



News You Can Use

– tip sheet

Online news is one of the hardest things to verify. Sometimes early reports that turn out not to be true still circulate on the Internet, and people may spread false reports for commercial or malicious reasons, or even just for “fun.”

Here are three tips to help make you a savvy reader – and sharer – of online news.

1. Check out the original source

Don't assume that a report is true just because lots of other people have shared it, it's high in search results or it's trending on a social network: hoaxers can manipulate these measures to spread their version of the story.

Instead, open a new tab to go “upstream” and find the *original* source:

- Did the story really come from the source listed? Instead of just following a link that might take you to a fake website, do a search for the website (or enter its web address if you know it) to double-check.
- Does the source for the news have a good track record for accuracy? Do a search to find out what other people say about the source as well.

No news source is *unbiased*, but some will be more *reliable*. Here are some markers of a reliable news organization:

- **Accuracy:** If they can't get the little things right – people's names, statistics, etc. – it's hard to trust them on the big things.
- **Willingness to acknowledge gaps and correct mistakes:** Do they admit when they don't have all the information? When they do make mistakes, do they admit and correct them?
- **Separation between opinion and news:** Most news outlets have an editorial “slant,” but that shouldn't affect the news they cover. For instance, if the editorial generally supports one political viewpoint, does the news still cover stories that could offer a contrary perspective?
- **Identification of sources:** While legitimate news outlets do sometimes use anonymous sources, most of the time sources should be identified. When statistics are given, it should be possible to follow them upstream to their source as well.



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2. Double-check photos and videos

Fake photos and videos are some of the most common kinds of misinformation that go around when a big news story happens. Old photos can get shared sometimes, too. Make sure to double-check that a photo or video is current and for real before you spread it any further.

Do a search for the subject with the words “hoax” or “scam”, as in “shark subway station hoax”. Take the time to scan the snippets below each result before you click on one to make sure that it’s relevant to what you’re looking for, and open the results in a new tab so you can get back to your original search easily.

For pictures, you can do a search at TinEye (www.tineye.com) or use a search engine. That will tell you where else the picture has appeared, and also show you pictures that are similar (which is a good way to find out if an image has been manipulated).

You can also search on hoax-busting sites like Snopes. Go to www.snopes.com or do a site search, like this: “shark subway station site:www.snopes.com”.

3. Think before you share

Everybody has a part to play in making sure that false news doesn’t spread, especially when a big story is breaking. Before you pass anything along on one of your social networks, ask yourself these questions:

- Could someone base an important decision (about their health, their career, travel, etc.) on this?
- Is this about a hot or controversial issue?
- Does this seem “too good to be true”?
- Could people do things that they might regret based on this?
- Could bad things happen because people thought this was true and it wasn’t?

If the answer to any of these questions is “Yes”, then you may want to do some more digging before you spread the news.

