



Concept

#Fakenews: innocuous or intolerable?

Wednesday 15 – Friday 17 February 2017 | WP1542

Context

“FAKE NEWS – A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!,” Donald Trump [tweeted](#) recently. Just as the American presidential campaign came to a close, the term “fake news” opened a new front in perennial debates over journalistic practices and ethics, government control and censorship, and the pervasive role of social media and search in today’s public sphere. But what exactly is “fake news”? How does it vary, if at all, from propaganda, disinformation, misinformation, and that seemingly ancient practice, spin? In what ways might it threaten the credibility of journalism and, broader yet, the vitality of public space in democratic societies? Do today’s dilemmas over it differ markedly from information wars past generations have faced?

This proposed [Wilton Park](#) meeting will bring together key stakeholders to examine “fake news” and explore these questions that have become critical to journalism and public debate in 2017. We aim to generate critical conversations and understanding at all levels: scope and meaning of the term, nature and targets of the threat, consequences of the public concern over “fake news,” approaches to alleviate its prevalence, standards of journalism and standards of law, and much else. While we do not expect to reach conclusions on all issues, we aim to foster a common vocabulary for thinking through “fake news”, generate a research and reporting agenda from which participants and others may wish to draw, and consider whether there is value in developing a framework to address the issue at a time of global threat to freedom of expression.

Key issues

The topics of discussion would reflect the main issues and challenges associated with the rise of “fake news” and address, at a minimum, the following questions in often overlapping categories:

- **Definition and scope:** What is “fake news”? How can people identify it? What actors produce it? Is it more about how content is produced or how it is interpreted by the individual? Can there be a universal understanding of what constitutes “fake news”?
- **Understanding “fake news”:** What are the main risks, threats and problems associated with “fake news”? Can fake news be looked at as a spectrum ranging from state propaganda to non-factual opinion? How are behavioural, opinion and voting patterns influenced by news and information?
- **The actors:** What role do journalists, the media, social media / tech companies and governments (among others) play in the era of “fake news”? What kinds of

In association with:

approaches are they thinking about to deal with it, if indeed they see it as a problem? What is the general public's role in confronting it? Are any of these actors exacerbating the problem? Are any of these actors working to regulate fake news?

- **Implications and consequences:** How serious is the problem of fake news? What are the main implications of fake news stories? How will fake news affect the protection and promotion of freedom of expression? How does the criminalisation of 'spreading false news,' common in authoritarian countries, shed light on the current debate?
- **Where does the responsibility lie?** Who/what is responsible for the production and dissemination of fake news? Should social media / tech companies be responsible for assessing, regulating, or taking down fake content posted on their platforms? Do they have the tools to do it? Is tech part of the answer?
- **Addressing 'fake news':** Should "fake" content be regulated in the digital era? Is fake news identifiable using algorithms?
- **What needs to be done?** Does fake news require a normative, or legal, response? A policy one? Journalistic? An academic agenda? An international normative one, such as through the mechanisms of the UN and other organisations? At what point should governments become involved? Is there a need for an international response? What are the next steps?

Goal and objectives

Wilton Park events, well-known worldwide for their depth and rigor, depend upon the participation of leading experts in the retreat environment of a relaxed but stately country manor 1.5 hours from London. With the exception of a small number of keynote talks or presentations, our discussion will revolve around roundtable formats led by participants (who commit to attending the full event). In seeking to address the issue of 'fake news' and explore its role in the 21st Century this meeting aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To build and engage an international network of experts from a cross section of policy and legal and geographic backgrounds and industry to promote informed decision making, responsible behaviour and to share best practice and ideas.
- To identify areas where greater cooperation is possible across industries both nationally and internationally.
- To explore options for understanding, identifying and addressing the issues of fake news in a manner that respects and protects freedom of expression and other human rights.

Who will attend

- This meeting will be a 48 hour, three day two night event at Wilton Park. Participation will consist of around thirty leading experts from the private internet sector, especially those with major social and search business; news media outlets, journalists and bloggers; civil society organisations; academics; leaders from international organisations, and key philanthropic donors.

Funding

This meeting is being supported by a mixture of private, philanthropic and statutory donors.

Follow up arrangements

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