

FIGHTING **FAKE** NEWS

Issue 2
January 2020

Welcome to Issue 2 of *Fighting Fake News*, a newsletter for staff and parents to help us all support our students in understanding what is meant by the term 'fake news', and to provide some hints and tips for navigating our way around the reams of information out there.

KEY TERMS

Clickbait

Content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page.

Echo Chamber

In news media, echo chamber is a metaphorical description of a situation in which beliefs are amplified or reinforced by communication and repetition inside a closed system.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that affirms one's prior beliefs or hypotheses. It is a type of cognitive bias and a systematic error of inductive reasoning.

Post-truth

Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

DOES THE TRUTH STILL MATTER?

Are we living in a world where facts and evidence are no longer regarded as necessary? Nick Enfield, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Sydney, warns that we need to be careful.

*"We will one day look back and be amazed at the reckless way in which people treated information in these early days of social media, passing stories on without knowing or caring whether they were true. What we urgently need now are advances in information literacy. This must start with a true appreciation of our susceptibility to falsehood and its dangers, and it must lead to an individual sense of duty to pause, think, and check before passing on information."*¹

"When we share false information we are ethically negligent"¹

NOTHING NEW

Below is a good example of fake news which spread quickly but had no malicious intent. I remember reading this as it was happening—if you're interested in the full story, see the references overleaf.

"Frida Sofia"—the earthquake victim who never was

Her plight captured the attention of the Mexican public: a 12-year-old girl, trapped in the rubble of a collapsed elementary school as rescuers rushed to save her.

Television cameras fixed their attention on the frantic rescue operations after a devastating earthquake toppled the school on Sept. 19. Tidbits of information about the child, whom some began to identify as "Frida Sofia," trickled out. Some reported that she was with five other children, some that she had spoken to rescuers and was wiggling her fingers, still others that she had been sent water.

But a day later, the world learned the truth: Frida Sofia did not exist. No children were believed to be alive in the building, according to Mexican Navy officials.

*So how did the nation, including emergency medical workers, some officials and news outlets, get it so wrong?"*²



Don't fall into the TRAAP

In their Library Lessons, Year 7 are currently being introduced to TRAAP³, an easy-to-remember system for evaluating information, whether it is in a book, article, or website. Think about the following:

T imeliness the “newness” of the information

When was the information published or posted? Have there been new versions or editions since this was published? How quickly does new research for this topic come out? Does new research expand upon or replace old information for this topic?

R elevance the depth and importance of the information for you

Does this source help answer your question? Does only part of it help? Is it covering all aspects of your topic or only parts? How detailed is the information? Is it too basic for your needs? Too advanced?

A uthor the source of the information

Who is the author? What can you find about them in the source itself or through a web search? Is the author a professor or other expert? Do they have a degree related to the topic? Has the information been reviewed in some way, such as by an editor or through peer review? Was it self-published or posted on a personal site?

A ccuracy the reliability and correctness of the information

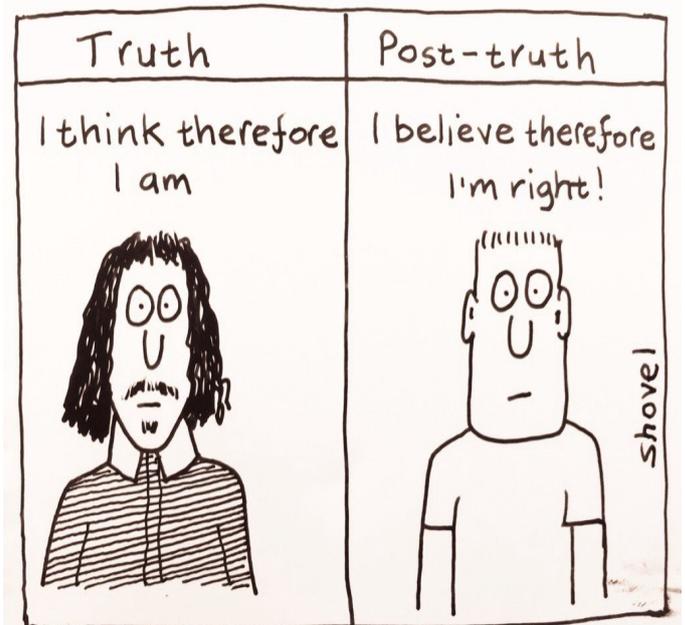
Where does the information come from? Does the author cite other sources? What do they cite? For websites, did the author provide links to other sources? Do the links still work? For studies, experiments and other original research, does the author explain the method they used to find the results? Does the information in this resource agree with other resources you have found and your own personal knowledge?

P urpose the reason the information was created

Why did the author publish this source? Are they trying to inform, teach, recommend, sell or entertain? Who is the intended audience? Is this designed for general readers or academic readers? What political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, personal or other perspectives does the author have?



How does your reaction to and interpretation of this image change following some selective cropping and a change of colour? It is easy to be manipulated without being aware of it.



REFERENCES

¹ Enfield, Nick (2019); Ideas spread like disease; let's treat them with the same caution; available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/24/ideas-spread-like-disease-lets-treat-them-with-the-same-caution#maincontent>; accessed 13 January 2020.

² Specia, Megan (2017); 'Frida Sofia'—the earthquake victim who never was; available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/world/americas/mexico-earthquake-trapped-girl.html>; accessed 13 January 2020.

³ Adapted from the Meriam Library, California State University, Chico