



Fact or Fiction? How to spot fake news

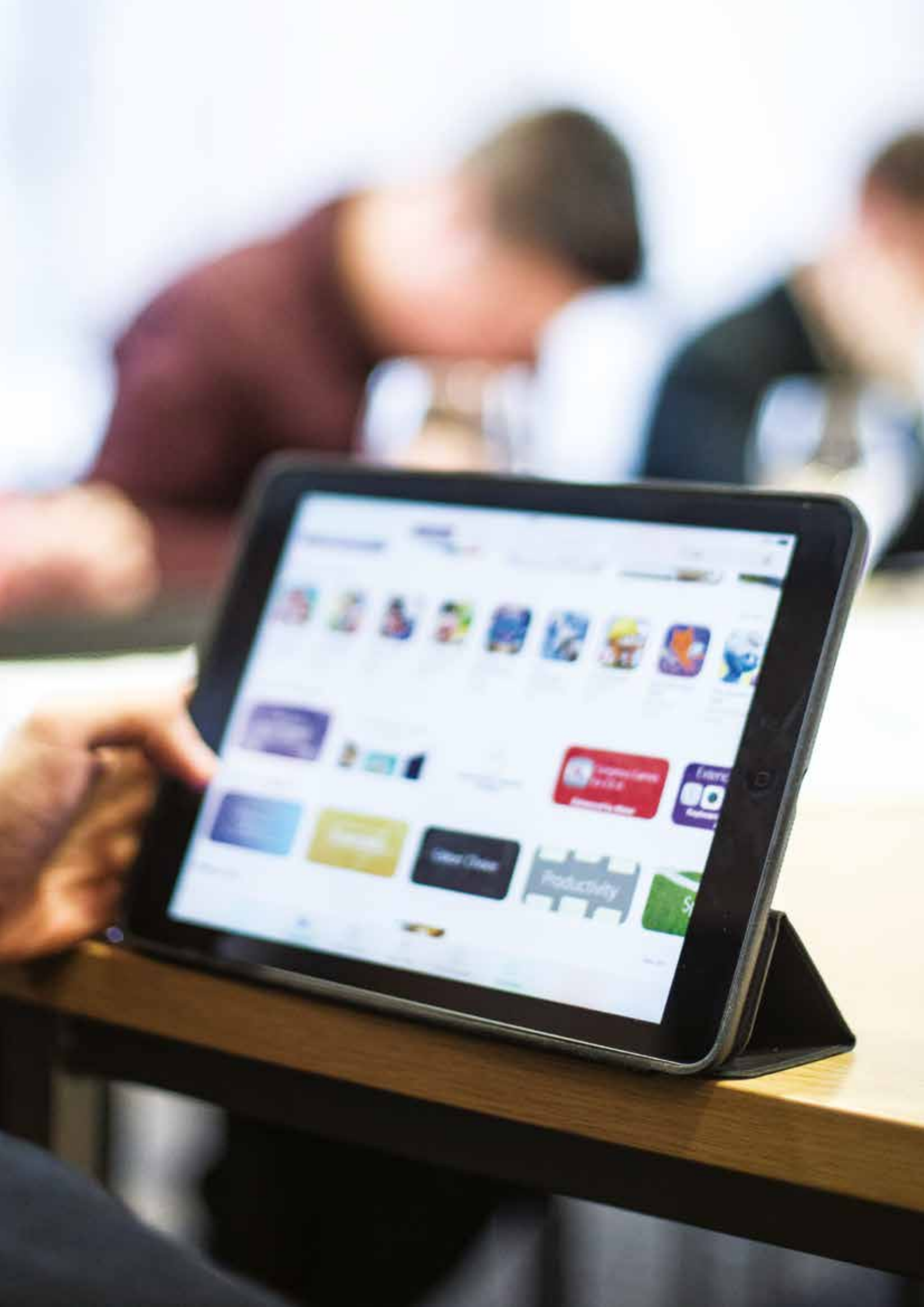
A Guide for Teachers and Parents

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Preface

This resource is intended to be of use to teachers and parents and aims to provide information on and suggestions for ways to support young people in developing their digital literacy skills in order to effectively identify fake news.

