



FIGHTING MISINFORMATION & DISINFORMATION

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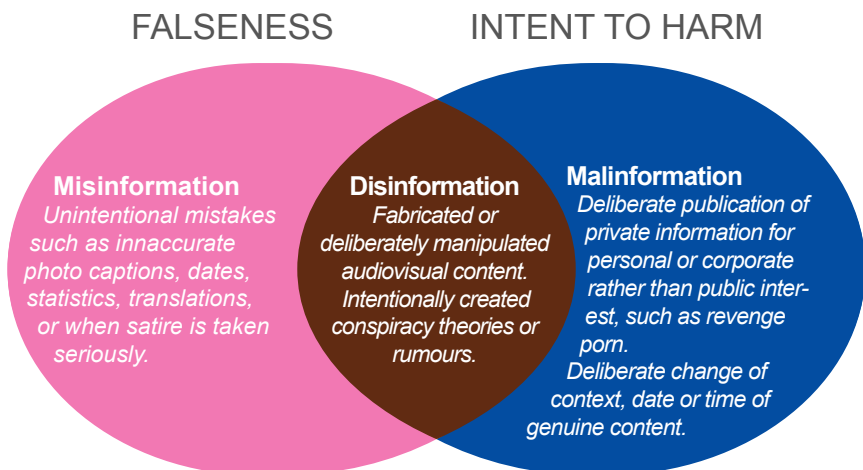
Main concepts

While “**Fake News**” remains a common term, there also exist different terms defining various types of “**information disorder**”, i.e., information that is either wrong in some way, or that is used in such a way to become manipulation.



Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation

The main distinction is made considering **factual correctness and intent for manipulation**, as seen in the image below. Misinformation is therefore defined as **erroneous information** that is not produced intentional, while disinformation refers to information that has been **intentionally altered** or fabricated to mislead. The third concept is **malinformation**, that denotes information that is technically correct but used to manipulate.



It may be relevant to mention these concepts are sometimes difficult to translate in other languages, thus teachers and youth workers should pay attention to what equivalents are used by experts in their own countries.

Other terms and concepts:

- **Fake News:** a form of disinformation (intentional false content) presented as a journalistic product – an article in a paper or online outlet, a news report on TV or radio. News articles that are intentionally and verifiably false.
- **Propaganda:** manipulated information meant to mislead by appealing to emotions. It is usually political in nature, and is overt, not hidden.
- **Conspiracy theories:** an explanation of events that opposes official or common-sense explanations and is based (without evidence) on the existence of a secret, evil plot that connects events/facts that are not proven to be connected.



Why is disinformation a threat?

Democracy is based on free and fair elections, citizens making ***informed decisions*** on who will run their city or country. Therefore, having incorrect

information means citizens lack the ability to make good decisions. Some authoritarian countries have often used “troll armies” to control the public discourse and prevent dissent.

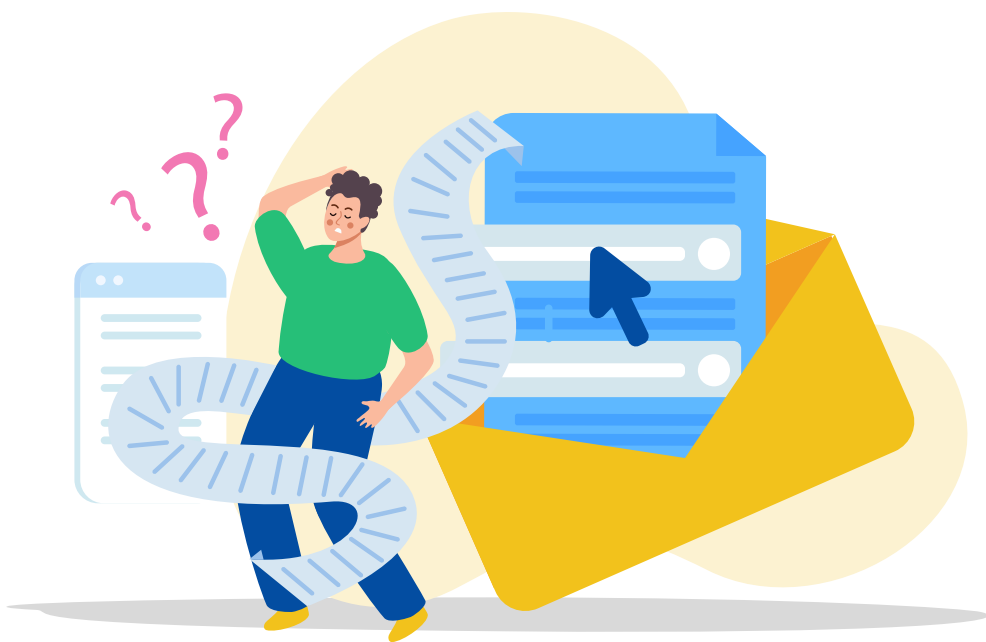
Disinformation is also used by radical politicians to bring authoritarianism, or what we sometimes call the ***tyranny of the majority***. Democracies are constructed to protect human rights, especially for minority groups – either ethnic groups, sexual minorities, or any other vulnerable groups. Disinformation is often used to demonize such minorities and to use political power to limit their rights or harm them.



