

EU / UK Youth

Stronger Together for social action

**Resource pack
Fake News and Disinformation**

<https://www.britishcouncil.be/programmes/education/stronger-together/social-action>



Introduction

The [EU / UK Youth Stronger Together](#) is a two-year project (2023-2025) implemented in co-operation with the [European Movement International](#) and co-funded by the [European Union](#). It offers young people aged 15–30 from the EU and the UK opportunities to connect, co-operate, influence and implement change together on issues of common interest.

The project aims to facilitate close and sustainable relationship between young people in the UK and the EU for Europe's collective benefit. We work with various groups of young people through different strands of the programme.

As part of the Social Action strand of the programme focusing on schools, we organise thematic events, workshops, and a competition to facilitate partnership building between schools in the UK and EU.

We aspire to highlight the role of young people aged 15–18 as changemakers, active global citizens and leaders at local, national and European level. You can find out more on:

<https://www.britishcouncil.be/programmes/education/stronger-together/social-action>

Let's get started!

Our focus in this resource is on how Fake News and Disinformation have permeated online sources of information. We know this is where young people gather most of the news that helps to form their world view. For this topic, we will develop lots of strategies for **critical thinking**, our mainstay in protecting ourselves when it comes to processing and deciding about fake news and disinformation.

We hope that this opportunity to discuss pertinent themes and issues will help you to take a wider and perhaps a better-informed look, at some important issues. This resource relates to the other two resources in the Stronger Together project - Climate and Sustainability and Integration of Refugee Students. We hope you will have the opportunity to consider how Fake News and Disinformation have influenced these debates, online and in society as a whole.

As a quick reminder this project is based on collaboration between students in different countries working together. It is designed to be **student-led**, with support and facilitation from your teacher(s). For the very best results international collaboration is vital. However, the ideas can work well within an individual school too.

There are two main support documents relevant for the 'Fake News and Disinformation' topic. **Stronger Together Teacher Facilitator Notes** are for the teacher facilitators supporting your project. The other is this one, for you, the students, the most important people in the project. The intention is that your teacher facilitators pass over responsibility for this project to you, the students, as soon as possible. Encourage your teacher facilitators to read this document - their role is to support you to lead the project.

Both documents contain more information than you need. The internet has hundreds of thousands more pages, (as you will see some are more reliable than others!). Be realistic. You



can't do it all. You do not have to read everything or do every activity! You have other subjects to study! You will have to be selective in consultation with your partners in the other schools and colleges.

The project writers have suggested that you make a journey, in stages, with three focal points. These are **Learn, Explore and Act**. Now that the Stronger Together project has evolved and entered its final topic, you, the students, will almost certainly find new aspects which the project writers and your teachers hadn't considered. You will probably put more emphasis on some sections rather than others – making your project as a whole unique.

Remember that working together is the aim. We would suggest that you take an early look at the final section 'Actions'.

1. Learn: 'Fake News and Disinformation'

Background information

Let's start this topic by taking a step back so we understand that there's nothing new about fake news. This can be summed up by this famous quotation:

'A Lie Is Halfway Round the World Before the Truth Has Got Its Boots On'

Often attributed to Winston Churchill or Mark Twain this quotation was probably in use before either was born and its use is a good example of misinformation! So here are some definitions we'll encourage you to use as you explore this topic:

Misinformation is when someone spreads false information believing it to be true. This often comes from ignorance. It is often not done deliberately and can be shared because an individual or group believes that the information they are sharing is true. One variant of this is the '**white lie**'. This is deliberate but is often used to avoid embarrassment or escape from a tricky situation e.g. being late for a lesson or receiving a gift that you don't really like!

Disinformation refers to the deliberate spread of false information to intentionally deceive others. It is usually shared to make people develop opinions about a certain person, organisation or ideology. The term has also been used to describe information spread by powerful groups such as a government. This may be designed to make the public feel or act in a certain way. In other circumstances disinformation can be spread purely to make money for the creator(s).

Fake news is the false story or news item itself.

Deep Fake is a video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else, typically used maliciously or to spread false information.

Regular exposure to disinformation (or misinformation) can reduce trust in the media so we may start to believe there's a possibility that any news story may be a fake. Since most young people use a digital platform as a source of their information we will concentrate on online sources of fake news for this topic. That's not to say that newspapers, books and posters (for example) don't spread fake news, but we know they may be less relevant to young people.

Therefore it is good to be sceptical, not to be easily convinced and to be prepared to **ask questions** and **to seek other sources of information**. Remember that established news sources often employ their own fact-checkers. BBC 'Verify' is a current example.

1a. Fake or True?

