

CLICK FARMS & FAKE NEWS

1) Digital wellness is about being safe online, being kind, monitoring how much you are on the internet, etc. Can you say *one thing you can do* to practice digital wellness?

"Everything You Need to Know About Click Farms" by Oli Lynch (2021).
<https://www.clickcease.com/blog/click-farms-what-are-they-what-are-they-for/>. (Article edited by Mr. Peters for the classroom)



This picture on the right is a real click farm in China, with rows and rows of phones linked together and operated by a lone worker.

What is a click farm?

A click farm is any location that generates internet traffic, in bulk, for a variety of purposes. Click farms are easily available for hire through resellers found on the internet. This means you can pay for a person or a bot to click on or interact with whatever you want online.

Services offered by click farms can include:

- Social media followers and likes
- Posting comments on websites or social media
- Generating website traffic
- Creating backlinks
- Channeling traffic to fraudulent sites to increase rankings, domain authority or to collect payouts on display ads
- Sharing, often fake, news articles

The click farm itself might be made up of hundreds, even thousands of people working from computer terminals or from multiple devices such as phones or tablets, with a team of human operators running them.

James is from India but works for a US based company that resells click farm services online, focusing on business building such as backlinks and social media. He told us that one click farm that he works with in Taiwan is thought to have around 18,000 employees across 7 locations, with each location able to accommodate around one or two thousand people.

As James points out, even with all of these people, the work is usually supplemented by automated clicks from bots. Website bot traffic is usually the cheaper option, whereas if you need forms or captchas filled out or other human interaction, you can choose a more expensive package that uses humans. Most click farms are from China, India, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Russia, Thailand, and Venezuela. Some people work from home, and get paid for every click on pay per click websites. Click farms are not technically illegal, even if they are frowned on.

Why click farms? "Engagement is value." Engagement is a badge of trust and an endorsement, so even a thousand followers can be worth a lot to a small business owner. Likewise, reviews are more important than ever and the practices and industry around creating site backlinks are booming. Companies have become smart to the fact that they can game the system and deplete their competitors ad revenue by using fraudulent practices.

2) In your opinion, what is the main problem with click farms?

"What Parents Need to Teach Children About Deep Fakes." By Paul Barnwell (2019). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/09/11/common-sense-media-shares-what-parents-need-teach-kids-about-deepfake-videos/>. (Edited for the class by Mr. Peters)

Everyone loves those videos of stuff that's obviously fake: dogs talking like humans or Nick Offerman playing every role in "Full House." But the same technology that enables these silly videos also has a dark side: deepfakes. Here is more information about what deepfakes are, why people make them and why they could pose a big threat to public trust.

What are deepfakes?

A deepfake is a video created using artificial intelligence to show real people doing and saying things they never did.

Why do people make them?

Deepfakes are designed to intentionally mislead people and spread false information. Though fake footage can be used for entertainment and satire on TV and social media (where it's

usually identified as such), deepfakes are created by folks with an ax to grind, an agenda to promote or an urge to troll. They're slowly becoming more common — and are maddeningly hard to spot — posing problems for government, the tech industry and people who are finding it tougher to trust what they see.

Do people need to worry about deepfakes?

Manipulating images to portray a point of view and persuade viewers is nothing new. But deepfakes aren't like airbrushed models in magazines or glow filters in Snapchat. When their targets are elected officials, actual events from history or other public information, the videos have the potential to erode people's trust.

What can you do about deepfakes?

Media literacy skills will be essential as you grow up in an environment where anyone can easily create anything online. Since the problem of deepfakes is only going to grow, it's time to be aware how to recognize signs that a video is manipulated but also to know the why behind the producer's intent.

How can you spot a deepfake?

Since humans can be easily deceived, it may be up to tech companies to help us recognize deepfakes and flag potential ones. Many organizations are developing sophisticated algorithms and AI for this purpose. In the meantime, the following characteristics might help recognize one:

- face discolorations
- lighting that isn't quite right
- badly synced sound and video
- blurriness where the face meets the neck and hair

3. In your own words, why are deepfakes a problem?

Fake News

There are websites or social media posts that post misleading or untruthful information. To be smarter you can:

- a) do reverse image searches to see where a picture came from
- b) check that the website is verified/secure.
- c) Use reliable websites, for example: .edu or .gov
- d) Check other websites.

4. When you are reading online or doing research, what might make you suspicious that what you are reading might not be true?

5. When you think something is not true, what do you do next?