# What to believe?
# The problem of fake news

I) In May of 1897, the famous American author Mark Twain visited London. While he was there,1_____ rumours in the US that he had fallen ill and died with several newspapers reporting on it and one going as far as printing an obituary. Twain was in fact alive and well, though suspected the story began due to a cousin who shared his surname had indeed 2 _____ ill. In a letter to a journalist, he humorously remarked 'The report of my death was an exaggeration.'

II) Fake news, then, is hardly a new phenomenon. Though with the rise of the internet, 3 _____ social media, its spread and influence have been greatly exacerbated and it has become a real hotbutton issue within the last decade, finding its way into discussions on politics, healthcare and international relations. News stories 4 _____ untruths come in two forms: completely false and not entirely true. The former are often created to drive traffic to a particular website or to push a false narrative about a person or event in the media. The latter can be somewhat more harmful as the true aspects are able to fool people more 5 _____ into believing that the false aspects are also worth their attention.

III) One of the issues of late is that the term 'fake news' has been weaponised to dismiss articles which are not worthy of the name. What fake news is not is articles talking about subjects you don't like or disagree with. Several politicians have used the label to attack reports on factual events that damage their reputation or present them in a bad light. There have also been incidents of articles 6 _____ for comedy value to critique events, which have been presented as fact which confuse readers who are not in on the joke who then confuse them with fake news. Websites such as The Onion and The Daily Mash have been producing these for some time. However, of late, reality has been so 7 _____ at times that it can be difficult to distinguish between that and satirical content.

IV) To add to the challenge, professional news organisations nearly all contain varying elements of bias in their reporting. News channels in the US such as MSNBC and CNN generally have a left-wing bias, tending to be more 8 _____ of conservatives. Similarly, Fox News is very right-wing, having been supportive of

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Republicans such as Donald Trump and George Bush. To a lesser extent, this is also true of several of the tabloid newspapers in the UK such as The Sun and The Daily Mail. Reporting from these institutions isn't fake news, but they are 9 _____ to push a view of the world which can entice or enrage their audience.

V) Real fake news can have 10 _____ real-world consequences. A serious issue is that the majority of everyday people don't have the time or brain space to tell which is which. Fake news is often compelling because it confirms what we already think or want to believe. It's 11 _____ that 'a lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth puts on its shoes,': a quote which many people think was written by Mark Twain. There is, however, no evidence that this is so, making it,
12 _____, another example of fake news.

**1-2. Read the article and choose the best word A - C to fill the gaps 1 - 12**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | a. circulation | b. circuit | c. circulated |
| 2. | a. being | b. was | c. been |
| 3. | a. partly | b. particularly | c. particular |
| 4. | a. spreads | b. spread | c. spreading |
| 5. | a. ready | b. readily | c. read |
| 6. | a. written | b. writing | c. writes |
| 7. | a. believable | b. disbelief | c. unbelievable |
| 8. | a. criticise | b. critic | c. critical |
| 9. | a. set off | b. set up | c. set down |
| 10. | a. disaster | b. disastrous | c. disastrously |
| 11. | a. saying | b. says | c. said |
| 12. | a. fits | b. fitting | c. fittingly |

*Sources: bbc.co.uk, skillsyouneed.com, weforum.org*

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**3. Listen to the interview with Dr Neil Richardson and be ready to answer the following questions.**

1. What can we do to check that information on a blog is true?
2. What action does Dr Richardson suggest ahead of posting a news story on social media?
3. What is the issue with satire?
4. What are the reasons for people posting fake news stories on social media?
5. How did fake news lead to a shooting in the United States?
6. How does Dr Richardson say fake news has affected politics?
7. Why does Dr Richardson mention Snopes.com and Politifact.com?

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**Find vocabulary in the article that has the same meaning as the following definitions.**

1. _____ some information that is discussed between people informally but may not be based on fact (para. I)
2. _____ an article detailing the life and achievements of someone who has recently died (para. I)
3. _____ a statement or a description, or the act of making one, that makes something seem more important, better, worse, etc., than it really is (para. I)
4. _____ make a situation, disease or problem considerably worse (para.II)
5. _____ use something to cause harm or damage to someone or something (para. III)
6. _____ using humour to criticise a person or an institution (para. III)
7. _____ encourage someone to do something, often by offering something they want to do (para. IV)

**Fill in the gaps with the words above**

1) The film's story was so _____ that nobody in the audience looked away for a moment.
2) There's a _____ going around that the manager is planning to resign, but no one knows if it's true.
3) Cutting the budget now will only _____ the problems the company is already facing.
4) Some groups try to _____ misinformation to influence public opinion.
5) His claim that he could run a marathon in under two hours was clearly an _____.
6) The TV show is known for its _____ humour that cleverly mocks politicians.
7) The smell of freshly baked bread was enough to _____ customers into the bakery.
8) The local newspaper printed an _____ describing the achievements of the famous scientist who had recently passed away.

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**Decide if the following statements are True (T), False (F) or Not Given (NG).**

1. Mark Twain had a British relative who died in 1897.
2. According to the article, fake news has become a bigger problem in the last ten years.
3. According to the article, fake news containing elements of truth can do more damage than that which is entirely false.
4. According to the article, a news story criticising a politician you support is an example of fake news.
5. Humorous stories which make fun of public figures and events are not an example of fake news.
6. The writer of the article believes that differentiating between reality and satire can be challenging.

**Discuss the following questions.**

1. Where do you usually get your news from? Why?
2. Do you read news stories on social media? Why/Why not?
3. Have you read fake news stories? If so, what topics were they about?
4. What effect has fake news had in your country?
5. What would you do if you saw a friend/family member had shared fake news?
6. What do you think you can do to guard against fake news? What do you think can be done about fake news that hasn't already been done?
7. How does fake news influence public opinion and behavior?
8. Should governments regulate fake news on social media, or does this risk censorship?
9. Should social media platforms be legally responsible for the spread of fake news?

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