

Training fiche

Title	Navigating the World of Disinformation
Keywords	Disinformation, critical thinking, media literacy, fact-checking
Provided by	University of Dubrovnik
Language	English
Training area (X where applicable)	
X	Information Literacy
	Communication & Collaboration
	Safety
	Problem Solving
Objectives / Learning outcomes	
<p>To understand disinformation, including its definition, common forms, and its impact on individuals and society.</p> <p>To develop and enhance your critical thinking skills that will enable you to evaluate information critically and apply these skills to identify and assess potential disinformation.</p> <p>To apply basic techniques of fact-checking to verify information before sharing it and understand responsible online behavior.</p>	
Description	
<p>Our online training is designed to give you the knowledge and skills you need to navigate the disinformation-plagued digital landscape. Through engaging modules, you will gain a deep understanding of disinformation, including its definition, common forms, and impact on individuals and society. The training focuses on developing and improving critical thinking skills so you can critically evaluate information and effectively identify potential disinformation. You will also learn basic fact-checking techniques to verify information before sharing it, and how to behave responsibly online. Topics covered range from understanding the motives behind disinformation and the role of social media to recognizing warning signs, using fact-checking tools, and building resilience to disinformation. By the end of the course, you will be equipped with the tools necessary to combat disinformation and make informed decisions in the digital realm.</p>	
Content index (3 levels)	
<p>Module: Understanding Disinformation</p> <p>Unit 1: Definition, types and impact</p> <p>1.1. Definition of disinformation</p>	

- 1.2. Types of disinformation
- 1.3. Cheapfakes & deepfakes
- 1.4. Conspiracy Theories
- 1.5. Fake news & pseudo media
- 1.6. The motives behind disinformation
- 1.7. Impact on the society
- 1.8. The role of social media
 - 1.8.1. The trumpet of amplification
- 1.9. The fact-checking organizations
 - 1.9.1. International Fact-Checking Network
 - 1.9.2. Meta (Facebook) and fact-checkers

Module: Identifying Disinformation

Unit 2: Skills for critical thinking

- 2.1. How to recognizing disinformation?
 - 2.1.1. Strange URLs
 - 2.1.2. How do I know if a source is credible?
- 2.2. Red flags of disinformation
- 2.3. Fact-checking tools

Module: Responsible Online Behavior

Unit 3: Skills for responsible behaviour

- 3.1. Recognize your cognitive biases
- 3.2. Build resilience to disinformation
- 3.3. 6 steps to responsible online behaviour

Content developed

Module: Understanding Disinformation

Unit 1: Definition, types and impact

1.1. Definition of disinformation

Disinformation is false or misleading information that is intentionally spread with the purpose of deceiving or manipulating others.

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is spread without the deliberate intent to deceive. It can arise due to various reasons, such as misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or a lack of knowledge on the part of the person sharing the information.

Malinformation is true information that is shared with the explicit intent to cause harm, damage reputation, or invade privacy. It involves the deliberate disclosure of private or confidential information without consent, leaking sensitive documents, or sharing personal information to harm someone's reputation.

1.2. Types of disinformation

Fabricated Content: Completely false content;

Manipulated Content: Genuine information or imagery that has been distorted, e.g. a sensational headline or populist 'click bait';

Imposter Content: Impersonation of genuine sources, e.g. using the branding of an established agency;

Misleading Content: Misleading information, e.g. comment presented as fact;

False Context: Factually accurate content combined with false contextual information, e.g. when the headline of an article does not reflect the content;

Satire and Parody: Humorous but false stories passed off as true. There is no intention to harm but readers may be fooled;

False Connections: When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content;

Sponsored Content: Advertising or PR disguised as editorial content;

Propaganda: Content used to manage attitudes, values and knowledge;

Error: A mistake made by established news agencies in their reporting.

1.3. Cheapfakes & deepfakes

Cheapfakes refer to manipulated or edited media that are relatively simple and low-cost to create. They typically involve basic modifications to images or videos, such as adding or removing elements, altering context, or applying basic filters.

Deepfakes refer to highly realistic and sophisticated manipulated media that are created using deep learning algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.

