

1 **Stanford Study Finds Most Students Vulnerable To Fake News**



2 Heard on [All Things Considered](#)

3 November 22, 2016 4:37 PM ET

4 [http://www.npr.org/2016/11/22/503052574/stanford-study-finds-most-students-vulnerable-to-fake-](http://www.npr.org/2016/11/22/503052574/stanford-study-finds-most-students-vulnerable-to-fake-news)
5 [news](http://www.npr.org/2016/11/22/503052574/stanford-study-finds-most-students-vulnerable-to-fake-news)

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7 *NPR's Kelly McEvers talks to Professor Sam Wineburg about his study that tested over 7,800*
8 *teenagers about their ability to differentiate fake from real news and sponsored ads from news*
9 *articles.*

10 **KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:**

11 How do kids and teenagers perceive what they read online? Can they tell real news apart from fake
12 news or ads? A new study from Stanford University asked more than 7,800 students to evaluate
13 online articles and news sources. And the results, says lead author Sam Wineburg, are bleak.

14 Large portions of the students - at times as much as 80 or 90 percent - had trouble judging the
15 credibility of the news they read. Wineburg is a professor of education and history at Stanford, and I
16 asked him earlier today to describe one of the tests they used.

17 **SAM WINEBURG:** We showed them a picture of daisies that looked like they were deformed.
18 There was a claim on a website that they were the result of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima
19 district in Japan. The photograph had no attribution. There was nothing that indicated that it was
20 from anywhere.

21 And we asked students, is - does this photograph provide proof that the kind of nuclear disaster
22 caused these aberrations in nature? And we found that over 80 percent of the high school students
23 that we gave this to them had an extremely difficult time making that determination. They didn't ask
24 where it came from. They didn't verify it. They simply accepted the picture as fact.

25 **MCEVERS:** So what do you think can be done about this?

26 **WINEBURG:** We simply have not caught up to the way these sources of information are influencing
27 the kinds of conceptions that we develop on a day-to-day basis. But the only way that we can deal
28 with these kinds of issues are through educational programs and recognizing that the kinds of things
29 that we worry about - these - the ability to determine what is reliable or not reliable - that is the new
30 basic skill in our society.

31 **MCEVERS:** So you're talking about programs to just educate people from the get-go about the
32 devices that they use and the information that they get on them and how - what would that look like?
33 What would that sound like in school?

34 WINEBURG: Right now, Kelly, in many schools there are internet filters that direct students to
35 previously vetted sites and reliable sources of information.

36 But what happens when they leave school and they take out their phone and they look at their
37 Twitter feed? How do they become prepared to make the choices about what to believe, what to
38 forward, what to post to their friends when they've given no practice in doing those kinds of things in
39 school?

40 And so consequently what we see is a rash of fake news going on that people pass on without
41 thinking. And we really can't blame young people because we've never taught them to do otherwise.

42 MCEVERS: If there were a way to start teaching - talking about this inside a school, what do you
43 think it would or should sound like?

44 WINEBURG: In search of expertise, we were led to professional fact-checkers at some of the
45 nation's most prestigious publications. And we found that fact-checkers actually look at web content
46 in ways that is - that are very different from what the typical user does. The typical user looks at web
47 content when they come to a page that they're not familiar with, and they read it almost like a piece
48 of print journalism. They read it vertically from up and down.

49 What a fact-checker does when they land in an unfamiliar place - is that they take bearing. They
50 almost immediately open multiple tabs, and they read horizontally. And they get a fix. But my
51 question is that - who actually does this? What we really want to do is try to figure out how to make
52 those five minutes worthwhile.

53 MCEVERS: So basically teaching people to be fact-checkers.

54 WINEBURG: Exactly. The kinds of duties that used to be the responsibility of editors, of librarians
55 now fall on the shoulders of anyone who uses a screen to become informed about the world. And so
56 the response is not to take away these rights from ordinary citizens but to teach them how to
57 thoughtfully engage in information seeking and evaluating in a cacophonous democracy.

58 MCEVERS: Sam Wineburg is a professor of education and history at Stanford University. He's the
59 lead author of a new study that tested hundreds of middle schoolers to college students about their
60 ability to differentiate fake from real news. Thank you very much.

