

## *New Media and Misinformation: The Tools We Need To Change Media Forever*

One of the most important skills to survive in the ever-changing revolution of the new media, which is means of mass communication using digital technologies, is media literacy. This covers the practices that allow people to access, critically evaluate, and create or manipulate media. Understanding complex concepts, and knowing how to sway public opinion with a simple phrasing of words can give power to whomever is behind this, power that can be used in good or bad ways. A common form of this bad power is what has been deemed “fake news”, or news consisting of conscious disinformation or hoaxes spread through traditional news media outlets or online social media platforms. While new media will never be completely free of misinformation, global steps such as: the discontinuation of bots and citizen journalism, and the review of security, access and privacy will drastically improve the market to become media literate, and help the layperson determine fact from “fake news”.

Bots, autonomous programs on a network specifically designed to interact with systems or users, help spread misinformation, “The spread of fake news by social bots is possible due the capabilities that bots have to search and retrieve non-curated information (information that has not been validated yet) on the web. Bots in social media sites post continuously, spreading non-curated content using trending topics and hashtags as the main strategies to reach a broader audience which, in many cases, further helps the propagation of the fake news. So bots spread fake news in two ways: They keep “saying” or tweeting fake news items, and they use the same pieces of false information to reply or to comment on the postings of real social media users” (How Is Fake News Spread?, Center for Information Technology and Society). They also keep the information popular on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. “According to an estimate in 2017, there were 23 million bots on Twitter (around 8.5% of all accounts), 140 million bots on Facebook (up to 5.5% of all accounts), and around 27 million bots on Instagram (8.2% of all the accounts). A hundred and ninety million bots on just three social media platforms - more than half the number of people who live in the entire USA!” (How Is Fake News Spread?, CiTS). With the discontinuation of the usage of bots, a hundred and ninety million accounts, all of which could be spreading

misinformation, will be removed from circulation of media platforms and the information these fake accounts share will stop surfacing as much, therefore making these platforms more trustworthy and safe. However, not all misinformation is spread by bots, and instead by real humans.

With the evolution of the media and the channels through which it is distributed and accessed, journalism has been adapted into a “skill”, rather than the difficult career it once was. This can partly be attributed to citizen journalism: the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news by the general public. “The general public needs reporters who help them make sense of complicated developments and deal with the ever-changing nature of social, economic, and political events” (How To Combat Fake News and Disinformation, Brookings). More and more turn to the internet for news everyday, rather than trusted reporters from newspapers or paper articles, as the paper news industry is rapidly declining. “Due to the emergence of new media, the readership of traditional media is declining. Public participation in the news process leads to independent online journalism. Both the markets and the technologies are growing steadily and at the same time, the availability of media services has grown. In fact, most people today use Facebook, blogs, and Twitter as their primary source of information and news” (The Impact Of Citizen Journalism, The Circular). Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, often looked at for information and news, have articles and posts by citizen journalists that are not fact-checked. These articles and posts are circulated throughout the internet, aforementioned with bots, can gain thousands to millions of views, and can be very persuasive. A solution to this is the closer look into security, access and privacy.

Security, access, and privacy are some of the most important aspects of media platforms to individual users. Companies like Facebook have fact-checking algorithms, but it has proved to be very ineffective, so other roads have to be taken. “Data privacy may offer a more precise solution. Data privacy laws like the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) are not intended to address harmful speech. Their main goal is giving users greater control over their personal data, allowing people to check what data has been stored, opt out of data sharing, or erase their data entirely. Personal data generally includes information

directly or indirectly linking accounts to real-life individuals, like demographic characteristics, political beliefs, or biometric data. By limiting access to the information that enables personalized ad targeting and polarization loops, data privacy laws can render disinformation a weapon without a target. Absent the detailed data on users' political beliefs, age, location, and gender that currently guides ads and suggested content, disinformation has a higher chance of being lost in the noise" (How Data Privacy Laws Can Fight Fake News). It has been proven that these data privacy laws have some effect in drowning out the noise of misinformation, which can be one of the most helpful tools in creating a media that is efficient and correct.

Misinformation has become so sophisticated, making it especially problematic in the political world. In order to maintain a healthy relationship, the government, business owners, and consumers of media need to work together to solve the problems brought by misinformation in new media. The news media outlets need to provide only the highest quality journalism, business owners need to invest in tools that identify misinformation, stop offering incentives to those who can profit from misinformation spreading, and the world needs to return to an age without misinformation. Until then, the general public, business owners, company CEOs, and even the President, have no feasible way to keep themselves informed of the whole truth.

## Citations

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