

# My Social Media for Seniors



# My Social Media for Seniors



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and Twitter<sup>™</sup>

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# My Social Media for Seniors, Second Edition

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## About the Author

**Michael Miller** is a prolific and popular writer, known for his ability to explain complex topics to everyday readers. He has written more than 150 nonfiction books over the past three decades, with more than one million copies sold worldwide. He writes about a variety of topics, including technology, business, and music. His best-selling books for Que include *My Facebook for Seniors*, *My Windows 10 Computer for Seniors*, *My iPad for Seniors*, *My Smart Home for Seniors*, *My Samsung Galaxy S7 for Seniors*, *My Google Chromebook*, *Easy Computer Basics*, and *Computer Basics: Absolute Beginner's Guide*.

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## Dedication

*To Lloyd Short, my old friend and mentor, enjoy your final role.*

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**Note:** Most of the individuals pictured throughout this book are of the author himself, as well as friends and relatives (and sometimes pets). Some names and personal information are fictitious.



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*Anyone can use this restroom regardless of gender identity or expression.*

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March 12, 2017
 Marshall Masterson
 0

James Mooles now prefers to go by Jamie, and identifies as a woman. The 56 year old Jamie has also been an avid supporter of [-]

## Pope Francis At White House: "Koran And Holy Bible Are The Same"

March 5, 2017
 Ben Draper
 0

On Wednesday the Bishop of Rome addressed 11,000 ticketed guests on the South Lawn of the White House, during which he indicated on the dirc [-]

Chicago, Illinois

Friday  
Chance of a Thunderstorm  
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 30%

Saturday  
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10%  
 30%

Sunday  
Partly Cloudy

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ENJOY THE WIDE-RANGING HEALTH BENEFITS OF **CHIEF ORGANICS ASTAXANTHIN!**

**In this chapter, you learn how various people and organizations use social media to disseminate false information—and how to recognize this type of fake news.**

---

- Why False Information Flourishes Online
- How to Recognize Fake News, Propaganda, and Opinions Online
- How to Tell Real News from Fake News
- How to Avoid Spreading False Information

# 2

## Separating Fact from Fiction Online

No doubt you've seen them online: headlines, news stories, links to web pages that make claims that don't feel quite right. Maybe it's something about the behavior of a given politician, or the details of some supposed new law, or even some wild claim that sounds more like a conspiracy theory than a news headline.

Chances are that what you're seeing isn't factual. It's what some people call "fake news"—a bunch of lies and hoaxes fool the public into believing the unbelievable. And, if you're not careful, you can easily be duped by the latest round of falsehoods circulating on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

(WARNING: This chapter contains multiple examples of fake news, conspiracy theories, urban legends, and other unsavory topics. I apologize in advance for any offense these items may cause, but they're all to be found in social media online.)

## Why False Information Flourishes Online

Just because someone says something online doesn't mean it's true.

That last sentence is important, so please read it again:

*Just because someone says something online doesn't mean it's true.*

If you remember nothing else from this chapter, remember that. Although the Internet can be a great source of news and information, it can also be a breeding ground for misinformation, lies, and propaganda. In fact, social media such as Facebook and Twitter exacerbate the problem, making it easier than ever before to spread rumor, innuendo, and plain old lies.

### Spreading Lies—Online and Off

People have been spreading lies and propaganda forever. It's just that this sort of thing spreads faster today. It used to be that misinformation like this would be spread by word of mouth; a friend would tell another friend about some supposed thing happening, then that friend would tell somebody else, and eventually you'd hear about it. It took some time for the rumors and such to make their way throughout even a small community.

Today, however, all someone has to do is post the latest piece of misinformation on Facebook or Twitter, and literally seconds later it can spread around the entire planet. One influential person makes an ill-informed tweet and hundreds of thousands of people or more hear about it—and take it as the gospel truth. It gets even worse when some of these people pass on the original post to their online friends; pretty soon millions of people worldwide are exposed to the misinformation, and the original falsehood takes on a life of its own that is now difficult to dispute.

