

DATA-553 Lab 1 Report

Q1: What has been the role of social media in legitimizing fake news?

Social media, Facebook in particular, played a significant role in propagating misinformation by enabling the creation and impersonation of seemingly credible sources. As depicted in the Facebook Dilemma video, individuals from around the world, notably a small Macedonian town, were able to spread fake news articles on Facebook, often surpassing the New York Times in terms of views [1]. The video also shares that those creating the fake content were primarily driven by income, with little knowledge or concern for the result of the Trump vs. Clinton election. Another instance discussed in the video involves Russia's interference during the 2016 election, where they were able to exploit societal divisions, even leading to riots and protests in some states [1].

Furthermore, as time progresses, information can evolve, yet Facebook currently lacks the mechanism for retroactively correcting historical information. This allows groups to perpetuate outdated and incorrect information even after it has been corrected. For example, the Ottawa Heart Institute initially published a paper on their website, indicating a high rate of heart inflammation following the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. It was later discovered that the elevated rate was due to a mathematical error, and the institute promptly retracted and amended the paper on their website. However, by then, it had already been shared tens of thousands of times on social media [2]. Even after the original paper and source were corrected, anti-vaccine movements continued to cite the initial paper as evidence to support their agenda [2]. Facebook and other social media platforms could mitigate this issue by either preventing the sharing of outdated information or by increasing awareness of the corrected version, ensuring that consumers access the most up-to-date information.

Given the lack of information regulation on Facebook, I tend to view news and content shared on the platform primarily as a form of entertainment. As a recent example, I watched the KSI vs. Tommy Fury boxing match, which ended with a controversial decision. I have seen several articles on Facebook claiming the outcome was a result of scoring error and the decision would be reversed. Upon investigating the fight results further, I have found that as of now, there is no official confirmation regarding the potential reversal of the fight's decision or the accuracy of the scoring. Even when articles reference reputable sources, I struggle to place trust in their correctness and recency. Consequently, I must invest a substantial amount of time in verifying the latest information on reputable sources' platforms, such as the New York Times website or the Wall Street Journal mobile application, before deeming it trustworthy.

In my perspective, Facebook's failure to exercise control over the spread of misinformation has reduced its credibility significantly. To regain its standing and compete with reputable news outlets, Facebook should implement methods to verify the content labeled as "news" and assess the credibility of the individuals or groups sharing this content. This would ensure the accuracy and quality of information shared on their platform. Additionally, Facebook should take measures to prevent the sharing of outdated information or promote awareness of the most recent versions, enabling consumers to distinguish between old and current news.

References

- [1]: Robertson, Megan, and Pierre Takal. Frontline The Facebook Dilemma Part 2. YouTube, YouTube, 8 Mar. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lg4XW4c9AAc>. Accessed 17 Oct. 2023.
- [2]: Miller, Adam. "A Canadian Covid-19 Study That Turned out to Be Wrong Has Spread like Wildfire among Anti-Vaxxers | CBC News." *CBCnews*, CBC/Radio Canada, 25 Sept. 2021, www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-19-vaccine-study-error-anti-vaxxers-1.6188806.