

MOOC

Fighting fake news

INFD-03.5.1-EN

UNDERSTANDING the MECHANISMS of INFORMATION DISORDER

A theoretical framework to understand
how false information circulates online

WHAT IS THE INFORMATION DISORDER?

The information disorder is the sharing or developing of false information **with or without** the purpose of causing harm.

The term was studied and presented by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan in 2017 in their essay *INFORMATION DISORDER. Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*, which this unit refers to <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>

Instead of using the term ‘fake news’ to describe the phenomenon – as inadequate to describe the complex phenomenon of information pollution – they introduce a new **conceptual framework** in order to examine information disorder, based on the dimensions of **harm** and **falseness**. Using these concepts, they identify and describe three different types of information: **misinformation, disinformation, mal-information**. As a matter of fact, if it is important to distinguish true messages from false ones, it is also important to distinguish messages that are created, produced or distributed by “agents” who intend to do harm from those that are not.

DISINFORMATION

A definition by EU

False or misleading verifiable information that is created, presented and disseminated for profit or to intentionally deceive the public, and in any case cause public harm.

(European Commission, 2018)

THE ROLE OF THE WEB

- Acceleration of the process of spreading disinformation, which becomes instantaneous and pervasive;
- Exponential multiplication of the potential recipients of disinformation (potential universe of networked people);
- Exponential multiplication of possible sources, in the sense that any person can produce effective disinformation, at zero cost;
- The threshold for capturing attention on the network is reduced (8 seconds);
- Symmetrically, the speed of use increases.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework has three components. Each of them includes three different elements

**THE 3 *TYPES*
OF
INFORMATION
DISORDER**

Disinformation
Misinformation
Malinformation

**THE 3 *PHASES*
OF
INFORMATION
DISORDER**

Creation
Production
Distribution

**THE 3
ELEMENTS OF
INFORMATION
DISORDER**

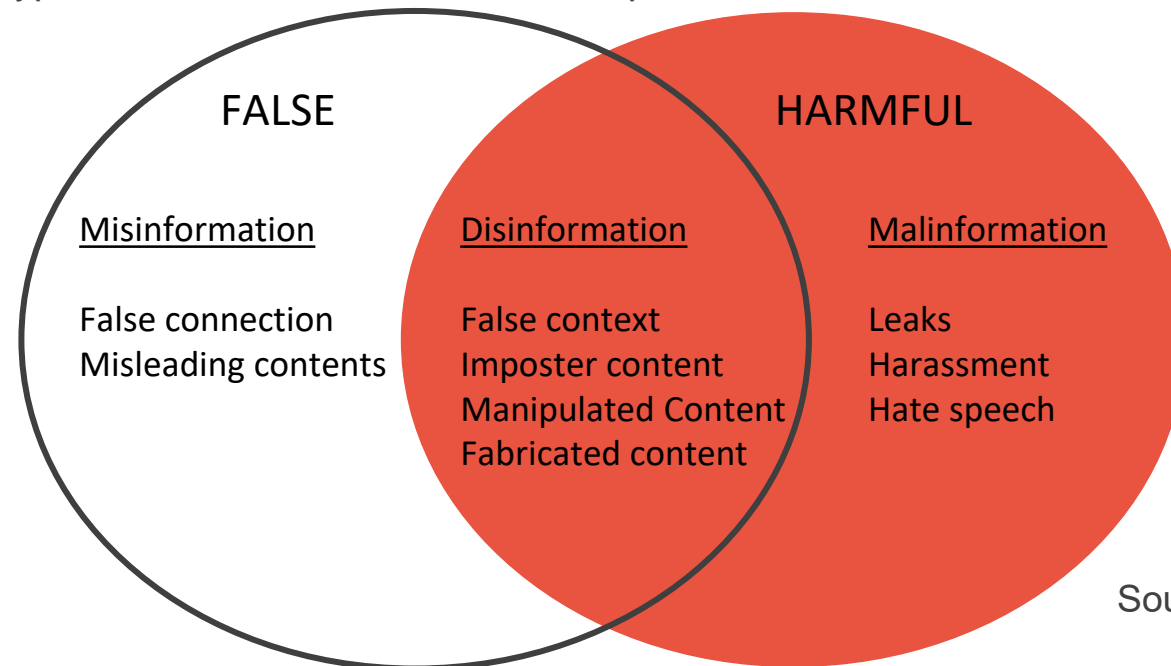
Agent
Message
Interpreter

THE 3 TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER

Disinformation. Information that is **false** and **deliberately created** to harm a person, a social group, an organization or a country.

Misinformation. Information that is **false**, but **not** created with the **intention** of causing harm.

