health (Ministry of Environment and Food 2018, 4). It is the first time that the Ministries of Food, Health, Elderly, Teaching, Children and Social Affairs have joined forces to oppose bad eating habits and reduce the negative effect lifestyle diseases have on the mortality rate.

In line with their new strategy, the government has also started a fight against fake news (Olsen, 2018). Surveys have shown that people become more sceptical and confused about health and nutrition advice when the information is spread through media, and especially through social media (Ministry of Environment and Food 2018, 16). As the number of stories in the media regarding food and nutrition increases, it becomes more and more difficult to figure out if they are based on official, scientific studies (Ministry of Environment and Food 2018, 16). The Danish government has chosen to launch two initiatives to stop this development. The first is to enhance their communication against fake news. They intend to do this by raising their public profile in the debate on their own platforms but also on external platforms and different media outlets. This is to help consumers see both sides of the story so form their own opinion (Ministry of Environment and Food 2018, 16).

The second initiative is to increase the availability of evidence-based knowledge. This means that the Danish government will try and make it easier to find relevant information based on advice given by the DVFA. They will do this by creating a team whose task is to constantly optimize the web and ensure SEO (Search Engine Optimization), prepare material and answers that are relevant for the Danish population, and more efficiently communicate the sources behind the material containing official recommendations (Ministry of Environment and Food 2018, 16).

**Method**

We have taken four cases from 1st December 2018 that the DVFA have marked and responded to as fake news. As we are using the DVFA's strategy as a point

of departure, and the cases fit Hendricks & Vestergaard's definition, we also define them as involving fake news.

We have chosen to use discourse analysis as a qualitative method of analysing the responses from the DVFA. Discourse analysis was first introduced as a term by Harris (1952) as a way to analyse connected speech and writing. Harris' central idea was to examine language "beyond the level of the sentence and the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic behavior" (Paltridge 2012, 2). Language meanings and their functions are central to discourse analysis, as the same discourse can be understood differently by different individuals or understood differently in different contexts.

We have decided to use the General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework suggested by Mullet (2018) as a point of departure for our analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), like discourse analysis, examines the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts; however, critical discourse analysis "emphasizes the role of language as a power resource" (Willig 2014). As Mullet (2018, 120) explains, the framework "...incorporates characteristics and processes shared common to approaches described by the network of CDA scholars founded in the 1990s, including Fairclough, Kress, Van Leeuwen, Van Dijk, and Wodak". It includes seven stages; 1) selecting the discourse, 2) locating and preparing data sources, 3) exploring the background of each text, 4) coding the texts and identifying overarching themes, 5) analysing the external relations in the texts, 6) analysing the internal relations in the texts, and 7) interpreting the data.

To code the texts, we have employed axial coding, which is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 96) as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by using a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies, and consequences". After studying the five texts from the DVFA and analysing the data, we identified five codes:

- Consumer responsibility
- Scientific facts / research
- Impartiality / open-mindedness

- Emotional appeal
- Warnings / recommendations

We coded each text in relation to the five categories above. When coding, we kept in mind the background information accounted for earlier, including the role of social media, the concept of fake news and particularly fake nutrition news, as well as the objective of the DVFA.

## **Analysis**

In this section, we will analyse four cases to examine how the Danish government fights fake news on digital media. The four responses each represent a case in the media where fake nutrition news circulated, and where the DVFA have commented on the issue. They are examples of the Danish government aiming to help consumers distinguish between what are scientifically based recommendations and what is false information online.

### *Case 1*

The first case is based on a YouTube video by Fie Laursen, a Danish media personality. In November 2018, she posted a video where she encouraged followers to go on the water diet, where you consume nothing but water and as a result supposedly lose weight. However, her video came under scrutiny as the diet can be extremely damaging to your health. Therefore, the DVFA published a Facebook post, where they address the issue.

