PARTNERS BULGARIA FOUNDATION

YOUNG PEOPLE, HUMAN SECURITY AND MEDIA LITERACY

TOOLKIT FOR TEACHERS AND YOUTH FACILITATORS

Partners Bulgaria Foundation

Young People, Human Security and Media Literacy

Toolkit for teachers and youth facilitators

U.S. Mission to NATO

The content of this Toolkit is the result of the partnership between the teams of the Partners Bulgaria Foundation and is a part of the project *The engagement of youth in the fight against disinformation and misinformation*. The project is implemented with the financial support of the US Mission to NATO. The content of the document reflects the statement of the Partners Bulgaria Foundation and under no circumstances can be considered as the official position of the US Mission to NATO.

Partners Bulgaria Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation, registered in 1998 in Sofa. The aim is to support the process of democratic development in Bulgaria by assisting institutions, non-governmental organisations and specialists to improve policy and practice in Bulgaria in the field of justice, social care, child protection, education, economic development and environmental protection. The organisation works to strengthen the dialogue between civil society, government and the business sector, as well as to promote the participation of various underrepresented organisations, groups and ethnic communities in decision-making processes.

Dr. Daniela Kolarova, Aneta Kalcheva–Spasova, Analusia Partida Borrego

Editors: Mirela Petkova

Anyuta Kacheva, REDAKTORITE BG

ISBN: 978-954-9945-76-8

Publisher: Partners Bulgaria Foundation

Address: 2a Yakubitsa Street, Sofia 1164

www.partnersbg.org

Sofia, 2024

Contents

Introduction: the importance of youth digital and media literacy

This Handbook aims to promote digital skills and media literacy among young people. In particular, it presents educational tools to educate young people digital civic and critical thinking. The Handbook focus to the spreading of misinformation as a danger to human security and community's welfare. It is designed to increase young people's knowledge and skills how to identify, cease and resist to disinformation and misinformation.

The Handbook responds to the need to reduce the Bulgarian youth's vulnerability to disinformation, and to promote media and information literacy, diversity and inclusion, critical thinking and digital civic culture. It connects media literacy with human security arguing that when people are more prone to disinformation and fake news the results may be actions in contrary to public health, safety and even to the democratic development of the country. This connect media literacy to human security, claiming that when people are more susceptible to misinformation and fake news, the results may lead to contradictions with public health, safety and even with the democratic development of the country.

The Handbook provides interactive learning based on methodology and understanding of the current information ecosystem, namely: content, motivation of content creators, ways in which this content is distributed, and tools for verifying the credibility of information. The Handbook includes approaches to understanding how news is made, identifying bias and misinformation, and being able to distinguish between fact and opinion. Students will learn to identify when news sources present biased or misleading information and seek additional sources to confirm or refute claims. The goal is for students to be able to prevent the spread of disinformation and misinformation, both of which can have serious and far-reaching consequences, such as spreading misinformation about health, elections or social issues.

The Handbook aims to assist teachers and young people to develop students' critical thinking in order to build up media literacy. Students will be able to question assumptions, analyse information, evaluate sources and evidence, and consider

multiple perspectives, which are all crucial skills for navigating our complex and constantly evolving media landscape.

The Handbook aims to assist teachers and young people to develop students' critical thinking in order to build up media literacy. Students will be able to question assumptions, analyse information, evaluate sources and evidence, and consider multiple perspectives, which are crucial skills for navigating our complex and ever-evolving media landscape.

The authors want to thank all contributors of this material, including teachers and students from the towns of Gotse Delchev, Blagoevgrad, Montana and Varshets, who shared their feedback and suggested valuable ideas for improvement.

xxx

Young people today have access to an abundance of information sources through the Internet, which they use as a key tool of both maintaining connections in their social life as well as accessing information. In this landscape, media literacy skills are critical key to navigating the information flow and for better perception of the vast and varied online information.

The sheer amount of media content available exposes young people to various risks given the growing rise of disinformation and misinformation. The most effective measure of online and non-virtual protection from unfiltered and distorted information is each person's internal selective mechanisms built on media literacy and critical thinking skills. To achieve this level of reflection, analysis and knowledge, it is important that media and information literacy become a core part of the education system.

The Ministry of Education and Science in Bulgaria introduced media literacy in civic education but despite this ordinance (2018), school students and teachers still need adequate resources and materials for teaching in class. Several initiatives, including those led by the Media Literacy Coalition and other organizations of journalists and educators, were trying to fill this gap by providing resource materials and training courses for teachers. A report by the Centre for European Perspective states that only 9% of Bulgarian students receive media and information literacy education as part of the curriculum, and only 4% of teachers are trained to present those skills

(2021)[1]. In 2022 the media literacy coalition conducted a study in 150 schools nationwide which shows that only 8% of teachers instruct students how to check sources of information and only 30% of instructed students have applied methods of checking different sources of information.[2]

This Handbook is consisting a part of this direction, aiming to fill some of the deficits in the education system and reach schools in more distant areas outside the capital.

According to the Open Society Institute – Sofia (2022), countries that have the highest index of media literacy have developed the highest potential to resist the negative impact of fake news and misinformation due to the quality of education, free media and high trust among people. Unfortunately, Bulgaria is on the bottom of this ranking of the EU member states and occupies the 33rd place out of a total of 41 countries.

Safe and responsible use of the Internet is one of the key competences for digital learning, which is important to be able to participate in today's technology driven world, where digitalisation affects life, interactions, study and work. Within the latest EU DigComp 2.2. framework, digital competence is defined as "the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, work, and participation in society". The concept includes 21 competences and five 'main competence areas': information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving.

As an EU member state, Bulgaria is struggling to transfer this policy into the school education and after-school classes at all levels. There is significant deficiency in digital skills; Bulgaria ranks lowest on the level of digital competence of young people in the country in comparison with all other member states.[3]

Digital and media literacy training is still extremely poorly integrated into the curriculum and the level of digital skills and competences of all citizens (including young people) is among the lowest in the EU.

---

[1] Digital misinformation / disinformation and children, UNICEF, 2021 link: UNICEF-Global-Insight-Digital-Mis-Disinformation-and-Children-2021.pdf

[2] Национално изследване за оценяване на дигитално-медийните компетентности на гимназистите, Аналитичен доклад, Коалиция за медийна грамотност, 2022

[3] Young people with at least basic digital skills by gender, 2021; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Figure_7_Young_people_with_at_least_basic_digital_skills_by_gender,_2021_order_by_young_male_(%25).png

In fact, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index [DESI 2019], Bulgaria – along with Romania, Italy and Greece – ranks lowest overall in terms of “Internet user skills” and “advanced and development skills”. On the other hand, EU Kids Online 2020 shows that the amount of time children spend online has almost doubled since 2010. The results of the 2010 EU Kids Online survey conducted in Bulgaria show that Bulgarian children have a higher than European average of learning online activities. This trend has strengthened even more over the years. Eurostat data for 2022 demonstrates a clear trend towards greater uptake of online activities and from an earlier age. Although Bulgarian children's technical skills have improved significantly since 2010, their critical evaluation, communication and collaboration skills suffer, possibly due to a slow-to-adapt education system, lack of resources and insufficient parental support.

The latest edition of PISA international comparative literacy examinations has shown once again the ongoing low results of Bulgarian students.[4] 54% of Bulgarian students in the second year of secondary school are below the critical minimum of knowledge and skills in mathematics, 53% of them do not have elementary reading skills, and 48% of them have drastic deficits in natural sciences. The general government expenditures on education are among the lowest in the EU – capital expenditure accounted for less than 5.0 % of current and capital expenditure in Bulgaria; and the expenditure on educational institutions per student is the lowest in EU (2020).

Bulgaria also faces a higher level of early leavers from education and training in comparison with the average in the EU.[5] Over 48% of teachers in primary and secondary education are over 50 years old, one of the highest rates within the EU. A highest number schools located in socially and economically disadvantaged areas often operate within social and economic challenges – i.e. coexistence of marginalised groups (i.e. Roma), families with low literacy, high unemployment rates, high crimes rates, etc. thus leading as a consequence to a high school dropout, high rates of children/young people with special needs, low participation of families in their children’s school life and high teachers’ turnover. In these contexts, there is a concentration of young people with fewer possibilities to take advantage of the

[4] How well did 15-year-old students in Bulgaria do on the test?; https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/bulgaria-29d65f4b#section-d1e17
[5] Early leavers from education and training; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training

opportunities that digital tools offer. Recent research has shown that students with parents with a degree or at least a high school education are more likely to make an informative use of the web (looking for information to deepen a topic or to critically read newspapers and news online).

In this context many young people become more susceptible to disinformation and misinformation. Lack of media and information literacy shows inability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media and information in various forms. These are vital skills for young people to develop critical thinking, civic participation, and democratic values. However, many young people in Bulgaria are not able to recognise and resit to the disinformation, propaganda, and fake news. At the same time, as stated above, their exposure to online platforms and social media is one of the highest in Europe. Since the online platforms and social media are the main sources of information and communication for many young people in Bulgaria, these platforms can also be used to spread and amplify disinformation, misinformation, and fake news (either intentionally or not) by various actors, such as state actors, non-state actors, or individuals. Online platforms and social media can also create echo chambers and filter bubbles – environments where users are exposed to information that confirm their existing beliefs and opinions, and are isolated from information that challenges or contradicts them. This can lead to polarisation, radicalisation, and intolerance among young people.

Finally, there are historical and political factors that may also make some young people more susceptible to disinformation, misinformation and fake news, especially when they appeal to emotions, fears or prejudices. For example, some young people may be influenced by nationalist or populist narratives that exploit the historical grievances or aspirations of certain groups of people, or by pro-Russian or anti-Western narratives that reflect the geopolitical interests or affiliations of political actors.

Misinformation can have serious human security implications for young people and the general population, such as affecting their health, safety, security and well-being, as well as their participation and confidence in democratic processes. In 2023, a report by the Foundation for Human and Social Research in Sofia revealed that more than 400 pro-Russian disinformation sites operate in Bulgaria, spreading false or

misleading narratives on topics such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union, NATO and Ukraine. These sites use various techniques, such as emotional manipulation, conspiracy theories and fake experts, to influence public opinion and undermine trust in democratic institutions.

In 2020, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Bulgarian media and social media users spread and reinforced misinformation, disinformation and fake news about the virus, its origins, effects and treatments. Some of the common narratives were that the virus was a biological weapon created by China or the United States, that it was a hoax or population control plot, that it could be cured with natural remedies or alternative therapies, and that vaccines were dangerous or harmful. These narratives have contributed to low levels of trust and compliance with public health measures, including vaccination, leading to high health security risks and one of the highest death rates from COVID-19 in Europe. This means that when people are more susceptible to disinformation, misinformation and fake news, it can have serious consequences for human and national security. When the public is deceived through misinformation and disinformation, the resulting behaviour can be contrary to public health and safety and even provoke action against the government itself. A misinformed or confused citizens can pressure politicians to make decisions that are not in the public interest. Such a situation creates division in society, undermines faith in institutions, endangers the core of democracy and blocks development towards a better future.

The Handbook aims to engage youth in combating disinformation and misinformation by developing knowledge and skills to identify, stop and react to all forms of false information.

1. Human Security and Media Literacy

Objectives of this chapter:

- To introduce human security definitions and principles.
- To demonstrate how disinformation and fake news may become a threat against human security.
- To underline necessity of young people's education in media literacy in order to resist to disinformation and fake news.

Contents of this chapter:

- What is human security?
- NATO's role in human security
- Cognitive security
- Activity: State vs. human security
- Activity: Categories of human security
- Activity: Debunking Russian Disinformation on NATO
- Media literacy and human security
- Activity: Analysing media messages

What is human security?

The human security concept was formally introduced in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 'Human development Report' of 1994.[6] The report highlighted that traditional security frameworks focused exclusively on threats posed to the *state*, not threats posed to the *individuals and groups* within the state. Human security is positioned as a complement to state-centred definitions of security, broadening the scope of threats, challenges and issues that "security" can refer to. Security at present does not only refer to threats to states' existence; rather, it is more focused on the survival of humans and the promotion of their wellbeing. This shifting of focus from the state to the individual means that:

- The individual is positioned as the "referent object" of security, rather than the state;
- The relationship between the security of the state and the security of people is strengthened;
- Recognition that threats to security are posed by a multitude of actors and actions beyond other state actors;
- Recognition of solutions beyond military capacity and actions.

Human Security is part of human development and human rights; it is about feeling safe on the streets or being able to speak freely and influence political decision-making at local and national levels. Human security is about how we respond to an urgent physical or material threat to individuals and communities. From a human security perspective, political stability includes a multi-dimensional approach that focus on social justice, peace, and sustainability. Stability tends to include management of political, social, economic and environmental risks.

A core principle of a *human security approach* is to ensure respect for human rights; to secure the safety, dignity and welfare of individuals and the communities in which they live. This is the main challenge rather than military victory or the temporary suppression of violence. This means that both civilian and military initiatives have to put the protection of civilians before the defeat of an enemy. Protection refers to both physical and material protection; economic and social, as well as civil and political rights.

[6] UNDP. Human Development Report, 1994

The UNDP's Human Development Report looks at human security as a comprehensive and future-oriented concept. According to the report, the two major components of HS are freedom from fear, meaning protection against physical violence, and freedom from want, addressing poverty.[7]

- *Freedom from fear* refers to protection of individuals from direct threats to their safety and physical integrity, including various forms of violence arising from the actions of external states, from the action of the state against its citizens, from the actions of groups against groups, and from the actions of individuals against individuals.
- *Freedom from want* refers to protection of basic needs and the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of life and livelihoods.

Afterwards the *freedom to live in dignity* is added in the 2030 Agenda,[8] focusing on the respect of the basic principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights and freedoms.

The UN interpretation of human security looks at these seven multitude challenges and security threats that individuals and communities face beyond military threats posed to national security. These categories include:

Economic security: Ensure people have means to a livelihood or access to a safety net in case of livelihood destruction (with special emphasis on the poor, marginalised and vulnerable).

Food security: Basic nutritional requirements are met and access to food is assured (distribution systems in place and prices reflect local capacities to pay them).

Health security: Access to health services and medicines, and low exposure to diseases, particularly those easily treatable. Preventative strategies and facilities in place as well as sanitation systems and access to clean water.

Environmental security: Decreased vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters through implementation of standards, early warning systems and mitigation/coping strategies.

[7] UNDP. Human Development Report, 1994, p.3
[8] https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

Personal security: Refers to vulnerability to physical, mental and psychological violence and/or abuse. Marginalised (women, girls, disabled, elderly, minorities) groups are particularly vulnerable to violence.

Community security: Refers to the systems in place that allow communities to develop and flourish, underpinned by shared values and identities. Supportive practices build inclusive social capital and bonds, while destructive community practices build identity by marginalising those that are different.

Political security: Institutions (in particular security sector) and actors that respect human rights and allow for political participation of all groups.

Thus, the Human Security Approach calls for integrated actions among a network of stakeholders to ensure lasting responses to the most difficult deficits in peace and development. It promotes multi stakeholder partnership engaging a wide range of actors from the UN system, governments, private sector, civil society and local communities. This allows for seizing synergies that capitalise on the comparative advantages of various stakeholders. The approach also calls for “localisation and ‘leaving no one behind’ which gives a significant focus on local realities”. It helps localise international and national agendas to ensure that local contexts and needs are considered. Prevention is another key objective of human security. It addresses the root causes of vulnerabilities, focuses attention on emerging risks and emphasises early action. It strengthens local capacities to build resilience, and promotes solutions that enhance social cohesion and advance respect for human rights and dignity.

Threats to these seven components of human security, or human insecurities, can occur at any time or can be long term and pervasive. *Pervasive threats*, such as large income disparities, unequal distribution of or access to resources, violation of personal security or threats from the security forces, or *sudden or unforeseen threats*, such as famine, financial crises or pandemics, can trigger violent conflict in stable or at-risk areas. Such threats, as well as personal and community insecurity, are greatly exacerbated during violent conflict. If longer-term insecurities are not addressed in the post-conflict reconstruction or development stages, there is a risk that a country or region will slide back into conflict. Likewise, sudden, unforeseen or time-limited threats can increase inequity, violence, and throw the development trajectory off-course.

It is important to note that these components of security are *inter-linked and mutually reinforcing*. For instance, economic insecurity impacts access to health services, medicine and nutritional food, while environmental insecurity can impact upon the ability to produce food and sell it at affordable prices. Political insecurity can have a very real impact upon personal and community security, and violation of the human rights of certain groups impacts security in all other domains.

NATO's role in human security

For 75 years NATO is guided by the commitment to safeguarding the freedom and security of its members. The importance of human security was stressed and became priority in latest summits and policy documents. The 2022 Strategic Concept[9] has emphasised the high importance of human security which is directly linked to NATO's common values of individual liberty, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

NATO's human security approach is drawn from that of the United Nations. The United Nations conceptualised human security as a multi-sectoral approach to security that identifies and addresses widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of the people. For NATO, taking such an approach means embedding considerations for the comprehensive safety and security of the

[9] NATO - PDF: NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (in English, French and other languages)

populations into all stages and levels of Alliance operations, missions and activities, wherever NATO operates, with the objective of preventing and responding to risks and threats to all people, especially in conflict or crisis situations.

NATO's human security work currently focuses on five areas where the Alliance can be most effective: protection of civilians; preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence; combating trafficking in human beings; children and armed conflict; and cultural property protection.

Guiding principles of NATO are:

a. Be people-centred, integrate gender perspectives[10], and address the differentiated impacts of conflict and crisis on different people in the population, especially individuals in situations of vulnerability or marginalisation;

b. Be prevention- and protection-oriented;

c. Take into account local customs and social norms in the communities coming into contact with NATO in Alliance operations, missions and activities, while respecting the common values and principles of the Alliance;

d. Be consistent with international law;

e. Respect and provide space for the neutral, independent and impartial work of humanitarian actors, whose operational viability and safety is essential during armed conflict and other situations of violence;

f. Be in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Cognitive security

In recent years, the concept of cognitive security was introduced in relation to cognitive warfare which includes "activities conducted in synchronisation with other instruments of power, to affect attitudes and behaviours, by influencing, protecting, or disrupting individual, group, or population level cognition, to gain an advantage over

[10] NATO Official text: Human Security – Approach and Guiding Principles, 14 Oct. 2022

an adversary". Designed to modify perceptions of reality, this human cognition shaping becomes a critical realm of warfare.[11]

According to NATO publications, cognitive warfare focuses on attacking and degrading rationality, which can lead to exploitation of vulnerabilities and systemic weakening.[12]

Example is given how Russian social media and public information operations targeted much of the international community in an attempt to label Ukraine as being at fault. Through a combination of communication technologies, fake news stories, and perceptions manipulation, Russia aims to influence public opinion, as well as decay public trust towards open information sources. Russia's military invasion of Ukraine is reinforced with activities such as targeted propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and support from its partners. Some of these cognitive warfare activities are obvious and direct: receivers of Russian aligned disinformation experience deterioration in their ability to identify fact from fiction, decaying their mental resilience. This has a potential long-term impact, such as loss of trust in media and institutions. The excessive use of the Internet daily exposes users to dangers generated by actors behind the screens - those who generate hostile, malign content. Using fake news and disinformation in social media represents threats to social stability and democracy.

[11] Cognitive Warfare: Beyond Military Information Support Operations, May 2023 – link: https://www.act.nato.int/article/cognitive-warfare-beyond-military-information-support-operations/
[12] https://www.act.nato.int/article/cognitive-warfare-strengthening-and-defending-the-mind/

Activity: State vs. human security

The concept of international security has evolved from the protection of *state security* to the protection of *human security*. State security primarily concerns the protection of territorial integrity and the prohibition on the use of force as traditional components of security under the United Nations Charter. Human Security is concerned with a broader set of threats affecting individuals and peoples within a State. Such threats include violations of human rights, public health emergencies, environmental issues, and other matters not directly related to the protection of state sovereignty.

Learning objectives: To explore the differences between State Security and Human Security and to gain understanding about the types of security threats related to the states, communities and individuals.

Duration and materials

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials: Flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers

Procedure:

1. Ask students what types of security threats nations, people and communities face today? These can be international, regional or local and affect all persons or specific groups. Facilitate brainstorming and write their answers on the sheet of paper. For example, answers can include:
    - Military invasion in a neighbouring state;
    - Shortage of basic food or water;
    - Lack of access to health services for specific groups of population.
2. Facilitate discussion about the differences between state security and security of individuals and communities in terms of treats, means and actors.
3. Use the table below to sort the answers on the sheet of paper.

	State Security	Human Security
Referent Object	**State**	**Individuals and Communities**
Threats	External, military attacks directed against the state; structured violence	Physical violence, socio-economic, environmental, food, health, community and political threats, structured and unstructured violence
Means	Defence, investment in military means; institutionalised	Empowerment and protection through the promotion of human rights and human development; institutionalised and non-institutionalised
Actors	State institutions	International, regional and national government and NGOs; states; and people themselves as active participants in determining their wellbeing.

Activity: Categories of human security

The essential seven categories associated with human security are economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Among the seven elements to human security are considerable links and overlaps.

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about the concept of *human security* by facilitating discussion about practical examples associated with each of the seven categories of human security.

Duration and materials

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials: Flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers, copies of Handout 1

Procedure:

1. Provide Handout 1 to each student and give them 5 minutes to reflect on each of the seven categories of human security.
2. Ask students to divide into small groups and give them 25 minutes. Let each group discuss the threats to economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security in the country. Ask students to discuss also how cognitive security is related to each of these categories. Remind them to think about threats against communities and individuals by providing specific examples.

