

Social media, fake news and global health

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Social media

“Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in **social networking**.

'**Social networking** sites, also called **social** software and **social media**, provide the **means** to create and maintain ties online”.

(Oxford English Dictionary)

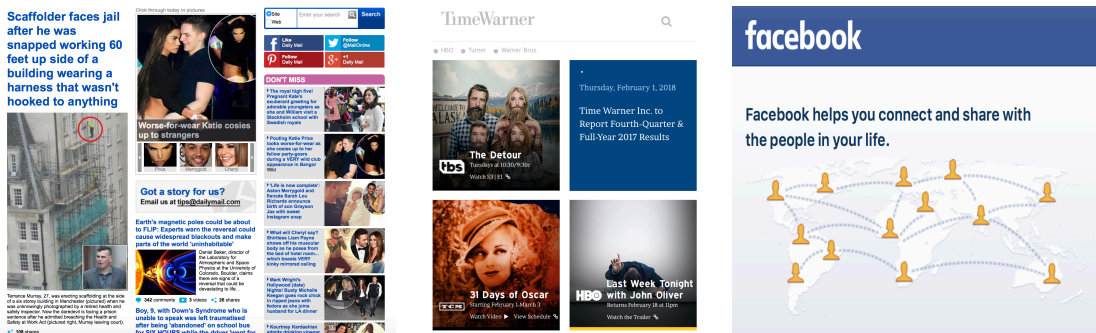
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George Soros at the WEF in Davos, 2018

- “social media companies influence how people think and behave without them even being aware of it. This has far-reaching adverse consequences on the functioning of democracy, particularly on the integrity of elections.”
- “deceive their users by manipulating their attention and directing it towards their own commercial purposes” and “deliberately engineer addiction to the services they provide”.
- The latter “can be very harmful, particularly for adolescents”.
- And what if Google surveillance pairs with state-led surveillance? ““This may well result in a web of totalitarian control the likes of which not even Aldous Huxley or George Orwell could have imagined”

Olivia Solon reporting in the Guardian newspaper, 26th January 2018

What are social media?



Facebook

“We can imagine Facebook as an endless labyrinth of tunnels and caverns connecting its billions of users. Most of those tunnels are benign, allowing people to share news, birthday wishes and videos of corgi puppies. But there are some tunnels, deep in the darkest parts of the site, where users subsist on misinformation feeding into their worst biases. And there’s no topic that illustrates this better than vaccines”

Robert Gabelhoff, Washington Post Jan 9th 2018



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Anti-vax movement in pictures



Andrew Wakefield - MMR



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Media reporting of vaccines

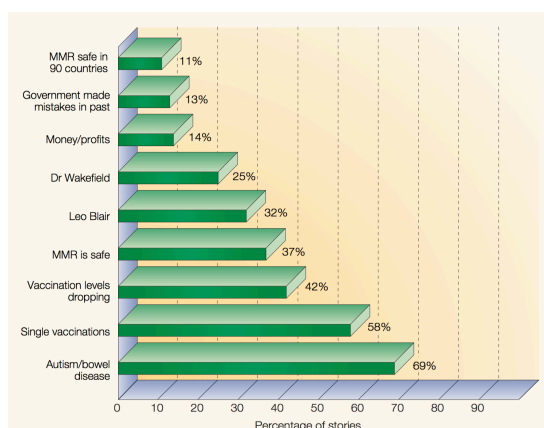
MMR vaccine

- Introduced in 1988
- 1998 Lancet study suggested a link between the measles virus and autism.
- One of the authors (Andrew Wakefield) at a press conference suggested 3 separate vaccines for M, M and R at year intervals would be better than the single MMR vaccination.
- None of the other 12 authors endorsed this recommendation.
- Extensive media reporting focused on the safety of the MMR vaccine. No stories mentioned that none of the other 12 authors endorsed Wakefield's suggestion.
- The BMA endorsed the MMR vaccine in 2003 and it is routinely given today.

Lewis and Spears 2003, Nature <https://www.nature.com/articles/nri1228.pdf>

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The media's ability to frame a health issue



“Together, our surveys indicate that the media coverage of the MMR controversy has powerfully communicated a range of concerns about the vaccine, while promoting the idea of three single vaccines as a popular alternative. Although a more complex picture was certainly available for those paying close attention, **the MMR story is a classic example of a dominant media framework** influencing public consciousness in ways that mislead as much as they inform”.

Lewis and spears 2003

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WHO identifies “vaccine hesitancy” as one of the top ten threats to global health in 2019

vaccine hesitancy = “the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines “

In the Philippines, confidence in vaccine safety dropped from 82% in 2015 to 21% in 2018

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019>

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Resisting the anti-vaxx movement

A screenshot of a WhatsApp message from 'Shashankh Release' dated 10 August 2017. The message title is 'WhatsApp-ening in India's measles-rubella vaccine campaign?' with three sad face emojis. Below the title is a cartoon illustration of a doctor in a white coat examining a young girl. A woman in an orange sari stands behind the girl, and a man in a blue shirt and a boy in a red striped shirt stand to the right. The text in Hindi below the cartoon reads: 'जुगि भादि हे ते शिरी, दात पात थिरे खुन, कैरी जाना नन्दिन के एग आर ठोके लुंग, अपने नीगिहली को खररे से बचाना हे क्वैल से बचाना हे, बसो टीका लगाना हे'.

The Karnataka government started a Facebook campaign even before the immunisation drive started as the parents had started protesting against the vaccine.

A screenshot of a Facebook video player. The video is titled 'Posted by Manjunatha Ns' and has 51 Views. The video content shows a woman in a black hijab and two young boys in school uniforms. One of the boys is holding a small green object up to his face. The video player interface includes a progress bar at 0:00, a volume icon, a settings gear, and a share icon.

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GAVI uses Twitter to share information

