Getting Real about Fake News: First-Year Students and Media Evaluation

Cara Evanson & James Sponsel
Davidson College
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National Data
Pew Research Center (2017)

Origin Story

Collecting Data at Davidson

Consume & Evaluate

National Data
523 first-year students completed the survey and exercise.

Over 80% of students got news from social media:

- Got news from social media in the past week
- Did not get news from social media in the past week

Students’ perception of fake news as a barrier to society and self:

- Not a Barrier
- Somewhat of a Barrier
- Moderate Barrier
- Extreme Barrier

Creating the Exercise:

External vs. Internal Evaluation:

**EXTERNAL ELEMENTS**
- Implicit or Invisible Elements
- Corroborating sources
- Life/Spread of the story
- Journalistic Practices

**INTERNAL ELEMENTS**
- Visible Elements
- Source/Publisher
- Headline/Byl ine
- Rhetoric

To evaluate you need to understand context beyond the source.
To evaluate you only need to read the source in front of you.
Creating the Exercise

ELDERLY WOMAN ACCUSED OF TRAINING HER 65 CATS TO STEAL FROM NEIGHBORS

Real?
Fake?

Exercise Case Studies

Case Study A: Misleading “Study”

https://tinyurl.com/ya97mwrc

How Students Evaluated Case Study A

“Seeing that the study was based on discount Website VoucherCodesPro, and they only received 1789 responses, I would say the claim is not reliable. At best, it can reflect a trend in vegetarians in the U.K. who browse the internet often or likely to submit replies to such surveys, but even that is a stretch given the small sample size. To expand these results to all vegetarians everywhere is quite the jump.”

Over half had no confidence in the Washington Examiner piece

Case Study B: Syndicated Content

https://tinyurl.com/ybqrp3yq

Case Study C: Fake News Tweet

https://tinyurl.com/y94dbdeg
How Students Evaluated Case Study B

“It’s an Associated Press story....it’s pretty darn credible.”

“The story coming from Breitbart makes me feel inclined not to trust the article, but it also claims to have gotten the story [emphasis added] from the Associated Press, a news source that I do trust.”

“Breitbart’ in my experience has consistently provided false information.”

“The source is clearly not very reliable, as there are strange ads all over the page”

“The author’s name is AP, which doesn’t seem like a real name which might mean this article was not written [by] a real journalist”

Confidence levels in the syndicated news story was mixed

Case Study C: Tweet of Fake News Story

https://tinyurl.com/yd9baysf

Over 1/3 of Students Thought the Source was NBC

How Students Evaluated Case Study C

“I’m generally skeptical of news on twitter, but she appears to be citing a reputable source in NBC.”

“I believe this claim because it came from NBC and this type of thing is not unheard of.”

“It is not so absurd that it is shocking or definitely false, and it also comes from a credible news source”
External Evaluation of Case Study C

“I don’t put full confidence in articles from social media or people on twitter so I would definitely look at another source before trusting this completely.”

“I would have to search for more information and look for other stories and corroborating information from other cites [sic]”

“I would have to read the actual NBC story and then maybe see if other sources can confirm the story before being highly confident”

Only 7% of Students Noticed the .Co Address

“This is fake...My librarians have told me that this is a fake news outlet”

Percentage of Social Media Shares by Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study A</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study B</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study C</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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Follow-up Survey – Fake News Tweet

Confidence Level in South Park Tweet

Confidence Levels in Fake News Tweet Changed

How would you evaluate the reliability of the claim made in the tweet?

“Probably inaccurate”

“I have no confidence in it.”

“Doubtful”
Lessons Learned & Takeaways

External vs. Internal Evaluation

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Questions?

Works Cited


