

Committee: Special Political 1

Topic: The Question of Means to Counter Fake News

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Summary

Fake News is a recent problem haunting the first world. Born out of the digital age, and the demand for immediate information, Fake News poses a real threat to democratic integrity of nations, as it can lead to public misinformation, which could thereby alter the public perception on certain issues, parties or people. Moreover, it can provide shelter to leaders who dislike unfavourable press coverage, by simply accusing that publication of Fake News. Finally, it leaves democratic countries vulnerable to misinformation campaigns by foreign entities, in order to try and swing an election one way or another. Delegates must work diligently to solve this fundamentally damaging issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Fake News — There is no official UN definition of Fake News, however it is considered to be journalistic features that consist of misinformation or hoaxes, published through both broadcast, print and social media, though widely spread through social media. It is written and published with the intent to mislead or damage a person or entity.

Broadcast News Media — Broadcast News Media is the element of television and radio that focuses specifically on delivering, examining and interpreting the news, normally through specific news channels, or standard news programmes — Examples include BBC News, Sky News, CNN and Fox News.

Print News Media — Print News Media is the element of publishing which focuses specifically on delivering, examining and interpreting the news, normally through daily/weekly newspapers or monthly news magazines — Examples include The Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Atlantic.

Social Media — Social Media is defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking — Examples include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Google +.

Background Information

History and Primary Example

Fake News has existed in some form for thousands of years, with one of the earliest examples of Fake News being a misinformation campaign by Rameses the Great about the Battle of Kadesh in the 13th Century. Fake News has also been used in history to incite racial hatred, notably in second and third AD about Christians and Pagans, a far more recently in Nazi Germany about the Jews.

However, Fake News has taken a far more prevalent and international role in society due to the dawn of social media and the internet, allowing everyone to access the information they so desire relating to the news, instead of relying upon News Papers or TV Anchors. Most notably, Fake News was an important factor in the 2016 Election and has been one of the most common attacks President Trump makes. Examples of such fake news include a report by Professor Philip N. Howard of the University of Oxford, which found that half of all news directed at Michigan, a key state in the President's victory, was fake and of this fake news, the vast majority was pro-Trump. These findings were rediscovered over and over again in different places, finding 7,000 pro-Trump social media accounts putting forward fake news, that were linked to Russian Trolls. In addition to this, Facebook discovered that a Russian troll farm linked to the Internet Research Agency, which itself has been financially linked to the Kremlin, paid for \$100,000 worth of pro-Trump/anti-Clinton ads. Most recently, both Facebook and Twitter have found and attempted to thwart mass misinformation campaigns ahead of the 2018 midterm elections. In a separate light, President Trump has accused organisations that provide unfavourable coverage of being fake news, as a means to disguise and isolate himself from his own falsehoods, including regularly attacking CNN, The New York Times and MSNBC, while also accusing any work with an anonymous source to be fiction. Finally, and most worryingly, Trump has called these organisations that he attacks for being fake, 'The Enemy of the People'.

Other Examples

However, Fake News is not just limited to the United States and by extension the Russian Federation, it is a truly international issue. Here are some examples of lesser known Fake News cases:

Austria — In the 2016 Presidential Election, a court in Austria allowed Facebook Europe to block any negative posts about Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek, the Chairwoman of the Austrian Green Party, after Fake News has targeted her, and created a fake profile.

China — China have used the guise of Fake News as a means to dispel and rumours of human rights abuses in the country, labelling the reports as Fake News. This has also led to apparent internet censorship as they 'protect' their people from it. A tweet from People's Daily, the Chinese Government's Newspaper, reads the following as an example of this: 'Foreign Media reports that police tortured a detained lawyer is FAKE NEWS, fabricated to tarnish China's image'.

Myanmar — Fake News Stories have been accredited to have raised violence in Myanmar against Rohingya Muslims, after a series of fake articles were published relating to those that practice Islam, including that they were being grossly violent against Buddhists. Journalist Sheera Frenkel has documented a direct relationship between fake news and violence against Muslims in Myanmar.

Poland — The Right-Wing, Populist, anti-EU Party Law and Justice, currently the largest party in the Polish government, have been accused of spreading illiberal disinformation in order to undermine and lower public confidence in the EU.

India — In India, Fake News, normally published through WhatsApp, has been found to increase violence between different Castes and religions. In addition, a government employee called Sukanta Chakraborty was murdered by mobs for trying to fight Fake News.

Bringing it all together

What these examples show is that fundamentally, there are 3 threats provided by Fake News: The Threat to democracy, the threat to a race and the threat to generally the people of a certain country. The former relates to the idea that Fake News leads to a misinformed public, and so can influence elections, thereby undermining democracy, either from within or from a foreign entity. The middle

refers to the idea that fake news can propagate bile about certain races leading to violence against them. Finally, the latter refers to the idea that the label of fake news can help to undermine the freedoms of those living in a country, including freedom of speech and press.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Countries: The United States of America, China, the Russian Federation, Myanmar — Western Liberal Democracies, NATO Members, Countries with a large minority population, Countries that have limited Press or Speech Freedom

Organisations: NATO (due to the Russian interference), Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Other Social Media Outlets, Google, First Draft News, International Fact Checking Day

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

The UN has taken little to no major actions relating to Fake News, with at most, a condemnation due to the recent and unpredictable nature of it.

Possible Solutions

Any possible solution has to tackle the three existential threats mentioned above: The threat to democracy, race and freedom in effect. In terms of the threat to democracy, the UN could begin its own study into misinformation in the 2016 US Election, and so recommend to sanction Russia accordingly for its actions. Moreover, education is essential to prevent the impact of Fake News. The UN must work with Tech Giants to create a means to counter it. Other solutions could include UN verified sources to stop countries for dismissing articles they don't like as fake news, and a strong condemnation of any attacks on the Press. Delegates have a tough job to do in ensuring an omnibus resolution tackling all the issues, but every confidence in them is provided.

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