   Advise students to think also about threats that may cross state borders as well as those affecting vulnerable or marginalised groups.
3. Plenary session. During the last 15 minutes each student's group reports their ideas and answers questions.
4. Discuss threats that fall into more than one category.

Variation of this exercise may be developed in a World Café setting:

1. **Setting:** Create an environment with seven small round tables covered with a chart sheet of paper and coloured markers. On each sheet of paper is written only

one category of human security. There should be four chairs at each table (optimally).

2. **Welcome and Introduction:** There is a host in each table /facilitator/ who begins with an introduction to the process and setting the context.

3. **Small-Group Rounds:** The process begins with the first of 15-minute rounds of conversation for small groups around a table. At the end, each group moves to a different table, reads the ideas put on the paper by the previous group and contributes by adding new ideas. After the small groups rounds the hosts of each group report the results of the conversations around their tables.

Handout

Categories of Human Security

Type of Security	Examples of Security Threat	Description of Threat
Economic Security	E. g. economic crisis	Poverty, unemployment; political instability, etc.
Food Security		
Health Security		
Environmental Security		
Personal Security		
Community Security		
Political Security		

Activity: Debunking Russian disinformation on NATO

Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has shattered peace and stability in Europe.[13] Russia's government acts to establish spheres of influence and to control other countries through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. It employs various means to achieve these goals: conventional, cyber and hybrid – including disinformation against NATO Allies and partners. NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia. It responds to Russian threats and actions in a united, resilient and responsible way. This includes countering disinformation and debunking various myths spread to confuse the population of NATO Allies and partners.

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about the facts necessary to debunk Russian disinformation on NATO and to develop their skills how to do that.

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Handout "Steps and Example of Refutation"; Myth cards

Procedure:

1. Give each student the Handout "Steps and example of Refutation"[14]. Explain how the refutation works by providing example (Handout).
2. Ask students to divide into small groups. Give each group a card with a myth and basic facts related to this specific myth. Ask them to debunk the myth using the steps and referring to the example given in the Handout. Students need to write down in a poster the 4 steps of debunking the myth and if necessary, refer to figures, charts, maps of other visual materials to support their arguments. They can refer to Internet information such as: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/115204.htm
3. Each group reports in front of the plenary what are the elements of their refutation regarding the myth they were discussing.

[13] This activity is developed using materials from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/115204.htm
[14] https://skepticalscience.com/docs/DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf

Steps and Example of Refutation

Steps:

1. **Core facts:** Emphasise what is true over what is wrong. Research indicates that when correcting misinformation, it's best to first introduce core fact before presenting the misinformation that needs correcting.

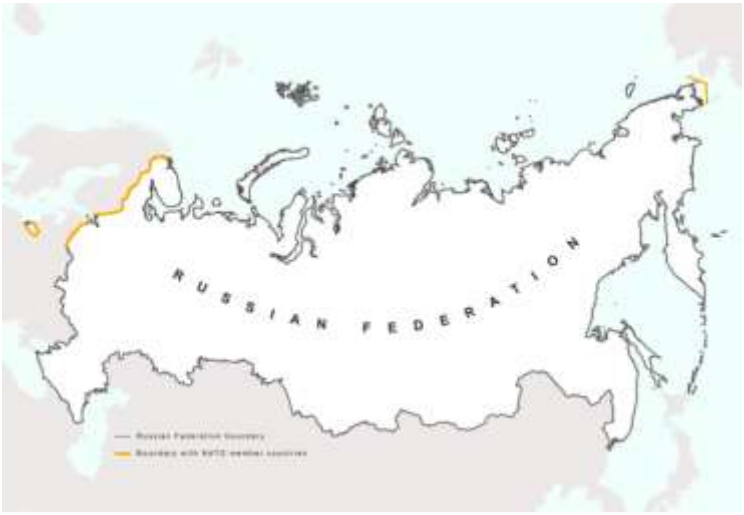
2. **Explicit warnings:** Before mentioning a myth, provide a warning the upcoming information is untrue.

3. **Alternative explanation:** To be effective, debunking must fill that gap left when refute a myth. To replace incorrect information, provide a clear explanation that will fill the "information gap." Try to explain things as clearly as possible.

4. **Graphics:** Visuals can help to illustrate core facts more clearly.

CARDS: MYTHS AND FACTS

Myth: NATO is at war with Russia in Ukraine	*Facts:* NATO is not at war with Russia and does not seek confrontation with Russia. NATO supports Ukraine in its right to self-defence, as enshrined in the UN Charter. In response to Russia's aggressive actions, NATO continue to strengthen its deterrence and defence to make sure that NATO is ready to protect and defend every Ally. NATO is a defensive Alliance. Its core task is to keep its nations safe. The Allies have commitment to defend every inch of Allied territory at all times; to protect its one billion people; to safeguard freedom and democracy, in accordance with Art. 5 of NATO.
Myth: NATO promised Russia it would not expand after the Cold War	*Facts:* Such an agreement was never made. NATO's is open to new members since it was founded in 1949. This has never changed. No treaty signed by NATO Allies and Russia included provisions on NATO membership. Decisions on NATO membership are taken by consensus among all Allies. Russia does not have a veto. Individual Allies cannot make agreements on NATO's behalf, e.g., USA presidents cannot negotiate with the Russian presidents about NATO's enlargement. NATO operates by consensus. The wording "NATO expansion" is already part of the myth. NATO did not hunt for new members. NATO membership is a decision for NATO Allies and those countries who wish to join alone.
Myth: NATO is aggressive	*Facts*: NATO is a defensive alliance. It does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia, or any other nations. NATO did not invade Georgia or Ukraine. Russia did. NATO made significant efforts to establish a strategic partnership with Russia such as the NATO-Russia Council and worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning. It was Russia that went away at any hopes of peaceful cooperation, with its aggressive behaviour in various countries such as Georgia and Ukraine. NATO Allies engaged in persistent diplomatic efforts to convince Russia to change its course. NATO held a last meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in January 2022 to call on President Putin to step back from the brink. President Putin chose war.

Myth: NATO's deployments are a threat to Russia	*Facts:* In response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine in 2014, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia, while maintaining political and military dialogue. NATO deployed four multinational battlegroups to the Baltic States and Poland in 2016. Before Russia's aggressive actions in 2014, there was no deployment of combat-ready NATO troops in the eastern part of the Alliance. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO has further reinforced its deterrence and defence posture. It has doubled the number of multinational battlegroups in the east of the Alliance from four to eight and put 40,000 troops under direct NATO command. It is Russia's aggressive actions that have shattered peace in Europe and are undermining international security and stability. As well as its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has military bases and soldiers in Georgia and Moldova without the consent of their governments.
Myth: NATO is encircling Russia	*Facts:* Russia is the world's largest country geographically. It is almost twice the size of the US and China. When Finland joined the Alliance in April 2023, NATO's land border with Russia more than doubled. Even after Finland's accession, only 11% of Russia's land border is shared with NATO countries. No one has backed Russia into a corner. It is hard to encircle a country with eleven time zones. 

Myth: Ukraine will not join NATO	*Facts:* Ukraine will become a member of NATO. NATO supports every country's right to choose its own security arrangements, including Ukraine. NATO Allies decide on NATO membership. Russia does not have a veto. At the Vilnius Summit, Allies reaffirmed the commitment they made at the 2008 Summit in Bucharest that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance when conditions are met and Allies agree. They agreed to remove the requirement for a Membership Action Plan, changing Ukraine's membership path from a two-step to a one-step process. NATO is stepping up its political and practical cooperation with Ukraine. NATO has also agreed a new multi-year assistance programme to help the Ukrainian armed forces transition from Soviet-era to NATO standards and strengthen Ukraine's security and defence sector to resist further Russian aggression. Ukraine is already closer to NATO that it has ever been. In Vilnius, Allied leaders reiterated that Ukraine's future is in NATO.
Myth: NATO's out of area operations prove that the Alliance is not defensive	*Facts:* NATO intervened in the former Yugoslavia to stop bloodshed and save lives. From 1992-1995, NATO conducted several military operations in Bosnia, including enforcing a no-fly zone and providing air support for UN peacekeepers. These activities were mandated by the United Nations Security Council, of which Russia is a member. NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions in 1995 helped pave the way for the Dayton peace agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia that had killed over 100,000 people. From 1996, NATO led multinational peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, which included troops from Russia. The European Union took over that mission in 2004. NATO's operation in Kosovo in 1999 followed a year of intense international diplomatic efforts, which included Russia, to end the conflict. NATO's mission helped to end large-scale and sustained violations of human rights and the killing of civilians. KFOR, NATO's ongoing peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, has a UNSC mandate (UNSCR 1244) and is supported by both Belgrade and Pristina.

Media literacy and human security

Human security highlights the trifold relationship between security, development and human rights as basic elements for human and national security. It means protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms that are essential to life. Technological progress has a major impact on all walks of life and on national and international security, for society and individuals. Unfortunately, there are hostile foreign and domestic actors who manipulate truth by distorting information to undermine social resilience. Social media platforms provide an environment and opportunities to replicate, disseminate and validate disinformation and misinformation.

To prevent such a threat to human security, it is important to increase media literacy among the wider population, especially children and young people. Media literacy includes the ability to access and analyse media messages as well as create, reflect and take action, using the power of information and communication constructively. When children and young people are spending large amounts of time online, they are exposed to messages and information that can have a negative impact on their health and welfare. The messages, images, information, and experiences they engage with through media help shape their beliefs, attitudes, values, and identity. Used well, media can entertain, inform, and engage children and young people in positive ways. Media use helps young people become more competent in a digital age, to express themselves and connect with others. But the negative impact that media can have on children and young people is also significant. It includes online safety, cyberbullying, disinformation and reinforcement of stereotypes. It may also lead to low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse and other negative behaviours.

The Centre for Media Literacy[15] defines media literacy as “a framework to access, analyse, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet.” It also notes that media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. It defines media literacy as the ability to:

- Decode media messages (including the systems in which they exist);

[15] https://medialiteracynow.org/challenge/what-is-media-literacy/

- Assess the influence of those messages on thoughts, feelings, and behaviours;
- Create media thoughtfully and conscientiously.

The ability to navigate within a complex and ever-changing media landscape depends on acquiring skills and tools to know how to consume and evaluate information, ask critical questions, avoid manipulation, and engage in digital spaces safely and confidently.

UNESCO Yearbook,[16] published in 2016, sets out ten skills that should be developed to achieve media literacy:

- Engage with information, media, and technology.
- Be able to apply information and communications technology skills in order to process information and produce user-generated content.
- Ethically and responsibly use information and communicate their understanding or newly created knowledge to an audience or readership in an appropriate form and medium.
- Extract and organise information and media content.
- Critically evaluate information and the content of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, in terms of authority, credibility, current purpose, and potential risks.
- Locate and access relevant information and media content.
- Synthesise or operate on the ideas abstracted from content.
- Understand the conditions under which those functions can be fulfilled.
- Understand the role and functions of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, in democratic societies and development.
- Recognise and articulate a need for information and media.

[16] Grizzle, A and Singh, J. (2016). In the MILID Yearbook 2016: Media and Information Literacy for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Activity: Analysing media messages

Media messages can be analysed by asking a set of questions:

1. **Who is the author or creator of the message?** What information can be found about the author or the creators of the message? Who has control over the creation and dissemination of messages?

Behind every media release are specific people who created it. They have some life experience, opinion, personal motivation, often also some professional skill or expertise – journalistic, marketing, creative, business. Information becomes a media release the moment it is published by a media outlet. In some media, high control is exercised over the creation and dissemination of messages by the management, operator or owner of the given media. They follow their interests, most often commercial, or political. In other media (such as social networks), the creation and dissemination of messages is largely in the hands of the users of the given media. When we know who created the media message and who has control over its creation and dissemination, we can place that message in a wider context, and then we can more easily understand why it was created.

2. **What is the content of the message?** What opinions or values are present in the message? What are the sources of information? Are they mentioned and can the information be verified? What information is not included in the message?

Media message tells something. It can convey facts, express opinions or promote or criticise some values or attitudes. Message creators who play fair help distinguish what type of message it is by clearly separating the news from comments or custom content from paid advertising. Recipients should know the sources in order to judge their relevance and credibility. What is not in the message is also important. Users can evaluate whether the creator is trying to present multiple views or not.

3. **What target group is the message intended for?** How is the message to the recipients received and how does it spread? How can the message influence opinions, attitudes and behaviour of recipients?

Every message has its target group. The creators try to learn as much as possible about it and adapt the form and content of the message to these findings. Information

is based on various researches and on the analysis of user's activities on the Internet and social networks. Every click a person makes is recorded. Automatic algorithms increasingly decide what kind of message reaches us via the Internet. They are set up to show what interests us and what we like. It is important to realise that different people perceive and interpret the same media messages differently. Sociodemographic characteristics, personal experiences, opinions and attitudes play a role how people perceive messages. Information about corruption in a political party will be processed differently by supporters of that party and by its opponents.

4. **How is the message trying to get attention?** What is the language and audio-visual form of **communication** and why? What emotions can the message evoke and why?

The creators of media messages are trying to capture attention by bold headlines, images or videos. A distinctive element of most communications is the chosen language. It can be neutral or emotional, the authors can speak directly to the recipients of the message, ask them questions, invite them to react, etc. If we realise the means by which creators try to capture our attention and evoke some emotions, we will be more resistant to manipulations.

a. **Why was the message created**? Who benefits from the message?

There is always a reason for the creation and spread of a media message. They can be simple personal motivations, such as the desire to entertain, to communicate something, to educate or convince. The reward for the creator can be popularity, lots of likes. Other motivations include commercial profit (media companies and social network operators sell our attention and data about our behaviour on the advertising market) or an effort to strengthen power or influence. When we learn to automatically think about who benefits from certain information and its dissemination, we more easily discover manipulations.

Learning objectives: To increase students' understanding about the construction and motivation behind media messages; how to identify reliable sources and resist manipulative information.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: Smartphones, Internet

Procedure:

1. Students are divided into small groups and pick news from the Internet or previously printed.
2. Groups discuss the news and answer the following questions:
    - Who created this media? What do we know about them and their interests? What are they passionate about? How do they attract readers' attention?
    - How would different kinds of people interpret this message? (age groups, gender, location, social and economic status, education, political and ethnic belonging, etc.)
    - What values and points of view are shown in this message? What is missing?
    - Why is this message being sent? Is it to entertain, persuade or inform? Is it to gain money or power?

2. Dealing with disinformation and misinformation

Objectives of this chapter:

- To introduce the concepts of misinformation and disinformation, their different types and build skills how to stop their spreading.
- To raise awareness to how distorted information on the Internet is created and disseminated.
- To build skills on how to fact check and use reliable sources; to foster students' ability to identify fake news and disinformation mechanisms, to stop spreading of false news, and to combat them.

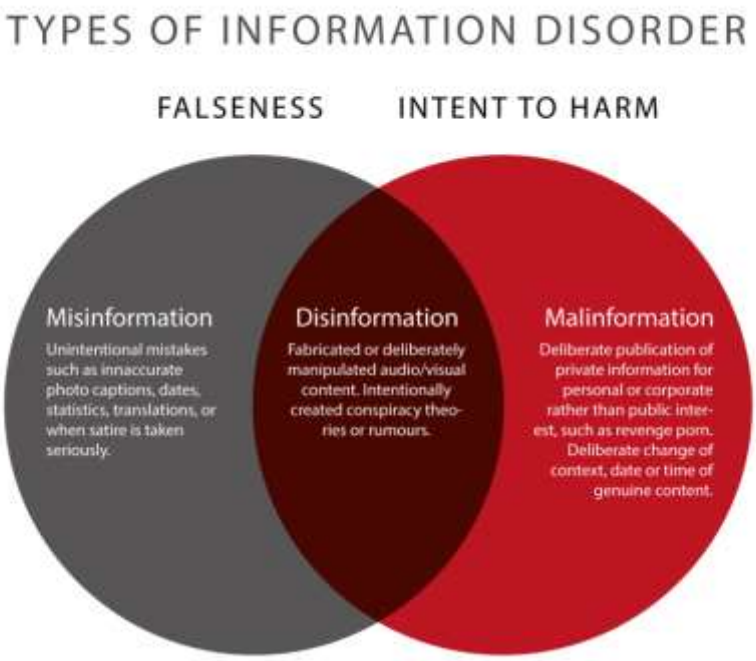
Contents of this chapter:

- Information disorder: disinformation, misinformation and malinformation
- Activity: History of disinformation
- Types of disinformation and misinformation
- Activity: What type of news is this?
- Activity: Is it fake or not
- Activity: Basics of fact-checking
- Activity: Fact-checking by Google search operators
- Activity: Reverse image search – Google lens
- Activity: Fact checking: lateral reading
- Spreading of disinformation and misinformation
- Activity: Why do we share?
- Activity: Is it what it looks like?
- Activity: Real or photoshop?
- Activity: Fake images and fake news – how to check them?
- Activity: Artificial intelligence, algorithms and information disorder
- Filter bubble
- Activity: Can we see the same?
- Cyber security
- Activity: Leaving a digital footprint

Information disorder: disinformation, misinformation and malinformation

Information disorder includes misleading information such as disinformation, misinformation and malinformation.[17]

Each of these categories contains subcategories.



Types of Information Disorder. Credit: Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan, 2017

- **Misinformation:** false information is shared, but there is no clear intent to harm a person or group.
- **Disinformation:** false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
- **Malinformation:** genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

[17] Wardle, C. and Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making, Council of Europe. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-november- 2017/1680764666

Misinformation	False connection	Headlines, visuals or caption not supporting the content
	Misleading content	Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual
Disinformation	False context	Genuine content shared with false contextual information
	Imposter content	Impersonation of genuine sources
	Manipulated content	Genuine information or imagery manipulated to deceive
	Fabricated content (Fake news)	100% false, designated to deceive and do harm
Malinformation	Leaks	For example publication of private emails
	Public harassment	Doxing, revenge porn, social shaming, intimidation, offshore investment corruption, etc.
	Hate speech	Violating sensibilities, often directed towards racial and sexual minorities and women

Popularity of this problematic content often depends on how it plays on people's emotions, encouraging feelings of superiority, anger or fear. These feelings drive resharing among people who want to connect with their online communities. Sharing becomes easy in most social platforms, which are designed for people to publicly 'perform' through likes, comments or shares. In this way distorted information, heavy with emotional content, travels quickly and widely while the fact-checking and debunking organisations struggle to reach such coverage.

Accessibility of social media makes it easy for everyone to create, publish and distribute content as well as to consume content created by others. Mobile devices accelerate the news distribution being at hand and speed the news sharing among trusted peers where the probability information to be challenged is very low.

According to Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakshan, there are three elements of information disorder - the agent, the messages and the interpreters. There are also three different phases (creation, production or transforming a message into a media product and distribution) of information disorder. The agents could be official actors (i.e., political parties, news agencies, PR firms or lobbying groups) or unofficial actors (groups of citizens) who are politically or economically motivated. Social belonging such as the desire to be connected with a certain group and psychological reasons can also play a role.[18]

The agent who creates and conceives the idea on which the content is based is often different from the one who practically produces it and the one that distributes and reproduces it. Once a message has been created, it can be reproduced and distributed endlessly by many different agents all with different motivations. Interpreters may become agents themselves: a social media post shared by several communities could be picked up and reproduced by the mainstream media and further distributed to other communities.

The content of distorted information can be verbal or visual. The visual content can be far more persuasive than other forms of communication, which can make them much more powerful vehicles for mis- and disinformation.

The information disorder poses many dangers to human security. It pollutes the information ecosystem and has real and negative effects on the public perception of news.

[18] Birdsell, D. S., & Groarke, L. (1996). Toward a theory of visual argument. Argumentation and Advocacy, 33(1), 1-10.

Activity: History of disinformation

The manipulation of information is present in history long before modern journalism established the standards defining news as a genre that adheres to certain principles and rules. There are chronicles reporting an early case of disinformation dating back to the ancient Roman period, for instance. But in the 21st century, the weaponisation of information has reached unprecedented proportions. It should be borne in mind that manipulation of information has a thousand-year history, while professional journalism is more recent. This session consists of a short introduction, group work activity "Timeline of disinformation" and a final discussion of the events, documents and persons, who have played a role in disinformation.[19]

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about the history of disinformation by studying the images showing milestone events.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: A set of images for group work prepared, the Annex I "Historical events related to disinformation and misinformation". PPP with background information on every image for the final discussion with students

Procedure:

1. Students are divided into small groups of five and set around a table. Each group is given a set of images. Facilitator asks students to produce a timeline of various events of disinformation, represented by the images. Students have to discuss images in small groups and put the images in one line chronologically on the table. Students do not have to know exact dates of events or persons shown in the pictures.
2. When the groups are ready, the facilitator initiates panel discussion. Each group presents their timeline and provides explanation about the group reasoning behind their chronological order of images. During the discussion students are

[19] This activity is prepared based on the publication: A short guide to the history of 'fake news' and disinformation, A learning module for journalists and journalism educators, International centre for journalism, link: https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/A%20Short%20Guide%20to%20History%20of%20Fake%20News%20and%20Disinformation_ICFJ%20Final.pdf

encouraged to come up with any suggestions and ideas they might have, irrespective if they are correct or wrong. The reporters share the group decision about the following questions: What does the image show? What connection does the image have to disinformation?

3. After each group sharing, the teacher presents images on a screen and gives background information on each image.

Variation of this activity could allow students to do research and come up with images and stories of famous events of disinformation in the history of their country.

Types of disinformation and misinformation

Misinformation and disinformation take various forms. Some of them are described by Claire Wardle and H. Derakhshan [20] as:

1. **Satire or Parody:** No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool.

