Anti-
RUMQUR

MODULE 3.
STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND COMBATING FAKE NEWS

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Module 3. Strategies for identifying and combating fake news

3. 1 Activity 1. Theoretical input. Strategies for identifying and combating fake news.

Duration. 20 minutes

Learning outcomes/Key Message. This is an activity lecture-based, in which the facilitator explains bullet points and offers strategies for identifying and combating fake news. The theoretical framework is based on the Anti-Rumour Guidebook, which can be used as a resource as well. Here there are some key aspects The facilitator can also expand or develop more on those topics that are considered relevant or that he/she has more knowledge about.

- *How to identify fake news:*

a) Do not trust capital letters headlines and with emotional language (exclamation marks, informal words…). Many times, the text below the headline does not correspond, and the article info as such is completely different from what the headline intends to describe. This 'click-bait' technique aims at easy clicks and shares, rather than to inform.

b) Check up the source. The source itself is very important when facing an article suspicious to be fake. One aspect that helps a lot is to click on the 'about us' or 'about' section of that source. Those sources created to expand fake news, often have this section empty. Other times, the source might be real, but has been criticised/reported by other authorised sources for frequent fake content or untrustworthy news.

c) Check if the links and the re-directions work. Fake news articles re-direct to pages that do not have anything to do with the news described. Furthermore, those images that do not have a link, or a footer are also likely to be fake, since the reader do not have a way to check the veracity of it.

d) Reverse image search. Fake news articles normally are accompanied with fake images. Engaging in reverse image search helps to spot fake news. It can be done through google lens, google image search… Sometimes the image can be real, but slightly manipulated or photoshop to alter the message that transmits. Moreover, you should watch out those videos that are blurry, black and white, or difficult to see clear graphics. When this happens, try to isolate the news from the video: fake news may include the video at the end so when the reader watches it, its mind is already 'polluted' by the information, therefore the video will just confirm it. However, if the video is seen before reading, the reader may notice different things and have a more critical approach.

e) Question your own ideas. Fake news has different levels, from being just a 'meme' or parody, to a intentioned false information. Between these two levels there are many types of fake news (no connection between headline and text, omission of specific info, real information with false context, intentioned alteration of content…). The reader may not know what level of fake news the article he/she is reading is, and as First Draft project explains, individuals tend to have an emotional relationship with information, therefore tend to be guided by their confirmation bias. Therefore, to question the self-biases, and not letting emotions guide the process of research and reading news can help to identify better fake news.

- *Strategies to combat fake news.*

a) The main strategy to combat fake news is to avoid sharing them. The most normal thing is to do so unintentionally. That is why is important to identify fake news and learn how to do so. Increasing a fake news will increase its capacity to be visualised, contributing in some way to make it viral. Once it is viral, its effects are difficult to prevent.

b) Fight the Echo-Chambers. Be aware that the algorithms are everywhere in social media, and that the content you consume 'aleatory' has already passed through many filters, which have been created according to your searches, clicks and preferences. Strategies to exit this echo-chamber can go from subscribing to different ideology forums, visit frequently different webpages that are contrary to each other and have opposed visions. Not only your algorithm will be more varied, but also you will get different perspectives and different points of view.

c) Aim for a qualitative journalism. Identify those sources that are able to recognize when they have committed a mistake or have published false information or not very true. Although this may sound confusing, since you are trusting a media that has not produced real info and has shared false information, the fact that it has recognized it shows first its capacity to detect that the news is false, and second, its commitment on cutting its spread by contradicting themselves and disproving their own information, even if this means losing credibility. Demonstrating commitment also demonstrates professionalism and enhances its credibility in the long run.

d) Preventing fake news in any way is more effective than combating them once they are already spread. Individuals that often consume fake news are less prone to find contradicting news or those disproving the fake ones. Moreover, they may have stronger confirmation bias, which will lead them to not accept factual corrections, and these can even cause less rejection to listen to the verification sources. Therefore, it is important to increase digital literacy and media literacy, as well as promoting it as an important skill for navigating the internet nowadays.

e) Report. Nowadays, there are many tools to report fake news, other than making it public. Every social media has its self-reporting tools and mechanisms. Here you can have a look at every social media strategy for reporting fake news: https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/how-to-report-misinformation-online

Materials/Resources needed. Pens, paper. The facilitator can also use a PPT for offering a more visual element-based explanation.

Estimated number of participants No estimated number of participants.

Participant instructions Listen carefully and take notes if necessary.

Possible alterations. This activity is lecture-type, therefore, depends on the facilitator/trainer to implement it the most suited way for their participants. The information described above shall be transmitted in accordance with the participant's knowledge and background. For that reason, the facilitator may adapt the content, to make it more relevant depending on its national context or target audience. The way of presenting it can be done through PPT or simple lecture. It may include external information as well, but it is recommended to read in advance the resources listed in the Background reading section.

Debrief: Have you ever faced a fake news identification process? How did you feel? Do you think you

acted in a correct way? Do you think you have fallen into a fake new sharing chain?