Very few topics or issues have one right answer. The term 'Fake News' itself can give the impression that there are only two options – fake or real. This is called a binary choice, a choice of just two things. In reality many news sources are a combined version of events. For example, two newspapers from different political backgrounds might tell the same news story very differently. Each will have elements of truth, and neither will be either wholly right or completely wrong. We live in a world of 'grey areas'. Truth is a very slippery notion and so is knowledge. Academics and philosophers have debated these concepts for millennia and are yet to find definitive answers.

Possible activity:

- *Work in your own school group to find two newspaper front pages which tell the same story in different ways, then share these with your international partners.*
- *Make a display of contrasting and conflicting headlines*

1b. Can we 'know' it's 'true'?

Every individual understands reality formed in a complex web in our own contexts, influenced by several external and internal forces. The external forces could be culture, media, up-bringing, education, and religious principles. The internal forces could be personality, reactions, past conflicts, and experiences. It is as if we examine the world through lenses in front of our eyes, lenses that are made of all these forces coming together in our own minds, as our own perspectives.

As our lenses are a result of all our experiences to date, we naturally lack ways of seeing the world that come from other people's contexts. We need to listen to and analyse multiple perspectives in order to imagine beyond the limits of our own lenses. However, it's really important that this is done through a process of critical literacy.

Accepting every perspective just because someone asserts it is called Relativism and can lead to a lot of uncertainty and confusion – especially when someone is setting out to disrupt thinking. **Questioning** other perspectives is a way of understanding them better, but also helps us to see if those perspectives have value for us or help us to understand something beyond our experiences so far. Can we learn from other ways of seeing and being? Or is this perspective something that undermines social justice, fairness and may promote hate? What can help us decide?

Possible activity:



- *Use the same newspaper headlines from “Fake or True?”, and discuss how we can know what is true, or not, in your school group and then with the partners.*
- *For triangulation, and a different perspective, you might want to add a third source, perhaps television headlines.*

1c. How does someone make sense of the world in a digital age?

Before the internet became available to the general public in 1993, finding things out was a very different experience. You could go to the library and get out a book, read a newspaper, talk to someone who might know... in short it was a much slower process. Of course, you could be told fake information just the same as today, and judgement was required in much the same way. The main problem then was possibly too little information, or that information wasn't readily available. The internet flicked that switch and today we possibly have too much information, too much information to process sensibly and think about carefully.

For example, to find out the causes of the Malvinas War (the Falklands War) in 1982 this writer had to read three newspapers, bringing three different perspectives, talk to a few people I knew, think about it and then make up my own mind. If I search for causes of the Malvinas / Falklands War on the internet today, I am presented with 2,470,000 results in 0.43 seconds.

The good news is that the **life skills** to deal with, analyse and process such a vast amount of information can be developed and honed, just like any other skill. The principles of critical literacy can help us to deal with complexity and uncertainty, and to develop a framework to support our thinking.

Possible activity

- *Where do you personally get your news? Make a list of possible sources and remember to include ‘other’ for ones you haven’t anticipated.*
- *Then carry out a simple survey with your partner school to see where everybody gets their news.*
- *What are the similarities and differences between countries?*

1d. Digital Technology: Shine and Shadow

Some social developments have both very strong advantages and disadvantages *at the same time*. Another way of putting this is that they can have positive benefits and negative drawbacks simultaneously; they can both aid and damage us, depending on the context.

These types of social developments can cause unease, confusion, and uncertainty as to whether they are for social good, or not. One such social development is digital technology.

The Internet, digital sources and social media can be fantastic, but they can also be a negative experience to engage with digital technology. When considering the concept of digital technology the following model helps us to understand the complexities and dual nature of the phenomenon.

Digital Technology’s SHINE



Examples: connectivity; creativity; active learning; interesting; saves time; ease of access to information; better informed; employment; digital literacy; electronic forms of books, money, music, shopping, payments, photos etc; builds critical skills; making friends, positive political change, sharing ideas...

Digital Technology's SHADOW

Examples: no laws or customs; dark forces gathering data; addiction; scams; political control; covert advertising; generational divides; tracking; monitoring; identity theft; fake news; damaging body images; 'second life' dis-attachment from reality; child abuse; cyber bullying; online grooming; sexting and sextortion (blackmail for online exposure), time consuming....

By looking at the notion of digital technology using the images of Shine and Shadow we can support critical engagement about several aspects: the place it takes in our society, the relationship we have with the digital world and our attitudes and values towards it.

Possible activity:

- *Within your school and international partner group identify topics of interest;*
- *Identify, share and discuss the Shine and Shadow features.*

2. Explore: Fake News and Disinformation

In this section you will find several suggestions for student-led activities, supported by your teacher facilitators. Please adapt the materials according to your school context, and, importantly, the needs and dynamics of the groups in the partner institutions. Flexibility and adaptability are highly recommended. One size does not fit all!

2a. Make your own Fake News!

