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Issue:
Combating fake news regarding climate change

Forum:
European Council (EuCo)

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Introduction

There are many ways to deceive people. Examples being xaggeration, lying, hypocrisy and promising. These are the more conventional ones, and a new way of deceiving people has been added to the list: fake news.

Fake news is a modern tool used by many companies, governments, etc. to create benefit for themselves regarding public and global matters. Fixing the public opinion on themselves, legitimizing their actions in the eyes of others and removing some 'obstacles' that prevent them from actualizing their intents are only some of the reasons why people use fake news.

There are many billon-dollar companies in the world, which have the purposes of profiting more, earning more, investing more, and eliminating their 'enemy' companies. These purposes require reducing the costs, and therefore, reducing the attention paid to the environment, as this needs a lot of money which can be used for previously stated purposes if not used for protecting the environment.

The acts of billion-dollar companies (oil and energy companies for example) cause climate change to get even more intense than it is. And, there is much fake news regarding climate change since climate change is a widely known topic that can easily attract attention from the public, as seen in the Fridays for Future movement and Greta Thunberg examples (who was selected the "Times Person of the Year 2019").

Throughout this chair report, the history of fake news, the reasons behind it, the tactics used, and some possible ways of solutions will be explained in detail.

Definition of Key Terms

Climate change
Climate change is the long-term shift in Earth's weather patterns and average temperature. Since the mid-1800s, with increasing CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions, climate change has become a more urgent issue with more intense effects. Among these effects, many extreme weather conditions' such as floods,

tsunamis, etc. becoming more frequent, and already existing natural phenomenons' such as El Nino and La Nina effects starting to have more detrimental effects compared to the previous decades can be listed.

Global warming
There are small differences between global warming and climate change. Global warming refers only to the increase in the temperature of the world and the effects of this increase such as icebergs' and glaciers' melting, wildfires, etc. On the other hand, climate change refers to any kind of change in the weather of the planet. The terms "global warming" and "climate change" are used interchangeably among many people even though the scientific community is aware of the differences between them. And the problem is that this 'synonymity' is often exploited by bodies as it will be explained in the further parts.

Fake news
Fake news is stories created deliberately to misinform people. These stories are usually used to change people's political ideas, create confusion and chaos, influence the readers, etc. Fake news is usually spread through the internet via websites that look trustworthy and reputable.

General Overview

I.the Reason

The Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius, for the first time, noticed and estimated the changes in climate and its impacts, in 1896. 60 years later, a New York Times article was published, clearly stating the long-term and long-lasting environmental effects of accumulating greenhouse gas emissions, especially the one caused by the energy production industry. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is the leading scientific body that researches climate change, was established in 1988.

All of these incidents, combined with many others, resulted in many different treaties to reduce the effects of climate change, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), the Kyoto Protocol (1997), Agreement on the Establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute (2012), the Paris Agreement (2015), etc.

These treaties limited the materials, methods, and techniques that many companies can and do use to make products, to make a profit as complying with these treaties increased the costs a lot. Because of these reasons, there are many attempts to disprove climate change, in many ways such as discrediting the scientists, discrediting the pieces of evidence, etc, as well as creating confusion and chaos among the public regarding the issue via fake news articles.

II.   the Methods Used in General

There are many tactics used in fake news production, and it is believed that they are needed to be known to get a general grasp on the issue.

One of the simplest and most basic techniques is constantly producing new fake news. By doing so, the one gets the chance to create chaos, and make news on his own, so that some "real news" that would be harmful to the party is not paid any attention. Also, with the contradicting pieces of news, doubt is created among public and even real news is sometimes disregarded.