Looking at external relations, the text includes competing discourses of responsibility and credibility. On one hand, the DVFA makes use of objective facts and research, warnings and recommendations, as well as consumer responsibility. On the other hand, some of the language used plays on emotional appeals. In the process of coding, we found that this particular text had less of the impartiality shown in the other texts. Instead, consumer responsibility, warnings and recommendations were characteristic of the text throughout. This gives the text a more straight-to-the-point feeling. Keeping

context in mind, most of Laursen's primary audience is impressionable teenage girls. The choice of language targets this group, attempting to enlighten their audience by drawing a clear line between fact and fiction. Additionally, the text was posted on Facebook, and the structural organization fits perfectly into this layout while utilizing the affordances the social media platform allows. This text has the highest user engagement, with nearly 5000 likes, approximately 800 comments, and over 3000 shares. The topicality as well as the inclusion of a prominent media personality sparked interest in the DVFA's Facebook post, resulting in a lot of people engaging in the conversation on fake nutrition news.

Analysing the internal relations in the text, the DVFA make use of linguistic devices such as a self-answered rhetorical question (i.e. Does this sound like a good idea? No.), anaphora (e.g. repeating the word "og" at the beginning of several sentences), and slang (e.g. quick fix). Several words with negative connotations are used (e.g. dangerous, lethal, die, miserable) to emphasize the seriousness of the issue. Furthermore, a concrete example is used where a Danish citizen died because of the water diet. After stating the facts surrounding the issue, a list of recommendations is included to clearly present solutions to the problem that directly address the intended reader.

### *Case 2*

The second case is about dietary supplements available for purchase online, in particular the supplement DNP. In this case, the consumer is made aware of why the Danish government has made the supplement illegal, and why they warn consumers against buying it online.

The Facebook post is divided into five sections with a headline to clearly give the consumer an overview of the text. In the text, the DVFA use formal language, while clearly stating the disadvantages of consuming the drug DNP. This is emphasized in the last section, where they mention how many people have died in England from the drug.

Looking at external relations, the text once again includes discourses of responsibility and credibility. The DVFA use facts to let the consumer know how the body reacts to the drug, while they also use warnings and

recommendations to inform consumers about the dangers of using it. When coding this text, we found that the DVFA give a concrete example of how dangerous the drug is both by using an emotional appeal and scientific facts. This can be seen in appendix 1. The text is constructed to fit the affordances of a social media post by delivering information concisely.

When analysing the internal relations in the text, it was found that the DVFA use various linguistic devices to best reach their objective. An example is using words with negative connotations such as *deadly*, *overheating*, and *died*, as well as words which signal authority (e.g. *previously warned*, *British authorities*).

Even though it is only a small number of people in Denmark that form the primary target group for their message (i.e. those who use the drug DNP), the DVFA do not point the finger. They make it clear that the drug is extremely dangerous and in some cases fatal, stating that it is marketed for slimming purposes and is also used by bodybuilders. The content of the text is substantially different to the first case, where the language targets a different, younger audience.

### *Case 3*

The third case concerns whether meat is carcinogenic or not. This is a subject that has been fiercely debated in the media recently because of the environmental impact of producing meat and the issue of animal welfare. With this post the DVFA once again contributed to the debate and made it clear what their official recommendations are.

In terms of external relations, the DVFA warn readers against comparing meat and cigarettes. They state that scientific studies have shown that this comparison is false. Additionally, they provide statements saying that not eating meat can be unhealthy if the consumer does not get the right vitamins and minerals from other sources in their diet. To further help the consumer understand this, they state how much the chance of getting cancer increases when you eat meat or smoke cigarettes respectively. By doing this, they use statistical numbers to back up their own statements and recommendations. The

use of this example sends both an emotional message and a message about consumer responsibility.

In order to send a message to other parts of the population, they also include a link to a website where the consumer can read about what other foods to eat if you don't eat meat. This sends a message that the DVFA take a neutral stance, and simply wish to provide information about the danger of not getting the right vitamins and minerals.

When we analyse the internal relations in the text, the DVFA make use of linguistic devices such as negative connotation (e.g. risk, cancer). These words are used to emphasize the erroneous nature of the comparison. The post also contains elements of generalization, making it relevant to a broader population.

The three cases mentioned above were all posted on social media. However, it is not only on social media that the DVFA are taking on the fight against fake nutrition news, it is also on other digital platforms. Therefore, the last case is not taken from Facebook, but from an online article.

