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## Auszug aus:

*Convenience comes at a cost - A debate on fake news and social bots*

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# UNTERRICHTS MATERIALIEN

Englisch Sek. II



## **A debate on fake news and social bots**

Den Einfluss von digitalen Meinungsrobotern und Falschnachrichten untersuchen und über Gegenmaßnahmen diskutieren

## **Impressum**

Unterrichts-Materialien Englisch Sek. II

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# Themenkreis „Discussion“

## Convenience comes at a cost – A debate on fake news and social bots

by Katrin Wenzel

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### Kompetenzprofil

- Niveaustufe: B2/C1 (Europäischer Referenzrahmen)
  - Kompetenzbereiche: *Speaking, reading, writing, audio-visual comprehension*
  - Aufgabenformate: *Developing arguments, observing and evaluating a debate, leading a debate, writing a speech, working with videos, working with texts, working with cartoons, working with charts/pictures, four corners, double circle, rebuttal tennis, 1-minute speech*
  - Medien: Videos, Diagramme, Fotos, Zeitungsartikel, Cartoons
  - fachübergreifende Aspekte: Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft
-



## Survey of topics and methods

Main focus	Working with a video	Working with the text	Presentation	Working with the cartoon	Working with charts/pictures	Developing arguments	Observing a debate	Leading a debate	Writing a speech	Material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ An introduction to the home robot 'Alexa' and its skills</li> <li>■ Exchanging opinions on Alexa</li> </ul>	•									Topic 1.1 ■ Video:  "Introducing All-New Echo Dot (2nd Generation)"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Positive and negative aspects of Alexa</li> </ul>	•	•								Topic 1.2 ■ Article: "Goodbye privacy, hello 'Alexa' ..."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Analysing cartoons on the topic of fake news</li> </ul>			•	•						Topic 2.1 ■ Three different cartoons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The impact of fake news and social bots on society</li> </ul>	•	•								Topic 2.2 ■ Article: "Facebook and Twitter are being used to manipulate public opinion" ■ Article: "Fake News Is The New Opium Of The Masses"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Differences in news consumption behaviour</li> <li>■ Forming 3-sentence arguments and playing rebuttal tennis</li> </ul>				•	•					Topic 3 ■ Statistics on news consumption behaviour of US adults

Main focus	Working with a video	Working with the text	Presentation	Working with the cartoon	Working with Charts/pictures	Developing arguments	Observing a debate	Leading a debate	Writing a speech	Material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Introduction to the structure of a debate</li> <li>■ Observing and evaluating a debate</li> </ul>	●					●				<p>Topic 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guideline: Debate procedure</li> <li>■ Video:  "Exemplar Highschool Canadian Parliamentary Debate 2016"</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Building arguments based on two different structures</li> <li>■ Presenting arguments to the class and offering POIs (short contributions)</li> </ul>		●		●						<p>Topic 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guideline: How to develop SEXI and PEE arguments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social bots and their influence</li> </ul>			●							<p>Topic 6.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Three pictures on the topic of social bots and their influence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collecting arguments with the help of the SPERM model</li> <li>■ Presenting a line of argument on whether social bots should be forbidden in political campaigning</li> </ul>		●		●						<p>Topic 6.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guideline: The SPERM model</li> </ul>

Main focus	Working with a video	Working with the text	Presentation	Working with the cartoon	Working with charts/pictures	Developing arguments	Observing a debate	Leading a debate	Writing a speech	Material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Preparing and leading a debate</li> <li>■ Debate topics: Banning social bots from social media and</li> <li>■ Holding social media platforms responsible for fake news spread by their users</li> </ul>						•	•	•		<p>Topic 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guideline: Debate preparation</li> <li>■ Class list: Roles during the debates</li> <li>■ Advance organisers for each speaker</li> <li>■ Role cards for adjudicators, chairpersons and timekeepers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The dangers of social bots</li> <li>■ Writing a speech on the motion: Botometers should be used by every social media website</li> </ul>	•			•				•		<p>Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Article: "Spotting a social bot might be harder than you think"</li> </ul>

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## Convenience comes at a cost – A debate on fake news and social bots

Convenience has become a very important part of our lives. We tell Siri, Alexa and Google our shopping list so that we do not have to write it down ourselves. We read news that is pre-selected for us based on our Facebook likes and tweets, presenting us with the topics we are supposedly most interested in. We happily accept the convenient advantages and often develop a blind spot for any negative side that goes along with these services. For this reason, we do not care as much if Alexa is eavesdropping or if Siri is collecting our data and we do not double check the news we receive via Facebook or Twitter for their correctness.

