

— FACTS or 'FACTS' ? —

Digital news platforms make it easier than ever to find information about almost any topic on **virtually** any device. But are we getting a balanced perspective? Apparently, for the most part, no. Social media experts Larry Jones and Sue Herrera explain why this is so and what we can do about it.



LARRY JONES

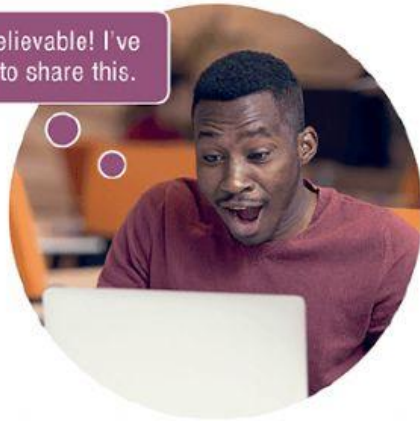
Research has shown that, generally speaking, people prefer to watch or read things they agree with. As a result, algorithms – the secret codes that power social media platforms – tend to show us what *they* think we want to read or watch, based on who we interact with, what we've read in the past, and the sites we visit. This means that the version of the world we find every day in our own personal newsfeed has been pre-selected to confirm our opinions and **reinforce** our beliefs. In a sense, it's as if we're

Unbelievable! I've got to share this.



all **trapped** inside social media's walls, stuck in our own bubbles. So it's no surprise that we're sometimes tempted to block people whose tastes and opinions are different from ours. However, we actually should do the exact opposite: actively follow people who don't necessarily share our point of view, and try to see things from *their perspective*. Not only is this a good exercise in empathy, it will also get algorithms "confused" and stop media platforms from flooding our newsfeed with ideas and opinions that are identical to ours.

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I just love my Facebook friends!



SUE HERRERA

In the newsfeed on your phone, most stories look believable – whether or not they come from a “serious” source. True, some fake news sites are so bad they’re easy to spot: missing references, no authors’ names, spelling and grammar mistakes. As a rule, though, it’s easy to be deceived by misleading, one-sided, or fake stories, which are sometimes read and watched even more widely than real stories. So here’s what you should do so you don’t get **fooled**.

I just love my Facebook friends!



First, if you’re reading or watching the news on an unknown site, check out other articles and videos the site has posted. On the whole, unknown sites may not be **trustworthy**, and you may need to look for a more reliable source so you can compare different news outlets that report the same piece of news. Second, when you’re reading an article, be sure to read past the headline and also go **beyond** the opening paragraph, which are usually designed to sound convincing and may mislead you. Last but not least, please remember: If a news story sounds **phony**, don’t share it because sharing fake news generally makes it go higher up in search-result pages. This, ironically, will make even more people read or watch it!

Skill inferring meaning using related words

When you are trying to infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary, look for related words. These are often:

- in the same sentence as the unknown vocabulary item.
- synonyms or near-synonyms to the vocabulary item.
- the same part of speech as the vocabulary item (e.g., both are adjectives).

Text builder generalizing

We can use the expressions in bold below to make generalizations:

Generally speaking, news sources in my country are trustworthy.

On the whole, I consider myself tolerant of other people's opinions.

As a rule, I don't read or watch the news in English.

For the most part, I get my news from Facebook and Twitter.

5 Read the Text builder. Complete each sentence from the text with the appropriate expression.

- 1 Are we getting a balanced perspective? Apparently, _____, no.
- 2 _____, people prefer to watch or read things they agree with.
- 3 _____, though, it's easy to be deceived by misleading, one-sided, or fake stories.
- 4 _____, unknown sites may not be trustworthy.