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Fake News

Fake news has been around for centuries, but it has just recently emerged as a worldwide calamity. Although it has never been a good thing, with the appearance of social media its effects have become increasingly negative. Recently, in Mexico, due to false information being spread through WhatsApp, two people were beaten and burned to death. Prior to this, rumors that there were people in the area looking to kidnap children and harvest their organs were circulated through WhatsApp. The results of this were two people's deaths. This is just one of the many incidents similar to this that has happened. Because technology makes information so accessible nowadays, we have to be very careful when deciding whether or not to believe something. Before we can truly understand fake news we must learn how to distinguish the real information from the fake, check our own and others' opinions, and understand the consequences that result when laws and policies are based off of false information.

There are certain steps that we, as the public, can take to ensure that we know how to spot fake news. Some of these steps are: check emotions and bias, check the author and publisher, read the whole article, not just the title, determine if the article tells each point of view, and find other articles on the same topic to make sure facts check out. Many of us probably have never even thought about doing these things, but following these steps could ultimately save many people from getting caught in the fake news trap.

One of the crucial steps that is essential to spotting fake news is stated in the article "How to Spot Fake News", written by Eugene Kiely and Lori Robertson. This step is determining if the story or post is appealing on an emotional level. If an article is based solely on

a topic that a person feels very strongly about, whether in a positive or negative way, doing some checking up would be advised. Arie Kruglanski, a psychology professor, stated: “. . . Now, just about every source is suspect of bias and serving interests other than the truth. In consequence, people increasingly believe what they wish to believe, or what they find pleasing and reassuring.”¹ An example of this is when a story came out claiming that an FBI agent was found dead in his apartment after supposedly leaking Hillary Clinton’s emails. Those who don’t like Hillary used this story to confirm their reasoning for not liking her. It was later found out that the story was a fake. Because people didn’t like Clinton they jumped on the chance to make her look bad, even though the information was false.

The step that follows determining if the article is biased, is checking the author and publisher.² It’s important to look at the author’s credentials before trusting what they wrote. For example, if an author’s biography states that they are a journalist for a reputable news site, check it out. Go to the site listed and look for other articles written by that author. If their bio states that he or she has received awards in writing or is a professional in the topic they wrote about, Google them. Doing this will most likely reveal whether or not the author’s claims are true. Checking out the publisher is the next thing to do. Go to the “About Us” on a website to find information about the creator or publisher of the site. In an article on *factcheck.org*, examples of red flags to look for are given: “In recent months, we’ve fact-checked fake news from abcnews.com.co (not the actual URL for ABC News), WTOE 5 News (whose “about” page says

¹ Kruglanski, Arie. “Our Shared Reality Is Fraying.” *The Conversation*, The Conversation, 19 Sept. 2018, theconversation.com/our-shared-reality-is-fraying-103065#annotations:P8rc8uH1Eei ohO-cC9Z19Q. Accessed on 5 November 2018.

² Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. “How to Spot Fake News.” *FactCheck.org*, 19 Dec. 2016, www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/#annotations:8OZ03OHxEeioO4P42sC6-g. Accessed on 7 November 2018.

it's "a fantasy news website"), and the Boston Tribune (whose "contact us" page lists only a gmail address)."³ Read the whole thing. If there is something that sounds strange or if it has little to no contact information, it would probably be wise not to trust their site.

Another thing to do before deciding whether or not an article is true, is to read through the whole article.⁴ Oftentimes, people get caught up in fake-news because they only read the headline before sharing it with others. In most cases, those people with whom the article was shared do the same. This results in a seemingly endless cycle of false information being spread because no one thought to read the whole article. It has been found that if a fake-news article is actually read through, it will often have mistakes. James Carson, a writer for *The Telegraph*, in his article about fake-news, gives this information: "Many false news stories often contain spelling and grammar errors, as well as an awkward looking layout."⁵ There are also times when the author quotes someone who doesn't exist or has no knowledge on the subject of the article. It is important to not base your opinion of an article solely on the headline.

Along with reading the whole article, people need to determine if it tells all sides of the story.⁶ Many news websites produce content with extremely biased political views. It is important to know what these websites are and for what political group they will base their bias

³ Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. "How to Spot Fake News." *FactCheck.org*, 19 Dec. 2016, www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/#annotations:8OZ03OHxEeioO4P42sC6-g. Accessed on 7 November 2018.

⁴ Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. "How to Spot Fake News." *FactCheck.org*, 19 Dec. 2016, www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/#annotations:8OZ03OHxEeioO4P42sC6-g. Accessed on 7 November 2018.

⁵ Carson, James. "Fake News: What Exactly Is It – and How Can You Spot It?" *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 14 Nov. 2017, www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/fake-news-exactly-has-really-had-influence/. Accessed on 6 November 2018.