---

### Going Viral

When a piece of information (or video or other type of file) gets circulated around a large number of people, it's said to have gone *viral*. The term comes from the way a biological virus spreads; on the Internet, anything that gets passed from person to person in this fashion resembles biological viral behavior.

---

This is how fake news becomes a real issue. It's especially prevalent in the world of politics, but it can permeate rational discussion in all fields of interest.

## A Few Examples...

When we say fake news, what exactly are we talking about? There are variations on the theme (which we'll discuss later in this chapter), but I'm mainly talking about made-up, phony news stories, the kind you used to read in the weekly tabloid papers in the check-out lanes at your local grocery store. Now those fake stories are posted on fake websites and then shared on Facebook and other social media.

What kinds of fake stories are we talking about? Well, here are some of the top fake news headlines shared on Facebook in 2016, in no certain order:

- "Obama Signs Executive Order Banning the Pledge of Allegiance in Schools Nationwide"
- "Brad Pitt is Moving to Morganton, NC"
- "FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide"
- "Clown Kills 3 Teens in Oak Ridge, TN"
- "Ireland is Now Accepting Trump Refugees from America"

All of these stories were totally fake. Not a drop of truth in any of them (which means if you saw and believed any of them, you got taken).

Let's look at one such fake story in more detail. During the 2016 presidential election, a white supremacist Twitter account made the claim that the New York City Police Department had discovered the existence of a human-trafficking ring operating out of a Washington, DC-based pizzeria named Comet Ping Pong. This ring was supposedly tied to Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and her chief of staff, John Podesta.

This claim was, of course, totally fabricated. Although there is a pizza joint in Washington named Comet Ping Pong, it is not the headquarters for any human-trafficking operations, and Clinton and Podesta are not tied to the pizza parlor or any such unsavory operations.



The truth of the matter didn't stop the original tweet from being passed around online from person to person, and eventually being picked up by multiple right-wing message boards, Twitter feeds, and Facebook feeds. It even got top billing on many so-called fake news websites, which helped the unfounded rumor to spread even further and faster.

Before long, "Pizzagate," as the ruckus was ultimately dubbed, had to be addressed in the mainstream media. Many unwitting individuals believed what they heard and took to harassing the owners and staff of Comet Ping Pong online and in person. One such true believer even took it upon himself to personally visit the pizza place and fire off three rounds from an AR-15-style assault rifle. (He was arrested—and apologized—for that.)

And all this happened because one person posted something totally fabricated to his Twitter account. That's how fake news and innuendo spread and become truly dangerous online.

## And a Few More...

The Pizzagate situation is just one (very prominent) example of fake news, and how it impacts people in the real world. I could cite hundreds of other examples, many of them political in nature, but many more related to other hot- and not-so-hot-button topics. Fake news sites have sprung up to muddy the waters about climate change, genetically modified food, gun violence, space travel, computer technology, racial issues, you name it. (And that's not counting the almost constant barrage of UFO and Bigfoot conspiracy theory sites.)

---

### Politics and Fake News

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, almost half (23 of the top 50) fake news stories on Facebook last year were political in nature. (Politics always seems to bring out the worst in some people.)

---

On the surface, much of this fake news is relatively harmless. (I mean, Bigfoot? Seriously?) But some of this false information could be deadly.

Take, for example, the topic of fake medical news. Yes, there are websites dispensing bogus medical advice, oftentimes pushing naturopathic and alternative cures

in lieu of proven medical solutions. Fake news stories emanating from these sites have oozed across the Internet in recent years, many promising miracle cures that the medical establishment is, for some reason, hiding from the public.

If you've been on Facebook for any length of time, you've probably seen a few of these articles. Some of the more popular ones purport to offer a true cure for cancer, typically via some form of naturalistic treatment. One of my favorites has the headline, "Dandelion Weed Can Boost Your Immune System and Cure Cancer." Which, of course, it can't.

