INFORMATION... IT'S COMPLICATED

Workshop Outline

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DESCRIPTION

This workshop defines what is meant by ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’ and explores how the world of information is slippery and complicated. Participants learn fundamental investigation skills to help them to verify information and become more information savvy.

*(This is part 2 of the misinformation workshop series, facts vs. feelings.*[***Click here for part 1***](https://datadetoxkit.org/en/trainings/design-tricks)

* Duration: 115 minutes
* Ideal for 10-25 participants

LEARNING GOALS

* Discuss the complexity of information
* Practice basic image verification
* Explore reverse image searching
* Identify methods to reduce misinformation

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Below is an overview of the workshop outline:

* Opening
* Presentation: Why So Complicated?
* Activity: Beyond Fake News
* Activity: Find the Clues!
* Demonstration: Reverse Image Search
* Discussion: Sharing with Care
* Reflection: Takeaways
* Closing

OPENING

**Time needed:** 5 minutes+  
**Purpose:** to welcome participants as well as setting expectations and goals.

1. Introductions:
   * Introduce workshop title
   * Facilitator introduces themselves
2. Explain the learning goals
3. Review the ground rules

**Variations:**

* Develop collaborative ground rules along with participants if there is time.
* Ask participants to go around and introduce themselves if there is time. You can even ask people to share what weather they are feeling like if it seems appropriate for the time and group dynamic. (e.g. “Hello, my name is... and I feel like a cold but sunny autumn day.”)

PRESENTATION: WHY SO COMPLICATED?

**Time needed:** 10 minutes  
**Purpose:** to orient participants into the complexity of the information space.

1. You can use or adapt the script below.

So why is information so complicated? First we need to take a step back to look at everything that surrounds the information we see everyday.

* + **The internet** changed how we consume information. First of all, the sheer amount of information that’s available to us. Secondly, the way we consume information has changed. Whereas before we’d go to a library, or get the newspaper once a day, now we have the whole world at our fingertips through social media and a 24 hour news cycle. And finally, the information we see is often based on algorithmically generated content which means that the way we use the internet – the things we search for, the things we post, what we buy – is fed back to us. So what you see on your social media feed or your search engine results may be very different from someone sitting next to you. This is often called a ‘filter bubble’ or an ‘echo chamber’ and it can have a huge impact on how we process information. For example, if you’re just seeing information that an algorithm thinks you’ll like, then you won’t be challenged by opposing views.
    - A quick quiz: can anyone guess how many things are searched in Google every day? Answer: 3.5 billion
  + The second thing is **society**. Things happen all over the world, all the time... It’s not that more things are happening now, it’s just that we are more connected than ever before. Someone doing a dance challenge on TikTok in Malaysia can be seen in real time by someone sat on their sofa in Europe. And just like the algorithms that work on the internet, things that are happening all over the world, are sometimes shaped by other factors, such as politics, economics, money and power. And this can alter what we’re seeing, or can make some things seem more important than other things.
  + And finally, **humans**. We are emotional creatures which means that we have an emotional relationship to information. If I see an article that says that it’s been scientifically proven that hedgehogs are the cutest animals then I more likely to believe it because it confirms my view of hedgehogs. Whereas if I see an article that states that hedgehogs have been biting people, then I’m less likely to believe it or want to share it. Secondly, our brains are constantly sorting through information and making snap decisions about what the believe and what to throw to the side. Our brains make mental shortcuts to help us make sense of the world often without us even knowing. For example if I’m scrolling through social media and I see 20 posts about different things, I may scroll past two posts about football because it’s not something that interests me. And finally, we also different motives for sharing things, such as peer pressure, political influence or because we think it’s funny.
  + There are two terms which are useful for understanding the ways that we process information and how it’s easy to be misled
    - **Continued influence effect** is what happens when still believe information even when it’s been proved wrong to us.
    - And **Illusory truth effect** is when we believe things because we have seen it many times. This often happens with social media, especially with viral news stories.
  + **Information disorder**: When you add all these things together, you’re left with a mess, what some misinformation experts call “Information Disorder”.

**Tip:** During this portion, you can find ways to engage the audience further by projecting images, or asking volunteers to draw on a poster while you talk.

ACTIVITY: BEYOND FAKE NEWS

**Time needed:** 15 minutes  
**Purpose:** participants will define the various terms surrounding the "misinformation" space in order to realize the complexity of information, and get past calling it “fake news”.

