FAKE NEWS AND OTHER INFORMATION MANIPULATION

INFORMATION AND DATA LITERACY > 1.2 EVALUATING DATA, INFORMATION AND DIGITAL CONTENT

TARGET GROUP	AGE GROUP	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	FORMAT	COPYRIGHT	LANGUAGE
All	Adults, Elderly citizens, Teenagers	Level 1	Activity sheet	Creative Commons (BY-SA)	English, French

Through this workshop, participants will learn to recognize and identify fake news and other ways people mistreat information. After the workshop, participants should be able to detect misinformation on the internet.

General Objective	Skillset building
Preparation time for facilitator	less than 1 hour
Competence area	1 - Information and data literacy
Time needed to complete activity (for learner)	0 - 1 hour
Name of author	Nothing 2hide
Support material needed for training	Board-projector-internet connection
Resource originally created in	French

WORKSHOP DIRECTIONS

1 Introduction

Fake news, alternative facts, disinformation, post-truth, intox. It is easy to get lost in all the definitions. Ask participants to first try to define fake news and then give a few examples that they may have heard of. After this first step, give the following explanation: fake news is category grouping several ideas. Some of these:

- Disinformation: false information of many aims, including to disparage a political party, to damage the reputation of a person or enterprise or to contradict an established scientific truth.
- Partisan information (biased): factual but presented to be interpreted in way favourable to the editor's or publishing organisation's agenda.
- Clickbait: false and sensationalised information designed to catch attention disingenuously (see the activity 'Clickbait').
- Hoax: false information circulated, often with a comic tone, designed to fool or elicit a certain kind of response from the target.

Draw a table classifying these definitions, with a column and heading for each You will refer to this table for the quiz coming up next.

2 Quiz

Organise participants into several groups. Project the images, videos and social media accounts associated with each question below. The groups will have to say whether the information is true, fake news, clickbait, partisan information or a hoax. After asking each question, leave the participants to debate for a moment before giving the response. You can then place each example in the correct column on the table you drew during the previous step.

Question 1

During the 2017 UK general election, the following image was circulated showing Jeremy Corbyn, the



eiving a vulgar gesture from a voter. Is this
artisan information or clickbait?

Answer: Disinformation. This is a photoshopped – false – image designed to encourage the idea that Jeremy Corbyn was little respected amongst the UK voter base. By doing a reverse image search on Tinyeye we can easily find the two original photos – having nothing to do with each other – that were spliced together to create this. Some media at the time reported that the person who posted this image was listed on LinkedIn as an 'Information Officer' working for the Conservative party who were at the time running against Corbyn during this election. See here for more information: https://fullfact.org/online/picture-doesnt-show-woman-making-offensive-

gesture-jeremy-corbyn/

Question 2

This article from Russia Today (RT) purports that the EU has failed to effectively lead during the Coronavirus crisis and that every country is effectively going their own way to combat the virus. The idea is that, due to 'the lack of cohesion from that gloriously intentioned supranational institution, the European Union', continent-wide infections could spike as, for example, one country decides to pursue more relaxed policies and others more strict. First give participants some background information. *Russia Today* is a multimedia news and entertainment agency founded in 2005 by the Russian state. It continues to be state funded and its self-described mission is to 'cover stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events.' **Answer**: this is a typical case of partisan information. Although it may well be true that the EU could have and should have been playing a more active role during the crisis, the article carries a sensationalist tone and uses disingenuous rhetorical tricks such as the following: 'Because one of the often-celebrated missions of the EU has been to provide an umbrella for everyone to gather beneath as one big happy Euro-family. Friends together. Ever closer union. The perils of getting too close are now causing nightmare conditions in hospitals from Athens to Amsterdam, as coronavirus victims in their thousands succumb to this killer disease.' It claims that Brussels has been 'silent'. This is not really the case, as the author does mention briefly themselves towards the conclusion that the EU has, for example, been working on large financial aid packages for members. The article also mentions that EU members were left to 'make unilateral decisions on such things as border closures, airline flight cancellation and export restrictions'. While this is largely true, this ignores the fact that the EU did ban entry for 30 days to the European Union and Schengen Zone. Ask participants what if they believe this article had a purpose or agenda beyond simply informing the reader. Beyond the fact that the core of the information presented is arguably true, this was an article clearly designed to promote the idea of the EU being weak and cast a biased doubt on European cohesion. Therefore, this is a clear example of a partisan source. Avoid being exposed to unilateral perspectives by reading information from multiple sources.

Question 3

During the 2016 US elections which saw Donald Trump being elected president, the Burrard Street Journal published an article with the following headline: 'President Obama Confirms He Will Refuse To Leave Office If Trump Is Elected https://www.burrardstreetjournal.com/obama-refusing-to-leave-if-trump-elected/. We know immediately that this was a hoax. The Burrard Street Journal is a satirical Canadian newspaper based in Vancouver. A number of their stories published during this campaign were taken for

truth.

Question 4

In 2015, Pete Hoekstra, the now US ambassador to the Netherlands made the following claim: 'The Islamic movement has now gotten to a point where they have put Europe into chaos…chaos in the Netherlands: there are cars being burned, there are politicians being burned, and yes there are no-go zones in the Netherlands.' Factual, disinformation, clickbait, partisan information or a hoax? This is a case of disinformation that is so removed from reality as for it become absurd, particularly from a person who is expected to be professionally familiar with the Netherlands. Show this video to the group to see the ambassador being confronted by a Dutch journalist about his claims. Things to point out: he denies that he made these claims – despite the fact that there is widely available footage of him doing so – and uses the term 'fake news' to accuse those who correctly accused him of saying these things of spreading false information. Later in the interview he goes on to deny ever using the term 'fake news'. Use this to underline how easily truth can be distorted even when there is clear evidence.

Question 5

Newspapers often publish corrections in order to amend errors they made unknowingly. Here is a recent example from the Guardian: 'An article in Tuesday's paper gave the wrong figure for Covid-19-related deaths in NHS care. At the time of printing it was 1,408, not 2,433 (UK starts to count death toll outside hospitals, 31 March, page 9).' Factual, disinformation, clickbait, partisan information or hoax? As the title indicates, this is a correction of an unintentional error. The media often makes mistakes but make regular corrections. A simple Google search reveals a number of examples.

3 Open the debate

Start a debate by asking participants if, prior to the contemporary idea of fake news, they had ever heard of false information before? Is fake news really a new thing? Give some 'old' examples of fake news and ask participants to give some if they have any. Amongst the examples there are some good old hoaxes you can find on hoaxbuster, a site dedicated to identifying hoaxes. At its inception, the site primarily tracked emails circulating via email. Since then, its sphere of activity continues to expand, particularly with the explosion of social media. Be aware that a discussion on this subject can be fascinating but also a little risky. According to the participants' ages they can easily get sidetracked by talking about conspiracy theories. In this case, avoid denying the conspiracies outright as this will not advance the debate. Instead, ask those who think some of them are true to explain, to find out where

they one comes from, who started it and why. It would be a good idea to complement this with the workshop ‘Fact Checking‘

4 Conclusion

Explain that it is important to know what it is really contained within the catch-all term fake news. There are all sorts of implications political and democratic. In the US, when President Trump disagrees with something, he will often brand it ‘fake news’. Incidentally, It is to him that we owe the popularity of this expression. In France and other European countries, this term is largely used by the extreme right. It is therefore important to be aware of the number of different areas covered by the term in order to understand and push back against disinformation in general.

5 Going further

To expand on this activity, you can consult the following workshop roadmaps:

- Clickbait
- Identifying Altered Images
- Fact Checking