Evidently, here lies the potential danger. As studies have proved, Twitter is swamped with fake accounts handled by social bots. Bots are computer programs that are able to lead conversations by using auditory and textual methods. They are used on social media platforms where they automatically create messages and comments. They may act as a follower or as a person generating followers. The purpose of creating messages via social bots is that they can promote certain ideas and opinions. Even for technically well-trained people it is hard to spot sophisticated bots. Hence, it is very difficult to tell which campaigns, ideas and opinions are furthered with the help of computer programs.

The influence of Twitter accounts depends on the number of their followers, tweets and re-tweets. Social bots have the potential to tweet and re-tweet in a matter of seconds. Thus, they can create popularity and attention for people and topics in an instant. Consequently, they may manipulate and alter public opinion in significant ways. Furthermore, topics that are promoted by social bots may lead to a change in public discourse.

Historically, fake news has existed as long as news itself. Generally, the term “fake news” is used for stories that are intended to misinform or mislead people. Fake news of this kind has often been used in political campaigns to discredit political opponents.

However, presently there has been a change in what we understand by “fake news”. Since taking office, President Donald Trump has given the term a new meaning, frequently using it to refer to any kind of negative media coverage. While other politicians answer uncomfortable questions, Trump often avoids them by calling the grounds for any critical questions “fake news”. He adopted this strategy during his campaign and has also been using it during his presidency. Thus, highly respected media outlets such as CNN or the New York Times were called “fake news” on numerous occasions. In this way, media has been compromised and to some extent stripped of its credibility.

Due to these recent developments, the strategic use of social bots and fake news has become very important in political campaigning and influential in public discourse. Politicians, parties and the public have to adapt to this trend and it is not clear what impact fake news and social bots will have on democracy, journalism and public information in the long run.

Attempts have already been made to have Facebook and Twitter close down accounts operated by social bots. Moreover, educators have tried to reach out to people and persuade them to double check what they are reading, forwarding as well as what they like on social media platforms. In addition, political parties have discussed legal actions, but so far, no effective laws against the use of social bots are in place.

## Notes on the material

The texts, video links and cartoons of this unit introduce students to a variety of aspects concerning the topic of fake news and social bots. Additionally, the tasks in this unit successively build up the students’ speaking skills – both monologic and dialogic. For this purpose, students often work in teams. At the end, students will be well prepared to enter a debate.

Within the units’ worksheets there are various possibilities of adapting the tasks to the students’ level of competence, for instance by choosing a different complexity of the task or by providing more language help.

**Topic 1.1** introduces students to the theme of the unit via an Amazon commercial promoting their **echo hub 'Alexa'**. Students are then asked to take a stand on the merits of this technology, using the **Four Corners method**. The teacher reads out one or several of the following statements:

- Alexa would make my life so much easier.
- I want to have Alexa in my home immediately.
- I am scared of Alexa.

Students react to the statement by moving into one of the four classroom corners (to indicate that they agree, disagree, strongly agree or strongly disagree). Once in the corner, students discuss their opinion and in a last step, share it with the class. This method gets them used to talking to their classmates right from the beginning.

In **topic 1.2**, students work on a text about the **negative impact** Intelligent Voice Control Systems like **Alexa may have on our lives**. The article from *The Guardian* concentrates specifically on what people are willing to give up in order to enjoy the advantages of home robots like Alexa. The class is divided into two groups (A and B). Students engage in an extended **Think-Pair-Share activity** that helps them understand the text. Rounding up the first topic is a **one-minute-speech** prepared and presented by students to the class, in which they give their **opinion on Alexa**.

**Topic 2.1** continues with a paired speaking activity in which students **analyse three different cartoons**. The cartoons are presented during a **double circle**. Depending on time and class, the double circle should last for 3 to 6 rounds. The three different cartoons vary in complexity, which allows students of different abilities to engage in the speaking activity. The first cartoon is the most challenging one, since it features current political figures students need to know in order to understand its message. The third cartoon has a very straightforward message and is the least complex in its use of symbols. The language help given on each worksheet may be altered to fit the students' level of competence.

Cartoons 1 and 2 are also provided on a transparency. In order to compare and sum up the students' results, the third black-and-white cartoon could be copied and presented on a transparency as well.