⁶ Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. "How to Spot Fake News." *FactCheck.org*, 19 Dec. 2016, www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/#annotations:8OZ03OHxEeioO4P42sC6-g. Accessed on 7 November 2018.

on. Articles on these types of websites aren't necessarily going to be written on completely false information, but because they only tell one side of the story, all of the important information won't be found. According to Tom Rosenstiel, "Most other stories, however, are built around an idea, a trend, or even some angle on a news event."⁷ When reading the news, it would be smart to look up other articles of the same topic to determine if all parts of the story are being told.

According to NorQuest College Library's website, looking up articles written about the same topic is the last important step to take when determining if an article is truthful or not.⁸ When something big happens, there is not only going to be one news article written on it, there will be many. To ensure that you are getting all of the correct information, it is advised to check out many different, reliable articles of the same topic. By doing this, you will be able to get the whole story.

Along with learning how to determine what is fake-news and what isn't, it is important to be aware that other's opinions, and sometimes even our own, can be based off of false information if we are not careful and check up on the facts. One of the biggest problems concerning fake-news is when an article is based on a real event, but only half of the story is told. A large portion of major news sources are strongly politically biased to one side. This results in a great portion of the articles written on current issues only covering one side of the story; the side that either appeals to people of their side, or that makes the other side look bad. Because public opinion is greatly based off of the media, after reading these articles they

⁷ Rosenstiel, Tom. "Six Questions That Will Tell You What Media to Trust." *American Press Institute*, 23 Oct. 2013, www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/six-critical-questions-can-use-evaluate-media-content/. Accessed on 13 November 2018.

⁸ "Research Guides: Fake News: Identifying Fake News." *Famous Psychologists & Theories - Psychology-Research Guides at NorQuest College*, libguides.norquest.ca/fakenews/identify#anotations:3a_PZOHvEeiKqaMf3Zk0_w. Accessed on 13 November 2018.

immediately form an opinion based on their biases. An example of this is two different articles concerning the immigrant caravans wanting to enter at the American border. One of the articles was very biased towards the side of letting the caravan into the country. The author based the article off of a picture of a mother and her two young daughters running from tear gas at the Mexican/American border.⁹ This article was very emotionally appealing and almost sounded more like a persuasive essay than a news article. There was a lack of information, as the author mostly kept to one certain event and elaborated on it. The second article had views that were against allowing the caravan into the American border. Although this article had multiple facts and information, it appeared to be strongly biased as well. It stated that the picture that the first article was based off of was fake and gave reasons why.¹⁰

It is important for people to base their opinions on facts, so that if the need arises to state or use them they know what they stand for and what their beliefs are. Many people who agreed that the caravan should be able to enter the country probably read articles similar to the first article mentioned and used those articles to support or strengthen their reasoning of why the caravan should be allowed in. Similarly, those who did not believe the caravan should enter the U.S. most likely did the same with articles that matched their views. When neither side really gives the whole story, it is hard to have a true, fact-based opinion on the matter.

Along with basing our own opinions on facts, it is also crucial to have laws and policies that are based off of real information. If not, there can be consequences. An example of this is

⁹ Uhls, Yalda T. "The Cruel Irony of the Migrant Mom in a 'Frozen' T-Shirt." CNN, Cable News Network, 27 Nov. 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/opinions/migrant-mother-frozen-photos-uhls/. Accessed on 27 November 2018.

¹⁰ Showalter, Monica. "Caravan Migrants Fake Photos for Gullible, Biased US Press." *American Thinker*, 27 Nov. 2018, www.americanthinker.com/blog/2018/11/caravan_migrants_fake_photos_for_a_gullible_and_biased_us_press.html. Accessed on 27 November 2018.

after a news story was written about people using food stamps to buy marijuana, a representative of the state of Colorado proposed that a law should be made preventing people from doing this. Later it was found that the story was a fake.¹¹ If people aren't careful and do their research before deciding on something as drastic as a law, problems that probably wouldn't have been problems can happen.

In the world we live in, we are being bombarded with all kinds of stories, opinions, and media. To survive this onslaught of information, we must learn how to identify when false information is being presented, examine not only our own beliefs, but other's, and make sure we know the facts before taking drastic actions. By doing this we can ensure that our opinions are evidence based and we steer clear of fake news.

¹¹ Sydell, Laura. "We Tracked Down A Fake-News Creator In The Suburbs. Here's What We Learned." *NPR*, NPR, 23 Nov. 2016, www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/11/23/503146770/npr-finds-the-head-of-a-covert-fake-news-operation-in-the-suburbs. Accessed on 5 November 2018.