1. Ask participants: can anyone tell me why the term “fake news” might be misleading?
   * Answers:
     + ‘Fake’ suggests that something is something is just true or false, but often it’s more complicated than that.
     + “Fake news” is often used in the media, and by some politicians, as a way of discrediting information
     + As we’ll learn today, there’s a whole grey area in between what’s true and what’s false so it’s important to understand the terminology.
2. [**Show the Venn diagram from fact-checking organization First Draft**](https://web.archive.org/web/20220119133506/https:/firstdraftnews.org/articles/coe_infodisorder), which explains three different terms. You will focus only on mis- and disinformation today, because these are the types that people come across most frequently.
3. Stattdessen auch dieser Artikel, oder dieses Schaubild: [Fake News, Misinformation, Desinformation | Medienkompetenz in einer digitalen Welt | bpb.de](https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/izpb/medienkompetenz-355/539986/fake-news-misinformation-desinformation/)
4. Ask: Can anybody tell me the difference between mis- and disinformation?
5. Explain: Misinformation is false information that is disseminated, *regardless of intent* to mislead. Misinformation also describes false content but the person sharing doesn’t realise that it is false or misleading. Often a piece of disinformation is picked up by someone who doesn’t realise it’s false, and shares it with their networks, believing that they are helping.
6. Explain: Disinformation is content that is intentionally false and designed to cause harm. It is motivated by three distinct factors: to make money; to have political influence, either foreign or domestic; or to cause trouble for the sake of it. When disinformation is shared it often turns into misinformation.
   * Note: (The third category is malinformation. The term describes genuine information that is shared with an intent to cause harm. An example of this is when Russian agents hacked into emails from the Democratic National Committee and the Hillary Clinton campaign and leaked certain details to the public to damage reputations.)

**Tips:** The idea is to give participants the language to discuss information with more accuracy and confidence. The conclusion here is that because intention is difficult to ascertain, then "misinformation" can be used as an umbrella term referring to all kinds of misleading or false information, rather than "fake news".

**Variations:** Each language tackles these terms differently. If your language does not have terms which match up, you can use this exercise as a chance to discuss and speculate with the group about the difference of the meanings and how the terms could be referred to instead.

ACTIVITY: FIND THE CLUES!

**Time needed:** 15 minutes+  
**Purpose:** for participants to try some basic image verification skills – using just their eyes and no digital tools.

1. Give instructions: Look closely and carefully at the images I’m going to show you next and see if you can spot any clue as to which city these images are from… Don't just shout out cities, but rather explain the specific clues that lead you to your guesses.
2. Show first image on [**page 22 of this document**](https://cdn.ttc.io/s/digital-enquirer-kit/guidebook/Digital-Enquirer-Kit_Guidebook_EN.pdf). Give people a minute to look at the image, after which people can point out the clues they found.
3. Page 23 of the same document reveals the clues. Answer is explained fully on page 16.
4. Show the second image on page 24. Again, give people a minute to look at the image, after which they can point out the clues they found.
5. Page 25 of the same document reveals the clues. Answer is explained fully on page 16.

**Tips:**

* Look at the city images within the document in advance, and prepare them on the screen before the session so that you don't accidentally give the answers away!
* This might be our most highly regarded activity. Participants become very competitive in this game. It can be fun if everyone is respectful.

**Variations:**

* You can use additional city images to add challenges and expand the activity. You could even take pictures within the city you live, and ask people to identify the neighborhood or street if that isn't too hard. Remember, you want to balance difficulty with possibility.
* If you are online, you can ask participants to write clues in the public chat.
* If you are in-person, allow a moment of silence and then invite people to shout-out or stand up and point to clues.

DEMONSTRATION: REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH

**Time needed:** 30 minutes+  
**Purpose:** for participants to witness the ease of reverse image search, and find out how to use it in their everyday lives.

1. On a projector, open up: **[TinEye](https://tineye.com/" \t "_blank)**.
2. Describe how images are often shared alongside information, especially striking images and how there are many ways to take a simple photo out of context to tell a different story. Therefore, running a reverse image search can help you to find the origins of a photo and uncover the full story.
3. Explain how it works: TinEye, for example, constantly crawls the web and adds images to its index. The TinEye index is over 61 billion images. TinEye uses image recognition to search for images and find matches to your search image. It creates a unique and compact digital signature or 'fingerprint' for it using image recognition, then compares this fingerprint to every other image in our index to find matches.
4. Grab a simple image to run through reverse image search, such as [**this photograph**](https://cdn.ttc.io/s/digital-enquirer-kit/ddk-reversesearch/scientist.png). Ask participants to snap the picture on their mobile phones, and practice running it through TinEye as well. Together, discuss the answers to the following questions:
   * How many results were found?
   * When did this image originally appear? (Sort by "oldest" or "biggest image" to find)
   * Are there any results identified as "stock" or "sponsored"? What do those terms mean? Why are these terms significant?
   * If you saw this photo on a website discussing health treatments, would you trust it? Why or why not?

