THE
FAKE NEWS
IMMUNITY BOOKLET

What's inside?

1. Information manipulation on the internet.
2. (Mis) information: the different types.
3. Tips for spotting (mis) information.
4. Examples from (social) media.
5. Data literacy.
6. Rhetoric and misinformation.
7. Strategies for deception or persuasion – How to spot deceptive stories.

Useful links...

Information about covid-19
https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/
https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Information about dis/mis/information
https://firstdraftnews.org/
https://www.disinfo.eu/
https://fakenews.publicdatalab.org/

Fact-checkers
https://www.factcheck.org/
https://www.snopes.com/
https://www.reuters.com/fact-check
https://fullfact.org/

Digital literacy
https://eavi.eu/
https://www.theguardian.com/newswise
https://literacytrust.org.uk/

Fake News Immunity Chatbot
https://fni.arg.tech/

Fake News Immunity Chatbot (Feedback form)
https://liverpoolcommsmedia.fra1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cumhqbTOi8rJTud

1. | Information manipulation

Hello!

This guide has been created by a group of researchers from Liverpool University and Dundee University. We come from various backgrounds such as media studies, rhetorics and computational reasoning, and we want to help you make sense from all the information noise. We designed this booklet based on our UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) funded project "Being Alone Together: Developing Fake News Immunity" where we examined how news is being checked by fact-checking websites.

A global pandemic, climate crisis, polarised politics and a confusing media landscape mean it is very difficult to make sense of the world today. Fake news, misinformation, conspiracy theories and hoaxes are often distributed faster and more effectively than truth, facts, and context. It can be overwhelming to try and understand, cope, and engage with the news and social media today.

We are here to help!

> Check out our website:
> **https://fakenewsimmunity.liverpool.ac.uk/**
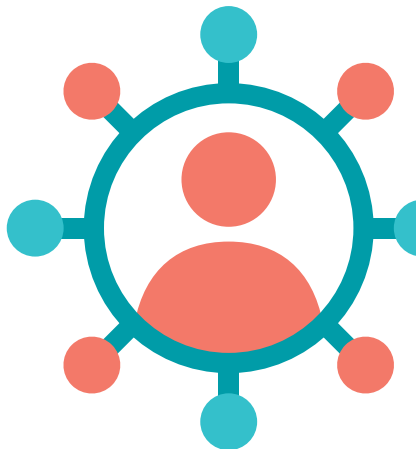
Keep safe and take care!

Elena Musi, Elinor Carmi, Myrto Aloumpi, Kay O'Halloran, Chris Reed, Simeon Yates, James Etheridge.

Elena.Musi@liverpool.ac.uk | Elinor.Carmi@liverpool.ac.uk

2. | (Mis) information: The different types.

Information today is complicated. From Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and of course the news that we read - it has become difficult to understand what we are reading and engaging with.

Is it true? Is it False? And what about all those grey areas? It is all going so fast, what is going on?

Our aim is to make things clearer and help you engage with information in a better way. In this section we want to clear some of the confusion and explain what all these things that you see mean. The information we engage with, whether text, videos, images or gifs is not clear cut. There may be **several types** of information manipulations in one newspaper article/tweet/post/video. But to know what each of these types are let's understand what we are dealing with.

Information manipulations you may encounter:

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

Dis-information - Information that is false and *deliberately* created to harm a person, social group, organisation, or country.

Mal-information - Information that is based in reality but is used to inflict harm on a person, organisation, or country.

Satire/Parody - Using humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people.

Imposter content - Content that pretends to be a legitimate news media when it is not.

Fabricated content - Inventing content that is not true.

False connection - Making connections between two things that are not connected.

False context - Providing a context to a story that is not true.

Manipulated content - Images and videos that have been deliberately manipulated.

Fake news - Stories which are presented as news while they are not.

Propaganda - Biased or misleading information used to promote a political cause or point of view.

