

# Fake News and Bias in Reporting

## MODULE JIGSAW TEXTS

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## **Suddenly, Many American Readers Have Decided Fake News Isn't Fake Anymore**

By *PBS News Hour*/Adapted by NewsELA Staff

*NewsELA*, December 11, 2016

- 1 One Sunday afternoon in 2016, a young man walked into a Washington, D.C., ping-pong bar and pizzeria with a large gun. He fired one or more shots before surrendering to police officers. No one was hurt.
- 2 Edgar Maddison Welch told police he went to the nation's capital to investigate a story he read online. The story said Hillary Clinton was part of a secret group hurting children. The pizzeria was also involved, the story said.
- 3 It was a false claim started by fake news.

### **Did Fake News Affect the Election?**

- 4 Fake news was once limited to joke stories and the corners of the Internet. Now it has become one of the most important phrases of the year. Following Donald Trump's surprise election, reporters have asked whether fake news changed people's minds about who to vote for. As it turns out, it might have played a big part. A recent study found that fake election news was very popular on Facebook.
- 5 There are different kinds of fake news. Some of it is funny fake stories that is meant to be a joke. The kind of fake news that led to PizzaGate is different. This kind of sensational news is filled with false information designed to fool people. Computer scientist Filippo Menczer said it started to spread across the Internet around 2010.
- 6 At that time, he found several websites publishing completely fake news. The sites were doing it for political purposes, or to change people's minds about important topics.

### **A Terrible Disease Made Worse by Fake News**

- 7 It got worse during 2014, when the deadly disease Ebola spread across West Africa. The websites for places like National Report began to look like real news sources. One National Report story said that a family in Texas was sick with Ebola. Even though it wasn't true, the story was shared on Facebook more than 330,000 times. The website earned money from all the people clicking on the story.
- 8 Scientist Dannagal Young doesn't blame readers for spreading fake news. They can't help it, she says.
- 9 Young has spent ten years studying how the human mind responds to political satire. Satire is probably the most common kind of fake news. It's fake news that pretends to be real, even though it's actually a joke. The reader is supposed to understand the joke. They are not meant to believe the story is truthful.
- 10 The brain works differently when it responds to satire, Young said. It becomes more engaged. As a result, people are more likely to remember things when they hear them in the form of a joke.

## **People Don't Recognize Satire**

- 11 These days, the problem comes from people not being able to recognize satire. Young pointed to a recent online petition as an example. The petition was written to make fun of lawmakers. But some people thought that it was real, including some news sources that wrote about it.
- 12 So, what happens next in the wild world of fake news? Some are looking to computers for help. For example, scientists can write programs to recognize satire and separate this kind of fake news from real news.
- 13 But these programs can't do everything. For example, they are not as good at identifying simple lies like those in the story that led to PizzaGate. The programs perform better than humans, but not by much.
- 14 Since the election, many have blamed Facebook for creating "echo chambers" in users' news feed. But these platforms are designed to satisfy people's choices. People are driven to read and share news they like, Young said. She thinks there should be people in charge to help select trending news. These people would also be able to stop fake news from spreading.
- 15 Users can also avoid "echo chambers" by making certain choices. "Don't unfollow people just because they post something you disagree with," Menczer said. "Unfollowing" is one of the easiest ways to "put yourself inside an echo chamber."

## **Websites That Publish Fake News Make Money and Suffer No Consequences**

By *The Los Angeles Times*/Adapted by Newsela Staff

*NewsELA*, January 8, 2017

- 1 It's never been easier to launch a wildly profitable online media empire. Just \$10 gets you a URL and online storage. Fill out a short form and copy-paste to get ads on your website.
- 2 Then lure in some readers and you'll have no trouble making money.
- 3 Every 1,000 visitors earns you at least a dollar or two with banner ads sold through Google. But the same number of hits will make you three times the amount of money from recommended content ads. They combine crazy headlines with exciting pictures.
- 4 "Site Reveals an Alarming Amount About Your Past (Photos & More)."
- 5 "19 Bikinis That Aren't Covering Anything."
- 6 It's that mix of ads that funds much of the Internet, including major media websites like *LATimes.com*, *Bloomberg.com* and *Newsweek.com*.

### **Advertising Technology Companies Are Not Regulated**

- 7 But the advertising technology companies have few regulations. They let sites that publish fake news make as much money as they can.
- 8 They take advantage of a general rule in online publishing: the crazier the story, the greater the interest. They post exaggerated political news articles—some with made-up quotes and details—that millions of consumers can't resist opening.
- 9 President Obama banning the national anthem at sporting events? Anything to get more attention on Facebook—and more income through recommended content ads.
- 10 Stopping fake news is now a major focus of the tech industry. Facebook, where the stories spread, has pledged to combat misleading publishers.