Questioning the credibility of the source of the information is one of the most common tactics as well. By creating a suspicion regarding the source, the expertise and the reliability of the source are doubted, and therefore, the information from that source becomes 'dishonored'. Examples would be the President of the United States of America's tweets regarding large media organs such as CNN and the Times.
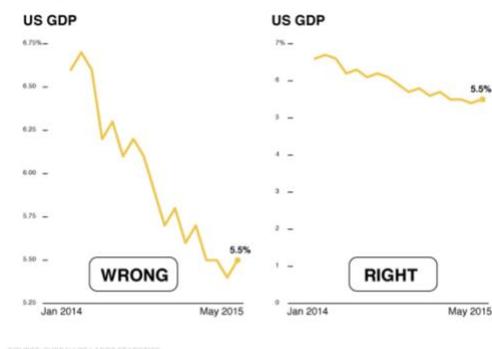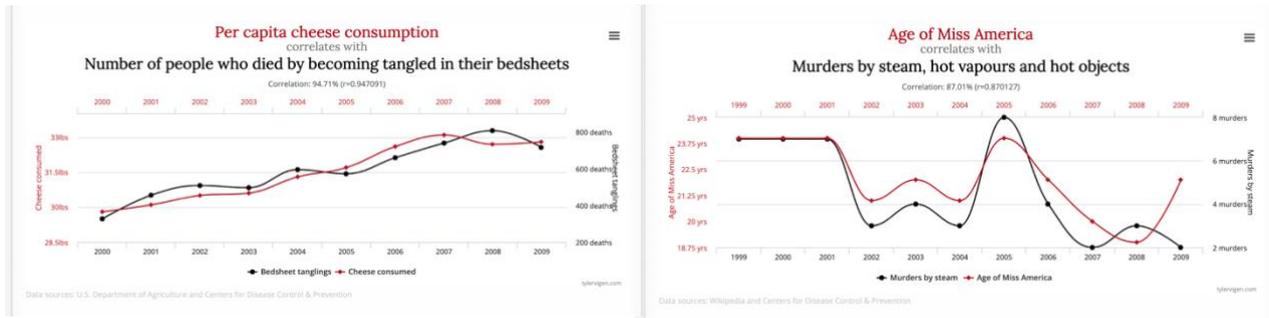

Using aggressive and emotional language is a technique as well. Sometimes, even the arguments that have logic and reason do not attract as much attention as the ones that are based on emotions and sentiments. Ranting gets people to listen, and again, this is used to create chaos and polarization, which takes the focus away from the main issue.

Making something that was not said and that was not done as if it was said and it was done is used in producing fake news. The one can doctor videos, pictures, and other content and then use it for his advantage. For example, by cutting and doctoring a record of an interview, one can make it look like the interviewed person has no answer to the question. Keir Starmer's live interview's being doctored is an example of this.

People crop and play with graphs to emphasize and tell what they want. In this case, the reporters are not actually 'lying', but again, they misinform the public. The best way to explain this would be by using an example. In the 1st chart, the y-axis is conveniently started from 5.25% to dramatize the change in the US's GDP, which drops down. This chart was probably used to criticize the government as they are responsible for the 'drastic' and 'unrecoverable' drop in the GDP of the country. The powerful and emotional language combined with the changed chart creates a powerful message and perfect fake news.

Charts are also used to create causation by showing correlations. However, this is not always the case and as it is often said, "correlation is not causation". For example, murders by steam, hot vapors, and hot objects are not caused by the age of Miss America or per capita, cheese consumption does not cause the number of people who died by becoming tangled in their bedsheets even though one of the graphs below show a clear relationship between them. These charts are examples
of how charts can be used to give incorrect messages.

III.   the Use of These Methods in the case of Climate Change

In this section of the General Overview, how the aforementioned methods are used to create fake news against climate change will be explained, with some examples.

There is multiple fake news about climate change, and scientists spend a lot of time to produce and give rebuttals to them. Some of these include: "Climate change is part of a natural cycle", "Climate change isn't that bad, life will find a way", "The models used to measure climate change are unreliable", "There's no scientific consensus", "There is a big conspiracy"... All these arguments can be disproven by scientific evidence. However, these fake news achieve their purposes and create chaos.

