



unesco

# Information and Elections in the Digital Era

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas  
with the support of UNESCO and UNDP



# MODULE 2

Disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech

## In this module...

- Why we shouldn't use the term “fake news”.
- Definitions of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation.
- Human drivers behind misleading content.
- Hate speech and its impact on electoral processes.
- Electoral related violence and gender-based violence.
- Violence against journalists.



Definitions

# « Fake news »

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- To refer to false information presented as real news.
- When we consider that some information which is circulating on the media is misleading on purpose.



News ...

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Have **values**

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Are **verified**

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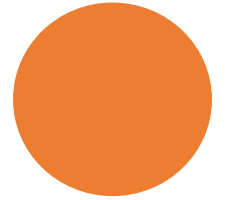
**Serve the society**

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**Empower the public**

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Are driven by **trust**



'Fake news' is an OXYMORON – a self-contradicting group of words which undermines, sometimes even without realizing it, the credibility of verifiable information: the very essence of the concept of NEWS



**~~FAKE NEWS~~ &  
DISINFORMATION**

# Crucial concepts

- **Disinformation:** Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country
- **Misinformation:** Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm
- **Malinformation:** Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization, or country.

## FALSENESS

### Misinformation

Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translations, or when satire is taken seriously.

### Disinformation

Fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content. Intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumors.

## INTENT TO HARM

### Malinformation

Deliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate rather than public interest, such as revenge porn. Deliberate change of context, date or time of genuine content.

# Artificial Intelligence, Big Data and Machine Learning...

- Can benefit democratic institutions by engaging voters and helping them be better informed.
- Great potential for enhancing independent journalism, campaigning, and supporting electoral processes in general.
- BUT the algorithms can easily spread disinformation, misinformation and malinformation, inflicting reputational damage to journalism, undermining the credibility of electoral processes and electoral regulators and undermining democracies worldwide.





## Rumors and fabricated contents

- The affordability of social networking technologies, their scope and precision are real GAME CHANGERS on how disinformation, misinformation and malinformation can be transmitted.
- Citizens struggle to discern what is true and what is false.
- Extreme views, conspiracy theories, and populism flourish, and once-accepted truths and institutions are questioned.
- The spread of disinformation has become a critical challenge for elections and responses, measures and solutions are urgently needed.



Key  
elements

## Agent

Actor Type: Official / Unofficial  
Level of Organisation: None / Loose / Tight / Networked  
Type of Motivation: Financial / Political / Social / Psychological  
Level of Automation: Human / Cyborg / Bot  
Intended Audience: Members / Social Groups / Entire Societies  
Intent to Harm: Yes / No  
Intent to Mislead: Yes / No

## Message

Duration: Long-term / Short-term / Event-based  
Accuracy: Misleading / Manipulated / Fabricated  
Legality: Legal / Illegal  
Imposter Type: No / Brand / Individual  
Message Target: Individual / Organisation / Social Group / Entire Society

## Interpreter

Message reading: Hegemonic / Oppositional / Negotiated  
Action taken: Ignored / Shared in support / Shared in opposition

# Other key actors of disinformation

- **Instigators** : actors who are at the origin of the creation and distribution of disinformation, and benefit from it, and who often pay for it to be operationalized.
- **Intermediaries**: vehicles for the content, such as social media platforms or applications,



Human  
drivers behind  
misleading  
content




- We want to be “liked”, be accepted, be part of the tribe or the group. We are humans and we are vulnerable.
- Emotive content, and content shared by a friend or family member, is more likely to be redistributed on social media than the content coming from an unknown source.
- “Trust networks” where the distribution of inaccurate, false and propagandistic content masquerading as news has found increased traction becoming “viral”.
- We also tend to have a tendency to be more attracted by shockingly emotional content. Drama, scandal, tragedy, gossip apparently, are very attractive to humans too.



Drama is very popular

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# Clickbait, echo-chambers and filter-bubbles

- **Clickbait:** marketing, advertising or information material that generates interest through these drivers and, thus, engagement, through a sensationalist headline that attracts clicks.
- **Echo-chambers:** situations in which beliefs are amplified or reinforced by communication and repetition inside a closed system and insulated from rebuttal.
- **Filter bubbles:** Artificial Intelligence-driven techniques to create ech-chambers, where users consume content that predominantly validates their views.

A photograph of a coffee break. In the foreground, a dark blue ceramic cup filled with a frothy coffee sits on a matching saucer. A silver spoon is tucked behind the cup. In the background, a white plate holds a golden-brown croissant. The entire scene is set on a light-colored wooden table with a visible grain. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a cozy atmosphere. The text "Coffee break" is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font, with a thin white horizontal line underneath it.

