Anti-
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MODULE 3.
MISINFORMATION VS DISINFORMATION VS MALINFORMATION

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Module 3. Misinformation vs Disinformation vs Malinformation

3.1 Activity 1. Differentiating Misinformation vs Disinformation vs Malinformation

Duration: 20 minutes:

Materials/Resources needed: Theoretical input

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There are a lot of terms related to fake news. One that is often misused and confused is to mix misinformation with disinformation terms. They do not mean the same thing. However, they form part of a bigger concept in which also fake news is part of. As a matter of fact, anything related to fake news is englobed in the following term: deception. Deception is understood as the act of hiding the truth, especially to get an advantage, representing a process that undermines the ability to consciously make decisions and take convenient actions, following personal values and boundaries. The ultimate consequence of deception is to get people to do things they would not otherwise do. Deception can take many forms, depending on the purpose/aim of the deception, the channel service (social media or mainstream media for example), the deception technique and the potential target.

Therefore, everything can be related to deception (fake news, disinformation, misinformation, rumours, conspiracy theories, clickbait, hoaxes…)

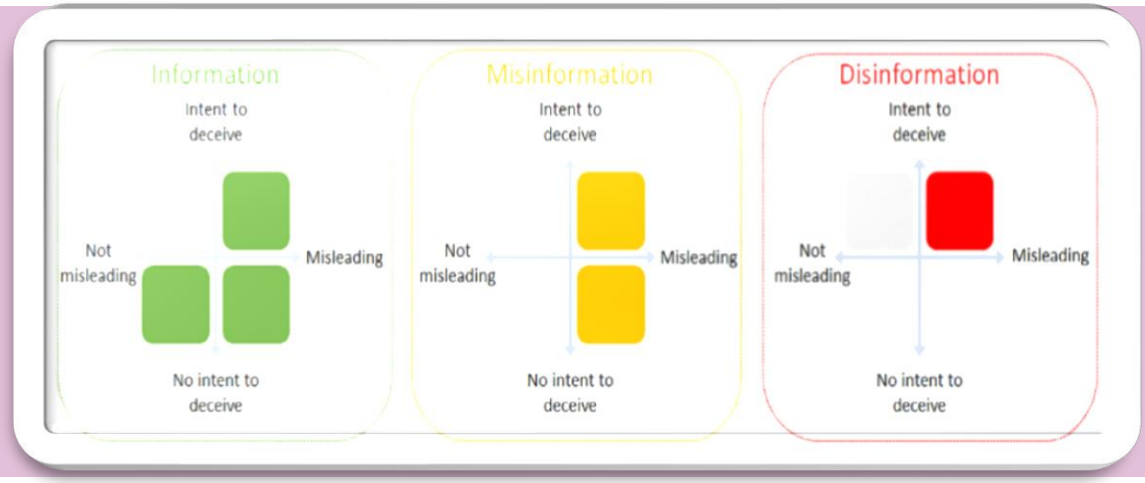
However, not all mean the same. In order to distribute these terms and classify it there are two main factors to take into account: authenticity and intent. The authenticity is rooted on the fact itself, if that issue is simply false or true. The intent refers to the human factor of giving a sense to that fact. Thus, if there is an human intent in the context of spreading deception, it can be to deceive or to provoke harm.

Misinformation then occurs when individuals or organisations unwittingly get the facts wrong, therefore, the authenticity is false, but there is not (apparent) intent of spreading deception. It often happens when the news and information has not been fully confirmed, and when it is shared, it has not been yet fully fact checked. Although there is presumably not malicious intent, misinformation can be spread easily, mostly through user-to-user sharing.

Disinformation however has false authenticity as well, but a rather different intent: to mislead others. It is deliberately spread with the intent to manipulate truths and facts, therefore, with the ultimate aim of deceiving. According to recent research, it is easier now to spread disinformation, especially through conspiracy theories, manipulated images, videos and audio clips. Propaganda and disinformation often go hand in hand.

However, what happens when the intention is to do harm? When an information is consciously manipulated and falsified in order to harm specific targets, it's called *malinformation*. The interest normally responds to individual interest or personal aspirations. Malinformation

normally is framed as a tool to directly attack specific targets, and damage their image, reputation, legitimacy… The most normal technique is to provide information without a context about a certain person/group and offer an interpretation of why that information. For example, 'X met with Y for a coffee. X is married with B, therefore X is cheating on B with Y'. The headline of this malinformation therefore is 'X cheated on B'.