Background/external resources.

- The Anti-Rumour Guidebook: https://anti-rumour.eu/
- https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/too-much-information/
- https://espacio.fundaciontelefonica.com/evento/fake-news-la-fabrica-de-mentiras/ (for Spanish readers)
- https://schwarzkopf-stiftung.de/content/uploads/2021/10/media_literacy_workshop_english.pdf?x93207
- https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/how-to-report-misinformation-online

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3. 2 Activity 2. Responding and informing

Duration: 30-35 min.

Learning outcomes/Key messages: To face real-life situations when combating fake news and reflecting about the behaviour and measures to implement when combating its spread.

Estimated number of participants: no estimated number of participants

Participant instructions: This is a role-playing simulation, but there is also group debate. The facilitator should expose the following situation:

'You are part of a WhatsApp group with your school or university colleagues. You have very good relationship with them, and you are usually active in exchanging information with them. In this group, there are different people and a variety of opinions, but they do not normally share them or create polemic debates through WhatsApp. Although everyone knows the ideological differences between some people, they maintain them outside the WhatsApp group. However, one day you find out, after hours without checking messages, that one of your friends shared some images (Annex 3) of a comparison between a weather forecast in Spain and Germany. This friend shared it claiming that it is possible to see the manipulation that we are all suffering from regarding climate change, just by looking at the comparison. This is because in recent years, although having lower temperatures, the colours are aggressively warmer than in previous times, apparently not following the same pattern. Your friend claims that global warming is not real and that this is just another example of how the media manipulates us, creating an alarmist perception of the weather temperatures. The answers to this message are all agreeing. Not everyone is replying, but those who are doing it are in favour of this narrative, some even admitted that while before they didn't have it clear, not they do. Some others are saying they are sharing them with other groups. You have the suspicion that the image is false, and that could be either placed in a wrong context or manipulated'.

Then, form groups of 3 and discuss what you would do. The facilitator may ask the following input questions:

- How can you check that image is false? What tools would you use to verify it?

- Once you certify that image is false, manipulated or wrong, how can you explain them to the group? How can you ensure that you give them sufficient explanation for them to understand your arguments, and not deny and dismiss everything you say?

- Explain to the group what the steps were you undertook for verifying the information

As facilitator, you can decide to establish a winning condition, to incentivize participants and make the activity more dynamic. The winning scheme is based on the ability of participants (either individually or in groups) to tick the following checklist:

In the Germany map:

- There are two different seasons. 1pt
- The TV programme has changed the colours 4 times since 1997, alongside the improvement in visual graphs and colour palette. 2 pt.
- Finding that this conspiracy narrative was spread by a far-right politician (AfD) 2 pt.

In the Spanish map:

- The presenter is Roberto Brasero. 0.5 pt
- The years are not correct (2017 and 2022). 1 pt.
- They are two different maps: one represents the temperature warning map, the other the peak temperature map. 1 pt.
- This manipulation was spread by Georgian Facebook users, and then reached Spanish audience 2 pt.
- The presenter Brasero debunked it itself by responding to criticism on twitter 0.5 pt.

Additional points:

- The participant used Google Lenses or Reverse Image Search 2pt.
- The participant found the two articles mentioned in the bibliography 2 pt.

Possible alterations: The exercise can be done individually as well. The explanation of this fake news is simple, and the facilitator can explain it if participants do not find the reason as to why these images follow this pattern. These sorts of comparisons are usually done in order to manipulate reality and present some sort of media manipulation of the weather forecast. It has been done in other countries such as Sweden: https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.32C27XA or Italy https://www.open.online/2022/07/29/negazionismo-riscaldamento-globale-unita-1964-fc/, therefore is a recurrent manipulative technique in Europe. Many arguments dismantle these false conspiracies. The most simple one is that usually these pictures are taken from different media channels, selecting precisely those that have radically different colours. If the pictures are from the same channel, this can be because they are indicating different phenomena. For example, in Annex 3a, the first phenomenon is a simple weather forecast, while the second one is indicating the level of risk. In Spain, the risk level is measured in colours (green, yellow, orange and red risk), while the weather forecast follows a different pattern. Therefore, these pictures are selectively manipulated so it seems that the programme is showing the same information while it is not. In the case of Germany, there is also a lack of context. In that specific forecast tv show, they change the colours depending on the season or even the month. The 1997 map had the summer colours, while the second from spring. Therefore, the comparison is between a spring map with a summer map. Moreover, that forecast show has changed their colours three times since 1997, adapting them to new technologies and new shades. Having more shades results in having more contrasts. Moreover, the forecast show directors argue that since temperatures have been getting warmer, they had to adapt the colours of the spring and summer palette so the contrasts are visible, otherwise the map will look all red.

Debrief: Were you satisfied with your response? Do you think it would have been effective in a real-life situation? What would you have changed? Would you have acted differently?

Background/external resources:
https://edmo.eu/publications/the-chromatic-change-conspiracy-theory/
https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/2023/06/16/nein-die-tagesschau-manipuliert-keine-wetterkarten/