

Course Support for the Development of Social Media Literacy in schools

What is news

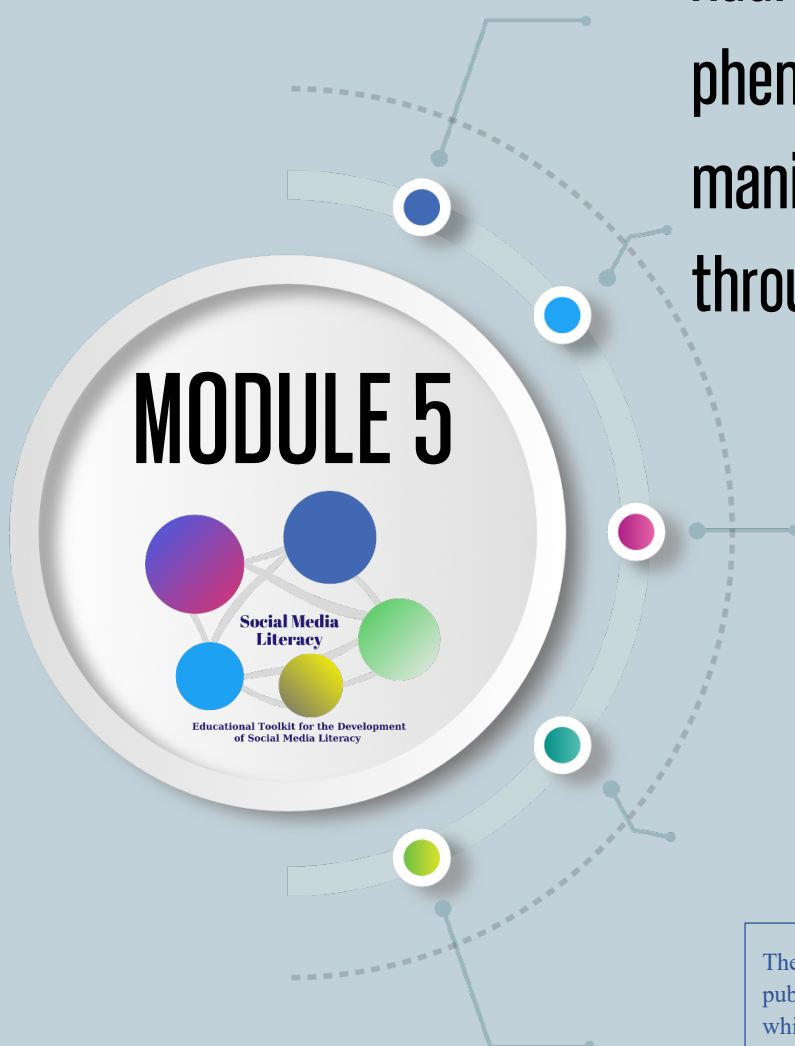
Fake news, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation

Other types of information

Why we believe - cognitive biases

How to spot fake news

Addressing the fake news phenomenon in school – manipulation and propaganda through social media



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Module aim

The aim of this module is to familiarize the participants with the concepts of fake news and disinformation so they are able to pass on the information to their students.

The module will tackle first the main concepts we operate with: news, fake news, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and the context in which they appeared, historically. Later, we will explore the various forms and formats of information: news, advertising, propaganda, malinformation, what is the main reason behind each form and how is it disseminated. We will look into why people tend to believe certain information and will explore concepts as credibility, authority, and notoriety of the sources and how these factors influence us.

Last but not least, we will present some simple steps and tools to check if a news story is likely to be credible and we'll see how we can use them with our students.

Number of hours: 2h

Learning Outcomes

This module answers to the competences formulated by the EU - developed framework DigiComp 2.1 as follows: **Competence area 2:** Communication and collaboration and **Competence area 3:** Digital content creation. The skills to which it contributes are part of the DigiComp 2.1 component 3.2 Integrating and re-elaborating digital content.

By the end of this module, the participants will:

- Master concepts such as news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation
- Master tools to identify various forms of information: news, advertising, propaganda,
- Be able to teach these concepts to their students
- Master techniques and tools to expose fake news and be able to educate the students to perform elementary news-checking activities

Training Material

01. What is news ?

News is information about a recently changed situation or a recent event. But also, news is information that is published in newspapers and broadcast on radio and television about recent events in the country or world or in a particular area of activity. Journalists gather information about recent events in their area or field of expertise, evaluate, sort and order it and construct the news story that is published and broadcast. Not all the information is making it to become news. In order to be communicated to the public, the information has to be newsworthy.

An information is **newsworthy** if:

- it is **recent**. With mobile technology available, people got accustomed to receive information about events as quick as they happen. So, this “recent” became shorter and shorter, which puts a lot of pressure on journalists.

Learning hack: *“Traditional media” - print publication and TV especially - are losing their appeal to people, as their news production chain is longer. Print newspapers give us the news from yesterday, the evening TV newscasts what happened during the day. Social media are better catering for the “need for speed” of the media users.*

- it is **unusual**. “Business as usual” is not interesting. People expect things to be regular, “as it should”. They are attracted to novelties, not only in terms of time, but also in terms of new patterns, exceptions, extra-ordinary things.

Learning Hack: *Click-bait titles include words as “shocking”, “amazing”, “unbelievable” because people are attracted to unusual, weird, “out of the norm things. This*

is also why journalists expose things that do not work properly in our society, as part of their job is to keep the authorities under scrutiny to perform their duties to the benefit of the public.

