FAKE NEWS

WORKSHEET

EXERCISE 1

> **FAKE NEWS**
>
> A story that is presented as being a genuine item of news but is in fact not true and is intended to deceive people.

a. Work with a partner. Discuss this question:

- How does fake news spread?

EXERCISE 2

a. Skim read the text. Answer the questions.

1. Were any of your ideas from Exercise 1 mentioned? If so, what?

2. What is the main purpose of the text? Justify your answer to your partner.

b. Read the text again. Answer the questions according to the text.

1. What makes a bot effective at sharing fake news?

_____

_____

2. How might users within our social network contribute to our confirmation bias?

_____

_____

3. How might being trolled result in you sharing fake news?

_____

_____

4. What is the real-world impact of microtargeting?

_____

_____

c. Summarise the four main paragraphs of the text in around 25 words each.

Paragraph 1:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Paragraph 2:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Paragraph 3:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Paragraph 4:

_____

_____

_____

_____

EXERCISE 3

a. Match the words in the text in bold with the correct definition.

Word/Phrase	Meaning
1.	share so much of something that it is difficult to deal with
2.	officially proven to be true or correct
3.	the fact that we tend to believe something that supports our own views
4.	confirm
5.	to make people think that something is not true
6.	a set of rules that a computer uses for solving problems or calculations
7.	not sure about the truth or quality of something
8.	careful examination of someone or something
9.	to become a feature of something gradually, without anyone noticing
10.	false information intended to make people believe something that is not true

FAKE NEWS

Word/Phrase	Meaning
11.	a situation in which people only listen to or read others with the same views, and so are not receptive to or aware of different views
12.	likely to do something, especially something bad
13.	making people do what you want by influencing them in a clever or dishonest way
14.	easily damaged or affected by something negative or harmful

b. Work with a partner. Use the prompts to ask a question to your partner. Take turns asking and answering questions.

1. why / people / discredit / moon landings ?

2. politicians / manipulative ?

3. know / algorithms / work ?

4. elderly / vulnerable / illness ?

5. prone to / mistakes ?

6. read / dubious / online ?

7. you think / echo chamber / social media ?

8. confirmation bias / sometimes ?

9. bombarded / spam emails / spam filter ?

10. how / stop / spread / disinformation ?

c. Read each extract. Discuss the meaning of each phrase in bold with a partner. If you are unsure, ask a teacher or use the Macmillan online dictionary to help you.

1. The success of bots in sharing fake news is partly **attributed to** people.

2. The 'echo chamber' phenomenon on social media **plays into the hands of** bots.

3. … seek to justify their opinion with evidence. That evidence is often shared uncritically, **in the heat of the moment**.

d. Can you make your own sentences using each phrase?

EXERCISE 4

Work with a partner. Answer the questions.

1. Did any of the information in the text surprise you? If so, what?

2. Which of these factors do you think is the most important for social media users to be aware of?

3. Do you think social media companies should do more to address the issue of fake news? If so, what?

4. What advice would you give social media users about how to limit the spread of fake news?

How is fake news spread?

Social media is rife with fake news, but what causes fake news to spread? There are lots of factors that contribute to the spread of **disinformation** – here are just some of them.

1. Bots

It is estimated that between 5–10% of all social media accounts are actually robots (*bots* for short). Bots can act like actual people, performing everyday tasks like sharing content, following other users, commenting and joining in debates. However, bots are just computer **algorithms** – they are simply completing a series of tasks that they've been programmed to do. They can also learn from patterns of interaction among social media users, which helps them complete their tasks more efficiently.

How do bots spread fake news? Well, bots can be programmed to share information that this not **validated** or reliable. What's more, they can do this on a large scale, and repetitively too. They can **bombard** social media with disinformation, linking this to trending hashtags in order to gain more exposure.
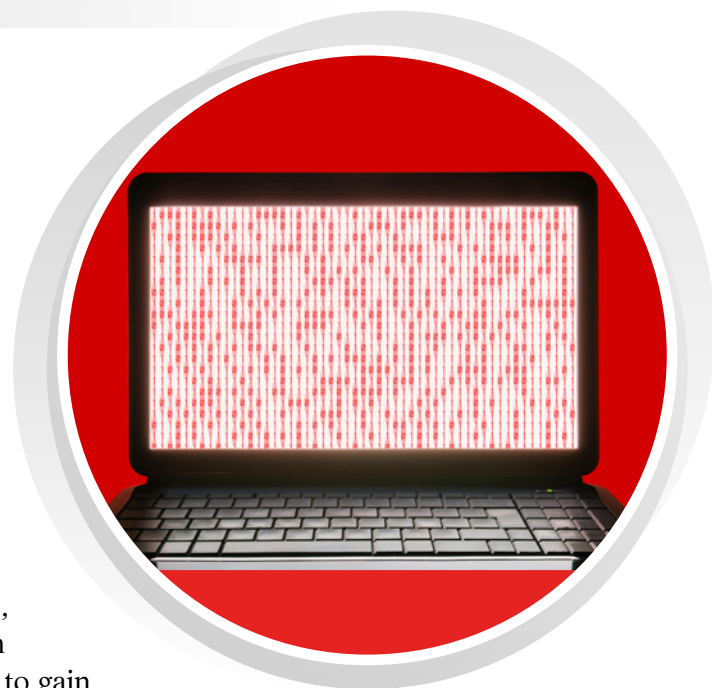
2. People

The success of bots in sharing fake news is partly attributed to people. Many of us fall into the trap of **confirmation bias** – that is, we are inclined to believe something that supports our own views. Bots are master manipulators - if they manage to **infiltrate** the feeds of users we trust, we may be quick to reshare that information without questioning it. Similarly, those who trust us will share that information too, which only serves to **reaffirm** or validate our own beliefs.

The 'echo chamber' phenomenon on social media plays into the hands of bots, but people **are prone to** sharing their own **dubious** content without the help of bots, too. The sheer amount of information available to us on a daily basis can make us lazy, and we can tend to skim read content without much **scrutiny**.

3. Trolls

There are certain social media users that aim to argue, intimidate and **discredit** those that they don't agree with. Strong, emotionally-fuelled engagement on social media is a friend of fake news. Trolling creates the perfect conditions for fake news to spread, as both the trolls and those being trolled seek to justify their opinion with evidence. That evidence is often shared uncritically, in the heat of the moment. Furthermore, trolling generates interest (everyone loves a good argument), meaning that trolls have a willing audience which may help fuel certain (questionable) ideas.

4. Microtargeting

Social media sites gather data on their users. They use this data to filter the information you see to make it more suited to your interests. The analytics used by these sites can improve user experience, but they can also be used for microtargeting. This is when a post is shared with a specific audience as they are likely to read it, share it, or interact with it. Some targeted content may seem harmless, but user data can be passed on to third-parties which have a more **manipulative** motive. One analytics company, Cambridge Analytica, used Facebook data to help target voters during the 2016 US presidential election campaign. Microtargeting doesn't necessarily mean that users will be targeted with fake news, but it does make them **vulnerable** to it.