### **Ad Networks Hold the Power**

- 11 But it's the ad networks that can do more to stop fake news. They hold the power to remove the profit for sites dealing in deception.
- 12 Years ago, the only way for a publisher to sell an ad was to work directly with an advertiser. Google, AOL and others realized that this was expensive and time-consuming for both sides and built huge businesses to make the process simpler. With just a few clicks, advertisers and tech companies now automatically place messages on many publications at once.
- 13 Businesses will spend more than \$30 billion on nonvideo online ads in the U.S. alone this year. People who want to advertise pay dimes or pennies each time their message gets clicked. The tech companies split the money with websites that run the ads. Publishers tend to get a bigger portion of the money the larger and more important they are, sometimes higher than 50 percent. People in the misleading news business have said they can make up to tens of thousands of dollars per month.

- 14 Many ad tech companies check sites for hate speech, violent content or illegal drugs. But they do not check whether information is accurate.

### **Hanks Supporting Trump Story Was Fake**

- 15 Before last month's presidential election, more than 100,000 Facebook users promoted articles that claimed Hollywood star Tom Hanks was voting for Donald Trump. Hanks actually supported Hillary Clinton.
- 16 Conservative101.com, ReaganCoalition.com, WorldPoliticus.com and other websites produce mostly real stories. But they rely on the viral posts for most of their traffic, according to research firm SimilarWeb. As much as 90 percent of their monthly visitors publication arrive by clicking on a Facebook link.
- 17 Some ad companies didn't respond to requests for comment. Nearly all the rest said they don't want to say what's fact and what's fiction.
- 18 AdSupply.com Chief Executive Justin Bunnell said he doesn't feel comfortable determining whether Hanks actually supported Trump.
- 19 Advertisers and major sites are increasingly urging ad networks to clean up their act. Media critics and politicians want action too, fearing that bad information makes it hard for readers to make good decisions.

### **Google and Facebook Have Banned Fake News Sites**

- 20 Some are making changes. The top two online advertising companies, Google and Facebook, have banned fake news sites from using their ad services. DoubleVerify just released a new filter to block fake news websites and provides a tool for advertisers to control where ads run on a site.
- 21 Revcontent is expanding beyond a ban. As early as next year, it wants to provide ratings of advertised links describing a website's quality and political slant.
- 22 "Providing more information is how you empower people," said Revcontent CEO John Lemp, vowing to donate any profit tied to fake news.
- 23 It's unlikely that any action by ad technology suppliers or social media services would fully thwart those who deliberately spread fake news.

### **The Truth Is That Fake News Sells**

- 24 There's also the element of human nature. Advertisers want eyeballs, and people are more likely to click on more exciting content.
- 25 "Lots of junk is there because that's what people call on," said Mike Rosenberg, chief revenue officer at Content.ad.
- 26 Its continued existence also shows that it works, and ad tech companies have little reason to change a product that customers are buying.
- 27 "Fake news sites probably perform as well as a real news website, so I don't think it makes an impact on my bottom line," said lifestyle blogger Andrew Wise. He paid for a link to his website on AmericanReviewer.com, the source of the Hanks-backs-Trump story. "That being said, from an ethical perspective, I would prefer to work with a business that prohibits fake news."

## **In Wake of the 2016 Election, Facebook and Google Block False Information**

By *The Washington Post*/Adapted by NewsELA Staff

NewsELA, November 11, 2016

- 1 Facebook has been under fire for spreading fake news stories that may have helped Donald Trump win the presidential election. Over the weekend, Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg said the social media giant did not affect the election results.
- 2 “More than 99 percent of what people see is authentic,” he wrote on the social network’s website over the weekend. He added it was “extremely unlikely hoaxes changed the outcome of this election.”
- 3 However, on Monday, Zuckerberg took the most serious steps yet to end the spread of phony stories stories. Facebook will hit publishers of fake stories where it hurts them most—their pocketbook. The social media giant won’t display ads on sites that post fake news stories.

### **Controlling the News?**

- 4 The move has raised new questions about Facebook, Google and other online platforms. They say they aren’t responsible for controlling the news they deliver to billions of people, even when it includes lies, falsehoods or propaganda.
- 5 Many of these articles were for Trump and against his opponent, Hillary Clinton. One article, for instance, said Pope Francis had endorsed Donald Trump. It was shared by over 100,000 users. There were “vote online” memes that assured Democrats in Pennsylvania that they could vote from home.
- 6 Over the weekend, many people searched for “final election count.” The top choice was an article from a little-known site. It claimed that Donald Trump had won the popular vote by 700,000 votes. In reality, Clinton, won the popular vote. By more than a million votes and counting.

### **With Their Scale Comes Responsibility**

- 7 Joshua Benton is the director of the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University. He said that it’s hard for Facebook to say its not responsible when so many people pay attention to Facebook’s news feed. “With their scale comes responsibility.”
- 8 Facebook has algorithms, which are mathematical formulas, that detect what’s popular. Facebook computers immediately spread and promote those stories to many other users in the network. In other words, they help articles “go viral” in a short period of time. However, it also becomes harder to catch false news before it spreads widely.
- 9 The fake stories spread on Facebook’s News Feed and Google Search rankings. The tech giants aren’t dealing with those directly. Instead, they are trying to put financial pressure on sites to change by not placing ads.
- 10 Nearly 1.2 billion people log onto Facebook every day, according to the Pew Research Center. Almost half of Americans rely on the social network for news.

