

Fake news is “killing people’s minds”

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

One of these headlines is true and four are ‘fake news’ (news which isn’t really true). Can you find the true event?

1. Pope supported Trump in the US presidential election
2. U2’s Bono rescued in terror attack
3. Dogs officially more intelligent than 56% of humans
4. Scientists trying to bring back the mammoth
5. Mobile phone found on Mars

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

squeeze
discourse

beneficiary
run-up

scrutinize
scourge

inauguration
diminish

falsehood
ingrained

1. A _____ is a statement that is not true.
2. A _____ is something that causes a lot of trouble or harm.
3. _____ is serious spoken or written discussion of a particular subject.
4. If you _____ something, you make it become less.
5. If you _____ something, you stop it from happening.
6. A _____ is someone who gets an advantage from a situation.
7. An _____ is a ceremony that officially celebrates someone beginning a new job, especially the president of a country.
8. If you _____ something, you examine it very carefully.
9. A _____ is the period of time just before an important event.
10. If an attitude, belief or habit is _____, it has existed for a long time and cannot easily be changed.

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many times were fake anti-Clinton stories shared on Facebook in the run-up to the US presidential election?
2. How many times were fake pro-Clinton stories shared on Facebook in the run-up to the US presidential election?
3. What did Kellyanne Conway call the Trump administration’s falsehoods?
4. Who is Tim Cook?
5. What percentage of those who recalled seeing fake news stories actually believed them?
6. According to Donald Trump, how far back did the crowd extend at his inauguration?

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Fake news is “killing people’s minds”, says Apple boss, Tim Cook

Apple chief calls on governments and technology companies to crack down on misinformation in public discourse

Kevin Rawlinson

11 February, 2017

- 1 Fake news is “killing people’s minds”, Tim Cook, the head of Apple, has said. The technology boss said firms such as his own needed to create tools that would help stop the spread of falsehoods, without impinging on freedom of speech. Cook also called for governments to lead information campaigns to crack down on fake news in an interview with a British national newspaper. The scourge of falsehoods in mainstream political discourse came to the fore during recent campaigns, during which supporters of each side were accused of promoting misinformation for political gain.
- 2 “We are going through this period of time right here where, unfortunately, some of the people that are winning are the people that spend their time trying to get the most clicks, not tell the most truth,” said Cook. “It’s killing people’s minds, in a way. All of us technology companies need to create some tools that help diminish the volume of fake news. We must try to squeeze this without stepping on freedom of speech and of the press but we must also help the reader. Too many of us are just in the ‘complain’ category right now and haven’t figured out what to do.” He said that a crackdown would mean that “truthful, reliable, non-sensational, deep news outlets will win”, adding: “The rise of fake news is a short-term thing. I don’t believe that people want that.”
- 3 While instances were seen among supporters of both sides of the recent US election battle, Donald Trump’s campaign was seen by many as a particular beneficiary of fake news reports. And the US president’s team has been caught sending aides out to insist that a huge crowd had attended his inauguration, when the evidence showed only a relatively modest audience. Trump’s spokesman, Sean Spicer, insisted that the event had attracted “the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration” and Trump said he believed the crowd went “all the way back to the Washington Monument”.
- 4 Images from the moment Trump was taking the oath showed the crowd was relatively small and
- 5 went nowhere near as far down Washington’s National Mall as the monument. Other evidence suggested a relatively small crowd in attendance. Senior aide Kellyanne Conway later characterized the Trump administration’s falsehoods as “alternative facts”. Hillary Clinton was scrutinized over her claim that there was “no evidence” her emails had been hacked because the FBI director, James Comey, had concluded it was likely they had been.
- 5 A study by economists at Stanford University and New York University published two months after November’s US presidential election found that in the run-up to the vote, fake anti-Clinton stories had been shared 30 million times on Facebook, while those favouring her were shared eight million times. It said: “The average American saw and remembered 0.92 pro-Trump fake news stories and 0.23 pro-Clinton fake news stories, with just over half of those who recalled seeing fake news stories believing them.”
- 6 But it called into question the power of fake news reports spread on social media to alter the outcome of the election, saying that, “for fake news to have changed the outcome of the election, a single fake article would need to have had the same persuasive effect as 36 television campaign ads”.
- 7 Nevertheless, Cook demanded action to decrease the reach of fake news. “We need the modern version of a public service announcement campaign. It can be done quickly, if there is a will. It has to be ingrained in the schools; it has to be ingrained in the public. There has to be a massive campaign. We have to think through every demographic. It’s almost as if a new course is required for the modern kid, for the digital kid.”
- 8 “In some ways, kids will be the easiest to educate. At least before a certain age, they are very much in listen-and-understand mode and they then push their parents to act. We saw this with environmental issues: kids learning at school and coming home and saying ‘Why do you have this plastic bottle? Why are you throwing it away?’”

