



MIRACLE

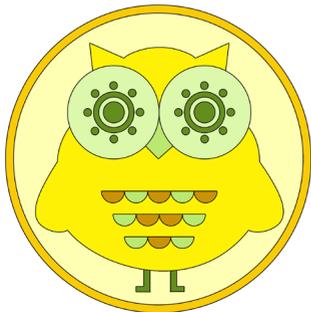
BOOKLET 4

Fake News and Disinformation



news

MIRACLE



L-Università
ta' Malta



AGRUPAMENTO DE ESCOLAS TERRAS DO AVE



Maria Regina College
St. Paul's Bay Primary



Co-funded by
the European Union

The project "MIRACLE" is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The content of MIRACLE is the sole responsibility of the project partners and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: KA220-SCH-766F6EA9



Booklet 4

Fake News and Disinformation

prepared by
Jaitek

2024

Contents

What is fake news	5
Types of fake news	7
Means of creation and dissemination	8
Fake news and climate change	13
Bibliography	14

What is fake news

The rise of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased the amount of information to which citizens are exposed. On the one hand, due to the appearance of new dissemination channels and, therefore, the ease with which new news can be created.

The new information channels have modified the rules of sender and receiver, with the people who consume news themselves being the ones who can create new pieces (Vila & Arce, 2019).

This overexposure to information has meant that users are the ones who decide what to visit and what to read. In the same way, low-quality information has increased, as truthful news has been placed in the same position as fake news (Blanco-Herrero & Arcilla-Calderón, 2019).

Fake news is news that, at first glance, may seem reliable, but is not, as it lacks verification and checking prior to publication. These news items are created on fake or fictitious accounts, or digital platforms under the guise of newspapers, or media outlets, which creates confusion, and are often accompanied by sensationalist titles to capture the reader's attention and appeal to their emotions (Chulvi, 2018).

Fake news is information deliberately created to mislead the reader (Alcott and Gentzkow, 2017). It does not have to be entirely fabricated; it can be based on a truth or contain parts that are real, but ultimately build a story that is not true.

These news stories are created so that those who read them will believe them and spread them until they go viral and, according to these authors (2017), they hide an objective that can be both economic (to make money) and ideological (to influence people's thinking and generate controversy).

Fake news is information based on facts that may be newsworthy, and presented in a way that touches people's emotions, thus generating what is known as post-truth. It is the culture in which real facts have less influence on public opinion than facts that appeal to emotions and one's own beliefs (Niño, Barquero & García, 2017).

We can identify two other concepts, in addition to fake news and post-truth, to pay attention to understand the issue. Misinformation and Disinformation are two terms that aim to highlight the transfer of misinformation or lack of information, differentiating the intention with which this transfer is carried out. In the article by Saavedra-Vásquez, Estrada-Cuzcano & Alfaro-Mendives from 2020, Misinformation is defined as erroneous information, which is not correct and therefore false. Disinformation, on the other hand, can be defined as the intentional transfer of misleading, misrepresentative or inconclusive information with the aim of manipulating the recipient's thinking.

There are other authors who add a third concept in addition to misinformation and disinformation. Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) explain the concept of malinformation as information that is based on reality but is used to inflict harm on people, countries or organisations.