Although satire or parody are treated as forms of art, they can be also used to intentionally spread rumours and conspiracies, and–in case of any accusations–they can get off lightly as something that shouldn't be treated seriously. The challenge is that satire is used strategically to bypass fact checkers and to spread rumours and conspiracies, knowing that any pushback can be dismissed by stating that it was never meant to be taken seriously. Increasingly, what is labelled as ''satire" is hateful, polarising and divisive. It can easily get re-shared or distorted, and start functioning outside of its original, humorous context.

2. **False Connection:** When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content.

Although people can at first think that false connections, such as, for example, clickbait headlines, can do no harm, only irritate; in a larger perspective this practice may undermine trust in media and promote polarisation.

3. **Misleading Content:** Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual.

It's about cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively in order to support an argument. We can often see this kind of manipulated content without even knowing about it, as spotting it requires having some specific knowledge, doing research, and checking the sources (e.g. the source of a quote in a given message).

4. **False Context:** When genuine content is shared with false contextual information.

A picture reshared to fit a new narrative would be an example here. It is a powerful form of information disorder, as the content used is genuine, so it cannot be denied, but is reframed in a dangerous way to support a certain point.

5. **Imposter Content:** When genuine sources are impersonated.

[20] Wardle, C, Derakhshan, H. Information Disorder. Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking, Council of Europe, 2017

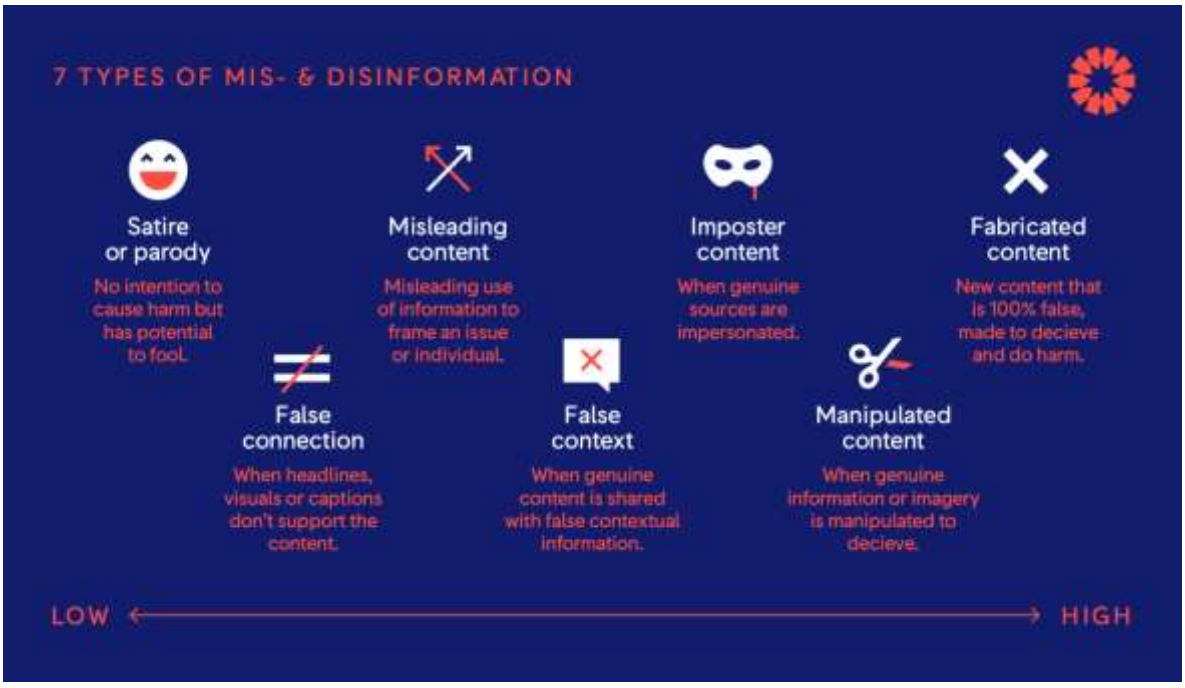
This form of disinformation takes advantage of the trust one may have in a specific organisation, person, brand, etc. Many phishing and smishing (phishing of mobile phones via messages) attempts are created this way: some well-known brand's logo or name is used to create an impression that you're receiving legit content. And it's enough to be distracted or in a hurry, to sometimes fall victim to such manipulation.

6. **Manipulated Content:** When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive.

Manipulated content may concern photos and videos that are altered in such a way that they seem real enough, but the overall meaning of the genuine content is different than intended.

7. **Fabricated Content:** New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.

The content is completely false. Distinguishing between the real and fabricated content can be difficult to people not knowing how to identify false content. When people often see fabricated content, their trust in the media can be reduced.



Categories of Information Disorder. Credit: Claire Wardle, 2017

Activity: What type of news is this?

The spread of distorted information can travel through various channels: traditional newspapers, radio and television and their online versions. The extensive use of social media (websites, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) makes distribution of misinformation and disinformation grow exponentially. For many people, it becomes problematic to identify what is fake and what is real on the Internet. This activity introduces the difference between fake news and real news and facilitates student's learning through various examples.

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about different types of misinformation and disinformation and to develop their skills to tell real from false news.

Duration and materials

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access or printed examples of distorted information taken from the Internet; Handout "Fake news and real news"

Procedure:

1. Present the Handout "Fake news and real news" and deliver a copy to each student.
2. Ask students to divide into groups of 3 or 4 and provide every group with different examples of distorted news from the Internet.
3. Ask students to identify the type of news they are given and to describe its features, source and possible motivation behind its spread.
4. Plenary session: Each group presents the results of their discussion.

Alternatively, students can be asked to find Internet examples of the 7 types of misinformation and disinformation.

Reflection questions: How difficult was it to tell fake news from real ones? What makes distorted information widely spread and what are some ways to stop its dissemination?

Fake news and real news

How to spot distorted information?

Fake News	Real News
● Has a questionable domain or URL (may end in something like.com.co)	● Cites multiple sources from differing perspectives
● Cites only one source, or none at all	● Language is straightforward
● Stories are formulated around speculation	● Facts are proven with reports or statistics
● Stories are formulated around a single opinion, rather than all sides of the story's multiple perspectives	● Does not cite "alternative facts"
● Language is sensational and/or embellished	● Headline is truthful and reflects the story
● States conspiracy theories	● Contains all elements of a story – not just selective components
● Heavy partisan bias	● Minimal partisan bias
● Not reported on by any other news outlets	● Journalist has a reputable history of fair stories
● Notes an older publish date and time, or none at all	● Publish date and time is recent

Differences between Fake News and Real News. Credit: Keohane, 2017,

https://buchananpr.com/what-is-the-new-definition-of-fake-news/

Activity: Is it fake or not?

With the widespread dissemination of information via digital media platforms, it is of utmost importance for individuals and societies to be able to judge the credibility of it. Fake news is not a recent concept, but it is a commonly occurring phenomenon in current times. The consequence of fake news can range from being merely annoying to influencing and misleading societies or even nations. In this activity students are encouraged to apply a variety of approaches to identify fake news.

Learning objectives: To support students learning about fact checking and evaluating the credibility of news.

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes
Materials: Handout “How to check news credibility?”; Annex II “Is it fake or not?”

Procedure:

1. Present the Handout “How to check news credibility” and deliver a copy to each student. Explain the steps of news credibility checking.

2. Ask students to divide into groups of 3 or 4 and provide every group with different examples of both real and distorted news from the Internet. Use the Annex II “Is it fake or not?” to access the links, or generate QR codes.

3. Ask students to identify the type of news they are given and to describe why they think the news is real or not?

4. Plenary session: Each group presents the results of their discussion.

Reflection questions:

- What challenge does a person face when checking the news credibility?
- How did working in a group facilitate the process?
- Which news was easier to analyse? Which were more difficult to analyse?

Handout

How to check news credibility?

1. **Check the sources.** Does the information come from a known source? Is the web address really correct? Many fake news websites imitate well-known news sources. If you don't know a source, take a look at the publisher's posts to check who is responsible for the content and who funded it. Has the website owner provided their address and contact information? Fake news websites often have no physical address. On the other hand, satire websites clearly indicate that the “news” published there does not correspond to the truth.

2. **Check the author of the article.** Make sure the news writer really knows the subject they are writing about. Sometimes authors pretend to be experts in a field, when in fact they are not.

3. **Check the given dates.** Check if the news is really relevant to the current situation. Some fake news is shared even after it has been debunked long ago. In addition, fake news often has incorrect dates and place names.

4. **Don't let the headlines fool you.** Fake news is often presented with screaming headlines, so that they spread faster. Read the text carefully to the end - many news articles are not as sensational as the headlines suggest.

5. **Uses multiple news sources.** Try to use as many sources of information as possible with a different point of view. This is also a good way to check the veracity of sensational news: if it appears in a single, little-known source, it's probably fake.

6. **Check the text content.** Do the institutions and documents referred to in the article really exist? Were the quoted statements really meant that way? Many fake news refers to reputable institutions and well-known people, but distort or make up the facts. Citing unnamed experts or the lack of references is also suspicious.

7. **Pay attention to the quality of the text.** Fake news, especially those generated automatically, often have grammatical errors or unusual formatting. Stylistic errors indicate that the text has not been professionally edited, which reduces its credibility.

8. **Check if it's not an advertisement.** Maybe the article is sponsored by a company? Advertising is not always made up of colourful images, often it is disguised as text.

9. **Pay attention to emotional expressions.** Pay attention to whether the author only informs about an event or expresses his personal attitude. Articles containing subjective assessments and using emotional language primarily reflect the author's opinion, which does not always correspond to reality.

10. **Evaluate yourself.** Our memory and reasoning abilities are not infallible. Specific wording, content, and forms of presentation act in such a way that some information seems more credible to us than others. Fake news creators use this phenomenon to their advantage. Therefore, information that seems particularly sensational should be carefully scrutinised rather than relying solely on first impressions.

Activity: Basics of fact-checking

What is fact-checking? Fact-checking is a specific form of journalism that can also be done by non-journalists. This is a method (one of many) in the fight against the disinformation pandemic. It can be considered also as a habit of consuming media content responsibly and critically. Fact checking is not censorship, "counter-propaganda" or ultimate truth.

What is fact-checkable?

- Quotes, speeches, official statements
- Names, identities
- Dates
- Places
- Numerical data, statistics, graphs
- Images
- Documents, regulations, laws

What is not fact-checkable?

- Statements that are too general and abstract
- Personal opinions
- Forecasts for the future
- Statements that would not have a serious impact on the audience
- Claims circulating in a very narrow circle of people

Duration and materials

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: Computer, tablet or phone with Internet access, presentation with a sample of articles

Procedure:

1. Present the group the information what is fact checking and what is subject to data verification.

2. Show the group the images on the screen and ask the group what they think about each image in relation to the following two questions:

    - Are the following statements verifiable?
    - Are they significant enough to fact-check?

1.

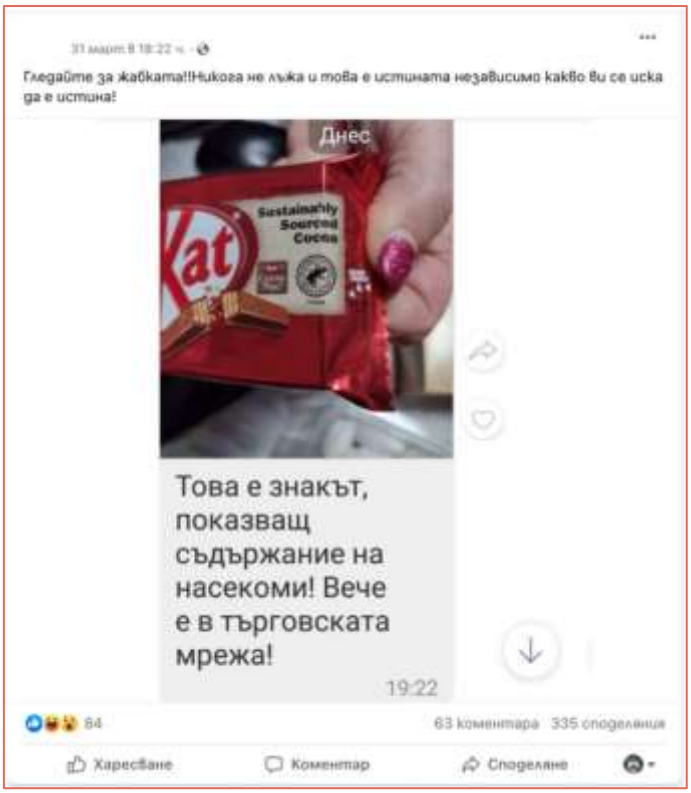
– The statement contains verifiable facts.

– The statement is significant.

2.

The statement contains verifiable facts.

Although colourful, the statement is not particularly significant.



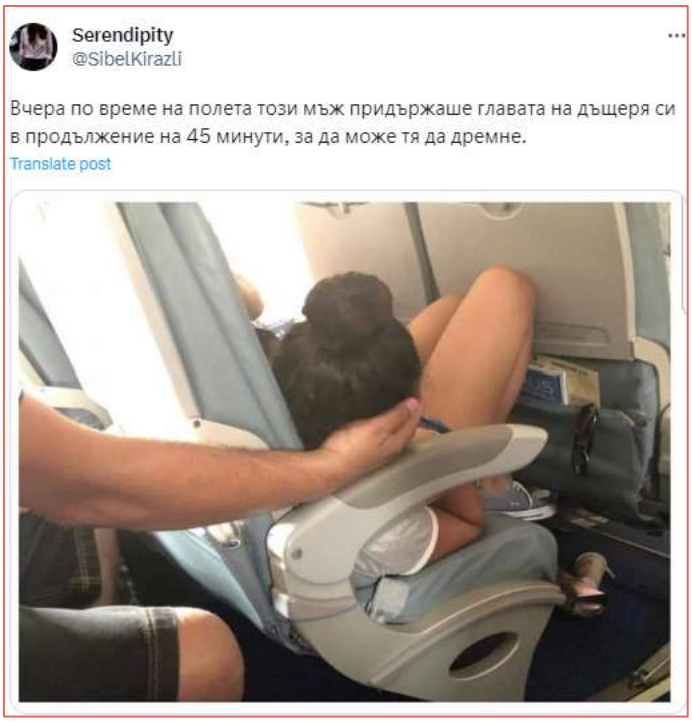
3.

The statement contains verifiable facts.

The statement is of public importance in the current context.

4.

There is no statement to be verified



5.

The origin of the photo is verifiable.

The statement is not particularly significant.

Древно пророчество се сбъдва: Глобален крах вместо избори в САЩ

Известният боен специалист, пенсионираният полковник Дъглас Макгрегър, някогашен помощник-министър на защитата в администрацията на Тръмп, направи извънредно и даже сензационно изказване. Той сподели, че " глобалисткият хайлайф възнамерява световен финансов колапс и че президентските избори в Съединени американски щати ще бъдат анулирани ". Изказването му ясно повтаря написаното в Откровението на апостолд и евангелист Йоан Богослов.

6.

The existence of such statement is verifiable.

The message of the speech itself is not verifiable

The statement is (could be) significant.

Activity: Fact-checking by Google search operators

Google operators are special commands consisting of symbols, words and phrases that specify the search query to obtain more accurate results.

Examples of Google Search operators:

“ ”	Exact match search. Searching within quotation marks would only return results for that exact phrase, in that word order, in which you entered it into the browser.
-	Excluding a term from the results. Putting a minus in front of a word means we exclude it from the search.
AND	Search for X and Y. While the minus sign excludes a word, this command adds a keyword to the search.
OR	Search for X or Y. This operator allows you to search for one or the other of the given keywords. The results will include pages containing at least one of the keywords.
Site:	Restricts results to a specific website only. you can only search for information on a specific website, for example, “site: example.com keyword”.

Learning objectives: Students will build skills how to use various Google commands to conduct Google search.

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

1. Show students different Google operators. You can start the exercise with a demonstration of each of the commands described above.

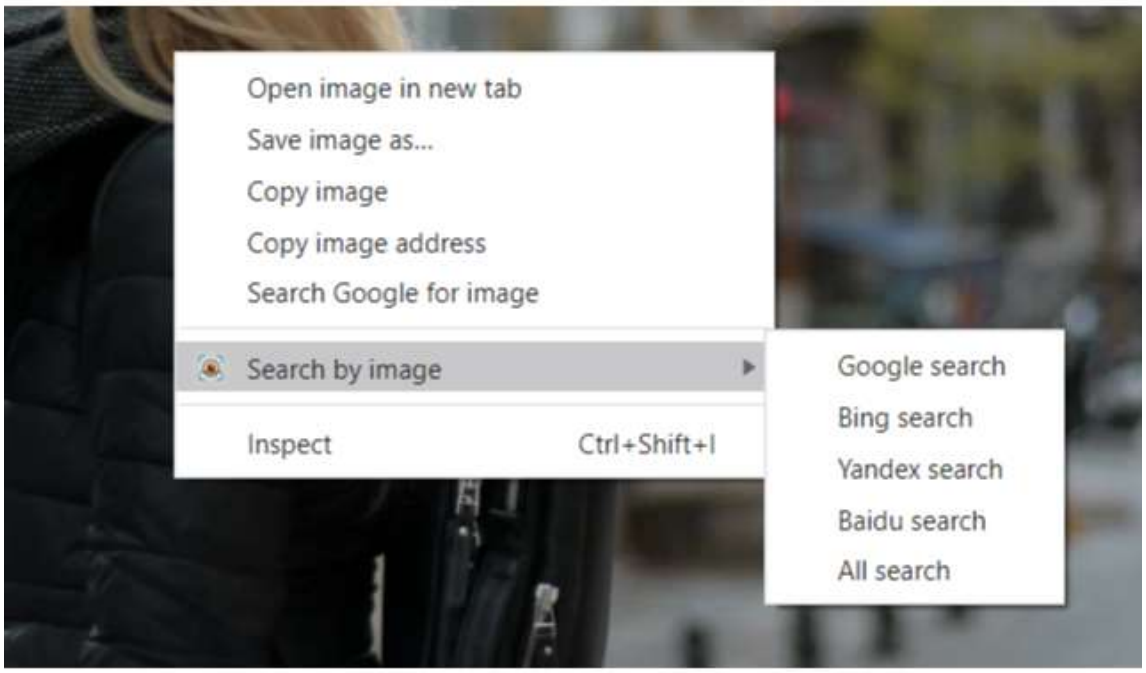
2. You can provide different examples with various keywords, sites or publication time. For example: ask students to use Google operators to find:

- publications on the subject of artificial intelligence from the site nova.bg...
- which have been published in the last month...
- they explicitly mention Bulgaria...
- and it's not about scams.

(*Answer: “artificial intelligence” site: nova.bg AND Bulgaria – scams*)

Activity: Reverse image search – Google lens

Reverse image search allows to find the original source or similar images. It can read letters and numbers from image and still-frame video (OCR). It can also translate the text on the image.



Learning objectives: Students will learn how to conduct reverse Google search and find the origin of specific image

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

1. Show students how to use reverse image search.
2. Project the two images on the screen and ask them, by using reverse image search, to determine whether the picture in the news item matches the text in the news item - ie.to find out if and where these pictures have been published originally on the Internet.
3. Discuss the results. In both examples, the photos used in the articles are examples of misleading content.

Electro mobiles – the biggest scam in the world

People protest against the Monument of the Soviet Army demolishment

Activity: Fact checking: lateral reading

People primarily approach information by "**reading vertically**" – reading the entire article before trying to figure out whether it is credible, basing that decision on the content of the source, as opposed to who wrote the article and how/where it was published. Conversely, fact-checkers tend to approach information by "**reading laterally**" – opening new tabs to search the Internet for additional information related to what they originally saw. This process is meant to validate or refute the original information. After reviewing additional sources, the fact-checker returns to the original information to examine it more closely for validity. This process is time consuming – a resource we can't employ every time we come across information.

Learning objectives: To practice lateral reading and find the deficits of vertical reading when analyse sites and sources

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access, medical news; Handout

---

Procedure:

1. Explain what "lateral reading" is; provide *Handout* about lateral reading. Divide the students into 2 groups. Take medical information from the Internet and give it to all students to read it. Below are given links to a few examples.
2. Instruct the first group that this is a suspicious medical site and they have to find reasons why we know that it is not reliable. They have 2 minutes to find out the reasons why this site is suspicious.
3. Tell the second group that this is one of the most reputable sites for medical information for the public. Students have to find the reasons why this site can be trusted.
4. Every group will share their reasons. Discuss with participants their approaches to source evaluation.
5. Introduce them to the concept of lateral reading. Then ask students to practice lateral reading using the steps above.

Example resources for medical news:

- https://www.bmj.com/
- https://nauka.offnews.bg/meditcina/
- https://nauka.offnews.bg/meditcina/sazdadeni-sa-gmo-kozhni-bakterii-koito-mogat-da-lekuvat-akne-199969.html
- https://www.meteobalkans.com/novini/ekstremni-sabitiq/paradoks-ucheni-tvardqt-che-prez-2025-g-evropa-shte-zamrazne-zaradi-globalnoto-zatoplqne

What does "Reading laterally" mean?

