# Facebook and Fake News

Consider each of the below proposals, and fill in each of the below TODOs.

Proposals

Proposal 1

Facebook relies on an algorithm as well as individual users' reports to identify content that is potentially "fake news." Once the content has been identified, it is sent to third party fact-checkers for verification. If the content is verified as fake news, it is publicly flagged with a warning that the content is disputed by fact-checkers.
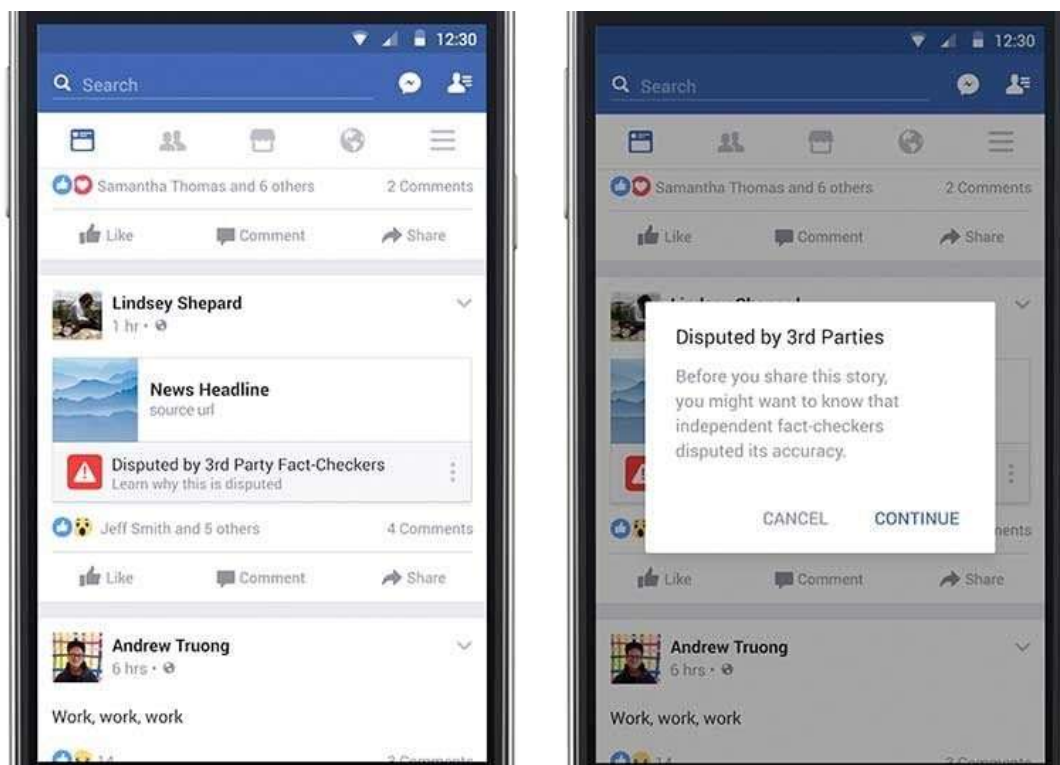
Proposal 2

However, a designer at Facebook believes that there needs to be a different approach to content regulation. Their proposal is that content deemed problematic by third-party fact-checkers should be prevented from being shared on the platform altogether.

Questions

1. Which form of content regulation, Proposal 1 or Proposal 2, do you feel is better? Why?

    a. My initial impression was that P1 is better overall. After having considered both proposals in terms of the values necessary for a democratic public sphere (see question 2.), my better informed opinion follows this initial impression. In my view, P1 is better at satisfying 3 out of 5 of these values.

       P1 does a better job at preserving the people's liberty of expression and association, because it allows them to use Facebook to express potentially false ideas with performative intent. It also does a better job at providing opportunities to make use of these liberties, for example by allowing debate over what the facts are. Lastly, P1 promotes more diverse content by better accounting for this nuance in intention when sharing content.

       On the other hand, P2 does a better job at granting users access to more reliable content by doing away with potentially false content, and has more potential to empower communication because this content would be less misleading.

       One way of rebalancing P1 would be by reducing targeted content. In this manner, Facebook could avoid some of the pitfalls that P2 is meant to avoid, like echo chambers of false content.

2. Which form of content regulation, Proposal 1 or Proposal 2, do you think best preserves or promotes the [five rights and opportunities necessary for a democratic public sphere](#)?

    a. Which proposal best preserves or promotes Rights? Why?

       i. Let us consider that here we are referring in particular to: a) the liberty of expression, and b) the liberty of association. When it comes to these two rights of an individual, it would seem that P1 preserves them better. If an individual is sufficiently informed that they are about to share potentially false information, is it not within their liberty of expression to share this information *anyway*?

          Moreover, I think that P2 makes the assumption that, in Facebook, language is used primarily in a *declarative* sense, i.e. to express ideas that are susceptible of being true or false (propositions). But the reality is that, at the very least, some content is shared ironically, humorously or with another *performative* intent other than to provide testimony in Rini's sense (2018). For example, individuals often share things with the intent to create or reinforce associations with other individuals, as it is their right. They may share these things without particularly vouching or believing themselves responsible for their veracity.

          Non-testimonial content would include content that appears to be testimonial, but is not. For example, someone might (knowingly and falsely) claim that The Lakers lost their last game in 2020 just to tease their friend, a Spurs supporter, by making them believe (momentarily) that their team won.

          Third party algorithms cannot measure the intent with which content is shared, only whether that content is verifiable. I believe that preventing problematic content from being shared

altogether would often infringe on the rights of expression and association of some individuals, without particularly promoting these same rights for other individuals to 'make up for it'.

b. Which proposal best preserves or promotes Opportunity for Expression? Why?

    i.   I think that P2 goes too far again and does more harm than good when the goal is to promote opportunities for expression. As long as false content is clearly flagged, it creates an opportunity for non-testimonial expression, without being misleading.

        On the other hand, stopping people for sharing false information does not substantially increase opportunity to participate in the debate for those e.g. being attacked by the false information. It may even be the case that those attacked will have better opportunities to respond to false information when this information remains public, and also publicly flagged.

c. Which proposal best preserves or promotes Access? Why?

    i.   Out of the two propositions, perhaps P2 promotes better Access: by removing false information, we can ensure that the remaining content is more reliable, thus making facts more readily available for greater numbers that would otherwise have to 'sieve through' a lot of unreliable content.

        However, I think that there are other ways to increase Access with P1. For example, by reducing the mechanisms for targeting content, all people would have at least some access to reliable information (assuming that at least some people would care to post it), thus preventing some bad corner cases, e.g. some people being stuck in echo chambers of false content.

d. Which proposal best preserves or promotes Diversity? Why?

    i.   P1 promotes more diverse content. Paired with a reduction in targeted content, it would allow users not only to see things related to their views (their views according to Facebook algorithms, that is), but also to see what people of opposed views are saying, *even if it is false*.

        If Facebook removed the ability to share false information, it would prevent all users from seeing *who* is sharing false information.

e. Which proposal best preserves or promotes Communicative Power? Why?

    i.   Communicative Power is about there being chances to associate with other people and form and develop ideas that challenge mainstream views. But false ideas lack the communicative power to challenge other ideas. The case can be made that by following P2 the spread of false ideas would be reduced. Therefore, P2 would be better suited at promoting Communicative Power.

        Another argument to support this conclusion is that testimonial content and the use of declarative language (see question a.) is better suited to empower communication than

non-testimonial content and performative language. The former is nearly always employed to communicate ideas clearly and directly, while the latter is often employed for opposite reasons.