Malinformation. Information that is based on **reality**, used **to inflict harm** on a person, organization or country. Our primary focus is mis- and dis-information, as we are most concerned about false information and content spreading. However, it's important to consider this third type of information disorder and its possible relations with the other two categories.



THE 3 *TYPES* OF INFORMATION DISORDER IN FRENCH ELECTIONS 2017

DISINFORMATION

The creation of a sophisticated duplicate version of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, with a false article claiming that Macron was being funded by Saudi Arabia

MISINFORMATION

The attack on the Champs Elysees on 20 April 2017 inspired a great deal of misinformation: on social media a number of rumours was published, for example that a second policeman had been killed. The people sharing these contents are rarely willing to cause harm. They try to be helpful, and fail to adequately inspect the information they are sharing.

MALINFORMATION

When Macron's emails were leaked the Friday before the vote on 7 May. The information in the emails was real, although Macron's campaign allegedly included false information to diminish the impact of any potential leak.

THE 3 *PHASES* OF INFORMATION DISORDER

CREATION

The message is
created

PRODUCTION

The message is
turned into a
media product

Images or videos
Written texts, often
easy-to-read
captions, also as part
of the image

Fake audiovisual
content ('deepfakes')

DISTRIBUTION

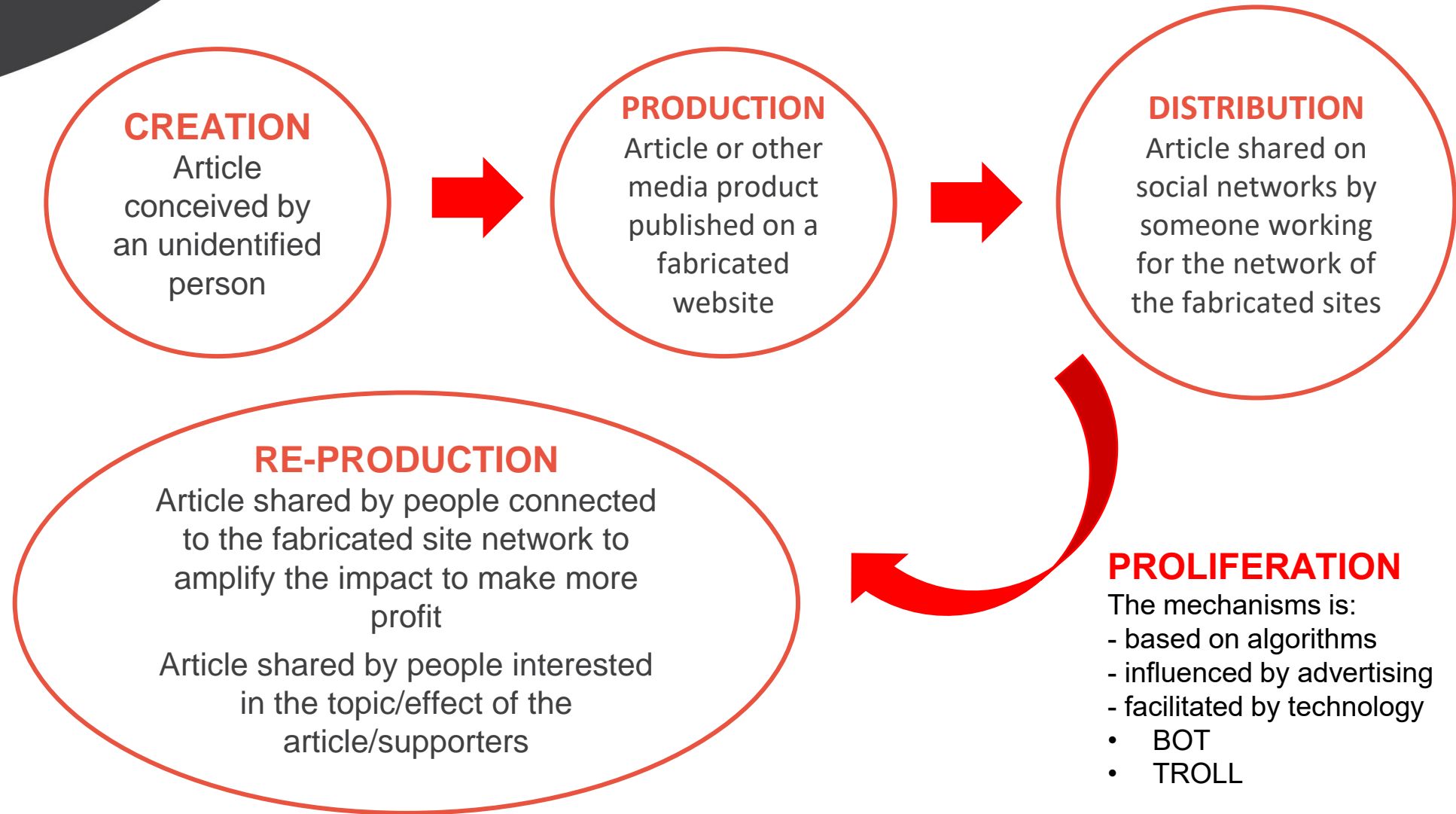
The message is
distributed or
made public