61 WINEBURG: Thank you.

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The problem of fake news came to a dizzying head in 2016 when a man fired a shot in a family pizzeria as he “self-investigated” a false report of a child abuse ring led by top democrats. A BuzzFeed report confirmed that fake news stories, such as the one that claimed Hillary Clinton sold arms to ISIS, were actually viewed more times than articles from established and legitimate news sources. Did fake news have an impact on the election? How do we address the problem from here? In this activity, students will analyze the problem and consider steps media outlets and individuals need to take to prevent the viral spread of propaganda.

Opening Activity: Discuss

- How do you get your news? If you get it from social media, can you name the news *sources* (where the information you read actually *comes from*)?
- What have you heard about fake news? Why are people concerned about it?

“If we can’t discriminate between serious arguments and **propaganda**, then we have problems.”

propaganda (*noun*): Information that is often exaggerated or false and spread for the purpose of benefiting or promoting a specific individual or cause.

Take a Survey

Students: Scan your social media newsfeeds to spot suspect articles. Then, use this checklist from the News Literacy Project, [Ten Questions for Fake News Detection](#), to determine whether you’ve spotted an illegitimate news source.

Then, work with the whole class to create a list of sites that you’ve evaluated. List the sites, and create columns for read, “liked,” or shared. Perform a class-wide survey to see how many times people read, “liked” or shared an article from each site.

Based on the results of the survey, discuss the following questions as a class:

- Were you surprised to learn that any of the sites were actually fake news sites?
- If you shared any articles from the site, what was the result? Did people like, comment or share the article from your social media page? Did you see this activity on other people’s social media pages? What types of behaviors did you notice?
- What impact do you think fake news has had on you, or on people in your life?
- What impact do you think fake news sites had on the election?
- Now that you know these sites are fake, what actions might you take to lessen the harm of misinformation?

Writing Task (about 1 page)

What impact do you think fake news had on the 2016 Presidential Election?

What steps should the government, media outlets and individuals take to address the problem?

Write a short essay exploring the issue. Support your answer with evidence from the article, the class discussion, the class survey and your own experiences in exploring news and social media.



TEN QUESTIONS FOR NEWS DETECTION

Use the questions below to assess the likelihood that a piece of information is fake news. The more red flags you circle, the more skeptical you should be!

START

1. Gauge your emotional reaction: Is it **strong**? Are you **angry**? Are you intensely **hoping** that the information turns out to be true? YES | NO ✓
2. Reflect on how you encountered this. Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know?
3. Consider the headline or main message:
 - a. Does it use **excessive punctuation(!)** or ALL CAPS for emphasis? YES | NO ✓
 - b. Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that **"the media" doesn't want you to know**? YES | NO ✓
 - c. Don't stop at the headline! Keep exploring.
4. Is this information designed for **easy sharing**, like a **meme**? YES | NO ✓
5. Consider the source of the information:
 - a. Is it a well-known source? YES | NO
 - b. Is there a byline (an author's name) attached to this piece? YES | NO
 - c. Go to the website's "About" section: Does the site describe itself as a "fantasy news" or **"satirical news"** site? YES | NO ✓
 - d. Does the person or organization that produced the information have any editorial standards? YES | NO
 - e. Does the "contact us" section include an email address that matches the domain (not a Gmail or Yahoo email address)? YES | NO
 - f. Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions? YES | NO ✓
6. Does the example you're evaluating have a current date on it? YES | NO
7. Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources? Does the information this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets? YES | NO
8. Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources? In other words, they haven't been altered or taken from another context? YES | NO
9. Can you confirm, using a reverse image search, that any images in your example are authentic (in other words, sources that haven't been altered or taken from another context)? YES | NO
10. If you searched for this example on a fact-checking site such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.com, is there a fact-check that labels it as less than true? YES | NO ✓



REMEMBER:

- It is easy to clone an existing website and create fake tweets to fool people.
- Bots are extremely active on social media and are designed to dominate conversations and spread propaganda.
- Fake news and other misinformation often use a real image from an unrelated event.
- Debunk examples of misinformation whenever you see them. It's good for democracy!