24.150 Liberalism, Toleration, and Freedom of Speech, Fall 2023

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UCLA Faculty Against Terror

Note: This letter is now reported on in the press at the Jewish Journal (https://jewishjournal.com/news/365107/nearly-300-ucla-faculty-members-call-on-university-to-condemn-hamas-terror-attack-anti-israel-rallies-on-campus/) and the Hill (https://thehill.com/homenews/education/4305783-ucla-faculty-call-condemn-protests-crossing-the-line/). The letter remains open for additional signatures.

We (signed below) are UCLA faculty who are deeply concerned about the recent terror attack by the Hamas terror organization, the celebrations of the attack in rallies on the UCLA campus and the UCLA response. We are concerned about the impact of these on the sense of community at UCLA, as well as on the safety of our community of students, staff, and faculty on campus.

We therefore urge the UCLA leadership to take the following actions:

- Denounce in the strongest possible terms any celebrations of Hamas terror attacks and killings. The Administration must take firm steps (including a public statement) to denounce any campus rallies crossing the line from speech to incitement, such as those rallies where speakers call for violence and spilling blood.
- Join President Biden and the European Union in characterizing Hamas as a terrorist organization.
- Hold student groups and UCLA community members accountable who directly participate in such incitement (e.g. distributing event invitations that encourage incitement) by enforcing existing UCLA policies prohibiting such behavior.

- Enforce UCLA's EDI program to fight antisemitism in all its insidious manifestations, including anti-Israelism by designating a special envoy to coordinate this fight.

In addition, while we all cherish the First Amendment and its guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly, UCLA must ensure that any hate speeches and celebrations of the Hamas massacre by students and faculty on our campus are prevented from crossing the line from protected speech to unlawful incitement. We were horrified to see Pro-Palestinian rallies on campus in which the massacres by Hamas were celebrated, including explicit calls for violence (including chanting **"Intifada"** or event advertisements featuring images of weapons/violence). Such celebrations create an atmosphere of fear; one cannot imagine that UCLA will allow for celebrations of the killing of George Floyd, or for celebrations of the Armenian genocide, or the celebrations of the 9/11 attacks. It is inconceivable why such celebrations are not denounced by the UCLA leadership, regardless of political views. The atmosphere on campus results in Jewish students, staff, and faculty who are afraid to be on campus, show solidarity with Israel, or practice their freedom of religion in public.

what do you think?

Social Media Freedom of Speech and the Future of our Democracy

LEE C. BOLLINGER

and GEOFFREY R. STONE

Section 230 Reforms

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE

Introduction

For better or worse, a few social media companies dominate today's internet. In recent years, with the spread of disinformation and other dangers online, the worse now overshadows the better.

Social media platforms—companies that facilitate information sharing through virtual networks—have shielded themselves more than any other media from responsibility for destructive content that they house and propagate.[1] They claim that their algorithms simply promote whatever is selected by the collective wisdom of the public,[2] and that they lack the resources or expertise to identify and remove unlawful or untruthful content. But the truth is they are not neutral or incapable observers. Social media companies spread disinformation,[3] exacerbate preexisting biases,[4] and disseminate unlawful content[5] because of deliberate, profit-seeking choices. These platforms choose how to structure their services; what content to allow or disallow; what content to promote; what ads to sell, and to whom; and how they connect advertising to the content users consume or create.

These deliberate choices create real-world harm. Although Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg initially tried to deflect blame to other platforms that she claimed "don't have our abilities to stop hate, don't have our standards and don't have our transparency," a leaked internal Facebook report acknowledged that the company chose not to act against January 6, 2021, insurrection plotting on its platform.[6] A *New York Times* study of the 2020 Senate run-off election in Georgia found that the "top 20 Facebook and Instagram accounts spreading false claims aimed at swaying voters in Georgia accounted for more interactions than mainstream media outlets."[7] A 2021 study by University of Southern California researchers found Facebook job advertisements were infected with gender bias, disproportionately targeting men for male-dominated

