

Fake News generation by the News Agencies and Individuals and its impact on the society

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Abstract

Fake News is a relatively recent term which has been used frequently in media since United States Presidential Election 2016. This term indicates deliberate false news creation in order to spread it among people to gain undue advantage – economically, politically, ideologically, socially or in some other way. In political arena, Fake News is spread among the electorates before the election in order to mislead people and influence their opinion, and gain political mileage from that manipulation. Due to advent of social media and social networks, disseminating information or news among masses currently may happen very fast through social network and internet, and millions of social media users may get reach of any news within minutes and get influenced also. So far this is quite difficult to judge validity of any news or information spread through social media, and hence there have been planned efforts to mislead people and their opinions for various agendas.

Keywords: Fake News, US Presidential Election, Donald Trump, Third-person perception, TPP

1. Introduction

Spread of ‘Fake News’ in the society in organized manner, by collective effort and in large scale has been perceived as a new reality and tangible issue across globe mainly since the event of United States Presidential Election in the year 2016. Since then, ‘Fake News’ term has got quite frequent usage in the media, within the political world and also among the common people during discussion of many events, incidents, trends etc.

What is “Fake News”

Fake News or false information can be associated with news or information shared through various media i.e. in printed or textual format e.g. News Paper, Magazine, Books etc., as well as in digital format e.g. shared through social media, electronics communication media etc. Apart from text-based or textual Fake information, also it can be represented by information and expressions in the form of doctored, fake memes, audio, video, picture or image etc. In present time not only the false stories or news abound in the news industry, even to substantiate those false stories and claims, other digital proofs are also being made up and

floated frequently in the internet and social media. For example, images and sound/video files are also many times manipulated, tampered with or created falsely to convey wrong or false information. The false information pages will generally have links, in order to mislead people to other false news sites; the pages will generally render false images, false audio/video files to users to boost and trumpet credibility of their own sites.

Although false information or claims can be propagated through various media, but because of recent advent of social media and internet, the false information and propaganda can reach to millions of users within very short time in uncontrolled manner. This uncontrolled way of sharing information via social media and internet is a relatively new feature of news or information dissipation among a large population across globe, and it has brought qualitative change in the information and news sharing industry fundamentally in new way. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Whatapp, Instagram etc have billions of users, and each day millions of messages, pictures voice and video files are being shared through the social media among this vast number of users in very short

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time. These features of social media and internet – its huge user base, rapid information sharing capability in uncontrolled and very fast manner have brought an explosive growth of digital news in the society. We have entered into modern world where we always remain connected through mobile and social media. In the hind sight, people have almost lost and forgotten the earlier rules and regulations, basic ethics which have been established and paramount in the printed and electronic news media for past decades; now through social media and internet, any fake and doctored news or propaganda can be shared to millions of users very fast in unrestricted manner, and almost no check is present right now in society and institutions for preventing propagation of those fake information or false news. This kind of false information sharing through social media and internet have given rise of 'Fake News' dissipation in present age. Hence characteristically, 'Fake News' can be identified with the deliberate false information being shared through Internet and social media and its various robust messengers like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Tumblr, online blogs, online news sites, web pages, bulletin boards etc.

Origin of the term "Fake News"

"Fake News" term was first coined by the Republican Party Candidate Donald Trump during 2016 US Presidential Election; he alleged that the Republican Party's opponents were spreading Fake News i.e., letting deliberate false news spread among people in order to influence the electorates and forming opinion against the Republican Party and the Republican Party candidate i.e. himself in order to gain undue advantage in the election. During the pre-election meetings, lectures, campaigns and rallies of the political parties in US, this "Fake News" term was used frequently by the political parties, their supporters and by media as well. During the pre-poll political gatherings and speeches, similarly the opponent Democratic Party and their supporters also alleged against the Republican Party and their supporters for spreading Fake News. Quite a many Fake News were spread regarding the political parties and their leaders/candidates during the pre-poll and the election process, and those were shared through various News media, e.g. News Papers, Social Media as Facebook,

Twitter, Whatsapp, Tumblr etc., and also via Internet, mails, Web pages, News blogs etc.

