

Fake News: The Root of Contemporary Human Separation

“The best way to keep a prisoner from escaping is to make sure he never knows he's in prison” - Fyodor Dostoyevsky. A tale as old as time; Plato's Allegory of the Cave has told humans the repercussions of ignorance. Plato's ideas state people will accept the reality of the world with which they are presented. What is one's reality today? Media. The detrimental power of misinformation and disinformation has carved away at the unity between the human race. The users of technology are the prisoners in the cave; the puppeteers are those like the government, news agencies, and people who create false news; the shadows are the media that is consumed. The more the prisoners see the shadows the more their beliefs are reinforced, and their false reality solidified. Fake news is the tool being used to bring forth a disconnect between society, wielded by social media, government hidden agendas, and artificial intelligence.

The first set of shackles stems from the large social media corporations that provide the 5 billion user-base platform. The cause of fake news is the result of people trying to mislead users about certain topics as a way to influence change in the world. People who spread fake news have either one of three intentions: to spread false information for the fun of it or to intensify social conflict, to distract people from important issues so they remain unresolved, or to spread information for personal gain such as for monetary or political reasons. These ideological or commercial reasons are the driving force behind fake news, whereas social media and humans' beliefs along with naïve realism, are the leading force in spreading this false information. There are three main targets to the fake news epidemic; microtargeting, bots, and trolls. Bots help propagate and inflate the popularity of fake news on the internet. Trolls are people who purposefully generate arguments on social media to undermine the credibility of other people's idealistic views and support the fake news story that they are ideologically aligned with. These comments create intense arguments on social

media and result in cyberbullying, violence and racism. Microtargeting works with the use of cookies from the websites people visit and shows users information that supports their beliefs and makes them most likely to share, click, and read that fake information. That is how fake news is brought to life and how it spreads like a virus.

The second form of fake news, which has become popular in recent years, is the advance of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology. Deepfake allows the creation of realistic audio and video content of individuals saying or doing things they never actually did. Due to the ability to generate convincing fake videos of public figures, this technology is a threat to trust in media and institutions. The human mind has always relied on its ability to believe what it sees, the introduction of deepfakes puts people into a state of confusion. The increase in deepfakes raises concerns about the authenticity of visual evidence and its possibility of being weaponized for malicious purposes. For example, videos of computer-generated news anchors were recently being spread by pro-China bots to promote the interests of the Chinese Communist Party and undercut the United States for English-speaking viewers. Moreover, the rapid advancement of AI algorithms means that deepfakes are becoming increasingly difficult to detect, making the issue of fake news even worse. The recent outbreak including Taylor Swift and illicit images quickly brought the reality of the situation to the frontlines. The subconscious brain can not distinguish between real or fake and takes in all the information regardless, this leads to small subconscious biases being developed. These implicit biases are the driving forces behind what we think and our actions, allowing the smallest bit of false information to shape future decisions and beliefs. Witnessing a politician act in a certain manner will affect their reputation, regardless of the superficiality of the matter.

The last form of puppeteers stems from government hidden agendas and propaganda efforts. Governments have taken advantage of their power to control the narrative and shape

public opinion through misinformation campaigns for centuries. Whether it's spreading propaganda to influence elections, suppress opinions, or justify policies, the manipulation of information by those in positions of authority poses a threat to democracy and freedom of expression. For example, the Canadian government has had its cases of limiting information for large cases. One of many is its participation in the Vietnam War. Although, officially stated as peacekeepers; the Canadian government backed the US forces by sending thousands of troops, manufacturing war technology, and providing valuable information for the war effort. This was likely done to upkeep Canada's image as a neutral country.

Fake news is very important to how society may progress in the future because of how much people depend on the internet. These fake news articles are being intentionally created with false information to manipulate people's perceptions of what reality really is. They are being used to influence politics and promote advertisements for self-profit, along with creating social conflict online. If a Google inquiry were done on the safety of vaccines, information on both sides of the coin would appear. The fact is every topic has information supporting whatever the reader believes. It is not good that people can just label information as false if it doesn't align with their views on a topic. It influences people in the wrong way and creates more intensity online. This intensity online can result in violence and racism, especially if people with malicious intent can use fake information to justify their actions. An example of where a person was motivated to use violence based on a news article is the Pizzagate incident. Due to an article read online, a man was motivated to shoot up a pizzeria because he believed that the pizzeria contained a trafficking ring that was being led by Hillary Clinton. This is just one example of many where fake news can incite violence and make issues worse than they are.

There are some potential solutions to how fake news can be countered and hopefully extinguished in the future. The number one solution to countering fake news lies in the

public's power to be proactive. People need to start taking closer a look at articles; does the website look legitimate, what lies beyond the headline, is there a way to use other sources to confirm the information? The other necessities are AI watermarks and detectors. If all media created by AI required a trademark by law, it would be vividly detectable to the contemporary consumer. As AI progresses faster than can be imagined, the ability of fact-checkers to determine whether a piece is real or not by cross-referencing it with the information it stores should reach a level of success in determining fake news. Media literacy, technological solutions, and accountability are the hopes for a future free from Fake News.

In conclusion, society needs to wake up to reality, understanding not everything that is seen is true, nor anything unbacked is false. The first step is to be aware; once this is done, sixty percent of the issue is resolved. Breaking free from the chains of ignorance and stepping onto a path of learning and understanding will help humans unite once again. Fake News can be the downfall of humanity, but together, the information war can be tilted in the people's favour.

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