

MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISINFORMATION & FAKE NEWS

MODULE OVERVIEW

This module is designed to introduce adolescents aged 12-17 to the concepts of disinformation and fake news, through an understanding of information disorders.

It aims to equip them with the critical thinking skills needed to identify and evaluate information and to promote responsible digital citizenship

MODULE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to:

- ◆ Define information disorders
- ◆ Identify the sources and motivations behind the spread of disinformation
- ◆ Recognize common tactics used to spread disinformation
- ◆ Evaluate the credibility of information
- ◆ Apply critical thinking skills to analyze information
- ◆ Practice responsible sharing of information online

STRUCTURE OF THE MODULE

1.1. Understanding information

- ◆ Concepts to be understood
- ◆ Related vocabulary
- ◆ The role of social media in spreading inaccurate information
- ◆ Psychological factors and tactics to spread disinformation

1.2. Impact of information disorders

- ◆ Effects of information disorders on society, politics, and education
- ◆ Personal consequences affecting citizens
- ◆ Types of disinformation





1.1. UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

Nowadays information abundance around us makes the understanding of information a very difficult task. Because of this situation a conceptual framework becomes necessary for a proper understanding of the information disorder emerged and spread, helping in the task of identifying the sources and motivations behind the spread of disinformation. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) we need to understand three components:

1) TYPES of information disorder:

- ◆ Misinformation
- ◆ Disinformation
- ◆ Mal-information

2) ELEMENTS of information disorder:

- ◆ Agent
- ◆ Messages
- ◆ Interpreter

3) PHASES of information disorder:

- 1 Creation
- 2 Production
- 3 Distribution

A) CONCEPTS TO BE UNDERSTOOD FOCUSING ON TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER:

- ◆ **Misinformation:** False or inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally. This can happen due to honest mistakes, misunderstandings, or a lack of proper verification. Examples: Rumors, gossip, hearsay, accidental errors in reporting.
- ◆ **Disinformation:** False or inaccurate information that is spread intentionally to deceive or manipulate. This is often created with malicious intent and can be used to harm individuals, groups, or society as a whole.
- ◆ **Mal-information:** Accurate information that is used with malicious intent to cause harm. This can involve leaking private information, sharing sensitive data out of context, or using true facts to spread hatred or division.



What about Fake News concept?

Although we offer a definition of the term it is worth noting that this is a controversial term defined by several authors and journalists as absolutely inaccurate: “fake news’ is woefully inadequate to describe the complex phenomena of mis- and disinformation” (read more in Information disorder)

Fake News: False stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke (Cambridge Dictionary). Fake news is deliberately false or misleading information created to deceive or manipulate. False stories that appear to be news. Examples: Hoaxes, satire, propaganda, clickbait.

All these concepts together constitute what we know as “information disorders”. The lack of accurate and trustworthy information can cause serious consequences.

In the process of understanding any information disorder, it is useful to consider **ELEMENTS** involved as explained by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, p. 28, [Questions to ask about each element](#)):

- ◆ **Agent.** Who were the ‘agents’ that created, produced and distributed the example, and what was their motivation?
- ◆ **Message.** What type of message was it? What format did it take? What were the characteristics?
- ◆ **Interpreter.** When the message was received by someone, how did they interpret the message? What action, if any, did they take?



To complete the conceptual framework, we need to examine the **PHASES** of Information disorder:

- ◆ **Creation.** The message is created.
- ◆ **Production.** The message is turned into a media product.
- ◆ **Distribution.** The message is distributed or made public.

This can be better understood with a real example:

[The True Story Behind The Biggest Fake News Hit Of The Election’ from BuzzFeed](#)



B) RELATED VOCABULARY (FROM CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY)

Information:

Fakta om en situation, person, begivenhed osv. Nyheder, fakta eller viden.

Faktum:

Noget, der vides at være sket eller eksisterer, især noget, der er bevis for, eller som der er oplysninger om.

Sandhed:

Kvaliteten af at være sand

Troværdig:

Kan stoles på.

Objektivitet:

Det faktum at være baseret på fakta og ikke påvirket af personlige overbevisninger eller følelser.

Hoax:

En plan om at bedrage nogen.

Clickbait

En internethistorie, titel, billede osv., der har til formål at tiltrække opmærksomhed og tilskynde folk til at klikke på et link.

Infodemisk:

en situation, hvor mange falske oplysninger spredes på en måde, der er skadelig.

Bias:

handlingen med at støtte eller modsætte sig en bestemt person eller ting på en uretfærdig måde på grund af at tillade personlige meninger at påvirke din dømmekraft.

C) THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPREADING INACCURATE INFORMATION

Social media platforms have revolutionized not only the way we communicate and consume information but the way it is distributed and who distributes it. While they offer numerous benefits, they also create fertile ground for the spread of information disorders. Here are some key factors that contribute to the spread of misinformation, disinformation or fake news on social media:

Widely accessibility and algorithmic amplification: leading information:

Social media has fostered technology that allows anyone to create and distribute any content. In addition, social media algorithms prioritize content that is likely to generate engagement, which can lead to the amplification of sensational or misleading information.

Lack of Fact-Checking and information consumption:

Many users share information without verifying its accuracy, leading to the rapid spread of false or misleading claims. This is greatly facilitated by the shift in the information consumption, from private to public.

Bot Accounts and Troll Farms:

Malicious actors use automated accounts and coordinated campaigns to spread misinformation and manipulate public opinion.

Echo Chambers:

Social media can create echo chambers, where users are only exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs. This can make them more susceptible to misinformation and less likely to critically evaluate information.

D) PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND TACTICS TO SPREAD DISINFORMATION

Understanding the psychological factors that contribute to the spread of disinformation:



Confirmation bias:

The tendency to favor information that confirms our existing beliefs.

Emotional response:

Strong emotions like fear, anger, or surprise can make us more likely to share information without critically evaluating it.

Cognitive biases:

Mental shortcuts that can lead to errors in judgment.

Tactics Used to Spread Disinformation:



Følelsesmæssig manipulation:

Brug af stærke følelser som frygt, vrede eller forargelse til at fange opmærksomhed og omgå kritisk tænkning

Vildledende overskrifter:

Brug af vildledende eller sensationelle overskrifter til at tiltrække klik.

Falske oplysninger:

Oprettelse eller deling af fuldstændig opdigtet information og forvrængning af fakta eller tage information ud af kontekst.

Vildledende billeder:

Ændring af billeder eller videoer for at skabe falske fortællinger.

Konspirationsteorier:

Fremme ubegrundede teorier, der ofte involverer hemmelige plots eller skjulte dagsordener.

1.2 IMPACT OF INFORMATION DISORDERS

a) Effects of information disorders on society, politics, and education

Information disorders have far-reaching consequences on society, politics, and education. These harmful practices can erode trust, polarize communities, and undermine democratic process.

Impact on Society

- ◆ **Erosion of Trust:** The proliferation of fake news can erode trust in traditional institutions, such as the media, government, and academia. When people are constantly bombarded with false information, they become skeptical of even credible sources.
- ◆ **Social Division:** Fake news can exacerbate social divisions by promoting stereotypes, spreading hate speech, and inciting violence. It can create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, leading to polarization and intolerance.
- ◆ **Public Health Crises:** During public health emergencies, the spread of misinformation can hinder efforts to control the outbreak. False information about vaccines, treatments, and preventative measures can lead to vaccine hesitancy, non-compliance with public health guidelines, and ultimately, increased morbidity and mortality.

Impact on Politics

- ◆◆ **Polarization and Extremism:** Fake news can fuel political polarization by amplifying partisan divisions and promoting extremist ideologies. It can be used to manipulate public opinion, sway elections, and undermine democratic processes.
- ◆◆ **Undermining Democratic Institutions:** By spreading false information about elections, voting procedures, and government policies, fake news can undermine trust in democratic institutions and erode public confidence in the electoral process.
- ◆◆ **International Relations:** The spread of disinformation can exacerbate tensions between countries, leading to diplomatic crises and even conflict. It can be used to spread propaganda, sow discord, and undermine international cooperation.

Impact on Education

- ◆◆ **Critical Thinking Skills:** The constant exposure to misinformation can hinder the development of critical thinking skills. Students may struggle to distinguish between fact and fiction, and they may become more susceptible to manipulation.
- ◆◆ **Digital Literacy:** It is essential to equip students with the digital literacy skills needed to navigate the online information landscape. This includes the ability to evaluate the credibility of sources, identify biases, and detect logical fallacies.
- ◆◆ **Civic Engagement:** Fake news can discourage civic engagement by creating a sense of cynicism and apathy. If people believe that the information they are receiving is false or misleading, they may be less likely to participate in democratic processes.

To mitigate the negative impacts of fake news and disinformation, it is crucial to promote media literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship. By empowering individuals to evaluate information critically and to recognize the tactics used to spread misinformation, we can work towards a more informed and resilient society.