2016 US Presidential Election - Impact of Fake News

For many people, win of the Republican Party Candidate Mr. Donald Trump in the 2016 US Presidential Election was a matter of shock and surprise as they did not really expect that result. Hence, after declaration of result, many people voiced their suspect and opinion that the unexpected result could be partly attributed to the Fake News which was shared with the mass and the electorates through social media. Many people suspected that deliberate, misleading news had the influence and capability to form people's opinion during the critical moment of the Presidential Election, i.e., last few days or weeks or months before the election and thus contributed to the change in the expected result. Also it has been noted that as most of those Fake News were shared through electronic and social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc., those Fake news could reach to millions of people in relatively much shorter timeframe compared to the time which the print media news would have needed to reach same number of people. This type of development where facts and figures get diluted by uncontrolled fast spreading rumor, false information and propaganda generally shakes foundation to the established rules and regulation of the society, and poses severe challenges for the democracy and the democratic institutions as those news can influence large number of people and their opinion very fast; still there is no way those news or information can be verified for authenticity soon. In fact, it was found during US Election 2016 that many of Fake news were intentionally created by individuals as well as News agencies or News organizations, with specific political or financial motive behind those. The situation became so severe that credibility of the news and news agencies were lost to many people, and those news vitiated the situation, also effectively biased peoples' opinion where facts and figures became secondary, rather fabricated false news prevailed over Truth at least for considerable span of time.

2016 US Presidential Election - Sources and Causes of Fake News

Among the false claims that were circulated during Republican Party's pre-election propaganda, one very

famous claim was of Pope Francis endorsing Donald Trump for the presidential election. This piece of news was published by a news site called "Ending The Fed". Among some of the top fake stories that were well known during 2016 election were: "Obama Signs Executive Order Banning The Pledge Of Allegiance In Schools Nationwide", "Obama Signs Executive Order Declaring Investigation Into Election Results; Revote Planned For Dec. 19th" etc. In this respect, Facebook had to face considerable criticism by many people as it did not have any mechanism to check reliability and sanctity of the news items before sharing those among masses, and many of the messages propagated through Facebook were fetched from unchecked websites which generated the fake news. Because of that, the social networking leader was termed as "dust cloud of nonsense". In Macedonia itself, considerably high number of sites (greater than 100 in number) generated news content favoring Trump, as claimed by certain news agency. Without prior precedence of generation of Fake News in this massive scale and the unstoppable manner in which those were shared with masses, it hints strongly that a relatively new, parallel industry has been developed with task of false information generation and sharing through the internet world as well as social networks. Beyond that, certain companies even provided users or individuals the flexibility to generate false news on their own using apps and distribute those in their social networks.

Sometimes false news are generated and spread only by tweeting some gossip. Case study of Sapna Maheswari in The New York Times on 20th November 2016 can be referred to know how the false news that anti-Trump protesters were bused in actually got fabricated with a single, ill-informed tweet by a man with just 40 followers. Another apparently false story, that Trump fed police officers working protests in Chicago, was also started with a single tweet – by a man who wasn't even present there but was passing along a claim made by "friends."

Another false news model worth mentioning is generally based on the site URL which is quite similar to the very well known and reputed site's URL e.g. for ABC (URL: abcnews.com). Here in this case, URL of the ABC news station's website is abcnews.go.com, and fake news are available at the similar-sounding URL abcnews.com.co.

These false news channel's URLs are developed and hosted to mislead people so that they get into the false news sites and start interaction, thus generate web traffic; these false news websites make profit out of advertising on the sites or by making arrangement for transactions frauds in the sites, hence web traffic is vital for them.

In the political world, false information is deliberately concocted and circulated by political parties and their supporters who do not least care for the truth and who want to get political advantage by spreading false news, or want to damage someone's image and reputation, otherwise want to earn revenue by attracting online traffic.

Election in Germany – Concern of Fake News

After US election, similar concerns related to chance of false news impacting the near future voting result (for 2017 Election) was raised in Germany by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. She expressed her concern in the German Parliament by saying "Something has changed – as globalization has marched on, [political] debate is taking place in a completely new media environment. Opinions aren't formed the way they were 25 years ago.....Today we have fake sites, bots, trolls – things that regenerate themselves, reinforcing opinions with certain algorithms, and we have to learn to deal with them." She also warned in her speech "Populism and political extremes are growing in Western democracies".