#### *Case 4*

The fourth case stems from an article published on the website Propatienter by Arne Astrup, a professor at the University of Copenhagen who has also worked as a doctor. Astrup writes that a larger general consumption of salt isn't necessarily a bad thing. In the response thread, the DVFA have given an official response to the article.

This text takes a firm stand on the issue of salt quantity in diets while remaining civil and open-minded. It is clear that the DVFA wish to promote a discourse of credibility and responsibility when it comes to fake nutrition news, which becomes apparent through the use of fragments such as "we think Arne Astrup deserves a counter response from us", "Contrary to what Arne Astrup indicates...", and "the DVFA recommends...". As the text is a direct comment on Astrup's article, the discussion could quickly become malicious. However, the DVFA never state outrightly that Astrup is wrong, or try to discredit him. Focus is on impartiality and open-mindedness, while still attempting to

enlighten the reader with recommendations and references to scientific research.

This particular text was written by a unit executive at the DVFA, Else Molander, who signs her name along with her official title and attachment to the DVFA. This further adds to the credibility of the text, as the reader is aware that the comment was made by a verified executive at the DVFA and not just a random person online. In terms of further interdiscursivity and external relations, the text doesn't contain opposing discourses, instead opting for a short and direct message with a common thread running through it. This is also in line with the affordances of the media, where comments on articles usually appear short in length and with a clear sender.

Examining the text for internal relations, the DVFA use concrete examples to support their statements, as is the case with all five texts. In this case, they once again use an example with emotional appeal and slightly negative connotation, as they refer to many Danes being affected by high blood pressure as a result of too much salt in their diet. Directly after citing this example, they recommend being conscious of the salt content in purchased foods.

In the last fragment before the signature, the DVFA write that they agree with and are very happy about Astrup's point that nutritional variation is good, emphasizing that this is perhaps the most important dietary recommendation. By stating this, they don't entirely dismiss Astrup's article, but instead focus on an important argument that lends credibility to both Astrup and the DVFA. This is particularly important, as Astrup already has credibility as a university professor and former doctor. This sets the case apart from the other three, where individuals with no credited scientific background are responsible for the fake nutrition news. Their linguistic devices and positionality aim to add to the conversation instead of starting a discussion where the reader is unsure of who to believe or trust.

## Discussion

### *Interpreting the analysis*

As part of our discussion, we will first and foremost interpret the data as outlined in stage 7 of Mullet's (2018) framework. This involves interpreting the meaning of the themes, external relations, and internal relations analysed earlier and placing the individual fragments into a broader context (Mullet 2018, 125).

Through our analysis, it became clear that the DVFA use discourses of responsibility and credibility in their fight against fake news. As mentioned above, one key initiative in their new strategy is to "enhance communication and launch a proactive effort against fake news" (Miljø- og Fødevarerministeriet 2018). The discourses of responsibility and credibility are present throughout the responses used to combat fake news and are used to promote the DVFA's strategy by establishing themselves as a credible source who consumers should trust. Furthermore, their overall use of linguistic devices and internal/external relations function to denote the concept of responsibility, firstly with reference to the organization itself, but also aimed at the instigators and consumers of the fake news cases.

The themes we coded were actively used to support the DVFA's objective. The five texts included the widespread use of formal language and words with negative connotations. As the DVFA are an official government organization, they must maintain their image and authority. However, rhetoric appealing to the emotions was also adopted through real life examples of the consequences that listening to and acting on fake nutrition news can result in. Concrete examples were used in the texts, stemming from scientific research and statistics to make the issue more applicable to the reader. These scientific facts were used in a non-debatable manner and expressed as a unitary truth. However, instead of directly telling the reader that they should make specific life choices when it comes to nutrition, they use their media presence as a catalyser for change – giving the reader the right tools to be mindful and critical of news online. One example of this is the fact that they provide links to scientific research and websites so that the reader can do their own research

and recognize that there are resources available if one is unsure of who or what to believe.

In the texts, the target audience was always central in order to maximise impact. In the case where the DVFA responded to an individual with a scientific background, they used special tactics such as focusing on the correct facts from the text, not discrediting the individual and their title, and countering their statements directly with external research and facts. The DVFA have also chosen to stand up against individuals with scientific backgrounds to establish themselves as an organization that is trustworthy, responsible, and credible, and whom the public should believe.

