



Discussing the responsibility of large corporations on the spread of misinformation

Committee: GA3

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Forum: General Assembly 3

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Introduction

Large corporations have the ability to influence many people within the population. Depending on the corporation, they have the ability to easily spread information through different mediums which can lead to a variety of different consequences for many different audiences. These consequences can range from threats to an individual's life, to major societal groups, political parties, and other corporations. The impact that information spread by corporations with large audiences has on the world, with the combination of today's technology which allows all information to be spread in a short time span has its advantages, however, can be extremely dangerous if the information is false, made up, or simply misinterpreted. These large corporations have the ability to spread misinformation very quickly about a variety of topics, and although it may not be the intention of said corporations, these scenarios often have dangerous outcomes. Once misinformation has been spread widely, it is extremely difficult to take back the information. This is why corporations must be extremely careful when releasing certain pieces of information, as not only could they be false, but, they could also be misinterpreted and misused. Once false information has been spread by anyone whether it is a large corporation or an individual, it will likely affect another person in some way. However, the likelihood of a greater consequence of the spread of false information is higher once the misinformation comes from a medium of a great audience - often a large corporation. These effects taking place, as above mentioned, could be detrimental to many, and therefore it is suggested to hold large corporations accountable for the consequences of their spread of misinformation. It may not be clear how large corporations are responsible for the consequences of other people's interpretation of misinformation, and therefore we must ask - how responsible are large corporations for the spread of misinformation?

Definition of Key Terms

Misinformation

Misinformation is essentially any false, inaccurate, incomplete or misleading information which is not spread in order to deceive people. For example, misinformation may be false and inaccurate, however, it was not published with the intent to harm or deceive the public.



Disinformation

Disinformation is any false, inaccurate, incomplete or misleading information which is spread purely with the intention to influence people's opinions or to hide the truth.

Malinformation

Malinformation is true and factual information which is spread with the full intention of harming another person. Examples of this would be private or revealing information which may affect a person's reputation to a smaller or greater extent.

Fake News

False stories and information which are spread on the news, the internet or often on social media, are created to influence other people's opinions.

General Overview

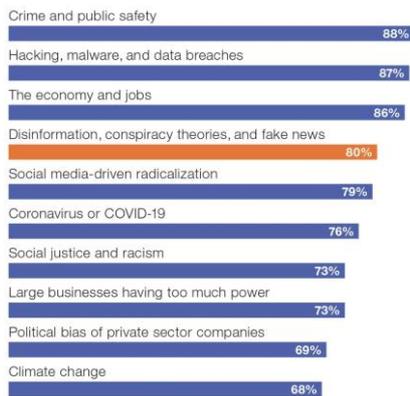
Misinformation

No matter if the information is true or false, modern-day technology still has the ability to spread information across the world in a matter of seconds. The benefit of this is that many people are able to receive important information very quickly and effectively. However, the negative of this is that if the information is biased or false, it can have many negative effects on people's lives.

Misinformation can change people's beliefs, most commonly when it is constantly repeated.

Although repetition is often used in a positive way with conveying information, it also tends to be an extremely negative resource when used to control views of a community. An example of this is related to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, there were countless pieces of misinformation and fake news being spread by not only individuals but also companies and corporations. Articles about Covid-19 being a hoax or the same as the flu prevented people from implementing measures in their daily lives to protect themselves and other people. It is important to note that these examples are only considered misinformation if the sources did not intentionally publish the information to cause harm. With cases like the pandemic, the lack of information about the virus does lead us to believe that these sources are examples of misinformation. Although misinformation means that no harm was intended, in this case, the spread of this perhaps caused people to underestimate the importance of taking treatments or seeking medical help when infected with the virus. This eventually, in the long run, would be a large contributing factor to the large number of deaths and people in critical condition due to the virus.

Industries and misinformation



In the United States, misinformation is considered just behind crime, hacking and the economy within the list of concerns, and is considered more of a priority to many Americans than Covid-19, social justice, racism and climate change. Additionally, companies are just as concerned about the impact that misinformation could have on their stock prices and the business in general. A single piece of misinformation could single-handedly have a massive effect on the success of certain businesses extremely quickly. However, there are definitely

certain industries which are more at risk of being negatively affected by the spread of

misinformation. For businesses,

this risk is correlated with the

likelihood of people believing

negative information about the

business, rather than the contrary.

