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CS3043 Social Implications
Fake News and The Social News Market

        Fake news is a constant issue in the post-internet world, and the duty to censor or control its effect on our media should not fall on the government, but it should rather be combatted with a combination of a competitive news market and a social change where we as people place more value in informing ourselves through thorough research.

        The government's involvement in the identification and punishment of fake news should be limited because it would violate the Freedom of Information Act and because to centralize that kind of control over the news market is to invite deception and corruption into our government and our media [1]. Recently we've seen some effects of this, where "in a deliberate effort to muddy the waters, President Donald Trump began labeling news coverage that was unfavorable to him 'fake news [2].'" The increased politicization of the fake news issue, from the 2016 election to now, is a clear illustration of the danger that is invited into our lives when we give the government authority over what is and isn't fake news. The best alternative we have in our internet-based media ecosystem is to approach it from a laissez-faire angle, relying on the competition between multiple news organizations to combat fake news, the idea being "conflicting points of view from various news outlets will meet in a kind of metaphorical debate. When the evidence from each is placed side by side, consumers will be able to distinguish the point of view that is true [3]." Each individual news organization and social media outlet must take it upon themselves to combat fake news, else they lose their credibility in the market. Social media in particular is incredibly important, as a study done after the 2016 election claimed, "sixty-two percent of adults get news from social media [4]." Companies like Twitter have found a good balance where instead of censoring fake news they flag it as possibly misleading. This strikes a fair balance between the ethical opposition of Kantianism to censorship and the Utilitarian concern for the effects of fake news dissemination.

        This issue with this "flagging" approach by social media is similar to the argument against government centralization of fake news authority. As time goes one, the public would lend more and more credibility to, for example, Twitter's flags, and automatically dismiss anything Twitter decides to flag, effectively giving the company that same level of absolute control over what is deemed "fake news."

        Although this argument has valuable aspects to consider, it can also be handled relatively well with the "news market" described above. Social media platforms are already in competition for people's time and attention, and as many begin to become people's main sources of news it is actively in the company's interest to maintain good fake news monitoring practices to avoid losing credibility and userbase. The control and flagging of fake news on social media is easier than some may think, as "social media's explosions in popularity has enabled research into credibility in the online context" through the use of massive databases and sophisticated algorithms to highlight potentially fake news to be reviewed [5].

        We can try to systematically defend ourselves from fake news with laissez-faire new markets, centralized authority, or whatever other methods we come up with, but in the post-internet world we live in it will always be prevalent. The most effective defense we can mount is to have a societal mentality that values individuals extensively researching multiple news outlets to attain a fully informed concept of any given topic.

[1]   M. Quinn, *Ethics for the Information Age*, 7th ed. New York, NY: Pearson, 2016. [E-book] Available: Yuzu E-book.

[2]   D. Graham, "Some Real News About Fake News," *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2019. [Online], Available: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/fake-news-republicans-democrats/591211/. [Accessed Nov. 10, 2020].

[3]   M. Gentzkow and J. Shapiro, "Competition and Truth in the Market for News," *Journal for Economic Perspectives*, vol. 22, no. 2, Spring, 2008. [Online serial]. Available: https://www.brown.edu/Research/Shapiro/pdfs/jepmedia.pdf. [Accessed Nov. 10, 2020].

[4]   H. Allcott and M. Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal for Economic Perspectives*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring, 2017. [Online serial]. Available: https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.31.2.211. [Accessed Nov. 10, 2020].

[5]   C. Buntain and J. Golbeck, "Automatically Identifying Fake News in Popular Twitter Threads," *2017 IEEE International Conference on Smart Cloud (SmartCloud)*, New York, NY, 2017, pp. 208-215, doi: 10.1109/SmartCloud.2017.40.