Facebook's "fake news" measures: A move toward censorship

George Gallanis
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On Thursday, the global social media giant Facebook announced new measures it said were designed to limit the spread of "fake news" from hoax web sites. The measures, however, are part of a broader corporate media campaign to clamp down on independent and alternative news organizations.

Facebook's announcement is in response to criticism it received from major corporate news outlets such as the *New York Times* alleging that fake news articles shared on the social media platform played a major role in altering the outcome of the 2016 elections. Facebook's CEO and founder, Mark Zuckerberg, first called such allegations "crazy" but has shifted to accommodate the demands.

In a news post on Facebook titled "News Feed FYI: Addressing Hoaxes and Fake News" by Adam Mosseri, vice president of product management, Facebook laid out the four components of its new policy.

Under the headline "Easier Reporting," Facebook will streamline the way people can report an alleged fake news site by implementing new features. Under "Disrupting Financial Incentives for Spammers," Facebook plans to financially hurt "fake news" sites by limiting their ability to purchase ads by making it more difficult to use fake domain sites when posting ads.

This is followed by the measure called "Informed Sharing." If an article is read multiple times and it is not shared afterwards, according to Facebook this may be a sign that the article is "misleading." If Facebook deems this to be the case, then the article will receive a lower ranking on Facebook's newsfeed, making it less visible and available for reading.

In practice, this means that if an article, whether it is telling the truth or not, is not shared, then it may be demoted and become less likely to be read. An analysis by BuzzFeed News found that during the 2016 presidential election campaign, news posts considered fake were in fact more widely shared than those considered real.

Most significant, however, is a policy under the headline "Flagging Stories as Disputed." Facebook will catalog reports of alleged fake news from users, along with other vague data it only describes as "signals," and will send them to a third-party fact checker for arbitration. If a story is deemed fake, then Facebook will mark it as such with an attached explanation as to why. Such stories will then appear lower in Facebook's newsfeed.

Facebook's "third party" reportedly consists of five news organizations acting as fact-checkers. These are: ABC News, Politifact, FactCheck, Snopes and the Associated Press. According to Facebook, these organizations are also signatories of The Poynter Institute's International Fact Checking Code of Principles, which are: 1) "a commitment to nonpartisanship and fairness"; 2) "a commitment to transparency of sources"; 3) "a commitment to transparency of funding and organization"; 4) "a commitment to transparency of methodology"; and 5) "a commitment to open and honest corrections".

Poynter, a self described "global leader in journalism," receives funding from, amongst others, Google, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and most notably the National Endowment for Democracy, a front for the US Department of State that has intervened in elections all over the world in the interest of US imperialism.

The implications of Facebook's moves to limit "fake news" are ominous. It takes place in the context of an effort by the corporate media to create an amalgam between clearly manufactured content and articles and analysis that it brands "Russian propaganda" because

they are critical of US foreign policy.

Last month, the *Washington Post* published an article, "Russian propaganda effort helped spread 'fake news' during election, experts say," which referred to an organization, PropOrNot, that had compiled a list of web sites that are declared to be "peddlers of Russian propaganda." The site includes WikiLeaks, Truthout, Naked Capitalism and similar publications.

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