Google accounts for roughly 40 percent of traffic to news sites, according to Parse.ly, a website that analyzes Web traffic data for news publishers.

- 11 Google spokeswoman Andrea Faville would not say how the company would determine the difference between true and false information.
- 12 Tom Channick is a Facebook spokesman. He said it does not shows ads that are “illegal, misleading or deceptive.”

### **Hard To Tell**

- 13 Channick said this includes fake news sites.
- 14 It can be hard to tell between true and false news online, said a former Facebook employee who worked on the News Feed product.
- 15 Some civil liberties experts said it was dangerous for Facebook to decide what its users see. “If we wouldn’t trust the government to curate all of what we read, why would we ever think that Facebook or any one company should do it?” said Jonathan Zittrain. He is a director at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard.

### **A News Bias**

- 16 In May, the company was accused by former employees of not posting news stories that were more politically conservative. In an effort to stop the criticism, Zuckerberg met with conservative leaders and looked into bias at the social network. The investigation, conducted by Facebook, found no evidence that its news was anti-conservative.
- 17 Facebook had quietly used a handful of journalists to help choose stories for the Trending Topics section. In August, a team of engineers replaced them, and let the Trending section’s algorithms make most of the decisions. The social network allows users to identify hoaxes or fake stories in its News Feed product.
- 18 Zuckerberg has repeatedly emphasized that Facebook is a technology company, not a news company. Still, “there is more we can do here,” he said in his weekend blog post. He said he was proud of Facebook’s role in the election and hoped to have more to share soon. The challenge, he wrote, is that major changes risk introducing unintended side effects.
- 19 “This is an area where I believe we must proceed very carefully,” he wrote, adding, “Identifying the ‘truth’ is complicated.”



## The Media's Definition of Fake News vs. Donald Trump's

By Angie Drobnic Holan

*PolitiFact*, October 18, 2017

- 1 When PolitiFact fact-checks fake news, we are calling out fabricated content that intentionally masquerades as news coverage of actual events.
- 2 When President Donald Trump talks about fake news, he means something else entirely.
- 3 Instead of fabricated content, Trump uses the term to describe news coverage that is unsympathetic to his administration and his performance, even when the news reports are accurate.
- 4 Trump is so taken with the phrase “fake news,” that he’s mentioned it at least 153 separate times in interviews, on Twitter and in speeches, according to a count compiled by PolitiFact.
- 5 Recently, Trump even took credit for inventing the term. “Look, the media is fake,” Trump said in an interview with conservative pundit and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee. “The media is—really, the word, I think one of the greatest of all terms I’ve come up with—is fake. I guess other people have used it perhaps over the years, but I’ve never noticed it.”
- 6 In 10 years of fact-checking, we here at PolitiFact have not seen such a yawning chasm between the meaning of words.
- 7 PolitiFact has devoted many hours to knocking down fake news: accounts of events that never happened, from the frightening to the frivolous.
- 8 We’ve fact-checked whether NASA said the earth would be plunged into darkness for 15 days in November. (Pants on Fire.) We’ve looked at whether HIV had been detected in bananas sold at Wal-Mart. (Pants on Fire.) And we looked at whether passers-by came to the aid of comedian Bill Murray when his car broke down in Rochester, N.H.—or Marion, Ohio; or Shakopee, Minn.; or many other cities. (All Pants on Fire.)
- 9 We think it’s worth diving into the differing definitions of fake news between the fact-checkers and the president. Our reporting found that it’s a distinction that has solidified over the months of President Trump’s tenure. And it has specific implications for language, for a free press and for the First Amendment.

### **The Fact-Checkers and Fake News**

- 10 If you define fake news as fabricated content, then 2016 was the year fake news came into its own. False reports ran rampant on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and they landed at the top of search results on Google and others. PolitiFact named fake news its Lie of the Year for 2016, citing fictitious Web posts that were the ultimate election-year clickbait, such as claims that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump, or that Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS. (Neither of those things is true.)

