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Profs advice on spotting ‘fake news’

Edmonton – It’s been almost a year since the words “fake” and “news” came together in a way no one expected. Neill Fitzpatrick, who studies the impact of fake news and media manipulation says sometimes falling for fake news is easier than it seems.

In today’s day and age, it’s sometimes difficult to spot what’s fake news and what’s real news, says the assistant professor in MacEwan University’s Bachelor of Communication Studies program. “If you see a story and you’re not sure if it’s real, look to other sources,” says Fitzpatrick. “If the story is repeated by other news agencies chances are it’s reputable. But if you can’t find the story anywhere else, that should raise questions about its authenticity.”

“I tell students in my classes that it’s up to them to make sure that their stories are accurate, that they check their facts and get all sides of the story.” A big part of this process, says Fitzpatrick, is looking past the spin. “Getting to the heart of a story means talking to people affected by the story, and not just the media spokesperson.” He suggests looking at stories where reporters have done just that—by publishing articles that cite sources beyond the spokesperson, or by talking to people who are affected by the story.

Fitzpatrick agrees it can be difficult to filter the good from the bad in today’s jam-packed news feeds. “Students tell me they can’t deal with the volumes of stories coming at them. I tell them they need to be choosy about who they follow. You still need to know what’s going on, but you have to be more selective.”

In a way, it’s like being a discerning customer, he says “People spend a lot of time reading consumer reviews when they’re going to buy something, and I tell my students that they need to do similar research when selecting their news service.”