

How We All Can Fight Misinformation | Harvard Business Review

By Claire Wardle

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[Claire Wardle](#) argues that the fight against “polluted information” has to be a collaborative process, involving technology companies, policy-makers, researchers, and other parties. She says that the first step is to define and understand the problem (noting that the term “fake news” is not helpful in this regard), before going on to explore a few ways that we begin combating mis- and disinformation, focusing on private firms in particular.

Polluted information online is a “[wicked problem](#).” It cannot be solved by conventional processes, and efforts to address it often exacerbate it. Consider, for example, Facebook’s addition of a “disputed by fact-checkers” tag to articles that have been deemed false. Rather than change minds, the tag actually [increased belief](#) in the false claim for those audiences who were already inclined to believe it. We need to do better.

The direct and indirect costs of information that is false, misleading, or manipulated are hard to quantify and tend to pertain to how polluted information is affecting democracies. Surprisingly, little discussion focuses on how it is influencing economies. Three recent major world events affected by misinformation — the [Brexit vote](#) and the elections of [Donald Trump](#) and [Emmanuel Macron](#) — certainly have global economic consequences. After all, any campaign designed specifically to sow mistrust and confusion — and to sharpen existing sociocultural divisions using nationalistic, ethnic, racial, and religious tensions — surely reverberates across economies.

[...]

We are witnessing an explosion in information pollution on a global scale, and the need for workable solutions is urgent. But I’m not naive enough to believe that we’ll ever get rid of false news. Academics, journalists, civil society, and policy makers tend to talk about misinformation as if we have a rational relationship with

it. The truth is that the misinformation — while aided by platform parameters and new amplification tactics — reflects who we are and our feelings of superiority, anger, and fear. The most viral of polluted information plays on those emotions and helps users feel validated in their beliefs.

Still, we must try. Technology companies should work closely with researchers; policy makers need to hear from fact-checkers; and we all have to be vigilant against false news. We're never going to solve the problem, but we can take actions that will limit its damage.

Source: [How We All Can Fight Misinformation | Harvard Business Review](#)