What is disinformation?

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Disinformation is information that is false or distorts reality. It is transmitted by means of mass media or social media. Its aim is to manipulate public opinion. Here are examples of misinformation:

- Repeating information adamently to exaggerate its importance
- Presenting information in a strongly favorable or unfavorable light
- Omitting, denying or falsifying facts

Is disinformation new?

Traces of disinformation can be found in antiquity and the Middle Ages. First transmitted by word of mouth, the printing press and the creation of the first newspapers allowed increased transmission. The arrival of the web and the omnipresence of smartphones now enable the wide and rapid distribution of false information.
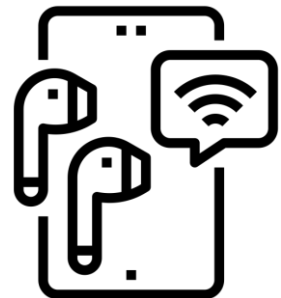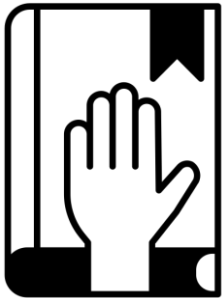
What is fake news?

Fake news is a publication that has the same structure as a news article, but contains exaggerated, distorted or false information. Fake news is a form of disinformation.

What is misinformation ?

Misinformation is information transmitted by mass media or social media that is considered to be truthful by the transmitter, but, in reality, distorts facts or is wrong.

Who shares fake news?

We can all be affected by misinformation.

According to one [Ipsos Public Affairs survey](#) (2019), 90% of people in Canada admit to having been fooled at least once by fake news on the Internet.

According to one American [study](#) (2016), the majority of young people have difficulty distinguishing false information from truthful information. In 2019, the same group [found](#) that high school students are unprepared to judge the credibility of information on the internet.

During the 2016 American [election campaign](#), those aged 65 and over were 7 times more likely to share false information than younger people.
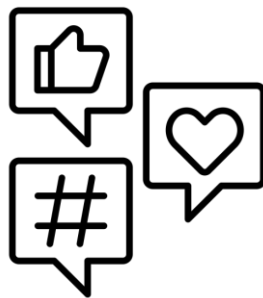
Fake news travels faster

According to one [study](#) in 2016, 59% of links on social media are shared even before having been clicked. Why?

People tend to share information that triggers strong emotions (fear, surprise, outrage).

Fake news travels quickly because it is written in a way to arouse these kinds of emotions.
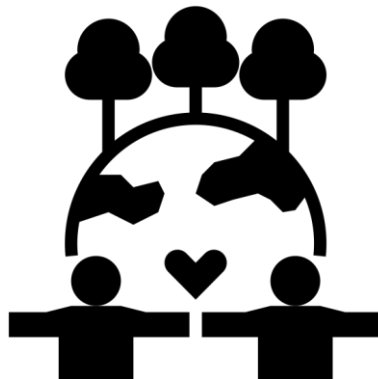
What are the causes of misinformation?

There are several causes for the spread of fake news.

First, we tend to **share information from our loved ones without verifying**.

The reasons we do this are that we:

- Trust our loved ones
- We want to please them
- Want to belong to a group

Another reason why we share fake news is a **tendency towards online distraction**.

We use social media to entertain ourselves. To do this, we quickly watch a large amount of content.

Scrolling through a large amount of varied content has been shown to discourage analytical thinking.

Online distraction causes us to put our logical reasoning aside. We are therefore more willing to share information without questioning its veracity.

Another cause of the spread of fake news is **algorithms**.

Algorithms are computer programs used by social media to:

- Follow us and save our preferences.

- Show us information according to our preferences to encourage us to click more.

The goal is to increase social media advertising revenue. The more we click, the more income we generate for these companies.

Algorithms can lock us in "filter bubbles" where we are constantly exposed to the same topics and the same opinions.

The way algorithms work allows creators of fake news to reach their target audience more easily.

What are the consequences of disinformation?

There are several consequences of misinformation. For example:

- The polarization of beliefs as our opinions are reinforced because of filter bubbles generated by algorithms.

- Increased sociocultural tensions.

- Confusion that can lead to poor decisions and anxiety.

- Lack of confidence in the democratic process that can impact on the results of an election.

- Health hazards.

What can we do?

There are a few things we can do to reduce the spread of false information:

- Be careful about sharing things just because of the way they make you feel.

- Take the time to verify any information you share.

- Be careful of hyper fakes.

- Vary your sources of information,

- Change your habits and the places where you look for information.

- Say something when you know information is false.

How to recognize
fake news?

Here are some clues to recognize fake news.

They are:

- Usually short.

- Often represented by a sensational or surprising title.

- Written in simple language.

- Contain few details about dates, places and names.

- Often written in the first person – I saw, I heard…

How to check
a source of information?

Here are some details to check:

- Check the link address (URL): Disinformation sites often try to imitate the addresses of official media sites.

- Take a look at the source. Be wary of those you've never heard of.

- Is this a humor site? Check in the "*About*" page to see if this is real news or a parody.

- Take a look at the publication date: Is this recycled old news?

- Is the author identified? Who is the author and what other writing have they done?

- What is the intention of the article: Is the information based on facts? Does the article present more opinions than facts? Are the opinions backed up with facts?

What activities can I do with learners?

- Choose a local newspaper and compare an opinion article with an article reporting facts. See the [Information vs opinion](#) fact sheet from Agence Science-Presse.

- Practice distinguishing fact from opinion with the Informable App from the [News Literacy Project](#) - [informable.newslit.org](#)

- Do an activity on the identification and consequences of fake news (for example: [Beyond the facts](#) – see the [interactive tool](#)).

- Use the [four ways to verify information](#) on a news item found on social media.

What activities can I do with learners?

- Practice the SIFT method. The [Infodemic blog](#) was created during the Coronavirus Pandemic to help people navigate the barrage of information but the SIFT method can be used any time.
  SIFT is

  - **S**top.

  - **I**nvestigate the source.

  - **F**ind better coverage.

  - **T**race claims, quotes and media to the original context.

- Print a [poster](#) and refer to it in class

- During election period, do an activity on the [online information evaluation](#).

What resources can I use with learners?

- [Media Literacy Crash Course](#)

  - 12 videos on a variety of media literacy topics

- Information Literacy Pack from [CommonCraft](#)

  - Videos w/ English captions, transcripts and lesson plans (some parts will work for literacy learners).

  - To see the videos without banners or a paid account use this link: [Evaluating Web Resources with Learners](#)

Where can I check fake news

Fact Check Explorer (Google tool)

Factcheck.org – Canada

Snopes

AP Fact Check (Associated Press)

Full Fact (based in the United Kingdom)

Look for fact checking sites that are part of the IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network).

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