Impact of Fake Information on Taxonomy and related causes

Fake News has not only kept itself confined within political world, although definitely political world is the biggest facilitator of Fake News generation and spreading as of now. Fake News has already spread its reach to many other fields. For example, Taxonomy is a branch of science with frequent wrong species classifications done by the researchers followed by publication of those wrong identifications in the journals in near future. Researchers, many a times, wrongly assume that they have discovered new species which are actually existing ones (i.e., not a new discovery). They also get their discoveries published in journals without getting those first verified by authorized Taxonomists. In several cases, they even do not lodge their voucher materials in a reputed museum, also never provide authentic illustrations of the species they

had been investigating into. These activities effectively lead to publishing wrong information or data in the journals. Thus misidentification of species has become a frequent incident in Taxonomy. Related other common issues linked with the researchers, even after their wrong classifications being identified and highlighted, the researchers do not go back to correct their mistakes or wrong identifications which were recorded or documented by them earlier. This may be due to their lethargy, inhibition to accept previous mistakes or simply 'Don't care' attitude. Hence the recorded documents many times are found to have lots of misidentifications and misclassifications that lead to wrong claims and misunderstandings in near future, but after certain point those claims and wrong identifications get challenged based on the factual verifications, and finally get rejected causing much disgraces and dishonor to researchers themselves.

In the museums of natural history, the scientific staffs are overloaded with administrative and other types of responsibilities because of staff shortage, funding issues and job cuts; hence there is a trend to lessen staff responsibility for managing specimens by stopping specimen curation responsibility, removing the need for specimen curation and loans, rather only maintaining species photographs. Since very few non-taxonomic scientists can distinguish species based on only photographic evidences, potentially this trend increases problems of classification correctly.

Also, in recent time, there is a trend to look down anatomy, morphology etc. as old branch of sciences and consider those as dying science whereas only giving credence or importance to relatively modern scientific streams e.g., gene-sequencing, population ecology, pollution research etc. This attitude is wrong as Taxonomy which depends on collected specimens related to type species, still stands as basis of almost all biological sciences. Thus looking down Taxonomy or similar existing old science branches or giving them less importance will cause further erosion of knowledge how among researchers, and potentially spread across Fake or wrong Information with greater extent.

Fake News - Impact on Society

There has lot of confusion about the actual impact of Fake

News on society, and hence the topic may lead to big debate and prolonged discussion involving contradicting views. The main issue in assessing the impact of Fake News is lack of dependable, recorded or proof of data related to Fake News spread in the society, and also unavailability of any well accepted technique for measuring the actual impact of Fake News. Still Fake News is a reality of the day and its impact is perceived and apprehended by many people in this age; public concern regarding the effects of fake news prevails. A growing concern is that fake news may cause confusion in the fact-checking process and eventually undermine an informed citizenry. Interestingly, both Republicans and Democrats in the US have voiced concerns about fake news (Jang, S. Mo. Kim, Joon. K., 2017). While some Democrats claim that the election results were greatly influenced by fake news, some Republicans argue that mainstream news organizations (e.g., CNN) have published fake news stories to hurt Mr. Trump (Zaru, 2017). 88% of Americans believed false news had resulted in misunderstanding among people about actually what happened and 25% of them acknowledged of sharing false political news online due to ignorance (Pew Research, 2016).

Third-person perception (TPP) Impact

One interesting observation by research is that, as per own perception of the Individual who has received Fake news, there remains a considerable difference of impact of it between the individual himself/herself, and the rest others (who also were recipient of the Fake news). This perceived difference of impact between self and others is called third-person perception or TPP. This occurs as one thinks that rest of the people is influenced by greater extent than he/she and his/her own group. In view of the degree of false news impact, Americans have been found generally confident in their own ability to identify false news, although the statistics proves other way. According to Pew research (2016) findings, despite of respondents' claim for their capability of identifying false news, 45% of them were somewhat found confident or sure, 39% of them were very sure, 9% was not so sure, and 6% was not at all sure. Individuals think others get easily swayed by false news than they themselves are. Also, Individuals feel other political groups get easily swayed by false news than their own political groups. Hence, Republican Party voters

believed that the influence of fake news was greater among Democratic Party voters than on Republican Party voters including themselves. Similarly, Democratic Party voters perceived that Republican Party voters were more influenced by fake news than Democratic Party voters including themselves. Supporting the self-enhancement explanation of the TPP, American voters generally think that they are smarter than others and they are not easily influenced by false attempts for persuasion.

In a nutshell, Fake News has brought significant challenge to the established industry of News generation and sharing. In the post Truth world, the line of difference between truth and false has become blurred; objective truth now has assumed lesser significance and influence compared to the emotion and personal belief that are dominant at this moment. In this juncture of history, Fake News appears with its ambition and threat to thwart the established facts, figures and values of the societies around us, and it tries to redefine all yardsticks for societal judgment and decision making capabilities.

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