**An Educated Public as a Plausible Recommendation for the Solution to Fake News as a Social Problem**

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**Executive Summary**

The concept of 'fake news' has been around for a long time, and its effects as we know them today are compounded from years of accumulation. As the world becomes more modernized, the power to report quickly moves from being reserved to specific groups to being a matter of personal initiative. With the development of social media and individual platforms, the incidence of fake news has continued to increase.

Fake news is now spreading more rampantly in modern society than when it first became a social issue. The effects of fake news are far-reaching and impact both the individuals in the society and the combined society at large. Since access to and disseminating information is now a right in the modern centuries, the news is now abundant, and so are the developers of news. With the monetization of possessing social platforms, people will develop and spread rumors for financial gain. Due to the rampant nature of false reporting, even when news is clearly fake and false, authenticating these accusations has become difficult. Hence, this has slowed down the effort for people to report fake news and have any action taken from such reports (Leetaru, 2016). Suppose something is not done about the rampant spread of fake news today. In that case, society's foundation of truth and integrity will continue to chip away. Soon, even such institutions as legal systems will be founded and guided by more falsehood than they currently are.

Today's culture of 'fake news' has become too inculcated into a society that it has become a social problem that we must adjust to and 'live with.' According to Freenberg (2012), technology has changed the dynamics of the world, and it has accorded different people various avenues on which to report any information they have on a subject to the world. Even though the technology is beneficial and mandatory in today's living, it also comes with a problem that challenges authority and democracy of the right to one's protection from hate speech and defamation, among other social wrongs related to fake reporting. Allen et al. (2020) indicate that fake news is now omnipresent today in online platforms. People have to find ways of navigating the world knowing that fake news may never be eliminated. Despite having been a social issue for a long time, institutions put in place to address the issue seem to be failing at their role. Numerous suggestions have been presented in an attempt to mitigate the trends of fake news today, but most are not plausible. One plausible recommendation to deal with the social problem of fake news is to promote technologies that identify fake news for online users, flagging them and notifying the user not to consume information from these sites. Such technologies could include crowdsourcing online and related algorithms to flag peddlers of fake news. Educating people on how to identify fake news themselves, and think critically in their consumption of the same, is the most plausible recommended solution to this social problem.

**The Context and Salience of Fake News**

A study by Burkhardt (2017) labeled the modern age of fake news as the 'era of misinformed society.' such labels relating to the spread of phony news point to how severe the problem is and how dire the need for a lasting solution is. Therefore, to understand why fake news is a social problem, the author must present the context and salience of fake news today.

Today, the outcomes of such public affairs, such as political affairs, are often dictated by popular ideas and news media. Whether the information is derived by legitimate means or disseminated by legitimate media organizations is often not the primary focus of the information consumers. Often, news media organizations will alter facts and information to tailor it to their financial needs regarding political support. In his article, Rutenberg (2018) presented that news media are prone to manipulation, where influential political leaders bribe or pressure them to manage the truth and how they reported to the public. Often, this fake news will be concealing the truth about leaders that would be detrimental to their careers if it came out to the public. For instance, before his election, former president of the United States, Donald Trump, pressured and financially bribed media houses to report skewed information about him, which eventually informed the decision of people who voted for him to win. Suppose a majority of the people in the society can be influenced by news media, even when the reporting is fake news. In that case, society is vulnerable, and the outcome of decisions informed by fake news is often detrimental.

The truth of fake news is very evident on the world's largest internet search engine, Google. When one seeks answers to such straightforward answers as who the first president of America was, they are not clearly forthcoming since there are numerous answers to the question, most of which are untrue. Innumerable people have published their opinions about facts that make it hard for people in society to learn the truth about simple matters. According to Gray (2017), we currently live in a world that has normalized the existence of 'alternative facts’ even when the alternatives are false information. With the power that the internet has accorded to individuals, fake news peddlers have become the more influential groups, and it is not uncommon for a site that reports fake news to accuse mainstream media of lying when it is they who are reporting the actual facts (Gray, 2017; Celliers & Hattingh, 2020).

Fake news also occurs because it often supports most misconceptions people already hold about something. People will often spend their free time consuming online information that they agree with and shun ideas or reports that speak on things they do not support. With the modem social media and internet algorithms, fake news is often recommended to people in line with the things they associate most with. As a result, people acquire confirmation bias from these fake news pieces and support the spread of this news as opposed to legitimate sources of information. People do not like to be wrong, and more often than not, fake news supports their ideologies since it is often derived from other people who hold similar stands (Celliers & Hattingh, 2020).

**Appraisal of Existing Alternatives to Dealing with Fake News**

The issues of fake news are still a big problem in today's society, despite the numerous measures that have been put in place to mitigate the problem. Groups of people often generate propaganda and fake news for economic gain, and thus, it is often difficult to bring them down since they are businesses for people. One of the most common solutions that have been put in place is the legislation that requires major media companies and social platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to tune out the content on their platform to protect consumers from wrong and fake information. In line with these legal requirements, software and applications to find rumors and propaganda in the media have been developed. However, putting pressure on media and social media companies is not a plausible solution. Even though the solution is used on the surface where posting some information is illegal in some states, businesses such as Facebook will still favor news that draws traffic to their platform and bring in more revenue. Therefore, if the fake news sites are giving more money to these companies, these solutions end up being futile (Chavern, 2019).

Fake news is deep-rooted in society. Wrong information being reported has become as lucrative a business as mainstream media. The bodies that benefit from it are bent on ensuring that the solutions to the problem do not last. According to Collins et al. (2020), the primary enemies of the solutions to Fake news are the news media institutions themselves. The plausible solution to this problem does not involve the media being pressured into not reporting the fake news but sensitizing people to reduce their consumption of the same to reduce the dissemination of fake news entirely.

**Proposed Recommendation**

Governments have employed crackdowns against fake news perpetrators on social media and mainstream media in the past. Yet, these efforts have not borne fruit. Moreover, legislation against fake news development has not been effective in mitigating the problem. The solution to this problem lies in the development of algorithms that identify and flag fake news and add to the existing solutions another facet. The current approach needs to be complemented with educating the public on the effects of fake news on society and how they can help mitigate the problem by educating them on critical thinking and self-analysis of fake news.

The existing solutions to fake news as a societal problem are technical. They do not address or involve the primary recipients, and the targets of fake news spread: the people. The recommended solution is to include digital literacy and critical thinking in relation to fake news into curriculums in schools to ensure that people are savvy in identifying and dealing with sites reporting fake news. Even though this solution would take years to end the problem successfully, it is a significantly better solution than the existing approaches. The digital age needs a critically aware consumer, and the absence of this is what the spread of fake news is preying on in today’s society (Molina et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2020). Giving young people the tools needed for them to think critically is vital to ensuring that the problem of fake news is being addressed in the short term and in the long term, in a way that it will not be a problem to the societies of the future.

**Conclusion**

The solution recommended for this social problem will have implications on both the legislative process and curriculums in states' education system in the United States. Therefore, it is one that will require the consultation of various policymakers in the wake of its implementation. However, based on the reviews of fake news origins, the people affected, and the expected long-term outcomes of the same on the society, it is possible to conclude that an educated society is the best weapon in the long term and eventual fight in the mitigation of fake news.

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