pressrelations, Fraunhofer FKIE, and NewsGuard Join Forces to Detect Disinformation

False information will be identified by using a combination of media expertise and artificial intelligence

Düsseldorf, July 8, 2020

In cooperation with the Fraunhofer Institute for Communication, Information Processing and Ergonomics (FKIE) and NewsGuard, a company that evaluates the credibility and transparency of news websites, the international media monitoring company pressrelations is developing an intelligent system for identifying potential false reports and disinformation campaigns. With the aim of providing guidance in an era of so-called fake news and conspiracy theories, the three partners combine the use of artificial intelligence and media expertise in a complementary process.

"The distinction between well-researched news and purposefully false reports is more important today than ever before," says pressrelations managing director Jens Schmitz. "Our task is to observe every form of published opinion as much as possible and to evaluate it according to the information needs of our customers. However, the increasing relevance of online and social media sources, which are subject to somewhat limited journalistic standards, has made it more difficult to make correct classifications." For this reason, the media monitoring and analysis service provider has been developing text mining methods for several years, and is in regular contact with Professor Dr. Ulrich Schade from the "Information Technology for Command & Control" department at Fraunhofer FKIE.

A tool developed by Fraunhofer FKIE allows for automatic evaluation of articles, together with their corresponding metadata, and provides indicators of deliberately distributed disinformation. On the basis of manually classified sample contributions, the process uses machine learning in order to analyze large amounts of data automatically, thus saving time and money. The stream of news articles and metadata undergoing evaluation that way will be provided by pressrelations. Every day, the full-service media observer processes over 2 million news items across all media channels, from print and online to TV, radio, and social media. "This is an ideal basis for collecting data for research," says Professor Schade of Fraunhofer FKIE. "Our tool can be continuously optimized and now demonstrate that it can be individually adapted to a wide variety of content and applications."

Media outlets that spread disinformation also have certain characteristics that could serve as indicators for false information. This is where NewsGuard comes in. With the help of trained journalists, the company analyzes and evaluates the credibility of thousands of media outlets in Europe and the USA. It rates online news sources according to nine weighted criteria, including: "Have false stories been repeatedly published without correction?", "Does the news source misrepresent content such as quotes, or take information out of context?", and "Do headlines mislead readers?".

"Our mission is to provide all users with the context they need in order to decide which news sources they can generally trust and which they should treat with caution," says Gordon Crovitz, Co-CEO of NewsGuard. "A content analysis of news articles, like the one we're doing with Fraunhofer FKIE and pressrelations, allows us to highlight interesting connections and differences among websites between their editorial practices, and how they are reflected in their articles".

The new disinformation detection system, which analyzes both the article and its source manually and automatically, is intended to give media users a sense of which news items could be false or misleading, without censoring the content. The newly developed method will be used for the first time in a cross-media analysis of the US election campaign during the coronavirus crisis. The project

was officially launched on July 1st. While evaluating election news coverage in the US as well as in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, analysts at pressrelations take into account the new indications of disinformation for the first time. The results will be published by pressrelations on a monthly basis starting in August 2020.

About the Fraunhofer FKIE
The Fraunhofer Institute for Communication, Information Processing and Ergonomics FKIE develops technologies and processes early detection, mitigation and management of existential risks. As a leading institute for application-oriented ICT research and innovation, it is dedicated to the entire processing chain of data and information: from acquisition, transmission and processing to its reliable protection. The "Information Analysis" research group involved here develops solutions for the automated analysis of text documents, including contributions in social media.

About NewsGuard
NewsGuard offers a journalistic solution to misinformation by evaluating the reliability of news and information sites. NewsGuard's ratings are based on nine apolitical journalistic criteria. Each website is given a score from 0 to 100 - together with a corresponding green or red label, which indicates the reliability or unreliability of a website. The ratings, which are determined by a team of trained journalists, provide users with important background information for online sources. NewsGuard's ratings and labels can be licensed by internet service providers, browsers, news aggregators, social media platforms, and search engines, and can be used free of charge by libraries worldwide.

About pressrelations
Founded in 2001, pressrelations GmbH, based in Dusseldorf and with further locations in Austin (Texas), Berlin, Dublin, Hamburg, Leipzig, Moscow, Singapore and Sofia, is a service provider for cross-media monitoring and analysis services. The company combines proprietary NewsRadar® technology with the expertise of its news managers, analysts and consultants. pressrelations provides more than 500 clients with practical insights and recommendations for planning, controlling and evaluating their communications work.