- it is about (important) **people**. People are interested in other people’s lives, they like stories. “Stories” were the primary way people learned about parts of the world they could never reach. Stories that are stirring strong - positive or negative - emotions in people’s hearts are more attractive. They are called “human interest” stories.

Learning hack: *More “important” - higher in rank, more powerful, better known to people, such as a celebrity - the people the story is about, more attractive the story. This is why the tabloid media, celebrity gossip or realty shows are so popular all over the world.*

- it is about **proximity**. People are more interested in what is happening close to their house, family and community than what is happening in faraway places.

Learning hack: *The local media are more liked in their communities and are more important to the local people because they deal with things that are closer to people. Social media have somehow changed the term of “community”, moving it from its geographic meaning (my village, my city, my country) to one linked to common interest, interest shared by members of one group irrespective of where on Earth they live. This is how social media groups function.*

- it is **dramatic**. People are more interested in drama, conflict and otherwise “negative news”. As species, we learn more from our mistakes and negative experience, as we need to avoid them in the future.

Learning hack: *“Scandal news” are more attractive to people, as they provide drama and conflict and may be a source of learning, in a streetwise manner. This is why the media expose mostly violations of the laws, norms and standards and focus on what is perceived as “the negative”.*

News are produced by reporters in newsrooms or independently, if they are freelancers. The journalists gather the information and assess it based on the criteria above. They also decide if it is relevant for their public - meaning what is the impact on the people and the community. In other words, if publishing the information is in the **public interest**.

The public interest is what distinguishes the work of journalists from other information processors. While there is no single unanimously agreed definition of what is “public interest”, it is generally accepted that it deals with the well-being of communities and the individuals that compose that community. For the media, the public interest is linked to the people’s right to know what is happening in their communities, what is affecting their lives and health, how the common property and public goods are administrated by those elected or paid to do so.

News stories are structured in the shape of an inverted pyramid.

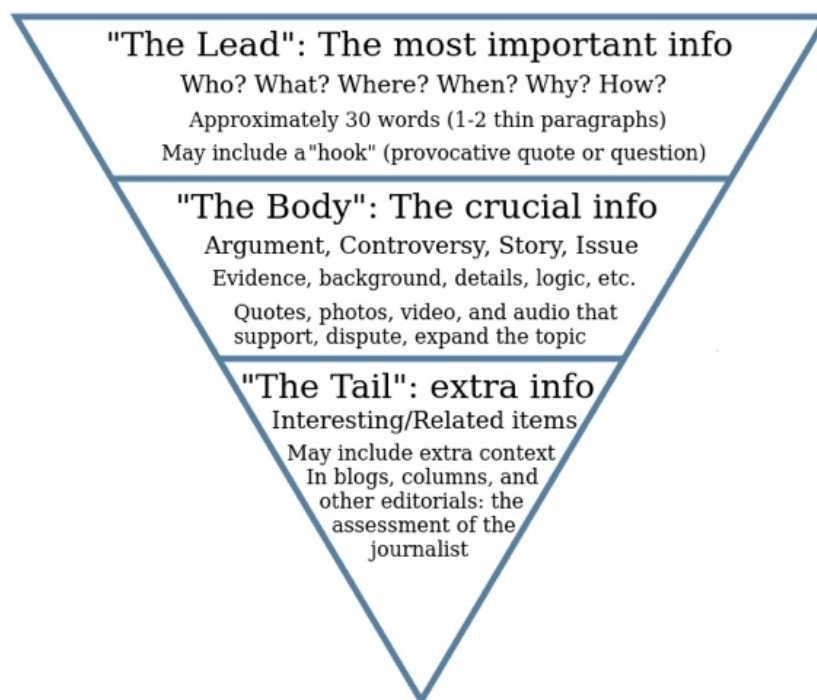


Fig. 1: “Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form” by Christopher Schwartz.

(image licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

The most important information should come on top because it is the likely that is going to be read/ followed by the largest number of people. Some people may lose interest in the content, so they move on after reading just the first paragraph.

The Lead: Summarizes the most important information and answers the five Ws: who, what, when, where, why.

The Body: offers other crucial information, such as how things happened, what people involved said - direct quotes, attributed to persons identified by their names and positions. It explains why that information is important for the public.

The Tail: provides information that puts everything into a larger context: statistics, history, precedents, previous info about the protagonists, explanatory content, related stories.

Learning Hack: *In social media, the most frequent way to circulate a news story is the snippet. It includes the title, the first paragraph (sometimes not even completely) and a picture, when available. Most people do not read beyond the snippet, so they only apparently “got the news”.*



Virus not gone away despite lockdowns easing - WHO

We must be prepared "for new outbreaks to build up very quickly", the organisation warns.

Fig. 2 A snippet - a small piece of information, enough to help the reader to "have an idea" of the story

A well written news story has to:

- provide clear, detailed answers to the five Ws;

- offer quotes attributed to identifiable “sources” - names, positions, affiliations, the context in which the quoted statement has been made, etc
- offer enough information about the documentary sources used for the data provided, better with direct link, so that the reader can double check them if interested.

02. Fake news, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation

Fake news is a term coined to designate false or tampered information circulated for purposes others than informing the public. Such purposes may include personal, commercial or political gains.

