



## VOCABS

**“Fake news”:** “in essence, a two-dimensional phenomenon of public communication: there is the (1) fake news genre, describing the deliberate creation of pseudojournalistic disinformation, and there is the (2) fake news label, describing the political instrumentalization of the term to delegitimize news media.” (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019)

**proliferation:** a rapid and often excessive spread or increase

**immunity:** a condition of being able to resist a particular disease; being unaffected by something

**hoax:** an act intended to trick or deceive

**rumor:** a story or statement in general circulation without confirmation or certainty as to facts; gossip or hearsay

**pandemic:** “the worldwide spread of a new disease” (as defined by WHO)



**Tweet your thoughts. What does “fake news” mean to you?**

Tweet us at @ootbmedialit and use the hashtag #IWASFAKE.

The closest thing we can get to a vaccine for “fake news” is increasing our **immunity** against it. And so, practicing these four steps will go a long way in our fight against “fake news”. But before you learn about each of these steps, it is crucial that you first *know the enemy* and know it very well.

## What is “fake news” and how did it all begin?

The rise of “fake news” can be traced to the year 2016 when the United States and the Philippines both held their presidential elections.

**Hoaxes, rumors**, false and misleading content dressed up to look like news articles about political candidates spread like wildfire on social media. This easily became one of the most discussed phenomena in the aftermath of the elections.

How did all these “fake news” spread so quickly and vastly? Did it affect the results of the elections, and how? What are its implications on the public’s perceptions of the media, of the government, and of democracy?

These questions have led to countless research and investigations on “fake news” by the academe, governments, the tech industry, and civil society groups worldwide. From 2016 to today, we’ve seen some breakthroughs and some fallbacks in what has become a global combat against “fake news”. Here are some headlines:



**Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach**

*The Guardian | March 17, 2018*



**Facebook takes down 200 pages, accounts, groups linked to Duterte campaign soc-med manager**

*GMA News Online | March 29, 2019*



**Jail time, up to P1-M fine await peddlers of fake COVID-19 news**

*CNN Philippines | March 25, 2020*

Have you heard about these? While many of these events are significant, these are not nearly enough to show that we have already figured out the “fake news” dilemma. As if we thought things could not get any worse, in 2020, we face an unprecedented global crisis: the COVID-19 **pandemic**. This pandemic has revealed to us how far we still are in solving the “fake news” crisis.

### HEADS UP!

List down 3 “fake news” stories that you have heard about COVID-19.  
*Example: Eating bananas is an effective cure for COVID-19.*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## LESSON 2 | What is the ‘Infodemic’ and what makes it a big problem?

“Fake news” about COVID-19 may be even more dangerous than COVID-19 itself. Why? Because the spread of false and inaccurate information about a highly contagious disease entails higher chances of misinformed people getting infected by it.

The World Health Organization (WHO) coined the term **Infodemic**, a combination of the words “information” and “pandemic” to describe our current world situation characterized by “an over-abundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.”

### Four Themes of COVID-19 “Fake News”

In this lesson, we are going to look at some of the most common COVID-related “fake news” that are categorized into four main themes according to [First Draft](#), the leading nonprofit organization conducting research on misinformation and disinformation.

#### 1. WHERE IT CAME FROM

“Fake news” thrive in a situation where verified facts are lacking. Since we are naturally curious, we always try to fill in the gaps of our knowledge. We tend to make sense of every new piece of information we encounter based on what we already know. When news came out about this new strain of coronavirus in December, as reported by Chinese authorities to the World Health Organization (WHO), theories about where it came from quickly flooded social media. There are **conspiracy theorists** who claim that the coronavirus is a bioweapon concocted by the Chinese government to target the United States.



### VOCABS

**infodemic:** “an over-abundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it” (as defined by WHO)

**conspiracies (or conspiracy theories):** an attempt to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small, powerful group. Such explanations reject the accepted narrative surrounding those events

## 2. HOW IT SPREADS

Many false claims about the coronavirus bank on our sense of fear and confusion. This is especially true when it comes to information about how coronavirus spreads. The WHO website has devoted a section to countering such false claims like the chances of COVID-19 being spread on shoes and infecting individuals (*Yes it can, but it is very low*); the transmission of COVID-19 through houseflies (*No, there's no evidence for it*); and the transmission through 5G mobile networks (*No, virus cannot travel on radio waves and mobile networks!*).

## 3. SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

Bad advice about treatment and cures are the most common and widely spread “fake news” about COVID-19, and it can have serious consequences. Not only does it prevent people from getting the proper care they need, it can cost lives too. In Iran, 44 people died and hundreds were hospitalized after drinking home-made alcohol to protect themselves from the disease. Every day, new speculations about home treatments like drinking hot water mixed with salt, symptom checks, and vaccines go viral online.



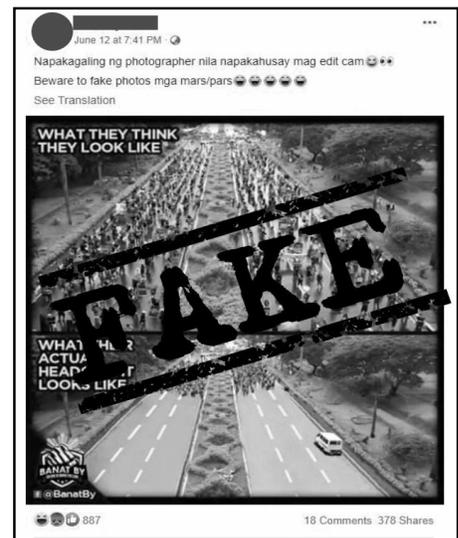
## VOCABS

**outbreak:** a time when something suddenly begins, especially a disease or something else dangerous or unpleasant

**polarization** (political): a sharp division, as of a population or group, into opposing factions

## 4. HOW WE ARE RESPONDING

As most people try to observe stay-at-home protocols, many rely on social media to get updated on how other people are doing. From photos or videos that show people panic buying to news about relief distribution or the transport situation, many of these are shared online without verification. As the government introduces new measures, loads of misrepresented pictures and rumors emerge. It is unfortunate to see an **outbreak** of political “fake news” in the midst of a health crisis. But this is something we expect in a **polarized** society such as ours. For instance, photos from the Independence Day rally held in UP Diliman amidst the COVID-19 lockdown were digitally altered to show that the protesters comprised a smaller crowd than the actual.





**Tweet your thoughts. Has any of your friends or family been a victim of “fake news” about COVID-19? How did they deal with it? Tweet us at @ootbmedialit and use the hashtag #IWASFAKE.**



**THIS IS THE END OF MODULE A.** Are you ready to test your knowledge and practice your skills? Get from us or your teacher the Module A quiz and worksheets.