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First published in *The Guardian*, 11/02/17

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4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- During the US presidential campaign, which candidate benefitted more from fake news?
 - Hillary Clinton
 - Donald Trump
 - neither candidate
- Which of these statements is true according to the text?
 - The average American saw and remembered twice as many pro-Trump fake news stories as pro-Clinton fake news stories.
 - The average American saw and remembered half as many pro-Clinton fake news stories as pro-Trump fake news stories.
 - The average American saw and remembered four times as many pro-Trump fake news stories as pro-Clinton fake news stories.
- Which of these statements is most true according to the text?
 - Fake news stories definitely influenced the outcome of the US presidential election.
 - To influence the outcome of the election, one fake news story would need to have had the same effect as more than thirty campaign advertisements on TV.
 - Fake news stories had absolutely no effect on the outcome of the election.
- Who, according to Tim Cook, will be the easiest to educate about fake news?
 - American voters
 - children
 - Facebook users

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

- a two-word phrasal verb meaning *have an effect on something especially in a negative way* (para 1)
- a three-word phrasal verb meaning *start dealing with something much more strictly* (para 1)
- a four-word verb phrase meaning *move into a position of importance* (para 1)
- a two-word phrasal verb meaning *experience something difficult or unpleasant* (para 2)
- a two-word phrasal verb meaning *be able to understand something or solve a problem* (para 2)
- a verb meaning *use a computer to connect to someone else’s computer secretly and often illegally* (para 4)
- a three-word verb phrase meaning *make something seem less certain* (para 6)
- a two-word phrasal verb meaning *consider the facts about something in an organized and thorough way* (para 7)

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6 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. lead | a. someone’s emails |
| 2. attract | b. an effect |
| 3. hack | c. action |
| 4. have | d. a campaign |
| 5. demand | e. the outcome of something |
| 6. change | f. an audience |

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. Supporters of both candidates were accused of promoting _____ in order to gain a political advantage. [INFORMATION]
2. Tim Cook supports _____, reliable, non-sensational news outlets. [TRUE]
3. A single fake article would need to have had the same _____ effect as 36 television campaign ads. [PERSUADE]
4. Trump was seen as a particular _____ of fake news reports. [BENEFIT]
5. A relatively small crowd was in _____ at Trump’s inauguration. [ATTEND]
6. Cook believes a modern version of a public service _____ campaign is needed. [ANNOUNCE]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- It should be illegal to publish fake news.
- Anyone with any intelligence should be able to tell immediately if a story is fake.
- Politicians have always lied and ‘fake news’ is nothing new.

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KEY

1 Warmer

Headline 4 is true.

2 Key words

1. falsehood
2. scourge
3. discourse
4. diminish
5. squeeze
6. beneficiary
7. inauguration
8. scrutinize
9. run-up
10. ingrained

3 Find the information

1. 30 million
2. eight million
3. alternative facts
4. the head of Apple
5. just over 50%
6. all the way to the Washington Monument

4 Comprehension check

1. b
2. c
3. b
4. b

5 Find the word

1. impinge on
2. crack down on
3. come to the fore
4. go through
5. figure out
6. hack
7. call into question
8. think through

6 Verb + noun collocations

1. d
2. f
3. a
4. b
5. c
6. e

7 Word-building

1. misinformation
2. truthful
3. persuasive
4. beneficiary
5. attendance
6. announcement