In every instance, the claims in these fake medical news articles have been discredited by doctors and healthcare researchers. Yet the fake stories persist, and people persist in reading and sometimes believing them.

This is not harmless folly. If you are a cancer victim and take these articles at face value, you might think you can stop your current expensive and often invasive treatments and switch to one of these holistic (and wholly disproven) solutions. Abandoning traditional medicine in favor of fake solutions could literally result in death.

## Why Do People Believe Fake News?

On the surface, the claims that drive most fake news seem totally outrageous. Why, in the Pizzagate scenario, would a presidential candidate be involved with a human-trafficking operation—and from a small pizza joint, at that? Why would doctors knowingly squelch a miracle cure for cancer—and why would such a cure come from a common garden weed?

First, people tend to believe what they read online. We've been conditioned to trust the information provided by traditional newspaper and magazine journalists, so we don't automatically question similar information presented online. We want to believe what we read; we don't want to have to question everything.

Then there's what experts call "confirmation bias," which we all have to one degree or another. This is the tendency to interpret new information as confirmation of our existing beliefs. If we see something that aligns with what we already believe, we take it as further proof—whether it's true or not. Put another way,

when someone introduces a new fact, we try to twist it around so that it seems to support our prior opinions. And if we can't, then we discount that new information as being somehow fake or illegitimate.

People also want to believe that there's hope. If you are the victim of a serious disease, you want to fervently believe that somewhere out there exists a pill, a treatment, an elixir you can take that will cure you. If you're deep in debt or can't find a job, you want to believe that the latest work-from-home scheme really does pay \$40 per hour. We need to believe, and when conventional means offer little hope, we reach beyond. It's the same desperation that has fueled miracle cures and get-rich-quick schemes for generations.

When you combine fake news with the speed and efficiency of the Internet and social media, you amplify the problem. You see, one of the bad things about social media, and the Internet in general, is that you can filter it so that you only see those posts and stories that you want to see. You only have to visit those websites you want; you don't have to view any sites you don't like. The same thing with the news feeds you get on social media; you see the opinions of your friends and the people you follow, and don't see any the opinions of anyone else.

This also means that you tend to see the same stories and information multiple times. You might read the initial source of the information then see that story reposted by one or more of your friends. The more often you see something, the more likely you are to view it as a fact—even if it isn't.

This all creates a kind of echo chamber, where you only hear from people and sources like you, and never get exposed to any opposing views. The echo chamber reinforces your existing views and never challenges them. You keep hearing more and more of the same thing, and less and less of anything remotely different—which makes you even more susceptible to fake news that buttresses what you already believe.

## How to Recognize Fake News, Propaganda, and Opinions Online

So far we've discussed "fake news" in very general terms. In reality, there are many different types of false information disseminated online, and not all for the same purpose or effect.

## Fake News

Let's start with fake news itself. Fake news is literally news stories that are deliberately false. These fake news stories are filled with lies and made-up "facts" about a particular topic. They describe events that didn't happen—or didn't happen the way the story describes.

In other words, fake news is fiction, in the form of a purportedly (but not really) real news article.

You find fake news stories in people's social media feeds, and on fake news websites. These are sites that exist purely to disseminate fake news articles—hoaxes, disinformation, and propaganda. The stories posted on these websites then get shared via social media, which is why you see them posted by your friends in your Facebook and Twitter news feeds.

The intent of these sites is to mislead people into thinking they're reading real news articles. They're neither satirical nor accidental. The writers are purposefully crafting believable-sounding but totally fraudulent articles, typically for their own financial or political gain.

Because of the outsized influence of these fake news sites, especially during the 2016 presidential election, many view this sort of propaganda as a threat to democracy. If enough people believe the fake news, not only are voters misled but genuine news is delegitimized. It becomes more and more difficult for people to determine the real from the fake, and that shakes everything up.

