

Hashtags, Tweets and Fake News: Contemporary [Dis]Information

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Lesson scenario

Introduction

1. Ask the students what they think 'fake news' is. Do not explain anything, count on their suggestions. Give them post-it notes on which to write what they associate with the term, then stick them on the board.¹ When discussing the answers together, point out the information that is repeated most often. This will narrow down the list of arguments.
2. Ask the students to come up with examples of fake news that they know or have believed in. They can search for it on the internet and share their findings in class. Also prepare some examples of your own. This will be useful for a less active group. Choose a few that you think are worth discussing together; then verify the fake news by looking for real information. Use websites that debunk fake news.² Also, point out that the verification should be done in many ways and each piece of information should be checked many times, paying special attention to the source of the news (whether many news portals do not duplicate the same information, rephrasing it). Go back to the students' associations with fake news and suggest another exercise with post-it notes. If they want to change their definition, now is their chance. In this way, you will create a coherent definition of the concept together.

¹ When working online, use such tools as [Jamboard](#) or [miro.com](#).

² Some recommended websites are: [Full Fact](#), [Snopes](#), [Fact Check Explorer](#), [EU vs DiSiNFO](#).

3. Distribute the worksheets. Analyse source A together (charts). Then the students independently do Exercises 1 and 2. After the exercise, compare the answers from Exercise 2.

Development

1. The current methods of disinformation are based on old solutions, which thanks to modern technology are commonplace and affect people's lives on an unprecedented scale. The exercise at the start of the lesson showed that many people are unaware that the information they receive through the media (including or especially social media) can be manipulated. There are many types of modern disinformation. Divide the students into groups (of four to six members each) and ask them to read Source B and return to the classifications of the types of manipulation cited in the chart (Source A). At the beginning, the students created a definition of fake news. Now, in groups, they will go through the definition again, this time focusing on specific types of disinformation (Exercise 3).
2. When they have finished their work, ask the group leaders to write down the keywords of the formulas created, supplemented with examples. Instruct the class to make a decision tree, putting fake news as a problem.³ Discuss the results of the students' work, pointing out the possibilities of free manipulation of information, not only in the world of entertainment, but also in the history and defence aspects of a given country.
3. Go to Source G. Based on a short tweet, discuss what might have happened. Who is the person the information relates to and why might it be harmful not to react promptly to an issue shown in the message? Cite examples of fake tweets relating to modern history.⁴
4. Consider how fake news is given credibility in modern times. Divide the students into groups again and inform them that they are going to work in teams using the Philips66 method, i.e. working quickly and intensively on a given problem. In the first phase of the exercise, the groups spend several minutes working with Sources

³ A model decision tree can be found in the set of source texts.

⁴ An example may be the tweets posted by the Russian or Belarusian Embassy. It is worthwhile reading an essay entitled '[Russia's Twitter propaganda](#)'.

C, D and E and information found online. In the second phase, the teams meet to discuss the results of their reflections and exchange ideas, written on the board or flipchart. In this way group members get to know each other's positions.

In phase three, each team works independently again and revises their ideas or confirms them. The number of phases can be arbitrary. I suggest a minimum of three. After the last phase, the students work together in a discussion based on direct democracy to come up with two ideas for each question, which they think best illustrate the instruction. After they have been introduced to the rules, ask them to look at Exercises 4 and 5 and give the topic of the discussion: how can fake news related to pandemics or politics work?

5. Once the students have finished their work, present their results in the form of a mind map (Exercise 5), whose main topic is what can fake news 'do'?

Summary

In conclusion, present to the students the story of the news about the soldier and the donkey (Source H), pointing out that this seemingly insignificant fake news has been circulating on the internet for many years, is present on dozens of portals and is quoted not only on entertainment websites.

Homework

Write a list of words or phrases (up to ten)⁵ connected with the history of the 20th century. The students are asked to create descriptions of these words or phrases as they appear on Wikipedia, but in such a way as to hide fake news among real information. During the next meeting, check the homework in an unconventional way: each student should present a news item and the rest of the class should have a moment to review it, based on their own knowledge and internet searches.

⁵ Below is my proposal of ten topics: the mission of Apollo 11; the sinking of the Titanic; the first-ever flight by plane; Noble Prizes for Marie Curie; Spanish fever epidemic; 1969 Woodstock Festival; 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow; the fall of the Berlin Wall; the wedding of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer; and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Keywords

fake news, hashtag, disinformation, manipulation of history, falsification of history, propaganda, security threat, cyberattack, national security