

# Transnational and regulatory responses to disinformation / FIMI and resilience building

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# Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI

The European Union (EU) has been actively engaged in combating disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) through various initiatives and frameworks



## ? Discussion





**The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation**

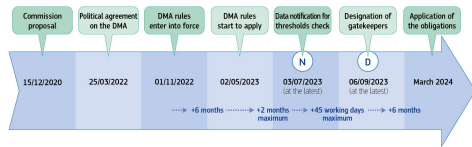
Major online platforms, emerging and specialised platforms, players in the

# Code of Practice on Disinformation

Urged online platforms to actively combat misinformation and promote accountability in political advertising. This code introduced voluntary commitments, including the creation of guidelines and transparency reports.



### Timeline for Digital Market Act



### The Digital Services Act package

The Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act aim to create a safer digital space where the fundamental rights of users are protected and to

## Digital Services Act (DSA)

In 2022, the EU adopted the Digital Services Act (DSA), which aimed to protect users fundamental rights and guard against disinformation and misinformation. The DSA outlined specific obligations for intermediaries, including social media and online platforms, with stricter criteria for larger services impacting society.



## Discussion

*How effective do you consider the existing EU framework for combatting disinformation and addressing the issues surrounding foreign information manipulation (FIMI)? In your view, what are the primary limitations or shortcomings of the current framework?*



### **Action Plan against Disinformation**

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is the European Union's diplomatic service. Since 2011, the EEAS carries out the EU's Common Foreign and

## **Action Plan Against Disinformation**

This plan focused on identifying, exposing, and combating disinformation tactics, especially in the context of European elections. Disinformation was for the first time defined by European Commission as **"verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security."**



## European Democracy Action Plan

In 2020 was adopted, highlighting the negative impact of FIMI on democratic discourse, social division, and elections. This plan emphasized the need for a strong and organized response to address these challenges.





## Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI | 2

In **2020**, the EU adopted **the European Democracy Action Plan**, recognising the negative impact of FIMI, which seeks to hinder democratic discourse, increase social division, and manipulate elections. The European Democracy Action Plan places emphasis on the demand for a strong and organised response for addressing these issues (European Commission, 2020).

In **2021** the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated the detrimental impact of disinformation on society. The European Commission has emphasized that the "infodemic," characterized by the rapid dissemination of false, inaccurate, or misleading information about the pandemic, has posed significant risks to personal and public health, crisis management, the economy, and social cohesion. The Commission, in response to the ever-changing conditions, has released its Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation, acknowledging the urgent need to address this issue. According to the Commission, it is critical that all parties involved, especially social media and other digital platforms, step up their efforts to remedy the gaps and flaws in the previous version of **the Code of Practice on Disinformation** in order to promote a more open, safe, and reliable online environment (European Commission, 2021).

In **2022**, the EU took another step towards creating safer digital space where fundamental rights of all users are protected. The adopted **Digital Services Act** assures the protection of users' basic rights while guarding the digital realm against the disinformation and misinformation. For suppliers of intermediary services, including social media, online marketplaces, very large online platforms (VLOPs), and very large online search engines (VLOSEs), the DSA outlines specific obligations and accountability. Stricter criteria apply to bigger intermediate services (VLOPs and VLOSEs) that have a significant impact on society (European Commission, 2022).

In addition to the Digital Services Act, the European External Action Service also adopted its **Strategic Compass for Security and Defence** in **2022**. In light of the Ukrainian war, the Strategic Compass provides direction for the growth of the EU's security and defence agenda. The Strategic Compass, which establishes the norm for the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox, attempts to identify, analyse, and respond to the danger, including by putting financial burdens on offenders (European External Action Service, 2022).



## **Infodemic - COVID19**

The year 2021 underscored the detrimental impact of disinformation during the COVID-19 crisis. The so-called "infodemic" characterized by the rapid dissemination of false, inaccurate, or misleading information about the pandemic, has posed significant risks to personal and public health, crisis management, the economy, and social cohesion.