Given that young people now use social media, mainly accessed on smartphones, as a main source of news (according to the 2016 Reuters Digital News Report, based on a YouGov survey of over 50,000 young people), it is vital that they develop the skills to evaluate digital information so that they can determine when they are confronted by fake news or misinformation, and what the implications are when people accept fake news as fact. This is a particularly topical issue. There is currently extensive media debate and attention on the role of social media in spreading misinformation, and fake news stories have garnered much attention internationally (for example, in the Brexit and US Presidential campaigns in 2016). 'Post-truth' was selected by Oxford Dictionaries as their Word of the Year for 2016.

By providing information on digital literacy and fake news, this resource aligns with the post-primary curriculum for Key Stage 3 (for 12-14 year olds) in the area of Using ICT. It is now a statutory requirement for all schools in Northern Ireland to report on the ICT skills of their pupils at the end of Key Stages in Primary and at the end of KS3. To report at KS3, a level has to be set across the curriculum for each child. Pupils are given a level in the 5Es:

Explore

- ∞ access, select, interpret and research information from safe and reliable sources
- ∞ investigate, make predictions and solve problems through interaction with digital tools

Express

- ∞ create, develop, present and publish ideas and information responsibly, using a range of digital media and manipulate a range of assets to produce multimedia products

Exchange

- ∞ communicate safely and responsibly using a range of contemporary digital methods and tools, exchanging, sharing, collaborating and developing ideas digitally.

Evaluate

- ∞ talk about, review and make improvements to work, reflecting on the process and outcome and consider the sources and resources used, including safety reliability and acceptability.

Exhibit

- ∞ manage and present their stored work and showcase their learning across the curriculum, using ICT safely and responsibly.

This project reinforces Ulster University's Digital Futures Strategy through supporting educational partnerships and enhancing the reputation of the university. We hope this resource pack helps parents, teachers and others in preparing and supporting young people to be digitally aware and literate and to develop the skills to distinguish reputable and reliable news sources.

What is Fake News?

Fake news is exactly what it sounds like; it is news that is supposed to convince readers that it is real when it is not. It may look just like a real news article but it contains information that is not true. The term 'fake news' is used to describe falsehoods which are presented as news. The term is an oxymoron, a contradiction in itself, because news cannot actually be fake. Fake news is like gossip, but on a much larger scale. Sometimes people like to share information online, even if they do not believe it, just as some people like to spread gossip. Fake news is like propaganda, as it aims to promote a particular opinion or cause.

Fake news is intended to be circulated and mistaken by readers for legitimate news. It differs from satire and parody because the intention is to mislead rather than to entertain. Fake news websites may deliberately publish disinformation, hoaxes and propaganda which appear to be genuine. These will often be shared using social media to widen their distribution and to drive web traffic. Some fake news sites will use 'website spoofing' to make visitors think that what they are reading is genuine; this means they will use a similar web address or design to real web pages, usually reliable news websites. It can therefore be very difficult to tell real and fictional stories apart. Some of this web content is also published with the intention of 'clickbaiting', which aims to generate online advertising by encouraging people to click on links to fake news stories. Fake news does not only exist online, there have been many examples of fake news in newspapers over the years.

It is important to consider disinformation and misinformation to help understand fake news. Misinformation can be defined as inaccurate, wrong or misleading information whereas disinformation can be defined as deliberately false, deceptive information. Misinformation is unintentionally false but disinformation is shared with the intention to deceive others.

Disinformation and misinformation are similar as they both seem informative yet incorrect kinds of information. Disinformation is deliberately deceptive whereas misinformation is not. False news is disinformation. The intentions behind disinformation vary; they may be personally or socially motivated, or politically or financially motivated. Information, misinformation and disinformation may be shared and spread, intentionally and unintentionally, by individuals, businesses and governments.