## Outright Lies

Not all of the untruths spread online come from organized fake news sites. Some of what you read on Facebook and other social media are plain old lies. You know, when someone deliberately says something that they know isn't true.

For some reason, some people have trouble calling a lie a lie. In the mainstream media, you're more likely to hear that someone "misspoke" or told an "untruth" or "falsehood." Sometimes a person is said to have "distorted the facts." And some politicians now refer to "alternative facts."

Whatever you call it, a lie is a lie, and the person telling it is a liar. But what if a person doesn't tell the original lie, they just pass it on via a social media post? The

person sharing the lie has the excuse that someone else said it, and they're just relating it without judgment. This might technically absolve the second person from the original sin, but passing on a lie as if it's the truth is just as good as lying, if you ask me.

In any case, be on the lookout for people lying or sharing lies on Facebook and other social media. Again, just because someone (even someone important) says something doesn't make it true. It may not technically be fake news, but it's just as false.

## Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories have been around as long as anyone can remember; some people want to believe that certain events are much more complex than we are led to believe. There are people who believe that JFK's assassination was part of a nefarious plot, or that the moon landing was faked, or that Elvis Presley faked his own death. Despite facts proving otherwise, these conspiracy theories persist.

In fact, conspiracy theorists have become more emboldened in recent years, thanks to others sharing their theories over the Internet. Social media makes it easier for those of like mind to pass their theories back and forth and to gain additional exposure to the previously uninitiated. If you haven't yet seen a particular conspiracy theory, it might look reasonable when you see it in a friend's news feed.

Social media has also helped spread newer conspiracy theories, often immediately after some tragic event in the news. More recent conspiracy theories have sprung up around climate change (it's a hoax perpetuated by greedy scientists), the 9/11 attacks (a "false flag" event planned by the U.S. government), vaccines and autism (the first causes the second), and Beyoncé (apparently she's been replaced by a clone). None of these theories has any amount of truth to them, yet they persist, especially in social media.

Why do some people believe these wild claims? For some, it's a way of trying to make sense out of seemingly random events. It just doesn't make any sense that a lone gunman could slip through the cracks and shoot a president, so there has to be more to the story. Hence the creation of a conspiracy behind the whole thing; that's somehow more comforting than acknowledging that random events sometimes just happen.

In any case, social media is rife with conspiracy theories of all shapes and sizes. Don't believe them.

## Propaganda

Some of what people call fake news is actually propaganda—disinformation used to mislead or promote a particular point of view. Propaganda is particularly popular (and particularly potent) in politics, where one side spouts selective facts in an effort to promote its cause or disparage the opposite side.

We're all targets of propaganda—from one or the other political parties, from our government, even from foreign governments. For example, China has built a multi-billion dollar media empire to spread pro-Communist propaganda around the globe; Russia has similarly been accused of using propaganda to influence elections in several countries. And some claim that the Qatar-based Al Jazeera television network is being used to spread Islamic propaganda throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Political propaganda isn't new, nor is it limited to foreign actors. No doubt some people abroad see the broadcasts of Voice of America as a form of propaganda. For that matter, some right wingers in our country see certain news media as spreading left-wing propaganda—just as some left wingers view other news media as spreading right-wing propaganda.

The fact is, big players—political parties, governments, and movements—have always used propaganda to influence the masses and will undoubtedly continue to do so. What's changed is they're now doing it via social media.

## Biased News

Listen to some people in the political sphere, and you're bound to hear that this or that particular news outlet is fake news. Although this can be the case, in most instances the person talking simply doesn't like the viewpoint espoused by that news outlet. That doesn't make the news from that outlet fake, but it could make it biased.



Let's be honest here. We live in a politically polarized society, where one side doesn't trust the other and few want to work together for the common good. This polarized environment spreads to news outlets big and small, with those of a particular viewpoint claiming that media with a different view are biased and not to be believed.