1.4. Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories are explanations or beliefs that propose a secretive, often nefarious, plot by a group of individuals or organizations to manipulate events or control certain outcomes. These theories typically involve allegations of hidden agendas, cover-ups, and collusion among powerful entities. Conspiracy theories often lack credible evidence and rely on speculation, misinterpretation, or fabrication of facts. They can cover a wide range of topics, from politics and government to health, science, and popular culture. Conspiracy theories can have significant social and psychological impacts, influencing public opinion, promoting distrust, and sometimes leading to harmful actions.

1.5. Fake news & pseudo media

Fake news refers to deliberately fabricated or misleading information presented as legitimate news. It can include false stories, manipulated images or videos, and misleading headlines that are spread through various channels, including social media, websites, and traditional media outlets. Fake news often aims to deceive or manipulate readers, provoke emotional responses, or advance specific agendas. It is important to critically evaluate sources and fact-check information to avoid falling for fake news and to promote the dissemination of accurate and reliable information.

Pseudo media are media outlets or platforms that engage in deceptive or misleading practices, presenting themselves as legitimate sources of news or information while lacking journalistic integrity or adhering to ethical standards. Pseudo media might intentionally disseminate false or biased information, manipulate facts, or engage in sensationalism to attract attention or promote certain narratives.

1.6. The motives behind disinformation

Political Manipulation: Disinformation can be used to manipulate public opinion, influence elections, or shape political narratives in favor of a particular candidate, party, or ideology. It aims to sow discord, undermine trust in democratic processes, or advance geopolitical interests.

Propaganda and Ideology: Disinformation can be employed to promote a specific ideology, advance propaganda agendas, or support extremist or separatist



movements. It aims to shape perceptions, recruit supporters, or demonize opposing groups.

Economic Gain: Disinformation can be motivated by financial incentives. Individuals or groups may spread false information to drive traffic to their websites, increase ad revenue, or promote products or services based on deceptive claims.

Social Division and Polarization: Disinformation can exploit societal fault lines, exacerbate existing tensions, and deepen social divisions. By amplifying controversial or divisive issues, it aims to foster mistrust, create animosity, and undermine social cohesion.

Personal or Organizational Reputation: Disinformation can be used to tarnish the reputation of individuals, organizations, or institutions. It aims to damage credibility, undermine trust, or settle personal or professional rivalries.

State-Sponsored Influence: Disinformation campaigns can be orchestrated by nation-states to achieve strategic objectives. This may include spreading false narratives to destabilize rival nations, manipulate global perception, or advance foreign policy goals.

1.7. Impact on the society

Key ways in which disinformation can affect society:

Undermining Trust - Erodes trust in institutions, media, and public figures, making it harder to discern between accurate and false information.

Polarization and Divisiveness - Exploits divisions, fosters animosity, and contributes to social polarization and unrest.

Manipulating Public Opinion - Shapes narratives, distorts public perceptions, and influences elections and policy decisions.

Public Health and Safety - Endangers public health by spreading false information about medical treatments, vaccines, and public health emergencies.

Economic Impact - Harms businesses and markets through false information affecting reputation, stock prices, and consumer behaviour.

Personal and Social Consequences - Damages individual reputations, spreads false accusations, and contributes to psychological distress and social cohesion erosion.

Misallocation of Resources - Wastes resources on debunking false claims, investigating fake news sources, and implementing measures to counter disinformation.

Threats to Democracy - Undermines democratic processes by manipulating information and potentially influencing election outcomes.

1.8. The role of social media

Social media plays a significant role in the sharing of disinformation. Its ease of use and wide reach make it a breeding ground for the rapid spread of false or misleading information. Social media platforms amplify and disseminate misinformation through user-generated content, fake accounts, and algorithmic biases. The viral nature of sharing on social media can quickly amplify disinformation, leading to the erosion of trust, polarization of opinions, and potential real-world consequences.

1.8.1. The trumpet of amplification

The diagram illustrates the path disinformation often takes, starting from anonymous web platforms, moving through closed groups, conspiracy communities,

and eventually reaching open social networks and professional media. Disinformation agents aim to amplify their message, and unfortunately, they often succeed when false information is embedded in news articles.

