Facebook Crackdown on Fake News

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Fake news is a type of journalism that deliberately includes false information. It is spread via traditional news sources such as print, broadcast, and internet. Fake news is different from satire because fake news is intended to mislead its audience for political or financial gain, while satire and parody is not intended to be taken literally. A huge portion of fake news is circulated online and uses attention-grabbing titles in order to gain shares and click-revenue, wherein websites make more money depending on their audience activity (Hunt, 2016). One of the most famous fake news stories involved a man in North Carolina opening fire on a pizza restaurant in Washington that was an undercover headquarters for a child sex ring headed by Hillary Clinton (Hunt, 2016). The number of fake news sites and their circulation has been on the rise, increasing their impact in a very troubling way.

Since the 2016 election, Facebook has been outspoken about cracking down on fake news sources that spread misinformation. Previously, Facebook relied on its users to flag fake news stories and alert personnel so that the article or source can be removed. This, however, was not sufficient in combatting such an influx of false information that Facebook decided to take more initiative. According to USA Today, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently announced seven different projects intended to halt the rapid spread of fake news stories. These include improving detection of offending articles, making it easier for Facebook users to report false news sources, requiring third-party verification, labeling stories as false so users know which ones contain misinformation, promoting higher quality news so that it appears more often in users' News Feeds, tightening the reins on advertisements containing false information, and cooperating with journalists to develop a more accurate system for fact-checking (2016). The goal is to establish an effective and bullet-proof system for ensuring that fake news stories are

labeled as such. In addition, the review process will be aimed at preventing real stories from being marked as false, as people deserve the right to have access to reliable information in order to make educated decisions. It is particularly important for Facebook to find an accurate system for detecting fake news stories because the Pew Research Center reported that almost half of all Americans get their news from Facebook compared to the 20% of adults that still get their information from print newspapers (2016). As more and more people begin turning to social media as their primary news source, false news has been able to affect important events.

After the 2016 Presidential election, many people questioned the role fake news sources played in the outcome. A Buzzfeed analysis found that the most popular fake news stories generated more online activity than the top legitimate stories from reliable outlets (Silverman, 2016). The same study found that the top twenty performing legitimate news stories elicited slightly over seven million shares while the top twenty performing fake news stories generated almost one and a half million more (Allcott, 2017). The concern over Facebook's influence over the election grew so much that Stanford and New York University both conducted studies to examine the possible impact. Researchers reviewed the most highly circulated false news stories and how many American voters believed the misinformation the stories contained. They then surveyed voters post-election and presented them with a list of both true and false news stories. The participants were asked which stories they remembered seeing and if they believed those stories to be true. The study found that the majority of Americans were able to determine which stories were false and which were true, though certainly not all. It was determined that fake news stories, while definitely influential on the viewpoints of some internet users, did not have a major

impact on the outcome of the Presidential election. Still, the fact that it does have some influence on political views continues to be troubling.

While many see the new Facebook protocol in regards to identifying false news stories to be a good thing, others have noted concern about whether or not this will lead to censorship. Some worry that Facebook's review process could lead to stories being marked as false due to bias rather than fact. Others have risen concern over the qualifications of those involved in the review process and the possibility of human error. Because of this, Facebook's fact-checking team must undergo a thorough vetting process and agree to total nonpartisanship and transparency (Olumhense, 2017). Another censorship concern regarding the new Facebook review process is how it will affect satire. It is not uncommon for people to take satirical news stories as actual fact. But, as mentioned before, fake news is written with the intent to truly mislead people while satire is more like sarcasm and not intended to be taken as actual fact. Therefore, satirical news sources are not in danger of being flagged for misinformation or removal. Still, some sites or sources may be harder to identify as satire rather than false news if they are not better-known or are not already labeled as such. Facebook maintains that their review process is designed to identify and flag only pages that are legitimately spreading misinformation.

With social media playing such a massive role in modern society, it is not unexpected that it would eventually play a role in news, important events, and politics. Because so many people use Facebook, it offers such a large potential audience for news stories, fake and real alike. As it grows into a much larger problem, Facebook has been implementing safeguards in order to prevent misinformation from being spread as fact. While it has not been in effect long

enough to produce any data or results, the goal is to identify untrustworthy news sources and

stories from being presented as fact, providing readers with legitimate and reliable information.

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