

# The Digital Literacy Series: Fake News

## What Is Fake News?

### | Transcript

- Narrator: We've all heard the term "fake news." It's used to describe a lot of different things. But what actually is fake news and why is everyone talking about it?
- Donald Trump: You are fake news.
- Jimmy Wales: The idea that we have to say things like "fact-based" journalism or "fact-checked" journalism is unfortunate, but we do live in an era where we've seen the growth of a lot of really low quality media outlets... ranging from true fake news to just a lot of nonsense online.
- Narrator: Fake news isn't just one single thing. It involves different types of news and information sharing across lots of apps and websites. We're going to break down what fake news really means and why people share it. In 2018, the British government banned the use of the label "fake news" in official documents because it's "a poorly-defined and misleading term." They wanted to make sure people were clear about what was meant when they used the label, because it had, up until that point, been used to describe simple errors in the news as well as more serious attempts to interfere with the democratic process.
- Damian Collins: It started to crowd out real news. There was a study done looking at the U.S. Presidential election in 2016 that showed the top 20 fake news stories were more widely shared than the top 20 real news stories. We know as well that the Russians have been involved in spreading disinformation and fake news through fake accounts, through advertising, and we feel this is becoming a danger to democracy because it is so widespread.
- Narrator: To make sure that we're not tricked by news stories that aren't what they seem, we need to understand where the ideas behind fake news come from. The problems starts with the fact that today we are interacting with the news in a way that is completely different to any other time in history.
- Radio: Reluctant to profit by a—
- Narrator: We used to get news from just a limited number of places. It was easy to trust news stories because they were produced by professional journalists working with well-known organizations.

Radio: 1500 yards by 900–

Narrator: Everyone got the news from the same range of newspapers and radio stations every day, and content was checked by editors. You knew who was writing the stories and, quite often, their usual biases or points of view. Things have changed pretty quickly. First, the news moved onto television.

Bruce Gyngell: Good evening and welcome to television.  
(TCN9, September 16, 1956)

Narrator: And then onto the web. And now it's on our phones and watches. Suddenly, there's so much news it's hard to keep track of where it's coming from. It's difficult to tell if the news we read and watch is made by qualified journalists, people trying to go viral, or even groups deliberately spreading false information. The person behind a news story always puts their own spin on it. And these days, it can be hard to work out who that person is.

When we're talking about fake news, does that mean it's news that's just a complete lie? Sometimes, yes. But often, stories can be misleading without being completely untrue. This makes them harder to spot. Let's look at some types of news that could be called fake. Fake news comes in many forms: hoaxes, scams, clickbait, jokes, advertising, spin, propaganda, satire, and sensationalism. And sometimes a story that we're told is fake news could actually be true, especially if the person saying it's fake doesn't like the story or it makes them look bad. They say something is fake news to try and make it go away.

Donald Trump: I'm not going to give you a question. You are fake news.  
(Press conference, January 11, 2017)

Narrator: The only way to be sure if something is fake news is to check for yourself. Let's look at some different types of fake news.

Scams are completely fake. But sometimes it's hard to tell they're not legit, or otherwise people would not fall for them. But next time you read about a miracle cream or complete a fun online quiz, beware. You could be about to be scammed out of money or even your identity.

Sometimes, news stories are just not true but they show up online anyway. Celebrities aren't really dead, events never happened, or quotes were never said by a person. This type of fake news is a hoax.

These stories make you want to click on them because they're shocking and bizarre. You can often find them next to a picture of someone famous. Headlines that ask dramatic questions or exaggerate details are designed to make you click through to their website. This type of fake news is clickbait.

Often, stories can look legit because the quotes and photos are real, but the article is trying to sell you a product or get you to believe something. These types of paid stories aren't always obvious, especially if they're pretending to be serious news. This type of fake news is sponsored, and is really just a form of advertising.

It's very easy to make something look real on the Internet. A story could use prejudiced quotes or include violent images from completely different protests to make it seem real. Images, photos, and quotes can all be used out of context to make a biased story appear to be true. This type of fake news is propaganda.

Spin is also a form of propaganda. Groups like publicity and media companies sometimes provide to the public a biased interpretation of an event, a product, or a person to gain votes, acceptance, or sales.

Closely related to spin and propaganda is sensationalism. This is where news stories are presented in a way to provoke public interest, outrage, or excitement, but always at the expense of all the facts and accurate, unbiased reporting.

Sometimes fake news articles make fun of a person or event, and they are intended to be obviously fake. But if the joke is too subtle or the satire of real news is too good, people can miss the joke and believe the story is true. Then they spread it as real news. This type of fake news is satire.

All these types of news spread across the Internet because real people share them through their social networks. Sometimes they're spread by social media accounts controlled by computer programs called chatbots, which imitate real people. These fake accounts share the fake news to try and reach more people with the false information. Ideas can seem more real when you see them multiple times.

To spot the fake from real, you have to check basic information and watch out for signs that the news you're reading isn't what it seems. This helps stop the spread of all types of fake news and misinformation.