Recognising the urgency to address the issue of the infodemic, the European Commission published guidance on strengthening the existing Code of Practice on Disinformation.



## **Strategic Compass for Security and Defence**

Additionally, in 2022, the European External Action Service introduced the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, responding to challenges like the Ukrainian war. This compass provided direction for the EU's security and defence agenda and established norms for addressing FIMI.



## Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats (2016)

Recognises that hybrid threats are disseminated through massive campaigns and that social media plays a significant role in controlling the narrative and radicalizing individuals.



# Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI | 1

The European Union (EU) has been actively engaged in combating disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) through various initiatives and frameworks. One of the earliest steps taken was the establishment of the **Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats** in 2016 as a response to threats that seek to undermine fundamental democratic values and liberties. Recognising that hybrid threats are disseminated through massive campaigns and that social media plays a significant role in controlling the narrative and radicalizing individuals, the EU understood the necessity of a coordinated response at the EU level to enhance resilience and address common threats (European Commission, 2016).

By implementing, **the Action Plan Against Disinformation** in 2018, the EU stepped up its efforts to better identify, expose, and combat disinformation tactics, notably in the context of European elections. Within the Action Plan Against Disinformation, the European Commission for the first time defines disinformation as “**verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security**” (European Commission, 2018: 1). To protect its institutions and citizens from the effects of disinformation, the EU acknowledged the necessity for swift and decisive action. The Action Plan states that social media platforms and private industry, including civil society organizations, are essential in the fight against misinformation. The EU unveiled **the Code of Practice on Disinformation** that same year as a component of this strategy. Online platforms were urged by the Code to actively battle misinformation and advance accountability in political advertising. It set forth a number of platforms' voluntary commitments, including the creation of guidelines and instruments to combat misinformation, the empowerment of users, and the provision of transparency reports (European Commission, 2018).



# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Each state must safeguard freedom of expression while at the same time ensuring that the dissemination of fake news is accurately tackled.

## *Article 11*

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01)

Defines freedom of expression and information as: “[the] right [that] includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers”



## *Article 10*

European Convention on Human Rights

Defines lawful restrictions to freedom of expression in democratic society in order to protect national security, public safety, health or morals, reputation or rights of others, impartiality of the judiciary; or to prevent disorder or crime, disclosure of confidential information.



**The right to freedom of expression is universal.** Therefore, states must protect and ensure that their legal systems provide adequate and effective safeguards for protecting freedom of expression.

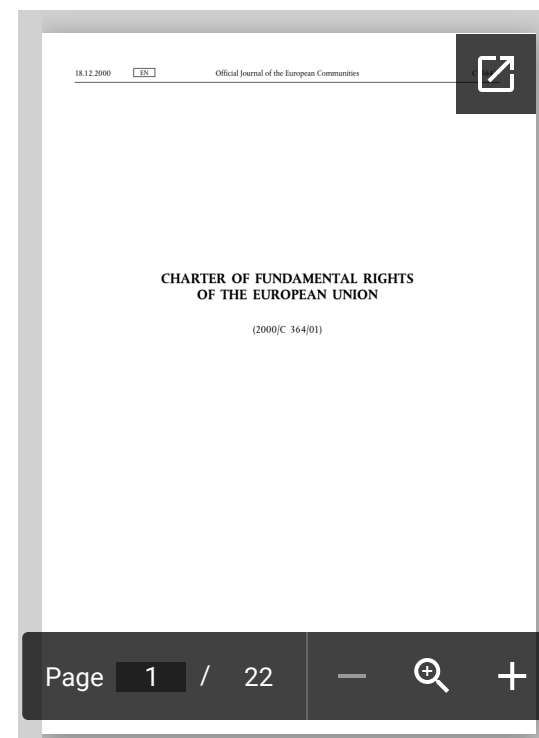
**Safeguards are usually defined in the constitution,** given that the protection of freedom of expression is essential for the democratic political process and development.