Fake news exists and is spread for many reasons. The motivation may be personal (to influence opinions on certain issues), political (to persuade people to vote a certain way), religious (to persuade people to follow a particular religion), financial (to persuade people to click on advertisements), for entertainment (to spread a joke or gossip) or unintentional, if the person passing it on does not know it is fake. Often, fake news sites exist for financial reasons, and the aim of sharing these stories is to make money through advertising. By producing articles on current affairs, the creators are more likely to gain more clicks and therefore more income will be generated. Clickbaiting attracts the attention of unsuspecting people who think they are following a link to a legitimate news source. They are unwittingly helping the producers of fake news make money with each click.

Thousands of fake news stories exist on the internet, and although the majority are ignored and do not receive widespread attention, those that are spread gain attention for a number of reasons. People traditionally trust news, and most news stories are produced by reliable sources but now anyone can publish information on the internet and make it look convincing. This makes producing and sharing fake news articles on the internet easy for those who want to spread them. Recently, much of the fake news circulating on the internet has been politically motivated and has revolved around the US Presidential Election.

The situation has been further complicated by the undermining of authoritative news sources by claims they have reported fake news. If legitimate news sites are being described as sharing fake news, people can be unsure of what to believe.

Although fake news has been a prominent topic recently, it is not a new phenomenon. Unethical journalism practice has been a problem for many years. While stories reported in the press are regulated by organisations such as the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), those shared on social media are not. It is important not to confuse fake news with satire, another journalistic technique which has existed for centuries. Satire makes fun of current events and no one is intended to believe it. Fake news is deceptive in its nature and is supposed to trick people into believing it.

Fake news may have existed since ancient times, but the internet and modern technology have made it easier to produce and access these

articles and therefore, fake news has become increasingly prevalent in recent times. The internet is now easily accessible and people can access these stories on their smartphones, tablets and laptops. Fake news stories are often spread on social media, increasing the size of the potential audience. Prior to the US Presidential campaign, fake news had never impacted an election to such an extent. As a result, fake news is now considered by many as being associated with politics but other varieties exist. Supporters of left wing politics have accused those who support right wing politics of creating fake news as a form of propaganda, whilst those from the right have accused left wing sources of censoring them. President Trump himself has frequently used the term to refer to news stories that are critical of him and his administration. If young people are to be active participants in society they need to be capable of finding credible sources of information and distinguishing fake news from factual reporting.

How easy is it to fall for fake news?

Here are some examples of recent fake news stories.

The White House Staff Photo



This photo was shared on Twitter on the morning President-elect Trump was arriving at the White House to meet President Obama. Hundreds of people retweeted the image saying that this was a photo of the Obama staff reacting to Trump's arrival. This picture was actually taken the day before, as the staff listened to a speech made by Obama. Their expressions are therefore showing their emotions as they listened to their boss give one of his final speeches, not their reactions to his successor arriving at the White House.

Some of those who shared the photo made a genuine mistake, not being aware of the true

context in which the photograph had been taken. One Twitter user who shared the photo commented: "White House staffers look on as Obama welcomes Trump. Those faces." This tweet received over 3500 retweets and over 5000 likes. This is an example of misinformation. Others, who did know, intentionally shared the photo, as an example of disinformation and fake news¹.

It can also be helpful to discuss celebrity hoaxes and fake news with young people.

Since the beginning of 2017, Queen Elizabeth, Eddie Murphy and Miley Cyrus have been victims

¹ Katz, A. (2016) So, What's Happening in This Photo From the White House? time.com/4566547/white-house-obama-staffers-donald-trump/

of celebrity death hoaxes, with stories of their supposed deaths being circulated online². Those who spread fake news have realised that this is a very effective way of driving internet traffic to their sites and therefore generating clicks and income through advertising. These stories will often be posted on websites which look genuine and have domain names which are very similar to those of authentic news sources. They tend to focus on popular celebrities to ensure that many fans would be shocked by the news and would start searching for more information. This causes a surge in traffic to these websites.