While false information, exaggerated or biased news stories and invented narratives have been present in the public sphere from the dawns of the media, “fake news” became a phenomenon after the US presidential elections in 2016, when Donald Trump won unpredicted victory - both media and political analysts, as well as the polls were giving Hillary Clinton as a winner. Analysis into the reasons why Trump’s victory went so largely unpredicted revealed the amount of false narratives circulated especially in the social media by actors - be them state or civil - who did not have the public interest at heart. For example, in 2017 an inquiry conducted by the US Congress established that the Russia-funded Internet Research Agency has employed fake accounts registered on major social networking sites, discussion boards, online newspaper sites, and video hosting services attempting to influence the 2016 United States presidential election.

The term is popular and frequently used, but what exactly is fake news is difficult to define. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism [conducted a research](#) on people from United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Finland and found the following:

- People see the difference between fake news and news as one of degree rather than a clear distinction;
- When asked to provide examples of fake news, people identify poor journalism, propaganda (including both lying politicians and hyperpartisan content), and some kinds of advertising more frequently than false information designed to masquerade as news reports;



- Fake news is experienced as a problem driven by a combination of some news media who publish it, some politicians who contribute to it, and some platforms that help distribute it;
- People are aware of the fake news discussion and see “fake news” in part as a politicized buzzword used by politicians and others to criticize news media and platform companies;
- The fake news discussion plays out against a backdrop of low trust in news media, politicians, and platforms alike—a generalized scepticism toward most of the actors that dominate the contemporary information environment;
- Most people identify individual news media that they consider consistently reliable sources and would turn to for verified information, but they disagree as to which and very few sources are seen as reliable by all.

“Fake News”

Associated with misinformation from different sources, including journalists. Seen as distinguished from news primarily by degree. Also recognized as weaponized by critics of news media and platform companies.



Fig 3: What people understand by “Fake news” (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism)

As the term means so many things to different people, “fake news” is considered a too vague a notion to be used in practice and to build a public policy upon it. It still remains in colloquial use and



designated, generally, false information use with the intent to obtain an advantage - personal, political or financial.

The European Union proposed the term **disinformation**. Disinformation can be understood as false information **deliberately created** and spread to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. Disinformation does not include journalistic errors, satire, or parody. So, the accent is not only on the falsehood of the information provided, but equally on the deliberate intention to deceive.

Fake news and online disinformation are not per se illegal - the freedom of information does not discriminate true from false information. Thus fake news and disinformation are not covered by existing legislation or self-regulation. Some EU Members States are looking into legislative actions against „fake news”, but any such action has to respect all the other human rights.

Learning hack: *When judging an information, one should look at two important aspects: if it is true/false AND if it has the potential to deliberately harm. The intersection of the two creates three possible types of information*

- *Dis-information. Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country.*
- *Mis-information. Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm.*
- *Mal-information. Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country.*

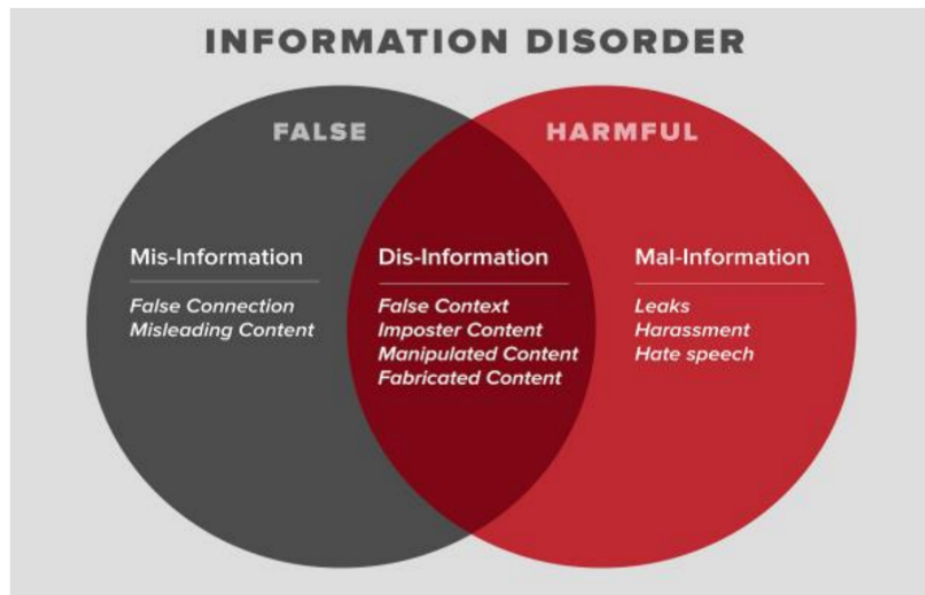


Fig 3: Three types of information that can be involved in fake news

(Source: Council of Europe report DGI(2017)09, Information Disorder, Claire Wardle, PhD Hossein Derakhshan)

03. Other types of information

Not all information with an interest different from “the public interest”, as we defined it for journalism, is harmful or wrong. There are other accepted forms of public communication, such as commercial communication, known as advertising and political communication, known as propaganda.

04. Why we believe – cognitive biases

Fake news has been very effective - a lot of people believe it - and have a capacity to spread virally - meaning very quickly, from person to person. A [study](#) published in 2018 shows that a false story is much more likely to go viral than a real story. According to the authors, a false story reaches 1,500 people six times quicker, on average, than a true story does. The authors investigated 126,000 stories tweeted by approx. 3 million people more than 4.5 million times. They claim that “Politics

was the largest rumor category in our data, with ~45,000 cascades, followed by urban legends, business, terrorism, science, entertainment, and natural disasters (a “cascade” is an interrupted flow of shared tweets from a single source).

