

# FAKE NEWS

## Teaching students about fake news



### BACKGROUND

Fake news is the term used to describe false tales that masquerade as bona fide news stories. These circulate on the internet and on social media and can convince readers that they are real news. The problem is persistent. How fake news proliferates and influences people and how disinformation can be countered were discussed.

### PROLIFERATION AND INFLUENCE OF FAKE NEWS

#### Proliferation of Fake News

Internet search engines format information to fit seekers' behaviors. In addition, content is offered based on its ability to engage readers and its popularity. The ability of information to reach internet users depends on the number of times it is cited, liked, disliked, tweeted, retweeted, or shared. This activity can be automated by bots or trolls, causing the information to achieve unearned importance.

Bots are autonomous programs that interact with computer systems without human intervention. Thousands of bots that like, share, or retweet a post will promote messages on that specific topic, via a hashtag, and make it popular. Trolls, on the other hand, are malicious humans driven by passion or money to write social posts that promulgate an idea or plan. That idea or plan is then amplified by hundreds of thousands of bots. Fake health news can be especially destructive, particularly when it involves contentious issues, such as childhood vaccination.

#### Power to Influence of Fake News

Strong financial or ideological interests often lead to efforts to influence more vulnerable members of society. Social media posts regarding dental health behaviors have led to fads such as the use of charcoal toothpaste. The fad is touted as a way to achieve whiter and improve one's appearance. Alternatively, fluoride, which has strong evidence indicating its anticaries abilities, may be labeled a poison and its benefits ignored. With the proliferation of these views comes a sense of authority about them, which isn't countered by scientifically supported posts because those posts aren't promoted by bots or trolls.

Even though evidence-based dentistry is recognized as the gold standard for providing high-quality information about treatments and techniques, many procedures are still based on historical practice rather than rigorous research. Both practitioners and the public tire of waiting for procedures to undergo stringent testing, which leads them to demand better answers to their particular problems. People often find a positive and even attractive message in the proliferation of

opinion-based statements or presentations, which are made to influence the behaviors of the public and practitioners. These articles often present views that people already believe, which then makes it more convincing than evidence-based truth. In addition, fake news items can carry a quasi-scientific element that makes them appear to be reliable.

### COMBATING HEALTH DISINFORMATION

Several simple methods have been suggested to evaluate information and not be fooled by fake news. First, it's important to check the source of the information. Readers need to develop a skeptical mind and not simply accept news on first reading or hearing it.

Second, the reader should continue to read and carefully check the content rather than simply rely on the title of the article. If an audio or video appears to present something that's too good to be true, other reliable sources should be sought to ensure the content has been peer-reviewed.

Third, it's important to check the date of publication. Old news can be repackaged and presented as new or recurrent content.

Even following these 3 rules doesn't keep fake news from being proliferated. Not only must students be educated about the dangers of fake news, but colleagues and other dental professionals need to retain a certain skepticism until something is proven.

#### Clinical Significance

Anyone involved in teaching dental students in undergraduate or postgraduate courses should encourage students to be on the alert for fake news. It also can be helpful for practitioners to discuss questionable issues with peers and patients, which will help them to become better informed. Each practitioner has the power to provide useful, reliable information and counter the misinformation found online.

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Reprints available from MAD da Silva, University of Birmingham, School of Dentistry, 5 Mill Pool Way, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B5 7EG, UK; e-mail: [M.A.DiasdaSilva@bham.ac.uk](mailto:M.A.DiasdaSilva@bham.ac.uk)