One of the aforementioned 'news', "There's no scientific consensus", is generated due to the principle of impartiality or neutrality. Media institutions often put one climate scientist against one denier, which makes it seem like the scientific community is 50-50, whereas, in reality, it is 98-2.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a body of the UN for assessing the science of climate change. Therefore, it can be considered the highest degree in the scientific discussion of climate change. However, it is not left unattended to conduct its scientific research, and there were many accusations against IPCC. One of those articles accused the IPCC of marginalizing the developing countries in its reports by leaving them too much or too little space in the reports. This accusation does not have any bias as it was made before the "marginalizing" reports were prepared. In the end, all that is left is an institution that treats the countries differently according to their wealth, with a bad reputation.
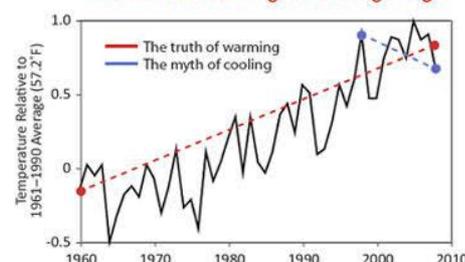
Another very common piece of news regarding climate change suggests that climate change is a conspiracy. Many people from YouTubers to the President of the United States publicly state their disbelief to climate change and their belief that it is a fiction plan. For example, on November 6, 2012, President of the United States Donald Trump tweeted "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive". This tweet creates chaos, creates a common enemy, and produces fake news, etc.

The usage of language in climate change causes another problem. The terms "climate change" and "global warming" are often used as synonyms even though they are different (the differences between them were stated in the Definition of Key Terms section of this chair report). Because of this, many people and media institutions say "We had the most snow since 1998, and people say that the Earth is getting warmer. How is this possible?". Despite being wrong, the argument looks like a compelling one, especially because the term "global warming" is used as much as and instead of climate change. The Guardian, British newspaper, for example, decided to change its vocabulary regarding climate change to relieve the misunderstandings originated from the English language. This might be an important step to prevent misconceptions and misunderstandings.

The uncertainties that are confessed by the scientific community are also exploited by the deniers. There is uncertainty in every scientific measurement, however, in most cases, they are neglected. In the case of climate change, the uncertainties are also neglected as the scientific proof outweighs the uncertainties. However, some people manipulate these uncertainties to justify the news they put forward.

Last (but not least), charts are used to give a wrong understanding to the people regarding climate change. The chart to the right is one of them. If zoomed in a certain way, the chart can be used to support the "myth of cooling" even though in the larger and more correct scale, the "truth of global warming" is seen.

FIGURE 4 The Truth of Warming: No Cooling in Sight

IV.   Pieces of Research on Fake News

As fake news is not an issue that only focuses on climate change but everyday life in general, there have been many pieces of research regarding fake news. Most of the research is on how to prevent and slow down fake news.

In a research conducted by van der Linden, who leads the Social Decision-Making Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, it was found out that 'vaccination' against fake news was an effective tool to prevent the spread of it. In the experiment, the team, led by van der Linden, prepared two documents: a 'truth brief' explaining that 97% of climate scientists agree that humans are responsible for climate change, and a 'counter-brief' revealing the flaws in the Oregon Petition (a petition that falsely claims that 31000 American scientists rejected that climate change was caused by humans), for instance, fewer than 1% of the signatories are climate scientists.

The team surveyed 2000 people and first asked them what percent was the consensus on climate change among climate scientists was; the average was 72%. Then, they divided the group into two and showed one group the truth brief and showed the other group the Oregon Petition. The average rose to 90% among the ones who were in the first group and decreased to 63% in the second. The fake news achieved its purpose and increased the doubt in the public regarding the consensus on climate change factors.

And then the 'inoculation' part of the experiment was conducted. When another group read the truth brief and was told that some groups could try to mislead the

public on issues on climate change, and they later read the Oregon Petition; the average rose to 80%. And another group read the counter brief and were told the same as above, and they later read the Oregon Petition, and the average of the estimated consensus rose to 84%.

