

Written Representation 30

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To whom it may concern,

In answering the call for the general public to contribute their views and suggestions on the tackling of "fake news", I have written a blog post which briefly highlights my concerns of legislation and what, in my opinion, would be a more effective way of tackling the issue. My blog post can be found here, hope the relevant authority will find it useful.

[Combating Lies and Half-Truths – Musings on the Future](#)

Regards,
Wilson

MUSINGS ON THE FUTURE

FEBRUARY 17, 2018 BY WILSON

Combating Lies and Half-Truths

Disinformation Awakening

The Internet has encouraged the free flow and exchange of knowledge and information, accelerating innovation and enlightening a whole generation of people. On the flip side, false or inaccurate information propagates as easily. Save for investing time to validate the information, it is difficult for the layman to discern the credibility of the information they read. With the political shakeups happening around the world in recent years, politicians are wising up to the impact of disinformation, not just on politics, but also national security. Such is the severity that it was even one of the topics in the recently held World Economic Forum.

Futility of Legislation

Some countries are considering legislation to tackle this problem of "fake news". That has always been the obvious solution to national problems. But would they really be effective in this case?

SLOWNESS TO ADAPT

Laws are cast in stone, but technology and innovation adapts and evolves around legal roadblocks. It is not feasible to introduce more legislation to try to keep up with

the fluid nature of the Internet. Furthermore, putting the law on paper is one thing, but to enforce it would be both challenging and costly.

CROSS-BORDER COMPLICATIONS

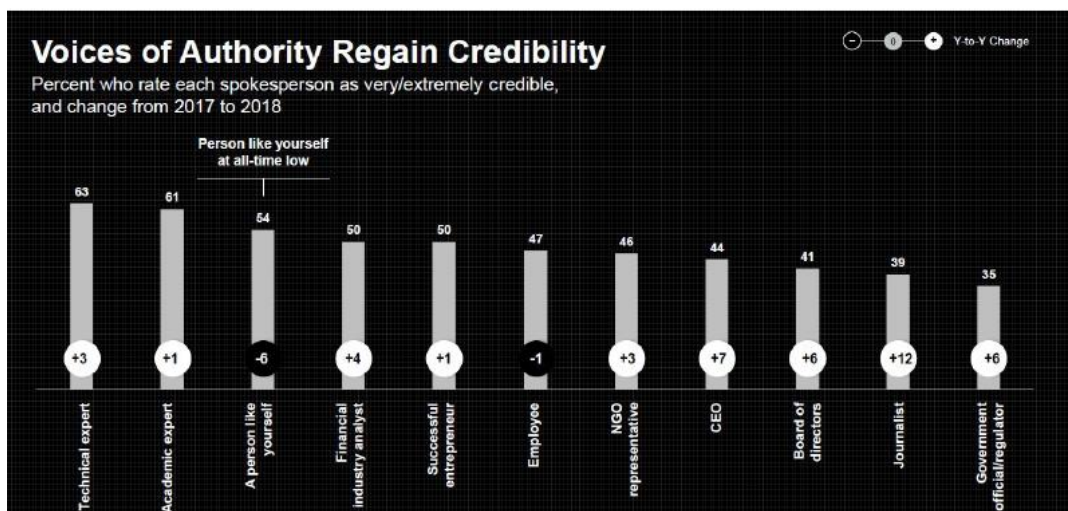
Fake news is a global problem that should be tackled at a global platform. If every country were to draft their own legislation, there would inevitably be duplication of efforts, and could also result in contradictory decisions. How would states, much less countries, reconcile among themselves what is fake and what isn't? What is deemed as fake to one government may be truth to another, due to their inherent bias. Is information only as fake as the government deems it?

CRUTCH MENTALITY

More legislation would result in the dumbing down of the people's ability to distill facts from lies or half-truths, depending instead on their governments to dictate what information is fit for their consumption. This notion may appeal to authoritarian systems, but surely that is not what we aspire to in democratic and progressive nations that value diversity and encourage critical thinking.

TRUST ISSUES

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report identifies 2018 as the year of the Battle for Truth. Between NGOs, Businesses, Government and Media, the latter two has traditionally garnered the least trust. Furthermore, despite an increase in perceived credibility of authoritative voices for 2018, they remain significantly distrusted, especially when these voices come from the government.



With such credibility scores, it would be naive for governments to think that any legislation or censorship would help with curbing fake news. Such mechanisms could easily become convenient tools for governments to silence dissenting voices, and would ultimately work against them as readers turn towards other sources for alternative views.

Unsurprisingly, technical and academic experts garner the most trust, and perhaps therein lies the solution.

Community-Based Solutions

Neither content producers nor social media platforms can be relied upon to moderate themselves as they stand to gain from viral and attention-grabbing news. Considering the distrust of governments, perhaps it is best that policing be done by the community and grassroots, since they stand to lose the most from the propagation of fake news.

BROWSER PLUG-INS

Browser plugins like B.S. Detector and Open Mind aim to help identify fake news sites or articles by flagging them based off a blacklist. Open Mind is particularly interesting as it also hopes to increase the readers' exposure to alternative viewpoints by analysing their reading patterns. However, being browser-plugins, they require readers to pro-actively seek out and install them, which limits their coverage and effectiveness.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

More recently, there have been attempts to use Artificial Intelligence to aid in the war against fake news by providing a tool that helps content platforms fact-check their sources. However, it would also have limited effectiveness as it requires companies to purchase a product or service.

CROWD-SOURCING

In my opinion, we could take the cue from our bodies' immune system, by allowing the Internet to organically evolve its own disinformation defense system. Since technical and academic experts garner the most trust as shown earlier, it would be useful to engage them to partake openly on the assessment of news sources.

The mechanism for implementing this could be similar to Quora, a question-and-answer site where questions are posed and answered by others in an open manner. In this case, instead of posing questions, subject matter experts would comment on either a particular sentence of an article, the article itself, or entire website.

By incorporating the necessary tools into web browsers (authorities would have to work with browser makers to incorporate them as a standard feature), subject experts could tag (e.g. fake, satire, bias, rumour) artifacts which they believe are non-factual or suspect, providing their comments and links to other resources that provide opposing views. These could themselves be disputed or corroborated by other readers, who would provide links to their own resources, eventually forming a graph of relationships between related articles.

Controversial artifacts would attract more tags, and could be visually flagged with colours or icons. With the aid of these visual indicators, casual readers would be able to quickly assess the credibility of a website or article. They could also contribute to the discourse via voting, further strengthening or weakening the strength of its classification.

The credibility rating of the artifact could then be made to correlate with its ad revenue or search result ranking, incentivising content producers to produce credible news.

Conclusion

Legislation would only address the problem locally, and even then would be too narrow in scope and ultimately ineffective. Governments must resist the urge to resort to legislation as a quick-and-dirty solution.

A global problem needs to be tackled on a global level, since facts are universal. A crowd-sourced expert system would be more robust and responsive to the dynamics of the Internet, without requiring governments to play an active role in it.

F A K E N E W S , P O L I T I C S