2014 年 10 月 17 日

●パイFCC委員、ツイッター上の政治的発言分析するプロジェクトを批判

【Washington Post, 2014/10/17】
　アジト・パイ FCC 委員は 17 日付けワシントン・ポスト紙に寄稿。全米科学財団（NSF）からの補助金を受けてインディア大学が進めるツイッターに関する研究を批判した。
　同氏によると、この「Truthy」という研究プロジェクトは、政治に関連したツイートを分析し、「政治的中傷」や大量の手紙、電子メールを政治家に送る「アストロターフ」式のロビー活動、その他の「誤った情報」がいかに伝播されるかを調べるもので、ユーザーの特定政党との関係も追跡するという。
　同氏は、これを公的資金を用いたソーシャルメディアの監視だと主張。
　プロジェクトのリーダー等が 2012 年に発表した論文で、「右傾的ユーザーがツイッターを活用して、その政治的見解の主張を強めようとしている」と指摘していたことも問題視しており、何が誤った情報であり、政治的中傷やプロパガンダであるかについて政府が決めるべきではないとしている。

（参考）本件報道記事
The government wants to study 'social pollution' on Twitter
By Ajit Pai October 17

Ajit Pai is a member of the Federal Communications Commission.

If you take to Twitter to express your views on a hot-button issue, does the government have an interest in deciding whether you are spreading "misinformation"? If you tweet your support for a candidate in the November elections, should taxpayer money be used to monitor your speech and evaluate your "partisanship"?

My guess is that most Americans would answer those questions with a resounding no. But the federal government seems to disagree. The National Science Foundation , a federal agency whose mission is to "promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; and to secure

the national defense," is funding a project to collect and analyze your Twitter data.

The project is being developed by researchers at Indiana University, and its purported aim is to detect what they deem "social pollution" and to study what they call "social epidemics," including how memes — ideas that spread throughout pop culture — propagate. What types of social pollution are they targeting? "Political smears," so-called "astroturfing" and other forms of "misinformation."

Named "Truthy," after a term coined by TV host Stephen Colbert, the project claims to use a "sophisticated combination of text and data mining, social network analysis, and complex network models" to distinguish between memes that arise in an "organic manner" and those that are manipulated into being.

But there's much more to the story. Focusing in particular on political speech, Truthy keeps track of which Twitter accounts are using hashtags such as #teaparty and #dems. It estimates users' "partisanship." It invites feedback on whether specific Twitter users, such as the Drudge Report, are "truthy" or "spamming." And it evaluates whether accounts are expressing "positive" or "negative" sentiments toward other users or memes.

The Truthy team says this research could be used to "mitigate the diffusion of false and misleading ideas, detect hate speech and subversive propaganda, and assist in the preservation of open debate."

Hmm. A government-funded initiative is going to "assist in the preservation of open debate" by monitoring social media for "subversive propaganda" and combating what it considers to be "the diffusion of false and misleading ideas"? The concept seems to have come straight out of a George Orwell novel.

The NSF has already poured nearly $1 million into Truthy. To what end? Why is the federal government spending so much money on the study of your Twitter habits?

Some possible hints as to Truthy's real motives emerge in a 2012 paper by the project's leaders, in which they wrote ominously of a "highly-active,

densely-interconnected constituency of right-leaning users using [Twitter] to further their political views."

Truthy reminds me of another agency-funded study, in which the Federal Communications Commission sought to insert itself into newsrooms across the country. That project purported to examine whether news outlets were meeting what researchers determined were the "critical information needs" of the American people. And it involved sending out government-funded researchers to ask editors and reporters questions about their news philosophy and editorial judgment.

Once this study was brought to the attention of the American people, howls of protest from across the political spectrum led the FCC to scrap the project — thankfully. The episode reaffirmed that the American people, not their government, determine what their critical information needs are and that the First Amendment means the government has no place in the newsroom.
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That principle applies here. Truthy's entire premise is false. In the United States, the government has no business entering the marketplace of ideas to establish an arbiter of what is false, misleading or a political smear. Nor should the government be involved in any effort to squint for and squelch what is deemed to be "subversive propaganda." Instead, the merits of a viewpoint should be determined by the public through robust debate. I had thought we had learned these lessons long ago.

Now, I do understand the motivation behind this scheme, even though I disagree with it. To those who wish to shape the nation's political dialogue, social media is dangerous. No longer can a cadre of elite gatekeepers pick and choose the ideas to which Americans will be exposed. But today's democratization of political speech is a good thing. It brings into the arena countless Americans whose voices previously might have received inadequate or slanted exposure.

The federal government has no business spending your hard-earned money on a project to monitor political speech on Twitter. How should it instead have reacted when funding for Truthy was proposed? The proper response wouldn't

have required anywhere near 140 characters. It could have been, and should have been, #absolutelynot.

Source: Washington Post, 2014/10/17

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