

# HOW CAN I GET RELIABLE NEWS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA?

**S**ocial media can be a useful tool. It can help people keep up with what's happening in the world. However, it can also spread misinformation. Sometimes it can even quickly spread fake news.



***People can look critically at news sources found on social media. They can have conversations with others about how reliable the content is.***

## **MISLEADING CONTENT AND FAKE NEWS**

Some news stories have mistakes. In these situations, the journalists did not intend to mislead anyone. But false information was still included. A reputable news outlet will post a correction when it uncovers a mistake. This is a follow-up to the original story. It clearly states the accurate information. A mistake in a story does not mean the entire story is fake news.

Some social media users also have blogs. Articles written by bloggers can also have inaccurate information. Most news organizations have standards for fact



***Anyone can have a blog. Some authors research the topics they're discussing, but others may not.***

checking. They also expect their journalists to write as objectively as possible. Bloggers do not have to follow these kinds of standards. They can say whatever they like.

Michael Lewis is a writer. He pointed out the danger of blogs and other online

content. He said, “Unlike traditional news media, there are few if any regulations governing the content of blogs, social media messages, and status updates. In other words, almost anyone can publish anything on the web without concern for quality or accuracy.”<sup>9</sup>

Fake news takes misinformation to a more dangerous level. People make these stories to intentionally mislead people. *Fake news* has become a popular term in politics. Both Democrats and Republicans have accused each other of spreading fake news stories. But sometimes people in other

countries play a role too. This happened during the 2016 presidential election. After the election, American intelligence agencies did an investigation. They found that people from Russia posted many fake news stories. Their goal was to generate conflict. They wanted to influence the election's outcome. Many social media users read

### **INFORMATION OVERLOAD**

Some people like to constantly check the news. They often do this when a big event, such as an election, happens. They may think having more information will give them more control. But that is not always the case. Some people find that checking social media for updates makes them feel more anxious.

these stories. They believed them. Then they shared the fake information. They also may have cast their votes with it in mind.

## **CHECK THE SOURCES**

The key to getting reliable news on social media is asking the right questions. People often post links to articles. To see if the news is real, people can look at what group is reporting the story. Does the article come from a reputable news source? If people don't recognize the source, they can do some more research. They can check out the source's "About" page. This page tells readers more about the organization. It also



***Taking time to research news sources can help people avoid unreliable information.***

gives information about who runs it. If this page is missing or has ridiculous claims, the source may not be a real news site.

A news outlet may seem legitimate. But people should still check the story carefully. Unreliable sources often have false



information alongside well-known facts.

Does a particular part of the story seem off? If so, people can check to see if the information is available elsewhere. When a big story breaks, multiple outlets will report it. If people only find a single article about an event or topic, it could be because the story isn't true.

Many fake stories posted to social media use fear to reel people in. After reading a story, people can ask themselves if it made them feel afraid or angry. When social media users see a story that stirs up strong emotions, they often want to share it with

others right away. Fake news creators know this. They want their stories to spread far and wide. They try to prey on people's feelings. It's important for people to make sure a story is legitimate before reposting it on social media.

### **SHARING FAKE NEWS**

People often blame bots for spreading misinformation on social media. These are computer programs. They can “like,” follow, and comment on posts. They can also post fake stories. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology did a study. It found that people are actually responsible for sharing most of the inaccurate information found on social media platforms.



***Many journalists work hard to report on just the facts.***

Readers should also consider the person who shared the article. They can think about why that particular person was drawn to the story. Sam Harnett is a reporter. He

did a story about news and social media. He found that many users share news on social media without even reading all of it. Harnett learned, “Sharing a post is often not about the information. It’s about what the content signifies about the person who posted it. It’s about trying to show that you are smart or woke or have certain values.”<sup>10</sup>

## **SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING**

Journalists are supposed to keep their opinions out of their work. But bias can still be found in many stories. People are more likely to read articles that support views they already hold. And they are more likely

to share those stories on social media. This happens even when the news isn't real.

Some social media sites have started to monitor posts. They want to reduce false or biased information. But some people don't like this. They think the platforms themselves are biased. On May 26, 2020, President Trump sent off a couple tweets. He said voting by mail would cause widespread voter fraud. He claimed that California was mailing ballots to people whether they were registered voters or not. Twitter responded by adding a disclaimer to these tweets. A blue exclamation point

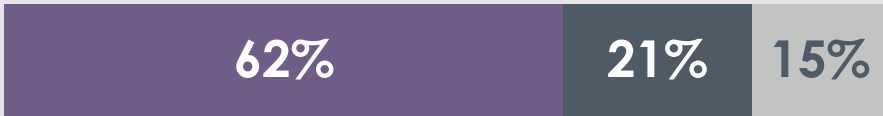





***Throughout the 2020 election, Twitter flagged some of President Donald Trump's tweets as being disputed and misleading.***

appeared on each post. It had a link. The linked page clarified that California was sending ballots only to registered voters. Many Democrats praised Twitter for flagging false information. But many Republicans saw the move as a sign that Twitter was biased against their political party.

Social media plays an important role in how people get their news. Many people rely on these platforms for information. Sometimes people can see or read details about breaking news events. They may see these things even before major news outlets cover the stories. But fake news can also spread quickly on social media. Sometimes it's difficult to tell what's real. Before sharing stories, social media users should make sure the content reflects real events. Readers can ask questions about the story. They can look critically at the sources. They can check their own biases.

## SOCIAL MEDIA CONTROL



-  **Too much power**
-  **Around the right amount of power**
-  **Not enough power**

*Numbers do not equal 100% due to rounding.*

*Source: Elisa Shearer and Elizabeth Grieco, “Americans Are Wary of the Role Social Media Sites Play in Delivering the News,” Pew Research Center, October 2, 2019. [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).*

***In 2019, the Pew Research Center studied how Americans felt about social media. It surveyed thousands of US adults. It found that the majority of people surveyed thought social media platforms had too much power over the mix of news that users see.***

This may protect people from believing false information. That way, people can actively seek out the best news possible on social media.