B) Personal consequences affecting citizens

Disinformation and fake news can have significant personal consequences for individuals. Key impacts:

1

Eroded Trust:

- **Distrust in Institutions:** Constant exposure to false information can erode trust in institutions like the media, government, and academia. This can lead to a general sense of cynicism and skepticism.
- **Damaged Relationships:** Sharing false information or believing in conspiracy theories can strain relationships with friends, family, and colleagues

Poor Decision-Making:

2

- **Financial Loss:** Falling victim to scams or fraudulent schemes propagated through misinformation can lead to significant financial losses.
- **Health Risks:** Misinformation about health issues, such as vaccines or treatments, can lead to poor health decisions and serious health consequences.

3

Emotional Distress:

- **Anxiety and Stress:** Constant exposure to negative and sensational news can increase anxiety and stress levels.
- **Depression:** Feeling overwhelmed by misinformation and the constant need to verify information can contribute to feelings of depression and hopelessness.

Social Isolation:

4

- **Echo Chambers:** Consuming only information that aligns with one's existing beliefs can lead to social isolation and a lack of empathy for diverse perspectives.
- **Reduced Social Interaction:** Spending excessive time online consuming and sharing misinformation can reduce opportunities for real-world social interaction.

5

Cognitive Bias:

- **Confirmation Bias:** Misinformation can reinforce existing biases, making it difficult to consider alternative viewpoints.
- **Reduced Critical Thinking Skills:** Constant exposure to false information can hinder the development of critical thinking skills and make individuals more susceptible to manipulation.

In conclusion, disinformation and fake news can have a profound impact on individuals' lives, affecting their mental health, financial well-being, and social relationships. It is crucial to be aware of the dangers of misinformation and to develop the skills to critically evaluate information. In this regard it is essential to recognize types of disinformation.

