

Extremism and Online Safety

The online world is an excellent resource for UCEM students and staff, but it also poses an opportunity for radicalisers and those with extreme ideologies to share their message. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the emergence of new risks. With many people spending more time online than ever before, the online landscape is fast changing.

What are some of the risks?

Misinformation vs Disinformation

Misinformation is where incorrect/untrue information is shared. This is also true of disinformation, but with disinformation there is a malicious intent. Disinformation may appear to be from a 'reputable' source, such as a doctor or other 'expert', and can spread easily on social media where counter arguments and challenges to information are not always available. Statistics may be skewed or taken out of context, and used to justify arguments. Websites may be designed to look legitimate, or to look like another well known site.

Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories are where someone tries to explain an event or situation by implying that a conspiracy has taken place, usually implying that a secret or powerful organisation is responsible. They have always been around, but Covid-19 has brought to light some particularly dangerous conspiracy theories, many of which circulate in the online world.

In particular, the DFE Prevent Co-Ordinator has identified narratives coming from the Far Right and Islamist groups. There are also many independent conspiracy theories which are widely circulated online and via social media.

Fake News

Fake news is where a news item which spreads misinformation or disinformation is shared, and is designed to look legitimate. Fake news may take the format of full websites (sometimes designed to look like a well-known, legitimate website), or it can come in other formats, such as the sharing of social media posts or videos; these posts may be shared from a so-called "reputable" source, such as a doctor, a government official, or someone with "insider knowledge".

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Incel Movement

Incel is short for “involuntary celibate”. The Incel movement is based around a violent misogynistic ideology. Incels believe that women’s empowerment and ability to pick their own partners has degraded men’s social status. Their rhetoric online dehumanises women and some of the more extreme views which circulate online advocate for a state-implemented wives and girlfriends programme, and sometimes advocate mass rape or murder. Much of the communication between incels takes place online.

Different platforms

Misinformation, disinformation and extremist content is frequently found on the dark web, however there is also a wealth of content which can be found on the mainstream web. Whilst many of the main social media platforms are moderated and have functions where users can report content which violates the community standards of the site, there are many “alternative” widely available platforms which have little/no moderation and/or reporting facilities.

Different platforms come with different risks. You may find it useful to review Safety Centre’s [Safety Cards](#), which provide one page guidance on how to stay safe on a number of different platforms.

What can I do?

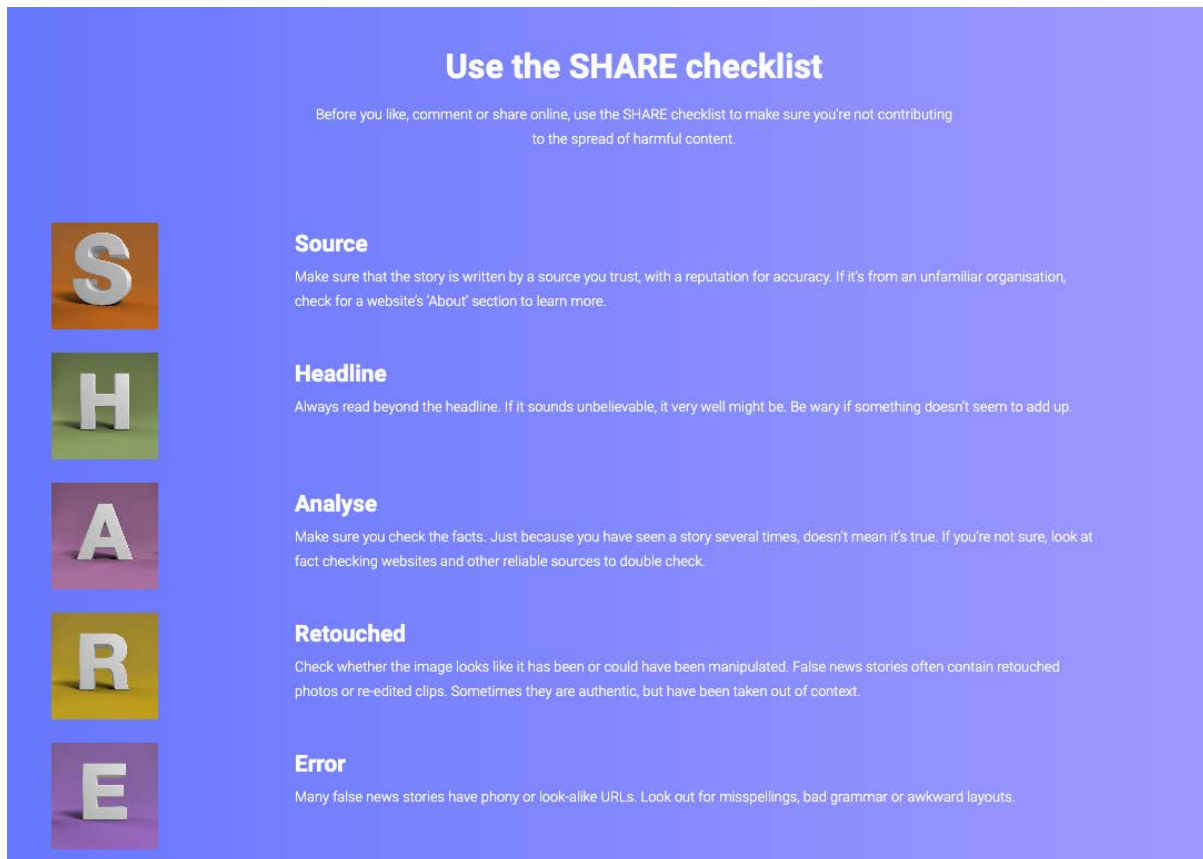
As per UCEM’s Prevent Procedure, if you come across anything online which makes you uncomfortable, or if you are concerned about a student or member of staff you can contact safeguarding@ucem.ac.uk for support.

You can report extremist material found online by visiting the [Government website](#).

If you believe there is an immediate threat of harm or risk to life, please report your concerns to the police by calling 999 and follow up by notifying the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) as soon as possible.

We also encourage students and staff to use the SHARE Checklist to consider whether content is genuine, or whether you may be contributing to the spread of harmful misinformation or disinformation:

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The graphic is a vertical blue bar with a gradient. On the left side, the letters S, H, A, R, and E are stacked vertically, each inside a colored square: S (orange), H (green), A (purple), R (yellow), and E (pink). To the right of each letter is a corresponding checklist item with a title and a short paragraph of text.

Use the SHARE checklist

Before you like, comment or share online, use the SHARE checklist to make sure you're not contributing to the spread of harmful content.

S
Source
Make sure that the story is written by a source you trust, with a reputation for accuracy. If it's from an unfamiliar organisation, check for a website's 'About' section to learn more.

H
Headline
Always read beyond the headline. If it sounds unbelievable, it very well might be. Be wary if something doesn't seem to add up.

A
Analyse
Make sure you check the facts. Just because you have seen a story several times, doesn't mean it's true. If you're not sure, look at fact checking websites and other reliable sources to double check.

R
Retouched
Check whether the image looks like it has been or could have been manipulated. False news stories often contain retouched photos or re-edited clips. Sometimes they are authentic, but have been taken out of context.

E
Error
Many false news stories have phony or look-alike URLs. Look out for misspellings, bad grammar or awkward layouts.

(Image: SHARE Checklist: Gov.uk, 2021, can also be found at <https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/>)