Coffee break



Hate Speech

The Rabat Plan of Action on  
the prohibition of advocacy of  
national, racial or religious  
hatred that constitutes  
incitement to discrimination,  
hostility or violence

Working definition as:

*"any kind of communication in  
speech, writing or behaviour that  
attacks or uses pejorative or  
discriminatory language with  
reference to a person or a group on  
the basis of who they are, in other  
words, based on their religion,  
ethnicity, nationality, race, colour,  
descent, gender or other identity  
factor."*

## Forms of hate speech

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Scapegoating, stereotyping, stigmatization and the use of derogatory language.

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It is often employed in the promulgation of conspiracy theories, disinformation and denial and distortion of historical events such as genocide.

# International Legal Framework and Policies

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- **Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

- **The Rabat Plan of Action**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized several multi-stakeholder workshops that resulted in the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.

It also contains threshold tests and recommendations, which are extremely relevant to social media and many other aspects of the digital universe.



Electoral  
related  
violence

- Electoral related actors can trigger violence online and offline.
- Election-related conflict has devastating effects on governance and development.
- Root causes of conflict are economic, social and / or political issues in dispute and in the allocation of power, like challenging electoral results.



# Four main characteristics of Electoral-related violence

Is employed to achieve a POLITICAL OBJECTIVE

Has BROAD RANGE OF MANIFESTATIONS like disruptions or delays in the polling process, coercive intimidation and threats of physical, psychological or sexual harm against voters, political supporters and polling officials.

CAN OCCUR DURING ANY PHASE OF THE ELECTORAL CYCLE: from voter registration, political campaigning and polling day to the announcement of results and formation of government.

Electoral violence is NOT gender-neutral.



Electoral-related  
Gender  
Based Violence  
(GBV)

# Forms and impact of GBV

- GBV can virtually exclude women from the electoral processes.
- Attacks on personal dignity as a factor deterring women from entering politics, amplified by social media and AI.
- Online violence and abuse against women contribute to a hostile environment with the aim of shaming, intimidating or degrading women. Not all forms are crimes, but all impact the human rights of women.
- Psychological violence is way of control that includes systematic ridicule, ostracism, shame, sarcasm, criticism, disapproval, exclusion and discrimination.
- Threats and acts of physical and sexual violence or violence against relatives, friends and destruction of property or sensitive materials.



Violence  
against  
journalists



## Journalism and Elections

- Journalism is key during electoral processes and all along the electoral cycle. It allows voters and citizens to make good choices and vote knowing what they are doing
- Attacks against those performing journalistic functions –including photographers and citizen journalists – have increased in the past decades, and impunity regarding these crimes prevails.



## ATTACKS AND HARASSMENT AGAINST JOURNALISTS



### Denial of Access

ONLINE THREATS

**Censorship**

**Internet Shutdowns**

**Technical Attacks**

Mass spamming  
Flooding servers  
Blocking  
User or website



### Invasion of Privacy

OFFLINE AND/OR ONLINE

**Surveillance**

**Doxing**

**Stalking**

**Hacking**



### Direct Harassment and Attacks

OFFLINE AND/OR ONLINE

**Harassment threats**

**Attacks, Assault**

**Sexual Harassment**

**Sexual Assault**

**Kidnapping**

**Torture**

**Murder**



**Gender issues affect all forms of violence and attacks against journalists**

# UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists

## Establish

Establish general safety provisions for journalists, including but not limited to safety training courses during electoral processes;

## Develop

Develop accessible, real-time emergency response mechanisms for groups and media organizations, including contacting and engaging available national and community resources;

## Work

Work together with EMBs and security forces in protocols for the protection and safety of journalists covering elections.

## Strengthen

Strengthen provisions for the safety of journalists in conflict zones, for example by encouraging the creation of so-called 'media corridors'.

# Recap Module 2

# During this module we learned ...

- Why we shouldn't use the term "fake news"
- The definitions of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation
- The different key elements of this dynamics
- The human drivers behind misleading content
- Hate speech and its impact on electoral processes.
- The Rabat Plan of Action
- Electoral related violence and gender-based violence
- Violence against journalists

# MODULE 3 we will address...

- The different strategies and techniques to spread disinformation and
- Who are the main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle and how it can affect them.
- The relevance of the ELECTORAL CALENDAR and its connection with the ELECTORAL CYCLE
- Why ELECTORAL OPERATIONAL PLANNING is critical for electoral processes.
- The different ways of tackling disinformation, misinformation and malinformation as well as hate-speech

See you next week!