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Science

The spread of true and false news online

SOROUSH VOSOUGHI, DEB ROY, AND SINAN ARAL   Authors Info & Affiliations

⬇ 89,779   💬 2,684

Lies spread faster than the truth

There is worldwide concern over false news and the possibility that it can influence political, economic, and social well-being. To understand how false news spreads, Vosoughi *et al.* used a data set of rumor cascades on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. About 126,000 rumors were spread by ~3 million people. False news reached more people than the truth; the top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1000 people. Falsehood also diffused faster than the truth. The degree of novelty and the emotional reactions of recipients may be responsible for the differences observed.
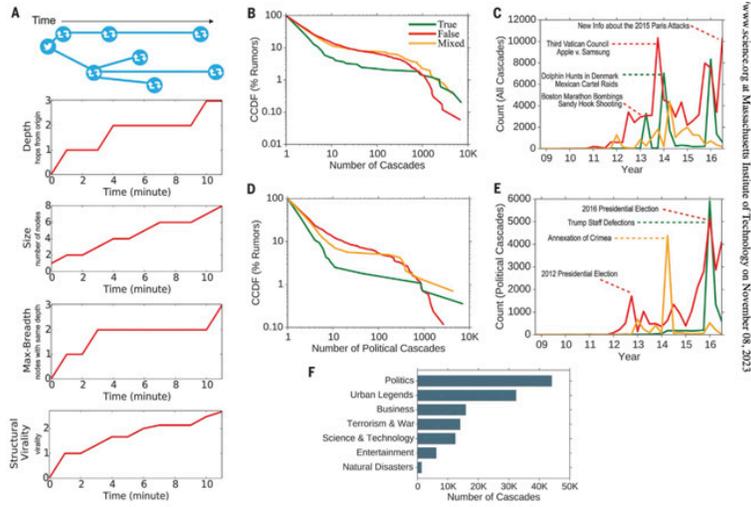
Fig. 1. Rumor cascades. (**A**) An example rumor cascade collected by our method as well as its depth, size, maximum breadth, and structural virality over time. "Nodes" are users. (**B**) The complementary cumulative distribution functions (CCDFs) of true, false, and mixed (partially true and partially false) cascades, measuring the fraction of rumors that exhibit a given number of cascades. (**C**) Quarterly counts of all true, false, and mixed rumor cascades that diffused on Twitter between 2006 and 2017, annotated with example rumors in each category. (**D**) The CCDFs of true, false, and mixed political cascades. (**E**) Quarterly counts of all true, false, and mixed political rumor cascades that diffused on Twitter between 2006 and 2017, annotated with example rumors in each category. (**F**) A histogram of the total number of rumor cascades in our data across the seven most frequent topical categories.
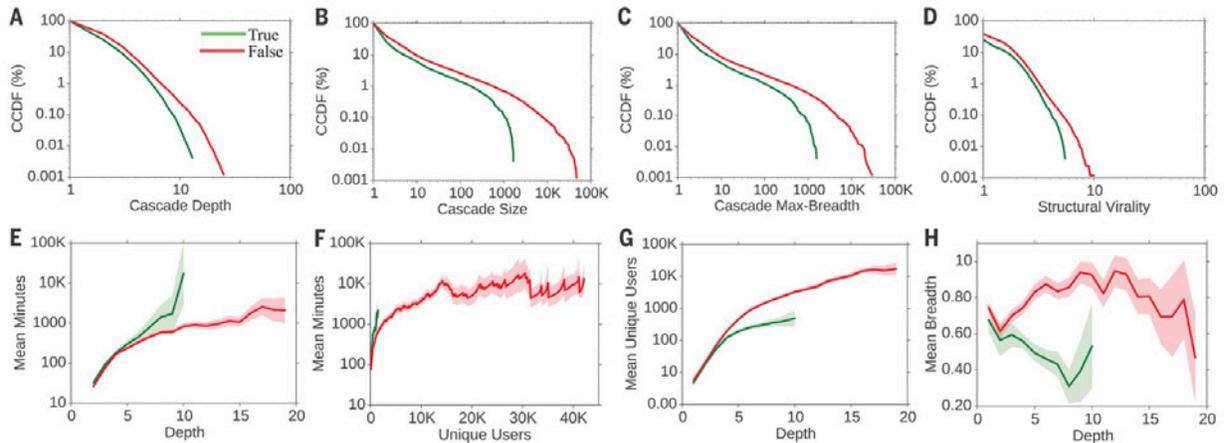
Fig. 2. Complementary cumulative distribution functions (CCDFs) of true and false rumor cascades. (**A**) Depth. (**B**) Size. (**C**) Maximum breadth. (**D**) Structural virality. (**E** and **F**) The number of minutes it takes for true and false rumor cascades to reach any (E) depth and (F) number of unique Twitter users. (**G**) The number of unique Twitter users reached at every depth and (**H**) the mean breadth of true and false rumor cascades at every depth. In (H), plot is lognormal. Standard errors were clustered at the rumor level (i.e., cascades belonging to the same rumor were clustered together; see supplementary materials for additional details).

