

News & Insights

Studies

Client Success

Social Media Minute

Socialbakers Blog

Press Releases

Blog Topics

Marketing	452
Statistics	329
Socialbakers News	146
Social Customer Care	144
Social Media Tips	121
Events	116
News	73
How to	72
Advertising	60
Product News	23
+ More Topics	

Top Articles

The 2019 Instagram Updates You Need to Know About



Top 5 Articles CMOs Have on Their Reading List



4 Reasons Why Dark Posts Going Public Is Good for Marketers



The Fake News Debate on Social - Who's Responsible?

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Global Editor

Published:

17 Feb 2017

Views:

19794

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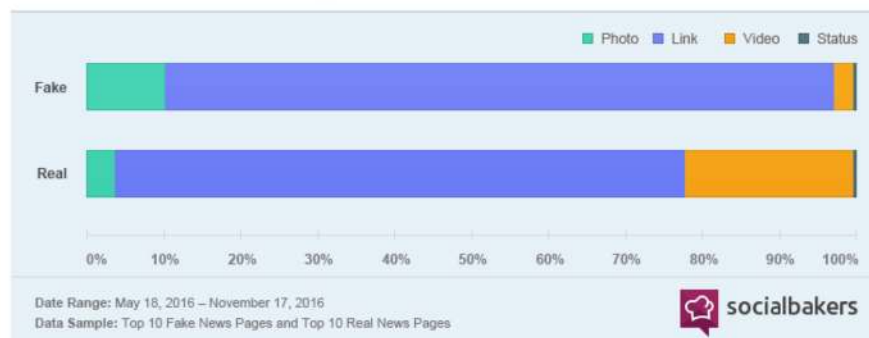
Fake news became a heated topic of discussion across social media during the 2016 US Presidential elections, and for good reason. We wanted to investigate why fake news became so important recently, what it looks like, and what platforms are doing to address the problem.

Misinformation and 'fake news' has always been prevalent in society, but the degree to which it gained momentum during the US Presidential election on social media was alarming. We saw false stories that ranged from the outlandish and utterly preposterous to the benign and the credible. In some cases, it was deliberately designed to be indistinguishable from real news. The reason?

Think of it this way, fake news is driven and shared for four specific reasons: **Profit, Politics, Propaganda, and Passion**. We wanted to compare the top-performing fake and real news shared on Facebook to see if there were any common threads in content types.


Fake News Posts Are Mostly Links To Drive Website Traffic


Real vs. Fake News Content Type Distribution on Facebook



We found that **87% of fake news content consisted of links**, 10% were photos and 3% were videos. We can infer that links were the dominant post type because their content creators wanted to drive users to their website for profit; it would be no surprise if they were clickbait headlines. What's most interesting is the fact that the top-performing fake news propagator (in terms of generating the most interactions), *American News*, promoted 35% of their posts to reach more audiences. Compare this with *BBC* the top-performing real news page, which promoted only 2% of their posts.




**American News**
/ / ThePatriotReview

ORGANIC 

Wednesday Nov 30, 2016 17:45 UTC +08:00

Melania Trump just unleashed on Rosie in a way she can never recover from. This is epic. Let's show her our support. Can we get 20,000 'LIKES' for Melania Trump!



Melania Trump DESTROYS Rosie O..
According to reports from TMZ, Melania Trump has threatened to sue the YouTuber who posted a video claiming her 10-year-old son, Barron Trump, suffers from autism. The tasteless video

17 114
Interactions

15 192
Reactions

726
Comments

1 196
Shares

3,12
Interactions per 1k Fans

Post Labels (0)

Details

**BBC News**
/ / bbcnews

ORGANIC 

Wednesday Nov 30, 2016 06:09 UTC +08:00

CIA Director John Brennan tells the BBC the Donald J. Trump administration will need to be wary of Russian promises. Read more: bbc.in/2g4GRKj

Russia is a country that will pursue its national interests

2 758
Interactions

1 980
Reactions

490
Comments

288
Shares

0,08
Interactions per 1k Fans

Post Labels (0)

Details

Real news sources tend not to promote their content because they generate an immense amount of interactions organically. In contrast, fake news sources tend to promote heavily to garner higher reach and engagement, and post links to drive website traffic where they can serve people ads for profit. Always be sure to verify if a news-like post is Sponsored, because there's a higher probability that it's fake.

We analyzed top 10 posts from October to December and found another distressing finding. Fake news posts from **Disclose.tv** on average, were shared more than posts from than real news sources like *CNN*, *The Huffington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, etc.

