Guide to Finding

FAKES & FACTS

Given the sheer volume of messages we receive on multiple media platforms all day, every day, how can the average person separate fact from fiction and know which information can be trusted?

Media literacy programs attempt to give people tools they need to dissect breaking news, identify the intent of the messenger, evaluate partisan or biased content, and utilize critical thinking before accepting a message as valid.

In the Connecticut Public original documentary, *FAKE: Searching for Truth in the Age of Misinformation*, we explore the many ways that messages, and audiences, can be manipulated via modern media.

We've created this guide to help you detect dupes and offer you resources that can help sharpen your media literacy.

Visit CPTV.org/FAKE

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Media for the curious.

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TIP: IDENTIFY THE MESSAGE

Ask "What Kind of Information Is This?"

OPINION OR EDITORIAL?
These may be written by journalists or experts, and they should be clearly marked as opinion pieces, not presented as an impartial news report.

PARODY OR SATIRE?
The purpose is to entertain or perhaps to persuade using irony or humor, but these are not reliable news sources. Examples: *The Onion* or *The New Yorker's Borowitz Report*.

NATIVE ADVERTISING OR SPONSORED CONTENT?
The primary purpose is to sell, not to present impartial information.

PRESS RELEASE?
Public relations articles come from companies or organizations with an agenda. They are often marked "For Immediate Release."

ADVOCACY OR THINK TANK PUBLICATIONS?
Groups like the Sierra Club, Moveon.org or the National Rifle Association may produce useful materials, but they should be understood to represent a particular point of view of the issues.

From the University of California Berkeley Library website

Think Like a Reporter

CONSIDER THE AUTHOR
Is this person a news reporter, a newsmaker,
or a news faker?

CONSIDER THE PUBLISHER
Is this publication real and reputable, or fake and
fraudulent? Is there bias? Is it transparent who
owns this publication?

CONSIDER THE SOURCES
Who is quoted in this story? Are they real people?
Are they real experts on the issue? Do I trust them?

FIND A SECOND SOURCE (OR MORE)
Are other news outlets I trust reporting the same story?

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THIS STORY?
To inform me? To help me think through all sides of an issue?
To sell me something? Does it bring me to a conclusion,
or does it help me to reach my own?

> **"We can actually remove a lot of the partisan politics from this and say it's not about the left, it's not about the right it's about being able to trust your sources of information."**
>
> — Benjamin Decker,
> Global Disinformation Index

When in doubt, don't share it out!

Those who want to spread disinformation or "fake news" count on casual or careless social media users to amplify — and lend credibility to — their false messages by sharing them with friends and followers. This can have serious consequences. Share with care!

Does It Look and Smell Like Garbage?

1. Big red flags for fake news: ALL CAPS, or obviously photoshopped pics.

2. A glut of pop-ups and banner ads? Good sign the story is pure clickbait.

3. Check the domain! Fake sites often add ".co" to trusted brands to steal their luster (Think: "abcnews.com.co").

4. If you land on an unkown site, check its "About" page. Then Google it with the word "fake" and see what comes up.

5. If a story offers links, follow them. (Garbage leads to worse garbage.) No links, quotes or references? Another telltale 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 bear no resemblance to what lies beneath.

9. Photos may be misidentified and dated. Use a reverse image search engine like TinEye to see where an image really comes from.

10. Gut check. 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.

From The "Breaking News Consumer Handbook" at OnTheMedia.org

How Safe Are You from Bots, Trolls and Other Media Manipulators?

With sweeping, serious consequences of the spread of misinformation — like influencing our election results and causing the reemergence of deadly diseases previously controlled by vaccinations — you may choose to develop some new intellectual self-defense skills. Here are several online services and resources to help the general public become smarter, safer consumers of today's media:

"INFORMABLE"
This app from the News Literacy Project tests your ability to distinguish ads from other information, fact from opinion, and false vs. sound evidence. Get points for speed and accuracy.

HOW WELL CAN YOU TELL FACT FROM OPINION?
Take this quiz from the PEW Research Center and see how you stack up to a national group of U.S. adults.

LEARN TO USE REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH
Read about the tools available to detect where a photo *really* came from.

CONSIDER A SERVICE LIKE "NEWSGUARD"
This for-profit company employs vetted, trained, real-human journalists to rate the credibility and transparency of news websites.

CHECK OUT FACT-CHECKING SITES
Sites such as factcheck.org, politifact.com, the Washington Post Fact Checker and the Sunlight Foundation all provide credibility and integrity checks on the news of the day. Still, tread carefully! Some of these sites may also operate with a bias.

"Given how crazy this stuff seems, why is it that people could come to believe it? Shouldn't our reasoning abilities allow us to see that this content is obviously not true?"

— David Rand, associate professor at the Sloan School of Management and the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT

Beware of Confirmation Bias

Cognitively, we humans tend to seek out or favor information that is consistent with our own beliefs. This can lead us to accept information as true on its face, when a deeper, more objective examination of the facts might prove it to be false.

Don't Believe Your Lying Eyes (and Ears)

Technologies like Photoshop and AI-enabled video editing tools can seemingly put people in places where they have never actually been, and put words in their mouths that they never really spoke. These images are distributed and amplified on platforms like Facebook and Youtube — often unwittingly by unsuspecting users. Big tech companies say they are trying to combat this growing "deepfake" problem, but consumers need to remain vigilant to avoid becoming part of the problem.

Do You Know the Meaning Behind These Terms?

Here are some short definitions of some of terms used when discussing media manipulation. We recommend that you do some of your own research into what these terms mean and look for examples during your own media consumption.

"Outrage Influencer"
Conspiracy theorists or ideologists that use mass media to spread false information with the intent of stirring up people's fear, anger or hatred.

"Illusory Truth Affect"
The psychological theory that if a falsehood is repeated often enough, people will start to believe it.

"Electoral Manipulation"
Refers to fraudulent techniques used to illegally interfere with the results of a democratic election.

"Computational Propaganda"
Using artificial intelligence, personal online data and automated, high-speed computing to deliver fraudulent news stories to the most susceptible people in order to initiate the viral spread of propaganda.

"Echo Chamber"
An environment in which people are only introduced to ideas, stories or messages that confirm and reinforce their own preexisting beliefs.

"Bumping Into News"
Describes the way that most digital natives consume news — through incidental discovery on social media feeds, rather than intentionally seeking out reputable sources.

"A lot of time we have the misconception that because our kids are so exposed to technology that they automatically know how to use it, they know what to do. And that is false."

— Nyree Copeland- Whyte, Achievement First, Director, Digital Learning

Teach Your Children Well

Learning how to think critically is key to the 21st century student's education. THINKALONG is a free online program for middle schoolers to analyze and debate current events while practicing media literacy.

thinkalong™
Current events for the curious classroom

Visit THINKALONG.org

Curious? Find Out More

We've collected several resources and links, some of which we used in our own research of this topic, on our website. We encourage you to seek out your own information and do further study about this vital issue of our times.

Get started at CPTV.org/Fake