American Social Media: A Conduit for False and Dangerous Information

**What is the problem?**

False and misleading information has been rife on American social media to the point at which the House Intelligence Committee of the US Congress conducted investigations into it. By not having these companies like; Facebook and Twitter submit to regulations or laws that govern other publishers of news Americans are left to fend for themselves in a dangerous war of misinformation.

**Why Is This A Problem for Americans?**

The House Intelligence Committee’s Report concluded that the Russian Government at the direction of Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 US Presidential Election by using social media to reach a large number of Americans by creating fake profiles on our social media networks. (US House of Representatives, 2018). This is a gigantic red flag and massive problem for Americans because it undermines the integrity of our elections, and sow discord and distrust for whoever is elected. The ICA (Intelligence Community Assessment published in 2017 wrote, “We assess Russian intelligence services collected against the US primary campaigns, think tanks, and lobbying groups they viewed as likely to shape future US policies.” (“Background to,”, 2017).

**Why does Regulating Social Media Matter?**

By enforcing rules on social media companies like; labeling all questionable stories as opinion, and oversight on fake accounts, both Conservative and Liberal Americans can have restored faith in our election system and fair representation of their respective ideas.

**2) Literature** The 2016 Presidential Election was influenced by a foreign power according to testimony from then Special Counsel Robert Mueller III. As outlined in Robert Mueller’s report, Russia at the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin, ordered the IRA (Internet Research Agency) to sow discord in the US and the US political system by using social media to spread lies on touchy subjects and sow discord between social groups, while at the same-time looking to disrupt one candidate’s campaign to try and bolster her opponent’s. A report outlined created by NYU Center for Business and Human Rights have found that multiple foreign actors are preparing to target the 2020 election with the same methods. Twitter and Facebook have refused calls for oversight and scoffed at suggestions of regulation while at the same time letting dangerously false information and groups exploit their platforms. It’s clear from the multiple reports that Facebook and Twitter have a problem regulating false information, with the 2020 election coming, it’s important for every American and politician to rise up and demand these companies face oversight, because in the end, these companies have no incentive to change. Today bi-partisan oversight is needed to wrangle these companies in, with stiff penalties and fines for failing to comply to standards set by the Government, because in the end, both sides want fair and honest representation on those platforms.

(According to the ‘Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election’ Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III wrote, “The Russian government interfered in the 2016 Presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion.” (Mueller, 2019, pg.1). Mueller then details exactly how Russian Agents used Facebook and Twitter to spread misinformation however, much of the material is blacked out due to the ongoing nature of the matter. According to Special Counsel Mueller, “Many IRA operations used Facebook accounts created and operated by specialists” (Mueller, 2019, pg. 24). Mueller also notes, “IRA Facebook groups active during the 2016 presidential election covered a range of political issues and included purported political groups, purported Black social justice groups, and religious groups.” (Mueller, 2019, pg. 24-25). According to Mueller the amount of Americans this potentially reached is angering, with Mueller writing, “According to Facebook, in total the IRA controlled accounts made over 80,000 posts before their deactivation in August 2017, and these posts reached at least 29 million US persons and “may have reached an estimated 126 million people””. (Mueller, 2019, pg. 26).

This is not the only example of false information being spread, NYU’s report, “Disinformation and the 2020 Election” writes of an incident in 2019 of a video that spread across the internet showing Nancy Pelosi appearing drunk. According to the NYU report, “In late May of 2019, two disparaging videos disparaging House Speaker Nancy Pelosi spread across social media. One posted on a conservative Facebook page called Politics WatchDog, had been altered to show Pelosi’s speech during a public appearance, making it appear as if she had drunkenly slurred her words. Rudolph Giuliani, one of President Donald Trump’s personal lawyers, shared the video on Twitter asking, “What is wrong with Nancy Pelosi?”” (NYU, 2019, pg.1) The spread of misinformation reached an individual with access to one of the most powerful people on the planet which goes to show the risk and danger that malicious news and content has.

We cannot leave these companies to police themselves or their content because as evidence has shown, they fail again and again and further make empty promises. By allowing oversight (monthly reporting, and fines if failure to regulate) and labels on potentially false or misleading stories, every American will have to chance to form their own opinions on news and stories that are actually from reality, instead of a fallacy or news made up to cater to an individual’s own agenda.

**3) Thesis**

Social Media companies like Facebook and Twitter have a problem with regulating false information and fake accounts, this led to the 2016 US Presidential Election to be interfered with and could possibly lead to the 2020 election being tampered with. By having oversight and enforcing regulations through fines and penalties, and specifically labelling questionable stories as opinion, Americans of both political backgrounds can have renewed faith in social media and its role in publishing news. This in turn reinforces and protects the integrity of our elections. Congress has passed bills with bi-partisan support on these issues before because of national security, making it a highly sensible and easily attainable solution.

**Conclusion:**

Multiple companies, the US intelligence community and various University’s in the US have studied the effects social media had on influencing and tampering with our elections in 2016. Tampering with our elections can undermine our whole system by sowing discord and distrust among Americans in the electoral system which leads to a breakdown of the very system that has held stable for the last 150 years. By enforcing opinion labelling standards and oversight on fake accounts and groups on Facebook and Twitter America can begin to heal from the ill-effects of the aftermath of the 2016 elections. Congress has passed bipartisan bills of oversight based on national security before, making the solution of oversight and labelling standards highly attainable and beneficial for all Americans regardless of party.

Work Cited

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