Fact Checking Workshop

Time: 90 minutes (2 standard lesson slots)

Class size: 6-30, above 20 it may need additional facilitators / assistants

Goals

The goal of the workshop is to teach the student the practical basics of active fact checking using the Internet. Different questions aim to exercise different skill sets, whether checking the author & date, debunking false claims or reverse image searching.

Warning: it does not cover the "passive" fact-checking and critical thinking, for that please refer to https://getbadnews.com/

Requirements

- Best with students above 14 years old

- The students should have access to the Internet, whether smartphones or in a Computer Workroom. Searching on smartphones can take more time, so adjust the number of questions accordingly.

- The students should have already seen the "10 steps for Fact Checking" (available below) during a separate lecture, preferably with a few examples. If no time, it's best to compress it within the first part of the workshop and leave on the projector / whiteboard as they work. Please refer to https://slides.com/pawelngei/fake-news-2020/ and https://youtu.be/UoOel_Vgnl8 for more on them.

- No student group should be bigger than 4 participants, it's better to add more questions and decrease the

Structure

There are three parts of the Workshop

1. 20 minutes – Introduce the topic and outline the tasks: the students are to use their phones / provided computers to research whether provided statements are true, false, partially true or out of context. If they're false, can they find the source of the falsification / misunderstanding? Remind them of the 10 steps and give them a list of your local fact-checkers from https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/ . Divide them in groups and assign 1-4 questions to each group.

2. 40 minutes – Work in groups. Answer any questions that arise without solving the task for the students. If no questions arise, feel free to walk between the groups and try to ask them additional questions (provided below). If a group finishes all their tasks first, give them tasks up to 4 total or ask to think about additional questions.

3. 30 minutes – Presentation. Ask a representative of each group to come to the front and present:

- What were their tasks and were they True / False / Partially true / Out of Context
    - What was the real context
    - How did they arrive at their conclusion, especially: how much and how good sources did they use? When did they feel it's enough?
    - What was the biggest problem they had
- Encourage students to make notes of the most interesting aspects.

Additional Questions

- What browsers did you use? Have you tried using others, like DuckDuckGo, Bing, Yahoo?
- What sources did you use? How do you know they're legitimate?
- (when faced with conflicting sources) How many sources confirming something are enough to claim it's true?
- Is Wikipedia a good source? Is a Wikipedia citation a good source?
- Have you tried Reverse Image Searching it?
- If it's false, is it completely false? Is it based on a fact?

10 Steps For Fact Checking

1. Is it a Clickbait?
2. Is the outlet – webpage, video platform, radio station legitimate?
    1. (use The Internet Archive Wayback Machine if needed)
3. Is the Author and the Date correct?
    1. Use advanced search syntax if needed +"phrase" -"phrase" inurl:website.com
4. Are the sources linked in the article legitimate?
5. Are the quotes in the article legitimate?
6. Do the comments under the article provide any help, link additional information?
7. Does the Reverse Image Search help locating the images?
8. Is the article a possible troll?
9. Am I biased towards the article?
10. Have other Fact-Checkers written about this information?

Sample Questions

Those questions were chosen to represent a possibly wide variety of potentially fake information without breaching any political or ideological topic. Using local political examples can cause a disruption among the students.

1. Red Bull is made of bull's sperm.

> (**false**) https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/red-bull-semen/
> https://www.redbull.com/ca-en/energydrink/no-semen-in-red-bull
> Students can look into what taurine is and what could be the source of this info.

2. FBI Issued an official warning that Smart TVs might spy on you.

> (**true**) https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/portland/news/press-releases/tech-tuesdaysmart-tvs/?=portland-field-office
> Is a .gov website a reliable source? Why is it only on a Local branch?

3. You can fast-charge induction-enabled devices by putting them in the microwave.

> (**false**) https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/spurious-charge-2/
> Same goes for waterproofing apps.
> Students can look into wireless charging standards

4. In the past, homeowners were encouraged to burn batteries to prevent chimney soot.

> (**true**) https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/burn-zinc-batteries-fireplace/
> A good exercise in not out rightly dismissing ridiculous claims.
> Bonus points for noting what can happen when you burn modern batteries.

5. McDonalds has a secret Nutella burger, available off menu, worldwide.

> (**false**, but) They were available in Italy for a limited time
> https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/fact-check-mcdonalds-creates-nutella-burger/
> This one can teach students about the subtleties – it did exist, just not globally.

6. You can send emails from any email address, even recipient's own.

> (**true**) https://lifehacker.com/how-spammers-spoof-your-email-address-and-how-to-prote-1579478914 and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email_spoofing
> Here we don't have just a well-known fact-checker, but we need to find the exact phrase to use: "Email spoofing"

7. A Russian officer saved the world from nuclear annihilation by refusing to attack the US.

> (**true**) and even TWICE! Give half the points for each name
> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislav_Petrov
> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasily_Arkhipov_(vice_admiral)

8. Iceland declared all religions as tools of mass destruction.

> (**false**) https://www.indiatoday.in/fact-check/story/fact-check-chill-iceland-hasn-t-declared-religions-as-weapons-of-mass-destruction-1475856-2019-03-12
> The source was a troll

9. Charging phones via USB cables in public places is dangerous.

(**true**)
https://da.lacounty.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/110819_Fraud_Friday_USB_Charger_Scam_ENGLISH_FLIER.pdf
https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/11/15/dont-let-public-usb-charging-stations-ruin-your-holiday-travels-officials-warn/#4bfc8aa5410c
https://www.zdnet.com/article/officials-warn-about-the-dangers-of-using-public-usb-charging-stations/

10. Mark Zuckerberg bought all the properties around his house so that no one can spy on him.
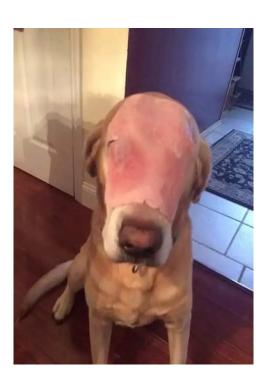
(**true**, may be hard to find)
https://www.fastcompany.com/3019869/mark-zuckerberg-bought-four-houses-near-his-home-you-know-for-privacy

11. US held asbestos shoveling competition.

(**true?**) https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3091148/Chilling-image-shows-miners-playing-asbestos-shovelling-competition.html
Is Daily Mail a good enough source? It's know for political manipulation.

12. This dog saved his family from a burning home but lost its eyes.

(**false**) – This dog has ham on its face

https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanhatesthis/the-great-ham-dog-of-facebook

This requires students to learn Reverse Image Search

13. (advanced) Vaccinated people have a higher chance of dying of cancer or cardiovascular diseases than non-vaccinated people.

(**true**) That's non-intuitive, but people who don't die early in their life have a bigger chance dying of old age diseases, like cancers and heart problems. Same with car accidents.

Students will probably focus on whether vaccines >cause< cancer or heart problems instead.

As far as I know, there's no single good source for this, but it's great to analyze this with Bayes' Theorem and https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/XTXWPQSEgoMkAupKt/an-intuitive-explanation-of-bayes-s-theorem & https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bayess-theorem

Additional Considerations

- Online you will need some way to create break-out rooms, whether on Zoom or Discord

- It's great to follow up with https://getbadnews.com/

- If the students really want to work on their debunking skills, https://youtu.be/bCXJA1MighQ is a worthy source