



AVOIDING MISINFORMATION

Many elections officials have highlighted false information as the number one threat to election security. Voters need to consume media responsibly and be aware of their role in information laundering.



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HOW TO SPOT FALSE INFORMATION

Facebook released the below tips on how to [spot false news online](#), in partnership with [The News Literacy Project](#), [The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University](#), and [Stony Brook University School of Journalism](#).

1. Be skeptical of headlines. False news stories often have catchy headlines in all caps with exclamation points. If shocking claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they probably are.
2. Look closely at the link. A phony or look-alike link may be a warning sign of false news. Many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the link. You can go to the site to compare the link to established sources.
3. Investigate the source. Ensure that the story is written by a source that you trust with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from an unfamiliar organization, check their "About" section to learn more.
4. Watch for unusual formatting. Many false news sites have misspellings or awkward layouts. Read carefully if you see these signs. Consider the photos. False news stories often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can search for the photo or image to verify where it came from.
5. Inspect the dates. False news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates that have been altered. Check the evidence. Check the author's sources to confirm that they are accurate. Lack of evidence or reliance on unnamed experts may indicate a false news story.
6. Look at other reports. If no other news source is reporting the same story, it may indicate that the story is false. If the story is reported by multiple sources you trust, it's more likely to be true.
7. Is the story a joke? Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humor or satire. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story's details and tone suggest it may be just for fun.
8. Some stories are intentionally false. Think critically about the stories you read, and only share news that you know to be credible.

HOW TO SPOT A BOT

Bots and botnets have played a large role in spreading misinformation online. Learn more about bots and how to spot them on social media.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL MEDIA BOT?

A bot is an automated social media account programmed to perform tasks normally associated with human interaction, including:

- Post content
- Follow users
- Like posts
- Direct message other users
- Retweet anything posted by a specific set of users featuring a specific hashtag

There are millions of bots on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. According to a [2017 report](#) by researchers from the University of Southern California and Indiana University, between nine and 15 percent of Twitter users are actually bots.

Not all bots are insidious – some are entertaining or helpful, like ones that Tweet out weather conditions or when a new program has been uploaded to an online streaming surface. But fake profiles can be used in malicious activities or be a part of modern, hybrid warfare when it comes to spreading misinformation.

In a [2018 study](#) Indiana University researchers analyzed 14 million messages and 400,000 articles shared on Twitter. They found that bots played a disproportionate role in spreading misinformation online: a mere 6 percent of Twitter accounts that the study identified as bots were enough to spread 31 percent of the "low-credibility" information on the network. These accounts were also responsible for 34 percent of all articles shared from "low-credibility" sources.

Bot accounts often work in tandem, as part of what's called a botnet, to post the same or similar content. This could be to make a phrase or hashtag trend, to amplify a message or article, or to harass other users.

HOW DO I DETECT A BOT?

So how can you identify fake accounts and bots on social media? Some typical characteristics of bots include:

- Anonymity. The account may have no profile picture, or a suspicious profile picture that does not match the name of the account. There is no bio or personal information included. The account username may include random numbers or letters, signaling auto-generation.
- Hyperactivity. Check how often the account posts. Generally an account that posts more than 50 times a day may be a bot. If the majority of posts are shares, retweets or mentions of other accounts, that may be another indicator of a bot.
- Multiple languages. Bots may post content in various languages according to who's paying to use them. If an account has clusters of posts in multiple languages, it's probably a bot.
- Unlikely popularity. If an account with a small number of followers suddenly racks up thousands of retweets, that may be a sign of bot activity.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOU SPOT A BOT?

The solution is easy – if you spot a bot, flag and report it. The rest will be taken care of by the social network itself. If you do identify an account as a bot, don't respond to or interact with its posts. You can also ban or block the account to stop seeing its content.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL NETWORKS DOING ABOUT MISINFORMATION AND AUTOMATION?

Since the 2016 election, Facebook and Twitter have taken steps to remove fake accounts and flag false information.

Facebook [reported](#) that it removed more than 6.59 billion fake accounts from October 2018 through September 2019. Voters can also search the [Facebook Ad Library](#) to see data for all ads about social issues, election and politics.

Twitter has introduced [new measures](#) to detect spam and malicious automation, and regularly deletes inactive and fake accounts. Twitter also stopped all political advertising.



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