

Japanese News Media Portrayals of Fake News

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Keywords: Fake news, sematic analysis, content analysis

1 Objective

Although it is not as dramatic as in the US, fake news has also become a social threat in Japan (総務省, 2019). One of the challenges in increasing public awareness of this threat is that because of the complex and dynamic nature of the phenomenon, there is no simple definition of what fake news is that can be easily conveyed to the public (McNair, 2018). Considering that news media play a key role in informing the public, the aim of this study is to find out 1- how fake news (フェイクニュース) is portrayed by the Japanese news media? And 2- how the portraits have changed over time and vary between different media outlets?

2 Methods

This study uses newspaper as a representative of the Japanese news media because it has been, and still is, one of the most influential and significant news media in Japan. Specifically, the study analyses 1,394 newspaper articles that contain the keywords 「フェイクニュース」, 「虚偽報道」, 「偽ニュース」 or 「虚偽ニュース」 published in the four largest national newspapers (読売新聞, 朝日新聞, 毎日新聞 and 日本経済新聞) between 2016 and 2019. It applies sematic network analysis using KH Coder (樋口, 2014) to uncover latent themes embedded within the articles.

3 Results

The analysis results reveal seven main themes, namely 「米大統領」, 「情報社会」, 「人間と情報」, 「メディア」, 「フェイスブック」, 「政治と選挙」 and 「個人データ」. The results also show that the themes had changed over time, from 「米大統領」 and 「情報社会」 during 2016-2017 to 「フェイスブック」 and 「個人データ」 in 2018, and subsequently to 「人間と情報」 in 2019. Moreover, it is also found that the themes also varied between different newspapers.

4 Conclusion

The results have shown that fake news, in the eyes of Japanese newspapers, has shifted from an ‘American issue’ to a ‘human-information issue.’ In order to raise the public awareness on this phenomenon, the media shall focus more on its threats as well as countering solutions.

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