Although each text contains small details that are tailored to the original target group of the particular fake nutrition news item, there is an overarching theme across all the texts to ensure the message can be of interest to the general public (i.e. be aware, mindful, and critical of information regarding nutrition online).

#### *Development of social media and the spreading of fake news*

As mentioned in the background section, social media has made it possible for news stories to be distributed by people around the world in a split second and without fact checking the content. News stories must be released quickly, and it is often more desirable to create traffic than to focus on content. Social media have also made it possible to have online debates on virtually any subject, where people can take part in discussions using emotional arguments instead of scientific facts. This leads to consumers becoming ever more confused about what is true and what is fake news.

Social media have made sharing news extremely easy. Posts are not only measured by the number of likes but also by how many times they are shared. In the case concerning Fie Laursen, she posted on social media in good faith, and later issued an apology. A large number of people left emotional comments on the DVFA's Facebook response, which was also shared over 3000 times. It might not have been Laursen's intention to create a fake news story; however, she still shared harmful information with no scientific evidence supporting it. By branding her post as fake news, the DVFA sent a message that consumers

need to be aware of all forms of fake news, and especially of information that can be harmful to those who believe it.

Fake news has always been a problem and is not a trend that has started solely because of the emergence of social media. However, it is a growing problem that is making people all over the globe question whether real stories are true or not. On the DVFA's Facebook page, their posts are presented with scientific empiricism and a formal voice. This is an attempt to eliminate any doubt that there could be fake news involved. They inform consumers about the official guidelines, and afterwards people can choose if they want to listen or not.

### *Counteracting fake news*

Today we can consume news content wherever we are and on virtually any media platform. There has been an increasing trend towards consumers obtaining news from social media instead of looking at the established media. One result of fake news is that it can be difficult to determine if we can even trust the established media, let alone news spread through social media platforms. The question becomes one of the quality of our judgement when we consume content. But can we do anything to counteract this tendency?

In an interview with DR, Vincent Hendricks stated recently that an appropriate first step to counteract fake news could be to make media such as Facebook enforce community standards that users would have to accept when creating a profile. But he also points out that one of the problems is that very few people read terms and conditions thoroughly and as such it is difficult to enforce these standards to two billion users. Another option he mentions is that we can begin to view social media as media companies with freelance journalists, which would mean they would have to comply with media laws. This could lead to a person writing fake news potentially getting a fine (Nielsen 2017).

But is this a genuine possibility? Counteracting fake news could mean giving fines to people who spread false information, but as mentioned above, on Facebook alone there are approximately two billion users. So, this begs the question: who should receive the money from the fines and who should enforce it? The intention behind the spreading of fake news could also lead to a lot of

different rulings which could create complex problems. Many new, difficult questions are likely to emerge.

Vincent Hendricks also mentions in his interview that we are in the beginning of the information age. It is not more than 15 years ago that many social media platforms were founded. This means that we may be experiencing a number of negative “symptoms” which in time will be rectified. For example, when we can hide behind our screens, our language online is often not the same as it is in the outside world. Hendricks believes that we should give it time, and not worry too much about these issues until such time as we can determine if they are permanent or temporary (Nielsen 2017).

So, according to Hendricks, it is too soon to start implementing extreme methods to try and combat fake news; instead we should start by learning how to use the Internet properly. In the radio program *Brinkmann på P1*, psychology professor Svend Brinkmann talks about the pollution of our information sphere, and how he worries about being fooled by fake news. He believes that one solution could be for people to learn how to slow down and give time to reflect on every story they read before writing an angry comment or something similar. Brinkmann suggests that time and perspective can be the most important factors in the fight against fake news (Nielsen 2017).

#### *Government interference and freedom of expression*

As the DVFA are part of the government-run Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark, it raises the question as to whether the Danish government should interfere at all when it comes to fake news, especially in relation to freedom of expression. In Denmark, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Constitutional Act of Denmark ensure freedom of expression (Institut for Menneskerettigheder n.d). In paragraph 77 of the Constitutional Act of Denmark, freedom of expression is defined as: “Anyone is entitled to make public their thoughts through print, in writing or through speech, however being subject to the consequences of the law. Censorship and other preventative precautions can never be imposed anew” (Folketinget n.d.). The fact that freedom of expression can be restricted means that a court of law has

the right to punish statements that are in conflict with different statutory provisions.

