

Scientists reveal fake news ‘vaccine’ that doesn't involve needles

 By [Andy Walker](#)

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Fake news is [pretty much everywhere](#) now (thanks US Elections), but “inoculating” yourself might be simpler than first thought.

Treating the scourge as a “virus”, scientists from University of Cambridge, Yale and George Mason have [formulated](#) a method that can effectively prevent subjects from internalising and believing fake news. No, it doesn’t involve any pricks or psychotic drugs, but it does rely on a simple conditioning technique.



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When subjects are presented with both a climate change study and a bundle of fake material purporting to be factual, the two pieces of information form an internal conflict. Effectively, this explains why fake news is so dangerous, numbing the users’ ability to internalise facts.

But researchers discovered that when a warning was placed on the fake news, users could distinguish the two more easily, effectively giving the fake news significantly less clout. Researchers also found that simply making subjects aware of the tactics publications use when issuing fake news negated its effects.

Fake news has a lot less resonance with users if it’s marked as fake

Cambridge’s Dr Sander van der Linden, leading the study, suggested that bogus news is a lot like a “sticky, spreading and replicating [...] virus”.

“We wanted to see if we could find a ‘vaccine’ by pre-emptively exposing people to a small amount of the type of misinformation they might experience. A warning that helps preserve the facts,” she explains.

“The idea is to provide a cognitive repertoire that helps build up resistance to misinformation, so the next time people come across it they are less susceptible.”

[Social network Facebook](#) and [internet heavyweight Google](#) are both currently trialing technologies that aim to identify fake news and warn users. But arguably, some believe that the [damage has already been done](#) in some parts of the world.

Although an injection would’ve perhaps been a more interesting story, there’s no doubt that this study could have ramifications on how phony news could be taught in schools and identified the internet.

ABOUT ANDY WALKER

Camper by day, run-and-gunner by night, Andy is editor at Memeburn and prefers his toast like his coffee -- dark and crunchy. Specialising in spotting the next big Instagram cat star, Andy also dabbles in smartphone and game reviews over on Gearburn.

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