# Article 11 (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union)

## Freedom of expression and information

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.





## Article 10 (European Convention on Human Rights)

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.







# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Each state must safeguard freedom of expression while at the same time ensuring that the dissemination of **fake news** is accurately tackled. Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01) defines freedom of expression and information as: “[the] right [that] includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.” Similarly, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

The right to freedom of expression is universal. Therefore, states must protect and ensure that their legal systems provide adequate and effective safeguards for protecting freedom of expression. These safeguards are usually defined in the constitution, given that the protection of freedom of expression is essential for the democratic political process and development. Freedom of expression and information, is addressed, in constitutions, either in combination with other **fundamental rights and freedoms** or as a separate fundamental human right Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01).

*Article 10, European Convention on Human Rights.*

# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

## How is freedom of expression addressed in different constitutions?

The Maltese Constitution safeguards freedom of expression within the framework of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. This right is subject to limitations aimed at preventing any infringement upon the rights and freedoms of others or the public interest.

### **What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Maltese Constitution?**

The Maltese Constitution allows for limitations on freedom of expression through consent or as a form of parental discipline

*Article 32*

#### Constitution of Malta

Highlights the entitlement of every person in Malta to a range of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression



*Article 41*

#### Constitution of Malta

States that individuals shall not be restricted in their enjoyment of freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions, receive and communicate ideas and information, and maintain correspondence, unless with their own consent or as part of parental discipline.





# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

The following slides will show how the constitutions of Malta, Spain and Romania – the countries analysed in this project follow the standards set by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Maltese Constitution does not have a separate freedom of expression clause. Freedom of expression is protected under a clause referring to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. **Article 32** of the Constitution of Malta reads as follows:

Whereas every person in Malta is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following, namely -

- (a) life, liberty, security of the person, the enjoyment of property and the protection of the law;
- (b) freedom of conscience, of expression and of peaceful assembly and association; and
- (c) respect for his private and family life, the subsequent provisions of this Chapter shall have effect for the purpose of affording protection to the aforesaid rights and freedoms, subject to such limitations of that protection as are contained in those provisions being limitations designed to ensure that the enjoyment of the said rights and freedoms by any individual does not prejudice the rights and freedoms of others or the public interest.

## What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Maltese Constitution?

**Article 41** of the Maltese Constitution introduces the possibility of limiting freedom of expression by consent or as part of the so-called parental discipline:

Except with his own consent or by way of parental discipline, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference (whether the communication be to the public generally or to any person or class of persons) and freedom from interference with his correspondence.



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- (b) freedom of conscience, of expression and of peaceful assembly and association; and
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### LEĠIŻLAZZJONI MALTA

Nista' insib leġiżlazzjoni ġdida fuq...

Legislation



## Article 41 of the Constitution of Malta

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# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

## How is freedom of expression addressed in different constitutions?

The article emphasizes the inviolability of freedom of expression, encompassing the expression of thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and various forms of creative expression through speech, writing, images, sounds, or other means of public communication

It explicitly prohibits any form of censorship and ensures the freedom of the press, including the establishment of publications. Suppression of publications is strictly prohibited.

### **What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Romanian Constitution?**

The Romanian Constitution recognizes the importance of limiting freedom of expression when it comes to safeguarding human dignity, privacy, and personal image

*Article 30*

### **Romanian Constitution**

Addresses freedom of expression, establishing a comprehensive framework that separately protects and regulates this fundamental right



*Article 30*

### **Romanian Constitution**

States that freedom of expression should not undermine an individual's dignity, honor, private life, or right to their own image.





# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

The Romanian Constitution, in **Article 30**, addresses freedom of expression, establishing a comprehensive framework that separately protects and regulates this fundamental right:

- (1) Freedom of expression of thoughts, opinions or beliefs and freedom of creations of any kind, through live speech, writing, images, sounds or other means of public communication, is inviolable.
- (2) Censorship of any kind is prohibited.
- (3) Freedom of the press also implies the freedom to establish publications.
- (4) No publication may be suppressed
- (5) The law may impose on mass media the obligation to make public the source of funding.
- (6) Freedom of expression cannot prejudice the dignity, honour, private life of the person, nor the right to one's own image.
- (7) Defamation of the country and the nation, incitement to war of aggression, national, racial, class or religious hatred, incitement to discrimination, territorial separatism or public violence, as well as obscene manifestations contrary to good morals, are prohibited by law.
- (8) The civil liability for the information or for the creation brought to public knowledge rests with the editor or producer, the author, the organizer of the artistic manifestation, the owner of the means of multiplication, of the radio or television station, in accordance with the law. Crimes that can be conducted through the press will established by law.

## What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Romanian Constitution?

The Romanian Constitution recognizes the importance of limiting freedom of expression when it comes to safeguarding human dignity, privacy, and personal image. **Article 30** of the Constitution states that “freedom of expression cannot prejudice the dignity, honour, private life of the person, nor the right to one's own image.”



## Article 30 of the Romanian Constitution

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### CONSTITUTION OF ROMANIA

ARTICLE 22 (1) The right to life, as well as the right to physical and mental integrity of person are guaranteed.(2) No one may be subjected to...

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# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

## How is freedom of expression addressed in different constitutions?

The article emphasizes the inviolability of freedom of expression, encompassing the expression of thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and various forms of creative expression through speech, writing, images, sounds, or other means of public communication

It explicitly prohibits any form of censorship prohibits any form of prior censorship that could hinder the exercise of freedom of expression

### **What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Spanish Constitution?**

Specifically, the right to honor, privacy, the right to one's own image, and the protection of youth and childhood must be considered when exercising freedom of expression.

*Article 20*

### Spanish Constitution

Upholds the importance of freedom of expression by intertwining it with other fundamental rights and freedoms.



*Article 20*

### Spanish Constitution

Recognizes that these freedoms should be limited by respect for the rights enshrined in other parts of the Constitution.





# Article 20 of the Spanish Constitution

1. The following rights are recognized and protected:
  - a) The right to freely express and spread thoughts, ideas and opinions through words, in writing
  - b) or by any other means of reproduction.
  - c) The right to literary, artistic, scientific and technical production and creation.
  - d) The right to academic freedom.
  - e) The right to freely communicate or receive truthful information by any means of dissemination whatsoever.
2. The law shall regulate the right to the clause of conscience and professional secrecy in the exercise of these freedoms.
3. The exercise of these rights may not be restricted by any form of prior censorship .
4. The law shall regulate the organization and parliamentary control of the mass communication means under the control of the State or any public agency and shall guarantee access to such means by the significant social and political groups, respecting the pluralism of society and of the various languages of Spain.
4. These freedoms are limited by respect for the rights recognized in this Part, by the legal provisions implementing it, and especially by the right to honour, to privacy, to the own image and to the protection of youth and childhood.
5. The seizure of publications, recordings and other means of information may only be carried out by means of a court order.



# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Spain sets protection safeguards for the freedom of expression in **Article 20** of its Constitution. It links the right to freely express and share thoughts with the right to literary, artistic, scientific and technical production; the right to academic freedom and; the right to freely communicate and receive truthful information. The following safeguards apply to all rights mentioned:

2. The exercise of these rights may not be restricted by any form of prior censorship.
3. The law shall regulate the organization and parliamentary control of the mass communication means under the control of the State or any public agency and shall guarantee access to such means by significant social and political groups, respecting the pluralism of society and of the various languages of Spain.
4. These freedoms are limited by respect for the rights recognized in this Part, by the legal provisions implementing it, and especially by the right to honour, to privacy, to the own image and to the protection of youth and childhood.
5. The seizure of publications, recordings and other means of information may only be carried out by means of a court order.