- 11 Since the election, fact-checkers and the public have learned more about fake news. Some people create fake news to make a quick buck off automated advertising in a simple cash-for-clicks formula. Others use fake news for political mischief, such as liberal blogger Christopher Blair who told PolitiFact he writes fake news to “mess with conservatives.” (A typical report: pop star Lady Gaga was arrested for criticizing first lady Melania Trump. Pants on Fire.)
- 12 Federal investigators, though, have been looking into whether people working on behalf of the Russian government have published or promoted fake news via U.S.-based social media as part of an effort to sow division and undermine democracy.
- 13 We don’t know much about the specifics of these investigations, and it may be that investigators are looking at actions on social media that include but are not limited to fake news, especially political advertising.
- 14 Without discussing details, the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee held a press conference recently to warn that Russia had sought to undermine U.S. elections in 2016 and would likely try again.
- 15 “What I will confirm is that the Russian Intelligence Service is determined, clever, and I recommend that every campaign and every election official take this very seriously as we move into this November’s election and as we move into preparation for the 2018 election,” said Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., on Oct. 4.
- 16 Burr and his Democratic counterpart, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, said they intended to have a public hearing in November with representatives of the major platforms—Google, Facebook and Twitter.
- 17 Meanwhile, Facebook has engaged with independent fact-checkers—including PolitiFact—since December 2016 to fact-check content that users flag as suspicious.
- 18 Facebook published its own report in April noting that the term “fake news” has come to refer to a wide variety of factually incorrect content, from inaccurate news to opinion pieces, parodies, hoaxes, rumors and simple misstatements. Facebook prefers the terms “false news” and “disinformation” for inaccurate content that is spread with intent to deceive.
- 19 “In brief, we have had to expand our security focus from traditional abusive behavior, such as account hacking, malware, spam and financial scams, to include more subtle and insidious forms of misuse, including attempts to manipulate civic discourse and deceive people,” the report concluded.

### **Donald Trump and Fake News**

- 20 Since the beginning of 2017, President Trump has invoked the phrase “fake news” on 153 separate occasions. Virtually every instance has been in response to critical news coverage.
- 21 Trump has used it when he felt he wasn’t getting enough credit for positive actions, such as helping Puerto Rico recover from Hurricane Maria. “We have done a great job with the almost impossible situation in Puerto Rico. Outside of the Fake News or politically motivated ingrates,” he said on Twitter.

- 22 He's used the term after news channels simply reported what he said, such as his comments about white supremacists in Charlottesville, Va. "The only people giving a platform to these hate groups is the media itself, and the fake news," Trump said at a campaign-style rally in Phoenix.
- 23 And he's used the term repeated when news organizations have covered basic facts about the government's own investigations into Russia's influence on the 2016 election. "It is the same Fake News Media that said there is 'no path to victory for Trump' that is now pushing the phony Russia story. A total scam!" Trump said on Twitter.
- 24 Most often, PolitiFact found, his targets have been CNN (23 mentions in 2017) and NBC (19 mentions), followed by the *New York Times* (12 mentions) and the *Washington Post* (eight mentions). We found only one news outlet that had been singled out for praise during his discussions of fake news: Fox News.
- 25 Trump is particularly quick to label coverage "fake news" when the reports have unnamed sources, and unnamed sources seem to make Trump the most irate.
- 26 It's understandable that public figures get angry when they're accused of something but they don't know who the source is, said Aly Colón, the John S. and James L. Knight Professor of Media Ethics at Washington and Lee University.
- 27 "If President Trump doesn't believe what is said, then he would believe it is fake, because it doesn't fit into the reality that he accepts," Colón said.
- 28 When the media uses anonymous sources and Trump labels the stories as fake news, the public doesn't have much recourse for evaluating the evidence for themselves, Colón said. That typically means they'll side with whomever they have the most sympathy with anyway.
- 29 "What becomes most prevalent is people are inclined to believe whoever they came to the dance with," Colón said. "Until something very obvious and visible contradicts that, they're not going to have a very strong basis for accepting things from people they don't trust."
- 30 Andrew Seaman, ethics chair for the Society of Professional Journalists, agreed that the use of unnamed sources "allows for people—from the president to the public—to sometimes easily wave away the information."
- 31 Nevertheless, that doesn't make the stories "fake."
- 32 "While I don't like the overuse of anonymous sources, I do have confidence in stories based on those sources from most large news organizations," Seaman said. "My advice to the public is to always consider a news organization's history and track record. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and others all have scandals in their pasts, but the overwhelming weight of evidence shows their journalism to be reliable and trustworthy."
- 33 At times, Trump has seemed to advocate outright censorship in response to negative coverage, as when he reacted to an NBC report based on anonymous sources that said Trump had wanted an unprecedented and likely impractical increase to the U.S. nuclear arsenal; Trump backed off when his advisers told him it was a bad idea, according to the report. (It was this incident that allegedly spurred

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to call Trump a moron—again, a report based on unnamed sources.)

- 34 The NBC report on the nuclear arsenal enraged Trump enough to threaten the network.
- 35 “With all of the Fake News coming out of NBC and the Networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their License? Bad for country!” he tweeted the morning of Oct. 11.
- 36 Later that day, when asked about the report on the nuclear arsenal at a press conference, Trump said, “No, I never discussed increasing it. I want it in perfect shape. That was just fake news by NBC, which gives a lot of fake news, lately. ... It’s frankly disgusting the way the press is able to write whatever they want to write. And people should look into it.”

