information matters

Training Programme
for Online Courses

Module 8

Media Literacy & Disinformation

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Contents

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Description for online Lesson

Hello and welcome to lesson 8 of our course. Today we will go deeper into the topic of media literacy and disinformation. Disinformation is an exceptionally important topic today for several reasons, reflecting the profound impact it can have on individuals, societies, and democracies. Here are key reasons why addressing disinformation is crucial in the contemporary landscape:

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- In the digital age, information spreads rapidly and widely through various online platforms. Disinformation can exploit these channels to reach a large audience quickly, potentially influencing public opinion and shaping narratives.

- The deliberate spread of false information erodes trust in traditional media, institutions, and even in the concept of objective truth. When people cannot trust the information they receive, it becomes challenging to make informed decisions and engage in meaningful discourse.

- Disinformation is frequently used as a tool for political manipulation. False narratives can be strategically crafted to influence elections, sway public opinion, or undermine trust in democratic processes, posing a direct threat to the foundations of democratic societies.

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- Disinformation often exploits existing social divisions and can contribute to polarisation within societies. False narratives that reinforce existing biases can deepen societal rifts, making it difficult for individuals to engage in constructive dialogue and find common ground.

- Misinformation, especially in the context of health crises, can pose significant public health risks. False information about medical treatments, vaccines, or the nature of a disease can lead to harmful behaviours, jeopardising individual and community well-being.

- Disinformation campaigns are often linked to broader cybersecurity threats. Malicious actors may use disinformation as a distraction or as part of a broader strategy to compromise systems, disrupt operations, or conduct cyberattacks.

With the interconnectedness of the global community, disinformation can transcend borders and impact international relations. False narratives can strain diplomatic ties, exacerbate conflicts, and contribute to the spread of misinformation on a global scale.

Disinformation can have direct consequences on individuals' lives. From financial scams to false health advice, individuals may suffer tangible harm when exposed to and influenced by false information.

The rapid evolution of technology and the rise of deepfakes and other advanced manipulation techniques make it increasingly challenging to discern between genuine and false information. Addressing disinformation requires staying ahead of these technological advancements.

In summary, the topic of disinformation is vital today because it intersects with numerous aspects of modern life, ranging from political stability and public health to individual decision-making. Addressing disinformation requires a multifaceted approach involving media literacy, technological solutions, and collaborative efforts across governments, technology companies, and civil society.

We hope you find this lesson useful. We welcome you to continue with lesson 9 of our course.

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Introduction

The growing numbers of senior citizens, their rapidly increasing adoption of social media and their high levels of voter turnout make their vulnerability to disinformation a matter of special concern. Relying on television as their primary source of news, older adults may find some protection against online disinformation, but the increased use of propaganda in traditional media, as well as on smart TV is noticeable. The rapid evolution of news distribution technologies is also changing older adults' habits in the media landscape.

Learning Outcomes

Participants will enhance critical thinking skills when evaluating information sources, helping them to identify disinformation and the most common strategies used by disinformation, such as misinformation, manipulation and propagand.

Main keywords

Fake news, misinformation, vulnerability, social media, disinformation, online propaganda.

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Subjects

» Information sources and evaluation of the information sources.

» Identification of disinformation and dealing with fake news in different sources of information.

» Main kinds of disinformation and distinguishing misinformation, manipulation and propaganda.

Main terms:

- Desinformation refers to the deliberate spread of false or misleading information with the intention to deceive, manipulate opinions, or influence behaviors. This type of misinformation is often disseminated through various channels, including social media, news platforms, or other communication channels. The goal of disinformation is typically to create an artificial reality or to sway public sentiments, while simultaneously undermining trust in reliable sources of information.

- Misinformation refers to the dissemination or propagation of inaccurate or misleading information, often unintentionally. Unlike disinformation, which involves a deliberate intent to deceive, misinformation may be spread without a malicious motive. It can arise from errors, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or simply the unintentional sharing of false information. Misinformation can be circulated through various communication channels, including social media, traditional media, or interpersonal interactions.

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- Manipulation refers to the skillful or crafty management or control of people or situations, often with the intention of influencing or directing them in a way that serves the manipulator's interests. It involves using tactics or strategies to shape the perceptions, beliefs, emotions, or behaviours of others. Manipulation can take various forms, including psychological manipulation, where individuals exploit cognitive or emotional vulnerabilities to gain an advantage. In different contexts, manipulation can be observed in interpersonal relationships, marketing, politics, or other social interactions.

