The State of the Truth by Emili Kovell

In an age when TIME asks whether Truth is dead and president elections are fought over who lied first, the mission to create an even playing field for political stances of all stripes becomes as imperative as it is elusive. As nationwide news consumption increasingly shifts online, with 93% of Americans getting their news online, there has been more room than ever for varying political beliefs and opinions to rub shoulders (Stocking). But democracy "requires a reliance on shared facts," as author of The Filter Bubble, Eli Pariser, explains, and online news feeds are far from shared (Pariser). News feeds vary as widely as their consumers, with sites like Facebook, Twitter, and News.me (now Digg Deeper) creating for each user a uniquely comfortable but homogenous bubble of information. How, then, can the country unite under a common goal when even their perception of the truth is radically different?

The threat doesn't stop at politics. With a surge in sensationalistic headlines featuring click-hungry promises of gossip, violence, and sex, users tend to read fluff pieces that don't hold much importance but are more fun to read. They ignore the more important and controversial headlines, the ones that are difficult to read and make them feel uncomfortable (Pariser). In 2007, the Virginia Tech shooting claimed 33 lives and America suffered a debilitating mortgage crisis (John). The most popular article in the *Los Angeles Times* that year? A piece about the world's ugliest dog (Pariser). Users whose online experiences offer such a small slice of reality begin to believe that "the world is a narrow island when in fact it's an immense, varied continent" (Pariser). Diversity online is diversity in thought, which is the core of a true democracy.

Of course, one could not talk about digital news and its shortcomings without touching on the celebrity of Macquerie Dictionary, whose 2016 Word of the Year "fake news" achieved considerable infamy that year as scandals like Pizzagate ripped across the Internet ("The Committee's Choice for Word of the Year 2016 Goes to..."). A theory that wouldn't have seen daylight on the pages of a newspaper attained prominence comparable to that of factually irrefutable scandals like the "Access Hollywood" tape that featured lewd comments from then-presidential candidate Donald Trump (Taylor). The Internet doesn't always have the patience to sort fact from fiction. And that impatience can sometimes turn deadly, as it nearly did in 2016 when a man named Edgar Welch entered Comet Ping Pong, a pizzeria frequented by Hillary Clinton and her staff, armed with a gun that he used to open fire on the venue. He was drunk on the "dark mysteries he found on the Internet" that the pizzeria functioned as an underground child prostitution ring and he wanted to see for himself if the rumors were true. Though no one was killed, the incident proved how an unstable media diet can have a devastating impact. A varied news feed can prevent the Edgar Welches of the world from endangering lives on flimsy misconceptions. And, potentially, it can unite a country.

TIME asks, "Is Truth Dead?" Only time will tell.

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