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Public cash paying for growth of fake news

WEBSITES RUN GOVERNMENT AND CHARITY ADVERTS

TIMES INVESTIGATION

Alisdair Moushous Head of Investigations

Taxpayers and charity donations are fuelling the surge in fake news by paying for adverts on dozens of fake or outrageous websites, an investigation by The Times has found.

Commercials for government-funded programmes such as the International Citizen Service, paid for out of the foreign aid budget, appear on fake news sites, including one alleging a Muslim plot to 'take over America'.

Dozens of other publicly funded bodies, including Save The Children, the National Theatre and Liverpool University, advertise next to false content. One Open University advert was placed by a story falsely alleging that President Trump's education secretary had described poverty as "genetic".

The Times reported yesterday that hundreds of leading brands were inadvertently funding Islamic extremists and white supremacists by advertising on their websites. Watson and Mercedes-Benz appeared on fake sites and YouTube videos by supporters of groups including Islamic State.

Google, which placed many of the adverts through its AdSense network, took down some of the extremist videos when it was made aware of them. It continues to place adverts on fake news sites and illegal piracy forums.

The culture select committee will examine Google's role in spreading fake news this year. Yesterday Damian Collins, its chairman, said that he intended to hand serious advertising executives before MPs to explain "how adverts are

placed online on sites promoting extremism, violence or fake news".

"Your investigation has highlighted a failure in the system," he said. "We have to ask how we turn off the cash tap."

Publicly funded bodies such as Oxford Brookes University, Cancer Research, Orphans in Need and the University of Southampton are among dozens of advertisers on fake news sites. The adverts were placed through automatic exchanges that buy and sell in the milliseconds it takes a page to load.

The National Theatre's new Nina Krause play *Consent* is advertised next to an online story on WorldNewsDaily-Report.com entitled "Missouri Pig Breeding Dismantled During FBI Raid". The website's stories have been picked up and republished across the world.

Oxford Brookes is advertised next to a piece claiming that Yoko Ono had an affair with Hillary Clinton. An advert for Cancer Research was placed under a story on US Patriot, a fake news site, claiming that "Supreme Court Judge Say Obama Birth Certificate A Fake".

The advert for the International Citizen Service appears on the website Eagle Rising above a story going viral to a conspiracy theorist who believes that the UN high commissioner for refugees is "under the influence of a powerful Muslim supremacist group".

Oxford Brookes and Cancer Research said they were not aware that their adverts were on World News Daily Report and asked their agencies to ensure that it did not happen again. The National Theatre denied that the site was fake news, describing it as satire. Industry insiders said "programmatic

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Celebrity protest Gigi Hadid and other models at a show in Los Angeles were banished on their wishes to oppose Donald Trump and 'divisive' politics. Page 9

Trump loses court battle over US travel ban

Ben Hovell Los Angeles

Donald Trump suffered the worst setback of his fledgling administration last night when a panel of federal judges unanimously refused to reinstate the immigration order that has come to dominate the first weeks of his presidency.

In what has become an early test of strength for Mr Trump, the US Supreme Court is now likely to determine the fate of the ban, which would temporarily close the United States to visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries.

The president, who had a long history of threatening legal action in his business career, invoked a furious response within minutes of the ruling by the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. He wrote: "SEE YOU IN COURT. THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!" The dispute may not be resolved for several months. In the meantime, citizens of the seven countries listed in the ban can travel to and from the US as before.

Mr Trump's order was imposed by executive action without warning at the end of his first week in office last month, prompting angry scenes at US airports and sparking protests around the world. It was suspended nationwide last Friday after a successful lower court challenge by the states of Washington and Minnesota, prompting Mr Trump to describe the seasoned federal judge responsible as a "so-called judge".

The case then progressed to three judges at the appeals court in San Francisco. Mr Trump argues that the restrictions are a vital defence against terrorists. Lawyers from the Justice Department contended that the president was oversteering with broad powers to make immigration policy at his own discretion.

The 9th circuit judges ruled yesterday that there was no precedent to support that notion, which "runs contrary to the fundamental structure of our constitutional democracy". They wrote: "The government has pointed to no evidence that any alien from any of the countries named in the order has perpetrated a terrorist attack in the United States."

