Fake News, Media Literacy, & Critical Consuming

Kristen Dembroski, Ph.D.

The New York Times defined "fake news" on the Internet as fictitious articles deliberately fabricated to deceive readers, generally with the goal of profiting through clickbait.

Key Terms

Fake News
- Purpose: Mislead, spread misinformation
- False info or propaganda published under the guise of authentic news
- Sensationalist, extreme
- Fuels passions and prejudices
- May provoke violence
Key Terms

**Clickbait**
- Exaggerated, scintillating, or fabricated headlines
- Photographs taken from other stories
- Click = $$

**Satire News**
- Purpose: Parody / Entertain
- Mimics mainstream news
- Entirely fictional
- Can be commentary on real news events

**Native Advertising**
- “Sponsored Content”
- Revenue source for news sites
- Promotes product in guise of a news story

**Echo Chamber / Confirmation Bias**
- Algorithms create our newsfeed
- Feed us what we ‘like’, and hide what we don’t
- This will increase our engagement time and the platform’s revenue
Key Terms

Other Terms to Consider

- **Extreme bias** - rely on propaganda, opinions distorted as facts, decontextualized information
- **Conspiracy theory** - kooky, unproven theories (e.g. vaccines as mind control)
- **Rumor mill** - propagates unverified claims, gossip
- **Junk science** - promotes pseudoscience and dubious claims
- **Hate news** - promotes ‘isms, phobias, and discrimination

“Fake News” used to be easy(ier) to spot, and a lot harder to disseminate

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In today’s digital world, we are all citizen journalists and researchers.

Social Media has made it easy to click, share, like, and “go viral.”

Why does Fake News even exist?
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What is going on in this photograph?

Fake
Hoax
Bogus
Propaganda
Counterfeit
False
Phony
Sham
Spurious
Fraudulent
Invented

What is going on in this photograph?

Media Manipulation
Fake News is as old as the printed word (1439)
- Sea monsters
- Witches
- Slave uprisings
- Native Americans ‘scalping’ colonists
- Yellow Journalism (Gilded Age)
- “Remember the Maine!” Spanish American War
- Political smear campaigns

Today’s code of ‘Journalistic Ethics’
- truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, public accountability

First Amendment vs. Libel

Overall: we expect integrity, but cannot rely on it.

Why is fake news so dangerous?
- Threatens public confidence in
  - Media
  - Political figures
  - Democracy
  - Reality
- Flames prejudices and fears
- Can incite violence

Impact on Education

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“Overall, young people’s ability to reason about the information on the internet can be summed up in one word: bleak.”

- Stanford History Education Group

“At present, we worry that democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish.”

- Stanford History Education Group

Stanford Study

Goal: Measure student digital literacy skills

- Identify advertisements
- Distinguish news article vs. advertisement
- Distinguish news article vs. opinion column
- Distinguish fake vs verified social media accounts
- Rate strength of evidence
- Verify a claim via research
- Evaluate trustworthiness of a photograph, website, tweet, and video

Task - Discern Advertisement vs. News
Is this an advertisement? Why/not?

Should California Stop Growing Almonds?

The nut has been vilified for drinking up the state’s water supply. It doesn’t deserve such a bad rap.

By Eric Hofhaus

SPONSORED CONTENT

The Real Reasons Women Don’t Go Into Tech

We know you’ve got a story.

GOTHAM WRITERS

SAVE $20

USE CODE: SAVE20

LIMITED TIME ONLY

Is this strong evidence about the conditions near Fukushima Power Plant? Explain your reasoning.

Fukushima Nuclear Flowers

by DaveKeller via flickr.com/photos/DaveKeller

Not much more to say, this is what happens when flowers get nuclear birth defects

Task - Evaluate Evidence

Task - Evaluate Claims on Social Media
Is this tweet a useful source of information?

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Conclusions & Implications

- Students lack digital vocabulary (i.e. “sponsored content”)
- Students believe photographs lend credibility to an article
- Students lack understanding of how political agenda can influence content
- Students may not be aware of or investigate political affiliations
- Students struggle to navigate social media content

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Spotting “Fake News”

1. Spotting “Fake News”

John Spencer’s 5 Cs of Critical Consuming:

- Context
- Credibility
- Construction
- Corroboration
- Compare

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Spotting “Fake News”

**CONTEXT**
Check the publication date / location
- Is it recent?
- Is it relevant?
- Have things changed since then? New info?

**CREDIBILITY**
The most trusted news sources, according to mixed ideological groups (conservatives and liberals).
_Pew Research Study, 2014_

- Popularity does not equal credibility.
- Retractions and corrections - reputable sources are willing to make them.
- Consider expertise - blogs can be credible if the author is an expert in the field.
Spotting “Fake News”

CREDIBILITY

Look at the url and site

Ex: www.abcnews.go.com vs. www.abcnews.com.co

Some sites admit they contain invented stories

Some sites do not report authors - Check for contact info
Spotting “Fake News”

You should be able to contact and investigate the author

Consider the advertising
■ Too much?
■ Inappropriate?
■ Pop-ups?
■ Embedded links?

Check it out
■ Snopes.com
■ RealtorSatire.com
■ Factcheck.org
■ PolitiFact.org
■ Google!

Check out http://bit.ly/2iJTrlG
Spotting “Fake News”

Check out http://fakenewswatch.com/

CONSTRUCTION
Consider tone
- Are there any ‘loaded’ or emotional words?
- Is there a lot of extreme or inflammatory language?
- Are there lots of absolute words (always, never), superlatives (worst, best), or colorful adjectives (horrifying, phenomenal)?