## What are the limitations imposed on freedom of expression according to the Spanish Constitution?

**Article 20** of the Spanish Constitution sets restrictions to the freedom of expression, to protect “the right to honour, to privacy, to the own image and the protection of youth and childhood.

# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

- 1** States have the responsibility to enact laws and regulations that need to create an “enabling” environment for individuals to exercise their right to freedom of expression.
- 2** The legislative framework needs to be carefully assessed, so as not to hinder the enjoyment of this right.
- 3** Special focus must be put on laws that could be deterring, such as those that define legal liability. Whereas these can help in tackling the issue of disinformation, they can foster censorship, self-censorship, and criminal, financial and administrative sanctions.

**?** Discussion





States have the responsibility to enact laws and regulations that need to create an “enabling” environment for individuals to exercise their right to freedom of expression. The legislative framework needs to be carefully assessed, so as not to hinder the enjoyment of this right. Special focus must be put on laws that could be deterring, such as those that define legal liability.

Whereas these can help in tackling the issue of disinformation, they can foster censorship, self-censorship, and criminal, financial and administrative sanctions. As the European Commission has emphasized “primary obligation of state actors in relation to freedom of expression and media freedom is to refrain from interference and censorship and to ensure a favourable environment for inclusive and pluralistic debate” (European Commission, 2018).

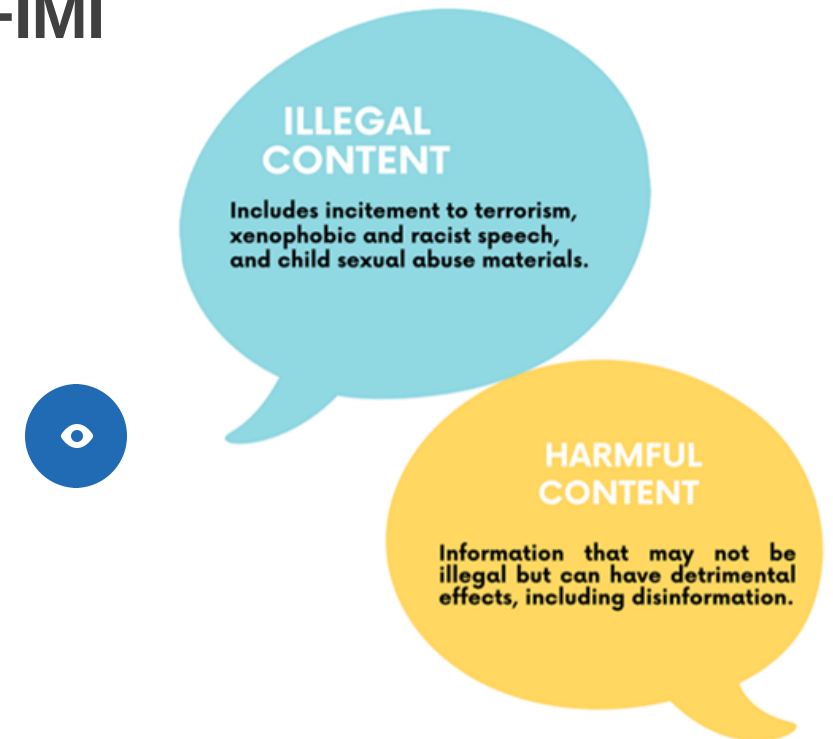


## Discussion

*What are the strengths and weaknesses of the presented constitutions? If you were to draft your own constitutional clause on freedom of expression, what elements would you incorporate, and what would you omit?*

## Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

- With the increasing use of disinformation to undermine democracies, the European Commission advocated towards national authorities to implement a variety of measures that would adequately respond to the new challenges posed by disinformation, while at the same time protecting freedom of expression
- Although an EU-wide unified response to the issue of **disinformation** was expected, EU Member States opted for an individual approach, **given that disinformation is harmful, but still not illegal per se.**
- **EU legislation currently differentiates illegal content from harmful content.** Incitement to terrorism, xenophobic and racist speech that publicly incites hatred and violence, as well as child sexual abuse materials are illegal in the EU (European Commission, 2017). Harmful content refers to information that does not strictly fall under legal prohibitions but that might nevertheless have harmful effects, inter alia, disinformation.