How to spot fake news and combat the problem

Some organisations are making efforts to combat fake news. FactCheckNI is an independent fact-checking organisation which provides free tools, information and advice to help people distinguish between factual and fake news³ about Northern Ireland. Wikipedia is notorious for its unreliable content due to users' ability to add and edit information on it freely⁴. The website now has a group of volunteer editors who scrutinise the content posted on the site and correct any errors, often within minutes. This is not a straightforward task however, due to the large amount of content and users of the website. In November 2016, Facebook revealed that it would start tackling

fake news by making changes to users' news feeds. They emphasised that one of their values was 'authentic communication' and that they wanted to prevent posts that are 'misleading, sensational or spammy'. It was reported that the company had an unofficial task force working on the problem of fake news and that they would be examining pages containing untrue news stories⁵. In an open letter, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, outlined his five-year plan to tackle fake news. He said that social media sites and search engines must be encouraged to continue in their efforts to fight fake news⁶. In April 2017, both Facebook and Google announced tools to help users identify fake news⁷. In January 2017 the Culture, Media and Sport Committee launched a fake news inquiry in the UK⁸.

It is getting harder to differentiate between false news and real news articles online. Anyone with access to a smartphone, tablet or computer can publish information online. More people are sourcing their news from social media sites. A recent survey of 50,000 young people in the UK found that 51% now say they use social media for news every week. 12% said that social media is their most important source of news. More than 25% of the 18-24 age group said that social media is their main source of news⁹. It is therefore crucial that we learn to spot fake news and digital literacy can help. Schools and parents can support young people to learn these skills.

² Moses, L. (2017) How celebrity death hoaxes power fake news digiday.com/media/queen-elizabeth-is-not-dead/

³ FactCheck NI <http://www.factcheckni.org/>

⁴ Fraser, I (2015) 14 of the oddest, funniest and most damaging Wikipedia edits telegraph.co.uk/technology/wikipedia/12031606/14-of-the-oddest-funniest-and-most-damaging-Wikipedia-edits.html

⁵ Newsbeat (2017) How Facebook is starting to tackle fake news in your news feed bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/38827101/how-facebook-is-starting-to-tackle-fake-news-in-your-news-feed

⁶ BBC (2017) World wide web creator Tim Berners-Lee targets fake news bbc.co.uk/news/technology-39246810

⁷ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-39515319> and bbc.co.uk/news/technology-39527644

⁸ Commons Select Committee (2017) 'Fake News' enquiry launched parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/news-parliament-2015/fake-news-launch-16-17/

⁹ Freedman, T (2017) Fake News: Resources and Suggestions ictineducation.org/home-page/fake-news-resources-and-suggestions

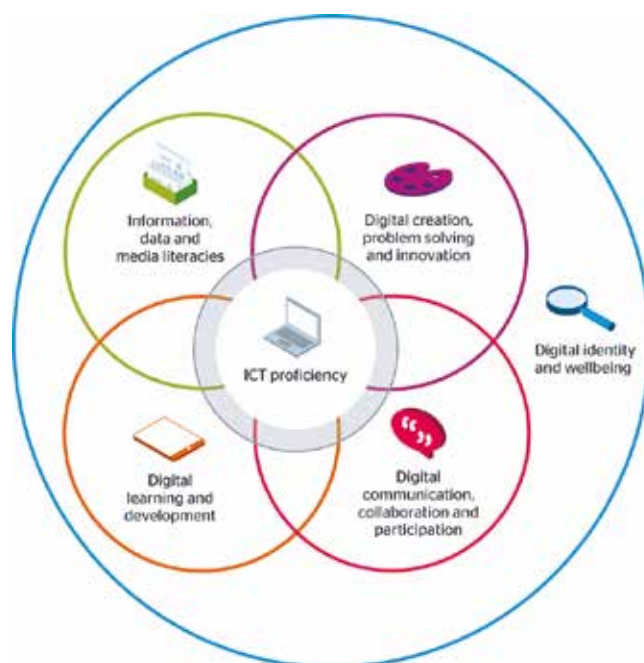
What is digital literacy?