A single image can 'freeze' our ideas. It can make us believe a story because if there's a photograph it must be true! Misused images play a huge part in Fake News stories – the sayings 'a picture paints a thousand words' and 'the camera never lies' help us to see why. Working with images can help us to understand how images can be manipulated and taken out of context, changing the story they tell completely.

In small groups find an interesting and intriguing image to work with – this could be a real image or one you suspect of being fake. It could be an image of refugees or to do with Climate and Sustainability – our recent topics. An image with people in will work best.

You will need to research potential images and agree as a group which one(s) to use. Hint: search online for 'Fake news photos'.

Stick your chosen image to the centre of a large piece of paper and then put each image you selected through the following series of activities:

Speech Bubbles: talk about the image and discuss what you think is going on in the image. Make speech or thought bubbles and attach these to your image. What is being said?

Questions: Write around the image all the questions the image brings up. Which questions are easily answered? Which require more information, or can't be answered?

Zooming in: zoom in on a section of your image – how does this change the 'story'?

Extending: look closely at the image and imagine what is happening outside the frame, beyond the image. Draw what you think is happening around the photo. How does this change the 'story'?

The whole story?: Imagine you are the photographer. Where are you? What noises might you hear? What might you smell? What is the temperature and climate like? What might you be feeling? What are the people in the photo saying? Do they know you are taking the photo? What do they think about you? Why did you choose to take this photo? How does the context of the photograph change its message?

Before and after: What might have happened just before the image was taken? Draw a picture to show what might have happened. What might have happened just after the image was taken? Draw a picture to show what might have happened afterwards.

Put the pictures in order. Tell the story of the pictures. How does this context determine the meaning of the image?

Reflections

How easy was it to change the meaning of your image?

Have these activities made you think differently about the image?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of relying on images for evidence?

2b. Spotting Fake News

Do you check out online stories before you share them? Fake news stories often have common features in the text that help us to identify, or at least suspect them to be, incorrect. Search online for famous fake news stories. Working in a small group chose one of the stories to analyse. Consider the following:

Errors – Are there frequent and obtrusive errors in spelling, punctuation, pronoun usage, statistics, dates, grammar? This level of errors can be a sign that the content is not going through quality checks and therefore may not be from a real organisation.

Is it a joke? Could this originally have been produced to entertain people rather than inform them? Sometimes items are shared because someone took a joke seriously and didn't realise. This could be misinformation.

Is it from a reliable source? Some sources are known for parody (or joke) stories, so this needs to be ruled out first. You could try using your favourite search engine to see what others have said about the source? Are there lots of pop-up adverts? Has believable contact information been listed?

Triangulation: a systematic process of gathering and validating information from multiple sources. How is the story told in at least three different sources? How do they differ? Where is the emphasis placed?

Is there bias? Could the story be an opinion rather than fact? That in itself is fine, but this should be made clear. Has the author missed out certain facts or presented things in an overly positive or negative way? Presenting opinion as fact is a common feature of fake news stories.

Confirmation bias Is this story what you want to hear? Confirmation bias is the willingness to believe something because it fits with our on views. Fake news items can use this to influence people, presenting something as fact when it is opinion.

Is it advertising something? Advertising can be very subtle and difficult to spot. Presenting a product or service within a fake news story can be very convincing and people may feel the need to buy something without realising they have been influenced by advertising.

Check the date Many joke stories get released on April Fools Day (1st April) making that an easy spot! Sometimes fake news stories use improbable dates or dates in the future or distant past.

Look at the images used Often the images used for fake news stories do not match the story and can be particularly shocking. These may be 'clickbait' – simply put there to encourage clicking through, something someone may receive a lot of money for!

Does the headline seem legitimate? Does the headline sound overly dramatic, made-up or impossible? Then it is probably another example of clickbait, with a bland fake news story behind it.

2c. Notice Deepfakes

Adapted from: How to use fake news critically in the classroom, British Council

Deepfakes are videos of people and events that look and sound real but are in fact simulated using Artificial Intelligence (AI). Seeing is not believing anymore! They are produced by exposing artificial intelligence to enough photos and videos of a person that it can manipulate that person's face to mouth words they have never said. The person's voice can then be synthesised or recorded by an impersonator and combined with the visuals to create a video that is fake. Currently, there are still elements that deepfake producers struggle to get right, for example the teeth. But deepfake videos are improving all the time and the technologies behind fake news are still emerging. Even AI cannot tell the difference, let alone ordinary people!

Working in small groups research online for deepfake videos. Consider a selection of videos and then try to identify features which may give away deepfake videos. For example, you could search for 'pope wearing a puffer jacket'; Volodymyr Zelenskyy 'put down your arms' or Trump resisting arrested in March 2023.

This is a great topic for practising speculative and critical debate using the following questions and ones you add yourselves:

What are the motives for spreading Fake News? e.g. international politics, Showbiz.