**The European Commission defined disinformation** as “verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security.”



### **Action Plan against Disinformation**

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# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

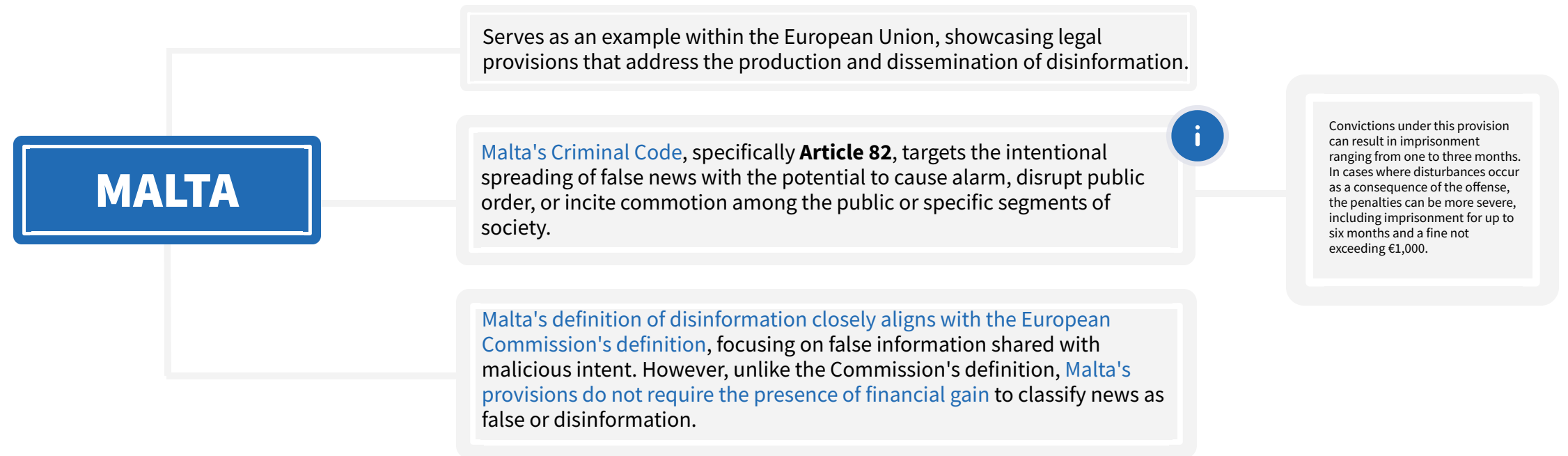
The European Commission has emphasized that the “primary obligation of state actors in relation to freedom of expression and media freedom is to refrain from interference and censorship and to ensure a favourable environment for inclusive and pluralistic debate”. However, with the increasing use of disinformation to undermine democracies, the European Commission has changed its approach, advocating for national authorities to implement a variety of measures that would adequately respond to the new challenges posed by disinformation, while at the same time protecting freedom of expression. The Cambridge Analytica scandal showed how disinformation can be used to target voters with individually tailored content, which is adjusted in real-time to reflect the debate that develops around critical electoral issues. Disinformation was not only used to undermine elements of good democracy, but it also destroyed trust in mainstream media, allowing alternative news to flourish.

**As a first step** to addressing the issue of disinformation, the European Commission had to decide what falls under this term. **The European Commission** defined disinformation as “verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security.”