Volume and speed
of content

Sharing without
verification

The role of
whatsapp and
messenger

The agent that creates the content is often different from the agent who produces it



PRODUCTION

Examples of fabricated websites in Italy

<http://www.butac.it/the-black-list/>

Blog News 24 ore (blognews24ore.com)
Corrieredisera.it
Direttanews24.com
Gazzetta24.com
Gazzettanews24.com
Giornale24ore.com
il-giornale.info
Giornale Il Sole (giornaleilsole.com)
Il Giornale News.com
Il Notiziario24.com
InformazioneLibera.eu
La Repubblica.it
La Repubblica.info
Libero-notizie.com
LiberoGiornale.com
Mattino.ch
Messaggero.com
News24italia
Notizie24h.net
Notizieflash.eu
Oggi 24 ore (oggi24ore.altervista.org)
Rainews24.live
Rassegnastampa.eu

RassegnItalia.info
Repubblica24.com
Skynew.it
Skytg24news.com
tg24-ore.com
Tg24italia.com
tg-news24.com
tg-quotidiano.net
Tg5stelle.it
Tgcom24news.com
Tutto24.info
Tuttoinweb.com
Ultimora24.it
Videoenotizie.it
Il mAssaggero
Il Fato Quotidiano
Il Fatto Quotidaino
(ATTENZIONE! Dopo aver visitato il loro sito, ci si ritrova iscritti a pagine Facebook che condividono esclusivamente loro link)
Siti chiaramente di satira o parodia:
Lercio (www.lercio.it)
Ticino Inforna (ticinoinforna.com)

THE 3 *ELEMENTS* OF INFORMATION DISORDER

AGENT

Agents are involved in all the phases of the information chain – creation, production and distribution – and have various motivations

MESSAGE

Agents in person (gossip, speeches, etc.)
Agents in text (newspaper articles or pamphlets)
Agents in audio/visual material (images, videos, audio-clip, memes, etc.)

INTERPRETER

Understanding the ritualistic aspect of communication is crucial to understand how and why individuals react to messages in different ways

THE MESSAGE - 1

Misinformation and disinformation can appear both in fabricated text articles and in visual formats. Technologies designed to *analyse* written texts are significantly different and more sophisticated than those designed to analyse still and moving imagery. They are therefore more efficient in spotting and debunking *fake news*.

DURATION OF THE MESSAGE

- Messages designed to stay relevant and impactful in the long term or in perpetuity
- Messages designed for a short term impact (i.e. during an election) or to last for only a moment (i.e. an individual message during a breaking news event).

ACCURACY OF THE MESSAGE

Malinformation is truthful information used to harm. For inaccurate information, there is a scale of accuracy ranging from false connection (a clickbait headline that is mismatched with its article's content) to 100% fabricated information.

LAWFULNESS OF THE MESSAGE

If a message is illegal or does not violate the law in the different countries. Some examples:

- Recognised hate speech
- Intellectual property violations
- Privacy infringements or harassment

THE MESSAGE - 2

MESSAGES THAT ARE 'IMPOSTER CONTENT' TRY TO APPEAR CREDIBLE (I.E. POSING AS AN OFFICIAL SOURCE)

- Use of official branding (i.e., logos) unofficially
- Stealing the name or image of an individual (i.e., a well-known journalist)

TARGET

The agent has an intended audience in mind (the audience they want to influence) but this is different to the target of the message (those who are being discredited). The target may be:

- an individual (a candidate or a political or business leader)
- an organisation (a private firm or a government agency)
- a social group (a race, ethnicity, the elite, etc.)
- the entire society

THE AGENT

TYPE

- official (i.e. intelligence services, political parties, news organizations)
- unofficial (i.e. groups of citizens involved in a specific issue)

MOTIVATION

- **Financial:** profiting from information disorder through advertising
- **Political:** discrediting a political candidate in an election and other attempts to influence public opinion
- **Social:** connecting with a certain group online or off
- **Psychological:** seeking prestige or reinforcement

ORGANISATION: USE OF AUTOMATED TECHNOLOGY TO SPREAD MESSAGES

- Bot (automated account)
- Troll (human account)
- Cyborgs (accounts operating jointly by software and people)

INTENTION TO MISLEAD

The agent may or may not intend to deliberately mislead the target audience

INTENTION TO HARM

The agent may or may not intend deliberately to cause harm

THE INTERPRETER

Audiences are very rarely passive recipients of information. An 'audience' is made up of many individuals, each of them interpreting information according to his or her own

- socio-cultural status
- political positions
- personal experiences

In a world where what we like, comment on and share is visible to our friends, family and colleagues, these 'social' and performative forces are more powerful than ever.