systematic analyses. Our analysis of all the verified true and false rumors that spread on Twitter confirms that false news spreads more pervasively than the truth online. It also overturns conventional wisdom about how false news spreads. Though one might expect network structure and individual characteristics of spreaders to favor and promote false news, the opposite is true. The greater likelihood of people to retweet falsity more than the truth is what drives the spread of false news, despite network and individual factors that favor the truth. Furthermore, although recent testimony before congressional committees on misinformation in the United States has focused on the role of bots in spreading false news (*36*), we conclude that human behavior contributes more to the differential spread of falsity and truth than automated robots do. This implies that misinformation-

3. Whitehouse claims that reforming section 230 with 'transparency requirements' will help fight the spread of disinformation. What requirements does he have in mind? Do you agree with him that the government is justified in imposing such requirements? Why or why not?

a. we ought to require platforms to disclose what is paid content and who is behind it, and to separate paid content from other content. Users should also be required by platforms' terms of service to disclose when they are paid to disseminate particular messages.

b. social media companies should open their algorithms up to scrutiny. In cybersecurity, firms deploy 'white hat' researchers to probe their systems for glitches and weaknesses. Mandating some form of access to social media platforms' algorithms would allow researchers to determine whether and how those algorithms contribute to illegal activity, and also provide a way to counteract any illegal actions found.

Today:

Liberalism, and the case for paternalism

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Background: what is liberalism?

"Liberalism" a slippery word; many varieties.

Classical (18th c) liberalism:

> presumption of freedom, from government and social interference in one's life: free markets, freedom of religion, and speech; generally, freedom to live as one chooses.

> John Locke, J. S. Mill.

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"Social justice" liberalism:

"Classical" freedoms are worth little without material resources. Eg, not enough to lift government restrictions on (e.g.) women's education, if few can afford tuition.

This justifies a more active government that classical liberals permit. Tax & transfer; public education; etc.

What then is liberalism *not*?

Central planning of large sectors of the economy by the government (communism)

Restrictions not justified by the harm principle, or something like it, e.g., outlawing all religions other than Zoroastrianism. This is one form of conservatism.

Another form of conservatism says: some restrictions on behavior are justified, because the widespread exercise of some freedoms will make us all worse off, e.g. by eroding social order.

The basic idea of paternalism: the government may outlaw certain behaviors "for your own good."

1. What is the difference between coercive paternalism and libertarian paternalism? Give some examples.

Glod:

Coercive paternalism (henceforth simply "paternalism") holds that it may sometimes be OK to forcibly intervene when a person is likely to do some action that will harm her overall, on balance, when any benefits that action brings her are outweighed by the costs that she faces from it.We might intervene simply by warning her about what she is doing, but the more interesting views of paternalism are ones that say it's permissible to interfere with her *even if* she is making a free and sufficiently informed choice to do something harmful to herself.

"libertarian paternalism" or "nudging" is probably the most common use of the term "paternalism" today. Nudging is the view that we can actually use people's biases to influence them to act in better ways. For example, we can manipulate people into eating healthier by putting the healthy food at eye level and making the less healthy food harder to notice or to reach.

HEALTH

Nudging Grocery Shoppers Toward Healthy Food

November 8, 2010 · 8:40 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition

By April Fulton

▶ 4-Minute Listen   + PLAYLIST

Some grocery stores are using subtle cues to point out good food choices.
Mike Ruocco/NPR

Brian Wansink, the co-director of the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs, says grocery store sales goals are compatible with public health goals. "Grocery stores want you to buy healthy things. They want you to buy produce, because if produce goes bad, they lose money," he says.

But just putting more produce and healthy food choices in the aisles is not going to cut it, he says. "Even when you give people these incredibly healthy stores, they're not buying escarole and tofu -- no, they're buying what they want. It's not escarole and tofu simply because it's in front of them," he says.

Wansink is also the author of *Mindless Eating*, a book about why we eat what we eat, and the subtle cues that make that happen.

Produce displays at Wegmans grocery store make vegetables like cauliflower seem more appealing by lighting some items more brightly.
Mike Ruocco/NPR

He's done a lot of research on produce and found that there are small things stores can do that will help them move a lot more volume of the healthy stuff.