1.9. The fact-checking organizations

Fact-checking organizations are independent entities dedicated to assessing the accuracy and veracity of claims made in public discourse, particularly in the media and online platforms. They employ journalists, researchers, and subject matter experts to investigate claims, analyze evidence, and provide objective evaluations. Fact-checkers utilize various methods, such as sourcing reliable information, conducting interviews, and analyzing data, to determine the validity of statements. Some well-known fact-checking organizations include PolitiFact, Snopes, FactCheck.org, AFP Fact Check, Full Fact, and The Washington Post's Fact Checker. These organizations play a crucial role in promoting truth and combating the spread of misinformation.

The list of fact-checking organisations https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fact-checking_websites

1.9.1. International Fact-Checking Network

The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) is a vital global organization that promotes accuracy and accountability in journalism. It sets standards for fact-checking organizations, offers training and resources, and facilitates the sharing of best practices. The IFCN also certifies fact-checkers through the transparent process of the IFCN Code of Principles. In parallel, the European Fact-Checking Standards Network Project, an EU initiative, brings independent fact-checking organizations together to define standards of independence, transparency, and journalistic quality in combating disinformation. These combined efforts enhance information quality and foster public trust in the media.

1.9.2. Meta (Facebook) and fact-checkers

Meta works with certified independent fact-checkers from the International Fact-Checking Network to combat disinformation. They work independently to review and evaluate potential disinformation on Meta's platforms. More than 90 organizations in 60 languages participate and take action against viral hoaxes and false claims. Meta and the fact checkers work together in three ways: Identifying potential disinformation, reviewing and evaluating the accuracy of content, and taking action. When content is determined to be false, its distribution is significantly restricted, warning labels are posted, and people are notified. Meta's three-part approach is to remove, reduce and inform about problematic content. Fact-checking partners adhere to IFCN's Code of Principles.

Module: Identifying Disinformation

Unit 2: Skills for critical thinking

2.1. How to recognizing disinformation?

Recognizing disinformation can be challenging, as it often appears realistic and is disseminated widely. To analyse and identify disinformation, follow these steps:

Check the source for credibility and check the URLs.

Look beyond the headline and watch for grammatical errors and inconsistencies.

Distinguish between satire and factual content.

Check references in the story and their credibility.

Be aware of your personal bias and look at facts objectively.

2.1.2. How do I know if a source is credible?

Look for content written by authoritative authors or reputable publishers, such as recognized experts in the field or well-established media outlets like the NY Times or Wall Street Journal.

Check for proper citations or references to reliable sources used in the content, ensuring transparency and the ability to verify the information provided.

Seek up-to-date information on your topic, as it reflects the most current understanding and knowledge surrounding the subject matter.

Ensure the content presents an unbiased analysis of the topic, where the author explores multiple perspectives and considers various viewpoints rather than favoring a particular stance.

2.2. Red flags of disinformation

Lack of credible sources - Claims without credible sources should raise suspicion and indicate potential disinformation.

Emotional content - Disinformation often evokes strong emotions to manipulate readers. Be cautious when encountering emotionally charged posts.

Cross-posted content - Disinformers spread false information by sharing it across multiple social platforms. Watch out for content shared across platforms.

Disinformation in memes - Memes, while entertaining, can also be a source of disinformation. Be cautious and fact-check before sharing memes.

2.3. Fact-checking tools

Ordinary citizens have access to several fact-checking tools that can help them verify information and identify potential disinformation. One popular tool is "FactCheck.org," which provides unbiased analysis of political claims and news articles. "Snopes" is another well-known platform that verifies urban legends, rumors and misinformation. To verify content on social media, tools like "Google Reverse Image Search" can help determine the authenticity of images. In addition, browser extensions such as "NewsGuard" provide credibility ratings for websites that flag unreliable sources. Citizens can also consult reliable news outlets and use fact-checking databases such as "PolitiFact," "The Washington Post's "Fact Checker," or "AP Fact Check" to obtain accurate information. By using these tools, citizens can actively participate in the fight against disinformation and promote informed discussions.