Pseudoscience - Misrepresenting real scientific studies with exaggerated, inaccurate, or false claims.

Conspiracy theories - A belief that some covert organisation is responsible for an unexplained event.

3. | Tips for spotting mis (information)

Motivation – When you encounter a problematic news story, tweet or post consider what might be the motivation behind it? There could be a number of reasons why a person has created this information including:

- Money
- Politics/power
- Humour/fun
- Passion
- Provocation

Consider the source – Investigate the website, its mission, and its contact information.

Read beyond the headlines – Often headlines are sensationalised to attract the greatest number of readers and viewers. Consider the whole story.

Check the author – Are they trustworthy or even real?

Supporting sources – Check any listed sources, investigate any links. Determine if they actually support the story.

Check the date – Often old news stories are reposted, this doesn't mean they are relevant to current events.

Is it a joke? – If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

Check your biases – Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

Ask the experts – Ask a librarian, consult a fact-checking website, or talk to a chat-bot.

4. | Examples

Are some news stories more fake than others?

> **Example 1** - *https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/10812276/coronavirus-china-virus-bat-soup/*

On 24th January 2020 The Sun newspaper printed a story stating that scientists believed the Covid 19 outbreak could be linked to bat soup made from infected animals.

Fullfact.org reported similar stories to this to be fake news which lacked credibility and misrepresented source material. The Sun Newspaper printed a correction clarifying there was no evidence for their previous claims on 5th February 2020.

https://fullfact.org/health/coronavirus-government-laboratory/

https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/10801901/china-coronavirus-outbreak-wuhan/

> **Example 2** - *https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8184259/Malaria-drug-hydroxychloroquine-effective-coronavirus-treatment-currently-available.html*

According to MailOnline, on 3rd April 2020 "Trump-backed anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine is the most effective coronavirus treatment currently available". "Majority of 6,200 doctors from 30 nations said malaria drug was most effective."

However, the poll the data relies on is not representative of all doctors. Only 37% of the doctors said hydroxychloroquine was among the most effective treatments.

Therefore, the news article can be seen to be 'Cherry Picking' (more about this below) preferable information to provide their argument with evidence.

How "social" is this news?

Below are the Facebooks statistics relating to this story.

119,543 Facebook Interactions
65,712 Facebook Reactions
27,045 Facebook Shares
26,786 Facebook Comments

https://fullfact.org/health/covid-19-hydroxychloroquine-chloroquine-treatment/

Example 3 - *https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/ 1266040/coronavirus-symptoms-signs-covid-19-infection-blood-type-a*

News articles and social media posts reported there was a link between those with blood type A and more severe symptoms of coronavirus.

However, according to Ferret Fact Checker (2020), there is not sufficient scientific evidence for this to be proven. Thus, the argument remains unproven and can be classified as Evading the Burden of Proof (more on this below).

https://theferret.scot/coronavirus-myths-fact-check-covid-19/

Example 4 -

This photo shows the words "Center for Global Human Population Reduction" inscribed on a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation building. *(http://archive.vn/KkSiu)*

Although this is a real picture taken of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation, the 'Center for Global Human Population Reduction' has been added to the photo using photo editing technologies (Snopes, 2020).

https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/gates-foundation-building/?collection-id=254522

How "social" is this news?
Below are the Facebooks statistics relating to this story.

31,526 Facebook Interactions

13,556 Facebook Reactions

10,287 Facebook Shares

7,683 Facebook Comments

5. | Data literacy

To be able to understand the information manipulations that happen on the news, internet search results, Twitter/Facebook/Instagram posts and WhatsApp messages you need to have **data literacy**. That means that you need to understand what types of manipulations are happening and to make your own decisions about how to interpret them.

We call this kind of critical thinking *data thinking*, where people learn various skills and become empowered to think, be critical and active when engaging with different types of information on the internet. Developing critical understanding is not necessarily an individual experience, and sharing and teaching your understanding with your family and friends can help in establishing healthier communities populated with informed **data citizens**.