Good fact-checkers read "laterally," across many connected sites instead of digging deep into the site at hand. The way they analyse the author's qualifications or the trustworthiness of the site includes lateral reading (as opposed to vertical reading) which is the act of verifying what they're reading as they're reading it.[21]

While most people read a new site by looking around the site and try to find out what the site says about itself by going to the "about page," clicking around in onsite author biographies, or scrolling up and down the page. This is a faulty strategy for two reasons. First, if the site is untrustworthy, then what the site says about itself is most likely untrustworthy, as well. And, even if the site is generally trustworthy, it is inclined to paint the most favourable picture of its expertise and credibility possible. Lateral reading helps you determine an author's credibility, intent and biases by searching for articles on the same topic by other writers (to see how they are covering it) and for other articles by the author you're checking on. The professional fact-checkers ask questions like:

- Who funds or sponsors the site where the original piece of information was published? What do other authoritative sources have to say about that site?
- Are the original texts or initial results from fact-checking organisations?
- Have questions been raised about other articles the author has written?
- Does what you're finding elsewhere contradict the original piece?

[21] https://newslit.org/tips-tools/expand-your-view-with-lateral-reading/

- Are credible news outlets reporting on (or *not* reporting on) what you're reading?

Lateral reading helps the reader understand both the perspective from which the site's analyses come and if the site has an editorial process or expert reputation that would allow one to accept the truth of a site's facts If other reliable sources confirm what you're reading, you can feel confident about its credibility. The so called 'SIFT steps' are used to find information about the source that isn't from the source:

Stop.

Investigate the source: What can you find online? What do others say about this source? Does this scholarly article have any associated commentary, editorials, or corrections? Has it been retracted? Where does this source fall on the political spectrum? Has it been investigated by fact checkers? Who funds the source?

Find other coverage: Did you find other sources on the same question or topic? Are those sources in consensus with the source you originally found, or do they have different information? What are other websites or organisations saying about this new source? How does this new coverage put your original source in context?

Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context: Trace the content back to their original context. If a blog post refers to a scholarly study, find the original study - does it claim what the website claims it does? Has that study been retracted or otherwise edited in the meantime? Research the claims made on your source. Does the general scholarly consensus agree with what is stated?

Spreading of disinformation and misinformation

Once false material is published online, it can then be spread to very wide audiences through the phenomenon of 'organic reach'. Research has suggested that relatively few people (maybe less than 10% of social media users) actively share false material they encounter online. Even so, this small proportion of users can significantly increase the reach of the misinformation. Therefore, it is important to understand who extends the organic reach of disinformation, and why. The answers to those questions will help inform the development of effective interventions.

There is a different motivation related to spread of disinformation and misinformation – economic, political or simply personal. Viral fake stories provide content producers with clicks that translate to advertising revenue. Some 'fake news' generators promote specific causes, ideas or people, by often discrediting others. According to "First Draft" – an initiative specifically set up to trace, study and find solutions to effectively counter 'fake news' – there are several reasons for the rise and creation of fake news content and why the phenomenon has gathered so much attention, especially on social media.[22]

These reasons (named 8 Ps) are:

Poor journalism: When there is misinformation and disinformation based on a lack of research or fact and source checking.

Parody: Often the headlines or content are exaggerated and highly ironic aimed at making fun of a person or an issue.

Provocation: information is designed to provoke reactions from the audience.

Passion: When the headlines, images and content are very explicit and colourful, the content might be driven by passion rather than precise research.

Partisanship: When there is clear bias and prejudice towards a cause or an issue.

Profit: News articles that go viral on social media can draw significant advertising revenue when users click on the original site.

[22] https://firstdraftnews.org/

Political influence: Political advertising has become sophisticated and targeted. industry, drawing on enormous pools of personal data on Facebook and Google. This means that campaigns create personalised ads for individuals.

Propaganda: Many state-controlled news providers have spent resources on building a strong web presence where the control or nation of origin is masked, allowing them to flex soft power both within and without their countries.

The matrix below shows how these reasons for spreading "fake news" content are related to the types of disinformation and misinformation.[23]

Misinformation Matrix							
	Satire or Parody	False Connection	Mis-leading Content	False Context	Imposter Content	Manipulated Content	Fabricated Content
Poor Journalism		X	X	X			
To Parody	X				X		X
To Provoke or to "Punk"					X	X	X
Passion				X			
Partisanship			X	X			
Profit		X			X		
Political Influence			X	X		X	X
Propaganda			X	X	X	X	X

(Wardle, 2017)

[23] https://medium.com/1st-draft/fake-news-its-complicated-d0f773766c79

Activity: Why we do share?

Often people share news, motivated by emotions. Information that evokes an emotional response is more likely to be shared and passed on irrespective of its believability. It is also known that information that produces strong negative emotions like disgust, anger, and fear are more likely to be spread by people, regardless of whether they are true or false. Once the information goes viral, people become a subject of social influence, more susceptible to believing misinformation if many others appear to believe as well, or if they are willing to overlook their own scepticisms in order to affirm and demonstrate their membership in a group. This activity explores why people spread disinformation and misinformation.

Learning objectives: To help students become aware why people share misinformation and disinformation and build their skills to analyse motivations for sharing and put them into categories.

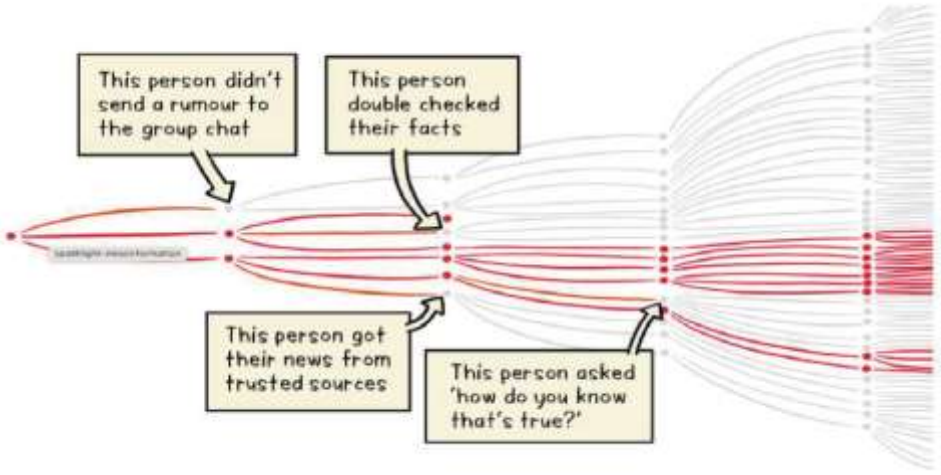
Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and big paper sheet; markers; computers, tablets or phones with Internet access; Handout "Is it fake or not?"

Procedure:

1. Brainstorming: Start with asking the question: Why do people spread disinformation? List all the reasons students share on the flip chart.
2. Use some of the news with distorted information from the Handout "Is it fake or not?" used in the previous activity and ask students to classify them (real or fake) and analyse motivations behind spreading them. Students may work in couples or in small groups.
3. Debrief the exercise by asking participants the following questions:
    - Which are the most powerful motivations for sharing and why?
    - How emotions and social influence motivate people to share this news?
    - Why is it important to think and wait a bit before sharing news to others?
    - How the process of information spreading below relates to you?



Credit: Wiles S, Morris T and Priestley R (2023) Going viral: A science communication collaboration in the era of COVID-19 and social media.

Activity: Is it what it looks like?

The phrase “It is not what it looks like” often used to describe certain situations means that some things first appearance does not convey what really is happening. It’s a popular phrase which means some things are not like what they appear because there could be more faces or attributes of it. This activity encourages students’ ability to assess the accuracy and credibility of information – visual and textual, identify biases and misinformation, look beyond the obvious, and make informed decisions.

Learning objectives: By exploring the idea that, as audiences, our perspective is shaped by what distributors of information decide to show us, students are guided to evaluate the news by asking questions and trying to see full picture and what’s omitted from the screen (or on the page) can be just as important as what’s in the final product.

Duration and materials

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access, Handout “Piece of information”

Procedure:

1. Students are divided into two groups. Each group is shown different photos. The first group will receive a whole image (Image 1), that shows the environment and at some extent the context. The second group will receive only part of the image (Image 2) which has limited or no information about the background.

   Instruction to each group: “Please describe what you see and what you think about this photo, what is the story behind; what can be said about it or about the people in it, their feelings and their situation”.

2. Each group shares what they believe the image shows and what could be the story behind it.
3. The facilitator explains that these two stories are based on the same photo and shows the group the two images. The activity shows how manipulated images

(partially shown, cropped, manipulated, improved, etc.) may change meaning and perception of the photo by cropping out key elements.

By circulating images, the media is portraying reality. Social media with its huge capacity of spreading images may reach a wide audience that is why it is important to evaluate evidence and consider multiple perspectives.

4. Ask students what is their personal experience about images and photos they see in their virtual life. Have they been misled by manipulated images?

Reflection questions:

- Would this activity change the way you use media?
- Do you think that image manipulation is something common in social media?

Piece of information

Image1

Image 2

Activity: Real or photoshop?

Visual information can be incredibly powerful. The human brain is more efficient at dealing with images than words. It processes them in two ways – visually and textually – as we apply textual labels to visual information in our minds. This 'dual encoding' is known as the Picture Superiority Effect.[24] Through pictures our brain accesses meaning more fully than words. That is why images are used as symbols to represent concepts or to provide visual cues that influence behaviour or call for action.[25] The ability to manipulate images using software like Photoshop is empowering but comes with a responsibility to use the technology ethically in a way which does not mislead others.

Take Adobe's "Real or Photoshop?" quiz and see if you can spot images which have been manipulated rather than cleverly photographed.

Learning objectives: Increase students' ability to observe images and learn how to see the difference between a real and manipulated image.

Duration and materials

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

1. Ask students to follow the link and take the Adobe Photoshop quiz "Real or photoshop?" You may provide a printed QR code.
2. Project the images on the screen and ask the group what they think about each image (Real or photoshop?) and was it difficult for them to pick the correct answer.
3. Discuss with the group ethical questions which come with every image manipulation:
    - Is the image that results from the original image adjustment still an accurate representation of the original data?

[24] Paivio, A., & Csapo, K. (1973). Picture superiority in free recall: Imagery or dual coding? *Cognitive Psychology, 5*(2), 176–206. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90032-7

[25] https://www.librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/Assets/pdfs/creating-using-images.pdf

- If it is not, can the actions be defined as misconduct? What could be the consequences of such actions?
- Ask students to provide examples of images that are not representing the original data and discuss the effect of their dissemination.

Activity: Fake images and fake news – how to check them?

Visual images are more attractive for the eyes than the texts but it is important to watch out for fake photos. Many fake news stories use images that are Photoshopped or taken from an unrelated site. Sometimes, a closer look at an image is enough to see if it has been changed. Tools like Google Reverse Image search are helpful to check images which are more difficult to evaluate at first sight. It will show you if the same image has been used in other contexts.

Learning objectives: To encourage critical assessment of images and other information coming from the media.

Duration and materials

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access, Handout “Real or fake photos?”

Procedure:

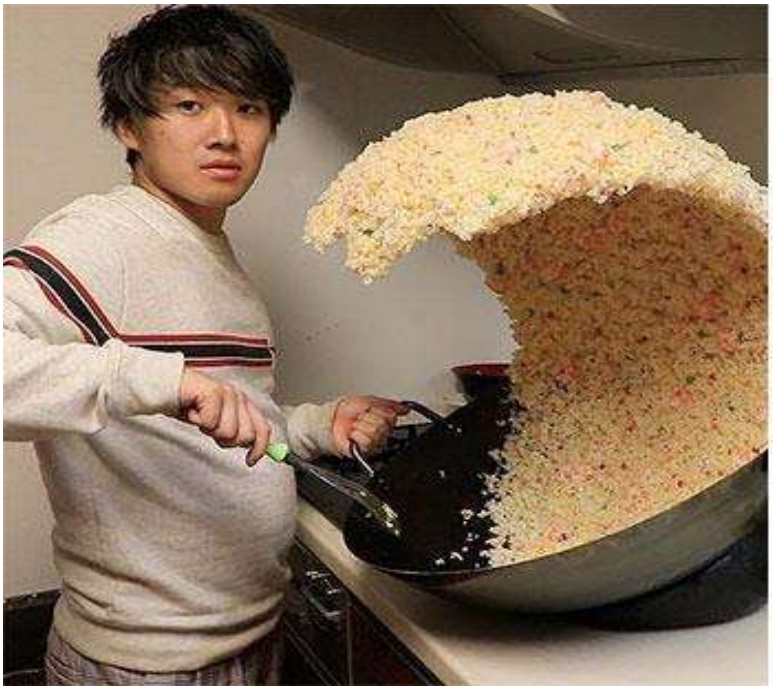
1. Present the steps that can be taken to check if we suspect that an image is not truthful:
    - Try a reverse image search to see if the photos pop up anywhere else online
    - Look to see if any other websites or sources have written about this story
    - Who is quoted or referenced in this story as an expert? Look up their name or organisation to see if they seem trustworthy or reliable.
    - Read beyond. Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get likes; the user needs to read the whole story.
    - Consider the source: who is publishing this story? Investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.
2. Divide the students in small groups
3. Give the students some photos and ask them to write a brief news about them.
4. Every group presents the news in front of the group. Then the other students have to decide and check if the news and the photo are real.

Real or fake photos?

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3



Picture 4

Picture 5

Picture 6

Activity: Artificial intelligence, algorithms and information disorder

Algorithms are now being used to personalise information flow as well. This turns into highly homogenous echo chambers where individuals largely discuss similar views with like-minded people, and fail to penetrate into other filter bubbles for alternative views. While information filtering is not new), the algorithm-driven filter bubble surrounds us with ideas consistent with our pre-existing beliefs, making us overconfident in our mental frameworks and dramatically amplifying our confirmation biases. Algorithm-driven filter bubbles work on people's cognitive biases like steroids, optimising the information they encounter as well as associating them with like-minded people and views such that their personal biases are further entrenched.

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about the way how algorithms work and how media can both positively and negatively affect our understanding of important events and issues

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

1. Explain that human beings sometimes make decisions assisted by algorithms (a set of actions or steps required to solve a problem); these decisions, therefore, are partly automatic. Computer recommendations may have an air of rationality or infallibility and people may follow them blindly. However, depending on how it has been 'trained' to work and on the information that humans give the machines, the algorithms may suggest 'discriminatory' decisions, i.e. favouring certain types of people over others. This is what is called "AI bias" (bias = a distortion of the decision-making process based on a prejudice).
2. Divide the students in small groups and ask each group to search images about a topic, for example: male student images; female student images; COVID images; Ukraine images; NATO images.

3. Participants in small groups search online the term they are working on, using the image option. A lot of images will come on the screen. Let them discuss the first images that appear and what these images represent. Groups record their points.
4. After the discussion of images, groups perform a normal search and analyse the first 20 hits of the search engine without opening the pages. Again, they discuss the titles and write down what they think the engine is primarily focused on. Alternatively, groups can be asked to search for videos or news sites.
5. Debrief the exercise by asking: "*Do you think you would have got different search results in different places of the world? Why?*"

Filter bubble

"Filter bubble" refers to a phenomenon that occurs with many of the websites and platforms: such as Google and Facebook. They use algorithms (mathematical equations) based on our search history and personal information to personalise and tailor their services to us. This means that different users using the exact same search or scrolling through a news feed on social media can see different content. This type of content tends to reflect our own likes, views and beliefs and therefore isolates us from differing views and opinions. When we go online or login to a social network we are generally presented with news, articles and content based on our own searches online. This is because platforms such as Google and Facebook use algorithms to personalise and tailor their services to each user, meaning different users will see different content.

Over recent years, fake news and the effect of the social media filter bubble have become increasingly important both in the academic and general discussion. This has been exacerbated by the perceived role of fake news and selective news filtering in the recent United State (US) presidential election and the British European Union membership referendum. According to a definition provided by Technopedia, a "filter bubble is the intellectual isolation that can occur when websites make use of algorithms to selectively assume the information a user would want to see and then give information to the user according to this assumption."[26]

[26] https://www.techopedia.com/definition/28556/filter-bubble

Pariser (2011), explored the issue in their book *"The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you"*. They described how companies like Google or Facebook make assumptions based on the information related to the user – such as browsing history, location or click behaviour. Then with the use of algorithms they construct a filter bubble where only selective information is circulated. A filter bubble, therefore, can cause users to get significantly less contact with contradicting viewpoints, causing them to become intellectually isolated. Some theorists claim that the algorithmic personalisation that filters our online experiences effectively places us in an echo chamber of our own beliefs, increasing polarisation.

Even in the pre-digital era audiences seemed to prefer reading specific media outlets and gathering information from sources which were close, or at least closer, to their beliefs.

The manipulation of computer code for social media sites allows fake news to multiply and affects what people believe, often without going beyond the headline or caption. This conclusion demonstrates the significant role bots and algorithms, as well as the 'filter bubble' effect, have on fake news production and dissemination on social media; therefore, it is crucial for users to be aware of the role bots and algorithms play in order to counter the spread of misleading information online.

Activity: Do we see the same?

Going online and searching for news exposes us more often to content that tends to reflect our own likes, views and beliefs. In this way platforms tend to isolate us from differing views and opinions. This is referred to as a filter bubble.

Learning objectives: To raise awareness about how the personalisation of algorithms may influence our view of the world.

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

1. The teacher gives short introduction what is filter bubble.
2. Students work in small groups of 3-4 participants.
3. The teacher asks students to agree on a couple of terms which the group will be working on (e.g. school, freedom, spring, clothes, etc.). After that everybody has to search these terms individually, then share their results and analyse if there is any difference with the results of people in their own group.
4. Students can also be asked to use different web platforms like DuckDuckGo, Google, Microsoft Edge, etc. and compare the results.

Reflection questions:

- How does the filter bubble limit the news of media users?
- What are the ways to overcome these limits?

Cyber security

Privacy and digital footprint

Internet usage is now thoroughly embedded in many young people's lives, that is why it is important to raise awareness about their digital footprint. Digital footprint refers to the information and data that people generate, through purposive action or passive recording, when they go online. Given that today's children are prolific users of the Internet, concern has been raised about the types of digital footprint that children are generating and what impact this could have on their future. There is a potential disadvantage for students who are not educated about digital footprints and do not possess the desired skills needed to portray a positive online presence.

The digital footprints left by Internet and social media usage can potentially affect their future careers or job prospects. Increasingly, media stories detail instances where individuals have lost their jobs or been discounted from higher education programs, based on content found on their social media accounts. Children and teenagers are building a much larger and more diverse digital identity than any other group previously, as they are online from a much younger age.

There are two types of digital footprint: passive and active. A passive digital footprint is a data trail or information path which users inadvertently leave online. For instance, when the user visits a website, the IP address may be logged on to the web server, which then identifies the Internet service provider and user 's approximate location. Although the IP address may change and does not include any personal data, it still remains part of users' digital footprint. Search history saved by search engines is a more private element of the passive digital footprint.

An active digital footprint involves information that users submit online deliberately. Examples include sending emails as users expect other individuals to view and/or save information. The more emails have been sent, the more digital footprint grows. Since most people save their email online, the emails can stay online for years.

Activity: Leaving a digital footprint

Although young people are frequently online, they do not consciously consider how their usage affects their digital identity, focusing instead on the short-term benefits of being able to network with friends. Communicating with others via social networking is a popular use of the Internet. This contributes towards an individual's online identity and the development of a person's digital footprint – the traceable data and information that people produce when they go online.

Learning objectives: To demonstrate how difficult it is to track down and deal with each and every piece of information once it has been shared online.

Duration and materials

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: A computer, tablet or phone with Internet access

Procedure:

In this activity students will use paper copies of a piece of shared information and hide them around the classroom: the classroom metaphorically represents the Internet.

1. The teacher asks one student, the "sharer", to write something (of their choice) on the board: it could be a word, a phrase, or trivia about themselves, then they leave the room.
2. Other students, the "re-sharers", will copy what was written on the board onto a piece of paper. They will have thirty seconds to copy and hide their slips of paper anywhere in the classroom. They may make and hide as many copies as they can produce in the given time.
3. After thirty seconds, the teacher invites the sharer to come back in. The sharer has then three minutes to find every copy of the information he/she wrote on the board. In the meanwhile, the re-sharers can still keep writing and hiding pieces of paper with the same information.
4. The teacher will lead the closing discussion and make students reflect about the consequences of sharing private information online. Discuss that there are various online threats such as phishing, social engineering, malware or cyber bullying. Phishing tricks users into providing personal information by phishers. Social

engineering plays with people's emotions, targeting people by using their interests ("you have won a gift card to your favourite store"). Students need to learn how to recognise scams and con artists. Malware is harmful software (virus, spyware) installed when the user clicks on a dangerous link. The employment of computer malware may turn to monitoring of home networks, identity theft or other exploitative activities. Cyber bullying via social media is characterised by persistent displays of aggressive conduct, such as making hurtful or threatening remarks.

Reflection questions: What are the risks of sharing private information through the Internet? What kind of measures can be taken to improve privacy protection? Discuss the "Cyber security tips for students".

Handout

Cybersecurity Tips

1. Always opt for Two-Factor Authentication: Through the use of two levels of protection, even if a hacker is successful in guessing your password, your account will still be protected by the third tier of security.

2. Double check while clicking on any website or pop-up: Never click on dubious links given by strangers and stay away from messages coming from someone you don't know. Before clicking on a URL, be sure it is secure and encrypted.

3. Use strong passwords: Use only secure, one-of-a-kind passwords difficult to decipher.

4. Check the relevance of the software updates: Not all software patches and updates add new functionality. It is important to run updates frequently.

5. Only access secured websites: Check to see if the website is secured and safe. Visit websites with URLs that start with “https”.

6. Social media should be secured: Make sure the passwords on your social media accounts are strong. Don't quickly click on sources given on social media sites or add unfamiliar persons to your lists. Maintain regular account monitoring so you can look out for and report any unusual activity.

