



How fake is fake news?

Everybody knows the term 'fake news'. We come across it every day, in the newspapers, on television, on the radio, on social media. Advertisements, to take an example, promise us wonderful things, like a miracle cream that will make us look 20 years younger overnight. In many cases these advertisements cannot be defined as 'news', but as 'fakery'.

Fakery is something that is deliberately forged to seem true. Magicians use fakery in an innocuous way, to amuse and entertain us. Politicians, we might say, sometimes use fakery in a much more malign way, by telling us things that are simply not true to persuade us to vote for them.

Politicians, world leaders, even celebrities... More and more they appear masters at creating fake news. However, this is not at all a modern phenomenon. If we look back into recorded history, we can find many examples of fake news. Over 3,000 years ago, Rameses II, the Great Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, declared that his army had won the Battle of Kadesh. Fake news: nobody won that battle. It was a stalemate.

In another example of fake news, Octavian, later Emperor Augustus, claimed that his rival Mark Antony was a drunkard and Cleopatra's puppy. It was not true, but the propaganda worked and helped to discredit Mark Antony. Fast forward to the US Presidential Election of 2016.

We are bombarded with fake news 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, especially on social media. It has got to the point where we find it very difficult to decide what is true and what is false. Many students use Wikipedia as their first source of information when they are writing an essay.

Wikipedia can certainly be very useful, but it is important not to forget that anyone can write an article for it, so be careful. Even the information in the article you are using may be fake.