Fake News – What to believe?

Recently, there's been a lot of stigma and talk surrounding the supposed issue of 'fake news'. It has been especially targeted by the media following the US presidential election that took place back in November last year, where Donald Trump (yes, the man who was utterly ridiculed by the millennials over social media) became president of the United States. It still shocks me to write that.

'Fake news' is becoming an increasingly pressing matter as it spreads to more and more social media sites where it hides between the statuses, hashtags and live streams plaguing the minds of the innocent. There have been many ridiculous stories such as the Daily Mail revealing that "Lego causes cancer" or "Osama Bin Laden alive and well in the Bahamas" according to Edward Snowden, which have clearly been written to get a reaction from the press and in doing so, insensitively mock the subject and the readers.

However, it is not always so easy to spot the difference between the genuine articles and the artificial, with reports showing that more Facebook engagements (likes, comments, shares) were being made on fake news stories than on real news. Could this be simply because of the categorically absurd headlines that are just comical to share with friends or is the line between lies and truth becoming blurred and hard for the public to tell the difference?

Here's a few steps on how to check if your news is fake or real:
- Who's your source?
  If it's from a website like the BBC or an article from The Guardian it's most likely reliable but if you're unsure just give the URL a little background check.

- Headline too good to be true?
  Search up the main storyline from the article…see if it's being talked about either on Google or even Twitter.

- Get a second opinion…
  It never hurt to ask a friend their view on a certain story.

- Fake or satire?
  If you continue to consider it an untrustworthy story, ask yourself if it may have just been written for satirical effect before casting it off as 'fake news'.

Nevertheless, is 'fake news' really as detrimental and deceptive as people say it is? Or has it been massively blown out of proportion? After all, aren't worldwide news events being implemented into social media to encourage the engagement of a younger audience? Be it true or false headlines, they should be spoken about for further research and development to get the younger generations involved in an incredibly important conversation that could affect their future. After interviewing Huw Merriman (MP for Bexhill and Battle) last Monday, we began talking on this subject and he spoke of how the discussion of 'politics' is being addressed 'more by young people' due to the accessibility and social platforms it's shared on. For example, Brexit was widely spoken of across a variety of social medias including the likes of Twitter and Facebook.

Overall, I can see how 'fake news' can be a problem for some when they genuinely find it difficult to decipher the authentic articles to the artificial. However, I also notice how it can be beneficial to get all news out on social media so more can become aware of pressing issues in the world. Facebook has also recently decided to tackle the issue and prevent 'misleading' news stories from being posted.

But then again, Donald Trump is constantly criticising and calling out organisations that he deems to be creating 'fake news', but didn't he become President because his highly controversial campaign was built off it? Guess it can't be all that bad...

By Arabella Cue