7. Securely connect: Connect only to private networks whenever feasible, especially while working with sensitive data.

8. Always back up data: Always maintain a copy of your data on hand. Dangerous threats and hackers may just wish to encrypt or delete your data rather than steal it. Back it up.

9. Be aware of phishing scams: Avoiding emails from unknown senders, checking for grammatical mistakes or other suspicious-looking discrepancies, and hovering over any links you get to confirm their destination are the best ways to guard against phishing schemes.

3. Debunking conspiracy theories

Objectives of this chapter:

- To introduce conspiracy thinking, its characteristics and ways to confront it.
- To equip students with knowledge and skills to identify conspiracy theories and factors which contribute to their popularity.
- To empower students with knowledge and skills how to tell the difference between conspiracy theory and truthful information.
- To build students' skills to debunk popular conspiracy theories about climate change and COVID-19.

Contents of this chapter:

- What is conspiracy theory?
- Why are conspiracy theories popular?
- Traits of conspiratorial thinking
- Protecting the public against conspiracy theories
- How to talk to a conspiracy theorist?
- Activity: Is this a conspiracy theory?
- Activity: COVID-19 conspiracy theories

What is a conspiracy theory?

A conspiracy theory is an explanation for an event or situation that asserts the existence of a conspiracy by powerful and sinister groups, often political in motivation, when other explanations are more probable.[27]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the European commission paid special attention to the conspiracy theories due to their harmful and misleading nature. A conspiracy theory is defined as "*the belief that certain events or situations are secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful forces with negative intent*."[28]

Conspiracy theories are described by these 6 features:

1. An alleged, secret plot.
2. A group of conspirators.
3. 'Evidence' that seems to support the conspiracy theory.
4. They falsely suggest that nothing happens by accident and that there are no coincidences; nothing is as it appears and everything is connected.
5. They divide the world into good or bad.
6. They scapegoat people and groups.

Could such a theory be harmful?

Stephan Lewandowsky, John Cook explain how conspiracy theories damage society in a number of ways.[29] Conspiracy theories that gain widespread credence can be very dangerous. For example, if enough people start to believe that COVID-19 is not a real virus, they will stop trusting scientific authorities and governments trying to curb the pandemic. They may even contribute to its spread if they cease obeying social distancing and quarantine measures.

A few cell phone towers in the United Kingdom have been set on fire, possibly by people believing the 5G conspiracy theory. Not only has this criminal damage taken up valuable time of law enforcement, but the resulting cell phone outages could

[27] *Goertzel, Ted (December 1994). "Belief in conspiracy theories".* Political Psychology*,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 731-742, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791630
[28] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en
[29] Stephan Lewandowsky, John Cook, The Conspiracy Theory Handbook, 2020.

hamper the work of health services and police during the pandemic. Any failure of communications technologies is especially damaging for people isolated at home.

Unfortunately, celebrities, or people with large audiences, with large followings can contribute to the spread of conspiracy theories. Such messages end up doing immense damage to international efforts to tackle the coronavirus epidemic, and the people who spread them could therefore find themselves responsible for additional avoidable deaths.

Why are conspiracy theories popular?

Feeling of powerlessness. People who feel powerless or vulnerable are more likely to endorse and spread conspiracy theories. This is seen in online forums where people's perceived level of threat is strongly linked to proposing conspiracy theories.

Explaining unlikely events. For the same reason, people tend to propose conspiratorial explanations for events that are highly unlikely. Conspiracy theories act as a coping mechanism to help people handle uncertainty.

Coping with threats. Conspiracy theories allow people to cope with threatening events by focusing blame on a set of conspirators. People find it difficult to accept that "big" events can have an ordinary cause. A conspiracy theory satisfies the need for a "big" event to have a big cause.

Disputing mainstream politics. Conspiracy theories are used to dispute mainstream political interpretations. Conspiratorial groups often use such narratives to claim minority status.

Conspiracy theories aren't always the result of genuinely held false beliefs. They can be intentionally constructed or amplified for strategic, political reasons. Others deliberately want to provoke, manipulate or target people for political or financial reasons.

Traits of conspiratorial thinking

Psychologists find out that conspiracy theorists are not necessarily ‘mentally unwell’, but often resort to conspiracy theories to fulfil unmet needs and rationalise distress. The conspiratorial thinking is a product of both motivational and personality factors. Like many others, people with conspiratorial thinking have a need to understand and feel secure in their environment but what makes them distinct from others and a sense of superiority over others as a key driver. In addition, personality traits such as paranoia, insecurity, impulsivity, and egocentrism were found to be common among conspiracy theorists.[30] Overall, researchers found out that the strongest correlates of conspiratorial ideation pertained to (a) perceiving danger and threat, (b) relying on intuition (not facts) and having odd beliefs and experiences, and (c) being antagonistic and acting superior. Social identity motives and a desire for uniqueness were found to be stronger factors. It is clear that conspiratorial thinking is complicated, and that there are important and diverse variables that should be explored in the relations among conspiratorial thinking, motivation and personality to understand the overall psychology behind conspiratorial ideas.

Here are some common traits of conspiratorial thinking:

Contradictory. Conspiracy theorists can simultaneously believe in ideas that are mutually contradictory. For example, believing the theory that Princess Diana was murdered but also believing that she faked her own death. This is because the theorists’ commitment to disbelieving the official account is so absolute, it doesn’t matter if their belief system is incoherent.

Overriding suspicion. Conspiratorial thinking involves a nihilistic degree of scepticism towards the official account. This extreme degree of suspicion prevents belief in anything that doesn’t fit into the conspiracy theory.

Nefarious intent. The motivations behind any presumed conspiracy are invariably assumed to be nefarious. Conspiracy theories never propose that the presumed conspirators have benign motivations.

[30] The Psychology of Conspiracy Theorists: More Than Just Paranoia, Featured Neuroscience Psychology · June 26, 2023

Something must be wrong. Although conspiracy theorists may occasionally abandon specific ideas when they become untenable, those revisions don't change their overall conclusion that "something must be wrong" and the official account is based on deception.

Persecuted victim. Conspiracy theorists perceive and present themselves as the victim of organised persecution. At the same time, they see themselves as brave antagonists taking on the villainous conspirators. Conspiratorial thinking is antagonistic. It involves a self-perception of simultaneously being a victim and a hero.

Immune to evidence. Conspiracy theories are inherently self-sealing – evidence that counters a theory is re-interpreted as originating from the conspiracy. This reflects the belief that the stronger the evidence against a conspiracy, the more the conspirators must want people to believe their version of events.

Re-interpreting randomness. The overriding suspicion found in conspiratorial thinking frequently results in the belief that nothing occurs by accident. Small random events are re-interpreted as being caused by the conspiracy and are woven into a broader, interconnected pattern.

The self-sealing nature. This nature of conspiracy theories means that any evidence disproving a theory may be interpreted as further evidence for the conspiracy. This means that communication efforts need to clearly differentiate between different target audiences. If conspiracy theorists re-interpret evidence to mean the opposite, then they require a different strategy to those who value evidence.

It's also important to remember that real conspiracies do exist. But the traits of conspiratorial thinking are not a productive way to uncover actual conspiracies. Rather, conventional thinking that values healthy scepticism, evidence, and consistency are necessary ingredients to uncovering real attempts to deceive the public.

Protecting the public against conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories can be dangerous. They identify an enemy and a secret plot that threatens peoples' lives or beliefs and spark a defence mechanism, which can fuel discrimination, justify hate crimes and can be exploited by violent extremist groups. They spread mistrust in public institutions, which can lead to political apathy or radicalisation; they spread mistrust in scientific and medical information with serious consequences.

Reducing the spread of conspiracy theories needs efforts that focus on protecting the public from exposure by inhibiting or slowing the spread of conspiracy theories. For example, sharing of conspiratorial climate-denial posts on Facebook was reduced by a simple intervention that encouraged people to ask four questions before sharing:

- Do I recognise the author and the news organisation that posted the story?
- Does the information in the post seem believable?
- Is the post written in a style that I expect from a professional news organisation?
- Is the post politically motivated?

When efforts to contain the spread of a conspiracy fail, communicators must resort to strategies that reduce the impact of conspiracy theories.

Prebunking

If people are pre-emptively made aware that they might be misled, they can develop resilience to conspiratorial messages. This process is known as inoculation or prebunking. There are two elements to an inoculation: an explicit warning of an impending threat of being misled, and refutation of the misinformation’s arguments. Prebunkings of anti-vaccination conspiracy theories have been found to be more effective than debunking. Fact-based and logic-based inoculations have both been successful in pre-bunking a 9/11 conspiracy. This indicates some promise in logic-based pre-bunking, given the seven tell-tale traits of conspiratorial thinking. If people are made aware of the flawed reasoning found in conspiracy theories, they may become less vulnerable to such theories.

Debunking

There are various ways to debunk conspiracy theories, some of which have been shown to be effective with people who are unlikely to endorse conspiracy theories, such as university students or the general public.

Fact-based debunkings. Fact-based debunkings show that the conspiracy theory is false by communicating accurate information. This approach has been shown to be effective in debunking the conspiracy which holds that President Obama was born outside the U.S. as well as conspiracy theories relating to the Palestinian exodus when Israel was established.

Logic-based debunking. Logic-based debunkings explain the misleading techniques or flawed reasoning employed in conspiracy theories. Explaining the logical fallacies in anti-vaccination conspiracies has been found to be just as effective as a fact-based debunking: For example, pointing out that much vaccination research has been conducted by independent, publicly funded scientists can defang conspiracy theories about the pharmaceutical industry.

It is always important to improve analytical thinking skills and ask the following key questions when interpreting conspiracy claims.

- What is the evidence?
- What is the source for that evidence?
- What is the reasoning that links the evidence back to the claim?
- Are the sources of evidence accurate, credible and relevant?

Links to fact checkers. Links to a fact-checker website from a simulated Facebook feed, whether via an automatic algorithmic presentation or user-generated corrections, effectively rebutted a conspiracy that the Zika virus was spread by genetically-modified mosquitoes.

Empowering people. Conspiracy thinking is associated with feelings of reduced control and perceived threat. When people feel like they have lost control of a situation, their conspiracist tendencies increase. But the opposite also applies. When people feel empowered, they are more resilient to conspiracy theories.

There are several ways to “cognitively empower” people, such as encouraging them to think analytically rather than relying on intuition. If people’s sense of control is primed (e.g., by recalling an event from their lives that they had control over), then they are less likely to endorse conspiracy theories. Citizens’ general feeling of empowerment can be instilled by ensuring that societal decisions, for example by the government, are perceived to follow procedural justice principles. Procedural justice is perceived when authorities are believed to use fair decision-making procedures. People accept unfavourable outcomes from a decision if they believe that procedural fairness has been followed.

How to talk to a conspiracy theorist?

While debunking conspiracy theories can be effective with the general public, it is much more challenging with people who believe the conspiracy theories. Rather than basing their beliefs on external evidence, conspiracy theorists’ belief system speaks mainly to itself, and each belief serves as evidence for every other belief. As a consequence, when conspiracy theorists encounter debunkings on Facebook, they end up commenting and liking conspiracist content within their echo chambers even more—debunking enhanced conspiratorial interactions.

Conspiracy theorists also have an outsized influence despite their small numbers. An analysis of over 2 million comments on the subreddit site found that while only 5% of posters exhibited conspiratorial thinking, they were responsible for 64% of all comments. The most active author wrote 896,337 words, twice the length of the Lord of the Rings trilogy![31]

Conspiracy theories are an inevitable ingredient of political extremism. Research into deradicalization therefore provides useful insights into how to potentially reach conspiracy theorists:

Trusted messengers. Counter-messages created by former members of an extremist community (“exciters”) are evaluated more positively and remembered longer than messages from other sources.

[31] Stephan Lewandowsky, John Cook, The Conspiracy Theory Handbook, 2020

Affirm critical thinking. Conspiracy theorists perceive themselves as critical thinkers who are not fooled by an official account. This perception can be capitalised on by affirming the value of critical thinking but then redirect this approach towards a more critical analysis of the conspiracy theory.

Show empathy. Approaches should be empathic and seek to build understanding with the other party. Because the goal is to develop the conspiracy theorist's open-mindedness, communicators must lead by example.

Avoid ridicule. Aggressively deconstructing or ridiculing a conspiracy theory, or focusing on "winning" an argument, runs the risk of being automatically rejected. But ridicule has been shown to work with general audiences.

Collaboration and patience. It is important to approach them collaboratively and to be prepared to admit that they might be right. Rather than engaging in fruitless argument, people may take a purposeful journey together to establish the truth. This approach can foster more productive conversations and avoid creating strained relationships. Establishing ground rules may help achieve a shared understanding of what constitutes credible evidence and provide a foundation for common ground because people have different assumptions about reality. One could even acknowledge that a conspiracy theory might have some merit if some evidence is against our point of view. This can promote openness and receptiveness to alternative viewpoints. Once parties agree to the rules and acknowledge the possibility that either might be right, they can start their journey to establish the truth.

Often, no matter how strong an argument is, people may not change their mind easily. Many people who believe irrational things really want them to be true and breaking this emotional connection may take time.

Other people were never really interested in figuring out the truth. What motivates them could be desire to behave antagonistic, to feel superior to others, to seek attention, amusement, or a familiar role in a family setting. For someone attempting to guide a conspiracy theorist toward reason, it's important to realise that the individual may simply be unwilling to do so.

Activity: Is this a conspiracy theory?

Even though the conspiracy theories are a certain threat to human security, i**t is not always easy to recognise them or know how best to deal with them.** While conspiracy theories are not typically supported by evidence, this doesn't stop them from blooming. They can come from many sources - Internet, friends, relatives.

Real conspiracies do exist. Volkswagen conspired to cheat emissions tests for their diesel engines. We know about these conspiracies through internal industry documents, government investigations, or whistle-blowers.

Conspiracy theories, by contrast, tend to persist for a long time even when there is no decisive evidence for them. Those conspiracy theories are based on a variety of thinking patterns that are known to be unreliable tools for tracking realty.

Learning objective: To increase students' knowledge and understanding about conspiracy theory and how to differ them from reliable information.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: Flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers, copies of news taken from social media, copies of Handout

Procedure:

1. Provide a brief explanation about the key features of conspiracy theories and how the disinformation and misinformation spread by them can be a threat to human security. (10 minutes)
2. Ask students to divide in small groups and look at a specific type of disinformation spread by conspiracy theories regarding climate change. Some examples are given in Handout but students may look for other stories on the Internet. Ask them the following questions to discuss:
    - What are the interests behind the conspiracy theory?
    - Why can these widespread beliefs be named conspiracy theories?

- How does this conspiracy theory create obstacles to climate solutions?
- How is this conspiracy theory a threat to human security?

3. Students present the results of their group work in a plenary session (15 minutes)
4. Question for reflection:
    - How do climate related conspiracy theories evolve from climate denial to man-made climate changes to attacks against climate solutions?

True or False?

1. Climate change is a scam

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Such shifts can be natural, due to changes in the sun's activity or large volcanic eruptions. But since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. But many believe that global warming is a scam and the threats are perceived as exaggerated or overblown. According to one such extreme belief, climate change is a myth used by scientists in order to obtain financial support for their projects, as well as by investors in alternative sources of energy who aim for high returns on their capital. Is it True or False?

Read more: https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change

https://climate.nasa.gov/what-is-climate-change/

2. 15-minutes cities

One popular idea about urban planning aiming to reduce pollution is called 15-minute cities – designing cities so that you access amenities in a short walk, bike ride or trip on public transport. Shopping, work, schools, walking in the park – all should be at a 15-minute distance. But there is a belief that this is a way to restrict people's movement or to trap people in an open-air prison. Is it true or false?

Read more: https://www.dw.com/bg/15minutnite-gradove-planirat-da-ni-zatvorat-v-kvartalite/a-65289408; https://www.npr.org/2023/10/05/1203893268/climate-change-conspiracies-disinformation

3. Climate change is caused by the HAARP – High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program

HAARP is a University of Alaska Fairbanks program which researches the ionosphere – the highest, ionized part of Earth's atmosphere. But some people believe that all the natural disasters that have occurred recently are linked to HAARP; antennas and weapons allegedly used by the US Army to control the climate. HAARP brings earthquakes, tsunamis and tornado. Is it true or false?

Read more: https://haarp.gi.alaska.edu/; https://www.168chasa.bg/article/4244957

4. Chemtrails or airplanes to blame

Hottest 2023 in Spain (and elsewhere), excessive heat, drought and major fires revived and repurposed an old belief that contrails left by aircraft contain chemicals that dissolve clouds and prevent rain. Another circulated satellite image of a band of high clouds has been used to support the alleged existence of an artificial barrier preventing Atlantic clouds from entering Spain. According to this theory there is a plan to ruin Spanish farmers with the drought and force Spaniards to import fruit and vegetables from Morocco. True or false?

Read more: https://shorturl.at/hkGNU; https://www.168chasa.bg/article/4244957; https://shorturl.at/efnrR

Activity: COVID-19 conspiracy theories

COVID-19 related misinformation has played a role in defaulting control of the pandemic situation. It has become evident that the Internet, social media, and other communication outlets have contributed to the dissemination and availability of misleading information. It has perpetuated beliefs that led to vaccine avoidance, mask refusal, and utilisation of medications with insignificant scientific data, ultimately contributing to increased morbidity. As a major threat to health security misinformation about COVID-19 has become a burden to individual health, public health, and governments globally.

Learning objective: To increase students' awareness about the effect of disinformation and misinformation related to COVID-19 on the health security of communities and individuals.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers, copies of Handouts

---

Procedure:

1. Discuss with students how to differ reliable information from disinformation and how to spot a conspiracy theory. Deliver the Handout "Is this a conspiracy theory? Check before sharing" and outline the key elements of consider when read texts and evaluate is the information likely or unlikely a conspiracy theory. (10 minutes)
2. Ask students to divide in 5 groups and provide Handouts of different COVID-19 conspiracy theories to each group. Each group has to read and discuss the theory described in their Handout and then develop a strategy to debunk the conspiracy theory. Students may use the links to scientific and other reliable sites to develop their argumentation. Posters are delivered to each group to list, draw, make a mind map or express in other creative ways their debunking strategy. (30 minutes)

3. Students present the results of their group work in a plenary session. (15 minutes)

4. Questions for reflection:
    - What are the similarities between these conspiracy theories?
    - What are the human security consequences of disinformation and misinformation spread through conspiracy theories related to COVID-19?
    - Which of these theories have been popular during the pandemic among people in the local communities and how they have affected the local population?

Is this a conspiracy theory? Check before sharing[32]

1. **Check the author – Who is writing this and why**?

Unlikely to be a conspiracy theory	Likely to be a conspiracy theory
• The author has recognised qualifications and credentials in the topic • The author uses verifiable facts and evidence from scientific or academic research.	• The author is a self-proclaimed expert and not attached to a reputable organisation or institution • Author claims to have credentials but they don't withstand scrutiny or are suspended.

2. **Check the source – Is it reliable and reputable?**

Unlikely to be a conspiracy theory	Likely to be a conspiracy theory
• The source has been quoted by several reputable media outlets • The information is backed by many scientists/academics • Independent fact-checking websites support the source and related claims.	• The source of information is not clear • The information is shared only by self-proclaimed experts • Independent fact-checking websites do not support the source and have refuted related claims.

3. **Check the tone and style – Is it balanced and fair or sensationalist and one-dimensional?**

Unlikely to be a conspiracy theory	Likely to be a conspiracy theory
• The author does not shy away from exploring complexity, including different perspectives • The author is prepared to acknowledge limits to their knowledge • The tone is objective, factual	• The author presents their information as the only valid truth • The author raises questions instead of providing answers • The author demonises whoever they assume is behind the alleged secret plot • The tone is subjective, emotionally charged • Emotional images, anecdotes are used

[32] European commission: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en#how-to-talk-to-somebody-who-firmly-believes-in-conspiracy-theories

COVID-19 conspiracy theories

1. Blaming 5G

Conspiracy theories are enticing because they often link two things which at first might appear to be correlated; in this case, the rapid rollout of 5G networks was taking place at the same time the pandemic hit. The central allegation seems to be that 5G radiofrequency communications have a damaging health impact, and that either these are directly making people sick (i.e.COVID-19 doesn't exist and people are actually suffering from 5G effects) or the radiation is depressing peoples' immune systems and therefore making them more likely to suffer from the virus.

Some posts promote an elaborate conspiracy that links COVID-19, 5G and vaccines to a plot to track and control the world's population.

How to debunk them?

1. Many mobile operators decided to deploy 5G in major cities with large populations to reach as many customers as possible before moving to the countryside where the community is more spread out. But major cities also have international airports and larger populations per square mile. Coronavirus started overseas and made its way stateside because of travellers that were previously infected. Once the virus is in the city, it is very easy to transmit it to others throughout the area accidentally.

2. It is biologically impossible for viruses to spread using the electromagnetic spectrum. The latter are waves/photons, while the former are biological particles composed of proteins and nucleic acids.

3. The World Health Organisation (WHO) points out that viruses cannot travel on mobile networks, and that COVID-19 is spreading rapidly in many countries that do not have 5G networks.

COVID-19 conspiracy theories

2. Bill Gates as scapegoat

Bill Gates became a target of disinformation after gently criticising the defunding of the World Health Organisation. They raise doubts about Bill Gates's motives in vaccine development and distribution and those that suggest that he is seeking to take control in a "new world order". These comments implied or linked to theories about using vaccines as a means for controlling or tracking large populations of people. A study of more than 38 000 comments in YouTube content that mentions Bill Gates has shown that they are heavily dominated by conspiratorial statements, covering topics such as Bill Gates's hidden agenda, his role in vaccine development and distribution and human microchipping. A recent variant of this theory, beloved by anti-vaccination activists, is the idea that COVID-19 is part of a dastardly Gates-led plot to vaccinate the world's population. But anti-vaxxers don't believe vaccines work. Instead, some have spread the myth that Gates wants to use a vaccination program to implant digital microchips that will somehow track and control people.

