

# Facebook steps up attempts to combat 'fake news' in wake of US election controversy

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg outlined in a blog post on 18 November 2016 a number of projects taking place to combat 'fake news' on the site, following widespread criticism that such misinformation is allowed to spread freely on the network, possibly distorting public perception and some suggest influencing the outcome of the US Presidential election.

Facebook and Google have both announced measures aimed at stopping the spread of fake news on the internet, in the wake of the controversy around the US Presidential election, by restricting advertising revenues. Facebook has updated its Audience Network policy to more clearly explain that the ban on deceptive and misleading content applies to fake news, and Google has stated that it will prevent websites that misrepresent content from using its AdSense network.

"Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act likely immunises platforms such as Facebook and Google from any liability for carrying such so-called 'fake news.' However, the Washington Post reported that many of these fake news stories originated in Eastern Europe and were created solely for the purpose of driving traffic and selling ads, i.e., they were 'clickbait.' In other words, the creators of the fake news were agnostic as to politics. They simply created inflammatory content in order to sell ads deceptively," said Christopher A. Cole, Partner at Crowell & Moring. In August, Facebook announced the creation of a new algorithm to reduce misleading headlines that appear in a user's News Feed, so-called 'click-bait.'

It's fair to say that if websites could be held liable for everything users post, the internet as we know it today could

not exist, explains Gonzalo E. Mon, Partner at Kelley Drye & Warren LLP. "Congress recognised that, and responded with Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. I think Section 230 strikes the right balance, even if the results aren't always perfect," adds Mon. "If platforms could be held liable for what other companies or people post, I fear that would have far-reaching and chilling effects. The platforms simply don't have the bandwidth to review everything that is created or posted by someone else. Of course, if the platforms played some role in the creation or development of the fake content, they could be held responsible."

The projects already underway at Facebook include: stronger detection to improve the ability to classify misinformation; making it easier for people to report stories as fake; third party verification; exploring labelling stories that have been flagged as false and showing warnings when people read or share them; raising the bar for stories that appear in related articles; and disrupting fake news economics with ads policies and better ad farm detection. Zuckerberg comments that "Some of these ideas will work well, and some will not. But I want you to know that we have always taken this seriously, we understand how important the issue is for our community and we are committed to getting this right."