**Tip:** Also let participants know that [**Google Image Search**](https://images.google.com/) is another option for reverse image searching.

DISCUSSION: SHARING WITH CARE

**Time needed:** 20 minutes+  
**Purpose:** for participants to discuss strategies for spotting and dealing with misinformation.

1. Ask the group if they have any tips for how to deal with mis- or disinformation when they come across it? Below are some points you can add if no one else does:
   * Recognise your emotions: One of the best things that you can do is to recognise your emotional reactions to information. If you find yourself have a strong emotional reaction (such as using lots of exclamation marks).
   * Dig a little deeper: If you see information that you are unsure of, then look more closely at it and ask questions. You’ve already seen using reverse image search, and doing image verification. But you can also ask critical questions – who is sharing this? What is their motive?
   * Talk to people: And finally, start pointing out information that you think might be false or misleading. This doesn’t mean pointing fingers and saying that it’s people’s fault and that they’re stupid, because we’re all victims of sharing mis and disinformation. You can tell someone they shared something false be using empathetic language like *‘I’ve seen lots of people sharing this, and I’m concerned that it’s not true...’*.
   * Debunk: Go one step further by debunking misinformation when you see it. How to debunk: On page 15 of [**the Debunking Handbook**](https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf) published in 2020, there is a visual showing how you can debunk.
     + Lead with the fact, this is the most important thing here.
     + The ‘myth’ here refers to the misinformation – repeat it only once to avoid it sticking.
     + Explain clearly what is wrong about it
     + And finally restate the fact again so that it’s the last thing people process.
2. Remember, if you were surprised by anything you learned, PASS IT ON to a close friend or family member and get them to reflect about misleading information.

REFLECTION: TAKEAWAYS

**Time needed:** 15 minutes  
**Purpose:** to get a sense of what your participants have learned.

1. Ask participants to create a takeaway poster by sharing their answers to the following question in the shared whiteboard / drawing board: What are your main takeaways from today's workshop?
2. Give participants a few minutes to write and/or draw their thoughts.
3. Ask participants to share their posters, either by presenting or hanging them on the wall.
4. Highlight some of the points brought up to the group.

CLOSING

**Time needed:** 5 minutes  
**Purpose:** to give a chance for participants to review what has been covered.

1. Wrap up the workshop and sum up its contents.
2. Run a quick feedback session to gather participants' reactions. Each participant can share:
   * one thing they found very good about the session and
   * one thing they would improve for the next time
3. Encourage participants to ask questions or give some final tips.
4. Share resources and any follow-up details.

**Tips:**

* Take notes of the feedback points.
* In case you have trouble accepting critical feedback, try to respond with a simple "thank you" and think about it later when you have the headspace for it.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

* [**Tactical Tech: Digital Enquirer Kit**](https://digitalenquirer.org/)
* [**Tactical Tech: Exposing the Invisible: The Kit**](https://datadetoxkit.org/kit.exposingtheinvisible.org)
* [**First Draft News via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine [external icon](https://web.archive.org/web/20230523202933/https:/firstdraftnews.org/)**](https://web.archive.org/web/20230523202933/https:/firstdraftnews.org/)
* [**The International Fact Checking Network portal [external icon](https://educheckmap.factcheckingday.com/)**](https://educheckmap.factcheckingday.com/)
* [**EU Fact Check [external icon](https://eufactcheck.eu/)**](https://eufactcheck.eu/)
* [**Full Fact (UK) [external icon](https://fullfact.org/)**](https://fullfact.org/)
* [**Bellingcat, open source investigations group [external icon](https://www.bellingcat.com/)**](https://www.bellingcat.com/)
* [**Verification QuizBot on Twitter [external icon](https://twitter.com/quiztime)**](https://twitter.com/quiztime), a channel run by several open source investigators with daily verification challenges and tips on image geolocation
* [**The Debunking Handbook [external icon](https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf)**](https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf)
* [**The Media Manipulation Casebook [external icon](https://mediamanipulation.org/)**](https://mediamanipulation.org/)

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