



# NEWS IN EDUCATION

## NIE 4-Week Fake News Lesson Series

### **Week 4: Social Media, Fake News, and You**

How much time do you spend on your phone every day? If you're like most young people, social media occupies much of your time. There's no doubt that we are a connected generation.

But have you ever thought about how much the things you see on social media affect you? When it comes to news, there is a constant and never-ending source of information at our fingertips. With this, though, comes the huge problem of...you guessed it, *fake news*.

Let's talk a little about the word viral.

**Viral** is defined as "*quickly and widely spread or popularized especially by means of social media*". This can be a post, image, advertisement, or video that is rapidly shared and becomes the latest internet sensation or buzz.

We have all read viral posts and watched viral videos.

What does all of this have to do with fake news?

Often, a post goes viral quickly because it is outrageous, unbelievable, heartwarming, or terrifying. We talked about this in last week's lesson on clickbait and satire. These posts evoke emotions in people and stir up feelings so that they are impassioned to comment or share the post immediately. There is nothing wrong with this, except when the post is...you guessed it, *fake*.

Have you ever witnessed a friend share something on social media along with a long commentary about how they feel, only to find out just a few days or weeks later that it was all fake, or even partially fake? Have you ever done it yourself? Kind of embarrassing, huh?

Marketers or publishers can create posts like this for the sole purpose of stirring up emotions, so people will react, share, comment, retweet, like, and more. The motivation is to get a reaction out of the public. This can be especially dangerous when it comes to the news. When a fake news story goes viral, it can have real effects on the public, because emotions lead to actions, and sometimes those actions have negative consequences.

A great example of this concept is shown in [this post](#) about the flu shot article that went viral. The article claimed that the flu shot was causing a deadly outbreak of the flu, stating that the shot was more dangerous than the flu virus itself. It was one of the most engaged articles on Facebook during the time it was being shared. Many people, not knowing it was false information, may have decided against getting their flu shot, which could have easily landed them in the hospital, or worse. Virality can become dangerous when it moves outside of the bounds of the digital world, into the real world.

Here are 3 **questions to ask when you come across a viral post**:

1. **Where did this originate?** *Try to locate the original author or creator. It's not always as easy as clicking on an original post, because people copy content all the time. Try to trace how the information got to you. You can trace backwards - where are you first seeing the post? Where was the post before that? You can also do a [reverse image search](#) for any images that are included.*
2. **Why was this created?** *What is the motivation behind the post? Does it seem specifically meant to make you emotional? Do you feel angry when seeing the post? If so, that's a good clue that it was intentionally designed to play on emotions.*
3. **When was this created?** *Check dates carefully. Often, social media can become a place where old stories are resurrected, because people aren't looking at details. Something from 5 years ago can become viral when enough people let their emotions run faster than the logic that prompts further investigation.*

With a little digging, you can be smart about sharing viral content that you may later regret.

Here is **a helpful article** for when you come across the next viral post:

- [Gizmodo | Six Easy Ways to Tell if That Viral Story Is a Hoax](#)

And here is **a list of fake news websites to avoid**:

- [The Definitive List of 176 Fake News Sites on Facebook](#)

#### **Week 4 Discussion Points:**

1. *How many viral posts (videos, photos, articles) do you click on each day? How often do you usually share these on social media?*
2. *How much do you care that the stories you see and share are real? How much does truth in the media matter to you?*
3. *Do you feel you are better prepared to combat the spread of fake news? Do you have a desire to help friends or peers become more media literate and savvy?*

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