

Fake news makes headlines on social media

Many students struggle to know if what they see and read online is true

BY MOLLY TURNER

People all over the country face a decision when they get on social media, watch the news or talk to others. Should they believe what they are hearing? So-called “fake news” has become more common as technology has advanced. Now, it has begun to cause world-wide issues.

One example of fake news happened a few months ago at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria. According to the Washington Post, a gunman entered Comet Ping Pong and fired shots in the restaurant after becoming interested in a fake news story. This story claimed that Hillary Clinton was holding children in the basement of the pizza place. Nobody at Comet Ping Pong was hurt.

Many teachers believe that fake news has become more common over the last couple of years because of the popularity of the internet and social media sites.

“We have become so used to typing what we need to know into Google and getting a quick answer that the majority of people don’t stop to think where the information is really coming from,” Norie-Anne Young, an 8th grade Language Arts teacher, said. “Also, there are so many platforms to share articles on social media and people are quick to believe what their friends post.”

Hunter Graybeal, a 7th grade teacher, agrees.

“It’s very easy and fast to get bits and pieces of the news through social media posts, and to fact check takes more effort than most people are used to doing these days,” Graybeal said.

Sam Wineburg, a professor at Stanford University, agrees with the teachers’ theories.

“There is no police on the internet; there are no traffic cops on the internet,” Wineburg said. “If your neighbor got an internet connection, he or she could decide to put up news right now, and that’s not how it was 30 or 20 years ago.”

Wineburg recently conducted

a study on fake news. He tested middle school students, high school students, and college students to see how difficult it would be for them to tell the difference between news stories and ads. The study concluded that 82% of students in middle

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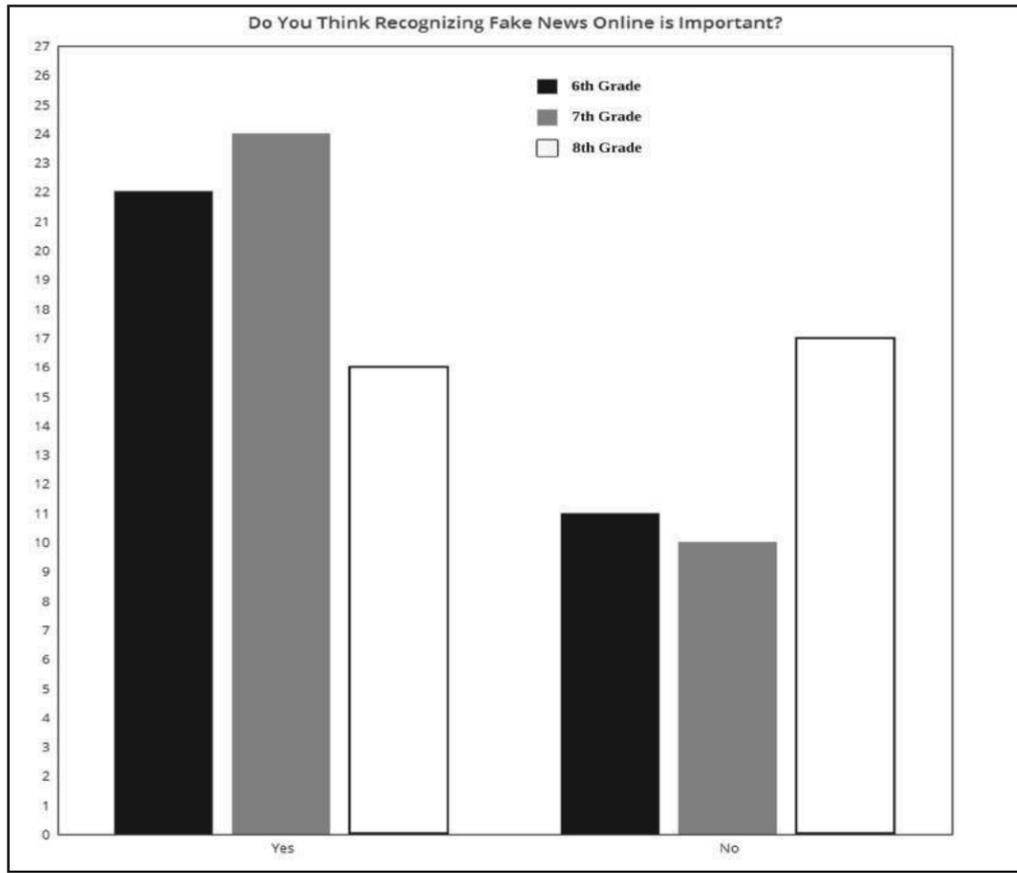
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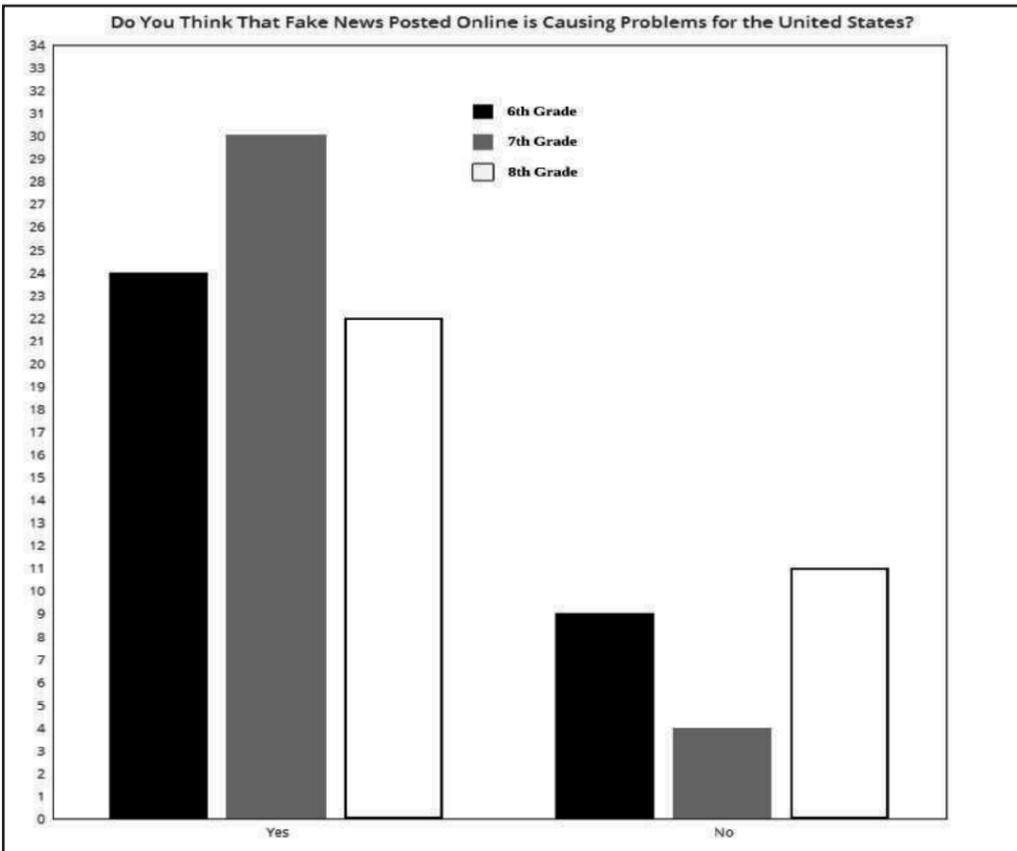
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FAKE NEWS BY THE NUMBERS