It is true that some news media strike a bias to the liberal or conservative side of things. For example, it's fair to say that Fox News is somewhat biased in a conservative direction, whereas MSNBC holds somewhat of a liberal bias. (Compared to these two outlets, CNN lies somewhere in the middle.) This can be seen by the stories they choose to cover, the "experts" they choose to interview, even the slant they put on their coverage. That doesn't mean their coverage is fraudulent, just that it comes from a certain viewpoint.

Ideally, you know the political bias of a certain outlet and take that into account when reading something from it or watching it. I always think it's good if you can avoid getting all your news from outlets that share the same bias; you want to get a variety of viewpoints to avoid creating your own echo chamber.

## >>> *Go Further*

### FINDING RELIABLE MEDIA

Although obvious biases exist, most mainstream media is more balanced than political die-hards would like to believe. Conservatives might rail against the "lamestream media" and liberals against the "corporate media," but most major national newspapers, magazines, and news channels are pretty accurate when it comes to reporting the daily news.

How do you know if a given news source is reliable? One good test is if the outlet employs some sort of ombudsman to listen to consumer complaints and offer in-house criticism. If a newspaper or news channel is open to self-examination and free to issue corrections when they're wrong, you're in good hands.

According to the Pew Research Center, the following news outlets are the most trusted by both conservatives and liberals, in order of trust:

1. *The Economist*
2. BBC
3. NPR
4. PBS
5. *The Wall Street Journal*
6. ABC News
7. CBS News
8. NBC News
9. CNN
10. *USA Today*
11. Google News
12. The Blaze
13. *The New York Times*
14. *The Washington Post*
15. MSNBC
16. *The Guardian*
17. Bloomberg
18. *The New Yorker*
19. Politico
20. Yahoo! News
21. Fox News

Other media with more discernable biases, such as Breitbart and HuffPost, were less trusted. (Except, perhaps, by those of the same political leaning.)

Now, any and all of these media may print editorial pages or opinion pages, or offer their share of talking head interviews, all of which are ripe for biased opinion. But when it comes to straight news coverage, these media do a pretty good job, according to Pew. So if you think all the major newspapers are lefty rags or conservative mouthpieces, chances are that it's your views that are biased, not the source's.

## Opinions

When I was a youngster, our household watched the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite. Mr. Cronkite spoke with an authority and engendered a level of trust not seen in today's generation of newsreaders. We watched CBS because we trusted Walter Cronkite.

Several days a week, at the end of the newscast, Walter turned the desk over to Eric Sevareid for two minutes of analysis and commentary. We knew this wasn't news reporting because the word "Commentary" appeared at the bottom of the screen. Mr. Sevareid was voicing his opinions, and they were clearly labeled as such. You could never question what his colleague Walter Cronkite said because it was hard news, but you were free to agree or disagree with Mr. Sevareid's opinions.

Fast-forward half a century and take a look at today's media landscape, where there are more opinions than facts being broadcast, whether on cable TV news networks or on talk radio. Much of the programming on MSNBC and Fox News is pure opinion, dominated by a coterie of talking heads and their slates of like-minded guests, and CNN isn't much better. Turn on the radio and all you hear are the Hannitys, Limbaughs, and Becks, and the occasional left-wing variation. It's all talk, all the time, with very little news to break up the conversation.

There's nothing wrong with espousing one's opinion—over the airwaves or online—as long as it's clearly understood as such. The problem comes when viewers, listeners, or readers take these opinions as facts, and view the commentators as reporters. They're not. Sean Hannity and Rachel Maddow, as much as you might like or dislike them, are not journalists. They're commentators, offering their own opinions on the day's events. What they say may be interesting—and it might even be true—but it's always served up with that person's own particular brand of biases. It's not news, it's opinion—even if it's not always identified as such.

Fifty or so years ago, during the Cronkite/Sevareid era, television news belayed any potential confusion by clearly labeling the opinion pieces as "Commentary." You couldn't easily confuse fact with opinion when that one word was emblazoned across the screen during the latter segments.