In the four cases analysed, the fake nutrition news being spread didn't directly contravene any Danish laws and didn't risk being involved in a defamation suit or similar. Therefore, it can be argued that the government does not have any right to interfere with the sender's right to free expression, and that the content of their communication should be left alone. Although the DVFA wish to tackle fake news based on research and scientific facts, there is a lot of evidence-based advice on having a healthy diet that isn't necessarily consistent with the DVFA's official dietary recommendations. That is not to say that the five cases don't include fake news or misinformation, but that the DVFA's use of their own recommendations might potentially represent a conflict of interest in future cases. In their official strategy, the DVFA state that they wish to combat fake news head on, but how exactly will they approach the issue? And how will the DVFA make sure that it indeed is fake news, and not just information that goes against their own recommendations?

In terms of freedom of expression, the further development of a fake news resistance movement might cause problems. If one of the first steps is to battle fake news through communicative measures online, will the next be to sanction laws and regulations which may compromise people's right to freedom of expression? Around the world, governments are combating fake news, and some countries like Malaysia are introducing new laws against misinformation (Priday 2018). The fact that several countries are considering using the law in the fight against fake news may lead to potential abuse of power or even censorship (Priday 2018). Freedom of expression is a fundamental precondition for a democracy. It ensures that anyone can express their opinion without being punished for it. As such the DVFA, and the rest of the Danish government, must be careful when it comes to fighting fake news, and consider how to tackle the issue without comprising people's right to free expression.

It is important that the DVFA inspect each case closely before choosing whether to and how to counteract or respond. Since fake nutrition news is a relatively new concept, the DVFA should examine the content carefully to make sure it is indeed fake news. This includes examining the user's purpose in passing on the information and what arguments lie behind it.

Another approach our analysis could have taken was to analyse the fake news content of the four cases instead of focusing on the DVFA's responses. This would have shed light on the content of the alleged fake news, and why the DVFA chose to respond to these specific cases, and would have investigate further whether the content should have been classified as fake news or not. However, we have chosen to examine the cases from the viewpoint of the DVFA and their publicised strategy, where they clearly state that the cases they respond to contain fake news that contradict the guidelines they have set up.

## **Conclusion**

Fake news has increasingly become a phenomenon that we as a society and as individuals need to take a stand on. It is something that has existed for decades, but with the emergence of social media, fake news has become easier to distribute and spread globally. As we live in a world where everything needs to appear online quickly, and with the increased use of social media, stories with false information content are increasingly shared both intentionally and unintentionally. On social media, influencers have started posting news stories and giving advice on subjects they think might be of interest to their followers. The last couple of years in particular have seen a dramatic increase in the number of nutritional recommendations.

In our analysis, we examined four different case studies where nutritional advice was identified as fake news. In some of the cases, the result of consumers following the advice offered could have been harmful or even deadly. In other cases, the stories were the result of subjects debated in the news where both ordinary people and professors authored news stories without having the proper scientific data to back up their claims. These are all examples of why the Danish government, in the form of the DVFA, wish to fight fake nutrition news head on.

In a strategy document published in August 2018, the DVFA list two main strategies for how they want to counteract the fake nutritional news trend that has been increasing dramatically over the last couple of years. It is primarily on the digital market that they want to focus their attention. As such, they have

formed a social media team whose task is to look through media posts to see if any of the content goes directly against their nutrition recommendations. Our analysis shows that they use discourses of responsibility and credibility to highlight the fact that the stories are not in line with their official advice. In the four different cases, the DVFA's strategy consists of generally using a formal tone but also text that is emotionally charged.

This is a way of counteracting fake news through social media monitoring and public responses. If the government were to fight fake news through other means such as introducing laws or fines, it could quickly cause problems related to freedom of expression. Hendricks points out, above, that we are in the early years of the information age, and therefore it is difficult to determine whether the fake news phenomenon is merely showing start-up symptoms or whether it is a permanent condition. However, it is still important to raise consumers' awareness of fake news that could potentially harm or fuel the negative development of news spreading.

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