

Fake news and disinformation in ludonarrative contexts. The case of *Headliner: Novinews*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Headliner: Novinews (Unbound Creations, 2018) is a video game in which the presence of disinformation stands out as the driving force of the narrative and, at the same time, as the cornerstone of its mechanics. Set in the fictional city of Novistan, the player embodies a reporter who works for one of the most important media outlets in the city. As such, their job is to decide which news will be published and which will be ignored. For this purpose, the player has to read each piece of news and assess, based on their knowledge of Novistan society and their boss's "suggestions", whether each piece is true or fake. Knowing that, the player can choose what to do with those news, and that decision will determine the development of Novistan and the player's reporter career.

Based on this synopsis, *Headliner: Novinews* could be regarded as another gamification project developed to fight against disinformation and fake news, just like *Harmony Square* (DROG, 2020), *iReporter* (BBC, 2018) or *Fake it to make it* (Amanda Warner, 2017). However, *Headliner* is not a serious game, as it was not created with the main purpose of tackling a real-life problem (Alvarez & Djaouti, 2011), and that is what makes this game particularly interesting: for the way in which it integrates this concrete social issue into the ludofictional landscape and into the game mechanics.

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Therefore, this research aims to explore how the phenomenon of fake news, along with that of disinformation, is manifested through the ludic fiction of *Headliner: Novinews*. To this end, this work is rooted in the systematization of fake news and disinformation (Quandt, 2019), and the role that these topics have played in the field of digital games, mainly in relation to entertainment-oriented video games.

More specifically, this research aims to analyze how fake news and disinformation are integrated into *Headliner: Novinews*, and in what kind of contexts the existence of such fake news and disinformation can be found. Thus, firstly, it is proposed an exploratory critical analysis of the contextualisation provided by this game in relation to the concepts of fake news and disinformation, and the ludonarrative scenarios with which they are associated. In order to do so, it has been used the analytical method developed by Pérez-Latorre et al. (2016), specially focusing in the ludonarrative dimension.

Secondly, it has been analyzed the narrative design choices employed in the game, such as the narrator and the focalizer. Special attention has been given to where the narrative focus and mechanics are placed, in order to understand how fake news and disinformation are presented and how they are manifested (Quevedo-Redondo *et al.*, 2022). In addition, it has been studied the genre, goal structure and interaction mechanics of *Headliner: Novinews*, with the objective of identifying its main ludonarrative strategy from the lens of persuasive games (de la Hera, 2019). The outcomes of this research enable us to understand how *Headliner: Novinews* uses the language of video game to bridge the gap between its ludofictional world and the real world stories that underpin it, and, also, to expose disinformation and fake news.

Keywords

Fake news, Disinformation, Ludonarration

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