Fake news in the post-truth era: policy options for Europe

Andrea Renda
Three quotes

“The crisis takes a much longer time coming than you think, and then it happens much faster than you would have thought”

“A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention”

“At the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted”
Hysteria among radio listeners throughout the nation and actual panicky evacuations from sections of New York and New Jersey resulted from a too-realistic radio broadcast last night, describing a fictitious visitation of strange men from Mars.

Hundreds of excited Chicagoans were deceived, and besieged newspaper offices, police headquarters
Trump is getting support from every leader, and that's the support that will make him grow great and strong. These elections will bring an immense change in our country.

North Carolina For Donald Trump
October 14, 2016

Pope endorses Trump!
Game changer!!

http://endingthefed.com/pope-francis-shocks-world-endorse-

BREAKING: Pope Francis Just Backed Trump, Released Incredible Statement Why- SPREAD THIS EVERYWHERE

WWW.DAILYPRESSER.COM I BY THE AMERICAN PATRIOT

Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement

VATICAN CITY – News outlets around the world are reporting on the news that Pope Francis has made the unprecedented decision to endorse a US...

ENDINGTHEFED.COM
Disinformation today: what is different

• Speed: “fake news” spread more quickly than real ones, for understandable reasons

• Control: difficult to control the spread of news without inspecting traffic and exercising editorial control over the ranking and exposure of news

• A plethora of intertwined phenomena:
  • Content bubbles
  • Unintentional fakes/opinions
  • Intentional disinformation
  • Lack of fact-checking
  • Lack of pluralism and user exposure to verified local and niche/minority content
  • AI-generated news sites, rankings and labeling
The fake news phenomenon in context

• From “neutral” to “platformised” Internet

• Intermediaries: from “mere conduits” to editorial powerhouses

• Social media increasingly involved in news sharing and distribution: They have an interest in:
  • Maximising (online advertising) revenues
  • Maximising traffic on their sites
  • Preserving/increasing reputation with their users
The legal context: need for balance

• Freedom of expression (Article 11 Charter of Fundamental Rights; Article 10 Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms)

• Limitations are to be provided by law, and typically focus on defamation and illegal content.

• The possible balance between the two is met by promoting responsibility in conveying information to end users; promoting pluralism; and empowering users

• Libertarian paternalism?
Possible policy responses: Internet platforms

• Monitored self-regulation (trust, findability, exposure)
• Co-regulatory schemes with enforcement options
• Transparency obligations
• Browser fact-checking extensions (pre-installed?)
• Responsible cooperation on online advertising (follow the money)
• “Nudging” options: make it more difficult to share non-verified, unchecked news
Possible policy responses: all players

• Multi-stakeholder alliance: platforms, journalists, fact-checkers, consumers, teachers, algorithm developers

• Charter of good practices?

• Experimentation at MS level + monitoring

• AI/fact-checking on the end user side (public, or third party NGO-led)

• Education and media literacy/awareness efforts!!
Conclusions

• Technology can be regulated only with technology, and even in that case full effectiveness is unlikely

• Co-regulatory schemes are essential: user empowerment and multi-stakeholder cooperation appear to be the best way to improve the quality of information spread online

• A re-intermediation phase is ongoing, and will change the role of platforms, journalists, NGOs, content producers and end users
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