

## Fake news is “killing people’s minds”

### Level 2 • Upper intermediate

#### 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. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

**advantage**  
**misinformation**

**falsehood**  
**inauguration**

**question**  
**massive**

**freedom of speech**  
**run-up**

**scrutinize**  
**diminish**

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a statement that is not true. (para 1)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is the legal or natural right to say what you believe is true, without being stopped or punished. (para 1)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is false or incorrect information, especially when it is intended to trick people. (para 1)
4. An \_\_\_\_\_ is something that makes one person or group more likely to succeed than others. (para 1)
5. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something, you make it become less. (para 2)
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a ceremony that officially celebrates someone beginning a new job, especially the president of a country. (para 3)
7. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something, you examine it very carefully. (para 4)
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the period of time just before an important event. (para 5)
9. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something, you express doubts about it. (para 6)
10. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is very large. (para 7)

#### 3 Find the information

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

1. Who is Tim Cook?
2. According to Donald Trump, how far back did the crowd reach at his inauguration?
3. What did Kellyanne Conway call the Trump administration’s falsehoods?
4. How many times were fake anti-Clinton stories shared on Facebook in the run-up to the US presidential election?
5. How many times were fake pro-Clinton stories shared on Facebook in the run-up to the US presidential election?
6. To be able to affect the result of an election, one fake news article would need to have the same effect as how many TV campaign ads?

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

Kevin Rawlinson

11 February, 2017

- 1 Fake news is “killing people’s minds”, Tim Cook, the boss of Apple, has said. The technology boss said companies such as his needed to create tools that would help stop the spread of falsehoods, without affecting freedom of speech. Cook also said governments should lead information campaigns to crack down on fake news. The danger of falsehoods in politics was particularly apparent during recent election campaigns, during which supporters of each side were accused of promoting misinformation for political advantage.
- 2 “We are going through this period of time where, unfortunately, some of the people that are winning are the people that try 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 amount of fake news. We must try to do this without limiting freedom of speech and of the press but we must also help the reader. Too many of us are just complaining right now and haven’t figured out what to do.” He said that a crackdown would mean that “truthful, reliable, non-sensational news organizations will win”, adding: “The rise of fake news is a short-term thing. I don’t believe that people want that.”
- 3 There were fake news reports among supporters of both sides of the recent US election battle but many people believe Donald Trump’s campaign gained most from fake news reports. And the US president’s team was caught sending aides out to insist that a huge crowd had attended his inauguration, when the evidence showed only a relatively small audience was there. 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 inauguration showed the crowd was relatively small and went nowhere near as far down Washington’s National Mall as the monument. Other evidence suggested a relatively small crowd. Senior aide Kellyanne Conway later called the Trump administration’s falsehoods “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, said 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 election, fake anti-Clinton stories had been shared 30 million times on Facebook, while pro-Clinton stories 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. Just over half of those who remembered seeing fake news stories believed them.”
- 6 But the study questioned the power of fake news reports spread on social media to change the result of the election. It said that, “for fake news to have changed the result of the election, a single fake article would need to have had the same effect as 36 television campaign ads.”
- 7 Nevertheless, Cook demanded action to decrease the influence of fake news. “We need the modern version of a public service announcement campaign. It can be done quickly, if we make an effort. There has to be a massive campaign. We have to think through every demographic. It’s almost as if a new course is needed 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 listen and understand quite easily and they then push their parents to act. We saw this with environmental issues: kids learnt at school and came home saying to their parents, ‘Why are you throwing this plastic bottle away?’”

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

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#### 4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. According to Tim Cook, fake news is a long-term phenomenon.
2. Hillary Clinton said there was evidence that her emails had been hacked.
3. The study by economists at Stanford University and New York University was published two months before the US presidential election.
4. More anti-Clinton fake news stories were shared than pro-Clinton stories.
5. The average American saw and believed more pro-Trump fake news stories than pro-Clinton fake news stories.
6. Tim Cook believes kids will be easiest to educate about the dangers of fake news.

#### 5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a three-word phrasal verb meaning *start dealing with something much more strictly* (para 1)
2. an adjective meaning *easy to see* (para 1)
3. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *be able to understand something or solve a problem* (para 2)
4. a noun meaning *strong action that someone in authority takes to stop a particular activity* (para 2)
5. a noun meaning *someone whose job is to help another person in their work* (para 3)
6. a verb meaning *use a computer to connect to someone else’s computer secretly and often illegally* (para 4)
7. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *consider the facts about something in an organized and thorough way* (para 7)
8. a noun meaning *a particular group of people* (para 7)

#### 6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. election     | a. media    |
| 2. alternative  | b. bottle   |
| 3. presidential | c. fact     |
| 4. social       | d. campaign |
| 5. plastic      | e. service  |
| 6. public       | f. election |

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#### 7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

|    | adjective   | noun      |
|----|-------------|-----------|
| 1. | false       |           |
| 2. | evident     |           |
| 3. | free        |           |
|    | noun        | adjective |
| 4. | truth       |           |
| 5. | sensation   |           |
| 6. | environment |           |

#### 8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- It should be illegal to publish fake news.
- 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. freedom of speech
3. misinformation
4. advantage
5. diminish
6. inauguration
7. scrutinize
8. run-up
9. question
10. massive

##### 3 Find the information

1. the boss of Apple
2. to the Washington Monument
3. alternative facts
4. 30 million
5. eight million
6. 36

##### 4 Comprehension check

1. F
2. F
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. T

##### 5 Find the word

1. crack down on
2. apparent
3. figure out
4. crackdown
5. aide
6. hack
7. think through
8. demographic

##### 6 Two-word phrases

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

##### 7 Word-building

1. falsehood
2. evidence
3. freedom
4. truthful
5. sensational
6. environmental