



## Tech Giants Face British Tax, Liability Problems

As if they didn't have enough problems with stock drops, accusations of political purging, and lawsuits from fired employees, the tech giants who rule the Internet with an iron fist now face a new tax to help fight fake news.

Google, Twitter, and Facebook are the targets of a media, sports, and culture committee of the British Parliament, which will not only propose the tax, but also hold the companies legally liable for the harm their platforms cause in spreading falsehoods.

The goal: Get the tech titans to pay for the expenses of the Orwellian-sounding Information Commissioner's Office.

### Democratic Crisis

[According to](#) the *Telegraph* of London, British leaders believe the tech giants, and their control over information flow, threatens democratic government.

A damning report from the Digital Culture Media and Sport Select Committee proposed that Facebook and other social-media firms should pay a levy to cover the costs of Britain's data privacy watchdog, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

MP Damian Collins, chair of the committee, called for urgent action to tackle the threat posed by fake news, including the possibility of social media being liable for the content posted online, possibly opening them up to lawsuits from members of the general public who have been targeted by hate speech.

He said: "We are facing nothing less than a crisis in our democracy — based on the systematic manipulation of data to support the relentless targeting of citizens, without their consent, by campaigns of disinformation and messages of hate."

The report warned of "hyper-partisan views, which play to the fears and prejudices of people, in order to influence their voting plans and their behaviour."

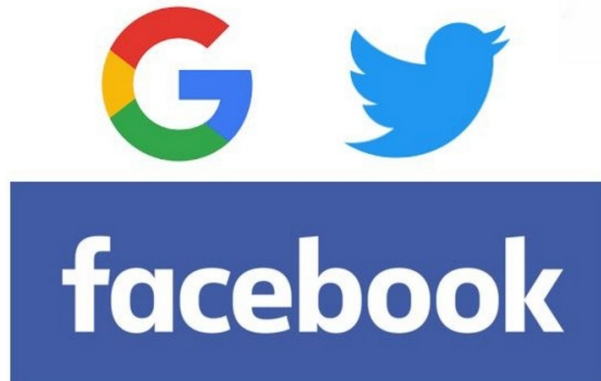
Of particular concern, for instance, is the way Facebook was used to push a yes vote for Brexit, the national referendum that, supposedly, will lead Britain out of the European Union.

[The Telegraph reported today](#) that a group called Fair Vote UK is suing Facebook for allowing a data-mining venture in Britain similar to what occurred in the United States during the 2016 presidential election and by the same company — Cambridge Analytica.

The data breach affected more than one million Britons, and perhaps, the Brexit vote:

The campaign group said 1.1 million people had their data harvested for the campaign. As a result, Facebook could face damages 'in the billions of pounds', it said.

The lawsuit follows calls from MPs to place levies on tech giants like Facebook to help stem the





Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on July 30, 2018

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flood of “fake news that threatens our democracy”.

The tax would pay for “introducing social media and data privacy protection onto the national curriculum to improve pupils’ understanding of how social media information may be used to manipulate them.”

Members of Parliament also want the companies to “face liability for what is published” on their platforms, the *Telegraph* reported.

### **Stock Collapses and Legal Trouble**

This isn’t good news for the tech giants. [As \*The New American\* reported](#) last week, Facebook suffered an unprecedented shellacking in the market, losing \$120 billion in market capitalization in one day thanks to a 20-percent drop in its stock price.

The crash cost the company all of its gains for 2018, and Facebook chieftain Mark Zuckerberg watched nearly \$20 billion of his fortune disappear.

In addition, Facebook faces growing unrest among its investors, a group of whom want to replace Zuckerberg as chairman because he is also the company’s chief executive officer.

For its part, [Twitter came under fire](#) for “shadow-banning” Republicans and conservatives. [It has denied](#) doing so, but in something of a disingenuous confession, [said a user’s reach could be harmed](#) depending who is blocking it.

But that wasn’t Twitter’s only problem. Like Facebook’s, Twitter’s stock took a major hit, dropping 21 percent at the close of business on Friday. Its market cap loss, [Marketwatch reported](#), was only \$6.6 billion.

That drubbing came from investors worried about the social-media giant’s report that “user growth has turned negative.” [Twitter purged](#) millions of fake, abusive, and suspicious accounts in early July.

Like Facebook, Google faces legal trouble.

James Damore, a senior engineer, [sued](#) Google after it fired him, he says, for writing a memorandum criticizing the company’s diversity policies.

According to Damore, Google routinely trespasses antidiscrimination laws by permitting the harassment of pro-Trump employees, by its hostility toward traditional parents, by blacklisting conservatives for employment, by discriminating against white men, and even by awarding bonuses for those who argued against Damore’s views.



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