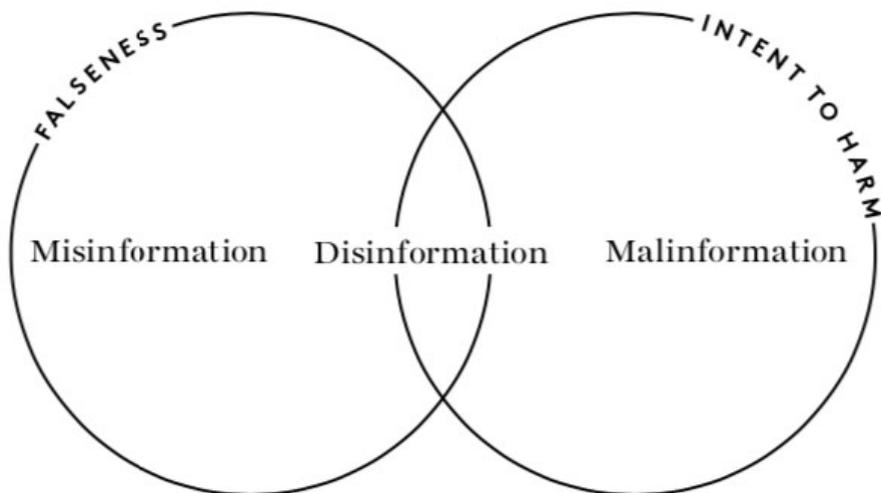


Figure 1. Information disorder. (Wardle, 2020)

Note: Created by Claire Wardle (2020) in www.firstdraftnews.org

Therefore, these three terms, although closely related, are very different from each other. Misinformation focuses on false or misleading content but the people spreading it think it is true.

Disinformation requires an intention to disseminate content which are false. Finally, malinformation aims to cause harm through the dissemination of information.

Nowadays, the increasing emergence of fake news on the internet and social media makes it very difficult to distinguish reliable news from unreliable news. For this reason, Bentzen (2019) indicates some steps that can be taken to analyse the veracity of the news. For this author, it is important to check the content, outlet, author, resources, and images of the news. He also recommends thinking about the news before sharing it, as fake news is usually written in such a way that it provokes emotions in the reader and is shared by many people. In addition, he indicates that it is necessary to question your own biases and when you believe that a news item is false you can report it on the different existing profiles on social networks (Bentzen, 2019).

Types of fake news

We can find different types of fake news on the networks. Both Márquez and García (2019) and Tandoc, Kim and Ling (2018) establish a classification, or taxonomy, of fake news in which six different categories of fake news stand out:

- Satire: writing that aims to ridicule and mock someone or something.
- Photo manipulation: editing of images and photos to alter the message being conveyed.
- Parody: the use of an ironic tone or a mocking imitation of an event to make a criticism of it.
- Publicity and public relations: advertising of products or other services that are unofficial, misleading and of unreliable provenance.
- Propaganda: presentation of information from a subjective point of view, usually related to political, religious, commercial issues, etc., with the aim of influencing people's thinking.

- Fabricated news: fabricated pieces of information, with no factual basis, that closely resemble truthful news in order to appear realistic.

Other authors such as Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) in *Journalism, "Fake News" & Disinformation* by UNESCO (2018) include other types of fake news such as false context, false connection and imposter content. The first one is about extracting textual or graphic information out of its original context. The second one, false connection occurs when titles or images do not support the content. On the other hand, imposter content focuses on signing a news item as their own when they have not created that news item, image or video.

We can find a seventh type, in addition to the previous six, known as clickbait. According to Bazaco et al. (2019), this phenomenon consists of, through editorial strategies, provoking users to enter the news because of the sensationalist headline it presents. Clickbait is used to cause an emotional reaction in users and provoke them to click on a link to see a news item, article, video or photo. Clickbait's main objective is to reach as many users as possible who visit the link. Bazaco et al. (2019) express that clickbait goes beyond emotional headlines, as it can be considered as a type of communication that aims to create eye-catching and sensational content that provokes an emotional reaction in users.

If we take into account the different ways in which fake news is presented online, in order to minimise its impact, in addition to fact-checking or other similar initiatives, it is necessary to create critical users who do not believe everything they read online (López-Borrull et al., 2018).

Means of creation and dissemination

Traditional media are very important when it comes to news production, however, they have become less important in terms of information distribution.

In recent times, new players have emerged in the field of dissemination, such as messaging platforms, social networks, or



search portals (Bell, 2017; Nielsen and Ganter, 2017). This major change in the news and information market, together with factors such as the economic crisis, the decline in print media sales or the advertising crisis in print media, has favoured the emergence of fake news (Blanco-Herreó & Arcilla-Calderón, 2019).

