

# 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

school students, high school students, and college students, and take away your home computers, and make sure you don’t have any tablets, and that’ll solve the problem, but that’s not going to happen,” he said.

Reagen Anderson, a 6th grade student, agrees.

“[It is important to know if news is true or not] so you can know real facts, and make things accurate such as papers and art-

icles you’re writing.” Anderson said.

Jeff Bobo, a professional journalist with the Kingsport Times-News, also sees a problem in the rise of fake news.

“Anybody can create a website and anybody can create a Facebook page, and if you’re clever and creative, you can make up stories, make them look real on a website, put it up on Facebook, let Facebook distribute it, and people aren’t going to know the difference,” Bobo said.

The main source of fake news appears to be the internet, specifically social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

“People are online and they just see something and most people believe it,” Sara Debord, a 7th grade student, said.

Graybeal fears that the facts are often lost online.

“The internet has provided a way for everyone, no matter what their views are, to have a safe place, and online, it is easier for us to change the facts to fit our views than it is to change our views to fit the facts,” he said.

Wineburg agrees.

“We could take away your

smartphone and the smart phones of all of the kids in your class, and take away your home computers, and make sure you don’t have any tablets, and that’ll solve the problem, but that’s not going to happen,” he said.

reliable source,” he said.

How do middle school students decide what to believe online?

“The best ways to determine the truth of news is checking the reliability of the site it came from, doing more research on the story or asking a reliable adult,” True said. “There are also websites where you can put in a news story and it tells you if it is true or not.”

Anderson suggests using more than one news source.

“You can read many different articles and see if they relate to each other,” she said.

Bobo agrees.

“If you see a headline and you don’t know if it’s real or not, but you want to know, you can go to legitimate news sources, and if it’s not there, then it’s probably not real,” he said.

Bobo feels that the spread of fake news is also partly the readers’ fault. He believes that if people know they have been fooled by fake news before, then they should be more careful the next time.

“It’s bad enough to just be fooled by the fake news, but fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me,” Bobo said.

Most Sevier students and teachers think that the world would benefit from everyone knowing the difference between real and fake news.

“I think we would, in general, be more informed and we would be more concerned about the truth and the greater good than for hanging on to our own agendas,” Graybeal said.

True agrees.

“The United States would benefit from everyone knowing real news from fake news because no one would cause a fuss about things that are false or irrelevant,” she said. “Things that need to be reacted to would be and things that don’t would not be.”

“Social media isn’t usually a

See **FAKE NEWS**, page 9

Scribe Photo/MOLLY TURNER



school had trouble knowing

if what they were reading was an ad or an actual news story.

“[The results] made me feel worried, because if you can’t tell if somebody is trying to sell you something versus trying to inform your opinion, then you are gullible,” he said.

Wineburg hopes that his study will help students be more aware of what they read and believe online.

“We hope that our study will accomplish an understanding that we are in a pickle,” Wineburg said. “That we have invented a series of tools, one of the biggest ones we call the internet, that have us by the neck, and that we are being controlled by the tools we invented instead of us controlling the tools.”

Many Sevier students agree with Wineburg that people should be able to tell the difference between fake and real news.

“It is important to know if news is real or fake because it determines how the news is interpreted and how it is reacted

254 WEST NEW STREET • DOWNTOWN KINGSPORT, TN  
(CORNER OF CLAY STREET AND NEW STREET)

**Chef's Pizzeria**

Kingsport, Tennessee

**DOMTAR**

The Sustainable Paper Company

**Cureton Orthodontics**

Steven L. Cureton, DMD, MS  
Scott M. Cureton, DDS

Come see a practice with personality! :)