### **First Amendment Implications**

- 37 Trump’s comments on revoking licenses prompted one member of Trump’s own party to question his commitment to the Constitution’s First Amendment.
- 38 “Mr. President: Words spoken by the President of the United States matter,” said Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., in a prepared statement. “Are you tonight recanting of the oath you took on January 20th to preserve, protect, and defend the First Amendment?”
- 39 Other First Amendment advocates described Trump’s use of the term “fake news” as Orwellian, because it uses words to mean the opposite of their literal definition, as in George Orwell’s dystopian novel 1984.
- 40 “It is a characteristic of authoritarian leaders, whether Communist or Nazi, to appropriate ordinary words and declare them to mean the opposite,” said Bruce Johnson, a Seattle-based media lawyer. “Repressive regimes hold power by depriving their population of independent thinking and making the masses believe lies.”
- 41 Trump’s threats are “simply unprecedented,” said Sonja R. West, the Otis Brumby Distinguished Professor of First Amendment Law at the University of Georgia School of Law.
- 42 “While other presidents have certainly had their disagreements with particular stories or journalists, they still showed a basic level respect to the press as an institution and acknowledged the important role it plays,” West said. “Having the president openly wage war on the press by trying to delegitimize it is extremely concerning.”
- 43 Finally, Trump’s “fake news” attacks confuse ideas about what is accurate and what is newsworthy, said Ronnell Andersen Jones, a professor of law at the University of Utah who studies the First Amendment and media law.
- 44 Trump’s complaints tend to focus only on labeling the press as fake, rather than offering evidence to the contrary. This flies in the face of norms that assume that political leaders will rebut incorrect news reports with better facts and evidence, she said.

- 45 “If mistakes are made, the president of the United States is better positioned than anyone in the world to clarify and correct the errors—to counter misinformation with actual, correct information,” Jones said. “Cases from the Supreme Court about media freedom envision that this will happen, and they protect the press even when it makes mistakes because of the expectation that government officials will counter any false information with clear, truthful information. Striking out at the press with nothing more than a bald label—‘fake news’—undercuts this central feature of our democracy and places the larger First Amendment framework at risk.”



## Six Easy Ways to Tell if That Viral Story Is a Hoax

*The Conversation*, September 18, 2015

- 1 “And so it begins...ISIS flag among refugees in Germany fighting the police,” blared the headline on the Conservative Post; “with this new leaked picture, everything seems confirmed”. The image in question purported to show a group of Syrian refugees holding ISIS flags and attacking German police officers.
- 2 For those resistant to accepting refugees into Europe, this story was a godsend. The photo quickly spread across social media, propelled by far-right groups such as the English Defence League and Pegida UK. At the time of writing, the page claims to have been shared over 300,000 times.
- 3 The problem is, the photo is three years old, and has precious little to do with the refugee crisis. In fact, it seems to be from a confrontation between members of the far-right Pro NRW party and Muslim counter-protesters, which took place in Bonn, back in 2012. A number of news outlets tried to highlight the hoax, including Vice, the Independent and the Mirror, as did numerous Twitter users.
- 4 But news in the digital age spreads faster than ever, and so do lies and hoaxes. Just like retractions and corrections in newspapers, online rebuttals often make rather less of a splash than the original misinformation. As I have argued elsewhere, digital verification skills are essential for today’s journalists, and academic institutions are starting to provide the necessary training.
- 5 But ordinary people are also starting to take a more sophisticated approach to the content they view online. It’s no longer enough to read the news—now, we want to understand the processes behind it. Fortunately, there are a few relatively effective verification techniques, which do not require specialist knowledge or costly software. Outlined below are six free, simple tools that any curious news reader can use to verify digital media.

### **Reverse Image Search**

- 6 Not only is a reverse image search one of the simplest verification tools, it’s also the one that showed the “leaked” ISIS refugee photo was a fake. Both of the most popular services, Google Images and TinEye, found pages containing this image dating back to mid-2012. As the screenshot below shows, the “ISIS refugee” story could be debunked in less than a second.
- 7 When a link to the story was posted to Reddit, skeptical users swiftly took to Google to query it. Soon, one reported back: “Google Image Search says the photo is from 2012”.

### **YouTube DataViewer**

- 8 When watching the latest viral video on YouTube, it’s important to be on the look-out for “scrapes”: a scrape is an old video, which has been downloaded from YouTube and re-uploaded by someone who fraudulently claims to be the original eyewitness, or asserts that the video depicts a new event.

- 9 Amnesty International has a simple but incredibly useful tool called *YouTube DataViewer*. Once you've entered the video's URL, this tool will extract the clip's upload time and all associated thumbnail images. This information—which isn't readily accessible via *YouTube* itself—enables you to launch a two-pronged verification search.
- 10 If multiple versions of the same video are hosted on *YouTube*, the date enables you to identify the earliest upload. This is most likely to be the original. The thumbnails can also be used in a reverse image search to find web pages containing the video, offering a quick and powerful method for identifying older versions or uses of the same video.

