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# FIGHTING FAKE NEWS

Made-up stories are taking over the internet. Are tech companies doing enough to stop the spread? **BY SARAH GROSSBART**

**T**he results were disturbing. Late last year, when Google users typed the phrase, “Did the Holocaust happen?” into the search engine, the first hit was a story—posted on a website run by a hate group—falsely stating that the mass murder of millions of Jews in Europe during World War II (1939-45) never occurred.

That lie—and the fact that it was the top result on the world’s most popular search engine—highlighted the growing problem of fake news. Misinformation published online often spreads faster than it can be challenged. Bogus stories shared extensively on social media are then ranked high by Google and other

search engines, making them easier to find—and increasing people’s sense of their credibility.

“Just because something is in the top five of your search results doesn’t mean it’s reliable,” says Jonathan Anzalone of the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University in New York.

The information may be made up, but it can have real-world consequences. In December 2016, a man was arrested at a pizzeria in Washington, D.C., after firing a rifle inside the eatery. He claimed he was “self-investigating” a story that the restaurant had connections to a human trafficking ring linked to the Democratic Party. The story was fake.

Since then, tech companies have come under fire for not doing enough to address the phony stories. Now Google and Facebook—among the biggest distributors of fake news—are rolling out strategies to combat it.

### Google & Facebook

Google recently announced plans to minimize the reach of fake news in its searches. The tech giant has assigned more than 10,000 employees to electronically flag articles containing misleading information. This ensures they’re ranked lower in Google search results and that users can see that they contain highly suspect or false information.