

## DIGITAL CIVICS IN PRACTICE

Developing a new digital civics for confronting digital extremism and media manipulation requires more than simply improving media literacy or learning effective fact-checking strategies. It is also important to understand the mechanisms that social and political extremists, disinformation campaigners, and other bad faith actors use in order to identify their telltale signs on social media, and to design tools and policies that can combat them.

### Activity 1

Amanda Warner, a learning designer and social impact game developer, has created a game called “Fake It to Make It,” which simulates the process of creating and spreading misinformation and/or disinformation. In the game, you play the role of someone who wants to save money for a large purchase by profiting from false and misleading stories circulated on a fictitious social media platform. The game takes between 30 minutes and 1 hour to complete, depending on your savings goal. Access it for free here, and see if you have what it takes to reach your target!

<http://www.fakeittomakeitgame.com>

### Activity 2

One of the most effective ways of identifying fake social media accounts that are part of a disinformation campaign and nodes in a network of extremist messaging is by reading metadata, i.e., labeled types of aggregated data. Learning how to read social media metadata is thus a critical skill for new digital civics.

- Individually or in small groups, pick a Twitter profile to analyze (for this step, it can be anyone).
- Using the chart on pages 10 and 11 in Amelia Acker’s Data & Society report *Data Craft: The Manipulation of Social Media Metadata* (2018) (available here: <https://bit.ly/2PmyvTL>), evaluate five types of metadata associated with this profile: name, “bio” information/photos, content tags, followers, interactions/engagements.
- Next, try to identify a suspicious profile. Suggested methods include:
  1. Click on a currently trending hashtag and look for a tweet using that hashtag with an unrelated message (e.g., “I lost 50 lbs. in just two weeks on this diet! #ElectionDay”). Then, navigate to the profile that tweeted it.
  2. Scroll through the replies to a tweet from a prominent politician or celebrity. Look for any replies from an account without a profile picture and/or an account name that includes a long string of random numbers and letters.
- Once you’ve identified a suspicious profile, use the chart to evaluate the same five types of metadata. If you encounter any of the red flags listed on the chart, follow the suggested steps for verification.

In small groups or as a class, discuss:

- Why do you think someone would create a fake social media account? What are some possible motivations?

- Have you ever interacted with an account that you thought might be fake? What made you suspicious?
- Do you think that fake accounts are a problem for social media communities? How about for companies? Why or why not?