Before believing a piece of new information, we usually want to learn the consensus on the topic, the pieces of evidence that support the claim, and the source of the knowledge. In daily life, according to the findings of different research, we accept new information if it *feels* right. The vaccination worked in the research because it slowed down the process of accepting the information and used the knowledge they had previously (that some parties might benefit from fake news on issues such as climate change). People that are not completely involved with climate change usually choose to act according to what is generally accepted by society or choose not to change their previous beliefs on the issue. Thus, it becomes harder to convince individuals on a different perspective on climate change or any other issue.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America (USA)
The President of the United States has always been one of the biggest deniers of climate change. He accused the main bodies that research on the issue; he said that climate change was a hoax (even though he later retracted that statement), prevented many laws regarding the prevention of climate change, so on. Also, the US is the 2nd country that pollutes the world the most after China.

Finland
An anti-fake news initiative was launched by Finland's government in 2014, aimed at teaching residents, students, journalists, and politicians how to counter false information. The initiative combined with Finland's education and justice systems put them in first place among 35 European countries. Many countries around the world such as many European countries and Singapore decided to see how Finland tackles the problem, which, in a sense, is proof that Finland's approach works. More on the system: Finland's fake news initiative

Climate Action Network Europe (CAN)
CAN Europe has many NGOs and 35 European countries as its members, and they provide sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe. CAN Europe is recognized as an established civil society in both EU policy and the UN climate negotiations.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

IPCC was created by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1988. They provide governments with scientific research on climate change, its impacts, future risks, and options for adapting and mitigating climate change. Because of these reasons, it is considered the highest authority on climate change. The IPCC currently has three working groups and a task force, however, new task forces can be established for a specific amount of time to address a specific question or issue.

Timeline of Key Events

1896 — Changes in climate was first noticed

1956 — A New York Times article on the origins of climate change and its long-term impacts

1988 — The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established

2016 — Fake news articles regarding the 2016 US Presidential Elections

December 8, 2016 — Hillary Clinton made a speech where she used the word "fake news" and its 'contribution' to the past elections

January 2017 — Donald Trump uses "Fake news" as an insult to a CNN reporter

2018 — The phrase "fake news" was used over 2 million times on Twitter

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

As the issue is a fairly new one, there are no United Nations resolutions on the issue, however, some governments and non-governmental organisations have tried to take steps towards solving the issue.

Published on November 2, 2018, **the International Declaration on Information and Democracy** provides some guidelines on how the " the global information and communication space" should be. The declaration was adopted unanimously by the members of the Information and Democracy Commission, with many Nobel Peace Prize laureates, journalists, new technology specialists, etc. as its members. The declaration was supported by the head of states or governments of Burkina Faso, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Norway,

Senegal, Switzerland, and Tunisia on the 11th of November. The declaration can be reached from this link: The declaration.

Finland's **anti-fake news initiative** aims to educate the public regarding the common ways of misinformation, deception, and fake news tactics. The government initiated program encourages the people and especially the children to ask more and be more suspicious. It has proved to be effective, and it has attracted a lot of attention from the international community.

Possible Solutions

Education of the people and the public is one of the biggest steps towards a sustainable solution. It is a known fact that as the media literacy rate increases, the effectiveness of fake news decreases. Also, critical thinking skills that can be obtained after a quality education will help to combat fake news.

As seen in the inoculation experiment, being exposed to a 'truth brief' helps to combat against fake news. Because of this reason, fake news tactics, reasons, and benefits could be explained as a part of the education curriculum. Finland's education system and anti-fake news initiative can be taken as an example.

Raising awareness among the public is hard to accomplish just by educating the new generation, the older generation should be educated as well to raise awareness. To this end, billboards, public service ads, etc could be used.

Finally, governments can warn the public on some already-known fake news websites, so that the usage of those sites would decrease. However, to prevent governments from using this for their benefit and to limit freedom of speech, the involvement of a United Nations body seems a prerequisite.

Useful links

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