Facebook Still Banning Purported "Fake Sites" To Support US Fake Stories

Over the years there has been much discussion about organisations using social media for nefarious purposes. Political organisations have been caught subverting campaign finance rules by sending out social media ads through third party organisations, and sex workers regularly post “friend invitations” to accounts which have ended up on some list, without the account owner knowing why.

This has led providers such as Facebook to take a number of actions purportedly designed to maintain the "integrity" of their platforms. For example, the same Facebook which collects data about its users and sells it once tried to prevent Orthodox priests from holding accounts in their Church names, as these differ from their secular names, as the Church requires.

It is not hard to see why. Facebook has always been quite happy for actors and singers to use their public names in their accounts, even if these differ from their legal names. But Orthodox priests, particularly those in countries which are not majority Orthodox, are "strange" and therefore inherently suspicious, so must be stamped on in a way which porn stars, with all their fake names and dubious business associates, are not.

After the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which we still don't know who was paid what to promote the views of Robert Mercer and his clients as "the will of the people," Facebook obviously has to be extra careful, despite
profiting itself from the same clients. But its way of “protecting itself” has now become highly suspect.

Facebook is not actually weeding out fake accounts, as its reporting mechanism implies, but applying fake criteria to how it assesses accounts, to keep its biggest clients happy. The old question about how Facebook, a free platform, makes its money can be answered to examining who it sells data to. So it is no surprise to discover that Facebook’s idea of a “fake account” is all about politics, and not about integrity, security or any other legitimate concern of a public website.

Your enemy is our enemy

A few months ago the Republic of Georgia was in the firing line of this latest US political stunt. Hundreds of accounts and pages were deleted after they were declared to be fake, as they apparently emanated from an advertising agency with “links” to the Georgian government.

How were these sites identified? “The page admins and account owners typically posted about domestic news and political issues such as elections, government policies, public officials, criticism of the opposition and local activist organizations” we are told. Is this not what users do every day, in countries recognised as democratic?

Apparently the people behind these pages, who were never named, knew each other and co-ordinated with each other. Anyone who has worked in Georgia will know that everyone in Tbilisi knows everyone else in Tbilisi who works in the same field. If they have a common view, they automatically reflect that view, whether by accident or design, and this therefore appears to be co-ordinated activity.

As one source told me, “I once worked for two Georgian newspapers simultaneously. They had different owners and different political orientations. On one occasion the editor of one paper carpeted me for stealing its material, on the basis that commentary from that newspaper was later appearing in the editorial columns of the other, and similar views were being expressed.”

The newspaper which was supposedly stealing this material through me (and why me?) had no reason to steal anything from the first one, which it didn’t have much regard for. It had simply drawn the same conclusions about the same news items, like much bigger news organisations do in much bigger countries. All these articles had also appeared without my input.

“But apparently I was working with one employer against the other, when I was known to agree more with the first paper than the second. Is this is what is being called coordinated activity?”

Your truth is my truth

There appear to be two reasons why these pages came to the attention of Facebook staff. The first was “criticism of the opposition,” implying only governments can be criticised. The second was “anti-American views”, meaning any criticism of US government policy and actions rather than of individual Americans.

It seems you can criticise any other government on Facebook, but not that of the US. As ever, follow the money.

The picture which was painted here is the classic Western one concerning Third World countries. Every government in the developing world is supposed to be corrupt and repressive, using its resources to stifle all opposition. Unless of course it is a favoured US ally - in which case it is fighting a noble battle to introduce democracy and human rights in the midst of a hostile, ignorant world controlled by US enemies.

The problem with applying this narrative to Georgia is that every branch of the US government knows that it is actually the other way round. By “opposition” is meant the UNM – the party of Mikheil Saakashvili and his criminal friends, who formed the government, and turned Georgia into the regional CIA and Atlantic Council dirty tricks base of operations, between 2003 to 2012.

Most of the UNM leaders from that time are now either in jail or on the run; they are accused of a vast array of criminal charges relating to their time in government. No one can deny that the crimes they are accused of were committed, and that only members of the government could ultimately have been responsible for them.

In fact the present Georgian government has lost a lot of domestic credibility because these charges only represent the tip of the iceberg. There is a perception that secret deals have been done to protect large numbers of other criminals in the UNM, as only a select few prosecutions have been made.
If anyone knows about attacking the opposition, depriving people of their human rights and ignoring the rule of law, it is the UNM. Yet throughout its period of government, and ever since, its most tainted members have been protected by the same forces which are criticising the present Georgian government for allegedly doing what the UNM undoubtedly did.

The present Georgian government, led by the Georgian Dream coalition founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, has not accomplished much. But it is not using the resources of the state to terrorise the population. No longer are 99% of state prosecutions successful, no longer are businesses forced to close unless handed over to a government minister, no longer is 25% of every aid loan or contract routinely stolen by the ministers of the relevant department.

