

Library Services

Fake News Friday: Week 4

26/05/2017

FIONA: Hello I'm Fiona, one of the librarians at the Open University Library and welcome to the last edition of Fake News Friday.

I hope you've found the tips in the other three sessions useful. This week I'm going to be looking at the IFLA infographic and the ones I'm choosing are Supporting Sources and Ask the Experts.

Many news articles are actually based on press releases or academic articles, and journalists often feel that they need to jazz up the stories in order to make them more interesting for people to read. Academic studies rarely come to black and white conclusions, and conclusions that say "well it might be this or it could be that" don't make for exciting headlines.

So my first tip is look at the supporting sources. Did the original authors really say that? News reports can vary from the slightly misleading to the outright contrary to what was originally said. And my example of this is reports from a big Danish study that came out earlier this week about chocolate eating habits and heart disease. And examples of news headlines are things like 'Chocolate six days a week will save your heart' and 'Eating just one chocolate bar a day can reduce risk of stroke' were appearing in the press earlier this week.

As you can imagine the original report in the scientific journal was nothing like that. The scientists were definitely more cagey about their results. And incidentally I think this links back to Nicola's tip last week about checking your biases because I think we'd all really love this story to be true, wouldn't we?

So this leads me on to my second tip 'Ask the Experts'. Ask yourself "who do I trust?": a news site that relies on sensational headlines to generate income or an organisation that's been working in this field for years and has a reputation to maintain?

So I often find that for medical and health science stories I like to look at NHS Behind the Headlines (<http://www.nhs.uk/news/Pages/NewsIndex.aspx>). An expert checks the news and analyses the facts and statistics and looks at the original scientific study and then writes an article which doesn't have the jargon in it that the original

scientific study had. And as you can see, this is what they said about the chocolate story: 'Chocolate good for the heart' claims sadly too good to be true'.

And you'd probably think that life is too short to check all the news stories that come your way and that's quite true but sometimes it's really important that if you need to make an important decision that you do check the information that you're given. And experts can save you a lot of time by analysing the claims and the statistics.

Certainly it pays to check on health stories and with a general election coming up in the UK it's also helpful to have experts analysing all those statistics and information that come our way and helping us to make the decisions that we know we need to make.

So some news fact-checking sites which are worth taking a look at are BBC Reality Check (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/267ada11-b730-4344-b404-63067c032c65/reality-check>), Channel Four News Check (<https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck>) and there are various reputable sites as well on the internet which have been around for quite a while which check on fake news and Snopes (<http://www.snopes.com/>) is a particularly good example of this. You can find links to all of these sites in the transcript when it goes up.

Hashtag Ask a Librarian (<https://www.cilip.org.uk/search/site/%23Askalibrarian>) is also an interesting set of blog posts to look at. A librarian looks at a news topic which is causing some controversy and then takes you step by step through all the stages of fact checking and looking at trusted sources in order to get to some idea of what the news story was originally about. The one I've chosen as an example is 'Is my smartphone listening to me?' which came out sometime last year. You may be surprised by the conclusions and I know that this smartphone is definitely listening to me!

So I hope you've found these fake news sessions useful and enjoyable. Just to recap, these are the top tips that we've told you about: Consider the Source, Check the Author, Check the Date, Check your Biases, Read Beyond the Headlines, Supporting Sources, Is it a Joke? and Ask the Experts.

Thanks very much for listening. Bye.