
17136 Cracking down on fake news

Kevin Rawlinson 11 February 2017 The Guardian

Fake news is “killing people’s minds”, Tim Cook, the head of Apple, has said. The technology boss said firms such as his own needed to create tools that would help stem the spread of falsehoods, without impinging on freedom of speech.

Cook called for governments to lead information campaigns to crack down on fake news. The scourge of falsehoods in mainstream political discourse came to the fore during recent campaigns, during which supporters of each side were accused of promoting misinformation for political gain. “Unfortunately some of the people that are winning are the people that spend their time trying to get the most clicks, not tell the most truth. All of us technology companies need to create tools that diminish the volume of fake news, without stepping on freedom of speech and of the press. He said that a crackdown would mean that “truthful, reliable, non-sensational, deep news outlets will win”.

While instances were seen among supporters of both sides of the recent US election battle, Donald Trump’s campaign was seen by many as a particular beneficiary of fake news reports. And the US president’s team was caught sending aides out to insist that a huge crowd had attended his inauguration, when the evidence showed that a relatively modest audience was there. Other evidence also supported the fact that there was only a relatively small crowd in attendance. Senior aide Kellyanne Conway later characterised the Trump administration’s falsehoods as “alternative facts”.

A study by economists at Stanford and New York Universities published after the election, found that in the run-up to the vote, fake anti-Clinton stories had been shared 30 million times on Facebook, while those favouring her were shared eight million times.

It said: “The average American saw and remembered 0.92 pro-Trump fake news stories and 0.23 pro-Clinton fake news stories, with just over half of those who recalled seeing fake news stories believing them.”

But it called into question the power of fake news reports to alter the outcome of the election, saying that, “for fake news to have changed the outcome of the election, a single article would need to have had the same persuasive effect as 36 television campaign ads”.

Nevertheless, Tim Cook has demanded action to decrease the reach of fake news. He said: “ There has to be a massive campaign. It seems as if a new course is required for the modern, digital kid.