

Mass propaganda used to be difficult, but Facebook made it easy | Washington Post

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Last month, Facebook announced that [it will not limit microtargeting](#) capabilities for political ads. Nor will it police factual accuracy of those ads. As much as the spread of blatant falsehoods on social media rankles Americans, that second judgment may be wise, as [Facebook has neither the capacity nor the legitimacy to act as arbiters of truth](#). But the propagation of falsehoods along with the targeting to narrow but receptive audiences is a dangerous combination. And recent public opinion data suggest that the public overwhelmingly agrees.

While concern over misinformation may seem like a post-2016 phenomenon, it isn't. In the 1940s, the rapid rise in mass media and the devastating use of mediated propaganda by the Nazis caused great alarm. To alleviate fears that this propaganda would overwhelm the United States, Columbia University sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton [suggested](#) that mass persuasion through the American media system was quite difficult. They outlined three criteria necessary for its success — monopolization, canalization and supplementation — and explained how these criteria were nearly impossible to meet in the media system at the time.

[...]

[Source:](#)

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