

A few simple tricks make fake news stories stick in the brain | Science News

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Bad information isn't new. Propagandists and scam artists have been selling their brand of proverbial snake oil for ages, all to bend people's thinking to their goals. What's different today is that the digital world flings information faster and farther than ever before.

Our brains can't always keep up.

That's because we often rely on quick estimates to figure out whether something is true. These shortcuts, called heuristics, are often based on very simple patterns (*SN: 9/20/14, p. 24*). For instance, most information we come across in our daily lives is true. So when forced to guess, we often err on the side of believing.

Other shortcuts exist that encourage information — true or false — to find its way into our minds, research on human psychology shows. We take notice of information that is new, that fires up our emotions, that supports what we already believe and that we hear over and over.

[...]

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