What Fake News technologies might emerge next?

What could happen in legislation to combat these new technologies? What legislation should social media platforms be subject to, regarding deepfakes?

What could be the future of deepfakes?

Will people eventually stop making them as we get better at detecting them? Or will they continue to get more convincing?

Who has the biggest responsibility to stop the spread of fake news: governments, individuals or social media platforms?

Should people be punished for creating or spreading fake news? If yes, in what circumstances?

Do you think the future will see laws introduced 'banning' fake news? How practical is this?

3. Act: Fake News and Disinformation

3a. Mis, Dis or Fake?

Here are five examples from November 2023, when this module was written. You may not agree with the examples!

Misinformation	Giving the wrong time for the next bus.
White lie	Saying that you already have a meeting to avoid something else.
Disinformation	Spreading a story that the exam results in one school are better than those in another because the teachers are better.
Fake News	Manchester United have won the Champions League more times than any other team.
Deep Fake	All four Beatles singing on their new album "Now and Then".

Now, in your own school group, create your own list:

Misinformation	
White Lie	
Disinformation	
Fake News	
Deep Fake	

Finally share your lists with the partner school, look for similarities and differences, and try to create a common list of examples:

Misinformation	
White Lie	
Disinformation	
Fake News	
Deep Fake	

3b. Thinking Critically about Fake News and Disinformation

The following activity provides a critical literacy framework, which could be used to think critically about any topic you choose. We are going to apply the framework to thinking about Fake News and Disinformation.

From work in the Explore section you will have identified a number of fake news stories on a range of topics. For this activity, please choose one that is related to either Climate and Sustainability or Refugees, the topics we looked at earlier in the Stronger Together project.

Working in a small group, identify your fake news story about climate change or refugees. Then think through the message(s) in your chosen story according to these framework criteria:

Perspectives: Where is your news story ‘coming from’? What approach is it taking to the issue? Is this perspective mainstream, alternative or ‘silenced’? What validates a perspective? Who decides?

Agents: Who are the main agents affecting this issue and what are their interests? For example, social groups, companies, countries, governments, political parties, institutions, faith communities, NGOs, etc? What do they gain from this fake news story?

Assumptions and beliefs: Assumptions are things that are accepted as true or as certain to happen, without proof or evidence, much like beliefs. How would you describe the assumptions or beliefs behind your chosen story? How are these being portrayed in the story? Opinion or facts?

Trends: What was the situation regarding this story 5, 10, 50 or 100 years ago and what are the predictions for the future (5, 10, 50 or 100 years ahead)? This period of time represents the life span of humanity as it exists today ie. there are people alive today over 100 years old and people born today who may live for 100 years. By taking a long view we can see trends and changes and see that situations can change – they are not set in stone.



Drivers and Blockers: Thinking more widely about your chosen topic, what are the main forces creating or preventing change, such as demography, environmental, natural resources, market forces, regulations, elections, lobby groups, media, beliefs, military etc. What are the connections between these? How does the local relate to the global and the global relate to the local?

Contradictions and complexity: regarding your topic, are there any 'easy answers'? What are the main contradictions between an ideal world and the real world?

3c. Misinformation or Disinformation and is it fake?

Consider the stream of Instagram posts and reels that are available to everyone each day. Some are genuine shot in the moment views of 'real' life but others..... Can you really discern which ones have been set up, prearranged, locations chosen just to impress?

In your groups scroll through some posts and assign them to two or maybe three piles – genuine, false and not sure.

What affect do these posts have on younger teenagers – aspirations, inappropriate expectations – discuss and create some kind of safety briefing for those younger members of your school.

TikTok often is used to set up challenges, many of these have proven to be quite dangerous. They sometimes give the impression that everybody is doing them but how can you guard against the most perilous of these suggestions. Again, consider how you can support younger members of your school community to be more discerning.

Inability to reach the goals of the TikToker or to post less impressive Instagram posts can lead to feelings of low self-esteem. Can you develop a campaign to counteract this? Genuine and real is okay!

3d. Fake News quiz time

Drawing on all the research, learning and exploration you have done so far for this topic, compile a true or false quiz about 5 news stories. You can put the quiz together using technology of your choice. The audience for your quiz is your partner school. Your aim is to

surprise, mystify and fool! For each fake news story correctly identified your participants get a point. Employ everything you have learnt so far to keep point scoring to a minimum!

Exchange quizzes with your partner school and see who does best!

Useful links

BBC

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4fRwwHcfr5hYMMltFqvP6qF/help-your-students-spot-false-news>

British Council

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/use-fake-news-classroom-critically>

The Guardian Foundation

<https://theguardianfoundation.org/programmes/newswise/schools/unit-of-work/lesson-5-spotting-fake-news-pshe-education>

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