Brian Wansink, the Cornell University nutrition researcher known for probing the psychology behind human eating habits, has resigned after a university misconduct investigation, and following the retraction this week of six of his papers.

rooms at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. There the authorities have etched the image of a black housefly into each urinal. It seems that men usually do not pay much attention to where they aim, which can create a bit of a mess, but if they see a target, attention and therefore accuracy are much increased. According to the man who came up with the idea, it works wonders. "It improves the aim," says Aad Kieboom. "If a man sees a fly, he aims at it." Kieboom, an economist, directs Schiphol's building expansion. His staff conducted fly-in-urinal trials and found that etchings reduce spillage by 80 percent.[1]
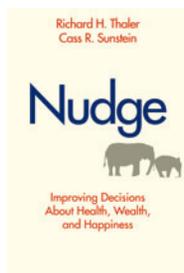
Image courtesy of the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance.
Source: Wikimedia Commons. License CC BY.

Aiming To Reduce Cleaning Costs

by Blake Evans-Pritchard (1972 words)

The picture of a fly in the urinals at Schiphol Airport has
been touted as a simple, inexpensive way to reduce
cleaning costs. Where does it come from, and how
effective is it really?

It is difficult to know for certain how much having a urinal target reduces cleaning needs. Some purveyors of this idea claim that it can reduce spillage by up to 80%, but Reichardt is sceptical. 'As I have learnt over the past 25 years, bathroom behaviour can be really strange. Perhaps 60–70% might start to pee towards the fly; the others probably wouldn't care so much. I'd say the reduction in spillage is probably more like 50%, but even so, that is still noticeable.'

Sphinx, the urinal manufacturer that provides the toilets for Schiphol, says that having the fly in the toilet represents savings in cleaning costs of 20% or more.

Schiphol is often cited as the source of studies done into spillage reduction, but it appears that no such studies have taken place. Kieboom says that he was certainly never aware of any scientific research done into the effects of the fly, and that the 80% figure was 'very empirical'.

do paternalists treat us as children?

Glod:

[Perhaps not, for two reasons] First, the best
defenders of paternalism stress that we are only
talking about certain harmful behavior being up for
intervention.

Glod:

A second [reason] why we should not think paternalists aim to treat us as children is that people don't actually want to suffer these bigger harms, given everything else they value, their overall best interest. Many paternalists insist that any proper manipulation or interference they defend is not meant to reflect values held only by the paternalist and not by the intended target. Rather, paternalism is meant to help us all do what <u>we ourselves would want to do</u> if we were not saddled with biases, clouded judgment, hot emotions, and weak wills. If they sat you down and got you to really think through things, you could get a better and more informed perspective on whether and when you should engage in certain habits.

are the two reasons convincing?

Usually for a harm to warrant paternalism, it will have at least two of three features: severity, immediacy, and irreversibility.

severe and irreversible
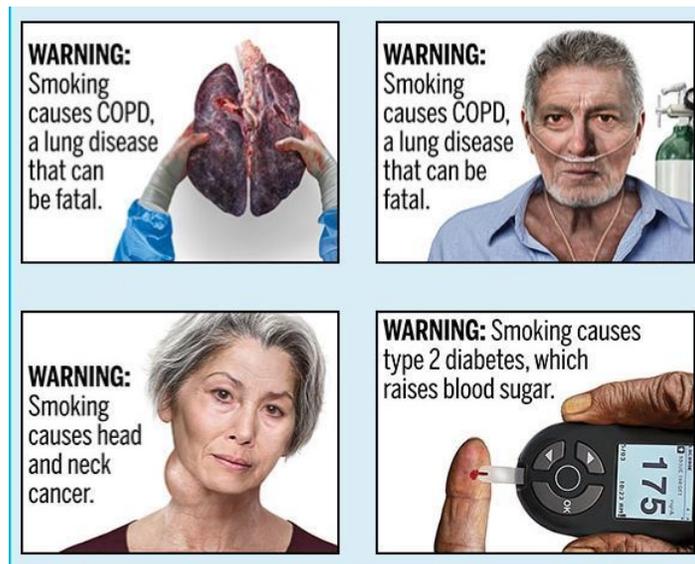
severe and immediate

immediate and irreversible

HOOKED ON THE LOOK

Glod:

it won't work, it is insulting or disrespectful, it imposes values, it violates rights, and it is likely to be misapplied or abused.

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