In fact, according to surveys done

on the topic of the likelihood that people will believe positive or negative news about an industry,

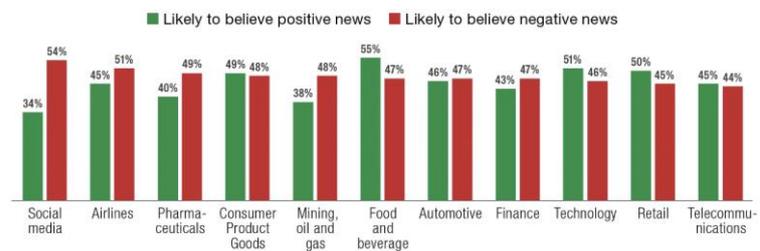
the social media industry has been shown to have the least amount of people believe positive news,

and the most amount of people believe negative news. This means that social media companies are

at risk from misinformation, as well as its wide spread, and therefore companies within this industry

must take steps to protect their name against misinformation, and contribute to the combatting of

misinformation as a whole.



Public trust

In addition to the countless harms that the spread of misinformation by a large corporation has, misinformation spread by companies with large audiences can often breach the trust of the public.

Although due to the fake news being misinformation, the corporation had no such harmful intent of breaking the trust of the public, it is still expected for the public to simply not have trust in these

companies. Once the general public has come to the conclusion that information provided by

corporations is not trustworthy or reliable, this may lead to extremely negative impacts on society

and the economy. As an example, if the public no longer trusts the validity of a good, consumer

confidence may experience a tremendous decline, causing the economy to suffer.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
2016	The government of China criminalized the creation or spreading of fake information undermining the economic and social order of China.
2017	The government of China required social media platforms to refer solely to news articles from registered news media.
1st of January 2018	Germany implemented a law forcing online platforms to remove obviously illegal content such as child pornography, hate speech and fake news.
14th June 2018	Law in Belarus was passed which gives the government the right to prosecute people who spread false information online.
September 2018	The Californian state government passed a law improving the media literacy system in public schools.
September 2018	Two democratic and one republican lawmaker wrote to the director of national intelligence, requesting an investigation on the potential national security dangers caused by disinformation.
17th September 2018	UNESCO published two policy briefs in order to assess the COVID-19 pandemic and the misinformation being spread about the pandemic.
2019	A lawyer in Bahrain was arrested for spreading fake news on social media.
May 2019	In Singapore, a law was passed criminalizing the publication of false information online, including any form of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.



Major Parties Involved

Bahrain

In Bahrain, a person can get arrested when spreading fake news that has the ability to harm on social media. There was a case of this in 2019, where a lawyer in Bahrain was arrested for committing such acts.

Belarus

In Belarus, on June 14th 2018, lawmakers were able to pass an amendment to the media laws of the country. This law essentially gives the government the power to prosecute people who spread false information online. The legislation allows for the blocking of social media and other websites if they breach the law, which is intended to improve the rights of the citizens while boosting state information security.

Germany

Germany has implemented a law on the 1st of January 2018, which forces online platforms to get rid of any obviously illegal content such as child pornography, hate speech and fake news. This must be done within 24 hours, and the consequences for the companies can be fines of up to 50 million euros. Not only is this protecting these companies from facing an overwhelming amount of backlash about their content being potentially harmful, but it also protects German citizens from the negative effects of misinformation.

United States Of America

In September 2018 in California, the state government passed a law improving the media literacy system in public schools in the state. The law originally came from a Stanford student, claiming that most students were unable to distinguish between sponsored content, and news stories. The law essentially requires the Department of Education to provide information on how to decipher trustworthy media from misinformation.

In Washington, lawmakers are debating whether to create a media literacy program in school curriculums. Infact, in Massachusetts, lawmakers have already introduced legislation requiring an education with a focus on media literacy. Additionally in mid-September 2018, two democrats and a republican lawmaker wrote to the director of national intelligence, which requested an investigation on the potential national security dangers caused by deep fake technology. It was stated that the



potential for foreign adversaries to employ deep fake disinformation content against the United States is a prime motive to investigate the case.