Another way that disinformation affects our lives is by allowing **vocal minorities to block action or reform**. For example, Romania has consistently failed to pass a law regarding mandatory children vaccination because a small but vocal group protested and made politicians reluctant to even start the debate on the issue.

Finally, **disinformation wastes time and resources**. False narratives often start from real issues but digress toward false problems and focus attention on the wrong aspects. For example, the “#savethechildren” movement started by followers of the conspiracy theory QAnon. According to several study, they use a flawed understanding of trafficking and have blurred the lines between real and fictional anti-trafficking activities, hampering the work of established organizations in the process.

More on this [here](#).



Types of disinformation

Misleading content

Cropping photos, selecting specific parts of some statistics or statements to support a false conclusion.



Example:

Anti-vaccination activists and some politicians have spread the false theory claiming that the COVID vaccine leads to “sudden death”. They sometimes claim they show statistics that support this theory, but the data is not considered as a whole, rather some parts of it are selected while the rest is ignored.

See further details [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#).

False Context

Information that is correct but shared claiming a different context. Usually images/clips that are repurposed to fit a new narrative.

Example:

Social media posts from November 2023 claimed to show a video clip that proves Palestinians are faking the injuries from Israeli strikes. The clip is real but shows the backstage of a movie shoot from Lebanon.

Details [here](#) and [here](#).

Manipulated content

Genuine information is sometimes slightly altered to support a false conclusion. This usually takes the form of editing images or videos.

Example:

a video clip was spread online claiming to show Albert Bourla, Pfizer CEO saying one of their goals has been to reduce the number of people in the world by 50%. However, the actual video shows that Bourla stated their goal is to reduce the number of people in the world who don't afford our medicines by 50%.

Details [here](#).

Imposter Content

This form of disinformation takes advantage of the trust you may have in a specific organization, 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 in order to create an impression that you're receiving a legit content. And it's enough to be distracted or in a hurry, to sometimes fall victim to such manipulation.

Fabricated Content

New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.

When the content is completely false, the only limit is the imagination of the creator's of such content. Distinguishing between the real and fabricated content is extremely difficult to the naked eye. If you have seen any "deepfakes", that can be often categorized as "fabricated content", you know how deeply it impacts our trust in the messages we see.

The importance of narratives

Humans are very good at using **stories** to give meaning to the world around them, and to pass their knowledge to future generations. The importance of storytelling also leads people to make use of stories in all aspects of life, even without thinking about it. For example, when we look at the candidates for any public office, we intuitively build stories in our minds using available information but also our existing experience or beliefs.

Narratives are therefore very important in disinformation, as most active campaigns (as mentioned, disinformation is intentional) involve many different messages spread by different people over different channels.



Disinformation narratives are

stories that are built from different messages that all point to the same conclusion. For example, the statement “Ukraine is dominated by



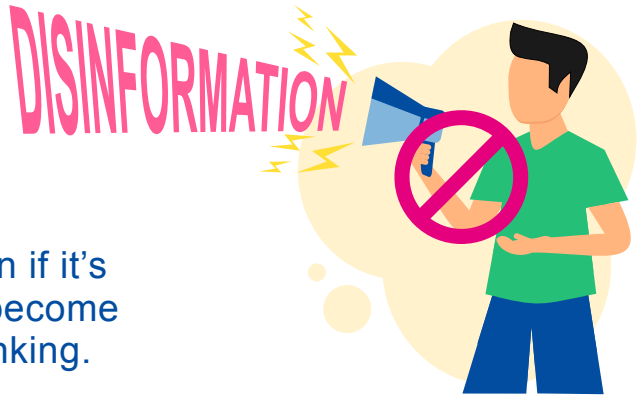
Nazis” is a false narrative. Some messages have stated this directly (e.g., speeches from Putin or other Russian officials). Other messages consisted in social media posts falsely claiming to show Ukrainian buildings displaying a Swastika flag next to the Ukrainian flag, Ukrainian troops wearing Nazi insignia, or Ukrainian stamps celebrating Nazi collaborators from World War Two. .

