

5.

SEEK THE TRUTH ON THE INTERNET

The term “fake news” is used to refer to a wide range of inaccurate or misleading information, including satire, poorly researched or unverified content, hoaxes and scams. Fake news isn’t always spread maliciously, but regardless of the reason behind why it’s shared, the result is generally the same: people on the receiving end believe that something wrong is actually right, or that something happened that never did.

At best, it may be a humorous meme. At worst, it might be inaccurate health information or false political information.

Even with your best efforts to investigate and ask critical questions of the articles you read, it may still leave you feeling confused. But know this: you’re not alone!

All Hands on Deck

Just because a website doesn’t acknowledge their mistakes, it doesn’t mean they don’t make them. In fact, the most reliable publications are those that are extra careful with the truth, and employ people or entire departments whose sole job it is to fact-check.

Look for sources that issue corrections when they’re wrong. Even better is when the update is summarised right at the top of the article and shared on social media, so you don’t need to search too hard for it.

6.

BURST YOUR FILTER BUBBLE

After websites and apps build a profile of what your interests are, you might find yourself in a filter bubble. This is when services feed you more stories like the ones you’re already clicking on. How does that limit or change what you hear about?

Being in a filter bubble can cause people to see completely different stories, news headlines, articles and advertisements, as demonstrated in the interactive article Blue Feed, Red Feed (graphics.wsj.com/blue-feed-red-feed).

If you know you’re viewing algorithmically curated content designed specifically for you across your apps and websites, the question is: how can you step outside of your filter bubble?

Change the Winds and Mix Up Your News

A good way to burst your filter bubble is to subscribe to services that aggregate news and information from a variety of sources and with a diverse pool of perspectives. RSS feeds, forums and mailing lists that exercise a broad range of opinions and themes may help you see outside of your bubble. Global Voices (globalvoices.org) and The Syllabus (the-syllabus.com) are great options to start with.

Apps, websites, and online media can be essential for accessing news, life hacks and entertainment. But amidst all that content, it can be tough to navigate the distractions to find what you’re really looking for.

What’s more, it can be hard to tell the difference between fact and fiction when you encounter a video, picture or article online.

From personality quizzes that try to profile you to shocking headlines and altered photos or videos that can convince you of a completely different reality, what you see online is not always what it seems.

In this Data Detox, you’ll explore misinformation-related topics and buzzwords, starting with a close-up look at your responsibility and then exploring the bigger picture, while getting advice on how to find your way through what’s out there.

Let’s go!

D A T A
D E T O X
K I T

6 TIPS TO STEER CLEAR OF MISINFORMATION ONLINE

datadetoxkit.org #datadetox

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1.

REALISE YOUR POWER TO MAKE WAVES

Liking, sharing, retweeting, reposting – these actions all describe how you interact with what you see online – and your interactions make a big difference. When enough people engage with a picture, video or post, it spreads rapidly, by definition becoming ‘viral’.

Take a moment to ask yourself: “What’s my influence online?” When was the last time you saw a shocking or funny article, headline, video or image, and within seconds you had already forwarded it to your friends? Researchers have found that the stories and images most likely to go viral are those that make you feel fearful, disgusted, in awe, angry or anxious. If this is something you did just this morning, don’t feel bad!



Sharing Is Caring

Sharing is a form of participation. When you share something (anything), you’re playing a part in the chance that it might go viral. If it turns out to be a fake, for example, do you really want your name and reputation attached to it? Before you share a link, consider whether you might be spreading something untrue, destructive or toxic.

2.

THINK TWICE BEFORE TAKING THAT PERSONALITY TEST

When was the last time you saw a quiz (either in text or photo filters) called something like:

- Which decade are you?
- What is your spirit animal?
- What is your perfect vacation?
- ... the list goes on!

While there’s a chance this was a fun quiz designed to get you to engage, it’s also possible that the questions were carefully crafted to collect data in order to categorise your personality, based on so-called psychometric patterns.

Your answers to a quiz like “Which Simpsons character are you?,” along with your other habits that might be monitored by your browser, app or connected items like loyalty cards, can give data analysts a sense of what kind of person you are, what you care about and how to influence you to buy a pair of shoes (for example)... or even build a profile of you in order to decide how to try to influence you to vote a certain way in the next election.

Keep More Secrets

When you think of private information, your passwords, identification number and bank account number might be the first things to jump to your mind. But details about you such as what scares you, what annoys you and your ambitions are just as personal. These details can be considered valuable by data analysts, shedding light on what makes you tick as a person. Think twice before giving away that kind of information in a survey or a quiz.

3.

DON’T TAKE THE BAIT

Click bait is a term used to describe sensationalist, dishonest or made-up headlines used with the intent to provoke people to click on the headline or link. The more attention an article, video or image receives, the more money it’s likely to earn. That means there’s a motivation for creators to say anything it takes to get you to click on or share their content.

Based on the personality profile built about you by the platforms you use (like Facebook and Instagram), you may get customised headlines that have been created to trigger your emotions in a way that’s most likely to get you to click.

Click bait may be found alongside misinformation, but not always. Once you begin identifying click bait headlines, you’ll notice them all over YouTube, blogs and tabloids.



Get to the Source

When faced with click bait, don’t stop at the headline. If it looks like a secure link, click into the article and find out who the author is, when it was published and which sources it’s referring to. It could be that inside the article, there’s a note that it’s paid content or an advertisement, or maybe it’s categorised as an opinion piece. These details can help you decide whether it’s worth your energy.

4.

WATCH OUT FOR FAKES

Deep fakes are videos, audio clips or pictures that have been digitally altered, typically to replace someone’s face or movements or to alter their words. While “deep fakes” is a recent term, they have actually been around in one form or another for ages. It’s even easier to create so-called **cheap fakes** – misleading content that doesn’t require sophisticated technology, but instead can be created by simply putting the wrong headline on a photo or video, or using outdated content to illustrate a current event.

It might seem impossible to truly combat fakes, but there is something key you can do ... stay anchored.

Stay Anchored and Explore

Just like when you’re dealing with click bait, don’t accept something at face value. If a video or photo you’ve seen seems surprising or outrageous, recognise that feeling and consider there might be more than meets the eye. Otherwise, if you notice the same image is filling up your feed or has been shared with you multiple times, recognise that as a possible reason to get to the real source.

That’s when you’ll want to ask more questions: who published it (which website, who was the author)? When was it published? If it’s an image, do a reverse image search on TinEye (tineye.com) and see where else you find it.

Cross-check other credible news sources before you consider it to be true and before you share it with your friends and family.