



## Get the Facts: Finding Truthful News

**“A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on.”**

**– Mark Twain**

### What is fake news?

Fake news is rampant in our post-truth world. For the scope of this class, “fake news” encompasses misinformation, or, any information that is false, partly false, or presented in a skewed or biased manner. Fake headlines are often exaggerated and inflammatory in order to attract “clicks” and visits to a specific site, which generates revenue. Social media is also enabling the spread fake news and misinformation; news that seems “real” or “true” is often shared faster than experts can fact-check. Fake news is also a subset of the wider “bad news” trend, “which also encompasses many forms of shoddy, unresearched, error-filled, and deliberately misleading reporting that do a disservice to everyone.”<sup>1</sup>

**Remember:** misinformation and misleading information doesn’t only take the form of news! You can apply the same techniques discussed in class to advertisements, images, sponsorships, satires, and individual social media posts, among many other information outlets.

### Class Outcomes:

By the end of class today, you should be able to:

- Identify misleading or false information, including satire, using telltale signs and signifiers.
- Use a number of online tools to verify facts and information.
- Use due diligence to inspect, verify, and evaluate news sources before sharing or propagating them.
- Understand the difference between weak sense and strong sense critical thinking, and use both of them!

---

<sup>1</sup> Kiely, E. & Robertson, L. (n.d.) How to Spot Fake News. Retrieved from <http://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>

## Glossary:

Post-truth: when emotional appeal and personal belief are more influential on the public and public policy than objective facts and reason.

Clickbait: online content purposefully generated to attract “clicks” and visits to a specific website, often in order to generate revenue or to intentionally mislead the public.

Triangulation: the practice of using more than one source (three is recommended) to verify information before coming to a conclusion about that information.

Filter Bubble: Online search results are personalized according to past results. In other words: Google and other search engines are more likely to give you results based on your own biases and beliefs, which may not necessarily give you all the facts.

Echo chamber: a situation in which information and ideas are amplified and reinforced by sharing within a homogenous group. For example: Facebook friends. Homophily is a similar phenomenon: our tendency to associate and bond with people who share complementary views.

Confirmation bias: our tendency to assume something is true because it aligns with our beliefs, and, alternatively, to assume something is false because it does *not* align with our beliefs. In today’s post-truth society, we need to become comfortable with challenging our pre-conceived notions.

Native advertising: a form of paid media; when a user experience is actually an advertisement and paid for/sponsored by an organization or corporation. Ex: sponsored YouTube videos!

Metaliteracy: emphasizes how we perceive and think about information. Metaliteracy moves past literacy and digital literacy by encompassing more than just *how* we find information, but how we make *sense* of that information.

Weak sense critical thinking: when you fact-check and verify something that you think is not quite right.

Strong sense critical thinking: when you fact-check and verify something that you think may be true.

Satisficing: “a portmanteau of the words *satisfy* and *suffice* introduced by Herbert Simon in 1956 to refer to the tendency of people, bounded by time limitations, to select *good enough* information over optimal information.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Valenza, Joy (November 26, 2016). Truth, truthiness, triangulation: A news literacy toolkit for a “post-truth” world. Retrieved from <http://blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch/2016/11/26/truth-truthiness-triangulation-and-the-librarian-way-a-news-literacy-toolkit-for-a-post-truth-world/>

### **Step 1: Pop the filter bubble!**

Our browsers and internet search history impact the built in algorithms that allow web browsers to personalize our content. As mentioned in the glossary above, this is helpful when we have shopping trends or hobbies, but not so helpful when trying to garner the truth. Follow the below guidelines to pop your filter bubble.

- Clear your search history regularly.
- Use different search engines, or one that does not track your searches (like duckduckgo.com).
- Use the “Incognito Window” feature on Google Chrome browsers.
- Turn off predictive search features:
  - Turn off this feature by finding your Settings panel on your browser.

### **Step 2: Use common identifiers to spot fake news.**

Many sites clearly explain that they are satire news sites (The Onion is a popular one), or have suspicious information that make it easier to spot which sites are fake.

- First, look at the URL. A “.com.co” address is usually a fake.
  - For example: “abcnews.com” vs. “abcnews.com.co”
- Check the “About Us” or “FAQ” pages. If a site doesn’t even have an “About” page, don’t trust it.
- Google the author; is he/she real?
- Notice any excessive hyperboles, for example “This is NOT a hoax!!!”
- On individual articles: check the date. Is this an old article being recycled?
- Follow links. If an article or site links out to corroborative evidence, follow up. Broken or degenerative links are easy to spot.
- Double check quotes. Who said them? Are there other instances where this person is quoted from the same circumstance, and do all the quotes match?
- Look at the “packaging.” Does the site clearly lean towards a certain audience? Does the language play on your feelings rather than objective fact? (See the MBFC below).
- Reverse Google search images to see where they came from. (See the below image searching tips and tricks).