Today, however, opinions are seldom labeled or presented as such, especially online. Some people hear Hannity or Maddow and take their words as gospel—and share them on social media as such. That's not a good thing. Opinions are fine as long as we know they're just opinions. We cannot confuse them with facts.

So when you see someone quoting their favorite left- or right-wing commentator, know that you're hearing that person's opinion. The facts of the matter may be different.

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## Editorial Pages

The newspaper business approaches this situation by putting the opinions on the editorial pages. You know when you turn to the editorial pages you're not reading unbiased journalism; you're reading the opinions of the editorial staff. (This sometimes leads to a paper, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, having a fairly trusted and down-the-middle reputation for reporting while maintaining a reliably conservative editorial slant.)

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## Satire

Don't confuse fake news stories and websites with satirical articles and sites. Quite a few websites manufacture humorous stories in the name of entertainment, and it's easy to mistake some of these sites with honest-to-goodness news sites or their mirror-image fake news cousins.

Take, for example, The Onion ([www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com)). This site started out in 1988 as a satirical print newspaper, akin to *National Lampoon* and similar rags of the time, and it eventually made the transition to an online publication. It has an established reputation as a source of humorous made-up news stories, with headlines like "Winner Didn't Know It Was Pie-Eating Contest," "Drugs Win Drug War," "CIA Realizes It's Been Using Black Highlighters All These Years," and "People Far Away from You Not Actually Smaller."

Most of what The Onion publishes is quite silly and wouldn't be taken seriously by anyone paying attention. But there are other satirical sites out there that use actual events as the basis for their content, thus creating satirical stories that may be confusing to people reading them out of context.

In other words, not everybody gets the joke.

Here's an example from the parody news site The Daily Curreant a few years back: The headline read "Sarah Palin to Join Al Jazeera as Host." The story was pretty funny but, as I said, not everybody got the joke. In this instance, the esteemed *Washington Post* got confused and cited this satirical story as fact in a profile of Palin. Whoops!

Other legitimate news organizations, both here and abroad, have been fooled by this type of satirical news item, as have millions of individuals who unwittingly repost the fake stories on Facebook and Twitter. I guess parody sounds all too real to some people, who then pass it on to their friends and family.

So satirical news stories aren't really fake news, but they're certainly not real news, either. They're meant to be funny and not to be taken seriously. If you run into one of these articles in your Facebook news feed and feel the urge to laugh, it's probably satire.

## >>>Go Further

### IT ISN'T ALWAYS FAKE

Some people (especially some politicians) are quick to dismiss news that they dislike or disagree with as fake news. This is a dangerous charge.

Just because you don't like something doesn't mean that it's fake. There are lots of facts that I don't happen to personally like, but I can't dispute them *because they are facts*. Facts are not opinions; they do not become less true just because you don't like what they mean.

So be wary of those who too quickly dismiss inconvenient truths as "fake news." You can't make bad news go away by questioning its validity. Facts are facts, even (and especially) if you don't like them.

## How to Tell Real News from Fake News

With all the fake news and outright lies circulating online, how do you distinguish the false facts from the real ones? After all, if you can't trust everything you see online (and you can't), then you have to do your homework to separate fact from fiction. No one else will do it for you.

### See if Facebook Flags It

Facebook is far and away the most used social medium today. Unfortunately, Facebook has also been the most common vehicle for fake news and misleading information due to users sharing inaccurate posts with their friends on the site.

As such, you need to be especially wary of the “news stories” and web links shared by your friends on Facebook. There’s a halfway decent chance that any given news item you see shared in your Facebook news feed is biased or fraudulent.

Facebook realizes this and has started flagging items that it believes are fake news. If a link in a post is suspected of being fake, you see a notice that says the link is disputed, and by which source(s). You can still click the link and read the source material, but at least you’ve been warned.



