



Why is fake news making news?

It has always been true that we shouldn't believe everything in the news – journalists get things wrong sometimes. But fake news has changed. Today, with the spread of social media, it is much harder to tell where a story came from and whether you can trust it.

1. People have recently blamed fake news for misleading voters both in the UK during the Brexit referendum and in the US during the election of Donald Trump. Fake news is now an issue in other countries throughout Europe, where several important elections are being held this year.
2. One issue during the Brexit campaign, was the claim the UK would save £350m a week if it left the European Union, and that this money could be spent on the National Health Service instead. This was not true. But it probably persuaded at least some people to vote to leave the EU.
3. Recently, in other European countries there has been widespread concern that fake news could sway their elections.
4. Donald Trump has also used fake news as a label to apply to real news that he does not like. This can be a tactic of those who spread fake news: to confuse people about what is real or fake by using the term fake news for anything.



How can fake news affect our democracy?

1. Fake news can undermine democracy because the news affects what people believe, and therefore might affect what, and who, they vote for.
2. One of the media's roles is to be a watchdog. That means they watch what political leaders and various government institutions are doing to check they're not doing anything wrong.
3. It is very important that people can trust the media. Fake news could make the public believe things that aren't true about their leaders, policies and government.
4. This can have serious consequences, not least because the public has the power to vote. How will they know who to vote for if they can't trust the news? The public also won't know what the government is doing once it is in power, so they won't be able to protest.
5. Fake news can benefit anybody who wants to use it as a weapon. By definition the people who use it are dishonest, and willing to deceive the public to get what they want.
6. Fake news and 'alternative facts' could lead to societies where the public does not know what information to trust.