While the study focused on Twitter data, the work has implications for Facebook, YouTube, and every major social network.

This raises the question: why do we believe it? Are people “stupid”? Are people gullible? The answer is not at all. And we believe things just because we use our brains. Humans like a coherent, predictable world and are looking for patterns, for causality, for intention and are adverse to “accident”. Things don’t simply “happen”, something or someone has to be “behind” those things. If the causality link is not visible, people are eager to imagine one.

When it comes to truth, people interpret it differently. For some, there is one single truth, “out there” and one has to be righteous or high in merit in another way in order to have access to it. For others, “true” is something that corresponds to some facts that can be objectively demonstrated (and this is how the good journalists work). For yet others, true is something that does fit with their previous beliefs and values, something that “satisfies” their life philosophy. This is why it is so difficult for one set of information to satisfy - or be accepted as true - by everybody.

Learning hack: there are different approaches of “truth” and different people decide differently what they consider to be “true”. This is why it is so difficult for one set of information to satisfy - or be accepted as true - by everybody.

Scientists do not know yet what neurological or psychological mechanisms make us to **believe** something. They just observed some patters, some shortcuts used generally by the human brain to interpret reality. These shortcuts are called “cognitive biases” and we evolutionary developed and used them because it is too difficult to process rationally all the information we are exposed to in our environment. There are a couple of them that are particularly relevant for judging the news:

1. Confirmation bias - the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. The effect is stronger for emotionally charged issues and for deeply entrenched beliefs.”

2. Bias blind spot - the tendency to see oneself as less biased than other people, or to be able to identify more cognitive biases in others than in oneself

3. Bandwagon effect - the tendency to do (or believe) things because many other people do (or believe) the same.

4. The Actor Observer Bias - the tendency to attribute our own acts to external influences, but other's to internal causes. For example, you failed an exam because the teacher was harsh, but your colleague failed the exam because he's stupid or lazy.

5. The Halo Effect - The tendency to evaluate a person based on the initial impression they made on us.

6. The Availability Heuristic - The tendency to estimate the probability of something happening based on how many examples readily come to mind.

More on cognitive biases can be found here: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/50-cognitive-biases-in-the-modern-world/>

These biases are general and function in everybody's mind. They can be overcome by practicing critical thinking and, in case of media, judging each story by its merit.

Studies showed that people with low education and of older age are more prone to believe fake news. This is due to the fact that the plasticity of their minds - the capacity to “change their mind”, to absorb new data and evidence - is lower, not because they are “stupid” but because their capacity to think critically is reduced.

Learning hack: What we believe is not only the result of our rational thinking, but also of our emotions, our moral beliefs and sense of identity. This is why it is so difficult to convince somebody to “change their minds” just presenting them a set of information or data - because this would affect all these aspects. Telling people that “they are wrong” is probably the most ineffective way to fight disinformation.

Not only our brains are sources of bias. [Society and technology](#) are also contributing to our misinterpretation of news.

In society, the same social criteria that help people select their friends guide them when they select the news they consume. There is a tendency to evaluate information more favorably if it comes from within one own social circles. This is how the **echo chambers** appear. (see next section).

Also, the algorithms used to determine what people see online are a source of bias. Both social media platforms and search engines use such algorithm claiming they help „make the experience more personal”. Such **personalization** select only the most engaging and relevant content for each individual user. But in doing so, it may end up reinforcing the cognitive and social biases of users, thus making them even more vulnerable to manipulation.

05. Social media consumption patterns

The usage of the social media has its own particularities, compared to the „traditional media”. Two of the main features are particularization and interaction.

Particularization of the content allows for the intelligent technologies to provide a person content that matches his or her preferences and interests. By monitoring the sites a person accesses, the time spent on these sites, the purchases made, the articles shared or liked, the AI technologies - the infamous “algorithms” - draw a profile for each of us and suggest or prioritize content or ads that matches the identified interests. On social networks, they also can suggest “friends” or contacts that share the same interests and views. This community of interests can create the so-called “echo chambers” - virtual spaces of uniform, harmonized opinions, where conformity is the key and alternative or dissenting opinions are discouraged. Such echo chambers are ripe for manipulation, either consciously or unintentionally. This self-segregation creates a sense of comfort and belonging, which encourages the group thinking and risks to turn the online conversations into “us versus them” confrontations.

Interactivity is the much-praised feature of the social media and some of the most important reasons why people join social media platforms. What people are looking for is participation in a broader conversation, they want to socialize, they see pictures from friends and family, keep up to

date with what is new and to find something entertaining to do. According to the market research company [Global Web Index](#), these are the main reasons why people join social networks:

1. To **stay in touch** with what friends are doing (42%)
2. To **stay up-to-date** with news and current events (41%)
3. To **fill up spare time** (39%)
4. To **find funny or entertaining content** (37%)
5. **General networking** with other people (34%)
6. Because friends are already on them (33%)
7. To **share photos or videos** with others (32%)
8. To **share my opinion** (30%)
9. To **research new products to buy** (29%)
10. To **meet new people** (27%)

One main tool to meet these goals is the sharing function - the possibility to partake with others something that the person finds “interesting” - either information, or emotions.

A [study conducted by New York Times](#) on the “psychology of sharing”, revealed the five main reasons why people do share content:

1. To bring **valuable, enlightening and entertaining content** to others
2. To **define themselves to others** (and to themselves, too)
3. To **get and stay connected to others**
4. For self-fulfilment, to be **credited by others** for what they shared
5. To **support causes** they believe in and **brands** they like.

