

Real Fake News

or some other clever title

by Dwayne Phillips 2 December 2018

the seed: We want real news until we don't and then we want a machine to know the difference in the news and in what we want.

A man walked into a religious training building. He killed people of that religious faith. The police arrived. Before the killer died, he was heard shouting "Death to all (members of that religious faith)."

That—including and especially the "Death to..." Phrase—was real news. The event actually happened. It was an unusual event so it fit the definition of "news." Too many persons witnessed and recorded it on their pocket computer-phone-recorders for it to be a hoax, so it fit the definition of "real" news.

Millions, or was it hundreds of millions, of us put bits of the real news on tweeta-insta-booka stuff. Web crawling software, those infernal machines, found all those repetitions of the real news. For several days, the most oft repeated phrase in the social mania (or is it social media?)—I confuse the two at times—was "Death to all (members of that religious faith)."

Stop the (hi)story here. No one wanted to read what the killer moron shouted as he was dying. We already have enough moronic speech everywhere. Yet there it was, real news everywhere. And we hated it. Surely someone in the social media industry would stop this garbage from spreading.

Once again, stop the (hi)story here. I thought we hated fake news and craved real news.

All this led me to the twisted conclusion that

We want real news until we don't and then we want a machine to know the difference in the news and in what we want.

Eventually we go to those who run the social media technology. Why don't they read what people post and approve or deny it before it is posted? Some of these magnates of social media actually did this way back when (four or five years ago). Posts went to a person who read it. If approved, the post went to the social media site. This prevented objectionable material from appearing on the social media sites. This practice ended when the social media magnates became rich magnates. Their sites had so many members posting so many posts, that it would require half-a-fortune to hire all the persons needed to read, approve, or deny posts. It is evident that the rich magnates of social media wanted to keep a whole fortune and not spend half-a-fortune on post readers, approvers, and deniers. Henceforth, the post gates were opened.

One day, fake news arrived. What once adorned the covers of Mad Magazine and The National Enquirer now popped up on tweeta-insta-booka. It was funny for a while because adults can tell the difference between an earthquake in Alaska and First Lady Hillary Clinton having an alien baby with three heads.

The jokes, however, became subtle and persons much younger than their birth certificates discovered they couldn't sense humor from fact.

Fake news too closely resembled real news for too many persons. The social media magnates weren't hiring discerning adults to approve or deny posts. What to do?

Turn to technology or magic since, as some wise person once said, "Any advanced form of technology is indistinguishable from magic." AI would do it. The AI marketers promised that AI software would "read" all the posts immediately and remove fake news. Simply deposit \$1 followed by a long string of zeros into the bank account of the AI company. The AI marketer would keep 10%, and a horde of low-paid but brilliant persons would teach the computer what to do.

"Here it is," proclaimed the social media magnates as they rolled out their AI (read "magic") software to the masses. "This will save us," they shouted as they neglected to explain who "us" was and what dastardly thing required their saving graces.

Within minutes of the roll out, some do-gooder ran a little experiment that showed the AI software was biased against this group and that group and the other group of persons. And, what's more, it didn't work correctly on 90% of the cases. Fake news was approved while real news was denied.

"Just send us \$1 followed by a few more zeros," shouted the AI marketers. "We'll adjust the models with better data and other whiz bang things that only they understood."

The money flowed, the models were adjusted (what are models?), and nothing of any value appeared. Social media magnates appeared before Congress and said, "The answer to that question is too technical to say in an open forum so we will send you something later that has the outward appearance of an answer." That was one way of saying, "The corporate lawyers told me not to say anything specific while under oath."

All this big-money maneuvering aside, nothing much changed. Marketers promise that the next generation of something will work just fine. The next generation of something repeated real news that made us mad.

Why can't these generations of AI and learning and deep learning and ever-yet-deeper learning work right? Why don't they tell us what we want to hear?

Perhaps because we don't know what we want to hear. We change our minds daily on what we want. There are too many of us wanting too many different things. We are diverse, not unified.

Surely there is some person or two who can tell me what I want. There must be someone who can decide what I believe and when I have "got it" and need no more of it.

Yes, there is such a person. Good news: there are two such persons. The first is the trained and acknowledged expert. The expert knows history, context, sources, and can combine all those into

wisdom. That wisdom allows me to absorb enough of the real news, notice some fake news for a few laughs now and then, and be satisfied.

The trouble with this expert is that expertise costs money—lots of money. Yes, but we can share the cost of the expertise across hundreds of millions of consumers to keep the cost per person to a minimum. This will only cost me a few dollars a month. And one more thing: I can reduce that cost to zero by selling advertisements.

Sound familiar? This is the "old mainstream media" model of major network television news, major newspapers, and major magazines. Remember those? Experts managed and contributed to those. Advertisers paid the cost. We benefited, until we didn't.

We trusted the old media until we noticed that it put explosives in a truck to make it explode right on cue in an attempt to expose evil big auto. We noticed that it forged a decades-old letter to embarrass evil big politician. We noticed that it won a Pulitzer Prize by passing a work of fiction as non-fiction, real news to expose big evil narcotics. We noticed that it straightened a women's teeth on a magazine cover to embarrass, well, I'm not sure who was the big evil one there, but surely there was something to avoid.

Old media became as greedy as the social media magnates became later. Advertising dollars became king and those dollars grew with viewer and subscriber numbers. Those numbers followed breaking stories, and the breaking stories meant breaking a few rules of truth and all those other pesky moral ideals.

Hence, the expert is gone. Who is the second person mentioned earlier?

Here is the good news and the bad news: the second person is staring at me in the mirror. It is time for me to "grow up" as one generation was famous for telling their successors. It is time for me to discern and decide.

I need to discern for myself, "Is this real or fake news?" How can I discern? Look at several reputable sources. Does anyone other than The National Inquirer carry the story about the alien baby with three heads? Who? How reputable are they? Are they just echoing a fake news story started by someone else?

I need to decide for myself, "Do I have this? Have I heard all that I need to hear about this?" If yes, move one. If no, listen further.

Fun? Probably not. Necessary? Maybe, some of the time. And there we go again, having to discern and decide how much of the time I need to discern and decide. Alternative? Stay angry at the AI machines that tell me real news instead of fake news too much and not tell me fake news at all or something like that if I want something like that today.