### **Step 3: Fact-Check and Triangulate!**

There are multiple trustworthy fact-checking sites used not only by corporate entities but also by the public. These sites are run by professional fact-checkers and have been vetted by multiple avenues.

- Politifact.com
- Factcheck.org
- Mediabiasfactcheck.com
- Allsides.com
- For political news: double check laws and code that are referenced in articles. Use the Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) or the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).
- Triangulate journalistic articles between reputable news sources, and keep in mind that many news sources may lean a certain political direction.

### **Step 4: Image searching tips and tricks.**

Many fake news stories and sites employ images to catch your attention or to corroborate their story. Images can also be misleading; they could either be photo shopped or otherwise edited, or be used out of context.

- How to double check image credibility: Reverse image search with Google. Google is a fabulous way to see where on the internet an image has been used and/or referenced, allowing you – with some hunting – potentially to see where it originated.
- Inspect context of the photo closely!

### **Step 5: Don't Be Afraid to Get Uncomfortable!**

Navigating the influx of information can be tedious, tiresome, and frustrating. Don't be afraid to look outside of your echo chamber, to explore ideas that may make you uncomfortable, and to fact-check things that you may automatically agree with. It is very important to use both strong sense and weak sense critical thinking, and to escape the filter bubble in order to be as informed as possible.

Other tips:

- Revisit the story! If a story is new, it will continue to develop as professionals get more details and facts. Devote the time to revisiting the story as it evolves.
- Be suspicious of pictures, videos, and other audiovisual media! The fake news phenomenon, and the above tips, can be applied to any form of media, not just text.
- Look at virality: if something went “viral” (everyone is talking about it), chances are it has been distorted along the way.

- Don't stop when you're "satisfied!" Be prepared to devote the time and attention needed to sift through all the information in order to come to your own informed conclusion(s).
- Don't be afraid to start a dialogue. If you've noticed a friend posting a story that is fake or misleading, gently let them know. Start a friendly conversation and talk it out.

### Your Fake News Checklist:

Use this checklist whenever you encounter suspicious information. Write down any observations or insights you may have.

#### At a glance:

- Check the URL: Are there any identifiers of false websites, such as .com.co?
- Check the date: is this an old article being recycled?
- Research the platform: is this from a popular satire site, or is this a piece from an opinion column?
- Research the author: Does he/she/they have contact information? Do they exist?
- Follow links: Do they lead to other legitimate webpages, or are they dead?
- Perform a reverse Google image search on questionable images.

#### After reading the article:

- Does the article include concrete information, such as citing evidence (names of witnesses/sources/professionals)? Or does the article leave out concrete names and accreditations?
- What kind of content is included? Is this secretly an ad in disguise, or an advocacy group?
- What is the context of the article? Does the article explore not only the issue, but the leading potential causes or surrounding situation(s)? Note if context is missing.
- Does the article use biased or opinionated language? Does the author add negative *or positive* connotations to a particular group of people, organization, or other subset?
- Does the article seem outrageous or too-good-to-be-true?

#### Do your homework:

- Has this story recently gone viral?
- Have you followed up with the story after your initial investigation? Be sure to keep up with it as the story develops.
- Have you triangulated the information?

# Navigating the Sea of Information



WELLESLEY FREE  
LIBRARY

How do we wade through conflicting facts, biased media, and plain-old lies? Follow these easy steps to help you be as informed as possible.

## 1) Pop the filter bubble!

Browsers and search engines we use often tend to filter our searches towards personal preference.

- Clear your search history regularly.
- Switch between search engines
- Turn off predictive search

## 3. Stick with it!

Don't stop researching when you're satisfied!

- Revisit the story as it develops; news networks rarely have all the facts at the outset.
- Be critical of images too. False information can take many formats.
- Look at virality; if something went "viral," chances are it's been distorted.
- Be prepared to start a dialogue. Don't be afraid to get uncomfortable in your beliefs!

## 2. Triangulate your sources!

Fact-check using at least 3 unique sources!

We recommend :

- PolitiFact.com
- Factcheck.org
- Allsides.com
- Mediabiasfactcheck.com