One important aspect of narratives is that they are built over time, using thousands of messages, getting more credibility as they are being developed (as the saying goes, if you repeat a lie enough times, it becomes truth). The false narrative claiming Ukraine is dominated by Nazis has been promoted through tens of thousands (!) of messages, including press articles, social media posts, and TV talk-shows.

How to Fight Disinformation

Bad actors use disinformation for their own benefit, usually to make easy money or to get political power. As mentioned in the section “Why is disinformation a threat?”, false narratives are making us act against our own interests.

Everyone should consider fighting against disinformation, even if it's only by striving to become better at critical thinking.



Beside improving your critical thinking skills, there are four other ideas: stay updated on local and global events, be mindful of your media diet, don't share bad information, don't be afraid to challenge your friends and family.

Stay updated on local and global events.

Listening to the news or reading articles is not a favorite past time of young people. In recent years it has also become more frustrating, since there are more and more crises, such as the COVID pandemic, climate change, and wars. However, ***not learning about these issues won't make them disappear.*** On the contrary, when people are more informed and engaged in society, it becomes more difficult for bad politicians to impose their ideas or profit from their positions.

The less you know about what is going on in your community and in the world, the harder it is to make informed decisions, and the easier it is for bad actors to manipulate you.

Be mindful of your media diet.

While following the news is the first step you can take to be more resilient in the face of disinformation, you also need to care about the quality of information, not only quantity.

News sources are varied today, including traditional “mainstream” media organizations but also online outlets and social media influencers. ***Not all sources are the same, some are intentionally manipulating the information themselves,*** usually for financial or political reasons.

State-owned media are the least credible since they operate for the government and usually just repeat the government’s narratives. Examples include Russian media like Russia Today, Sputnik or the Chinese Xinhua News Agency. ***Only democracies implement mechanisms to ensure the existence of independent, free media,*** so sources from authoritarian regimes are not reliable.

Some of the most credible outlets are “public interest” – like BBC or NPR (National Public Radio from the United States). They are partially funded from public funds but are not controlled by the government, being run instead through boards that usually include media experts, academics, cultural managers etc.

Private media outlets can be good or bad, depending on their leadership. Well-known, established organizations such as Reuters, New York Times, Der Spiegel or Washington Post are usually more reliable than the so-called “alternative media”, since their income depends on their reputation. For information about reliability and bias of US based media, you can check out the media map published by AdFontes Media

<https://adfontesmedia.com/interactive-media-bias-chart>.

National media organizations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Don't share bad information.

Though you might have not realized this, you are part of the media too: simply posting some information or sharing an article on your social media makes you a source of information.

Since some sources spread disinformation, you should be careful ***not to amplify it further by sharing it yourself***. Especially if some information seems to appeal to emotions – makes you angry, sad, weary etc., force yourself to think before sharing (a short visual guide is provided below). ***If you are not 100% sure of the source, try looking for the information in other sources***, to see if you can confirm or debunk it. Sometimes you will easily find that others have already fact-checked that information, so you can read that as well to help you decide what

the truth is. Some social media posts contain images that may be repurposed, so you can search for the image to see if it had been circulated before. On your PC/laptop it's easy: right click and select "Search image with Google". On your phone, you need to save the picture, then go to Google and use "google lens" to have it search for it. Some clips can also be altered to cut out some parts to make them "say" something totally different than intended, so if in doubt, try looking for the original source.