These reasons testify for the deeply social character of the “social networks”, as they lead to one conclusion: people share in order to **nurture relationships with others**.

The same study also revealed what type of content people share more frequently:

- Pictures and stories about friends and family
- Funny videos and gifs

- Coupons and discounts
- News articles
- Educational videos
- Informative blog posts and infographics
- Music videos
- Sports news
- Highlight videos and other entertaining content.

But who spreads the false information? There are, of course, those ill-intended, those who have a deliberate plan to disseminate panic and mistrust, those paid to do it, the state-sponsored trolls who put disinformation on so many public agendas. But apart from them, other, less vicious, even unwilling agents contribute to the spreading of misinformation.

A [BBC analysis](#) during the Coronavirus pandemic identified several types of persons who do it:

- The Joker - who thinks that is a good prank and hopes to get a good laugh
- The Scammer - who looks to make money from the panic they spread.
- The Politician - who looks to gain sympathy, support or other kind of advantage over his opponents;
- The Conspiracy Theorist - who is fully convinced that occult forces are ruling the world and seven billion people are too blind or too brain-washed to see.

The Insider - who is - or looks like - a trustworthy source - a doctor, professor or hospital worker. Sometimes they really are, but their information is wrong. Other times are just marginal voices, all part of the legit scientific debate, but not the ultimate truth holders they claim to be.

- The Relative - who, in all good faith, alarm all the family of something they thought as valid information but turned out to be as fake as it gets.

- The Celebrity - who is taking any opportunity to increase their visibility and we take their popularity for competence. As do their followers.

Studies show that an active use of social networks does not translate into an equally active civic engagement. So, even if a person shares a lot of political content and has strong political opinions it doesn't necessary means that the said person will be involved in off line political actions. It goes the

same for other causes, such as environment or animal protection. This kind of keyboard activism is called **slacktivism**.

Research in 2019 shows that over half of the world’s population is now on social media — an increase of 9% over 2018. People access multiple social media channels regularly, not just one. Women are apparently more inclined to use the mobile application, as men prefer desktops.

Information about how the young people (9 to 16 years old) use the Internet is provided by the comprehensive study [EU Kids online](#).

Watching videos, listening to music, communicating with friends and family, visiting a social networking site and playing online games top the list of activities done on a daily basis.

A majority of children is using the social media frequently, as shown in the table below:

Use of social media	Daily or more often	At least once a week
Italy	54	13
Portugal	67	9
Romania	49	15

Paradoxically, the use Internet for school yasks is not as popular as one would have expected:

	Daily or more often	At least once a week
Italy	35	44
Portugal	25	27
Romania	37	32

The mobile devices are the most popular means to access internet. The study reveals that “While the widespread use of mobile devices is associated with an increasing number of online activities, the

range of activities taken up is not necessarily more varied. Children still engage mostly in communication and entertainment activities” [...] The frequency of all the activities increases by age, whereas gender variations tend to be less. Older children are more likely to take up more diverse online activities, suggesting a progression along the ‘ladder of opportunities’ from more basic uses of the internet – such as communication, entertainment and schoolwork – to more participatory activities”.

It is important to know these things in order to understand how information circulates on social media, where and how we can interfere with educational tools and how we can turn the social media consumption patterns onto educational and learning opportunities.

06. How to spot fake news

Spotting fake news and debunking is a complicated matter and get harder and harder as the technology used to fabricate the news is getting more and more sophisticated. Still, there are a couple of steps that everybody agrees upon as a minimal and easy set of moves to help us navigate the maze of online information. UNESCO, a leading authority in media literacy, [recommends](#) the following minimal steps:

1. **Consider the source** - Analyze the site where you found the information. Check the name, the “About us” section, the publisher and the contact information. Treat with caution all sources that do not offer information about the publishers (name, organization) and detailed contact information, including a physical address where they can be contacted. The journalistic best practices ask for the sites to indicate the name and contact information of the person who is responsible for the editorial content of the site. Look at the other articles published by the same site. They may look bizarre, the language they use may be broken, the grammar faulty. These are all red flags. Look at the URL address. Some sites try to lure people by mimicking legit sites, even copying their look. The URL may give you an indication about this.

Learning hack: In order to create some sort of classification in the maze of internet domains, some extensions are used typically for sites in the same field called Top Level Domains (TLD).

For example:

.com - for commercial sites - amount for half of the sites currently active

.edu - for educational organizations

.gov - US governmental bodies

.org - public interest organizations

.eu - the country code top-level domain (ccTLD) for the European Union (EU). The domain is available for any person, company or organization based in the European Economic Area (the EU member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

In addition to this, every country has its own code TLD. The [list of all country extensions](#) is available at Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA).

Learning hack: Some TLDs are notorious for being used by unreliable sites. ICDSOft, a web hosting company supporting 57,465 active websites [prepared a “badness scale”](#) featuring TLDs to be avoided. So, the site you are visiting has one of these extension, be double careful.