### Jeffrey's EXIF Viewer

- 11 Photos, videos and audio taken with digital cameras and smartphones contain Exchangeable Image File (EXIF) information: this is vital metadata about the make of the camera used, and the date, time and location the media was created. This information can be very useful if you're suspicious of the creator's account of the content's origins. In such situations, EXIF readers such as Jeffrey's Exif Viewer allow you upload or enter the URL of an image and view its metadata.
- 12 Below is the EXIF data of a photograph I took of a bus crash in Poole in August 2014. It's very comprehensive; had I claimed the photo was taken, say, last week in Swanage, it would be very simple to disprove. It is worth noting that while Facebook, Instagram and Twitter remove EXIF data when content is uploaded to their servers, media shared via platforms such as Flickr and WhatsApp still contain it.

#### Basic Image Information

Target file: IMG\_0150.JPG

Camera:	Apple iPhone 4S
Lens:	iPhone 4S back camera 4.28mm f/2.4 Shot at 4.3 mm
Exposure:	Auto exposure, Program AE, 1/132 sec, f/2.4, ISO 50
Flash:	Auto, Did not fire
Date:	<b>August 29, 2014</b> 12:40:20PM (timezone not specified) (1 year, 18 days, 20 hours, 21 minutes, 27 seconds ago, assuming image timezone of US Pacific)
Location:	Latitude/longitude: <b>50° 41' 9.2" North, 1° 56' 33.8" West</b> ( 50.685875, -1.942717 )  Location guessed from coordinates: <i>40 Banks Rd, Poole, Poole BH13, UK</i>  Map via embedded coordinates at: <a href="#">Google</a> , <a href="#">Yahoo</a> , <a href="#">WikiMapia</a> , <a href="#">OpenStreetMap</a> , <a href="#">Bing</a> (also see the Google Maps pane below)  Altitude: 11 meters (36 feet) Camera Pointing: Northeast
File:	<b>3,264 × 2,448 JPEG (8.0 megapixels)</b> 2,971,193 bytes (2.8 megabytes)
Color Encoding:	<b>WARNING:</b> Color space tagged as sRGB, without an embedded color profile. <b>Windows and Mac browsers and apps treat the colors randomly.</b>  Images for the web are most widely viewable when in the sRGB color space and with an embedded color profile. See my <a href="#">Introduction to Digital-Image Color Spaces</a> for more information.



### **FotoForensics**

- 13 FotoForensics is a tool that uses error level analysis (ELA) to identify parts of an image that may have been modified or “photoshopped”. This tool allows you to either upload, or enter the URL of a suspicious image and will then highlight areas where disparities in quality suggest alterations may have been made. It also provides a number of sharing options, which are useful for challenging the recirculation of inaccurate information, because they allow you to provide a direct link to your FotoForensics analysis page.

### **WolframAlpha**

- 14 WolframAlpha is a “computational knowledge engine”, which allows you to check weather conditions in at a specific time and place. You can search it using criteria such as “weather in London at 2pm on 16 July, 2014”. So if, for example, a photo of a freak snowstorm has been shared to your timeline, and WolframAlpha reports that it was 27 degrees and clear when the photo was purportedly taken, then alarm bells ought to be ringing.

### **Online Maps**

- 15 Identifying the location of a suspicious photo or video is a crucial part of the verification process. Google Street View, Google Earth (a source of historical satellite images) and Wikimapia (a crowd-sourced version of Google Maps, featuring additional information) are all excellent tools for undertaking this kind of detective work.
- 16 You should identify whether there are any reference points to compare, check whether distinctive landmarks match up and see if the landscape is the same. These three criteria are frequently used to cross-reference videos or photos, in order to verify whether or not they were indeed shot in the location the uploader claims.
- 17 Google Earth, in particular, has been put to incredible use use by Elliot Higgins AKA Brown Moses, of Bellingcat—a site for investigative citizen journalism.



## **Opinion: Asking the Right Questions Helps Students Steer Clear of Fake News**

By *Smithsonian.com*/Adapted by NewsELA Staff

*NewsELA*, January 9, 2017

- 1 People don't usually ask strangers for information on the news. The Internet is different. There, people read stories written by people they do not know all the time.
- 2 In 2016, Americans chose the next leader of the United States. People used news on the Internet to help them decide which person to vote for. However, many people who voted could not tell whether the news they used to make their decision was true or not. When websites have incorrect news, it is called "fake news."

### **Fake News Looks Like Real News**

- 3 Fake news makes money. News websites get paid when they have more visits to the stories, and more people visit the stories when they are interesting. Sometimes, people write stories that are fake just because people will read them. The more visits, the more money the website makes.
- 4 Fake news stories look just like real news stories. This means readers can't always tell the difference between the two. Sometimes, people believe stories that are fake to be real.

### **Edward Owens Isn't Real**

- 5 For history teachers, this problem is nothing new. The Internet gives students and teachers the ability to read more information about the past. However, it is important for readers to be able to tell if the information is true. Librarians used to make sure the books students used for class were true. Now, with the Internet, librarians can't police students on what is fact and what is not, called fiction.
- 6 In 2008, a teacher named T. Mills Kelly had a class called "Lying About the Past." Kelly wanted to teach students not to trust all information they read online. Students in the class created fake websites about Edward Owens. Owens was a made-up fisherman who attacked ships in the northeast in the 1870s. The exercise helped students see how easy it is to believe fake news.

