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Thank you, Steven. I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak to you here at the World Policy Conference. I think it is a really timely topic. Many of you on the way over to Marrakesh might have picked up the latest issue of *The Economist*. Their cover story actually asks, 'Is social media undermining democracy?' It is remarkable how our discussion about the Internet has really changed in the past few years. I want to start with a quote from Hillary Clinton when she was still US Secretary of State and she said, 'The Internet has become the public space of the 21st century, the world's town square, classroom, marketplace, coffee house and nightclub. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there, all 2 billion of us and counting'. She said that in May 2011 and really captured a very optimistic mood about the Internet at that time. It was seen as a place where people can globally connect, where they can share ideas and where they can actually shape the world for better.

Now, fast-forward to the end of 2016 and Hillary Clinton, coming from a defeat in the US presidential election, says the Internet has become a space where there is a fake news epidemic with real-world consequences and for her, of course, the real-world consequences mean that she lost the presidential election, but the fake news discussion is not just about the United States. The consequences are real and they can be seen around the globe, and so I think it is a really good topic for the World Policy Conference.

We had Brexit, of course, and in the course of the Brexit campaign, lots of fake news were shared and spread. The *New York Times* covered this. This is from *The Guardian* mentioning that in Myanmar, fake images and also fake news are used to instigate violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Another topic we talked about this morning at the conference is the independence vote in Catalonia and also in the context of the Catalanian discussion, lots of fake news were spread, for example, about fake incidents of police brutality. There were some incidents with the police, but also lots of made-up stories that were shared widely on the Internet.

We have heard the term a lot. I think it is important to take a moment and reflect on what this term 'fake news' actually means because when we looked at the Internet, we found the term was widely used and on one side, you see that fake news has become a political term. It has been used most prominently probably by President Trump to discredit the mainstream media in calling that media fake news. Often, we make up news in terms of forms of satire. We are not that concerned about that. In the middle, you see that fake news can just result from poor journalism. Journalists make mistakes. Media organisations make mistakes. Editors make mistakes. That can result in fake news, but usually it is quickly corrected. What really concerns us is more on the other side, which is intentionally spreading false information, usually a story that is taken out of context and is intentionally misinterpreted to give it a different spin and to drive an agenda.

When you look at all these cases I have cited, if you look at the US presidential campaign, the Brexit campaign, Catalonia, you will actually find that spreading fake news are not just incidents on the Internet, but they are usually part of campaigns. They are part of a strategy for political mobilisation in all of these cases and I would argue here that we should understand that fake news are being used as a strategy for political mobilisation. You can rightly ask, and we should rightly ask ourselves, 'What is actually new about fake news?' Here is an example from medieval Europe of spreading fake news. There was fake news about Jews killing Christian babies, blood libel, and there is an image depicting that, which was used to incite violence and pogroms against Jewish people. Fake news has been around throughout history, so what is really new about that?

This brings us of course to what we have been talking about here on the panel today. The Internet revolution, the digital revolution, the spread of the Internet and the spread of social media have given all of us here the ability to produce news and to share or distribute it, two functions that used to be held by radio, television and print, the traditional gatekeepers of how news and information were created and distributed. These media organisations have

lost this central gatekeeping function. Now everyone who is connected to the Internet, who has the ability to use Facebook, who has a smartphone to take pictures can create stories and can share them on the Internet and can also distribute news stories to friends and networks.

That is what is really new, and at the same time, we see that the established media is in a crisis of revenue, as Steven mentioned earlier, with declining revenues, and also that there is a lot of distrust in established news media around the world. We can see that it is not the same everywhere, so some countries still have much more trust in news media. In Germany, trust is still quite high. There are other countries where it is much lower. This is also a problem in the US, where the high penetration of social media combined with the distrust in the established media system has really led to the fake news problem and proliferation of fake news.

Let us take a look at Germany. This is from our own data, from a survey we did right after the German election. We saw that in Germany, there is distrust in the media, but there is a particular group that has very high distrust in the media in Germany, and those are the AfD. It is a new party that is staunchly anti-immigrant and has had surprise success in the German election, getting more than 12% of the national vote and getting into parliament. You will see that they have very high numbers among AfD voters who distrust the media and they are also the group that is most likely to believe fake news and most active in sharing fake news. We would therefore also argue that in Germany, fake news are mostly used in the context of the election campaign as a political strategy to mobilise AfD voters.

You will probably ask yourselves, and we are also asking ourselves, 'What should we do about it? Do we need regulation? What are the ethical responsibilities of social media companies?' I will end with three things based on our data that we can explore more in the discussion. We looked at engagement with fake news and then engagement with debunking news, which is news that corrects the story. What you find consistently, as lots of media entities now try to correct news or debunk fake news is that the effect is not as big as the initial fake news stories. Fake news gets much more attention and there is much more engagement with fake news on social media platforms. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that a lot of fake news results from what I would call poor journalism or poor press releases that are ambiguous and then are turned into fake news. Here is another story that came up in the context of the German election campaign where there was an incident where bottles were thrown at the German police and the initial press release talked about a gathering of 1,000 young people throwing bottles at the police. Then a media report turned these 1,000 young people into 1,000 rioters and then fake news stories appeared that talked about 1,000 young migrant rioters throwing bottles at the police. That is what we see consistently. When there is ambiguous reporting, poor reporting or a poor press release, this is often taken advantage of to put a new spin on it and use that for political purposes. In this case, it was to blame migrants.

Finally, what really does not work that well, and our data shows this too, is the fabrication of news, when you completely make stuff up. The most effective way to stop that is if organisations immediately put out a counter-narrative on social media. In this fake news story, apparently, a German minister in a big German state had said the police should not talk about migrant criminality and they should suppress this issue. When this news appeared, immediately his office put out a statement that he never said that and this is not true. You can see that his debunking story was very widely shared and the fake news story was completely ineffective. It is also really important that we react very quickly when fake news stories come up.

Fake news and disinformation on the Internet have become major challenges. We need to study this problem more carefully to better understand it. Coming up with solutions won't be easy as we need to avoid undermining freedom of speech. It is thus really important that governments, social media companies and civil society come together to address this issue. Otherwise, truth and trust will decline and the potential of the digital age won't be realised.

Steven ERLANGER

Stefan, thank you very much. That was great. I must say we all have teams of fact-checkers. Every time Donald Trump issues a tweet or makes a speech or says something, we have fact-checkers saying, 'This is right, this is



wrong'. It seems to make no difference at all because people seem to get their news in silos and if you believe Trump, you believe him, and if you do not believe Trump, anything he says has to be wrong. It is the nature of our divided politics in America. We see it in Britain also. We see it in lots of places, but there is no question that fake news can make things worse and it seems quite clear that groups of Russian hackers were trying very hard to touch on polarising issues in America before the election to create unease and unrest. I think this was one of the most fascinating aspects of the whole meddling in the American election campaign. Did it make a difference? It is hard to know. Did it change the election? I doubt it, but maybe it served as a kind of antibody for future elections. We will have to see.