Top 10 Facebook News Pages by Interactions

	Sum of Interactions on Page Posts	Average Shares/Post	
 Fox News	95 136 597	6 926 050 776	
 Disclose.tv	5 639 661	3 765 401 274	 Fake
 CNN	48 088 293	3 123 447 884	
 The Huffington Post	36 200 355	3 067 354 100	
 BuzzFeed	37 438 695	2 922 800 838	
 Drudge Report	5 177 931	2 766 990 548	 Fake
 American News	18 603 343	2 559 584 562	 Fake
 Liberty Writers	10 013 669	1 970 829 315	 Fake
 ABC News	36 408 153	1 881 730 560	
 NBC News	19 492 011	1 651 817 408	

Data Range: October 16, 2016 – December 20, 2016



The top 15 posts from these fake media pages received 4x less interactions than reputable media top 15 posts. According to Socialbakers data, these fake news posts didn't receive **more interactions as Buzzfeed's analysis suggested**. Still, ¼ of interactions is still quite a large number of interactions considering the fact that we are discussing false media.

For those that turn to social media for news, this poses a huge challenge to stay well-informed, and with credible information. Yet, with social media, users frequently consume more news and information is spread faster than ever before; not to mention it's often shared from the people you trust most - your family and friends.

A study from **Pew Research Center** was conducted in 2016, and found that the **62% of adults get their news on social media**, and 18% are doing so very often. The report explored nine different platforms and discovered that 66% of Facebook users obtain their news on the platform, and roughly 59% of users on Twitter. However, it's important to consider the sites' total reach, not taking the size of the user

users on Twitter. However, it's important to consider the sites' total reach, so taking the size of the user groups into consideration, Facebook reaches 67% of US adults whereas Twitter reaches just 16%. To put this into perspective, two-thirds of Facebook users that receive their news on the platform amount to 44% of the US population.

A **Gallup poll** said that "Americans' trust and confidence in the mass media "to report the news fully, accurately and fairly" has dropped to its lowest level in Gallup polling history, with 32% saying they have a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media. This is down eight percentage points from last year". Gallup started to ask this question in 1972, and conducted a study on a yearly basis since 1997.

Leading up to the 2016 US Presidential election, Americans closely followed events that unfolded across a variety of media outlets. In a well-functioning democracy, it's incredibly important that citizens have access to credible information to make a well-informed voting decision. Influential leaders from the Pope to then-President **Obama strongly denounced** the spread of disinformation on Facebook and other social media platforms, and its threat to democracy.

The problem wasn't just that fake news was apparent in public discourse. It was the fact that this verifiably false content garnered millions of shares, and some were deliberately created to be indistinguishable from real news. The purpose of fake news may be motivated to generate profit, but the contentious issue is that it could sway public opinion. When fake news is disseminated, consumed and shared in large numbers, coupled with Americans' growing distrust in mass media, it has the power to influence.

What are Platforms Doing to Mitigate Fake News?

The world's largest digital information platforms, Facebook and Google, have been **testing online tools in the US and UK** to help their users identify credible information on their portals. Google has integrated a "fact-check" tag for some news pages to help users immediately see fact-checked content.

Facebook is currently testing and launching tools to help mitigate fake news. "It is still early days, but we're looking forward to learning and continuing to roll this out more broadly soon," said Facebook spokesman Alex Kucharski.

According to Chief Product Evangelist of Socialbakers, Moses Velasco, *"Facebook is the single largest news platform in many markets. This step shows they're aware of their importance, but they're sticking to their values of empowering the users, who will be able to flag content and then decide how they feel about a story that's 'disputed.' The fact is there's no one tool that will deal with fake news: it requires both the platform to sort information and the user to read critically. This is a positive step for both. With social media, we're better informed than ever, but it is our duty to ensure the information we receive is correct before sharing it with our networks".*

What are Users Doing to Take Action Against Fake News?

The users of social media are what make it social. We engage with the content we are exposed to, so we have an inherent responsibility to differentiate fake news from real news. Additionally, this means thinking twice and doing some research before hitting that "Share" button. Our actions have consequences. If readers keep this in mind, it can help them think critically about the news they consume as well as what they share with their private networks.

Velasco is hopeful for the future and discusses his final thoughts on the topic, *"I would like to see more education from platforms on helping people understand how to distinguish fake news from real, and what to do about it. When a situation arises where tech companies like Facebook and Twitter start to control what people say on the platforms, users will accuse them of censorship. Social Media should remain a marketplace of ideas and sharing. The old adage of 'Don't always believe what you see on TV' still holds true today - be critical, be aware. Educate yourself on the sources of fake news, but even with respectable media institutions, those who control the news will use their point of view. There is a distinction between opinion and facts, the lines are blurred, and truth is often subjective so look out for it."*

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2019 was a pretty busy year for Instagram. We

Top 5 Articles CMOs Have on Their Reading List

CMO's don't have a lot of time on their hands

...and a pretty easy job for Instagram. He saw plenty of updates, ranging from easier shopping experiences to being able to hide Likes. And now, for your reading pleasure, we've rounded up a list of the most important updates every social media manager should know before

...and even have a lot of time on their hands, which means they need to spend it wisely. With the digital landscape changing by the minute, these hard-working professionals need good news - fast. We've whipped up a list of top articles the most successful CMO's have on



Enterprise, Mid-Market, and overall Leaders.

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Community Management

Free Tools

Persona Mapping Tool

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Facebook Quadrant Report

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