

Should I believe it?: some additional questions for digital media

This set of questions is a supplement to the broadly generic ones given in Dombrowski, Rotenberg, and Bick, *Theory of Knowledge* (OUP, 2013), 219-220.

SOURCE

- What features of the domain name give an indication of its reliability, or of its status as a news site, blog, or the website of an organization? What does the suffix of the url (.com, .org, .edu?) indicate? Does the domain give accurately the name of an identifiable organization in conventional format, not a “look-alike” name and/or additional suffix (e.g. Note the added suffix: abcnews.com.co)?
- Does the website provide background “About us” and contact information? What can you learn by googling the domain, the writers, the organization – possibly about political affiliation, reputation for reliability, or identity as a satirical site? (useful: wikipedia, Snopes, FactCheck.org)? Is there a “disclaimer” that denies responsibility for the content?

STATEMENTS

- Are other sites, including known and reputable ones, covering this topic and making similar statements?
- Can you check quotations and details with other sites, by googling? Do the sites seem to be independent from each other in what they report, or do they echo another source site? If studies are cited, can you find the original source of the information in order to evaluate it?
- Does the website look amateur in design? Does it use lots of CAPITAL LETTERS, bold headings, banner ads, and pop-ups? Does the headline fit the story that follows it?
- Do sensational statements or unlikely promises (click bait!) tempt you to follow the links, on reflex? Do the statements make you indignant, angry, fiercely patriotic or otherwise emotionally aroused about an issue on which you’re not already informed, then suggest actions (signing petitions, sharing a link, downloading material, donating, voting in a particular way, buying a particular product)? Does an inflammatory article give you sources of information, evidence, and “facts” that you can check?
- Is there any indication that an article (e.g. on Buzzfeed) is a sponsored link (look for acknowledgement in top corners), probably an ad presented in the same format as news?
- What is the date of the information on the webpage? Is the information current? (Some stories circulate endlessly on Facebook!) Is the image current and specific to this report or is it recycled from elsewhere on the web? (Right-click the image for its url, then google it or check with a reverse image search on TinEye)

SELF

- Do you care if what you accept online and share with others, for instance via Facebook, is true? Why does, or doesn't, it matter to you?
- Are you patient with breaking news, aware that early reports, posted quickly, are more likely to have errors than later, more verified ones?
- Under what circumstances do you share posts to pass on to others reports or images you’ve received on Facebook, Twitter, or other forms of social media? On reflection, what guidelines would you give yourself in order to be on guard, in a tempted moment, against passing on false “news”?
- On Facebook, does the news posted by friends, or appearing in sponsored space, always support your own point of view? If so, which is more likely: that you’re consistently right, or that you are insulated from alternative views?
- Do you have a media-reading strategy that includes a range of sources you have carefully judged reliable across a political spectrum? Do you actively seek out news and evaluate it, and select and sign up for newsletters and feeds on topics on which you want to stay informed?

from Eileen Dombrowski, “TOK and ‘fake news’: 3 tips, 2 downloads, and 3 resources”, Theory of Knowledge blog, *Oxford Education Blog*, March 27, 2017. <https://educationblog.oup.com/category/theory-of-knowledge>.