*A disputed link in a Facebook post.*

Facebook has also introduced a way for you to report posts that you think contain false information. On a computer, click the down arrow at the top-right corner of a post; on a mobile device, tap the down arrow or three dots in the same corner. Tap or click **Report post** and then, on the Choose a Reason screen or panel, select **It's a False News Story**. You can then opt to mark this post as false news; block all future posts from this person; hide all posts from this person; or message this individual to let him know you think this article is false.

**1 Choose a Reason**  
What's going on?

It's annoying or not interesting ☐

I think it shouldn't be on Facebook ☐

It's a false news story ☐ **Select to report a post**

It's spam ☐

**2 What Would You Like to Do?**

[CLOSE](#)

## Consider the Source

Whether you're dealing with Facebook or another social network, you should always consider where a piece of information came from. Some sources are more reliable than others—and some are obviously fake.

For example, if you see an article shared from CNN or ABC News or the AP, it's real news. If the article comes from a source that's less well-known, not known to you at all, or known to be a fake news site, you should treat that article with a grain of salt.

### *It's Not All Good*

Be especially wary of fake news sites designed to look like legitimate news sites. You can often tell by a slight difference in their web URLs. For example, there's the legitimate CBS News site at [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com), and the fake site at [www.cbsnews.com.co](http://www.cbsnews.com.co). That little extra ".co" at the end is a completely different web address that leads to a completely different—and completely fake—site.

## Verify with Multiple Sources

If you're not sure about a given news article—either the article itself or the article's source—then see if you can find a similar story from another source you know is reliable. That means opening up your web browser and doing an Internet search, or (if you're on Facebook) just searching from the Search box at the top of the news feed page.

If you can't find any corroborating stories then it's likely the original story was fake. If you do find similar stories, but they're all from similarly questionable sources, then the original story might still be fake. If, on the other hand, you find similar stories from trusted sources then the story is probably okay.

## Consider What Is Being Said

Sometimes the best way to tell whether a story is fake is to simply trust your nose. If it smells fake, it probably is.

For example, would you believe a story with the headline "President Trump to Give All Legal Voters \$1000"? Although this would be nice if true, it just doesn't seem likely. It smells funny, and it is funny, too.

This doesn't always go the other direction, however. Some fake news is designed to sound legitimate, even if it isn't. A headline like "Firefighter Jailed 30 Days by Atheist Mayor for Praying at Scene of Fire" isn't wildly outlandish, and it might even sound like something that could happen. It might pass your smell test, even though it's fake from start to finish.

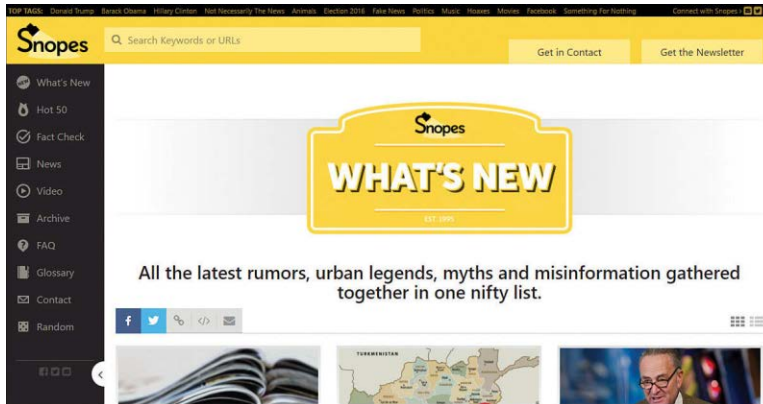
All in all, though, trust your instincts. If something doesn't seem plausible, dig into it a little more to evaluate the source and legitimacy of the article. Don't accept questionable content at face value.

## Check with Snopes

When I'm not sure whether something is fake or real, I consult a site that specializes in debunking fake news and urban legends. Snopes ([www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)) is a reliable source for debunking falsehoods or confirming truthful information you find on the Internet. It's original and primary focus is on urban legends, but it's become a fact-checking site for all sorts of fake (and real) news articles.



