

Hundreds of 'pink slime' local news outlets are distributing algorithmic stories and conservative talking points | Columbia Journalism Review

By Priyanjana Bengani

December 18, 2019

An increasingly popular tactic challenges conventional wisdom on the spread of electoral disinformation: the creation of partisan outlets masquerading as local news organizations. An investigation by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School has discovered at least 450 websites in a network of local and business news organizations, each distributing thousands of algorithmically generated articles and a smaller number of reported stories. Of the 450 sites we discovered, at least 189 were set up as local news networks across ten states within the last twelve months by an organization called Metric Media.

Titles like the *East Michigan News*, *Hickory Sun*, and *Grand Canyon Times* have appeared on the web ahead of the 2020 election. These networks of sites can be used in a variety of ways: as 'stage setting' for events, focusing attention on issues such as voter fraud and energy pricing, providing the appearance of neutrality for partisan issues, or to gather data from users that can then be used for political targeting.

[...]

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