To make you a **data citizen**, we are going to teach you a few tricks drawn from **rhetoric:** persuasive language often with no meaningful content.

More specifically, in the following pages we will provide you with an easy way to identify potential information manipulations, through a series of common rhetorical strategies around false information called **fallacies:** mistaken beliefs, especially those based on unsound argument.

6. | Rhetoric and misinformation

Rhetoric is as old as language itself and is inseparable from its use. In the past when people wanted to impress their audiences and persuade them towards a particular course of action rhetoric would be used. Rhetoric encapsulates the relationship between language and power: we employ our language not merely to communicate information, but also to steer the emotions of our audience, to include and exclude and to shape and reshape social norms.

In the world of (social) media, the power of rhetoric is amplified and whether news becomes viral is ultimately a matter of persuasion. In this contemporary forum being able to reach a broader audience can quickly become an asset, it can also be harmful when what is rapidly spread is misinformation. Ultimately, rhetoric is a double-edged sword as it can be employed to convey information in ways that are persuasive yet flawed.

Language is powerful, and policing information is a challenging task!

Being aware of the power of rhetoric can make us better speakers and more critical citizens. Understanding how rhetorical persuasion works can be an invaluable weapon in the fight against misinformation and disinformation.
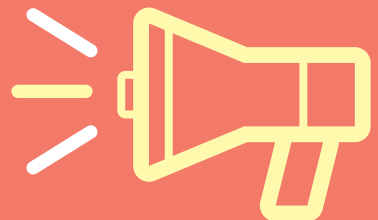
7. Strategies for deception or persuasion – How to spot deceptive stories.

Tips - How to spot deceptive news?
These are the most frequent fallacies found in COVID-19 news:

No proof - saying something without providing proof.

Example: A politician tweeting that a vaccine for Covid19 was found without providing proof.

Question: Is there any evidence apart from the author's personal guarantee?

Strawman - intentionally misrepresenting the other side.

Example: A politician arguing that he does not have to follow the advice of the World Health Organisation (WHO) since it did not give positive results in the past, even though that piece of advice was good at that time and in that context.

Question: Is the other side's opinion misrepresented (e.g. exaggerated)?

False Authority - trying to claim authority when the person/source lacks credibility.

Example: When a politician says he knows that the climate crisis does not exist because he did research on it.

Question: Is the authority a genuine and impartial source?

Red Herring - giving misleading / distracting / irrelevant arguments for a standpoint.

Example: When a politician is asked to assess the seriousness of the Covid19 pandemic and replies that corruption is a worse problem.

Question: Are the provided arguments relevant for the standpoint?

False analogy - making comparisons which are not true.

Example: When someone compares Covid19 with regular flu.

Question: Are the two situations really alike?

Cherry picking - choosing information that supports a given position, while ignoring or dismissing information which does not support it.

Example: When a politician announces that schools should be open because one research project indicates that children are less affected by a virus, whilst different research suggests otherwise.

Question: Is there any other data available which would support or refute the claims?

(Hasty) Generalisation - making an inference from a specific case onto a broader context.

Example: Arguing that all people from a specific race are more likely to refuse to wear face-masks because of one incident.

Question: Is the specific case representative of the broader context?

Post hoc - making a causal argument based on two separate circumstances when no or only a vague connection exists between them.

Example: Claiming that 5G is causing covid19.

Question: Is it possible that the situations co-occur by coincidence?

False cause - claiming a false cause for a particular thing.

Example: When someone claims that ibuprofen makes Covid19 worse.

Question: Where is the evidence to support this claim, is it verifiable?

Ambiguity/Vagueness - providing vague and ambiguous information.

Example: A council stating that there is a fair number of available swabs without specifying what "fair" means.

Question: Do the words have an ambiguous or vague meaning?