Europe backs Trump ban, page 30

IN THE NEWS

Mid Staffs warning

The Mid Staffordshire hospital scandal is likely to be reported because the health service is "manifestly failing", according to the man who led the inquiry into the trust's failings. Page 2

Woman fights Isis

A self-styled "revolutionary" from Lancashire who claimed a place at Sandhurst is believed to be the first British woman to travel to Syria to fight Islamic State. Page 5

Plot to oust Bercow

John Bercow, the Speaker, is facing a formal motion of no-confidence after his attempt to bar President Trump from parliament. Critics said that he could be ousted in days. Page 7

Putin's sympathy

Russian warplanes have killed three Turkish soldiers in Syria. President Putin expressed his sympathy amid fears of damaged relations between Moscow and Ankara. Page 11

Shareholders revolt

Thomas Cook has bowed to investor pressure to change a long-term incentive scheme for bosses as companies prepared for a season of shareholder revolts. Page 17

Wales wound up

Eddie Jones, the England head coach, has continued to play mind games with Wales by insisting that the stadium roof must be open for their Six Nations contest. Page 72

COMMENT

Slimbyism — why we need it now



Anne Ashworth
Property and Personal Finance Editor

Disappointment was the common reaction to the housing white paper because an unsustainable edifice of hope had been built on its proposals. The British have £5 trillion invested in homes; the interests of those who have a stake in this wealth will always be difficult to reconcile with those of the generation who long to accumulate their own slice of real estate.

The ideal outcome of the government's proposals to mend the "broken" housing market would have been more support for homebuilding, an upsurge in slimbyism (something logical in my backyard). Instead, if the proposals are enacted, slimbyism may be reinforced, given the retreat on the development of new scrappy green-belt land.

Most disgruntled with the white paper's recommendations were construction companies such as Redrow, which disputed its culpability in the slow delivery of homes in any setting. The delays caused by planning departments are to blame, or so says Steve Morgan, Redrow's chief executive, who cited the "wall of bureaucracy" put up by some councils. Could these be the same councils accused by the government of understating their housing need figures for their areas? Who can tell?

This is not the only question posed by the white paper. The government wants new homes to be "attractive" and of "quality". Who will be the arbiter of this new age of elegance? The shoddy nature of so many new builds lies behind the widespread preference for 19th-century mansion flats, terraces and villas (see page 12) rather than 21st-century dwellings.

How will the build-to-rent sector expand while the stamp-duty surcharge on rental homes remains? The paper mentions stamp duty only once, which is a sign that the government fails to understand how this tax has brought some parts of the market to their broken state. However, let's remember that the white paper is a framework for policy, not a fully finished structure. Every building project is subject to revision — this should be no exception.

Statistic of the Week
The Statistic of the Week shortlist included a scheme of 300 new homes outside Bonn. Why? Because the German city's council had to negotiate with no fewer than 80 landowners. This example of how to achieve consensus for a project featured in the housing white

paper, presumably as a challenge to recalcitrant UK local authorities. It will not be so much a question of "Are you strong enough to overcome opposition to development?" as "Are you Bonn enough?"

The forecast from the Institute for Fiscal Studies that tax bills are set to rise was also on the shortlist because this will affect potential buyers' ability to afford a home. The latest Halifax figures, which show that the annual rate of growth has eased to 5.7 per cent, provide evidence of such pressures. However, the bank expects that cheap loans and the scarcity of homes for sale will put a floor under prices.

In a slowdown, focus switches to the locations that may surpass the rest and the JLL consultancy is predicting that property values in Birmingham will rise by 3 per cent this year — our Statistic of the Week. Workers at the multinationals arriving in this city are driving up demand for apartments. The average price in Birmingham (£142,000) is 26 per cent above its downtown low, according to HomeTrack. The London average — £483,300 — is 84 per cent higher than at that time, making a reordering of the market hierarchy inevitable.

A black-and-white issue
In restaurants, I study the decor; it's part of my job description. The recent surge in black walls in smart bar-grill establishments will, inevitably, lead to the spread of ebony shades across the interiors of private houses, as we explain on page 13.

Will such redecoration projects be preceded by rows between couples and families? Definitely.

Even Farrow & Ball's Black Blue shade (black 64) is too moorland for some tastes. Another looming source of domestic discord is the growing, room-matching chair trend, illustrated below. It's big in cafes, so it's coming soon to a dining space near you.



INTERIORS

Get into prints



▲ Patterned cushion cover, £199 hm.com

▲ Yife multi-colored wool rug, £150 habitat.co.uk



▲ Minty pouffe, Persia blue, £99 www.edition.com



▲ Triandrom cushion cover, £28 ok.com



▼ Karma rug, stone, 160 x 273cm, £299 therapseller.co.uk



▲ Bakhtie rug, blue, £1,600 a square metre homeinrevel.com



▲ Honnors Lys velvet cushion, £88 designerguild.com



▲ Maison Home Maraleh pouffe, £124 mazz.com



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