This reality complicates our search for solutions to information disorder.

- How, for example, can we make sharing false information publicly shameful and embarrassing?
- What can we learn from the theories of performativity, particularly in performance and identity management in an online setting that could help us experiment with some potential solutions?

What the 'interpreter' can do with a message highlights how the three elements of information disorder should be considered parts of a potential never-ending cycle. In an era of social media, where everyone is a potential publisher, the interpreter can become the next 'agent,' deciding how to share and frame the message for their own networks.

- Will they show support for the message by liking or commenting on it, or will they simply share it?
- If they do share the message, have they done so with the same intent as the original agent?

QUIZ

1. Which of these types of information disorder includes both harm and falsehood?

- Misinformation
- Malinformation
- Disinformation

[answer: 3]

2. What characterises the PRODUCTION and DISTRIBUTION phases?

- They are carried out by the same people
- Distribution also makes use of technology
- Production is limited in time

[answer: 2]

3. A message is presented as more credible when

- It uses an official brand in an unofficial way
- It addresses many people
- It respects the laws in force in that country

[answer: 1]

TO KNOW MORE...

C.Wardle, H.Derakhshan, *Information disorder. Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making, 2017* <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>

European Union, *Action plan against disinformation*, March 2020
https://www.eca.europa.eu/lists/ecadocuments/ap20_04/ap_disinformation_en.pdf

Flash Eurobarometer 464: Fake News and Disinformation Online
https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2183_464_eng?locale=en

UNESCO, *Media and information literacy. Curriculum for teachers, 2011*
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971> (EN version)
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216531> (FR version)

Centre for media pluralism and media freedom, *Fact or Fake? Tools & Practices to Fight Disinformation*, Brussels Press Club <http://cmpf.eui.eu/panel-fact-or-fake-tools-practices-to-fight-disinformation-brussels-press-club/>

AGCOM, *Osservatorio sulla disinformazione online (in Italy)*
<https://www.agcom.it/osservatorio-sulla-disinformazione-online>

CREDITS

SLOVENIA

- . Contact : boomerling.slovenija@gmail.com
- . Katja Jeznik - Team coordinator, pedagogical expert
- . Marko Krevs + Nejc Bobovnik - IT geography - Geography of informational technologies
- . Zala Gruden - Pedagogical expert
- . Patricija Camernik - Pedagogical expert - Researcher

ITALY

- . Contact : Glocal Factory - ITALY
- . Cristina Demartis - Project coordinator, socio-pedagogist
- . Anna Schena - Philosopher, expert in youth & social networks - Glocal Factory President
- . Maria Carla Italia - Expert in political communication

FRANCE

- Udaf82
- . Stéphane Michelin - Director of Udaf 82 - (directeur général Udaf 82)
- . Thérèse Bouche - Psychologist, radicalization expert
- . Isabelle Bonnefous - Responsible for data protection & project evaluation
- . Philippe Le Gonnidec - Expert in multimedia strategies - www.Politique-Numerique.fr
- . Ethan Le Gonnidec - Assistant réalisateur

CAFFES :

- . Audrey Foulon – Director of CAFFES (Directrice du CAFFES)
- . Florence Denis – Head of Department of Udaf 59
- . Sylvie Condette – Full Professor in Educational and Training Sciences, Lille University - France, CIREL Research Unit laboratoire CIREL
- . Benoît Maréchaux - Mobile security team and the Academic Group for School Climate (GACS) of the Lille's Rectorate (Equipe mobile de sécurité et du Groupe Académique pour le Climat Scolaire (GACS) du Rectorat de Lille

ESPAGNE

- . Lluís Marroyo Molina - Fundació Campus Arnau d'Escala - Directeur - www.campusarnau.org
- . Paolo Leotti - Chargé de mission
- . Neus Dalmau Tarrés - Sergi Fernandez Gracia - Laia Galobardes vilanova
- Gemma Gomila Moll
- . Anna Ferrer Fornells - Tècnica de gestió i project

Media banks :

Shutterstock / AdobeStock / iStockPhotos / FreePik / Pexels / Skilla Kanga - Chris Egan – SoundCloud - Gaspard Augé – Vox Yepic – Mid Journey – FilmStock – Vecteezy – OpenAi – Vogue sur la Lune 1902 – Metropolis 1927 – Frankenstein 1931 – Fesliyan Studios – Adobe AI

Voix :

- . Sylvie Condette
- . Philippe Le Gonnidec
- . Audrey Foulon
- . Eva Khairon
- . Anna Fornells