RECOGNIZING FAKE NEWS. A high number of Sevier Middle students believe that recognizing fake news online is an important skill.



A NATION DIVIDED. A large majority of students believe that fake news is causing problems in the United States.

COMPILED BY MOLLY TURNER

SOUND OFF



HUNTER GRAYBEAL

"I think it's a shame that we don't fact check everything that we see to make sure that it is true."

CHEYENNE HOUCHINS

"I think that we should do more research to see if it's true."



ISHAWN GRAVES

"Sometimes, I hear people talking about it in the hallway but I don't believe it most of the time."

SARA SMITH

"When the teachers start to talk about it during class, it disrupts class time, and I hear kids talking about it and it's distracting."



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FAKE NEWS: students worried about impact on their lives

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Young believes that people would be more willing to unite without fake news.

"I think there would be a lot less divisive writing and more of a united front for the average citizen and their well-being," she said.

On the other hand, if the world continues to not be able to tell the difference between fake and real news, students and teachers agree that current prob-

lems will stick around.

"They might believe something that was untrue and that could cause them to act or react in a way that is incorrect," Amanda Cox, an 8th grade teacher, said.

True agrees.

"If no one paid attention to the fact that news could be false, people would freak out over everything," she said. "Relationships would be destroyed because of made up rumors and people would be afraid to go

places because of stories and threats that are not true."

If people don't stop believing everything they see, Wineburg feels the world could really be in jeopardy.

"When we decide somebody is a murderer and we put that person behind bars, how do we make that decision?" Wineburg said. "We make that decision based on evidence, and if we can no longer establish facts that we agree on, our entire society is going to crumble. So, if people

believe in lies without evidence, then we better open up all the prison doors and let all the prisoners out, because we can no longer make any decisions. That's how bad it could get."

There is a simple remedy for fake news.

"People need to stop and think for themselves and not believe something just because it's in print," Young said.

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