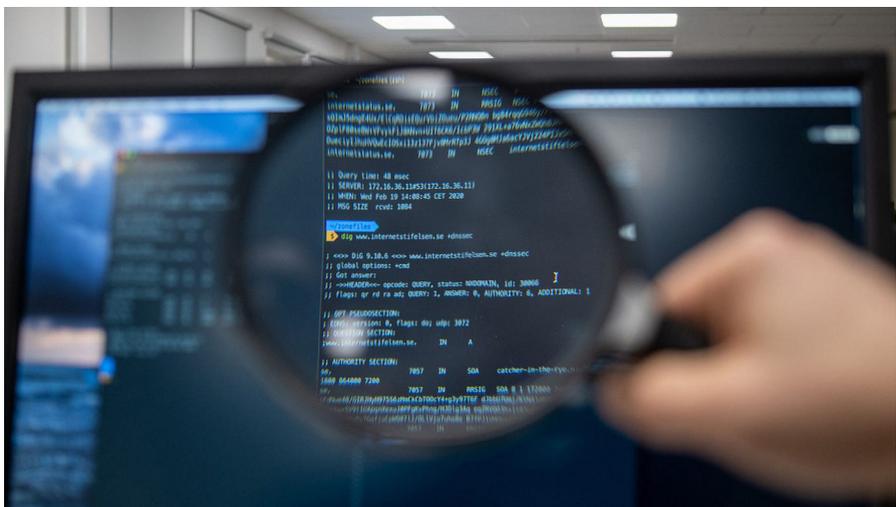
The main creators and disseminators of fake news are social networks such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. These platforms have become reference news portals where users read and share content without paying attention to the veracity of the news (López-Borrull et al. 2018).

On these networks, fake news is shared faster than truthful news due to users' conformism, according to Kim and Dennis (2019). These online information users are exposed to news shared by their friends, news that is based on search history or advertisers' propaganda in media that have paid to be on the network. This, together with the fact that the purpose for which they connect to the Internet is usually for fun and entertainment,

means that when they read something that appeals to them and resembles their thoughts, they share it without, perhaps, verifying its authenticity (Alfonso, 2020).

We can argue all this information with real examples of fake news being spread as truthful. In 2017 the word “fake news” was declared word of the year by Collins Dictionary. Its use increased by 365% compared to 2016 due to the political strategy carried out by Donald Trump, former US president (Hunt, 2017). During his election campaign, different platforms published Russian propaganda in favour of Trump’s speech to influence Americans’ thinking (Kaufman, 2018).

After his victory in the 2016 US election, there was greater awareness of the influence of fake news on networks and initiatives to uncover lies in communications began to emerge. Fact-checking, for example, is a journalistic practice that responds to the need to contrast press hoaxes by checking publications a posteriori and verifying the information presented in the speeches of politicians or relevant people (Herrero et al., 2019). An example of this is the one carried out by the Washington Post, which created a space to verify the claims made by Donald Trump during the first 100 days of his mandate. It was observed that during the first 33 days, 132 false or misleading statements had been made, referring to issues



such as immigration, foreign policy and employment, among others (Magallón-Rosa, 2018).

According to several studies, the influence of fake news in the US elections was not an isolated event. According to Chulvi (2018), the acceptance of Brexit in Great Britain and the Colombian rejection of the peace referendum are also possible victims of this movement created on the web, which political parties in nations such as Spain are also taking advantage of, given the influence they have. An example of the latter is COVID-19's handling of information on the global pandemic.

Spanish political parties made use of photographs that did not correspond to the reality of the moment as a representation of the situation that was being experienced with the pandemic, magnifying the existing damage. Unscientific and unverified studies on the management of the pandemic in Spain were also used to claim that the government's management of the situation was the worst in the world.

