

Topics



Age category



15+

Group size



up to 20

Time



60 – 80 minutes

27 True or fake news?

Topics: **critical thinking,**
media literacy

Recommended age group: 15+

Participant count: up to 20 participants

Activity duration: 60-80 minutes (total time for the activity depends on group size)

Methods of education: group work, discussion, reflection

Aims of the activity:

- identify types of fake reports and define them,
- identify sources and methods of spreading a fake report, (again pl?)
- analyze the causes and effects of fake reports on people and society,
- name the criteria and skills for assessing the credibility of the report,

Equipment:

- assess our own role in spreading fake messages,
- discuss options to limit the spread of rumours.
- computer / tablet with internet connection (at least one for each group),
- various emails containing false information or fake messages that need to be sent to participants (for example, from websites that reveal false information: <http://www.hoax-slayer.net/>, <https://www.hoax.cz/> / [cze / https://www.hoax.sk/](https://www.hoax.sk/), etc.),
- a copy of the fake report for each member of the group,
- printed Annex 2 as a handout for each participant,
- flipchart board and papers, markers.

Keywords:

false report, verification of information, analysis of reports, credibility of the media

Activity process:

Tips for leading the activity: It is advised to select fake reports that have already been discussed in society, so that it is possible to obtain enough material online.

1. At the beginning of the activity, we ask the participants how often they encounter misleading information or fake reports, either by email or on the internet in general. We will ask them to mention some of the fake reports they can remember. We direct a brief discussion on fake reports to name possible types, to determine their characteristics, to identify the objectives of these reports and their impact (typology, objectives and impacts are given in Annex 2 of this activity). If the

discussion starts slowly, the lecturer can name some examples of fake messages he has encountered in internet communication or those published by the media. Types of false reports are recorded by the lecturer or one of the participants on a flipchart. We will return to them at the end of the activity.

2. We will ask the participants to divide themselves into small groups (2-4 people) and we will give each of the groups a copy of the fake message received by email. Their role is to gather as much information as possible about this fake report (especially through internet search engines). They have about 20 minutes to complete the task. We can choose two ways to assign messages:

- a) we use the same message for all groups and compare the search results,
- b) we give each group a different report and during the presentation of their outcome each group explains the content of the solved report to the other participants.

3. Additional instructions - points on which the work should focus:

- *Source - where the email / rumour likely comes from;*
- *Method of dissemination - how the rumor was spread (via the Internet, traditional media) and how each can amplify false information;*
- *The causes and effects of the circulation of the report;*
- *Assessment of the truthfulness - how the information contained in the report can be confirmed or refuted.*

4. At the end of the allocated time, all the participants will meet in a circle to share their findings. During the discussion, the group should classify different types of false reports. They may use the categories suggested by <http://www.hoax-slayer.net/> or the typology in Annex 2. We will ask the group to clarify the definitions of the terms (types of fake messages) we have worked with. If necessary, the definitions will be completed by the lecturer and at the end he will hand out the printed handouts to the participants.

Final analysis:

In the final reflection, we ask the participants how they themselves could be involved in spreading or creating rumours. Questions for reflection:

- *What do you notice when reading the news? What most often tells you that a message could be fake?*
- *What helps you look at reports objectively?*
- *What do you think are reliable sources?*
- *Do you often only read the title of an article? When do you do this the most often?*
- *What tools can be used to limit the spread of false messages?*
- *What would you recommend to your friends if they came across a fake report?*
- *How did the activity benefit you?*
- *What did you realize because of it?*
- *What was the hardest/easiest part of the activity?*
- *Would you do something different now?*

Source: This activity has been adapted using the “Educaunet” tool, an online risk education tool: www.educaunet.be.

VASLIN N., THERER S. A kol., liaisons – a toolkit for preventing violent extremism through youth information. ERYICA, 2018. ISBN 978-2-9199519-7-0

ANNEX

Annex 1

Example of a false report and its resolution (as a task for one group of participants)

Text of the fake report: These are US senators from Arizona and South Carolina with the terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. Although discussing the fight against terrorism, we must not forget that trade always takes precedence over morality.