Instagram has allowed campaigner Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to post anti-vaccine misinformation that attracts tens of thousands of likes.

How to debunk this conspiracy theory?

According to the New York Times, anti-vaxxers, members of QAnon and right-wing pundits have seized on a video of a 2015 Ted talk given by Gates – where he discussed the Ebola outbreak and warned of a new pandemic. His warning to take precautions in relation to pandemics has been used by anti-vaxxers to bolster their claims he had foreknowledge of the COVID pandemic or even purposely caused it. The suggestion that COVID-19 is a deliberately planned pandemic is false. The WHO explains the source of COVID-19 was most likely a large seafood and live animal market in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 is believed to have spread from an animal to a person much like MERS and SARS. There is no indication or publicly available evidence suggesting that the coronavirus was "designed".

COVID-19 conspiracy theories

3. The lab leak theory

This conspiracy theory[33] promotes suspicion that the coronavirus may have escaped, accidentally or otherwise, from a laboratory in the central Chinese city of Wuhan where the virus was first recorded. Its supporters point to the presence of a major biological research facility in the city. The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) has been studying coronaviruses in bats for over a decade. The institute is a 40-minute drive from the Huanan wet market where the first cluster of infections emerged.

While many in the media and politics dismissed these as conspiracy theories at the time, others called for more consideration of the possibility. The idea has persisted, despite many scientists pointing out there is no evidence to back it up. Still, even though many scientists believe the coronavirus was originally transmitted to humans by animals rather than by a laboratory leak, others still appeal for more investigations to determine the source of the pandemic.

Conspiracy theory blaming the lab-leak in Wuhan

Conspiracy theory where Beijing officials were keen to blame the pandemic on a US institute.

What does science say in relation to these theories?

It is true that the original epicentre of the epidemic, the Chinese city of Wuhan, also hosts a virology institute where researchers have been studying bat coronaviruses for a long time. One of these researchers, Shi Zhengli, a virologist who spent years collecting bat dung samples in caves and was a lead expert on the earlier SARS outbreak, was sufficiently concerned about the prospect that she spent days frantically checking lab records to see if anything had gone wrong. She admits breathing a sigh of relief when genetic sequencing showed that the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus did not match any of the viruses sampled and studied in the Wuhan Institute of Virology by her team.

A team of WHO-appointed scientists flew to Wuhan in early 2021 on a mission to investigate the source of the pandemic. After spending 12 days there, which included a visit to the laboratory, the team concluded the lab-leak theory was "extremely unlikely".

[33] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57268111

COVID-19 conspiracy theories

4. COVID-19 as a biological weapon

A spicier variant is that COVID not only escaped from a lab, but it was intentionally created by Chinese scientists as a biowarfare weapon. This theory that the Chinese somehow created the virus is particularly popular on the US political right. It gained mainstream coverage that the Wuhan Institute of Virology "is linked to Beijing's covert bio-weapons program."

The Chinese government responded to the anti-China theories with a conspiracy theory of its own that seeks to turn blame back around onto the United States. This idea was spread initially by Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who Tweeted "it's possible that the US military brought the virus to Wuhan." These comments "echoed a rumoured conspiracy, widely circulated in China, that US military personnel had brought the virus to China during their participation in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan last October." For China, as the Atlantic reported, this conspiracy theory, and an accompanying attempt to rename COVID the "USA virus,"' was a transparent "geopolitical ploy" — useful for domestic propaganda but not widely believed internationally.

***Amazon** promotes the far-right Canadian Rebel Media anonymous publication about COVID-19 as a "biological weapon created by the world elites".*

How to debunk this theory?

This theory can be easily debunked now that there is unambiguous scientific evidence – thanks to genetic sequencing – that the SARS-CoV-2 virus has entirely natural origins as a zoonotic virus originating in bats. The Examiner has since added a correction at the top of the original piece admitting the story is probably false.

COVID-19 Conspiracy theories

4. COVID-19 doesn't exist, death rates are being inflated

According to professional conspiracy theorists like David Icke and Alex Jones' InfoWars, COVID-19 doesn't actually exist, but is a plot by the globalist elite to take away our freedoms. Early weaker versions of this theory were prevalent on the political right in the notion that the novel coronavirus would be "no worse than flu" and later versions are now influencing anti-lockdown protests in many countries. Because believers increasingly refuse to observe social distancing measures and wear masks, they could directly help to spread the epidemic further in their localities and increase the resulting death rate.
Another conspiracy is the idea that COVID death rates are being inflated and therefore there is no reason to observe lockdown regulations or other social distancing measures. Prominent in promoting this myth is Dr Annie Bukacek, whose speech warning that COVID death certificates are being manipulated has been viewed more than a quarter of a million times on YouTube. Bukacek appears in a white lab coat and with a stethoscope around her neck, making her look like an authoritative medical source. Dig a little deeper, however, as Rolling Stone magazine did, and it turns out she's actually a far-right anti-vaccination and anti-abortion activist.

A number of posts in social media claim that COVID is a "false flag" or "Pandemic" in order to force compulsory vaccinations.

How to debunk this conspiracy theory?

The insistence that COVID doesn't exist and the death rates are inflated have, of course, no basis in fact. More likely the death tolls are a serious under-count. To further clarify the issue, the governments and centres for disease control have published extensive information about excess deaths associated with COVID-19.

4. The role of stories, narrative and power

Why do people tend to trust disordered information?

Objectives of this chapter:

- To engage students in cognitive reflection and build their capacity to think about the way we think, as an indicator that can help us recognise unreliable information.
- To help students become aware of their own cognitive bias as a powerful tool in understanding the power of information and the need to go beyond simple black and white answers.
- To encourage students' reflection on stories, narratives, and the role of power.

Contents of this chapter:

- What is cognitive bias?
- Activity: Recognising cognitive biases
- Activity: Self-reflection on identity
- Activity: About the power
- Activity: What are stories?

What is cognitive bias?

Cognitive biases are systematic, universally occurring, tendencies or inclinations in human decision-making that may make it at risk for inaccurate, suboptimal, or wrong outcomes.[34] In other words, we tend to take mental shortcuts when thinking and when understanding information around us. These mental shortcuts are helpful but can lead to generalisations, inaccurate or misleading information, called cognitive bias.

Every one of us are prone to cognitive bias – after all, we receive too much information each day, and use mental shortcuts as a way of not being overwhelmed by the complexity around us. However, it is helpful to recognise what cognitive biases look like, to better identify when we fall into these biases. This is particularly important because they can underlie choices and behaviours of people.

There are many examples of cognitive bias. Here are just a few:

- Confirmation bias – the tendency to process new information in a way that is very heavily influenced by one's own existing beliefs and ideas, and to underestimate or ignore information that does not support them.
- Anchoring bias – the initial focus or understanding fails to adjust as new information comes in.
- Overgeneralisation – the act of jumping to a broad conclusion based on a single piece of evidence.
- Hindsight bias – the act of overestimating after an event has taken place, the fact that it was foreseeable or likely.
- Familiarity bias – the tendency to believe in information that is “high volume”, that is, if we hear it often enough, our brain will want to believe it.

Knowing our brains and thought processing are biased is important in making them work better for us, and for those around us. Recognising these biases assists in the development of critical thinking skills, as well as in reinforcing emotional consciousness.

[34] Korteling and Toet, Encyclopedia of Behavioral Neuroscience, 2nd ed. (pp.610-619), January 2022.

Activity: Recognising cognitive biases

Learning objectives: Students will become knowledgeable how to **i**dentify and recognise different cognitive biases

Duration and materials

Duration: 70 minutes

Materials: Printed paper with diverse situations (situations below), coloured stickers, blank pieces of paper (1 per table/group), different colour markers

---

Procedure:

This activity has two parts.

1. Ask students to divide and work in groups.

After a brief discussion by the facilitator on the definition of cognitive bias, provide students with a series of situations. Students have 10-15 minutes to discuss within their groups which situation falls under which bias.

Each bias will have its own colour – students will use coloured stickers to identify each situation. Situations can have multiple colours (representing several biases) if students deem suitable. This part encourages students to reflect on common types of cognitive biases.

After students complete the situations, there will be a general debrief.

2. The second part of this activity consists: students, in the same groups, creating their own story (can be real or imagined) of a cognitive bias which happens often.

Students have 10 minutes to think of a creative way to present their story (can be using flipchart paper, enacting the story theatrically, storytelling method, song, etc).

The groups will be asked to present their story in plenary to their peers, in less than 5 minutes.

3. The closing of this activity can motivate students to reflect on the very common presence that cognitive biases have in our lives, and the importance of the

awareness of how these can manifest and give us distorted images or information.

Several tools to overcome biases can be shared, such as reflecting on past decisions, including external or diverse perspectives, challenging our own perspectives, and not making decisions under pressure.

Situations (to print out and hand out to groups)

- You choose only one news source as your information outlet.
- You make an impression of an article just from its title, without reading it.
- You are looking for physical signs of lying and mistakenly classify other behaviours as evidence of lying.
- A referee judges that your team committed a foul and you feel they are wrong.
- You only follow people on social media who share your viewpoints.
- Believing that you knew all along that one political candidate was going to win an election.

Activity: Self-reflection on Identity

When thinking about our perspectives and biases, it is important to take three steps back and look inwardly. Our lived experiences greatly shape how we see and understand the world around us. Understanding the role that our identity and lived experiences play in how we look at and understand others is central in visualising our strengths and biases.

Identity is fluid and changes over time, geography and context. There is both an internal and external part to identity; factors of our identity and how we see ourselves may transform depending on our circumstances and how others see us. Being sensitive to our identity and identity factors of others also shows the role of privilege and power, as well areas of marginalisation and discrimination. Each person has multiple factors that are part of their identity: gender, ethnicity(ies), race, sexuality, age, religion, level of education, among others, which generates an intersectionality or interrelation of different categories.

Intersectionality is a theory from Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer who focuses on critical studies of race/ethnicity and gender studies. In itself, intersectionality helps us to understand how different factors of identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc., are connected and interrelated.[35] This interrelatedness of factors of our identity brings to light the role of our own, others', and others' identities play in how we understand and deal with conflicts. The important experiences and factors of our identity allow us to see the world in a certain way: they shape our perspective.

Learning objectives: To assist students recognise important factors in our identity to understand how those nurtures how we look at and understand others.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: Projector, coloured pens, blank pieces of coloured paper

---

[35] Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf. See also https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality

Background: This is a self-reflection activity that encourages students to reflect on the many factors of their identity, and to consider which ones are most important to them at this moment. A way of looking at the role identity plays in how we see the world is to see it as an internal GPS.

This internal GPS is not visible, but every person carries it. Like a GPS, identity orientates the way we walk and what we see around us. Being aware of the role our identity and lived experiences has a double benefit:

Being sensitive to our own sensitivities and biases and

Being sensitive to other people's identities, that assist us in deconstructing* our biases and stereotypes.

* *Note*: 'Deconstruction' is a term used here that implies a process of unlearning and relearning. Over our lives, the frames with which we look at and understand the world are unconsciously gathered from diverse resources: our nuclear family, our community, primary education, and news outlets we are exposed to. Some of these frames are useful, while others might be limiting the information we receive and are exposed to. Practicing deconstruction and critical thinking in how it is we think how we think can assist in understanding the many other perspectives that exist outside of ours.

Procedure:

1. Start by providing background information on the importance of identity and looking inwards as a first step to understanding the lens with which we see the world, which gives us understanding and tools but also our biases. Present this activity as one that is self-reflective. As such, this activity looks differently for each person, since it highlights factors that one considers important in his or her identity at this specific moment.

2. The identity circle will be used in order to facilitate a reflection on factors of identity that are important to each person. Students will be encouraged to take 7 minutes to select 3-7 factors they closely identify with at this moment. Afterwards, students will be asked to list their own identity factors they would like to learn more about. Finally, students will be asked to list those identity factors they feel have the strongest effect on how they perceive the world.

3. Due to the self-reflective nature of this exercise, once back in plenary, students will be asked to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. A safe space inviting responsibility for self and responsibility for others should be reminded. After opening the space, students will be encouraged to share if they have been surprised by the – at times invisible – relationship between identity factors and perceptions of understanding our surroundings.

4. This reflection will wrap up connecting identity and perspective to power and privilege. Based on who we are and the context we are in, we will be treated differently. Sometimes this treatment might be favourable, other times it may be unfavourable. Understanding the role of power and privilege is very important when navigating through information and dealing with diverse situations.

Design and adaptation by Analucía Partida Borrego based on the Patricia Hill Collins model.

Activity: About the Power

It is impossible to talk about perspectives, information, and stories without talking about power. Power has several forms that go beyond the binary "the powerful" vs. "the powerless". In reality, there are many shades to power that can be contextual, relational, or symbolic. There are many definitions of power, but for the purpose of this training, power will be defined as: forms, relations or interactions between people, knowledge and discourse that create influence, control, or effect.

Power is neither positive nor negative in and of itself. It's all about how we construct, reconstruct, and practice power. Who practices power and how they do so is relevant in understanding power dynamics and potential conflict that can arise?

Taken from Michel Foucault, "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes," it "represses," it "censors," it "abstracts," in "masks," it "conceals" in fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belongs to this production."[36]

Learning objectives: Identify the role of power in communication and relationships and reflect on power's different manifestations.

Duration and materials

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper**,** coloured markers, coloured paper, map of the world (if possible)

Procedure:

1. Students will be asked to, collaboratively in small groups, draw an image that comes to mind when they think of power. They will have 10 minutes to agree on this image and can use up to three words, in any language, to describe power.
2. Each group will then present their definition. Once all students' definitions are shared, the above definition will be used to compliment what was already shared.

[36] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and punish. the birth of the prison*. New York, USA: Random House, 1991. pp. 183.

3. The conversation will then be guided to reflect more precisely on the relationship between power and knowledge – how is it that we know what we know and believe what we believe.
4. An example will be provided: students will be asked to name 3 countries starting with the letter S. They will then be asked to name 3 countries starting with the letter A. Finally, they will be asked to name three countries with the letter M.

Afterwards, students will be asked to point on the world map the location of:

- Ukraine
- Egypt
- Mali
- Indonesia
- Germany
- Colombia
- China
- Haiti

Which countries do they know better? What stories do they hear of these countries?

Part of where there is more information and knowledge comes from context: which countries are closer to Bulgaria, which countries share a moment of history. Another part is based on the power of the country in international relations. How many times we hear of a country, the diversity of stories about it, and who tells them all matters in the idea and perception we then have.

Activity: What are stories?

Stories have a theme, protagonists, and a beginning, middle and end; they carry a plot. They serve to convey messages and make sense of lived experiences, inform how we see situations, how we see each other, and influence what we believe.[37]

WHAT ARE NARRATIVES?

Narratives are collections of mutually reinforcing stories that provide a shared understanding about people, places, and the context around us. They are articulated and refined as they come to represent a central idea or belief. We can call this central idea a frame. We use narratives to understand the world and our place in it. These narratives also create feelings of belonging, solidifying group identities and separating from others (a sort of "we" and "they").

Narratives in themselves are not negative; they are a mechanism people use to help them create understanding. It is important to recognise the multiple narratives that exist within a context, as well as the sources of information and their potential biases. A step in seeing multiple narratives is to analyse who is behind them, and who is perceived as legitimate in a particular context. Understanding local cultural nuances, historical grievances, and existing power dynamics can provide a wider perspective.

Learning objectives: Explore the power of stories and narratives, and the concept of inclusivity. Use an example of social media to discuss power, polarisation, and perspectives.

Duration and materials

Duration: 120 minutes

Materials: Projector, main computer, Internet or USB drive. *Note*: Facilitator must search for recent social media news for Part II of this activity (comments on Facebook or Twitter/X, on news from a national or local outlet).

Procedure: This activity is divided into two sections.

Part I:

[37] Polletta Francesca et al. "The Sociology of Storytelling." Annual Review of Sociology, Vol 37: 109–130, University of California, Irvine, 2011.

The first will present a video by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The danger of a single story.” Share with participants that a diverse and plural representation of voices and people in a space is essential to appreciate many perspectives and experiences. To jointly reflect on what happens if there is a lack of plurality, a video by a wonderful Nigerian novelist will be shown.

Following the video, break students up into groups. Have groups reflect on what spoke to them in Adichie’s speech and what key messages they identify. Once back in plenary, draw on a flip chart or whiteboard a collective bubble of ideas and reflections that most struck students.

Part II:

Taking this individual and joint reflection on the danger of a single story, have participants work on a joint activity in the same groups they were previously in. Explain that they will all work on a case related to social media.

Reminder: Prep search for a recent case that has received much attention in the country in recent days (look for a social media component, try to print out the original news and comments/reactions on social media). The idea for this exercise is to reflect on the role of the media and alternative media, on the potential dangers for polarisation and social division and mistrust, and on ways to combat disinformation/misinformation.

Groups will have 30 minutes to look at the news article provided, as well as comments from social media users, and reflect on some of the following questions:

- What do you interpret from this article?
- Do you believe the language the journalist uses is sensitive?
- If the topic is sensitive, do you believe there is a careful attempt by the journalist to consider these sensibilities?
- Does the journalist provide different perspectives and/or sources on the topic?
- Regarding the comments/social media reactions:

- What do you believe is reflected in the language?
- What do you believe is behind the reactions?
- How can this contribute to either polarisation or depolarisation?
- Do you believe there may be a risk of the development of a dominant, or “single story”?
- What are the main challenges you observe in media and social media, that you see reflected in this activity?

Each group will then present in plenary, sharing in the following three parts, from their perspective:

1. Interpretation on the article and comments
2. How does this contribute to either increased or decreased dehumanisation and polarisation?
3. How does this connect to the creation or disruption of single stories?

In closing, highlight key words and concepts that came out. Emphasise that, like all tools, social media can open spaces for many stories – often excluded stories – to be heard and by so pluralise information and make it more widely available but can also serve as a way of dividing parts of society and making it difficult for people to understand what issues are really about.

Disinformation is not necessarily “misinformation.” It includes the selective sharing of accurate news to push an ideology or an agenda. This often creates an echo chamber, where people only hear part of a story and do not interact with the other parts of the story and the people listening to them. When communication is cut off between communities, polarisation rises.

5. Young people's engagement and active citizenship

Objectives of this chapter:

- To give information about different forms of responses to disinformation and equip students with some measures to combat disinformation
- Encourage the audience to think about the way they would do things differently, and think of themselves as people who can influence change

Contents of this chapter:

- Active citizenship and civic engagement
- Responses to disinformation
- Activity: What are responses to disinformation?
- Activity: How do we react?
- Young people and social media
- Activity: Apps and online platforms
- Activity: Positive change through social media
- Activity: Planning a successful campaign

Active citizenship and civic engagement

Civic engagement refers to any action or activity performed by an individual that addresses the concerns, interests, and common good of a community. Today, young people's civic engagement is inseparable from the digital media landscape, and research suggests that older frames which view the 'online' and 'offline' as entirely separate experiences are inaccurate for today's youth. Young people across the world are increasingly connected, using the Internet and digital tools to build their communities, interact with other similar-minded people as well as advocate, express resistance, organise events and raise funds for causes they care about and adopting new forms of participation. For many youth-led social movements, one of the most important shifts of the 21st century has been moving from what used to be predominantly in-person activism to increasing different forms of digital activism.[38]

Digital civic engagement refers to civic engagement activities specifically done by young people and involving digital media of some kind. Digital literacy, including skills combating misinformation is necessary to enact digital citizenship. Over the last several decades, young peoples' participation in traditional measures of civic engagement, such as voting and political party affiliation, has been steadily declining Research suggests that young people today approach the concept of citizenship differently than their predecessors. They are less invested in 'dutiful' citizenship acts, such as voting, favouring instead a "personalised politics of expressive engagement" such as digital networking, self-expression, protests and volunteerism.

The digital space provides opportunities for young people to engage in social and political issues in forms that were not previously available. Young people are using digital and online tools to democratise and facilitate their direct participation and to monitor, document and report governance failures and human rights breeches. Digital activism has been dismissed as 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism' that gives people a false sense of making a difference and inhibiting more effortful, effective offline civic engagement. However, this view is simplistic: while there is mixed evidence that engaging in online activism may subdue offline engagement, other evidence suggests that in some cases, online and offline actions are relatively unrelated –

[38] UNICEF: Digital civic engagement by young people, 2020

either people act differently online versus offline or it is different people engaging in online versus offline actions. The two can also be seen as correlating phenomena: people's online and offline behaviours are intertwined, and one person's online activism can mobilise others for offline civic action.[39]

Citizens can become more active through three specific types of activities:

- Awareness rising: spreading knowledge of a particular problem or cause.
- Advocacy: an action directed at changing the policies, positions or programs.
- Accountability: a decision maker is obligated to explain, justify, and take responsibility for one's actions, and to answer to someone.

[39] Civic participator of youth in a digital world , United Nations Development Programme,2021

Responses to disinformation

UNESCO's outlines four groups of responses to disinformation[40]:

1. **Prevention:** Initiatives that focus on countering disinformation by helping audiences discern reliable sources of information; identifying and promoting trusted media sources; technological tools; and/or training programs for educators.

2. **Identification and monitoring:** Initiatives that uncover disinformation articles and their sources in the various media/ social media channels to alert the public to their existence and provide truthful information.

3. **Contextualisation or correction:** Initiatives in this category go beyond identification and focuses on inoculating the public against these disinformation messages, including directing audiences to the correct sources of information.