Other examples are the posts that circulated online about the origin of the pandemic, blaming the world's superpowers for using the virus as a manoeuvre to massacre their opponents' economies, or the unscientific home remedies that claimed to be useful to stop COVID, such as injecting disinfectant into the lungs or drinking bleach, according to statements by Donald Trump. These examples show that it is no longer the facts that generate the news, but the news itself that pretends to generate the facts (Álvarez, 2017).

The influence of fake news affects all sectors of society. Several authors, such as Amorós (2018), indicate that democratic societies are harmed by the presence of unreliable news that generates emotional reactions in readers so that they do not carry out an analysis of the information they are receiving. Social networks are very powerful sources of information, but on many occasions, they are used to disseminate extremist political ideas that endanger democratic systems.

Apart from that, efforts are being made to fact-check controversial news stories that attempt to pervert the normal functioning of the fundamentals of society (politics, government, health care, etc.) Efforts are being made around the world to counteract false information.

At an institutional level, numerous strategies have been implemented to combat fake news, giving rise to different fact-checking platforms such as Fact-Check (www.factcheck.org) or Fullfact (www.fullfact.org), among others. In addition, many governments have implemented plans and initiatives to fight fake news.

Thus, the European Union has developed numerous initiatives to put an end to disinformation, such as the Digital Education Action Plan, the European Democracy Action Plan, or the Communication “Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach” (European Commission, 2018).

In addition, the European Union has developed the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) (www.edmo.eu), a network of hubs working individually and collectively on data mining, teaching factcheckers and pooling of resources for this purpose.

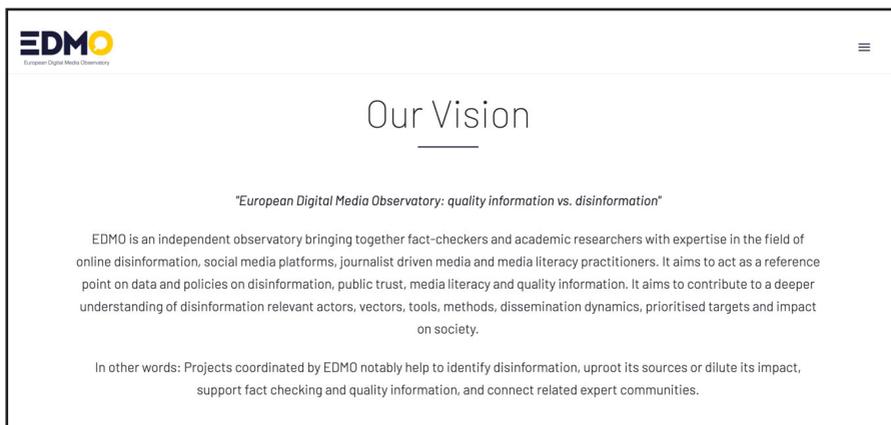


Figure 2. EDMO's website.

At the individual level, it is important to raise awareness and teach people to evaluate the information they receive critically. Therefore, it is important to promote media literacy, as this approach can be used to combat misinformation through critical thinking. As Jones-Jang and Mortensen (2019) point out, media literacy helps people to develop skills and competences in analysing and evaluating fake news. These authors also mention another method of combating disinformation. The

crowdsourcing proposes that users can identify fake news through comments made by other users.

An important element in the process of analysing the reliability of information is self-assessment. It is essential to ask the questions “who, how and why”, in order to know whether a piece of content is reliable or may offer indicators of being fake news. (Google Developers, n.d).

Fake news and climate change

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the term denialism became known, almost on the same level as the term fake news became known with Donald Trump's campaign in 2016, as we have seen in previous sections. If at that time we were talking about denialism towards a virus or fake news related to politics, now we are talking about the climate crisis.

According to a truthful newspaper in Spain called El País, after the pandemic, fake news and disinformation has been directed towards other topics such as climate change. As the temperature rises, so does fake news about climate change (Planelles and Álvarez, 2023).