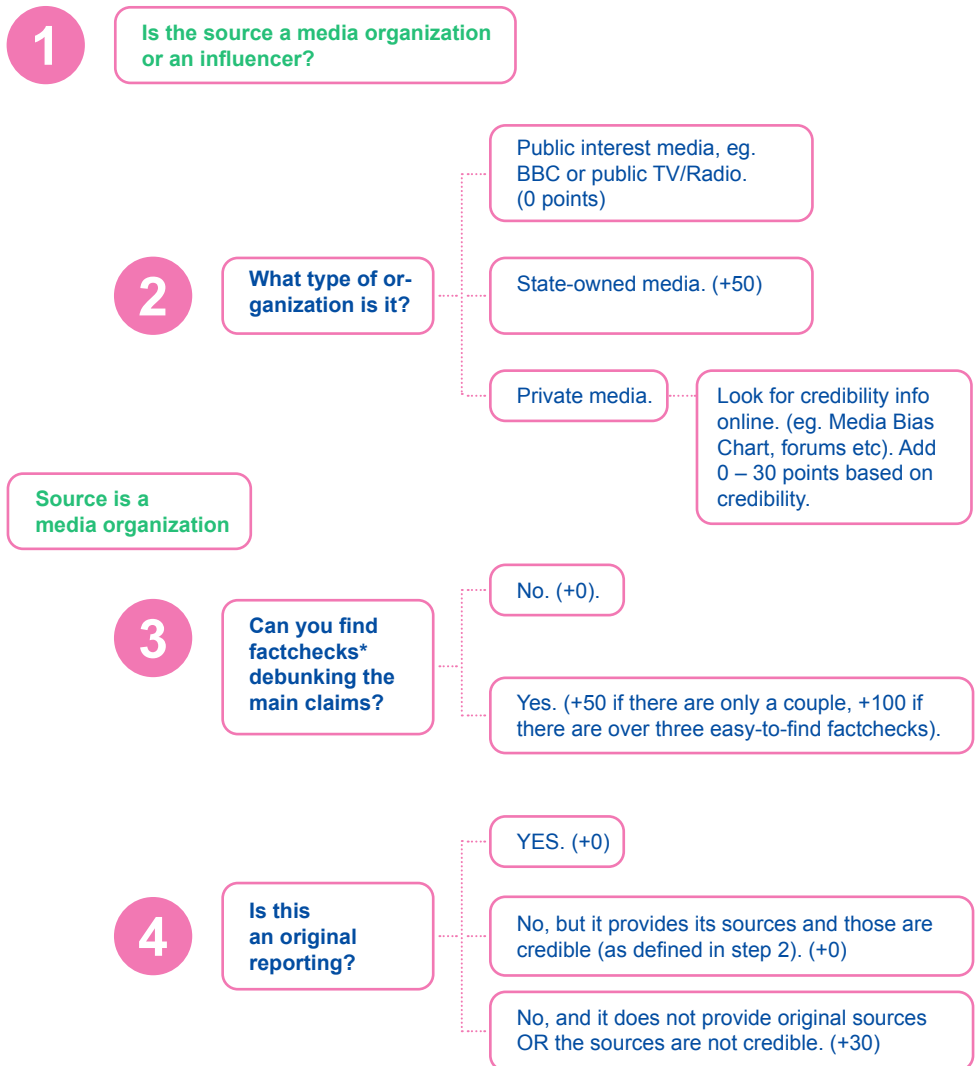
Don't be afraid to challenge your friends and family.

We all have friends and family members who sometimes repeat bad information they have heard or read somewhere. Some people shy away from confronting them, even if their ideas are clearly part of some unhinged conspiracy theories.

You should not be afraid to confront them, especially if you feel you have some good information on the topic. ***State your opinion and give your arguments, calmly but firmly. Make sure you also listen to their opinion, though.*** A good technique to deal with such situations is to ask specific questions that relate to inconsistencies in their arguments. However, don't expect them to change their mind, but mostly to make them a bit more reluctant to spread false ideas any further.

How to Check Information

Follow the question below, start from zero points and give points as indicated. At the end, if the score is high, the content is probably a manipulation / disinformation of some sort.



5

Can you confirm the information from other (credible) sources?

Yes. (+0)

No, information appears only in this source or other unreliable sources. (+30)

6

Can you find factchecks* debunking the main claims?

No. (+0)

Yes. (+50 if there are only a couple, +100 if there are over three easy-to-find factchecks).

Source is an influencer

7

Is the tone & language neutral, academic or at least clear & straightforward?

Yes. (+0).

No, author uses coded word (eg. Plademic instead of pandemic, cou_veed instead of covid etc) or tone suggests a shocking outrageous discovery that seems to appeal to emotions. (+30)

8

Can you confirm the information from other (credible) sources?

Yes. (+0).

No, information cannot be confirmed from credible sources. (+30)

9

Is the tone & language neutral, academic or at least clear & straightforward?

Yes. (+0).

No, author uses coded word (eg. Plademic instead of pandemic, cou_veed instead of covid etc) or tone suggests a shocking outrageous discovery that seems to appeal to emotions. (+30)

10

Does the post fairly represent another information from a different source?

YES, or there is no other source. (+0)

Post mentions a source but misrepresents the main claims or fact. (+30)

11

Are there any logical fallacies** in the post?

NO.

YES. (+30 if there is one noticeable fallacy, +50 if there are several.)

Project partners



Zavod Inana Bhakti
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*factchecks need to be authored by established organizations, that adhere to standards such as EFCSN or IFCN.

**logical fallacies are known, common errors in argumentation such as "cherry picking", "hasty generalization", "appeal to ignorance", "post hoc ergo propter hoc" and others. [Source](#).