4. **Regulation or non-regulation**: In the context of private sector efforts, this category refers to self and co-regulation responses in an attempt to stop or (at least) hinder disinformation.

The European Union implemented political measures to **prevent** spreading disinformation online. Since 2018 the EU has had a voluntary code of conduct that asks social media companies to submit reports about their services and products. The European Union (EU) has flanked national efforts with a 2016 Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online and 2018 action plan. This culminated in codes of practice in 2018 and 2019, which have been voluntarily adopted by social media platforms and news associations such as Facebook, Twitter, Mozilla, and Google; the European Association of Communication Agencies, the Interactive Advertising Bureau, and the World Federation of Advertisers. In May 2021, the European Commission released a complementary Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation, with an aim to strengthen application of the Code and expand it beyond large social media platforms, demonetise disinformation, empower users to understand and flag disinformation, expand the coverage of fact-checking, and provide increased access to data for researchers.

40 Elections and media in digital times, UNESCO, 2019

The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)[41] serves as a hub for fact-checkers, academics and other partners to collaborate, actively link with media organisations and media literacy experts, and provide support to policy makers.

As a result of these efforts everyone can **react and help to stop the spread of disinformation.** If people see content online that they believe to be false or misleading, they can report it to the hosting social media platform. Examples of reaction to false news in social media can be seen as follows:

Facebook:

- Click ••• next to the post you'd like to mark as false.
- Click Report post.
- Click false information, then select the kind of misinformation.
- Click Submit.

YouTube: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802027

Instagram: https://help.instagram.com/1735798276553028

TikTok: https://support.tiktok.com/en; https://support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/report-a-problem

Viber: https://help.viber.com/hc/en-us/articles/8922694984733-How-to-Report-Inappropriate-Content

41 https://edmo.eu

Activity: What are responses to disinformation?

Learning objectives: To increase students' knowledge about various options and measures to combat disinformation

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: big sheets of paper, computers, phones

Procedure:

1. Divide the group into 4 small groups. Ask groups to give examples related to each of the four ways to combat disinformation and misinformation.
2. Help students, if they are struggling, by giving brief information about different initiatives, such as legislation and different projects to debunk disinformation and misinformation.

Activity: How do we react?

Learning objectives: To raise awareness about the motives and reactions of young people in relation to online content and the way they react to disinformation and misinformation.

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: big sheets of paper, markers, computer

Procedure:

1. Choose a series of news (fake and true) which evoke strong emotions from the handout. Prepare the room so there is a lot of space to move around.
2. Create different areas on the floor by sticking a sheet of paper with different reactions:
   - Emotion – love or other emotions; emoticons can be put on the paper, e.g.

   - Share
   - Comment
   - Ignore

3. Ask students to stand on one of the papers based on how they would react.
4. Ask some of them why they would share such a news or what they would comment? What are some common motives behind reactions, especially sharing and commenting?
5. Announce if the news is real or fake. Show the next news on the screen and start again with the same instruction students to choose their reaction and stand on one of the papers.

Youth and social media

Social media is shaping our everyday lives. In 2009, an observer noted that social media is changing our lives in at least five ways:[42]

- Where we get our news?
- How we start and do business?
- How we meet and stay in touch with people?
- What we reveal?
- What we can influence?

Social media platforms are web-based and mobile technologies used to share information with an interactive component. Examples include YouTube and blogs. Social networking platforms are technology structures designed for people who share common interests. Social networking is a subset of social media. Examples include Facebook and Instagram. There are various social media apps that exist, for example, social networking sites, blogs, Wikis, podcasts, forums, content communities, and microblogging. [43]

Social networking sites are "web-based services" that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Facebook is the world's leading social networking site.

Blogs are sites "containing the writer's or group of writer's own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often having images and links to other Web sites". A blog is a tool to amplify an individual's voice. It gives users an opportunity to publish his/her own view for the world to read and provide feedback.

A Wiki "is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser". The most popular wiki is Wikipedia, "a

[42] Soren Gordhamer 5 Ways Social Media is Changing Our Daily Lives Mashable October 16, 2009 http://mashable.com/2009/10/16/social-media-changing-lives/
[43] Antony Mayfield What Is Social Media http://www.icrossing.co.uk/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf

collaboratively edited, multilingual, free Internet encyclopaedia". Wikipedia has over 24 million articles, (over 4.1 million in the English edition of Wikipedia alone). Wikipedia articles are written collaboratively by volunteers around the world.

Podcast is "a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio radio, video, PDF, or EPUB files subscribed to and downloaded through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device.

Forums are "online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages".

Content communities are "defined by a group of people" gathering online around an object of common interest. The object can be just about anything e.g., photos, videos, links topic or issue and is often organized and developed in a way either includes social network elements or makes them central to the content.

YouTube and Flickr are the most popular content communities. YouTube has become the world's video-sharing site. 70% of its traffic comes from outside the United States and it is localised in 39 countries and across 54 languages.

Here are some staggering facts about YouTube:

- 60 hours of video are uploaded every minute on YouTube, or one hour of video is uploaded every second;
- Over 4 billion videos are viewed a day;
- Over 3 billion hours of video are watched each month.

Microblogging is "as an Internet-based service in which (1) users have a public profile in which they broadcast short public messages or updates whether they are directed to specific user(s) or not, (2) messages become publicly aggregated together across users, and (3) users can decide whose messages they wish to receive, but not necessarily who can receive their messages; this is in distinction to most social networks where following each other is bi-directional (i.e. mutual)".Twitter (or X) is the leading microblogging platform.

Activity: Apps and online platforms

Nowadays social media platforms, apps for smartphones and online services provide unique opportunities to connect people, but we should be aware of our security. By connecting all these data, it is possible to receive a detailed picture of where you are going, whom you are meeting, what are your personal interests, what are you buying and how often.

Learning objectives: To raise awareness about cyber security and online threats.

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: big sheets of paper, markers, computer

Procedure:

1. Ask the participants to gather information about all online services are they using. Students could do this by themselves or in small groups.
2. Every group would make a poster with all apps and online services that they are using.
3. Ask the participants: Why are so many apps and online services for free?

Explain students that by analysing and connecting all these data (their check ins on Facebook, the products they buy with bank cards, the pictures they upload on social media, etc.) it is possible to receive a detailed picture of where they are going, whom they are meeting, what are their personal interests, what are they buying and how often.

Data Privacy Is Crucial to Fighting Disinformation

Micro targeting allows the spread of disinformation, allowing both political entities and individuals to disseminate ads to targeted groups with great precision, using data collected by social media platforms. It is important to limit access to the information that enables personalised ad targeting. When users do not give detailed data on their

political beliefs, age, location, and gender that currently guide ads and suggested content, disinformation has a higher chance of being lost in the noise.

Tips for online security

- It is important to know browser settings. Unlike Goole.com, other search engines such as DuckDuckGo or Start page do not capture IP-addresses; personal data is not stored and given to third parties and no cookies are used to identify the user.
- The software and operating system have to be kept up to date.
- On a regular basis, it is important to clear the cache memory, browsing history and cookies.
- There is incognito mode when surfing the Internet which allows doing it without saving cookies, browsing history or cache.
- It is possible to check and be aware of location and tracking settings; and use a tracker blocking add-on.
- Use of safe password is a must; e.g. including capital letters, symbols and numbers.

For example: Iw2cMYd8@S - I (I) want (w) to (2) see (c) my (MY) data (d8@) secure (S)

Activity: Positive change through social media

Alongside these challenges with disinformation, social media has also been highly influential in spreading timely and useful information. For example, the recent #BlackLivesMatter movement was enabled by social media, which united concurring people's solidarity across the world when George Floyd was killed due to police brutality.

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge reached more than 440 million people from every country in the world, becoming one of the top two viral social media campaigns of the decade and helping the creators reach their goal: Rising awareness of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). In addition, the challenge raised more than $100 million for the ALS Foundation.

#MeToo movement became known in 2017, when women responded to the news that movie mogul Harvey Weinstein had been accused of multiple counts of sexual abuse by sharing their own stories using the hashtag #MeToo. It became a global movement and sparked significant change on the policy level. In November 2018, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted its first resolution exclusively dedicated to the fight against sexual harassment. Two years later, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) approved the Violence and Harassment Convention and Recommendation. This established the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. The #MeToo movement shows how digital activism can drive change in society.

Social media movements

Learning objectives: This activity allows students to think critically about how powerful social media is and explore different campaigns that make positive change to the community

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers

Procedure:

1. Give the students examples of social media movements like #FridaysForFuture #BlackLivesMatter #MeToo.

   Let them search and present some information about these movements.

2. Ask students to share examples of local or national social media movement that initiates positive social change.

Social action: how to build a successful campaign

The process of social action can be broken down into six questions: who, why, what, how, where and when?

- **Who** would you like to engage in your social action initiative?
- **Why** – Having a strong reason 'why' will increase the extent to which your project can be socially impactful?
- **What** – Can you identify a specific challenge? What you will do. You could focus on education, advocacy, community or something else.
- **How** – Once you have an idea, the next step is to putting it into action. Dou you need support or any resources.
- **Where** – It could occur on many different scales – locally, nationally – or offline, online. Where will you be able to create change?
- **When** – When it will happen. For its launch, you could sync it with events happening in broader society or start at a specific period.

There are several steps to build a successful campaign:

Choose your issue: This invites students to think about their community, what makes a community, what they do and don't like about their area that is connected to disinformation and misinformation and whether there are any problems or issues in their community or neighbourhood that they would like to change or do something about. They will start to think about change and how to mobilise support about change.

Setting goals: Explores in more detail what your group wants to do about the problem or issue. They will decide a goal for their project or campaign. (Do they need a law changed to solve their problem or issue? Do they need to raise awareness? Do

they need to get people together and organise something?) They will create a statement of their goal, “We aim to…” and use this to formulate their campaign message.

Building your team: The group will need to work well as a team if they want to make their project or campaign a success. They will take the time to think how to work together. They have set ground rules, and now they will start to define clear roles and responsibilities for each person, decide when to have regular meetings, think about how they will listen to each other, manage conflict, negotiate and take decisions.

Becoming an expert on your issues: First the group needs to focus on becoming an expert and researching the issue related to misinformation. This includes: finding out the facts, collecting information and statistics to support their arguments and gathering information about the other opinions. Where to go to find the answers: the media, search the Internet, the library, speak to other people in the community, people who live there, work there etc. Does their youth worker, supportive adult, parent or teacher know anything about the history of the issue or problem in the area? This stage looks at putting together a survey to find out more information from others in their community. They might at this stage want to think about making a leaflet to tell people what they are trying to do and what help is needed, including any facts and statistics to make sure people understand what the problem is. This will help raise awareness.

Planning for success (identifying resources you will need): The planning cycle: working out goals and how to reach them, creating an action plan with the tasks allocated into NOW, SOON and LATER timescales. Building on their team building sessions, they will think about allocating tasks, who will do what, and what they need help with. They might now be able to identify people who can take a lead on different tasks. They will look at the resources they need to achieve their plan.

Who is in charge: Looking at government, local institutions, media or groups? How does the local council work? Is there a lead councillor for their community issue or problem? Do you know who is responsible for the issue at the national or regional level? How do human rights and young people’s rights are related to this issue: how can a reference to rights help them achieve their goals of influencing decision-makers

to ensure they really do listen? Check legislation related to protesting, public rallies, licenses etc.

Recruiting allies and identifying roadblocks: Here the group can look at which decision-makers they need to reach to help solve their community problem or make their project work. Who are their allies and who are the people that will oppose them? They might want to invite people in to speak to their group, to see if they agree with their ideas or not. Other people are resources; they have knowledge and expertise that might be of use.

Working with the media, raising awareness and getting support: Explore how using the media as a tool may help get the solution to their community issue or problem; how media can help communicate their project out to a larger audience.

Evaluating: It is important to assess progress at regular intervals. Making their plan of action should help them know where they are going before they start. Check back to the plan: does it need changing or updating?

Activity: Planning a successful campaign

Learning objectives: To equip students with skills how to organise their social initiatives

Duration and materials

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials: flipchart, big sheets of paper, markers

Procedure:

1. Ask students to create 4 to 6 small groups. Give them the tips for a social media campaign.
2. Deliver the Handout with the steps how to plan a social initiative.
3. Ask them to think about an issue and plan a successful social initiative to make a positive change
4. Ask each group to present their ideas.

Handout

Steps to successful planning of social initiative countering disinformation

Choose your issue	
Setting goals	
Building your team	
Becoming an expert on your issues (research)	
Planning for success (what will you need?)	
Who is in charge here?	
Recruiting allies and identifying roadblocks	
Working with the media (public speaking), raising awareness and getting support	
Evaluating	

Handout

Tips for using social media for your campaign

- **Post interesting images** – Art, photographs, memes, etc. that will attract a lot of shares and/or likes from constituents and allies. Include timely, funny, or inspiring captions for added engagement.
- **Create videos** by asking supporters to share their stories on camera. You can also livestream events and actions.
- **Share news and conversation starters** on sites like Twitter and Facebook as a way to spark dialogue about your issue and make widely visible comments from your supporters.
- **Document your actions with photos and videos** of your supporters at work on your campaign.
- **Ask influencers to endorse your campaign.** Ask influencers (people or organisations with large social media followings or notoriety in the community) to help champion your message by officially endorsing your demands. Celebrities, politicians, admired teachers, athletes, Internet personalities are all examples of people that may have large followings in your community.
- **Make your campaign** more accessible to people who may not be able to attend in-person actions and events.
- **Organise an online day of action.** There's no better way to raise awareness for your campaign than flooding everyone's timelines with content about it.
- **Organise your supporters** to take specific online action throughout the day (e.g. share this news story in the morning, post a picture of yourself doing X at noon, post a status explaining why this is important at 6, etc.) to demonstrate the support your campaign has.

Annex 1

Historical events related to disinformation and misinformation

Image 1. Circa 44 BC – Mark Antony smear campaign

Octavian's propaganda campaign against Antony deployed Twitter-worthy slogans etched onto coins to smear Antony's reputation.

Around 2000 years ago, the Roman Republic was facing a civil war between Octavian, the adopted son of the great general Julius Caesar, and Mark Anthony, one of Caesar's most trusted commanders.

To win the war, Octavian knew he had to have the public on his side – winning important battles helped, but if the people didn't like him, he would not be a successful ruler.

To get public backing, Octavian launched a 'fake news' war against Mark Anthony. He claimed Anthony, who was having an affair with Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen, didn't respect traditional Roman values like faithfulness and respect. Octavian also said Anthony was unfit to hold office because he was always drunk.

Octavian got his message to the public through poetry and short, snappy slogans printed on to coins. It was a bit like an ancient version of a politician today releasing a book or sending out a social media post. Octavian eventually won the war and became the first Emperor of Rome, ruling for over 40 years.

Image 2. 1307 The Knights Templar

The Knights Templar was an order of warrior knights that existed nearly 900 years ago. It owed its allegiance to the Christian Church. In its 200-year history, it also established one of the first banking institutions in the world, before it was brutally suppressed by French king Philip IV. One of the allegations the king used to completely destroy this banking institution was ‘sodomy’. Other charges were that these monk-warrior-bankers were heretics and secret followers of Satan, and even Islam.

By accusing the Knights Templar of being homosexuals, they were being equated with the Muslims, hence the pleasure-loving Devil. The ‘fake news’ helped the French king destroy this once powerful institution.

Image 3. Gutenberg press

After the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, news (both truthful and distorted) was able to spread faster than ever before. This technology meant books and other documents could be produced much quicker than any handwriting.

The newspapers were fast spread. The first coffee house in London in 1652, prompting a revolution in London society. The defining feature of English coffee houses were communal tables covered with newspapers and pamphlets where guests would gather to consume, discuss and even write the news. On June 12, 1672, Charles II issued a proclamation to “Restrain the Spreading of False News, and Licentious Talking of Matters of State and Government.

Burkhardt, J.M. (2017), Combating Fake News in the Digital Age, Library Technology Reports, 53(8). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/ltr.53n8.

Image 4. The Great Moon Hoax

On 21 August 1835, The New York Sun published a series of articles about the discovery of life on the moon. These were falsely attributed to a well-known astronomer of the time named Sir John Herschel.

The article reported that Herschel had made these discoveries using new “hydro-oxygen magnifiers” and went on to describe in believable scientific detail, how the discovery was made. Bizarre life forms, inhabitants of the moon, were described, painting a fantastical picture.

“Of animals, he classified nine species of mammalian, and five of ovipara. Among the former is a small kind of rein-deer, the elk, the moose, the horned bear, and the biped beaver. The last resembles the beaver of the earth in every other respect than in its destitution of a tail, and its invariable habit of walking upon only two feet. It carries its young in its arms like a human being, and moves with an easy gliding motion.”

Great astronomical discoveries, Lately Made, The Sun, Thursday, August 27, 1835

Image 5. The War of the Worlds

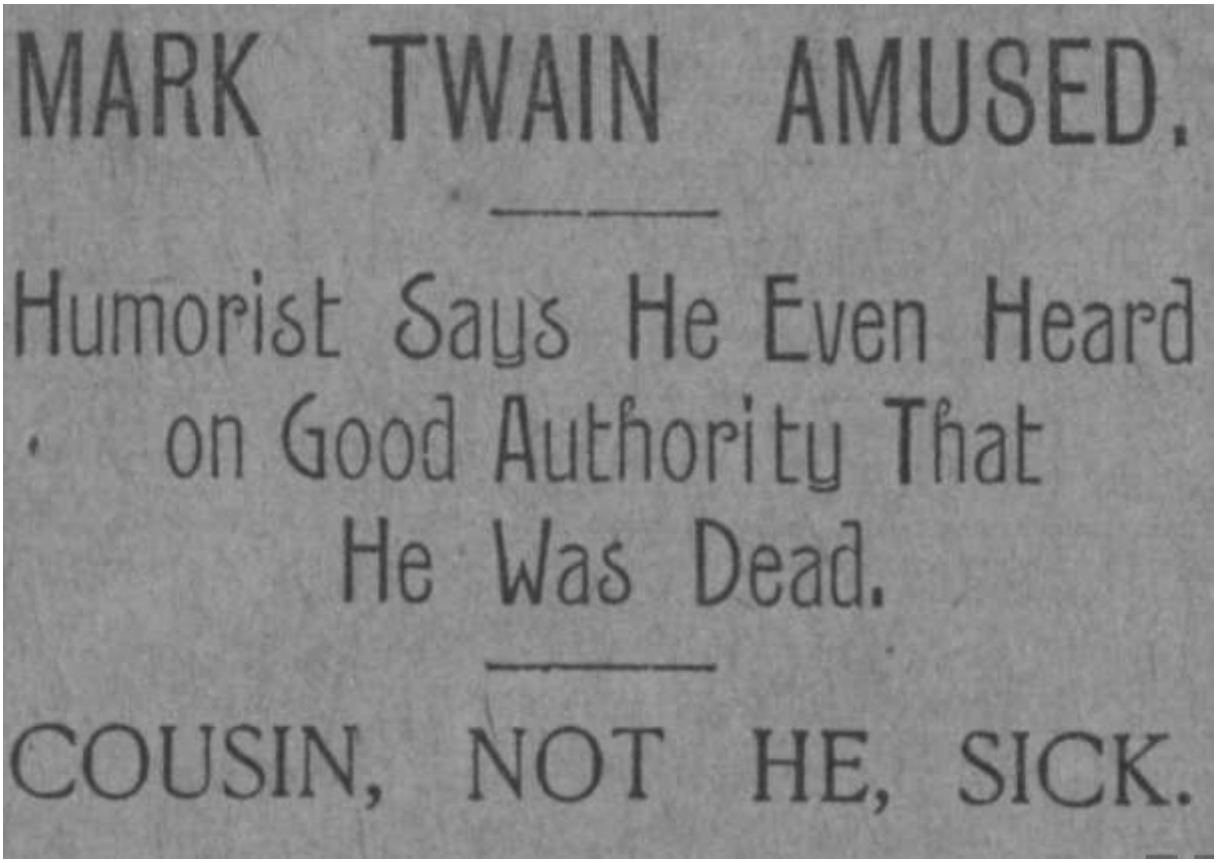
Orson Welles (arms raised) rehearses his radio depiction of H.G. Wells' classic, *The War of the Worlds*. The broadcast, which aired on October 30, 1938, and claimed that aliens from Mars had invaded New Jersey, terrified thousands of Americans.

The War of the Worlds was published as a book in 1898, but those who did not read science fiction were unfamiliar with the story. The presentation of the story as a radio broadcast again caused a minor panic, this time in the United States, as there were few clues to indicate that reports of a Martian invasion were fictional. While this broadcast was not meant to be fake news, those who missed the introduction didn’t know that.

Image 6. Arab men

It is a photo of two men dressed in traditional Arab garb in a carpeted room. They're smoking a pipe. It's a beautiful photo, but it's not from the Middle East. It was shot in a studio in London by photographer Roger Fenton. The men in the photo are white Europeans, dressed up and posing as Arabs.

The whole thing was staged – as were several of the exhibit's images. The photos were taken in the 19th and early 20th centuries, roughly the first 75 years of photography. This was also a time of rising European colonial power. European empires needed justification for subjugating vast swaths of earth, and photography could frame the Arab and Asian world in a way that supported the empire.


MARK TWAIN AMUSED.

Humorist Says He Even Heard on Good Authority That He Was Dead.

COUSIN, NOT HE, SICK.

Image 7. Mark Twain death

In June 1897, reports out of New York were that Mark Twain was *'dying in poverty in London'.* That this was fake news was confirmed by Mark Twain himself.