The environment is one of the topics of greatest interest because it is a cross-cutting issue, like health, for example. As the pandemic became less important and the predictions of fake news (such as that vaccines would be bad) did not come true, the focus has shifted to other topics.

Hoaxes tend to be short-lived, lasting about ten days, although some do resurface at other times. For example, in the case of the lies about the trails left by planes in the sky, which conspiracy theorists have long seen as a sign that the population was being sprayed. Another example is that of a lawyer with close links to the countryside who presents herself as the head of a water users' organisation and claims that the drought is caused by governments and politicians.

According to the same newspaper article, people who generate disinformation tend to do so by appealing to problems that affect people in order to spread their hoaxes, such as the

case of the drought. Another common feature of hoaxes is to appeal to feelings and, in the specific case of climate change, to appeal to fear or danger, such as hoaxes about electric cars catching fire or exploding.

Another element to pay attention to is that historically, disinformation and hoaxes about climate change have been linked to the so-called alternative right or far right internationally. Within climate denialism, there is a significant community of far-right accounts.

Beyond the ideological element, there is also an economic interest behind fake news on climate change, such as those claiming that global warming is not a human responsibility due to greenhouse gases generated mainly by fossil fuels.

Since last summer, we have noticed an increased aggressiveness and creation of hoaxes. The number of denialist comments has multiplied. Experts believe that this is due to the fact that there are more and more climate events or because they are becoming more and more organised.

Bibliography

Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social Media and Fake News in The 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-236. doi:10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Álvarez, E. (2017). Hechos alternativos: el peligroso arte de construir realidades con palabras. El Diario. Retrieved from www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Hechos-alternativos-peligroso-construirrealidades_6_607249299.html

Alfonso, I. B. (2020). Posverdad, percepción de la realidad y opinión pública: Una aproximación desde la fenomenología. *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, (187), 167-186.

Amorós García, M. (2018). *Fake News: La verdad de las noticias falsas*.

Bazaco, A., Redondo, M., Sánchez-García, P. (2019): "El

- clickbait como estrategia del periodismo viral: concepto y metodología". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 74, pp. 94 a 115. <http://www.revistalatinacs.org/074paper/1323/06es.html> DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-2019-1323
- Blanco-Herrero, D. & Arcila-Calderón, C. (2019). Deontología y noticias falsas: estudio de las percepciones de periodistas españoles. *El profesional de la información*, 28(3).
- Bell, E. J., Owen, T., Brown, P.d., Hauka, C., Rashidian, N. (2017). *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism*. In Tow Center, Columbia Journalism School.
- Bentzen, N. (2019). How to spot when news is fake. At a Glance. *European Parliament Research Service (EPRS)*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599386/EPRS_ATA\(2017\)599386_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599386/EPRS_ATA(2017)599386_EN.pdf)
- Chulvi, C. P. (2018). Noticias falsas y libertad de expresión e información. El control de los contenidos informativos en la red. *Teoría y Realidad Constitucional*, (41), 297-318.
- European Commission (2018). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions: Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0236&from=EN>
- Google Developers (n.d.). Crear contenido útil, fiable y centrado en las personas | Centro de la Búsqueda de Google | Documentación. Google Developers. <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/creating-helpful-content?hl=es>
- Herrero, J. V., García, Á. A. V., García, X. L. (2019). Innovación tecnológica y comunicativa para combatir la desinformación: 135 experiencias para un cambio de rumbo. *El profesional de la información*, 28(3), 2.
- Hunt, J. (2017). Fake news' named Collins Dictionary's official Word of the Year for 2017. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/>

[fake-news-word-of-the-year-2017-collins-dictionary-donald-trump-kellyanne-conway-antifa-corbynmania-a8032751.html](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fake-news-word-of-the-year-2017)