Position	Domain	Badness Index
1.	.live	5.79
2.	.buzz	5.46
3.	.gq	4.85
4.	.tk	4.75

Position	Domain	Badness Index
5.	.fit	4.60
6.	.cf	4.33
7.	.ga	4.28
8.	.ml	3.99
9.	.wang	3.55
10.	.top	3.23

2. **Check the author** - Look for the byline of the article. The name of the person who has written the article or taken the photo or video should appear. For a journalist, it is a matter of personal and professional pride to put their signature on a piece they have worked on hard, maybe days or weeks in a row. If the article is not signed, this is a sign of warning: maybe the journalist is not content with the result, maybe the article is a re-run or adaptation of somebody else’s work (sometimes with the violation of the copyright legislation) or maybe the author is not a journalist at all. If a name appears, check it out. Verify it with Google or other search engine and see what else have they authored. If the search returns few or none references, it is possible the name is a pseudonym - a fake name chosen to hide the author’s real identity.

Learning hack: A pseudonym is not automatically a sign of fake news. Some publications want to appear larger than life and show that they have more journalists than in reality. It's like the bear raising on two feet to look scarier or the puff fish turning into a balloon in order to scare away the enemies.

3. Check the date - The date the article was posted or updated has to be recent. One of the most frequent techniques to make fake news viral is to “revive” and recirculate old articles that may have a different, strongest impact in the new context.

4. Check for biases - Read the article and try to evaluate if it is balanced and presents more than one angle. Then check yourself and see if you, as a reader or watcher are open to new facts, ideas or angles. If not sure, look for and read other articles from the same source and author - the bias may be more visible.

5. Read beyond the headline - Some of the titles are exaggerated in order to attract readers. Remember click baits? The actual content may be cooler, less outrageous and, in some not so rare case, complete different from what the title suggests. If the title includes words such as “shock”, “unbelievable”, “danger” and so on, be more careful than usual.

6. Check for supporting sources - The journalists have to substantiate the facts they present with documents or quotes from knowledgeable, competent sources. Check first if such documents or sources exist and are completely spell out. If there is a link to some documents (such as scientific studies, opinion polls), check them out to see if they are for real and they say what the article claims they say. Check if the expert quoted exist and their affiliation is correctly mentioned. If suspicious, verify the quote in the article: is it accurate? Does the source really said what the article claims they said?

7. Is it humor? - This is a tough one, as some humor pieces are really good and appealing. So appealing and life-like that we are ready to lower out critical thinking defense and believe them just because are funny or outlandish. Repeat steps 1 and 2.

8. Consult the experts - If you still have doubts, verify the story on one of the expert fact checking sites, run by professional journalists, documentarists and fact checkers. A [collection of the strongest fact checking sources](#) is provided by MIL expert (a teacher herself) July Smith.

07. Fact Sheet

Italy

There were **49.48 million** internet users in Italy in January 2020. The number of internet users in Italy **increased** by +2.4% between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Italy stood at **82%** in January 2020

There were **35.00 million** social media users in Italy in January 2020. The number of social media users in Italy **increased** by +6.4% between April 2019 and January 2020. Social media penetration in Italy stood at **58%** in January 2020

Time spent on the Internet : 6h 00 min

Time spent on social media: 1h 57 mi

Source: <https://datareportal.com/digital-in-italy>

Most used social media

Rank	Brand	For News	For All Purposes
1	Facebook	54% (+3)	77%
2	WhatsApp	27% (+2)	78%
3	YouTube	25% (-)	69%
4	Instagram	13% (+6)	41%
5	Facebook Messenger	8% (-)	40%
6	Twitter	8% (-2)	19%

41% - share the news via social media, messaging apps or email

37% - comment on articles via social media or wensites

Source:

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf

Portugal

There were **8,52** internet users in Portugal in January 2020. The number of internet users in Portugal **increased** by +3,0% between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Portugal stood at **83%** in January 2020.

There were **7,00 million** social media users in Portugal in January 2020. The number of social media users **increased** by **6,6 %** between 2019 and 2020. Social media penetration in Portugal stood at **69%** in January 2019.

Time spent on the Internet : 6h 38 min

Time spent on social media: 2h 04 min

Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-portugal?rq=Portugal>

Most used networks

Rank	Brand	For News	For All
1	Facebook	53% (-)	77%
2	YouTube	24% (+2)	70%
3	Facebook Messenger	20% (+1)	61%
4	WhatsApp	15% (+4)	47%
5	Instagram	12% (+6)	40%
6	LinkedIn	6% (-1)	17%

49% - share the news via social media, messaging apps or email

29% - comment on articles via social media or websites

Source:

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf

Romania

There were **15.35** internet users in Romania in January 2019. The number of internet users **increased** +1,9% between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Romania stood at **80%** in January 2020.

There were **11 million** social media users in Romania in January 2019. The number of social media users **increased** by **5,5%** between 2019 and 2020. Social media penetration in Romania stood at **57%** in January 2019.

Time spent on the Internet : 7h 21min

Time spent on social media: 2 h 13min

Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-romania?rq=romania>

Rank	Brand	For News	For All
1	Facebook	68% (-1)	86%
2	YouTube	32% (+1)	78%
3	WhatsApp	23% (+5)	64%
4	Facebook Messenger	22% (+4)	62%
5	Instagram	10% (+3)	35%
6	LinkedIn	7% (+1)	24%

40% - share the news via social media, messaging apps or email

32% - comment on articles via social media or websites

Source:

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf

Resources

- News Manual: https://www.thenewsmanual.net/Manuals%20Volume%201/volume1_01.htm
- Data on digital consumption Italy: <https://datareportal.com/digital-in-italy>
- Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis: <https://www.disinfoobservatory.org/about-us/>
- Council of Europe report DGI(2017)09, Information Disorder, Claire Wardle, PhD Hossein Derakhshan - <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-november-2017/1680764666>
- The spread of true and false news online, Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, Sinan Aral, 2018, Science Magazine, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1146>
- Why people believe weird things, Michael Shermer, https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_shermer_why_people_believe_weird_things?language=en#t-179467
- 10 Cognitive Biases That Distort Your Thinking, <https://www.verywellmind.com/cognitive-biases-distort-thinking-2794763>
- How to Use Social Media in Your Career, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/business/social-media-for-career-and-business>
- The 10 Top Reasons Why We Use Social Networks, <https://wersm.com/the-10-top-reasons-why-we-use-social-networks/>
- EU Kids Online, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/eu-kids-online/reports/EU-Kids-Online-2020-10Feb2020.pdf>
- Coronavirus: The seven types of people who start and spread viral misinformation, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-52474347>
- Fake News Resources for Teachers, <https://heyjuliesmith.com/2017/03/16/fake-news-resources-teachers/>
- 11 Tools to Verify that Online Info, <http://heyjuliesmith.com/2016/06/02/11-tools-verify-online-info/>
- Tools to monitor Disinformation, <https://www.disinfo.eu/resources/tools-to-monitor-disinformation>



- Journalism, Fake News and Disinformation, Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, UNESCO,
https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0.pdf





Infographics

50 COGNITIVE BIASES TO BE AWARE OF SO YOU CAN BE THE VERY BEST VERSION OF YOU

This infographic grid lists 50 cognitive biases, each with a brief description and a small icon. The biases are organized into six columns: Memory, Social, Learning, Belief, Money, and Politics. Some examples include:

- Memory:** Fundamental Attribution Error, Halo Effect, Availability Heuristic, Forer Effect (aka Barnum Effect), Reactance, Availability Cascade, Zero-Risk Bias, Placebo Effect, IKEA Effect, Cryptomnesia.
- Social:** Self-Serving Bias, Moral Luck, Defensive Attribution, Confirmation Bias, Social Desirability Bias, Stereotyping, Bystander Effect, Social Loafing, Clustering Illusion.
- Learning:** Just-World Hypothesis, Naive Cynicism, Backfire Effect, Self-Serving Bias, Sunk Cost Fallacy, Outgroup Homogeneity Bias, Authority Bias, Survivorship Bias, Ben Franklin Effect, Systematic Error, Pessimism Bias, Optimism Bias.
- Belief:** In-Group Favoritism, Bandwagon Effect, Curse of Knowledge, Naive Cynicism, Confirmation Bias, Confirmation Bias, Backfire Effect, Self-Serving Bias, Sunk Cost Fallacy, Outgroup Homogeneity Bias, Authority Bias, Survivorship Bias, Ben Franklin Effect, Systematic Error, Pessimism Bias, Optimism Bias.
- Money:** Bandwagon Effect, Curse of Knowledge, Naive Cynicism, Confirmation Bias, Confirmation Bias, Backfire Effect, Self-Serving Bias, Sunk Cost Fallacy, Outgroup Homogeneity Bias, Authority Bias, Survivorship Bias, Ben Franklin Effect, Systematic Error, Pessimism Bias, Optimism Bias.
- Politics:** Groupthink, Spotlight Effect, Naive Cynicism, Google Effect (aka Digital Amnesia), Belief Bias, Confirmation Bias, Confirmation Bias, Backfire Effect, Self-Serving Bias, Sunk Cost Fallacy, Outgroup Homogeneity Bias, Authority Bias, Survivorship Bias, Ben Franklin Effect, Systematic Error, Pessimism Bias, Optimism Bias.

Figure 4

The infographic 'FAKE NEWS How to spot Fake News' provides a guide on identifying fake news through eight steps:

- Consider the Source:** Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact information.
- Check the Author:** Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?
- Check the Date:** Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they are relevant to current events.
- Check for Biases:** Check if your own beliefs could affect your judgment.
- Read Beyond:** Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?
- Supporting Sources:** Click on those links. Determine if the information given actually supports the story.
- Is it a Joke:** If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.
- Ask the Experts:** Consult a fact checking site or ask a librarian.

At the bottom, it provides social media links for @factcheck.org, @factcheck.org.uk, @factcheck.org.uk, @factcheck.org.uk, and @factcheck.org.uk.

Figure 5

< CUT OUT AND TAPE NEAR YOUR COMPUTER OR TV

BREAKING NEWS CONSUMER'S HANDBOOK

FAKE NEWS EDITION

1. Big red flags for fake news: ALL CAPS, or obviously photoshopped pics.
2. A glut of pop-ups and banner ads? Good sign the story is pure clickbait.
3. Check the domain! Fake sites often add “.co” to trusted brands to steal their luster. (Think: “abcnews.com.co”)
4. If you land on an unknown site, check its “About” page. Then, Google it with the word “fake” and see what comes up.
5. If a story offers links, follow them. (Garbage leads to worse garbage.) No links, quotes, or references? Another telltale sign.
6. Verify an unlikely story by finding a reputable outlet reporting the same thing.
7. Check the date. Social media often resurrects outdated stories.
8. Read past headlines. Often they bear no resemblance to what lies beneath.
9. Photos may be misidentified and dated. Use a reverse image search engine like TinEye to see where an image *really* comes from.
10. Gut check. If a story makes you angry, it’s probably designed that way.
11. Finally, if you’re not sure it’s true, don’t share it! *Don’t. Share. It.*


ON THE MEDIA

ONTHEMEDIA.ORG

Figure 6

Infographics sources:

Figure 4: <https://www.titlemax.com/discovery-center/lifestyle/50-cognitive-biases-to-be-aware-of-so-you-can-be-the-very-best-version-of-you/>

Figure 5:

<https://www.facebook.com/UNESCOWindhoekOffice/photos/a.958549287501262/3061018133921023/>

Figure 6: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/articles/breaking-news-consumers-handbook-pdf>



Learning Snacks

News is information that is published in newspapers and broadcast on radio and television about recent events in the country or world or in a particular area of activity.