"The report of my death was an exaggeration. The report of my poverty is harder to deal with. My friends might know that unless I were actually dying in poverty I should not live in poverty when I am receiving offers to lecture by every mail. The fact is that I was under contract to write the book that I have just finished or I should have accepted those offers."

Mark Twain in New York journal and advertiser, June 2, 1897

Image 8. The yellow kid

Yellow journalism, or the yellow press, is a type of journalism that presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to sell more newspapers. Techniques may include exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism. The term yellow journalism is used today as a pejorative to decry any journalism that treats news in an unprofessional or unethical fashion.

Started with duelling newspapers led by William Randolph Hearst (New York Journal) and Joseph Pulitzer (New York World) in a circulation battle – they both used sensationalised front-page headlines/pictures to sell more papers & would publish (largely untrue) stories to excite public opinion. In fact, the term "yellow journalism" was born from a rivalry between the two newspaper giants of the era: Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal.* Starting in 1895, Pulitzer printed a comic strip featuring a boy in a yellow nightshirt, entitled the "Yellow Kid." The Yellow Kid, was a popular comic strip character printed by both papers in the 1890's, when this Circulation battle was in full swing.

Image 9. Yellow journalism

Hearst and Pulitzer devoted more and more attention to the Cuban struggle for independence, at times accentuating the harshness of Spanish rule or the nobility of the revolutionaries, and occasionally printing rousing stories that proved to be false," the office states. "This sort of coverage, complete with bold headlines and creative drawings of events, sold a lot of papers for both publishers."

Things came to a head in Cuba on February 15, 1898, with the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana harbour. The Spanish mine was officially blamed in March, 1898. Later investigations will show the cause as an accident on board the ship.

Pulitzer's treatment in the *World* emphasised a horrible explosion.

Hearst's treatment in the *Journal* focused on the enemy who set the bomb – and offered a huge reward to readers.

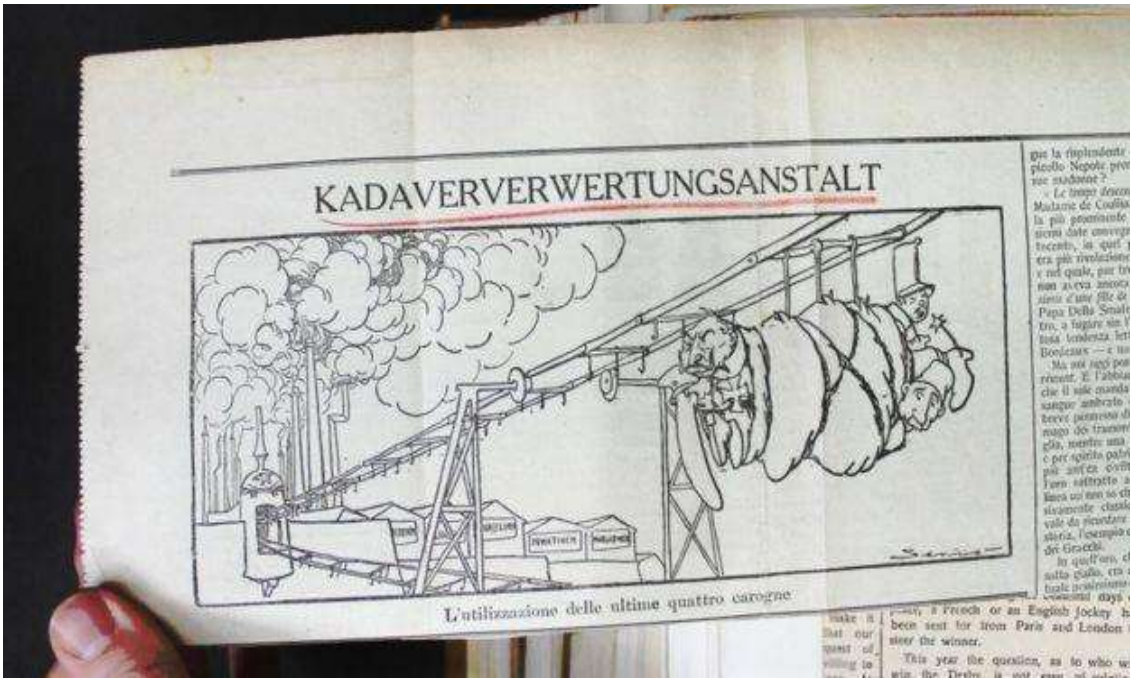


Image 10. The German corpse factory

British propaganda focused on demonising enemy Germans during World War I. In 1917, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* printed articles claiming that due to a fat shortage in Germany, resulting from the British naval blockade, the German forces were using the corpses of their own soldiers to boil down for fats, bone meal, and pig food. This had implications during World War II, when early reports of Holocaust atrocities emerged. The disinformation contained within news stories in 1917 is said to have caused the accurate reports of Nazi atrocities to be doubted when they first appeared.

Image 11. 1939-1945 World War II Nazi propaganda

Propaganda has been used in wars throughout history to try and change people's views. This is a type of fake news where false information is used for political gain. It can help change public opinion by persuading people that their country should go to war, or convince them the other side is their enemy.

Nazi propaganda often portrayed Jews as engaged in a conspiracy to provoke war. Here, a stereotyped Jew conspires behind the scenes to control the Allied powers, represented by the British, American, and Soviet flags. The caption reads "Behind the enemy powers: the Jew."

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Helmut Eschwege

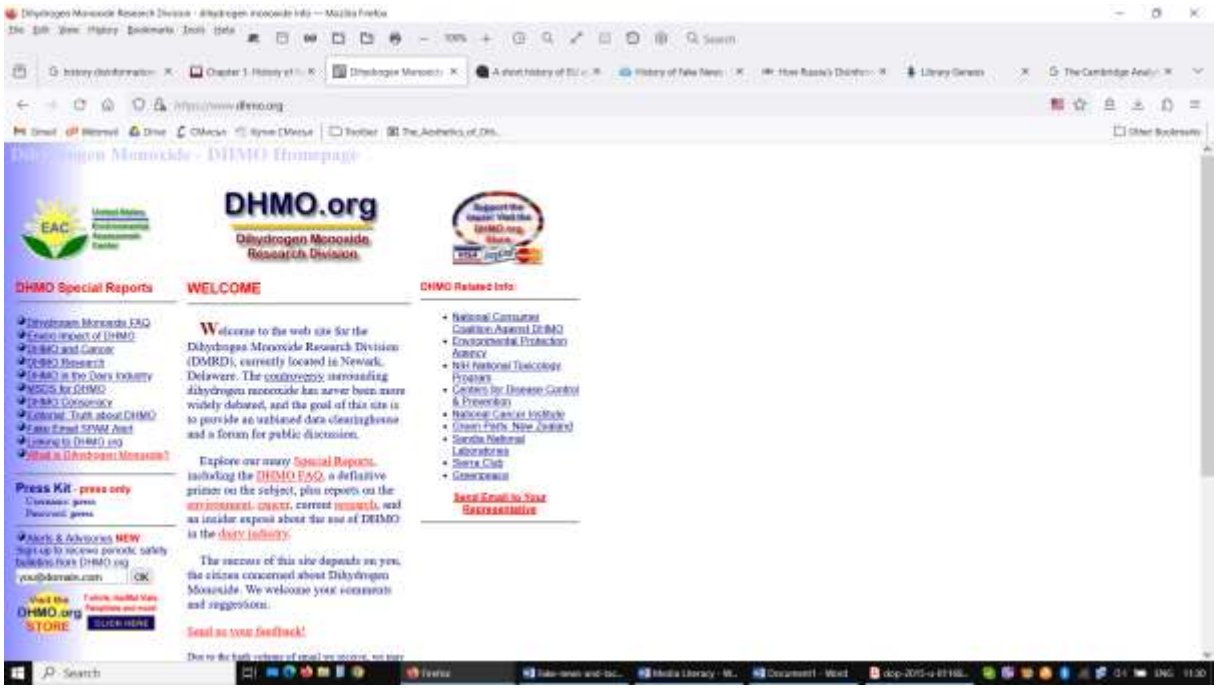


Image 12. DHMO.org

In the late twentieth century, the Internet provided new means for disseminating fake news on a vastly increased scale. When the Internet was made publicly available, it was possible for anyone who had a computer to access it. At the same time, innovations in computers made them affordable to the average person. Making information available on the Internet became a new way to promote products as well as make information available to everyone almost instantly.

Some fake websites were created in the early years of generalised web use. This website claims that the compound DHMO (Dihydrogen Monoxide), a component of just about everything, has been linked to terrible problems such as cancer, acid rain, and global warming. While everything suggested on the website is true, it is not until one's high school chemistry kicks in that the joke is revealed – DHMO and H_2O are the same thing.

Image 13. Russian Disinformation Machine

In the post-Soviet era, disinformation evolved to become a key tactic in the military doctrine of Russia. In the post-Yeltsin era, Russian disinformation has been described as a key tactic in the military doctrine of Russia. Its use has increased since 2000 under Vladimir Putin, particularly after the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia.

Annex II

Is it Fake or Not?

News	Is it fake?	Why?
https://1chas.bg/%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%87%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B5%D1%85/	No	Some reliable Bulgarian sources also posted the news Lock olive oil Spain there are some news sites like Reuters also posted https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/spanish-supermarkets-lock-up-olive-oil-shoplifting-surges-2023-11-20/
https://bulgarian.cri.cn/2024/01/05/ARTIZdM67ZlFguONrN6W1IXc240105.shtml	No	There are official Chines Instagram account that share it
https://news7.eu/787807	No	There is official Instagram account that share it
https://bgr.news-front.su/2024/01/03/nato-ne-mozhe-da-pobedi-rusiya-nyama-v-evropa-drzhava-koyato-da-e-sposobna-da-se-protivopostavi-na-rusnaczite-video/	Yes	It's a personal opinion of a man
https://trafficnews.bg/biznes-klub/nov-byust-podariava-parvata-plastichna-klinika-plovdiv-297708/	No	There is official Facebook account that share it
https://www.tiktok.com/@alion.963/	Yes	Manipulation

video/7306496072132709664?lang=en		
https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=637411945053713&set=a.509534344508141&locale=hi_IN	Yes	Manipulation
https://www.novinite.bg/articles/242479/Shok-Hishtna-skarida-misteriozna-se-zaseli-v-r-Dunav-VIDEO	No	Some reliable Bulgarian sources also posted the news
https://trafficnews.bg/absurdi/absurdna-mechta-dvoika-vegani-osinoviha-brokoli-100151/	Yes	Fake news
https://novini.bg/bylgariya/obshtestvo/617708	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://dnes.dir.bg/spektar/ekspert-ulovihme-izvanzemni-signali-koito-sa-zaplashitelni-za-nas	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://www.plovdiv24.bg/novini/Bylgaria/Britanec-s-unishtozhitelen-komentar-Ima-li-po-prost-narod-ot-bulgarskiya-964860	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://trud.bg/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5-%D1%81%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B0%D1%89-%D1%81%D0%B1%D0%BB%D1	Yes	Fake news, manipulation

%8A%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82-%D0%B5%D1%81-%D0%B8-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2-%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B0/		
https://epicenter.bg/article/Brad-Pit--Elitni-pedofili-upravlyavat-sveta--ilyuminati-dvizhat-seks-trafika-s-detsa-v-Holivud-/132614/7/0	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://lifestyle.bg/mobile/5g-tehnologiyata-i-opasnostite-za-zdraveto-ni.html	Yes	Manipulation
https://www.novinite.bg/articles/186765/Koronavirus-i-izgradenite-5G-mreji-kakvo-e-obshtoto	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://19min.bg/news/novini_8/es-iska-da-zabrani-pravoslavieto-82420.html	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://www.bgdnes.bg/bulgaria/article/6127417	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
http://bradva.bg/bg/article/article-108980#.WOEh6FPyt3k	Yes	Fake news, manipulation
https://infoburgas.com/%d0%b8%d1%81%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d0%b4%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d0%be-4-	Yes	Manipulation

%d1%85%d0%b8%d0%bb%d1%8f%d0%b4%d0%b8-%d0%b5%d0%b2%d1%80%d0%be-%d0%b0%d0%ba%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%be%d0%b6/		
https://www.informiran.net/%d1%83%d0%ba%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b8%d0%bd%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b8-%d1%82%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%be%d1%80-%d0%ba%d0%b8%d0%b5%d0%b2%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b6%d0%b8%d0%bc-%d1%83%d0%b4%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b8/	Yes	Manipulation
https://novinite.eu/napitka-sas-soda-i-limonov-sok-10-000-pati-po-silna-ot-himioterapiya/	Yes	Fake news
https://www.actualno.com/asia/palestina-izchezna-ot-kartite-na-google-maps-news_1482218.html	Yes	Fake news
https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1718192456838107162	Yes	Fake news
https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=484951523669128&set=a.455110916653189&paipv=0&eav=AfYYrj0-	Yes	https://factcheck.bg/rusiya-ne-e-obgradena-ot-amerikanski-bazi-s-yadreno-orazhie-kakto-tvardi-

wiWh3mT2jBZp24kDwSzjzh6_MTnM75kxJgbCSwYY_M1g2LKkynXqC5fNyTo&_rdr		falshiva-karta/
https://www.tiktok.com/@vladislavmakedons0/video/7249255945237318917?_r=1&_t=8eAtr71HknS	Yes	Fake news
https://ia902709.us.archive.org/20/items/altered-messi-image-with-israeli-flag/Altered%20Messi%20Image%20With%20Israeli%20Flag.PNG	Yes	Fake news

Bibliography

Димов, П., Иванов, Ел. Фалшивите новини. Разпознаване на фалшивите новини и дезинформацията в съвременната хибридна среда за сигурност. София: Военна академия „Георги Стойков Раковски“, 2020. Достъпно на: https://rndc.bg/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FakeNews-21-05-2020-pechat.pdf

Национално изследване за оценяване на дигитално-медийните компетентности на гимназистите: Аналитичен доклад. Коалиция за медийна грамотност, 2020, Достъпен на: https://shorturl.at/giAeA

A Short Guide to the History of ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation. A Learning Module for Journalists and Journalism Educators. Available on: https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/A%20Short%20Guide%20to%20History%20of%20Fake%20News%20and%20Disinformation_ICFJ%20Final.pdf

Burkhardt, J. History of Fake News in Combating Fake News in the Digital Age, ALA Techsource. An imprint of the American Library Association, 2017.

Caulfield, M. Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers Washington State University Vancouver. Self-published, 2017. Available on: https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/

Celot, P., Low, F. Get Your Facts Straight! Toolkit for Educators and Training Providers. European Association for Viewers Interests, 2020.

Civic Participation of Youth in a Digital World. United Nations Development Programme. 2021. Available on: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/eurasia/Civic-Participation-of-Youth-in-the-Digital-Word.pdf

Cognitive Warfare: Beyond Military Information Support Operations. May 2023. Available on: https://www.act.nato.int/article/cognitive-warfare-beyond-military-information-support-operations/

Crenshaw, K. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. In: University of Chicago Legal Forum. Vol. 1989, Iss. 1, Article 8. Available on: https://urlis.net/cqsg15d6

Digital Civic Engagement by Young People, Unicef. 2020. Available on: https://www.unicef.org/media/72436/file/Digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020_4.pdf

Digital Misinformation/Disinformation and children. UNICEF, 2021. Available on: https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/856/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-Digital-Mis-Disinformation-and-Children-2021.pdf

Dotto, C, Berkefeld, J. From Coronavirus to Bushfires, Misleading Maps are Distorting Reality. First Draft, February 27th 2020. Available on:

https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/from-coronavirus-to-bushfires-misleading-maps-are-distorting-reality/

Ecker, U.K.H., Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. et al. The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction. In: *Nature reviews* psychology, 2022, Vol. 1, pp. 13–29. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y

Elections and Media in Digital Times. UNESCO, 2019.

Fake off: Training Material for Youth Workers, Tutors and Teachers. Exercises, Games, Tips & Tricks On How to Foster Digital Literacy and Digital Wellbeing Among Young People in the Era of Fake News. December 2019. Available on: https://www.fake-off.eu/toolbox/contents/english/training%20material.pdf

Foucault, M. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. New York, USA: Random House, 1991, p. 183.

Goertzel, T. Belief in Conspiracy Theories. In: *Political Psychology*, 1994, Vol. 15, N 4, pp. 731–742. Available on: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791630

Gordhamer, S. 5 Ways Social Media is Changing Our daily Lives. Mashable, October 16, 2009. Available on: http://mashable.com/2009/10/16/social-media-changing-lives/

Grizzle, A., Singh, J. Media and Information Literacy for the Sustainable Development Goals. The MILID Yearbook, 2016.

How It Started, How It is Going: Media Literacy Index 2022. Available on: https://osis.bg/?p=4243&lang=en

Human Development Report 1994. UNDP.

Human Security. Approach and Guiding Principles. NATO official work. October 14th, 2022. Available on: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_208515.htm?selectedLocale=en#_ftn3

Identifying Conspiracy Theories. Available on: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en

Jacobs, M. Fake News in the 1890s: Yellow Journalism. New York City Department of Education/New York City School Library System. Available on: https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/fake-news-in-the-1890s-yellow-journalism

Journalism, Fake News & Disinformation: Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, Unesco. **2018**. Available on: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265552

Keohane, M. Differences Between Fake News and Real News, 2017. Available on: https://www.buchananpr.com/2017/03/what-is-the-new-definition-of-fake-news

Kertscher, T. The Corpse Factory and the Birth of Fake News. BBC News. January 30th, 2017. Available on: https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-38995205

Korteling, J., Toet, A. Encyclopedia of Behavioral Neuroscience. 2nd ed. pp. 610–619, January 2022.

Let's Flatten the Infodemic Curve. WHO. Available on: https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/let-s-flatten-the-infodemic-curvNe

Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. The Conspiracy Theory Handbook, 2020.

Literacy For the 21st Century. An Overview & Orientation Guide To Media Literacy Education. Center for media literacy, 2008. Available on: http://medialit.org/pdf/mlk/ola_mlkorientation_rev2.pdf

Mayfield, A. What is Social Media? Available on: http://www.icrossing.co.uk/fileadmin/uploads/ebooks/what_is_social_media_icrossing_ebook.pdf

Media and Information Literacy: Policy & Strategy guidelines, Unesco. 2013. Available on: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225606

Media Literacy for Global Education – Toolkit for Youth Multipliers. Council of Europe, July 2022. Available on: https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/11284-media-literacy-for-global-education-toolkit-for-youth-multipliers.html

Media Literacy with One World in Schools Methodology. A Brief Overview of One World in Schools Methodology Application for Media Literacy, Critical Thinking Skills and Disinformation Resilience in the Context of Eastern Partnership and Balkan Countries, 2021. Available on: https://resources.peopleinneed.net/documents/1238-owis-mil-in-eap.pdf

NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (in English, French, and other languages). Available on: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm

Pennycook, G., Rand, D. G. The Psychology of Fake News: Trends in Cognitive Sciences, vol. 25, N 5, pp. 388–402, 2021.

Polletta, F. et al. The Sociology of Storytelling. In: *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2011, Vol. 37, pp.109–130. University of California, Irvine.

Posetti, J., Matthews, A. A Short Guide to the History of „Fake News" and Disinformation. International Center for Journalists, 2018. Available on: https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/a%20short%20guide%20to%20history%20of%20fake%20news%20and%20disinformation_icfj%20final.pdf

Shane, T. The Psychology of Misinformation: How to Prevent It, 2020. Available on: https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/the-psychology-of-misinformation-how-to-prevent-it/

Starsman, B. J. 10 Examples of Fake News from History. May 7th, 2017. Available on: https://www.thesocialhistorian.com/fake-news/

The Psychology of Conspiracy Theorists: More Than Just Paranoia. Featured in Neuroscience Psychology, June 26, 2023.

Ting, CSW, Song, SGZ. What Lies Beneath the Truth: A Literature Review on Fake News, False Information and More. Institute of Policy Studies. June 30th, 2017.

Training of Trainers Program to Address Disinformation and Promote Media Literacy – Toolkit for Educators. The ASEAN Secretariat, 2022. Available on: https://asean.org/book/training-of-trainers-program-to-address-disinformation-and-promote-media-literacy-toolkit-for-educators/

Uberti, D. The Real History of Fake News. In: *Columbia journalism: Review*. December 15th, 2016. Available on: https://www.cjr.org/special_report/fake_news_history.php

Wardle, C. Fake News. It's Complicated. First Draft News, 2017. Available on: https://medium.com/1st-draft/fake-news-its-complicated-d0f773766c79

Wardle, C. Timeline: Key Moments in the Fake News Debate. First Draft News. Sept. 30th – Dec. 1st, 2016. Available on: https://medium.com/1st-draft/key-moments-in-the-fake-newsdebate-bce5fb6547d4

Wardle, C. Understanding Information Disorder. First Draft News. 2020. Available on: https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/

Wardle, C., Derakhshan, H. Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making. Council of Europe, September, 27th, 2017, Available on: https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c

Wardle, C. et al. Information disorder: The Essential Glossary. Shorenstein center, Harvard University, 2018.

Wineburg, S., Mcgrew, S. Lateral Reading: Reading Less and Learning More When Evaluating Digital Information. Stanford History Education Group working paper N 2017-a1. October 6th, 2017. Available on: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3048994 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3048994

YOUNG PEOPLE, HUMAN SECURITY AND MEDIA LITERACY

TOOLKIT FOR TEACHERS AND YOUTH FACILITATORS

PARTNERS BULGARIA FOUNDATION

WWW.PARTNERSBG.ORG

WWW.HUMANRIGHTS-EDUCATION.ORG