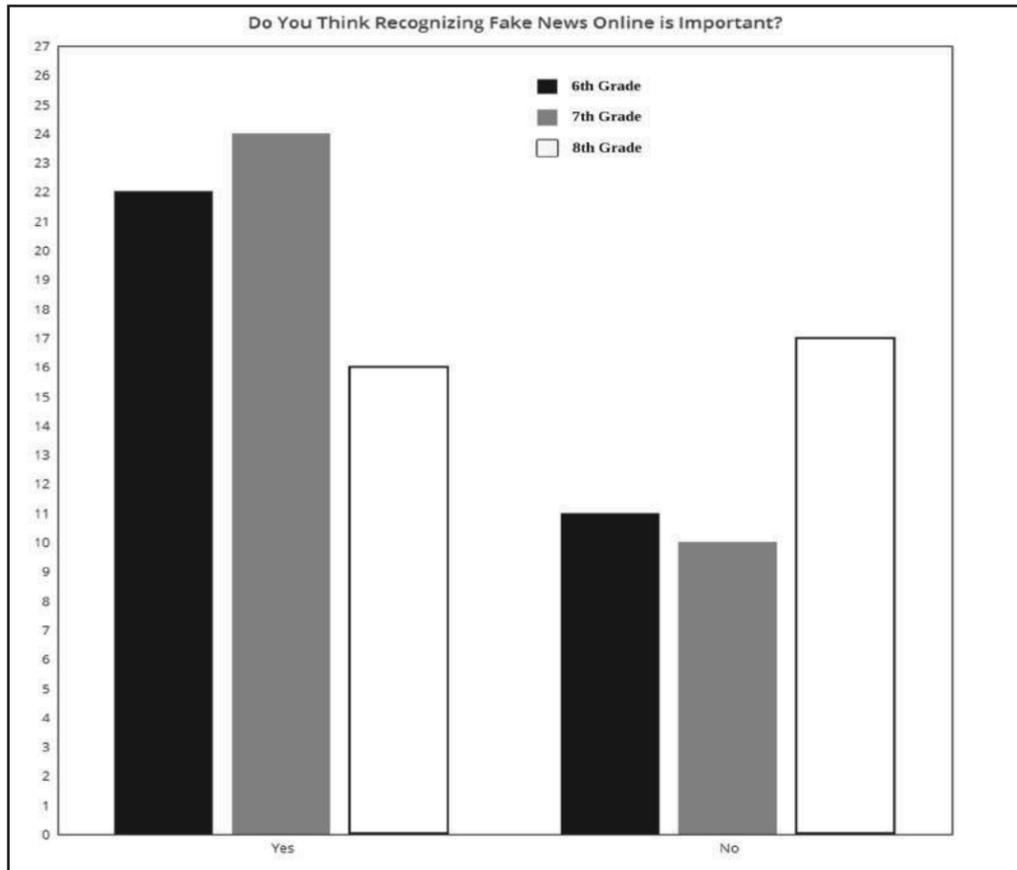
We offer traditional braces as well as Invisalign with affordable payment plans.

Call us for your free consultation TODAY!

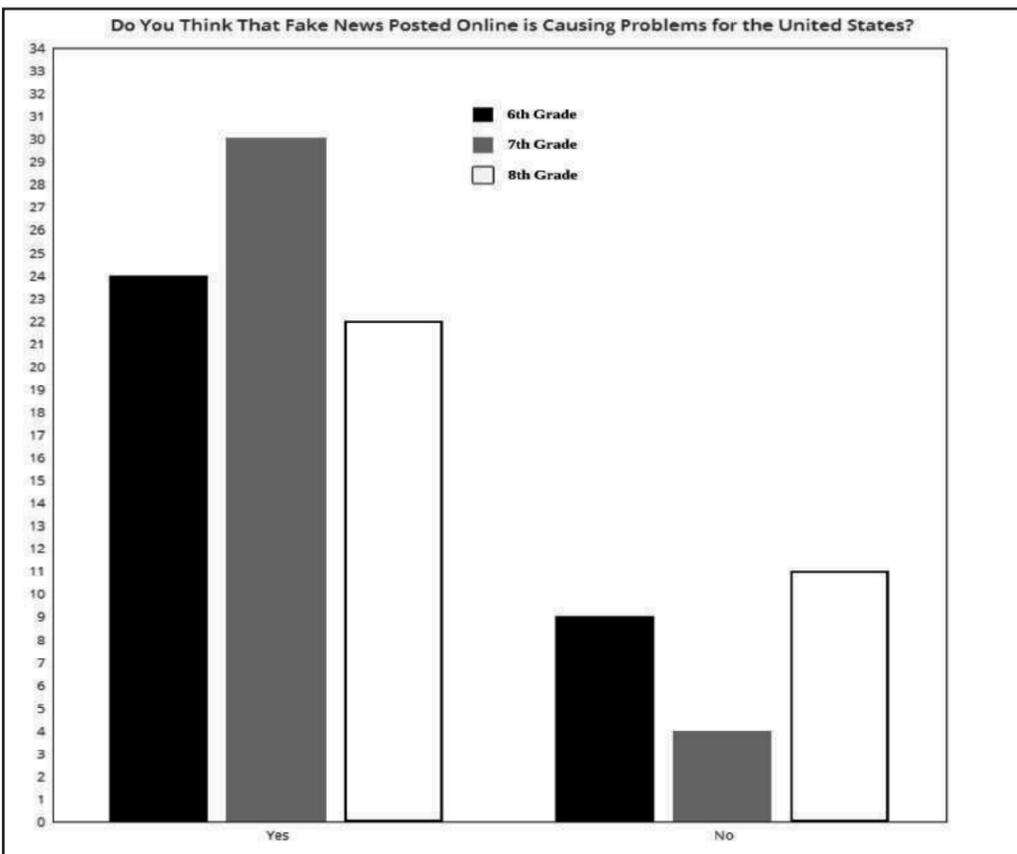
2753 East Center St.  
Kingsport  
(423)246-7121

Like Find us on Facebook  
www.facebook.com/curetonortho

## 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."



COMPILED BY GRACE LYLES

## FAKE NEWS: students worried about impact on their lives

continued from page 8

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.

Support the Scribe and purchase a subscription!

Contact us at sequoyah scribe@k12k.com