

## **Regulating Fake News and Deep Fakes**

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The terms fake news and deep fakes are gaining public and expert attention due to increased sophistication in its creation, rapid spread, and harmful consequences. While sometimes the term, “fake news” is used to simply disavow a personally disagreeable fact, the true threat of fake news is when social media platforms, the news source of “62 percent U.S. adults in 2016”, are utilized to intentionally spread incorrect information (Shu et.al 22). A notable consequence of this is its influence on voters during 2016 presidential elections, that raised the core concern of misinformation, “that a well-functioning democracy depends on its citizens being factually informed” (Grinberg et.al, 363). On the other hand, deep fake is making “realistic videos by substituting the face of one individual for another who is really speaking” (Galston). Beyond entertainment, such videos are used to misrepresent politicians and celebrities that could endanger their reputation and make consumers distrustful and unable to rely on what they see to judge the situation.

Much of fake news is spread on social media platforms that hope to just provide a medium to connect and share one’s thoughts, and not be held accountable for the content and its consequences. However, they should be held liable to some degree because the technique used to create user engagement intensifies the misinformation sphere. Studies show that “0.1% accounted for nearly 80% of fake news sources shared” and the demographics of the audience is clustered (Grinberg et. al, 363). Social media algorithms are designed to suggest content based on one’s network, demographic profile and previous engagement behavior, so it is likely that people who have the tendency to be “overly accepting of weak claims” or fit a profile, are continuously exposed to fake news (Pennycook and Rand, 2). Social media should try to randomly introduce new content to break the rigidity of social bubbles. In addition, to alert users to fake content while not restricting people’s right to share and consume content of choice, social media platforms should use technology to detect if it is news, categorize its credibility and let the users decide to if they want to read and believe it. Finally, content detected from “malicious user accounts, such as social bots, cyborg users, and trolls” should be taken out of circulation (Shu et. al 25).

The issue, however, is that it is difficult to definitively categorize something as fake and there is little incentive for a for-profit social platform to take this responsibility. According to Lazer et. al, fake news is “information that mimics the output of the news media in form, but not in organizational process or intent—e.g., lacking editorial norms and processes to weed out the untrue in favor of the true” while Shu et. al, simply put it as “low quality news with intentionally false information” (Pennycook and Rand, 2; Shu et. al 22). If social media platforms flag any article in news form not from a known media source, it will limit the surge of creative, independent sources of opinions. In their paper, “Fake News Detection on Social Media: A Data Mining Perspective” Shu et. al, propose good solutions to characterize and detect fake news. This includes, feature selection based on language, visual clues, user information, types of posts and networks. As well as news model construction using characteristics of knowledge, style, stance, and propagation process to guide what is news. Better detection of fake content would also help build links to malicious accounts, that could then be deactivated.

To address the lack of incentive, there should be government regulations combined with market demand for “true news”, raised through awareness. Given that social media companies identify as platforms not a media company, it absolves them from the responsibility of content on site, and with protections from first amendment, government would not be able to explicitly monitor individual content. However, government can regulate a business to deliver quality product to all users. It would be unacceptable if an iPhone works perfectly for one user and blows up in another’s face. Similarly, if users are giving engagement and information to gain user experience, the business is liable to ensure no one person or a group is constantly subjected to unreliable news or have rampant circulation of false information from malicious account on their platforms. The government can develop policy around digital product (user experience) quality assurance and hold social media companies accountable to deliver upon that. In addition, if perils of fake news are identified and quantified as problem, businesses that deliver solutions to mitigate that will emerge and prosper. With its deep implication for society, these businesses do not need to be for-profit. Solutions for digital content integrity could be academically backed and delivered by non-profits or for-profit social ventures, such as benefit corporations. Here the incentive is wellbeing of a rational society and the funds can be raised from people who believe in power of true knowledge and information in a democracy.

It is worth remembering, that, while widespread misinformation is intensified using technology, its reception and unabashed acceptance is a symptom of social schisms. The distrust for leading media grows in factions as that feel alienated, unrepresented, and sometimes attacked. “True news” sources must ensure that monetary incentives from targeted sensational journalism is not affecting their standards of journalistic integrity and unbiasedness. They should foster an inclusive environment to allow differing, but factual, viewpoints to build unified trust in truth. Despite this, there will be people who are inclined to news that is confirmatory of their beliefs over hard truth. As Pennycook and Rand highlight, people with “reflexive open-mindedness” have the tendency to accept their intuition without following up with analysis. A better understanding of the distribution of this tendency in population and education to strengthen “reflective open-mindedness”, would help people become better judges of content. Social media platforms can provide some safeguards against circulation of blatant lies, but the problem will ultimately be solved through a collective social contract to value analytical thinking, making media trustworthy and building trust in each other.

## References

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