- Propaganda is a form of communication that is designed to manipulate public opinion and influence people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions in a particular direction. It often involves the deliberate dissemination of information, ideas, or rumours with the aim of promoting a specific political, ideological, or commercial agenda. Propaganda can use various techniques, including biassed or selective presentation of facts, emotional appeals, and manipulation of symbols or language, to shape public perception. It is commonly associated with political contexts but can also be employed in advertising, public relations, and other domains. Propaganda can be used both for positive purposes, such as promoting a cause believed to be just, and for negative purposes, where manipulation and misinformation are employed to serve hidden or unethical interests.

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Useful resources

Disinformation is the greater risk for old users:

🔗 https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/OXAN-DB263856/full/html

Aging in the era of fake news:

🔗 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7505057

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A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world - Poynter:

🔗 https://www.poynter.org

🔗 https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/making-it-click-supporting-people-with-low-internet-use

🔗 https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/2023-06/tipsheet_break_fake_critical_thinking_vs_disinformation.pdf

How does disinformation work?

🔗 https://crisiscenter.be/en/how-does-disinformation-work

Learn what fake news is:

🔗 https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/fake-news-and-misinformation-advice-hub/learn-about-fake-news-to-support-children

A short video on the politics of news:

🔗 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWP_N_FoW-I&t=65s

Lesson plans designed for trainers:

First Lesson Plan: Identifying misleading images in the media:

🔗 https://eavi.eu/lesson-plan-identifying-misleading-images-in-the-media

Second Lesson Plan: Detecting and decoding bias in the media:

🔗 https://eavi.eu/lesson-plan-detecting-and-decoding-bias-in-the-media

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Activity 1#: Debate: No room for disinformation. We will be better informed!

Learning objectives:

- To create a space for discussion on the topic

- To make a better understanding on the way propaganda works

- To have a list with basic rules for fighting disinformation

Settings/materials/duration

- Video materials example

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frjITitjisY

- 4 people form a debate and the other listen and afterwards ask questions

- Video and introduction time – 15 minutes

- Debate – 45 minutes

- Conclusions – 15 minutes

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Implementation of the activity:

A video is played and an introduction on the topic is made. Four volunteers take the floor and are divided into two groups to debate in front of the others with examples for propaganda, disinformation – historical and contemporary stories, known by movies, etc. After the debates the whole group comes out with conclusions.

Step 1 - Watch the videos:

- Useful material: How does disinformation work? https://crisiscenter.be/en/how-does-disinformation-work

- Learn what fake news is:

  https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/fake-news-and-misinformation-advice-hub/learn-about-fake-news-to-support-children.

Step 2 - Discuss

- Define disinformation and its impact on individuals and society as a whole.

- Present common strategies such as clickbait, manipulated images and false news;

- Illustrate methods to resist disinformation such as taking distance, questioning information, and seeking diverse perspectives.

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Main terms:

» **Desinformation** - deliberate spread of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive, misinform, or manipulate individuals or groups. It is often used as a tool to influence public opinion, sow confusion, or achieve political, social, or economic objectives. Disinformation can be disseminated through various channels, including traditional media, social media, or online platforms, and it poses a significant threat to accurate and trustworthy information dissemination.

» **Clickbait** - content, typically in the form of headlines, thumbnails, or captions, designed to attract attention and encourage users to click on a link. It often employs sensationalism, exaggeration, or misleading tactics to generate curiosity and increase click-through rates, without necessarily delivering substantial or accurate content. The primary goal of clickbait is to drive web traffic and engagement for financial or promotional purposes.

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» **Manipulated images** - visuals that have been altered or edited, often using digital tools or software, to create a deceptive or misleading representation of reality. This manipulation can involve changes to the content, context, or visual elements within the image, with the potential to spread misinformation or influence perceptions.

» **False news** - information that is intentionally fabricated or distorted to deceive and mislead readers, viewers, or listeners. Also known as fake news, false news can be spread through various media channels and platforms, often with the aim of influencing public opinion, creating confusion, or achieving specific agendas. It is essential to critically evaluate sources and verify information to combat the spread of false news.

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Recommendations for implementation

- Try to involve all participants

- Share how the desinformation shapes your life?

- Share examples of desinformation you have met recently

- Give enough time for the debate and conclusions

Reflective questions

- What makes information desinformation?

- Who spreads disinformation?

- What are the main characteristics of disinformation?

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Evaluation of the Module

Questionnaire

To be answered by learners at the end of the module to measure the overall impact of the training program. For a printable version please see the annex.

Quiz for Self-Assessment

To be answered by learners at the end of the module.