### **Anyone Can Write an Article**

- 7 Today, the general public can put anything online, whether it is true or not. Problems can start if the public is unable to determine what stories are real and which are fake.
- 8 "Our Virginia: Past and Present" is a fourth-grade textbook. In the chapter on the Civil War, a line reads, "thousands of Southerner blacks fought in the Confederate," or Southern army. Black soldiers fighting in the Southern army is a myth, though. Not one historian agreed with this information printed in the textbook. Even though this is proven to be untrue, many websites still say black soldiers existed in the Southern army.

## **Everyone Is a Historian**

- 9 The history classroom is a good place to teach students how to search online information. In history class, reading and analyzing are already required. There are helpful questions to consider when assessing whether something is true or not. For example, does the article come from a museum or school? Who wrote the article? Where do they work? This will help readers decide if the material is trustworthy.
- 10 The Internet has made it possible for everyone to be his or her own historian. We need to teach our students to see the difference between fact and fiction online. This will help them stay away from fake history and fake news. Everyone should be able to be responsible and informed when it comes to the truth. In teaching this, we strengthen the United States and our freedom.

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## Facebook and Google Pledged to Stop Fake News. So Why Did They Promote Las Vegas-Shooting Hoaxes?

By David Pierson

*The Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 2017

- 1 Accuracy matters in the moments after a tragedy. Facts can help catch the suspects, save lives and prevent a panic.
- 2 But in the aftermath of the deadly mass shooting in Las Vegas on Sunday, the world's two biggest gateways for information, Google and Facebook, did nothing to quell criticism that they amplify fake news when they steer readers toward hoaxes and misinformation gathering momentum on fringe sites.
- 3 Google posted under its "top stories" conspiracy-laden links from 4chan—home to some of the internet's most ardent trolls. It also promoted a now-deleted story from Gateway Pundit and served videos on YouTube of dubious origin.
- 4 The posts all had something in common: They identified the wrong assailant.
- 5 Law enforcement officials have named Stephen Paddock as the lone suspect, and so far pinpointed no motive. But the erroneous articles pointed to a different man, labeling him a left-wing, anti-Trump activist.
- 6 Meanwhile, Facebook's Crisis Response page, a hub for users to stay informed and mobilize during disasters, perpetuated the same rumors by linking to sites such as Alt-Right News and End Time Headlines, according to Fast Company.
- 7 "This is the same as yelling fire in a crowded theater," Gabriel Kahn, a professor at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, said of Google's and Facebook's response. "This isn't about free speech."
- 8 The missteps underscore how, despite promises and efforts to rectify the problem of fake news with fact checkers and other tools after the 2016 presidential election, misinformation continues to undermine the credibility of Silicon Valley's biggest companies.
- 9 Google and Facebook have since tweaked their results Monday to give users links to more reputable sources—acknowledging their algorithms were not prepared for the onslaught of bogus information.
- 10 "This should not have appeared for any queries, and we'll continue to make improvements to prevent this from happening in the future," a Google spokesperson said about the 4chan link, which surfaced only if users searched for the wrongly identified shooter's name and not the attack in general.
- 11 Facebook did not respond to a request for comment but told Fast Company it regretted the link to Alt-Right News.
- 12 "We are working to fix the issue that allowed this to happen in the first place and deeply regret the confusion this caused," the social network said.

- 13 Both Google and Facebook—along with Twitter—are under growing pressure to better manage their algorithms as more details emerge about how Russia used their platforms to interfere in the presidential election to sow discord.
- 14 The platforms have immense influence on what gets seen and read. More than two-thirds of Americans report getting at least some of their news from social media, according to the Pew Research Center. A separate global study published by Edelman last year found that more people trusted search engines (63%) for news and information than traditional media such as newspapers and television (58%).
- 15 Facebook's algorithms are designed to favor the kinds of stories and posts that get the most shares and comments. Promoting those posts drives up engagement, and with it advertising revenue.
- 16 But that strategy also helped inflame the spread of fake news during the campaign season—intensifying calls for the platforms to behave more like media companies by vetting the content they promote.
- 17 That would require more human management, something tech companies are loath to do given their very existence is owed to replacing human activity with software.
- 18 Still, Facebook has tried to strike a balance. In March, it rolled out a third-party fact-checking program with PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, Snopes.com, ABC News and the Associated Press. Those partnerships, however, did not stop inaccurate reports from landing on Facebook's Crisis Response page.
- 19 Putting people in charge of content can help tech companies avoid controversy. Snapchat, the disappearing messaging app, maintains strict control over news shared on its platform by employing staffers, including journalists, to curate and fact-check its stories. Granted, Snapchat attracts far fewer users—and far less content—than Facebook or Google.
- 20 Facebook has begun boosting its human oversight team. On Monday, the Menlo Park, Calif., social network pledged to hire more than 1,000 employees to vet its advertisements for propaganda.
- 21 The changes come amid growing frustration in Washington as lawmakers push Facebook, Google and Twitter to be more forthcoming in the investigation into Russian election meddling.
- 22 Facebook on Monday gave congressional committees more than 3,000 ads purchased during the 2016 election campaign by a firm with ties to Russian intelligence. In a blog post, the company said an estimated 10 million people in the U.S. saw the ads. Last week, Twitter briefed Congress on the number of fake accounts run by Russian operatives. And Google said it would conduct an internal investigation on Russian interference. (In a separate move to placate news organizations, the search giant said Monday it will tweak policies to help publishers reach more readers.)