In **topic 2.2**, two texts introduce social bots and cover the **impact of social bots and fake news on society**. Students delineate the author's arguments with the help of an advance organiser and exchange their thoughts on the text in a **partner-interview**. Finally, they collect positive and negative effects of social bots and fake news and present them to the class. Students could also collect their ideas on the topic in a placemat activity.

**Topic 3** is concerned with the aspect of receiving news. The students are asked to link **two statistics on news consumption** to the rise and impact of social bots and fake news. The statistics focus on who pays for news and where people receive their news from. The two statistics should raise students' awareness that younger age groups are especially likely to be exposed to fake news and to be manipulated by them. Additionally, they think of and write down **3-sentence-arguments** on two different motions. Thereafter, students engage in a game of **rebuttal tennis** where they toss their arguments and rebuttals at each other. The rules of this debating game are explained in an info box on the worksheet.

**Topic 4** focuses on debate formalities and formulating strong arguments. Firstly, the class is introduced to the **procedure of a debate** which is outlined on the worksheet. Secondly, they watch parts of a **video of a high school debate**, focusing on different aspects: content and structure of the speeches (group A), language and style (group B) and the speakers' performance (group C). The results of these tasks are used to create a rubric for judging the class debate at the end of the unit. Students decide on criteria they want to judge the speakers on.

In **topic 5**, students are introduced to two mnemonics used for **building strong arguments**: SEXI (Statement, Explanation, Illustration) and PEE (Point, Example, Explanation). With a partner, they develop an argument according to each of these two models. Additionally, the tool "**Point of Information**" is introduced as being crucial to debating. Depending on how advanced and comfortable students are with debating this may also be introduced at another time during this unit. The topic closes with students presenting their SEXI and PEE arguments while their classmates listen and give POIs.

**Topic 6.1** presents students with **three pictures** on the topic of **social bots and their influence**. Their task is to identify the different positive and

negative aspects portrayed on these images and to explain for each picture in which ways it criticises or supports social bots.

**Topic 6.2** introduces another mnemonic. **SPERM** supports the students' ability to think outside the box, asking students to come up with arguments from different areas: **S**ocial, **P**olitical, **E**conomic/Ecological, **R**egulated by law and **M**oral. After getting to know this model, students use it to gather arguments on the motion *Social bots should be forbidden in political campaigning*. They work in groups of three, **collecting arguments** for the side of the motion assigned to them. In the next step, they **weigh up and prioritise their arguments** and put the strongest ones into a **line of argument**. These team lines are finally presented in front of the class and should be rewarded with feedback.

**Topic 7** focuses on the **debate preparation** in different teams. During this period, students are teamed up into groups of three to work on their arguments and strategies. Following a step by step guideline, students prepare for the role they will assume during the debate. If a class is very advanced in debating, students could prepare for either side of the motion.

Every function in the debate can be fulfilled by students. Depending on class size, there could be up to **four debates**. During the debate, each speaker is given around three minutes time to make a case for or against the motion. As there are six speakers per debate, each debate should last approximately 18 minutes.

The chairperson, the adjudicators and the timekeepers receive **role cards** telling them about their function and offering them language help. An **advance organiser for each speaker** in the debate facilitates their debate preparation. In addition, a preparation sheet for the whole team and a class list for noting down the names of the participants in each debate are provided.

The **exam** deals with a text on **Botometers** which can detect social bots and examines their impact. Students are asked to outline the dangers of social bots mentioned in the text and to **write the 2<sup>nd</sup> proposition or opposition speech** on the motion *This House wants Botometers used by every social media website*. If necessary, students may use the worksheet 'How to lead a debate' during the exam in order to check what needs to be included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker's speech.



# Introducing Alexa

## Working with the video



1. Watch the video “Introducing All-New Echo Dot (2nd Generation)”. What is Alexa? What does she do? Take notes while watching the video.

Link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWBNQEGLNhE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWBNQEGLNhE)

2. Find one word for each letter of A-L-E-X-A that describes the home robot. Keep your notes to yourself.

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

**L** \_\_\_\_\_

**E** \_\_\_\_\_

**X** \_\_\_\_\_

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

## Four corners

3. You will hear statements on Alexa. Once you have heard a statement move towards one of the corners in the classroom according to your level of agreement (agree, disagree, strongly agree, strongly disagree). Take your notes from tasks 1 and 2 with you.
4. Explain to the other students in your corner why you chose this answer.
5. Each corner shares their ideas and opinions with the rest of the class.

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