Fake news among teenagers – towards a more responsible media literacy
German Mobility C5 (01.02.-04.02.2022): Students make media

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Fake news and fact checking

Lucie Renard — 16. Jan. 2019

What is fake news?

Fake news is defined as news stories that are false. The story is fabricated and there are no verifiable facts, sources or quotes. Fake news can be propaganda that is intentionally designed to mislead the reader or may be designed as "clickbait" written for economic incentives. Think about advertisements, or writers that profit on the number of people who click on their story.

The Dangers of fake news

Just how harmful are little lies? A little bit of fake news is nothing new, right? Wrong. There is a dangerous new trend: "deep fake" technology. With deep fake technology, it's possible to create audio and video of real people saying and doing things they never said or did. Deep fakes are more realistic and resistant to detection.

1. Fake statements can influence business
Falsely created videos can show events that have never happened. They can show people saying things which they never said. Fake statements by CEO's (=bosses of companies) or banking officials could have a big effect on the financial markets. They can ruin these people's reputation or the reputation of their business and people can start buying from other companies instead.

2. Fake news can influence politics
A fake article such as "BREAKING: Pope Francis Backed Trump…" (back = support) can leave a huge impact on politics and elections. Pope Francis is one of the biggest influencers when it comes to the Catholic Church. So, if he backs a certain politician, some people will perhaps also back this politician because they think the Pope did that…

3. Fake multimedia can ruin personal lives
Photoshopped images of two people meeting, intimate scenes, and much more will ruin a person's personal life. People usually start judging without checking the facts or the source.

4. Fake news can create confusion
When you find different information on one topic, it is difficult to know which source is correct.

5. Fake news can cause crime
Some readers who believe a fake article or fake post will potentially harm others for revenge. Then, things can go out of hand and can get really dangerous.

How to spot fake news - 10 Fact checking tips for students

This checklist will help you to see if your source is trustworthy or if it might be fake news.

1. Check the headline
If the headline uses a lot of punctuation or capital letters, it might be a good thing take a closer look. If it is screaming for your attention, it might be a trap. If the headline says it contains a secret or tells you something that "the media" doesn't want you to know, your alarm bell should be going crazy.

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2. Use Google image reverse search

Google's image search tool can be used to fact check and research images. That way you can find out where else the photo has been used and can perhaps see if it was taken out of context.

3. Look for information on the publisher/ author

Look for the "about us" page on a website, or you can look for the author's biography in the article. If the author's background is unknown, this source is perhaps fake.

4. Easy to share?

Is the resource easy to share? Take a meme for example. They get shared a lot, but the content isn't reliable at all. Everybody can create a meme and most memes are biased (=prejudiced, not objective).

5. Encounter and purpose (=goal)

How did you find this resource? Was it promoted on a website? Was it advertised in Google? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know? If it was advertised, the resource is less reliable than content that reaches Google's top pages without advertising.
Ask yourself what the purpose (=goal) of the document is and why it was made.

6. Check the domain

Check the domain of the article. What institution publishes this document? Use reliable domains. For instance, you can enter ".gov" or ".edu" in the box that asks for site or domain. It will limit the search results to just government or university-owned websites.

7. Up-to-date?

Check the date. If the information from an article or post is five years old, many new things could have happened, and the information might not be relevant anymore.

8. Check more sources

It's always better to check 2 or more sources to verify the same information. The more resources state the same facts, the more likely the information is true.

9. Emotional stage

If you are intensely hoping that the information turns out to be true or false, it might be not the right emotional stage to start from. Ask yourself if you are neutral or if your opinion is biased.

11. Use Fact checking websites

It's hard to distinguish real news from fake news. So, use fact checking websites.

1. Politifact: This website also has a Truth-o-Meter, which tells the level of truth in a statement.

2. FactCheck.org: This is a website with an established history of a team of journalists and linked to Pennsylvania University. The website focusses primarily on US politics and it lets users submit their own questions to the website.

3. AllSides: This website isn't a fact checking website, but useful. AllSides has stories from right, centered and left-oriented media so that readers can compare how bias influences reporting on topics.

Source: Adapted from:

https://www.bookwidgets.com/blog/2019/01/fact-checking-and-fake-news-lesson-plans-the-ultimate-teacher-guide#resources
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