- It is difficult to classify fake news within these terms. Some authors prefer to refer it to disinformation, others as misinformation, malinformation or both. The truth is that not only fake news can be part of this debate, but also other concepts such as clickbait, hoaxes, rumours, satires, propaganda, framing… All of them can be interpreted as disinformation, misinformation or malinformation.

- How can we then differentiate if any deception tactic is dis/mis/malinformation? The answer is through recognizing, analysing and identifying. In other words, media literacy. However, this is not an easy task, everyone is susceptible to dis/mis/malinformation and sometimes we do not even realize. For that reason, the first step is to identification. Here are some key references for which is which.

a) *Clickbait*. Refers to misleading headlines and dishonest pop-ups, in which the main aim is to attract readers, usually with sensationalist or flashy messages.

b) *Hoax*. Refers to false/inaccurate information, usually in the form of a new story, which is typically presented as factual. The intention of creating a hoax is to spread a completely manipulated or fabricated piece of info, with the general goal of misleading the audience.

c) *Rumour*. Refers to ambiguous information, or never confirmed claims. The previous stage to the factual information is rumours, which are often taken as true. Therefore, they can take form of fake news as well.

d) *Satire*. Stories that contain a lot of irony or sarcasm. The intention however normally is not to inform but rather to parody and ridicule the subject is talking about. Satire is not a fake news *per se*, but rather a technique to be used to spread misinformation or malinformation. Satire however moves in a blurry line; it is not easy sometimes to spot when there is intention to manipulate behind. They key to spot if its being used with deceiving intentions is to check the levels of exaggerated, ridiculous and irony levels. Satire many times assumes that the audience will spot the irony and exaggerated levels. Therefore, identifying satire will probably ring a bell in the audience and be careful when interpreting the information described. However, the subtle tone of a parody or irony may mislead audience, due to its difficult nature of being perceived as irony, and therefore its more likelihood of being perceived as making fun of a real fact.

e) *Framing*. Refers to a typical manipulation technique, consisting of hiding the truth, omitting relevant aspects of a certain piece of information, taking out of context statement, images or other factual material to enhance their narrative. One of the key aspects of framing is that there is an intention to influence on people's opinion, aiming at shaping information in a specific way so it is interpretated in a concrete manner. For example, X says: 'Our objective is to neutralize them, we are not going to approve their political programme because we do not agree with certain points'. Then, there is a headline that reads: 'X threatens to kill B', misinterpreting the point X wanted to refer to, and therefore framing X so to be perceived as aggressive or with bad intentions. The difference between hoax and framing lays down on the type of arguments: Typically, hoaxes focus more on convincing on a narrative, making people *believe* in certain paradigms. Framing could also be based on that, but It is more typically associated with the intention of misleading, hoping to influence and make people *interpretate* the information.

f) *Fake news*: This term may englobe any of the techniques used. All definitions of fake news could also potentially be used for any of the techniques described above. Therefore, fake news is a blurry concept that serve us to described in general terms all inaccurate information, either hoax, framing, clickbait, satire or rumours.

g) *Conspiracy theories*: They constitute a different form of false information, being part of a broader and higher scale. Normally, these techniques are used to present a newstory that aims to support a conspiracy theory. More information is provided in other lessons

h) *Propaganda*: The propaganda concept has the same definition as fake new (and therefore can take up many forms and techniques) but what differentiates it from fake news is the political intention. Propaganda is always produced under a political trigger, with political implications. More information is provided in other lessons.

To differentiate if any of these tools is either disinformation, misinformation or malinformation, it is fundamental to engage in critical thinking and revision. Thus, every time a situation like the above described is identified, the individual should analyze it, examining:

1. *Purpose*. It is essential to discern the purpose of the information. Normally, to discover it, we should just deprive ourselves from any bias and approach the information as if we did not know anything… What is the first feeling that causes in us? Does it bring rage, suspicious, or malevoulos feelings? That could be the aim of the info. It also helps to find the same piece of information in other media and see if the feeling is the same. If the purpose is to offer simple facts unrelated to other news, it might be misinformation. If the purpose is to prove a narrative and guide readers into a concrete portrayal of reality, probably is disinformation. Lastly, if the purpose is to attack, point fingers at some group/institution/person for dishonest actions, it may be malinformation