News value of information:

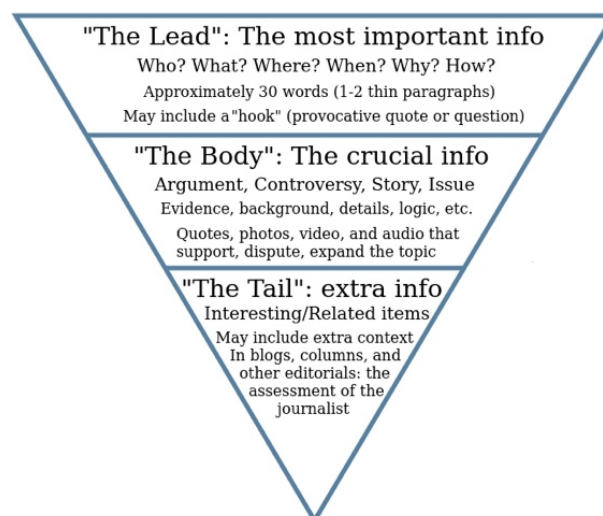
An information is **newsworthy** if:

- it is **recent**
- it is **unusual**
- it is about (important) **people**
- it is about **proximity**
- it is **dramatic**

What distinguishes journalism from other types of communication:

Journalists publish the information that is in the **public interest**. For journalists, the public interest is linked to the people's right to know what is happening in their communities, what is affecting their lives and health, how the common property and public goods are administered by those elected or paid to do so.

News structure: inverted pyramid. It illustrates the interest of the people in the respective story. Most people read just the title and the "lead".



Learning hack: Say the most important thing first, as you have the attention of more people.

Activity plans with students

01. Activity 1: Cognitive biases

Read the following paragraphs and fill in the type of cognitive bias the situation describes. Remember the biases you learned about: Confirmation bias, Bias blind spot, Bandwagon effect, the Actor Observer bias/asymmetry, the Halo Effect, the Availability Heuristic!

List of terms: Bandwagon effect, Bias blind spot, Halo effect

1. Paola's classmates are all talking about how cool veganism is. The next week, Paola also tries vegan burgers and praises them to her classmates, even though she doesn't really like the taste that much. This example describes the _____.

Correct answer: Bandwagon effect

Paola's curiosity to try vegan food only appeared because she heard other people talk about it, not because she actually was interested in veganism. The bandwagon effect means that someone has the tendency to do or believe something simply because other people around them do it, and sometimes, they don't even need it or resonate with it.

2. Teodor is a high school student who likes politics. He believes that his conservative classmates are like that because they are influenced by their environment and families, who are also conservative. He considers that he is progressive for very rational reasons and no external factors influence his views. This example describes _____.

Correct answer: Bias blind spot

Teodor is aware of other people's biases, but fails to see that he himself may also be influenced by the people, content or places he is surrounded by. The bias blind spot means the tendency to see oneself as less biased than other people, or to be able to identify more cognitive biases in others than in oneself.

3. Lia, a high school student, has a new classmate who comes from Spain. She is amazed by how pretty her new classmate is. Just because of that reason, Lia thinks that her new classmate is a very nice person, even though the new classmate actually makes mean jokes about Lia behind her back. This situation describes the _____.

Correct answer: Halo effect

The halo effect is the tendency to evaluate a person positively based on the initial impression they made on us, or on previous assumptions, even though it may not apply to all aspects of our interaction with that person or to the traits of the person. Lia assumed her classmate was very nice (evaluation) because she considered the classmate to be so pretty (first impression).

02. Activity 2: How to spot a fake news

Fake News is 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.

How to spot Fake News? Check the source, watch out for details, cross-reference the sources, use fact-checking sites or Google.

The following image became a viral post on Facebook a few years ago, but it was shortly found false. Which steps can you take to find out the truth?



1. Look at the image and check the source:

- a. University of Nebraska Department of Entomology
- b. **Gary Neaderhiser's Facebook page**
- c. The source is not indicated

The correct answer is b because the image is in a private FB post and the name of the spider isn't mentioned. The user who posted it is not from the University and only used its image.

2. Look at the headline, be cautious, and analyze it: which parts of it can make you doubt the credibility of the message? (select the useful option)

- a. It has a scientific lexicon
- b. **It is a screaming headline and it spreads fear**
- c. It is a generic headline

The correct answer is b because the letters are uppercase and the content is alarming.

3. Read the text and think: how can you cross-reference the sources? (select the unuseful idea)

- a. Look for the spider species in the picture (google, TinEye)
- b. **Search other similar news in other social media**
- c. Check in the newspapers from North Carolina written in July to see if there were deaths reported

The correct answer is b because social media are not reliable sources and even if you find similar news they could also be false.

4. Look at the author: who is publishing the post? Has he got proven scientific competencies?

What can you do to find out? (select the unuseful option)

- a. Google the author's name
- b. Check the name in Snopes or other fact-checking sites
- c. **Take a look only at the author's profile**

The correct answer is c because the information in his account (if they even exist) is not a guarantee of truth and it does not prove his expertise.