



IDENTIFY DISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS

Frequently asked questions



FINNISH SOCIETY ON
MEDIA EDUCATION

GLOSSARY

Fake news

Previously referred to content that appears to be news but contains distorted information. However, the term has come to be used as a weapon in debate when trying to attack any content or person that represents a different opinion. Since the concept has become so vague, institutions, e.g. the European Commission, now prefer to use the term disinformation.

Disinformation

Incorrect, misleading and inaccurate information or information that is deliberately selected to promote the goals of the person who published it.

Misinformation

False or inaccurate information shared unintentionally.

Propaganda

Systematic efforts to influence the attitudes of the masses in order to promote the interests and (political) ideology of a particular body using powerful manipulation methods.



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1. HOW DO I IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS?

Assess information in a critical way

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Fake news often mixes fact and fiction. It's vague, often one-sided, sometimes humorous and insulting news coverage, videos, images or other social media content that appeals to people's emotions. The content may be too unbelievable to be true.

It can be difficult to identify fake news, as it often looks like reliable news coverage and has reliable looking logos, for example. A news story can also claim that the information comes from a dependable and known source.

- **Examine the content carefully, including the sources and the author – can you find more information about them?**
- **Can you find the same news story elsewhere?**
- **Does the news story cover several aspects?**
- **Does it seem too unbelievable to be true?**



2. WHY DO PEOPLE PRODUCE FAKE NEWS?

● Think about the purpose of the message

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Misleading news is about money (e.g. selling something, raising money) or power – or both. Fake news stories are intended to influence people's opinions, emotions and behaviour. Sometimes their purpose is to cause chaos and confusion and to undermine confidence in certain individuals, institutions or society. Sometimes the purpose is to cause harm.

- **Why would someone want to draw your attention to the topic?**
- **What kind of feelings did the content try to evoke?**
- **What was the thing that specifically caught your attention?**



3. WHO PRODUCES AND DISSEMINATES DISINFORMATION?

Various people and bodies

Various people and bodies

Fake news and disinformation are generated by money- and power-seeking organised institutions or communities across the world. These organisations hire people to write news from specific perspectives that are not based on scientific research or facts. Disinformation can also be produced by anyone who claims to be an expert on a particular matter, for example. Be careful, because anyone can generate fake news, even countries.

- **Who wrote the news story?**
- **Were experts quoted in the content and if so, who are they?**
- **Who are reliable experts?**
- **Is the news story based on scientific facts, people's experiences or hearsay?**



4. HOW DO DISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS SPREAD?

Quickly and extensively

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Disinformation and fake news spread quickly on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. Fake news often evokes great emotions and reactions, which is why it quickly grabs people's attention. When many people share disinformation, its original publisher becomes difficult to track.

Even if you hear a news story through the grapevine, your own social media channel or from a friend or a relative, this does not automatically mean that the story can be relied on or is true.

- **What was the last news story you shared?**
- **Did you check the origin of the news story or the information you shared?**



5. WHY DO FAKE NEWS STORIES SPREAD SO QUICKLY?

They appeal to people's emotions

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The purpose of all news coverage is to arouse interest and appeal to people's emotions as the publisher wants to have the largest possible audience for the news. In fake news stories, however, complex issues are simplified or distorted, so that strong reactions strengthen the confrontation and support the different intentions of the various parties.

Your views and experiences affect how you receive and interpret news and what type of content you want to see and read.

- **Do you try to find news stories that are aligned with your values?**
- **How do you react to information published by the authorities?**



6. WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS CAN DISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS CAUSE?

● Serious problems

Serious problems

Fake news conveys disinformation, which can lead to dangerous situations, such as lies about issues related to health. The information provided by the authorities is based on the latest scientific facts available. Fake news can also irreversibly damage a person's reputation or trick people into donating money to scammers instead of a genuine charity. Media content can influence people's decision-making and actions such as voting and elections. It is therefore important to be able to tell fact from fiction.

- **Have you noticed how news coverage or different media content has affected people's opinions?**



7. WHAT IMPACT DO FAKE NEWS STORIES HAVE ON RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION?

Incorrect information can be misleading

Incorrect information can be misleading

Fake news undermine people's trust in reliable sources of information in contexts such as health-related communications, where the information can change quickly. Misinformation is misleading and creates suspicion and distrust in official communications, reliable media and society.

- **When was the content published and is it still up to date?**
- **What sources of information do you use?**



8. WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT SPREADING FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION?

Think twice before you share

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Everyone is responsible for identifying and fighting fake news. Never share a news story or information unless you have read the whole story carefully and have assessed if it is real news or information. Producing and distributing fake news stories and using them to cause harm is a crime in many countries. Spreading inaccurate or private information or images of someone else may also be a crime.

You can find material and information produced by various parties, such as the authorities, reliable media, libraries and a variety of organisations.

- **Whose information do you trust?**