

The rise of left-wing, anti-Trump fake news

By BBC Trending

Going in-depth on social media

15 April 2017



Since the US election presidential race, fact checking websites report what seems like an increase in anti-Trump, 'liberal fake news'.

The fact-checking site **Snopes** told **BBC Trending radio** that in the past week, for example, they have debunked many more anti-Republican party stories than pro-Republican ones.

One example of an incorrect story is the unflattering, digitally-manipulated image, which suggested that US President Donald Trump had diarrhoea during a recent golf outing.

It's hard to gather definitive data on the political bias in fake news stories, so the evidence for a rise in 'liberal fake news' is essentially anecdotal. But a recent study did effectively debunk the stereotype that fake news tends to be shared more by uneducated people or those with right-leaning politics, as compared to other groups.

"Fascinating and frightening"

"It [fake news] affects both the right and the left. It affects educated and uneducated. So the stereotypes of it being simply right-wing and simply uneducated are 100% not true," says Jeff Green, who is the CEO of Trade Desk, an internet advertising company that was recently commissioned by American TV channel CBS to investigate who is reading and sharing fake news online.

His company did this by initially putting out two fake news stories - one from the left which falsely stated police had raided a protestors camp at Standing Rock and burnt it down, and the other from a right-wing website about false claims there was a congressional plot to oust Donald Trump.

Note: This document has been edited.



By using specialist software, the company's researchers then followed readers' online behaviour to get an idea of who and where they were.

"On the left if you're consuming fake news you're 34 times more likely than the general population to be a college graduate," says Green.

If you're on the right, he says, you're 18 times more likely than the general population to be in the top 20 percent of income earners.

And the study revealed another disturbing trend: the more you consume fake news, the more likely you are to vote. It's "fascinating and frightening at the same time," says Green.

Confirmation bias

One of the reasons for the growth in liberal fake news is financial.

"Those people who generate this kind of fake news don't care about politics. They just care about generating clicks, and so sometimes they generate similar messages for the right and the left," says Filippo Menczer, a professor of Informatics and Computer Science at Indiana University who runs the fake news tracking site Hoaxy.

As for where the market for liberal fake news comes from, according to Claire Wardle, who is a research director at First Draft - a non-profit organisation which is looking for solutions around trust and truth in the digital age - the appetite stems from so-called confirmation bias.

"People like to share information that makes them feel good, " she says.

"Many people on the left right now are feeling overwhelmed and fearful and unsure of what's going to happen next. While they're scrolling through their information feeds at speed on small mobile phones their critical functions are not kicking in, and they're seeing information that makes them feel immediately connected with other people who think similarly to them. And without doing the usual checks that they would do, they're sharing and very quickly passing on similarly false and problematic content that we were seeing before the election."



Brooke Binkowski, who is managing editor at Snopes website, warns newsreaders to stay aware of the emotions they feel when consuming content.

"If you are a newsreader or someone who likes reading news but you don't know immediately what may or may not be fake, ask yourself by reading the headline, what emotions do I feel? Am I really angry, scared, frustrated, do I want to share this to tell everybody what's going on? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then check your sources."