The truth about fake news

We've seen this story before.
Executive director, PolitiFact

Aaron Sharockman

- Spent an hour on the phone with Marco Rubio debating taxes. (We haven't talked since.)
- Reported from Moscow in 2012, teach fact-checking at the University of Missouri.
- Married to Hilary, dad to a demanding cat named Mika.
What is PolitiFact?

- Founded in August 2007.
- First website to win the Pulitzer Prize.
- 13,500 fact-checks published.
- Partners in 14 states.
- Created PunditFact in 2013 to fact-check television and radio personalities.
- Staff of 10 split between St. Petersburg and Washington, D.C.
WE HAVE A PROBLEM
We really have a problem

Since the beginning of 2017, President Trump has invoked the phrase "fake news" on 153 separate occasions. Virtually every instance has been in response to critical news coverage.
News literacy is losing ... Sad!

According to a Stanford study, more than 80 percent of middle schoolers believed that 'sponsored content' was a real news story.

Students didn't understand the significance of a blue "checkmark," and 30 percent thought a fake story without a checkmark was more trustworthy than a story with a checkmark.
Everyone, anyone can publish

Who's a journalist?

Markus Muir, a 27-year-old marketing professional from Glasgow, sent direct messages on Twitter to Infowars editor-at-large Paul Joseph Watson claiming BuzzFeed News and CNN were due to release harmful footage of Trump. Muir, who claimed in the messages to work for NBC, has revealed he was the single source for the report in the form of an account which he set up solely for the prank.

He said Watson did not ask for any evidence that he worked for NBC or about how he gained the information.
But don't be fooled into thinking is a new problem. We've been here before.
This guy ...
DOCTOR WARNS OF DISASTERS IN WORLD TUESDAY
Worst to Come in 1955, He Declares

1990

Are You Ready for the RAPTURE?
Jesus is coming on Oct 28, 1992

1992

1994 and 2011!

1999

1982

... And so many more.
“A few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.”
You know it's not new!

Death panels (2009)

Seniors and the disabled “will have to stand in front of Obama’s ‘death panel’ so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their ‘level of productivity in society,’ whether they are worthy of health care.”

— Sarah Palin on Friday, August 7th, 2009 in a message posted on Facebook

"Republicans voted to end Medicare." (2011)
Three things we can do to fight back against the spread of fake news.
Fighting back

Slow down

- Don’t panic.
- Question everything you read online, particularly from a news source you’re not familiar with.
- Don’t be so quick to share a post on Facebook ... particularly if it confirms your beliefs about a person or topic.
- Google test. If it’s a sensational story, the mainstream media will be writing about it.
Fighting back

Speak with our wallets

- Fake news websites are driven by advertising revenues from page views. Fake websites mimic real ones. Let's change the model.
Fighting back

Support trusted information

- We're spending so much time working to stop "fake news."
- We need to put the same amount of energy into supporting real news.
Questions?

Aaron Sharockman
asharockman@politifact.com
@asharock
Executive Director
PolitiFact