**Forum:** General Assembly 6th Committee — Legal

**Issue:** Combating the Dissemination of So Called “Fake News” Via the Internet and Social Media Sites

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Introduction

The concept of fake news has become a hot topic recently in response to internet publications circulating on social media platforms of dubious factual content. However, fake news is a concept known since the earliest days of printing. In the 16th and 17th centuries there were pamphlets printed offering detailed accounts of monstrous beasts. [5] In the 19th century, cheap newsprint and improved presses allowed newspapers to expand their reach dramatically. In the early 2000s, the growth of online news prompted a new set of concerns like the formation of “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles” [1]. Most recently, the focus of concern has shifted to social media. Because of the abundance of mediums through which people can get information and the ease with which anyone can spontaneously share information currently, the media is facing a crisis of fake news.

Definition of Key Terms

Fake News

‘Fake News’ is a term defined as false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting. It is frequently used to describe a political story which is seen as damaging to an agency, entity or person. [2] Stories classified as fake news can generally be put into five categories: Intentionally deceptive, jokes taken at face value, large-scale hoaxes, slanted reporting of real facts and stories where the ‘truth’ is contentious.

History

Bending the truth for political gain is certainly nothing new - it’s propaganda, and the record of its use stretches back to ancient times. It then continued to the 19th century and then fuelled by mass communication grew in scale during the turmoil of the 20th centuries in a series of major ideological struggles. The creation of social networks allowed people to exchange information on a much greater scale than ever before, while publishing platforms allowed anyone to create a dynamic website with ease.In recent years, small groups of people are taking advantage of social media interaction to make money by advertising. [6]

Key Issues

The fundamental issue with fake news is that lies and misinformation is presented as being entirely factual. As democracy relies on the opinions of voters, information and its accuracy are of vital importance. Moreover, the confusion fake news creates makes all news seem equally unbelievable. The danger of this situation is that it could cause individuals to ignore journalism all-together as they don’t feel they can trust it. [3][4] This gives an opportunity for populists to gain support by presenting themselves as a trustworthy source and using the media as scapegoats to prove that they are needed to restore order. Then the outspoken nature of populists results in polarization of the people that prompts even more fake news, leading to an ever-growing problem. This, in conjunction with populist rhetoric, represents a threat to human rights.

Many of the issues with fake news is the Philippines and specifically the case of Leila de Lima. Filipinos spend more time on social media per day than any other nationality and have slow and very expensive internet connection. This mean that they see the headlines but do not read the articles due to the cost attached. The confusion about what is real and fake has caused the populist president to become the only source of truth for his supporters.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Social Media**

Social media platforms such as Facebook and google started putting in place means to combat fake news in 2016 as a result of the phenomenon becoming globally known.

**UN**

United Nations and key regional human rights experts have called on State actors to ensure that they disseminate reliable and trustworthy information, including about matters of public interest, such as the economy, public health, security and the environment. [11]

**Russia**

Zakharova, the spokeswoman for Russia, who has allegedly invested significant resources in organized and systematic distribution of fake news on an industrial state and has been accused of influencing the U.S election, had this to say at the 39th session of the COI; “Our delegation proposes the UN to define a strategy for battling fake news and disinformation. Russia will be ready to fully support this initiative which is extremely important for developing a healthy environment for news reporting.”

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

**Facebook and Google**

Facebook is the enlisting the help of the International Fact Checking Network(IFCN) to flag fake news. However, there is nothing stopping the fake news from being posted and spread in the first place - and perhaps quite widely before being tagged. Even when accurately labelled it does little to change the minds of people who already reject reporting by mainstream news sources in favour of fringe conspiracy sites. Moreover, Human beings have a tendency to only focus on ideas that confirm existing beliefs and reject those ideas that contradict those beliefs. [8]

Journalism non-profit First Draft News working with Google and Facebook to incorporate code to stop the spread of fake news. However, human language and news stories are complicated in ways that computers have difficulty dealing with, and any automated method of fact checking risks reflecting the biases of the programmers who created it. [9]

In November, Google and Facebook announced moves to restrict advertisements on fake news stories. But fake news producers are quick to adapt to platform rule changes. [10]

**Legislations**

Germany unveiled a landmark social-media bill that would compel large outlets to rapidly remove fake news or face fines as high as 50 million euros. However, the highly anticipated draft bill is also highly contentious, with critics denouncing it as a curb on free speech.

Possible Solutions

One of the major reasons fake news is spread is the publics inability to distinguish fact from fiction. [7] One possible solution is to add more courses on critical thinking in the school curriculum. A population less susceptible to false news stories would in turn seek news content from legitimate news outlets.

Another possible solution is to give incentives to the traditional media outlets to promote qualitative journalism based on facts, such as grants provided for research purposes.

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