You can find a printable version in the annex.

Validation of the Module

At the end of the Module, learners will have acquired.

Knowledge:

The learners are able to

- Evaluating information critically, discerning between reliable and unreliable sources.

- Being open to learning and adapting to changes in technology and social media trends.

- Striking a healthy balance between online and offline activities for overall well-being.

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Skills:

The learners are able to

- The ability to use digital devices and navigate online platforms effectively.

- Cultivating a constructive and positive presence on social media platforms.

- Developing a mindset of seeking new knowledge and staying informed about digital technologies.

- Effectively using social media to connect with others, fostering relationships.

- Understanding the techniques and strategies used in media, including recognizing clickbait and manipulated images.

Competencies:

The learners are able to

- Verifying the accuracy of information by cross-referencing with reliable sources.

- Actively participating in online communities and fostering connections with others.

- Recognizing signs of intentionally false or misleading information to avoid being influenced by it.

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ANNEX For Module 8
Media Literacy & Disinformation

Entry Level Test - Media Literacy & Disinformation

Question 1: Disinformation refers to false information that is spread intentionally to deceive or manipulate people.
   a. True
   b. False

Question 2: What are some common strategies used to spread disinformation?
   a. Clickbait
   b. Manipulated images
   c. False news
   d. All of the above

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Question 3: Which of the following methods can help individuals resist disinformation?
  a. Taking distance from the information
  b. Questioning the information
  c. Seeking diverse perspectives
  d. All of the above

Question 4: How can creating a space for discussion contribute to a better understanding of how propaganda works?
  a. It allows for the exchange of different perspectives and insights.
  b. It encourages critical thinking and analysis of information.
  c. It helps individuals recognize propaganda techniques and tactics.
  d. All of the above

Correct answers:

Question 1: a) True

Question 2: d) All of the above

Question 3: d) All of the above

Question 4: d) All of the above

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Questionnaire

To be answered by learners at the end of the module to measure the overall impact of the training program.

Dear Participants, your feedback is crucial for evaluating the impact of the disinformation training module. Kindly take a moment to share your thoughts and insights.

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in identifying and combating disinformation after completing this training? 1 being not confident at all, 10 being extremely confident.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. To what extent did the training help you recognize common signs of disinformation and misinformation online?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Extremely

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3. Did the practical exercises and case studies contribute to your understanding of how disinformation operates?

☐ Not at all
☐ Somewhat
☐ Moderately
☐ Very much
☐ Extremely

4. How likely are you to apply the fact-checking and verification techniques learned during this training in your online activities?

☐ Not likely at all
☐ Somewhat likely
☐ Moderately likely
☐ Very likely
☐ Extremely likely

5. Were the examples and real-life scenarios presented in the training relevant to your online experiences?

☐ Not at all
☐ Somewhat
☐ Moderately
☐ Very much
☐ Extremely

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6. Did the training raise your awareness of the potential impact of disinformation on personal decision-making and societal issues?

☐ Not at all
☐ Somewhat
☐ Moderately
☐ Very much
☐ Extremely

7. What specific aspect of the training did you find most valuable or insightful in combating disinformation?

8. Do you believe this training has equipped you with practical skills to critically evaluate information and sources online?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Partially

9. Were the training materials, including presentations and handouts, clear and helpful in conveying the information?

☐ Not at all
☐ Somewhat
☐ Moderately
☐ Very much
☐ Extremely

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10. In what ways can the training be improved to better meet your needs or expectations?

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11. Would you recommend this training to others? Why or why not?

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12. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the disinformation training module?

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Thank you for sharing your feedback. Your insights are invaluable in refining and improving our training initiatives.

Exit Level Test - Media Literacy & Disinformation

Question 1: Disinformation only affects individuals and has no impact on society as a whole.
- a. True
- b. False

Question 2: Which of the following is NOT a common strategy used to spread disinformation?

Clickbait
- a. Manipulated images
- b. False news
- c. Peer-reviewed research

Question 3: To resist disinformation, it is important to question information and seek diverse perspectives.
- a. True
- b. False

Question 4: How can individuals resist falling for clickbait?
- a. By clicking on the headline without reading the article
- b. By sharing the clickbait article without verifying its authenticity
- c. By ignoring the clickbait and seeking reliable sources for information
- d. By clicking on as many clickbait articles as possible to become more informed

Correct answers:

Question 1: b) False

Question 2: d) Peer-reviewed research

Question 3: a) True

Question 4: c) By ignoring the clickbait and seeking reliable sources for information

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contact@informationmatters.eu

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