- 23 Still, skepticism abounds that the companies beholden to shareholders are equipped to protect the public from misinformation and recognize the threat their platforms pose to democratic societies. Now, calls are growing to regulate the companies more strictly. As platforms, they aren't liable for most of the content they distribute.
- 24 "These algorithms were designed with intent and the intent is to reap financial reward," USC's Kahn said. "They're very effective, but there's also collateral damage as a result of designing platforms that way.
- 25 "It's not good enough to say, 'Hey, we're neutral. We're simply an algorithm and a platform.' They have a major responsibility that they still have not fully come to terms with."

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## **Proof that the World Will End Tomorrow! (Not Really, but You Clicked)**

By *The Washington Post*/Adapted by NewsELA Staff

NewsELA, November 2016

- 1 It is a common mistake: sharing something based on the headline without actually reading the link. If you spend a lot of time on social media, you have probably done this at least once.
- 2 But you are not alone. According to a study released in June by computer scientists at Columbia University and the French National Institute, 59 percent of links shared on social media have never actually been clicked. People share these articles after only reading the headline.
- 3 The first thing you can do to fight “fake news” is to actually read articles before sharing them. When you read them, pay attention to the following warning signs. There are fake news stories generated by both Democrat and Republican websites. The same rules apply to both.

### **Determine Whether The Article Is From A Trustworthy Website**

- 4 ABC News, the television network, has a website at abcnews.go.com. And ABC News, the fake news site, can be found at abcnews.com.co.
- 5 The use of “.co” at the end is a strong clue you are looking at fake news. But there are other signs as well.

### **Check the “Contact Us” Page**

- 6 Some fake news sites do not have any contact information. The fake “ABC News” does have a “contact us” page, but all it shows is a picture of a house in Topeka, Kansas. The real television network is based in New York City in a 13-story building.

### **Examine the Byline Of The Reporter And See Whether It Makes Sense**

- 7 On the fake ABC News site there is an article claiming a protester was paid \$3,500 to protest Donald Trump. It is supposedly written by Jimmy Rustling. “Dr. Jimmy Rustling has won many awards for excellence in writing,” the site says, “including fourteen Peabody awards and a handful of Pulitzer Prizes.” (Peabody awards and Pulitzer Prizes are the highest honors in journalism, and are very difficult to win.) Doesn’t that seem strange?
- 8 Or that he “spends 12-15 hours each day teaching his adopted 8-year-old Syrian refugee daughter how to read and write”?
- 9 All of these details are signs that “Dr. Rustling” is not a real person.

### **Read the Article Closely**

- 10 Many fake articles have made-up quotes that are hard to read without laughing. About midway through the article on the protest, there is a quote from the founder of Snopes, a site that proves certain news on the Internet is fake. He is quoted as saying he approves of the article. It also goes on to describe Snopes as “a website known for its biased opinions and inaccurate information they write about stories on the internet.” It is like a weird inside joke. In readers’ minds, it should raise immediate red flags.

### **Scrutinize the Sources**

- 11 Sometimes fake articles are based on merely a tweet. For example, a fake news story said anti-Trump people were being driven by bus to protest at events. That would have been shocking because it could make the protests seem bigger or more popular than they actually were—but it was not true. As The New York Times found, this story started with a single false tweet. The man who tweeted it had just 40 followers.
- 12 Another fake story said that Trump gave food to police officers who were watching protests in Chicago. This one was also started with a tweet—by a man who was not even there. He was just passing along what he had heard from his “friends.” He also had a locked account, making the “news” very suspicious.
- 13 Few real news stories start with a single tweet. Most real stories have plenty of other sources of information, too. If the article has no links to sources, you are likely reading fake news.

### **Look At the Ads**

- 14 Too many pop-up ads or other advertising on a news site means you should handle the story with care. Another bad sign is a bunch of ads or links designed to be clicked. For example, fake news sites often have many links about wild celebrity scandals on them. You do not usually find stories like this on real news sites.

### **Use Search Engines to Double-Check**

- 15 A simple Google search often will quickly tell you if the news you are reading is fake. Snopes has put together a guide to fake news sites, which lets you check the articles you read. A website called RealorSatire.com is another way to see if an article is truthful. It allows you to post the URL of any article and will quickly tell you if the article comes from a fake or unfair news website.
- 16 Stopping the spread of fake news begins with you, the reader. If it seems too crazy to be true, it probably is. Please think before you share.