The list of the tools: <https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay/fighting-disinformation/search.html>

Module: Responsible Online Behavior

Unit 3: Skills for responsible behaviour

3.1. Recognize your cognitive biases

Cognitive biases are inherent tendencies in our thinking that can lead to errors in judgment. It is crucial for older adults to be aware of these biases when navigating the online world. Some common cognitive biases include confirmation bias (favouring information that confirms pre-existing beliefs), availability bias (relying on readily available information), and anchoring bias (being influenced by initial



information received). Recognizing these biases can help older individuals approach online content with a critical mindset and avoid being easily swayed by misleading information.

Recognize signs of cognitive bias

1. You pay attention only to news that confirms your opinion
2. You blame external factors when things do not go your way
3. Attributing other people's success to luck, while taking credit for your own achievements
4. Assuming that everyone else shares your opinions or beliefs
5. Learning a little about a subject and then assuming you know everything about it

3.2. Build resilience to disinformation

In order to navigate the online world responsibly, there are key steps to follow. First, verify information by fact-checking it before believing or sharing. Seek reliable sources and consult reputable fact-checking organizations, while cross-referencing information to ensure accuracy. Second, be mindful of emotional triggers that disinformation often exploits. Stay aware of content that evokes strong emotions and take a step back to evaluate credibility, considering alternative perspectives before reacting or sharing. Third, develop a critical eye when consuming online content by scrutinizing sources, checking for supporting evidence, and questioning claims that seem too good to be true or lack sufficient evidence. Lastly, seek out diverse perspectives to gain a well-rounded understanding, engaging with reputable news outlets, expert opinions, and alternative viewpoints to avoid falling into echo chambers and being swayed by one-sided narratives.

3.3. 6 steps to responsible online behaviour

Verify before sharing: Check the authenticity and credibility of information against reliable sources or fact-checking organizations before sharing.

Diversify your sources: Rely on multiple trusted sources for news and information to avoid bias and misinformation. Follow reputable news outlets, fact-checking websites, and experts in various fields.

Question and analyze: Develop a critical mindset by questioning the information you come across. Evaluate the source, examine the evidence presented, and assess possible biases or conflicts of interest.

Use fact-checking tools: Use fact-checking tools and resources available online to verify the accuracy of claims and statements.

Be aware of emotional triggers: Disinformation often aims to evoke strong emotions. Be aware of emotional triggers and take a moment to think before responding or sharing. Emotional reactions can cloud judgment and contribute to the spread of misinformation.

Report and flag disinformation: If you come across false or misleading information, report it to the platform or social media site where you found it.

5 Glossary entries



[Disinformation]. False or misleading information deliberately disseminated to deceive or manipulate people, with adverse effects on individuals and society.

[Cognitive Biases]. Tendencies inherent in human thinking that can lead to errors in judgment. Awareness of cognitive biases is critical to critically evaluate information and recognize potential disinformation.

[Fact-checking]. The process of verifying the accuracy and credibility of information through thorough research and analysis. Fact-checking helps distinguish between reliable sources and misleading content.

[Responsible online behaviour]. Ethical and prudent behaviour when navigating the digital world. Responsible online behaviour includes verifying information, watching out for emotional triggers, and critically evaluating content before sharing or believing it.

[Resilience to disinformation]. Developing the ability to resist and counter the influence of disinformation by developing critical thinking skills, being open to different perspectives, and actively seeking reliable sources of information.

5 multiple-choice self-assessment questions

Question 1. What do we call manipulated or edited media that is relatively easy and inexpensive to create?

Option a: Deepfake

Option b: Cheepfake X

Option c: Disfake

Question 2. In which phase of the "trumpet of amplification" do the disinformation agents reach their goal?

Option a: Anonymus web

Option b: Social media

Option c: Professional media X

Question 3. What is false or misleading information that is intentionally disseminated for the purpose of deceiving or manipulating others?

Option a: Disinformation X

Option b: Misinformation

Option c: Malinformation

Question 4. Why is it important to behave responsibly online?

Option a: To combat disinformation X

Option b: To protect privacy

Option c: To make better decisions

Question 5. Who reviews the information for Meta?

Option a: Fact-checking organizations X

Option b: Media organizations

Option c: Government agencies

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