Digital literacy involves learning how to find, organise, evaluate and create information using digital technology¹⁰. It includes the ability to distinguish the quality of information items, sources, and stories. Digital literacy is a requisite for full and effective citizenship and the ability to participate in the democratic process.

A Digitally Literate Person:

- ∞ possesses the variety of skills - technical and cognitive - required to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information in a wide variety of formats;
- ∞ is able to use diverse technologies appropriately and effectively to retrieve information, interpret results, and judge the quality of that information;
- ∞ understands the relationship between technology, life-long learning, personal privacy, and stewardship of information;
- ∞ uses these skills and the appropriate technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, colleagues, family, and on occasion, the general public; and
- ∞ uses these skills to actively participate in civic society and contribute to a vibrant, informed, and engaged community¹¹.

Digital Literacy can also be defined as the capabilities which fit someone for living, learning and working in a digital society¹². Six elements of digital literacy are displayed in the diagram below:



JISC Six Elements of Digital Literacy¹³

¹⁰ London School of Economics (2016) Digital Literacy <http://lti.lse.ac.uk/projects/digitalliteracy/>

¹¹ ALA Digital Taskforce (2011) Digital Literacy Definition <http://connect.ala.org/node/181197>

¹² JISC (2014) Developing Students' Digital Literacy <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy>

¹³ JISC (2014) Developing Students' Digital Literacy <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy>

Considering the growing prevalence of fake news, it is now essential that we are able to find trustworthy information online and developing our digital literacy skills will enable us to do this. A recent Stanford University study found that the majority of junior high school students were unable to distinguish between a news story and an advertisement on the internet. The study also found that young people were likely to be influenced by how high a story appeared on search results rather than by the source of the information, and struggled to determine the reliability of the information they read online¹⁴. Another study found that high school students did not fully understand the difference between Wikipedia articles and other sources¹⁵. In a post-truth era, young people must be capable of interpreting the abundance of information online, evaluating it and distinguishing what is genuine and what is not.

Using digital literacy skills to spot fake news

Pupils should be encouraged to think of the definitions of digital literacy above and what a digitally literate person is able to do, particularly the ability to understand, evaluate, communicate and judge the quality of information you find online. When it comes determining whether information found online is genuine or fake news, here are some questions which should help:

- ∞ Who made this?
- ∞ Who is the target audience?
- ∞ Who paid for this? Does someone get paid if you click on this?
- ∞ Who might benefit or be harmed by this message?

- ∞ What is left out of this message that might be important?
- ∞ Is this credible (and what makes you think that)?

Here are a few things pupils should be encouraged to watch out for too:

- ∞ Look for unusual URLs or site names, including those that end with “lo” or “.com.co” for example; these are websites that are trying to appear like legitimate news sites
- ∞ Look for signs of low quality, such as words in all capital letters, headlines with grammatical errors, bold claims with no sources, and sensationalist images
- ∞ Check to see if there is an “About Us” section on the website. Find out who supports the site or who is associated with it. If this information doesn’t exist or if a site asks you to register, be suspicious
- ∞ Perform a quick Google search before trusting or sharing news that seems too good (or bad) to be true
- ∞ Consider whether other credible, mainstream news outlets are reporting the same news stories. If they’re not, it doesn’t mean it’s not true, but it does mean you should dig deeper
- ∞ Think about your emotions when you are reading news articles. Clickbait and fake news strive for extreme reactions. If the news you’re reading makes you really angry or upset, it could be a sign that you’re being misled. Check multiple sources before trusting the information you have found¹⁶.