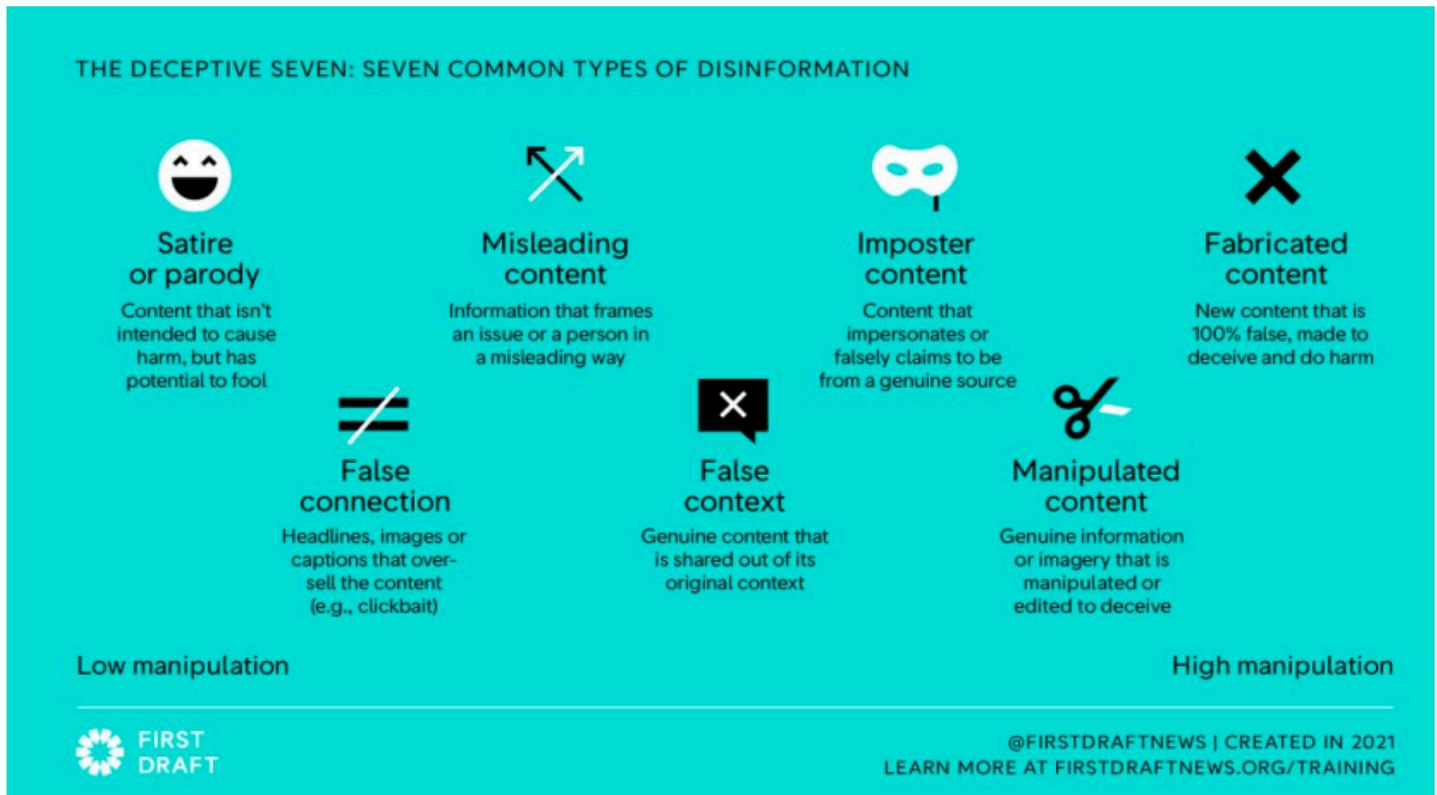
c) Types of Disinformation

Finally, in order to make the types of disinformation clear and understandable, we use Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017) classification of information disorders which ranges from low manipulation to high manipulation intent:

- ◆◆ **Satire or Parody:** No intention to cause harm, but has the potential to fool.
- ◆◆ **False Connection:** Headlines, visuals, and captions don't support the content.
- ◆◆ **Misleading Content:** Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual.
- ◆◆ **False Context:** Genuine content is shared with false contextual information.
- ◆◆ **Imposter Content:** Genuine sources are impersonated.
- ◆◆ **Manipulated Content:** Genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive.
- ◆◆ **Fabricated Content:** New Content is entirely false, designed to deceive and do harm.

Examples of each kind of disinformation disorder

Figure 1. Types of disinformation



Source: FirstDraft: <https://x.com/firstdraftnews/status/1406897519725056000>

Disinformation Bingo

Practical Activity 1

(OFFLINE)

Objective:

To reinforce the concepts of misinformation and fake news in a fun and engaging way.

Instructions:

1. Create Bingo Cards:

- Distribute blank bingo cards to each student.
- Have students fill in the squares with terms from the module, such as "clickbait," "conspiracy theory," "fact-checking," "emotional appeal," and "confirmation bias."

2. Call Out Clues:

- The teacher or a designated student reads clues or statements related to misinformation.
- For example: "A headline that is designed to shock or outrage."

Materials:

- Bingo cards with a variety of concepts all related to the module 1 (see Annex 1).
- Markers or bingo chips.
- A list of clues or statements related to misinformation from the module.

3. Mark the Cards:

- Students mark the corresponding square on their bingo card if the clue matches a term on their card.

4. Winning the Game:

- The first student to mark five squares in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) calls out "Bingo!" and checks their answers with the teacher.

Disinformation Detectives

Practical Activity 2

(ONLINE)

Both the online and digital-free activities can be accessed on: <https://wiseme.eu/module1-students-en/>

Annex 1

CARD 1

DISINFORMATION BINGO			
MISINFORMATION	DECEPTIVE HEADLINES	MAL-INFORMATION	
MESSAGE	BIAS	BOT ACCOUNTS	
OBJECTIVITY	HOAX	CLICKBAIT	
TRUSTWORTHY	ECHO CHAMBERS	AGENT	

CARD 2

DISINFORMATION BINGO			
FAKE NEWS	DISINFORMATION	AGENT	
FACT	CLICKBAIT	TRUSTWORTHY	
BIAS	MISLEADING VISUALS	INFODEMIC	
MAL-INFORMATION	SATIRE OR PARODY	MESSAGE	

CARD 3

DISINFORMATION BINGO			
COGNITIVE BIASES	CONSPIRACY THEORIES	EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION	
SATIRE OR PARODY	ECHO CHAMBERS	INFORMATION	
TRUSTWORTHY	OBJECTIVITY	AGENT	
MISINFORMATION	DECEPTIVE HEADLINES	MAL-INFORMATION	

CARD 4

DISINFORMATION BINGO			
MAL-INFORMATION	DECEPTIVE HEADLINES	ECHO CHAMBERS	
HOAX	DIGITAL LITERACY	FALSE CONNECTION	
FAKE NEWS	SATIRE OR PARODY	MESSAGE	
MANIPULATED CONTENT	BOT ACCOUNTS	INTERPRETER	

CARD 5

DISINFORMATION BINGO			
DISINFORMATION	EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION	MISINFORMATION	
MANIPULATED CONTENT	BOT ACCOUNTS	INTERPRETER	
CLICKBAIT	CONSPIRACY THEORIES	DIGITAL LITERACY	
HOAX	BIAS	FALSE CONNECTION	

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