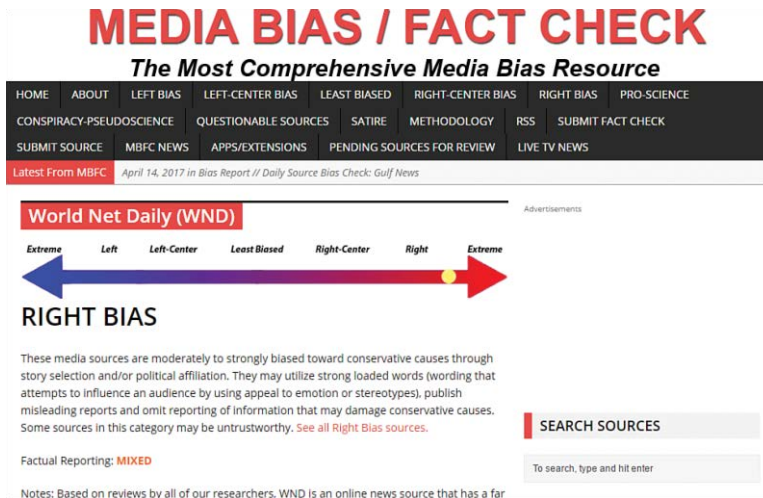
You can browse the latest and most popular news articles and urban legends, or use the top-of-page search box to search for specific news items in which you're interested. Just enter the title of the questionable article and Snopes likely has information about it. Snopes tells you if a given article is true, false, or somewhere in between.



Fact checking at the Snopes website

## Check with Media Bias/Fact Check

The Media Bias/Fact Check website ([www.mediabiasfactcheck.com](http://www.mediabiasfactcheck.com)) lists most known major media outlets, and assigns them a place on a sliding left-to-right scale, in terms of bias. You can enter the name of a particular news website or organization and find out whether they have a leftward bias, a right-leaning bias, or are relatively unbiased. You can also find out a given site's conspiracy level (Mild to Tin Foil Hat) and pseudo-science level (Mild to Quackery). It's a great way to see how legitimate a site is, as well how biased it may be.



### Checking bias and conspiracy levels at Media Bias/Fact Check

## How to Avoid Spreading False Information

Hopefully the information in this chapter has alerted you to the problem of fake news and fraudulent information you might find on Facebook and other social media. You've learned what fake news is and how to identify it.

Your challenge from here is to not only avoid being influenced by fake news, but also to not spread it to your friends and family. To be a responsible social media user, you need to keep your news feed as factual as possible and avoid spreading information of questionable validity.

Here's what you need to do.

### Read It Before You Share It

Believe it or not, the majority of people who share stories via Facebook don't actually read those stories all the way to the end before they post. A lot of folks read only the headline and post it without reading anything. That's irresponsible.

If you're going to share something with people you know and respect, respect them enough to read the thing you're sharing. You might discover, on closer inspection, that the article is obviously fraudulent, that it doesn't actually say

what the headline promises, or that you disagree with what it ends up saying. If you want your friends to read it, the least you can do is read it first.

## **Check It Out Before You Share It**

Don't share things that you suspect are fake. Use all the techniques you've learned in this chapter, including the Snopes and Media Bias/Fact Check websites, to check the validity of the article; don't just blindly repost things you see in your news feed. Make sure it's factual before you share it.

## **If Someone Questions It, Remove It**

If you somehow end up posting something that isn't factual, and someone points out to you that that's the case, go back and delete. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media let you remove your posts after you've posted; you should do this if you discover you've posted some fake news. It's a way of correcting your mistakes, and you need to do this. (You may even want to create a new post revealing the new information you have about the first post, to completely clear the air.)

Bottom line, you need to be careful about what you share on social media. There's a lot of phony stuff out there, and you don't want to be duped into sharing it with people who trust you. Keep their trust by not posting fake news.

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