Singapore

Singapore passed a law in May 2019, which criminalizes the publication of any false information online, which includes any form of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. This law makes it completely illegal for anyone to spread false statements in Singapore that have a potential threat to the country's security, public tranquility, public safety and international relations. Consequences to the spread of misinformation can be anywhere from heavy fines to jail time, no matter if the misinformation is being spread by an individual or a large corporation. For example, if a threatening individual shares false information, the penalty would be a fine of up to \$37,000, or 5 years of imprisonment. Inauthentic online accounts spreading misinformation leads to a fine of up to \$74,000 and up to 10 years of imprisonment. Large platforms such as Facebook may spread misinformation and face fines of up to \$740,000, as well as jail sentences of up to 10 years.

China

China is extremely outspoken about its zero tolerance for misinformation, and has extremely strict laws against these acts. The government started by criminalizing the creation or spreading of fake information undermining the economic and social order of china, in 2016. The government continued by requiring social media platforms to only refer to news articles from registered news media in 2017. Chinese authorities also took matters into their own hands by making an app which allows people to report potential misinformation. The app allows the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically detect misinformation, and it is suspected that the app broadcasts solely from state-owned media.

The World Health Organization

The World Health Organization has been combating many cases of misinformation spread by any mediums that are related to the public's health and well-being. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they were providing science-based information, while responding to and disproving misinformation. Due to the pandemic being a time of excessive spread of misinformation, the demand for reliable information about Covid-19 was high. Therefore, the World Health Organization established the Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN), which tracked and responded to misinformation related to the virus, and provided the people with reliable information. The United Nations, countries and teams are dispelling and countering misinformation and rumors through any available platforms



and media, such as the radio and social media. Additionally, the Organization's 59 United Nations centers are also contributing to the battle against the misinformation in local languages.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has contributed in the tackling of misinformation by issuing two policy briefs, which assess the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the misinformation, fabrications, lies and disinformation being spread about the situation. The International Center For Journalists (ICFJ) backed the policy briefs made by the UNESCO, which assists journalists working for the “disinfodemic” frontline, and it ensures reliable public health information which is able to reach around the world.

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions for the issue would be to enforce clear punishments for the act of spreading misinformation, disinformation, fake news or malinformation. Perhaps punishments should be more severe for corporations with larger audiences, as they have the ability to influence more people. Since larger corporations with a larger audience can influence more people, as more people rely on the corporation for information, these corporations can be faced with the biggest punishments. This may not only be an incentive for these corporations to not spread misinformation, it could also make smaller corporations with less of an audience more cautious about the information they spread.

Another possible solution which should be implemented in every country is to provide information on how to distinguish between misinformation and reliable information. They have already started doing this in some countries such as Finland and the United States, however this should be vital in every education system. This is because the likelihood of corporations continuing to spread misinformation is quite high unfortunately, and therefore it should be taught on how to tell information and real information apart. Additionally, there should be constant reliable information being released by valid sources about the topics which are often misinformed about. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a lot of misinformation about the situation, which was soon combated by the World Health Organization, which released reliable and true information as a response to the misinformation being spread.

In addition, big corporations and organizations could perhaps spread awareness about the negative effects of misinformation, and how dangerous it can be to many aspects of society. With this, there can be working groups and research teams which check the information being spread by the



organizations, and make sure that the information is reliable and valid. This ensures that the information spread by not only large corporations, but smaller corporations as well is not examples of misinformation. These working groups and research teams could also punish the corporations which have spread misinformation. If the corporation is a state owned business, the state could perhaps be sanctioned as a result of serious cases. Other cases could be fined a certain amount, or sentenced to prison for a decided number of years.

Countries should continue to promote the spread of valid and reliable information, as a way to encourage these corporations to be cautious with the information spread. There could also be working groups started on creating reliable information, which can be spread all across the world. This could be for every individual to have the privilege to receive reliable and trustworthy information about various topics, without the fear of the information being false. Lastly, organizations could spread the importance of public trust to large corporations, as this is at stake when spreading misinformation continuously as a corporation. Corporations could be provided with statistics on how much public trust can benefit a corporation or company, which will be an incentive to be more cautious and careful with the information they spread.

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