¹⁴ Hargittai, E., Fullerton, E., Menchen-Trevino, E., & Thomas, K. Y. (2010) Trust online: young adults’ evaluation of web content. *International Journal of Communication*, 4, pp.468–494

¹⁵ Forte, A., & Bruckman, A. (2008) Information literacy in the age of Wikipedia. In *Symposium on learning and research in the Web 2.0 era: Opportunities for research*. Proceedings of International Conference of the Learning Sciences, Utrecht, Netherlands, pp.237–244

¹⁶ Common Sense Media (2017) commonsensemedia.org/

When young people are searching for information online it is important to remind them to access, select, interpret and research information from safe and reliable sources.

When young people are sharing information online they should be encouraged to create, develop, present and publish ideas and information responsibly.

By becoming aware of digital literacy and the associated skills outlined above, and by using their own initiative young people will be equipped to spot fake news.

Advise them that if they are still unsure, they can ask a teacher or a librarian for help.

Conclusion

Fake news and disinformation can be very harmful and can have serious consequences for people, businesses and governments. It can

create confusion, mistrust and hatred amongst the people who read it and influence their decisions on particular issues. As acknowledged in this guide, fake news is an important current issue but it is not a new phenomenon, it has existed for centuries and has simply grown in prominence as technology has evolved and ways of producing and accessing information online have developed. It is becoming easier to create and share false information online, for whatever motive an individual may have, and it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between genuine and fake news articles. By developing digital literacy skills, young people can better equip themselves to spot fake news and avoid being victims of disinformation. If young people can effectively identify fake news, they can find the facts elsewhere and become properly informed on an issue. When young people are equipped with skills to effectively identify fake news they can establish facts as a basis for their understanding of the world and active participation in society.

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?



CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

I F L A

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

with thanks to www.FactCheck.org

ifla.org/publications/node/11174

Further Resources

5 Rights

5rightsframework.com/

ALA Digital Taskforce (2011) Digital Literacy Definition

connect.ala.org/node/181197

Common Sense Media

commonsensemedia.org/

Developing Students' Digital Literacy

jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy

Evaluating Internet Resources

library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/research-guides/evaluating-internet-content

Fact Check NI

factcheckni.org/

Fake news or real news?

stonesoupcreative.com/infographic-fake-news-real-news-10-tips-getting-facts/

Fake News: Resources and Suggestions

ictineducation.org/home-page/fake-news-resources-and-suggestions

Five ways to spot and stop fake news

pocho.com/from-the-harvard-library-5-ways-to-spot-fake-news-infographic/

How to recognise a fake new story

stonesoupcreative.com/infographic-fake-news-real-news-10-tips-getting-facts/

JISC (2014) Developing Students' Digital Literacy

jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy

Net Smart: How to thrive online

mitpress.mit.edu/books/net-smart

Reverse Image Search

tineye.com/

Ten Questions for Fake News Detection

thenewsliteracyproject.org/sites/default/files/GO-TenQuestionsForFakeNewsFINAL.pdf

The Best Tips for Spotting Fake News in the Age of Trump

teenvogue.com/story/the-best-tips-for-spotting-fake-news-in-the-age-of-trump

Feedback

We would be grateful if you could complete this page and return it by post, or scan and email to:
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E: j.bates@ulster.ac.uk

I am a:

Teacher Subject: _____

Parent

Other Please specify: _____

I found this resource on fake news:

Very helpful

Helpful

Neither helpful or unhelpful

Unhelpful

I acquired knowledge about fake news and digital literacy from this resource that I did not previously have:

Agree

Disagree

Unsure

I have or intend to use what I have learned from this resource with my pupils / children:

Agree

Disagree

Unsure

This resource has helped me work with pupils / children and they now have a better understanding of how to identify fake news:

Agree

Disagree

Unsure

Please add any other comments you have about this resource:

Thank you for your feedback



