

Why Information on the Internet Needs Close Inspection

Why is the internet more unreliable than other media?

The internet is a platform where **anyone can post anything**. Most on-line **information does not have to pass any standards** or be subject to any checks for reliability (unlike other media), so there is a very real risk that on-line information can lead you astray.

Social media sites are notorious for spreading misinformation. Remember - Just because something posted on the internet **goes viral**, it **does not mean that it is true!** Check your facts before you "share" it.

Even websites that we use daily for information still need to have some thoughtful consideration before believing it. An example is the website Wikipedia. Anyone can edit or add to the information in it, so users can mistakenly add incorrect information. Occasionally, false information can remain on Wikipedia for extended periods of time. Wikipedia itself admits that "some articles are of the highest quality of scholarship, others are admittedly complete rubbish".

It is very important that we analyze this media source before believing everything as true.

Contrast Reliability of One Media to Another

Do you believe the information you hear on the news on the radio?

Listen to the following news report found on the CBC station.

[AUDIO CLIP - Proposal](#)

What do you think about this story? Does it sound legitimate? Why or why not?

Listen to listener response to the story. [AUDIO CLIP - Response](#)

This is That – CBC Radio

Here is the information in the "About" section of CBC's "This is That" radio program.

This Is That is a current affairs program that doesn't just talk about the issues, it fabricates them. Nothing is off limits--politics, business, culture, justice, science, religion--if it is relevant to Canadians, we'll find out the "This" and the "That" of the story.

Each week, hosts Pat Kelly and Peter Oldring introduce you to the voices and stories that give this country character in this 100% improvised, satirical send-up of public radio.

By the number of people calling in, it is clear that many listeners mistook this program for a news program. Unless you were previously aware of the program's intent to entertain and raise awareness of issues using humour, it would be difficult to know that the stories aren't true.

There are many aspects of the show that make it "seem" legitimate.

What aspects of the story fooled listeners?



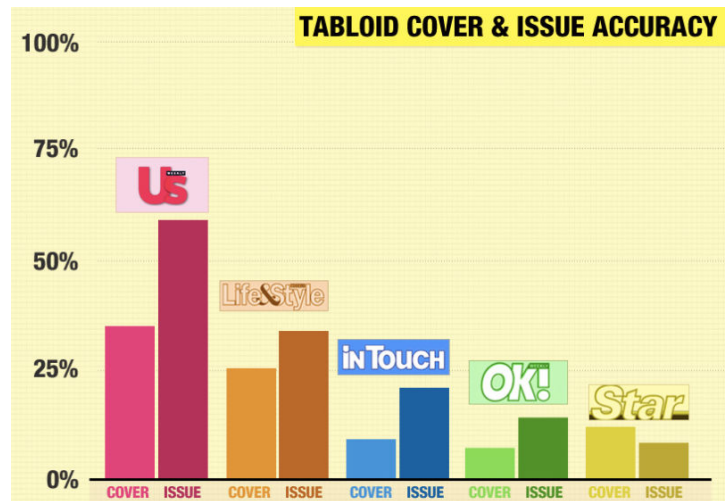
How to Tell if Information is Reliable

You read in the introduction to this unit that media is all around us. When we are using media to get information, it is very important to ensure that it is reliable. You don't want to learn "false" information or spread misinformation to others. So, how can you choose what media is reliable?

One of the first things you should do, is to **think about the reputation** of the source of information. A quick internet search will reveal it. Here are a couple of examples to contrast.

Magazines:

- "Discover" versus "The Star"
- "Discover" magazine is about science and nature. Thought-provoking articles from award-winning editors, opinion makers, Nobel laureates, and scientists. It has a fairly good reputation.
- "The Star" is a magazine that focuses on celebrities. Below is a "truth" rating graph produced by gawkers.com.



Once you are comfortable with the reputation of your media choice, a good rule of thumb is to **use several sources**. If several sources of media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) all confirm the same information, it is likely true.

When learning about important information, it is important that what you learn is accurate and as truthful as possible. However, you will learn in the lessons of this unit, that even reliable media might not provide the whole truth to you.

How can you use this information about source reliability when browsing social media?