2. *Channel Service*. The channel is simply the media that is used. Normally, mainstream media do not fall into malinformation, due to its accountability, but they may fall into misinformation (especially sensationalist headlines to attract viewers) and disinformation (if that media has a pre-establish tendency/position regarding a narrative). Social media however is different, and malinformation tactics are quite more often used. Misinformation is usually spread in WhatsApp and Facebook groups (message chains), since it usually reaches older users, unfamiliar with fact-checking tools. In others such as Twitter or Instagram, in which echo-chambers are usually easier to expand, disinformation and malinformation is more usual.

3. *Deception technique*. Each above-mentioned technique is linked with a type of information it aims to give. Note that this is a general classification. Most of techniques follow the same scheme, but it is possible that it does not correspond.

Link for translation (Please make a copy)
https://www.canva.com/design/DAGEzmVaXVU/tfxYlMUF14DF3lm3B4fx_A/edit?utm_content=DAGEzmVaXVU&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton

	Misinformation	Disinformation	Malinformation
Clickbait	X	X	
Hoax		X	X
Rumour	X		
Satire		X	X
Framing			X

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: How does disinformation/misinformation spread, and what are the common channels or platforms used for dissemination? How can media literacy be improved to better equip people in discerning between credible and unreliable sources of information? Did you understand the different categorization of fake news, and the complexity of the terminology and manipulation tactics?

Background/ External resources:

- Adjin-Tettey T.D. (2022) *'Combating fake news, disinformation and misinformation: Experimental evidence for media literacy education'*, Cogent Arts & Humanities, 9:1
- Freiling I. Matthes J. (2023), *Correcting climate change misinformation on social media: Reciprocal relationships between correcting others, anger and environmental activism*, Computer in Human Behaviour
- Aimeur E. Amri S, Brassard G, (2023), '*Fake News, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review*' Springer-Verlag GmbH
- https://www.britannica.com/topic/misinformation-and-disinformation
- https://www.konsyse.com/articles/misinformation-vs-disinformation-vs-malinformation/

3.2 Activity 2. Mis/Dis/Malinformation: practical excercise.

Duration: 20 minutes

Learning outcomes/key messages: To foster critical thinking and implement fake narratives detection mechanisms.

Estimated numbers of participants: No estimated number of participants

Participant instructions: The facilitator will provide participants with a quizz, with different headlines. Participants will test their knowledge gained from the previous activity, and they will apply it to the quiz. Their job is to identify.

a) which of the following statements is misinformation, disinformation or malinformation
b) what manipulation technique is.

If participant guess a) will be 1 point, b) will be 2 points. A wrong identification will cost them 0.5 points. The team/person that wins more points wins the game. Provide the quizz in a written version (done previously) or write in the board:

Statement 1.
Headline: 'New research shows that Covid can be detected by holding breath by 10 seconds. If you think you have Covid symptoms, hold your breath for 10 seconds. If you didn't cough during that time, it means you are clean, there is no infection in your lungs. If you coughed, it may indicate you have Covid'

Channel Service: 'Whatsapp chain'

Correct answer: misinformation and hoax

Statement 2.
Headline: 'VIDEO: A down-syndrome teenager attacks people on the street, for no apparent reason. The attacks of disabled individuals on public spaces have increased in recent years. 'They need to be controlled' -says one of the victims-

Channel service. Twitter

Correct answer: malinformation and framing

Statement 3.
Headline: 'The new ID geolocation features in Greece threaten privacy and freedom of movements of Greek citizens. Some Governmental sources claim that these geolocation features will not be present in immigrant identification numbers'.

Channel Service: Twitter

Correct answer: Disinformation, Framing

Statement 4.
Headline: 'You would not want to get vaccinated ever again: The horrendous (and ugly) side effects of vaccines'

Channel Service: Digital Newspaper.

Correct Answer: Clickbait and Disinformation

Statement 5.

Headline: "Just like Jesus turning water into wine, Father Andrew has the habit of turning sacraments into spirits.'

Channel Service: Instagram

Correct Answer: Satire + Disinformation

Possible alterations: Consider doing groups, pairs or individually, depending on the group. The quiz questions can be adapted to a PPT or written on the flipchart.

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