

Click wisely: recognizing fake news in politics, history and everyday life

Dr Ana-Maria Cătănuș

Keywords

fake news, disinformation, conflicts of memory, *damnatio memoriae*, clickbait

Introduction for the teacher

The lesson script is intended for students aged between 14 and 18. The subject matter discussed can be used in interdisciplinary classes in history, culture, media education and social sciences.

The material has been divided into three parts: the lesson scenario, a set of source materials and a worksheet of exercises to be done during the class, in a group or individually.

Instructions

The script contains five pieces of source material and a worksheet with exercises to be implemented during three lessons (45 mins). The lesson structure can be modified by the teacher to achieve specific objectives. Also, the source materials and worksheet can be adapted and used only partially according to the class requirements. The lesson will benefit from using the Internet (computer, multimedia projector and an interactive white board), including devices connected to the Internet (smartphones, tablets, etc).

Operational goals

The student is able to:

- understand and define the following concepts: disinformation, fake news, clickbait and conflicts of memory,
- acquire knowledge about the history of fake news,
- understand the concept of *damnatio memoriae* (condemnation of memory) and how it works in the contemporary world,

- develop critical thinking and verify the information before sharing it on social media,
- understand the implications of a cyber attack on an institution or country.

Teaching methods

- teacher-led discussion,
- group work,
- brainstorming,
- analysis of source material, texts and illustrations,
- metaplan,¹
- independent work with a set of exercises.

Teaching aids

- board/flipcharts, felt pens/chalk,
- large paper sheets/Bristol board sheets, post-its,
- a computer with internet access and a multimedia projector and an interactive white board.

Before the lesson

Ask the students to read the essay titled '[Disinformation and Fake News Versus Interpretational Disputes in History and Conflicts of Memory](#)'.

¹ One of the activation methods used during class; it involves poster making by the discussion/debate participants. The poster represents a graphic summary of the debate (based on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaplan> [accessed 24 October 2022]).

Lesson Scenario

Introduction

1. Begin your lesson with a brief discussion with your students regarding the Internet and social media. Do they often share articles and posts on social media? Do they read the entire post before sharing it? Or is a headline enough to catch their attention and make them share it? Have they often been tricked by a sensational headline and clicked it, only to discover the content is not so exciting or even untrue? How did this make them feel? Try to have a rapid exchange of ideas to warm up the class.
2. Distribute the worksheets and sets of source material among the students.
3. Let the students know that during the lesson they are going to work both individually and in groups.

Development

1. Sensationalism and the goal to attract public attention to gain more money is not a 20th-century discovery. That was used in different guises starting with the 19th century. However, the Internet and social media have enhanced the ways to spread fake news. Fortunately, the Internet can also be a useful tool to verify information and uncover fake news. Direct the students' attention towards Source A, a short text about the history of fake news. Ask the students to work individually on Exercise 1. Once that has been done, a student will read the answers while the rest will approve or correct.
2. To continue, ask the students how often they were tricked into opening an article with a sensational title only to find unimportant or fake information. Ask the students if they are familiar with the concept 'clickbait' that refers to a sensational headline that entices someone to click on it, so the authors gain more advertising money. Also emphasise that clickbait is usually strongly linked with fake news, and it is a current method of spreading this kind of information.
3. Direct the students' attention towards Source B to learn about the characteristics of clickbait and how to spot it. Reflect on the conclusion of the short text: 'If the headline tells you how to feel instead of letting you come up with your own reaction, it's probably clickbait.'

4. To understand the concept of clickbait and fake news better, read Source C that describes how a charming story about a bear, who joined the Polish troops during the Second World War, was used to create fake news. Ask the students to form groups of up to six persons and to work on Exercise 2. Set a time limit of 15 minutes. At the end, a representative of each group will write down on the board the clickbait headline and clickbait-fake news sequence.
5. *Damnatio memoriae* is a modern Latin phrase meaning 'condemnation of memory'. That meant that the memory of a particular person was to be removed from official reports and anywhere they are represented, even visual ones. The practice was used in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. The modern world has seen it under Stalin's USSR and in China recently. According to some scholars, traces of *damnatio memoriae* are present in the Black Lives Matter movement's call for the removal of certain statues from public spaces. In this context, direct the students' attention towards Source D. Work together on a metaplan centred on the following claim: '**In contemporary authoritarian regimes some political leaders are erased from history.**' Demonstrate by providing answers to the following questions: '**How is it done?**' and '**Why is it the way it is?**' Build an alternative approach to history by answering the questions: '**How should it be done?**' and '**What can be done?**'
6. Cyber attacks and fake news do not target only individuals or companies; they also target countries, which may lead to destabilisation. The case of Estonia in 2007 offers an example of how disinformation, fake news and cyber attacks generate riots and disrupt major national institutions. Use Source E and ask the students to work on Exercise 4.

Conclusion & Homework

To conclude, reflect with your students on the benefits the Internet brings by providing access to vast amounts of information. Together, reflect on the fact that part of the shared information is untrue and is deliberately intended to manipulate in order to gain money or influence people in a desired direction.

Please write a short essay describing a clickbait that led to a story you felt you needed to verify. Describe the process of verification.

Worksheet

Exercise 1

Use Source A to evaluate whether the statements in the table below are true (T) or false (F).

Fake stories developed in the 20th century.	
Sensationalism sells tabloids.	
Clickbait leads to true stories.	
'Yellow journalism' reported rumours as though they were facts.	
Many news stories are not disseminated on social media by friends' sharing.	

Exercise 2

Use Sources B and C to create a clickbait headline and a clickbait – fake-news headline.

Your answer:

Exercise 3

Use Source D to create a metaplan following the model below by answering the questions in the table.

How is it done?		How should it be done?
	PROBLEM In contemporary authoritarian regimes, some political leaders are erased from history	
Why is it the way it is?		What can be done?

Exercise 4

Using Source E, debate whether fake news and cyber attacks can destabilise a country.

Your answer:

Answers

Exercise 1

Fake stories developed in the 20th century.	F
Sensationalism sells tabloids.	T
Clickbait leads to true stories.	F
'Yellow journalism' reported rumours as though they were facts.	T
Many news stories are not disseminated on social media by friends' shares.	F

Exercise 2

Possible answer:

Clickbait: You will never believe it! The bear who fought in World War II

Clickbait – fake news: You will never believe it! The bear who fought in World War II.
Wojtek the bear who fought for the Nazis

Exercise 3

Possible answer:

How is it done? – They are removed from public office, forced into exile and when they die, they are not buried in the graveyards reserved for political leaders.

How should it be? – Every political man should be remembered by history regardless of his actions.

Why is it the way it is? – By acting in this way, the authoritarian leadership tries to obliterate the memory of actions opposed to its official politics.

What is to be done? – Historians, the press and the public should keep documents, information in any format (written, audio and visual) to preserve the historical truth regardless of the political will.

Exercise 4

Possible answer:

In the case of Estonia in 2007, the moving of the Bronze Soldier monument erected during the Soviet period led to serious public unrest within the Russian population. Almost immediately, this combined with cyber attacks that affected the banks, press