

Who benefits from using the term 'fake news'?



*'Fake news' is a topic that dominates many current debates in academia, **politics**, and the tech world. In his new media policy brief **'Fake news : public policy responses'**, **Damian Tambini** illustrates the challenges of finding regulatory solutions to the 'fake news' phenomenon. The following excerpt from the brief clarifies who exactly benefits from using the term 'fake news'.*

Why have politicians and the media suddenly started talking about fake news? It is worth asking who benefits from using this concept. I would say there are three main beneficiaries:

- The new populists benefit because they use the notion of "fake news" to undermine legitimate opposition, and resist fourth estate accountability. The Donald Trump administration in the US uses the term fake news in a blanket way to describe news content it disagrees with. This approach becomes more serious and alarming when it is used to justify new forms of media regulation including restricting access of certain media to news events and information.
- Historical losers. Those on the wrong side of recent historical events claim that political changes result from misinformation. Both the referendum vote and the Trump victory have been blamed on 'fake news'. Some even go so far as to suggest that a result based on misinformation is not legitimate.
- Legacy media. At the very least, the established "mainstream media" want to discredit the 'wisdom of crowds' and aim for a return to trusted news brands. The media benefit from the "fake news crisis" in their long term battle with the new tech intermediaries. By claiming that the intermediaries (mainly Facebook and Google) are in fact acting as media, and doing so irresponsibly, with none of the obligations that traditional media have taken on, they can seek to get them regulated as such, and recoup lost ad revenue.

All three of these constituencies have a claim to a grain of truth about fake news, and have forced it onto the agenda. It should also be acknowledged that the historical circumstances of 2016-2017 have been rather particular: a US election and an EU referendum involving very polarized choices in the context of a collapse of deference. So many promoting the concept of fake news have an axe to grind, but at the same time it cannot be denied that structural changes in media systems are transforming the procedures for verifying and distributing news.

You can read the whole policy brief 'Fake news: public policy responses' [here](#).

This post gives the views of the author and does not represent the position of the LSE Media Policy Project blog, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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