Yes, Georgia is suffering economically, but that is because it is trying to keep proper accounts. In the UNM era the figures were routinely falsified, just like election results were. The true picture was kept from the population by various money laundering exercises, such as constructing hotels and government buildings and obtaining extra funds illegally through arms sales to terrorists and the like.

Whether its policies are successful or not, the present Georgian government is trying to do what the US says all governments should do. Nor has it disagreed with US policy on anything, though any democratic government might do so on occasion.

Yet the Georgian government is still being presented, through the attacks on Facebook accounts and many other means, as an anti-democratic tyranny, while the UNM is lauded as the friend of democracy. Facebook chooses to believe such stories simply because they justify US racism and previous US support for the UNM and similar forces.

Anyone painting a different picture to the one the US wants to present is regarded as "manipulating people" and therefore suspected of being fake. Anyone undertaking the same activities, but expressing the accepted views, is presented as a real person, even if they use a fake name, tell blatant lies, and use Facebook solely to manipulate people whilst pretending to be somebody else.

**Your identity is my identity**

So who was behind these fake accounts? Apparently it was the advertising agency Panda, and through this "people connected to the Georgian Dream" - the current ruling party in Georgia. What constitutes such a connection?

I was once approached by a fan of Latin American music, who was complaining that he could not get hold of original Spanish and Portuguese lyrics. On investigation, it turned out that the music publishers were regarded as "possibly connected" to terrorists, because they were part of artistic communities regarded, not entirely without justification, as "hotbeds of leftist subversion" by the military or quasi-military governments which ran most of Latin America at this time.

If this music fan had tried to communicate with these publishers, he too would have been on a list of people associated with terrorists, and of those providing support for them by being prepared to pay for the lyrics he wanted. He could therefore have been summarily shot by US overseas agents, without any legal process being followed. This is what is meant by connection, and this is the threatened consequence of such a connection being suggested.

The Georgian Dream is not persecuting people for having supported the UNM, or still doing so. The UNM operates freely, and is still treated as a legitimate political party. It was the UNM which branded everyone it didn't like a terrorist, but those who did that are not being accused of having unsavoury connections.

If such connections exist, it would be in the interests of the people making these allegations to name and shame those connections. This would mean other people they were associated with would also be investigated, and wider criminal networks uncovered, Facebook thus protecting the public.

Under Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, both of which are famously fake names, dissidents were publicly shamed under their real names, even if they had disguised these names in their publications. Trotsky was invariably referred to as Bronstein, or Bronstein known as Trotsky, much to the consternation of other Soviet citizens who happened to be called Bronstein.

So why are we not being told who the people behind these "fake accounts" are? Could it possibly be that no one actually knows, and therefore they cannot comment on their connections? Or that their connections are known, but they present a different picture to the one Facebook wants us to accept?

**Your friend is only your friend**
If we are to believe the voting figures from the last parliamentary and presidential elections in Georgia, there are almost as many opposition supporters as Georgian Dream supporters now. Therefore any advertising agency, or any other sort of business, will be as much connected with the Georgian opposition as with the Georgian government.

When Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the former Premier of Queensland, was tried on corruption charges in 1991 he walked free (unlike several of his ministers who had faced similar charges) because the jury failed to reach a verdict. The following year it was revealed that the foreman of that jury was a member of Bjelke-Peterse’s party, and a strong supporter of him personally.

However, as Sir Joh pointed out when confronted with this, that was only one person. Many other jurors had belonged to groups (such as trade unions) which he had attacked throughout his career, so the jury as a whole could equally be said to be as much against him as for him, on the basis of the arguments his detractors were using.

So why are these accounts inauthentic, compared to those of many others, especially those whose identities are being disguised? How is the integrity of Facebook being breached by them? The inappropriate behaviour claimed by Facebook is actually the ‘pot calling the kettle black.”

The claim is that pages have been set up, allegedly by the Georgian government, to discredit the opposition and spread discord among the populace. But in this day and age what can be treated as genuine and what not is highly questionable.

Maybe authenticity and integrity are in the eyes of the beholders. But not the identities of the fraudsters, if they are actually known – which is why they are then prosecuted. If you won’t reveal these, you can’t use their alleged existence to promote US policy. That is only something an unaccountable source, whose evidence cannot be tested, would do.

Who might such unaccountable sources be? If you are interested, it is easy enough to track many of these articles exposing fake accounts back to their funding source.

At the bottom of a very BIG can of worms, is an organisation called BBG (the Broadcasting Board of Governors). This has now changed its name to US Agency for Global Media, with a new website.

This claims, “the US Agency for Global Media is an independent Federal Agency overseeing public service media networks that provide unbiased news and information in countries where the press is restricted.”

One only needs to know how the media actually works to see that the US government uses foreign media as part of its foreign policy, with the aim of changing any given government at will. Not only governments and supporting social media pages are affected by these very high level actions, which a mere corporation can’t ignore, but even private citizens.

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