Resolution (what participants might find out): Although many people mourned the death of United States Senator McCain on 25 August, 2018, a group of social media users used their efforts to destroy the former legislator's legacy. This false information was spread in conspiracy forums and social networks and is an example of manipulated content. Below is the **real photo** of both senators standing next to the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. Some possible **reasons** for creating and disseminating the report could be: political discredit, political propaganda, a failed joke based appearance similarities. **Possible effects:** producing public outcry, leading to aversion to politics, inciting hate speech against other nations / foreigners. **Credibility assessment:** The image can be found on different websites with a completely different description of events (type of meeting, place of meeting, etc.), which indicates that the message is not trustworthy. In addition, the image can be found on websites detecting fake reports, therefore indicating that this photo has been falsified.



Source of false report information: *6 nástrojov ako identifikovať falošné správy a konšpirácie*, AKČNÉ ŽENY [online]. [cit. 2021-05-02], Available at: < <https://akcnezeny.sk/6-nastrojov-ako-identifikovat-falosne-spravy-a-konspiracie/> >

Annex 2

Typology of false reports

What are the most common objectives of fake news?

- change someone's opinion or political beliefs,
- have fun, prank people
- try to express one's own opinion or perception of the world, manifestation of ego,
- money (from advertisements),
- power, advancement and manipulation (creating doubt, mistrust, fear).

What are the effects of fake news?

Fake news can result in a loss of public confidence in the media, facts, science and democratic principles. It often leads to the division of society and isolates people into so-called information bubbles. In these bubbles, we read articles, follow news and people, and communicate especially with those who share similar views.

Types of false reports in print and electronic media:

a) **Fabricated content of the message:** *the content is completely untrue and its purpose is to deceive and harm someone.*

b) **Propaganda:** *takes advantage of human passions, fear and hatred. It also tends to give the impression that it is of moral character and defends a higher goal while spreading political conviction or ideology. It is aggressive, does not shy away from personal attacks or fictional content, it tries to change political opinion, for example by looking for various conspiratorial connections.*

c) **Manipulated message content:** *the actual content of the information or image is modified.*

d) **Distorted choice of messages:** *we are attracted to messages that confirm our own convictions. Technology companies (Facebook, Google, etc.) know our taste, political beliefs, what we like and dislike, and therefore show us the news they think we will like. Regardless of whether these reports are true or completely false.*

e) **Clickbait:** *This is a type of online article or website that uses a headline to exaggerate information, creating and spreading various scandals and sensations. A typical clickbait headline tries to arouse the reader's attention and curiosity, but does not provide enough information on the topic, so the reader is motivated to click on a link leading to more content. The creator of such articles then earns revenue from the ads.*

f) **Misleading headlines:** *even messages that are not completely untrue can be distorted - having misleading or sensational headlines. These types of messages often spread quickly on social networks. Most people do not read the whole article, but they will retain the feeling of the title and what they have (often incorrectly) understood from its content.*

g) **Poor journalism:** *the media sometimes publish reports with unreliable information or without sufficient verification of sources and information.*

h) **Parody and satire:** *these are articles that are conceived from the ground up - like April fools. Their goal is to entertain the audience, parody the conspiracy media, and laugh at how some people will believe and share it.*

i) **Hoax** = deception, joke, bluff. On the Internet, this is usually an electronically distributed message that warns recipients of various imaginary dangers, asks for help or tries to entertain. The hoax often includes a call for further dissemination.

j) **Other types of misleading messages:** misleading posts(of celebrities), mass chain emails, lies in discussion forums, misleading videos.

Source of information in the annex:

ZAJAC, L., *Falošné správy a hrozby internetu, Manuál (nielen) pre seniorov*, Transparency international Slovensko, ISBN: 987-80-89791-16-3, Available at: <https://transparency.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TISK_Fake_News_manual_WEB.pdf>