- Jones-Jang, Mo & Mortensen, Tara. (2019). Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don't. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 10.1177/0002764219869406.
- Kaufman, E. (2018). Redes, medios, violencia y democracia. *Escenarios de debilitamiento institucional y desconfianza ciudadana. Derecom*, 25, 59-85 <http://www.derecom.com/derecom/>
- Kim, A. & Dennis, A. R. (2019). Says who? The effects of presentation format and source rating on fake news in social media. *MIS Quarterly*, 43(3), 1025-1039.
- López-Borrull, A., Vives-Gràcia, J., Badell, G. J. I. (2018). Fake news, ¿amenaza u oportunidad para los profesionales de la información y la documentación?. *El profesional de la información (EPI)*, 27(6), 1346-1356.
- Márquez, F. V., & García, S. A. (2019). Fake News y difusión en Twitter: el caso de Curro, el perro "condenado". *Historia y comunicación social*, 24(2), 485-503.
- Nielsen, R. K., & Ganter S. A. (2017). "Dealing with Digital Intermediaries: A Case Study of the Relations between Publishers and Platforms". In *New Media & Society*, April.
- Niño, J. I., Barquero, M., & García, E. (2017). Opinión pública e infoxicación en las redes: los fundamentos de la post-verdad. *Vivat Academia. Revista de Comunicación*, 139, 83-94. doi: 10.15178/va.2017.139.83-94
- Saavedra-Vásquez, V., Estrada-Cuzcano, A., & Alfaro-Mendives, K. (2020). *Disinformation y Misinformation, Posverdad y Fake News: precisiones conceptuales, diferencias, similitudes y yuxtaposiciones*.
- Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "fake news" A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital journalism*, 6(2), 137-153.

Planelles, M. & Álvarez, C. (2023). "La fábrica de bulos del clima se pone a toda máquina cuando llega el calor", *El País*. <https://elpais.com/clima-y-medio-ambiente/2023-06-11/el-calor-aviva-los-bulos-del-clima.html>

Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2018). MODULE 2: Thinking about information disorder: formats of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information. *Journalism, "Fake News" & Disinformation*. UNESCO.

Wardle, C. (2020). Understanding Information disorder. *First Draft*. <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/>

THE TOOLKIT

includes five booklets

1) **THE BASIC SCIENCE BEHIND CLIMATE CHANGE** aims to empower educators to teach the elements of CC inside and outside their classrooms. It is guided by four principles: contextual relevance, knowledge-based learning, action-oriented learning, and curriculum links. It combines elements from the five types of learning (UNESCO's CCE for SD), the New European Bauhaus initiative; the Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability; and the "GreenComp" to incorporate rigorous scientific knowledge and ethical reflection into CC adaptation and mitigation approaches and measures in small communities.

2) **DIGITAL COMICS CO-CREATION** aims to explore CC through art and digital technology, developing an understanding of the concepts of visual narrative-creating stories with images and words that tell stories in ways that the two cannot say separately.

3) **DIGITAL AUGMENTATION OF COMICS** aims to provide a series of design guidelines to assist teachers and pupils in the development of digitally-augmented print media. With the advances of affordable mobile AR hardware and off the-shelf AR libraries, the focus will shift from technical development to the effects of the technology on pupils.

4) **FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION** discusses a truly global problem, extending beyond the political sphere to all aspects of information, including climate change.

5) **EDUCATIONAL SCENARIOS**, each including Lesson Plans, with hands-on and online activities on co-creation of comics on climate change.



BOOKLET 4

Fake News and Disinformation

Fake news is news that, at first glance, may seem reliable, but is not, as it lacks verification and checking prior to publication. These news items are created on fake or fictitious accounts, or digital platforms under the guise of newspapers, or media outlets, which creates confusion, and are often accompanied by sensationalist titles to capture the reader's attention and appeal to their emotions.

These news stories are created so that those who read them will believe them and spread them.

This booklet deals with these issues.