

# The Digital Literacy Series: Fake News

## Why Do We Fall for Fake News?

### | Masking the Issue

Imagine that the following image was posted on social media:



"Halloween Masks" by runnr\_az is licensed under CC BY 2.0

It was spread by someone unconnected to the couple in the photograph, with the headline "Severe Allergy Caused by Imported Face Masks." The brief story reported that this couple had bought cheap face masks from China in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. When they put them on, the couple suffered severe allergic reactions. This left them permanently disfigured and forced them to wear "protective skins" over their damaged faces.

The story went viral. People used it as a reason to throw away their face masks, refusing to wear them even in crowds. However, if anyone had bothered to check the origins of the photograph, they would have realized that the couple had made masks for Halloween and were merely posing in them.

1. Does this image and the fake news story connected to it create a strong emotional reaction? What emotions does it provoke?

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2. What kinds of people would be inclined to believe this story? In your answer, refer to "confirmation bias."

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3. If people took the time to look closely at the photograph and think it through, do you think they would be likely to believe the story? Justify your answer.

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4. What are the possible ramifications of people believing this fake news story?

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