CONSTRUCTION
Consider author bias. Ask yourself:
- Why did the author use that language? (Notice & Note)
- Does the author seem to have a strong opinion?
- Is the article balanced / neutral?

CONSTRUCTION
Consider the content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion / Judgment</th>
<th>Verifiable fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(may be based on evidence)</td>
<td>(can be cross-checked)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speculation</th>
<th>Inference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(not based on evidence)</td>
<td>(based on evidence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spotting “Fake News”

**CORROBORATION**

Does this same information appear on other credible news sources?

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**CORROBORATION**

Trust your “spidey sense”

- Does this seem right?
- Does this seem possible?
- Have you heard this anywhere else?

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Spotting “Fake News”

**COMPARE**

- Read other news sources to get different perspectives.
- Get the big picture of what’s going on.

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**BREAKING NEWS CONSUMER’S HANDBOOK**

**FAKE NEWS EDITION**

1. Big red flags for fake news: All CAPS, or obviously photoshopped pics.
2. A grid of paragraphs and numbers? Good sign the story is pure clickbait.
3. Check the domain! Fake sites often end .汲 or “tr” to sound trendy and steal their traffic. (Think: “America.com.co”)
4. If you land on an unpopular site, check its “About” page. Then, Google it with the word “site” and see what comes up.
5. If a story offers links, follow them. (Orange links to worse garbage) No links, quotes, or references? Another dubious sign.
6. Verify an unlikely story by finding a reputable outlet reporting the same thing.
7. Check the date. Social media often resurrects outdated stories.
8. Read past headlines. Often they have no resemblance to what ties behind.
9. Photos may be misidentified and dated. Run a reverse image search engine like TinEye to see where an image really comes from.
10. Get checked. If a story makes you angry, it’s probably designed that way.
11. Finally, if you’re not sure it’s true, don’t share it. Don’t. Share it.

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Spotting “Fake News”

(Harvard) Melissa Zimdar’s Tips for Spotting Fake News

- Cross check with known/reputable websites
- Check ‘About Us’ to learn more about the site/source
- ALL CAPS is a bad sign
- Did the story make you really angry? Read another viewpoint.

Solutions for Education

- Explicitly teach media definitions (e.g. sponsored content, bias)
- Study and discuss text features of digital news articles (footnotes, citations, by-lines, embedded links, etc.)
- Coach students in checking for authors, sources, citations, media bias
Read the ENTIRE article. Clickbait grabs the reader by the title and first paragraph.

Locate the **information intersection** - compare news stories from multiple and varied sources.

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Engage in regular discussions about the author’s craft.

- **Author’s purpose**
  - Explain
  - Describe
  - Inform
  - Entertain
  - Persuade
  - **Combination**

- **Questioning the Author** (Beck)

- **Discussion “About the Text”** (Fountas & Pinnell)

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Teach students to be skeptical “fact checkers”

Investigate content

- Google search exact quotes “__”
- Reverse image search

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**THE PROBLEM WITH QUOTES FOUND ON THE INTERNET IS THAT THEY ARE OFTEN NOT TRUE.**

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Where did this image come from?

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Where did this image come from?

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Newseum ED provides “free quality online resources to cultivate the skills to authenticate, analyze and evaluate information from a variety of sources and to provide historical context to current events.”
Solutions

- Stanford History Education Group’s online “Read Like a Historian” curriculum
  - Historical Inquiry
  - Multiple perspectives on an event/topic
  - Sourcing, Contextualizing, Corroborating, Close Reading
  - U.S. and World History - can augment your current curriculum

- Teaching students how to research online - Search terms matter!
  - Narrow search to keywords only (not the entire question)
  - Avoid adjectives or loaded language
  - Keep search terms neutral and specific
  - Use academic language

- Teach students how to select from search results
  - Model, Think Aloud
  - Practice with sample topics
  - Practice offline
  - Dissect search engine results - components, color, placement, order, advertisements, etc.
NewseLA Fake News Text Set

- The history of fake news
- Facebook and Google responsibility
- Fact Checking

NewseLA Comparing Multiple Sources Tasks

Investigate a topic and read at least 4 sources

Discuss:
- Tone, language
- Investigate the author / publisher
- Look for textual clues of the author’s POV

Topics to investigate:

- Dakota Access Pipeline
- Climate Change
- Refugee Crisis / Immigration
- Drone Laws
- Social Media for Education
- Body Cameras for Law Enforcement

Dakota Access Pipeline Facts

https://daplpipelinefacts.com/

Key Facts

- The Dakota Access Pipeline is the best way to move Bakken Crude Oil to market.
- The Dakota Access Pipeline is located underground.
- The Dakota Access Pipeline does not cross Standing Rock Sioux Reservation land.
- Lake Oahe currently contains eight other pipelines, including existing oil CRM, oil 46, and 450-line pipelines operating since 1952.
- Pipelines on the Dakota Access have proven to be effective in transporting oil through the pipeline system.
- The Dakota Access Pipeline can deliver up to 430,000 barrels per day.
- The pipeline extends from the Bakken to Cushing, Oklahoma.

* Who are the publishers or authors?
* What are their purposes or goals?
* Can you find examples of bias or loaded language?
* Is this site credible? Useful?
Stand with Standing Rock
https://standwithstandingrock.net/

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Reflection / Follow-up:

- About what do the websites disagree?
- Do the websites agree on anything?
- What do you still wonder? What else can you research?
- Extension: Repeat these questions with a mainstream media post on the topic.
- Can you locate any ‘neutral’ or unbiased news sources on this topic?
- What did you learn from this experience?

References


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Thanks!
Any questions?

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