Although an EU-wide unified response to the issue of disinformation was expected, EU Member States opted for an individual approach, given that disinformation is harmful, but still not illegal per se. EU legislation currently differentiates illegal content from harmful content. Incitement to terrorism, xenophobic and racist speech that publicly incites hatred and violence, as well as child sexual abuse materials are illegal in the EU. Harmful content refers to information that does not strictly fall under legal prohibitions but that might nevertheless have harmful effects, inter alia, disinformation. Whereas with illegal content the EU law is clear, in the case of harmful but legal content, the situation becomes more complicated as it consists of information that may be inadequate, but whose legality varies significantly across Member States.

## Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Consequently, some Member States decided to address harmful content by introducing in their Criminal Code legal provisions that define the act of producing and sharing disinformation and prescribe punitive measures





## Article 82. Malta's Criminal Code

Whosoever shall maliciously spread false news which is likely to alarm public opinion or disturb public good order or the public peace or to create a commotion among the public or among certain classes of the public, shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term from one to three months:

Provided that if any disturbance ensues in consequence of the offence, or if the offence has contributed to the occurrence of any disturbance, the offender shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than one month but not exceeding six months and to a fine(multa) not exceeding one thousand euro (€1,000) or both such fine and imprisonment.



### LEĠŻLAZZJONI MALTA

Nista' insib leġislazzjoni ġdida fuq...

Legislation



# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Consequently, some Member States decided to address harmful content, by introducing in their Criminal Code legal provisions that define the act of producing and sharing disinformation and prescribe punitive measures. Malta serves as an example of the EU Member State, which has legal provisions that address the issue of producing and sharing disinformation. Article 82 of Malta's Criminal Code stipulates the following:

Whosoever shall maliciously spread false news which is likely to alarm public opinion or disturb public good order or the public peace or to create a commotion among the public or among certain classes of the public, shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term from one to three months:

Provided that if any disturbance ensues in consequence of the offence, or if the offence has contributed to the occurrence of any disturbance, the offender shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than one month but not exceeding six months and to a fine(multa) not exceeding one thousand euro (€1,000) or both such fine and imprisonment.

Article 82 of Malta's Criminal Code shows significant similarities with the European Commission's definition of disinformation. It highlights false information that is shared with malicious intentions, intending to deceive and harm the public. However, in comparison with the Commission's definition, no financial gain is needed for the malicious news to be labelled as false or disinformation.

Alongside the example of Malta, there are other Member States who have also introduced into their Criminal Codes provisions which address the intentional spread of disinformation and these are France, Croatia, Greece, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Cyprus.

Article 82, Malta's Criminal Code. Available at: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/9/eng>

Fathaigh, R., et al. (2021). The perils of legally defining disinformation. Internet Policy Review, vol 10, issue 4. Available at: <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/perils-legally-defining-disinformation>

## Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

### ROMANIA

Romania has taken a similar approach to other countries in addressing the spread of disinformation, but with a **distinct focus on threats to national security**.

**Article 404** of the Romanian Criminal Code explicitly **condemns the deliberate dissemination of false information that poses a threat to national security**, carrying a sentence ranging from 1 to 5 years.

However, the lack of a precise definition of what constitutes a threat to national security raises questions about the criteria used by authorities to determine the gravity of false information. The absence of a clear distinction within this legal provision creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and potential legal ambiguity.



**Article 1, Romanian Law on National Security.**

By the national security of Romania it should be understood a state of social, economic and political legality, equilibrium and stability that is necessary to the existence and development of the Romanian national state - a sovereign, unitary, independent and indivisible state, to the maintenance of legal order as well as of the climate for the unhampered exercise of the fundamental rights, freedoms and duties of the citizens, in accordance with the democratic principles and rules provided by the Constitution.



## **Article 404, Romanian Criminal Code Giving false information**

The act of communicating or disseminating, in full knowledge, by any means, of false news, data or information or false documents, if such act is likely to jeopardize national security or the international relations of Romania, shall be punishable by no less than 1 and no more than 5 years of imprisonment.



## Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

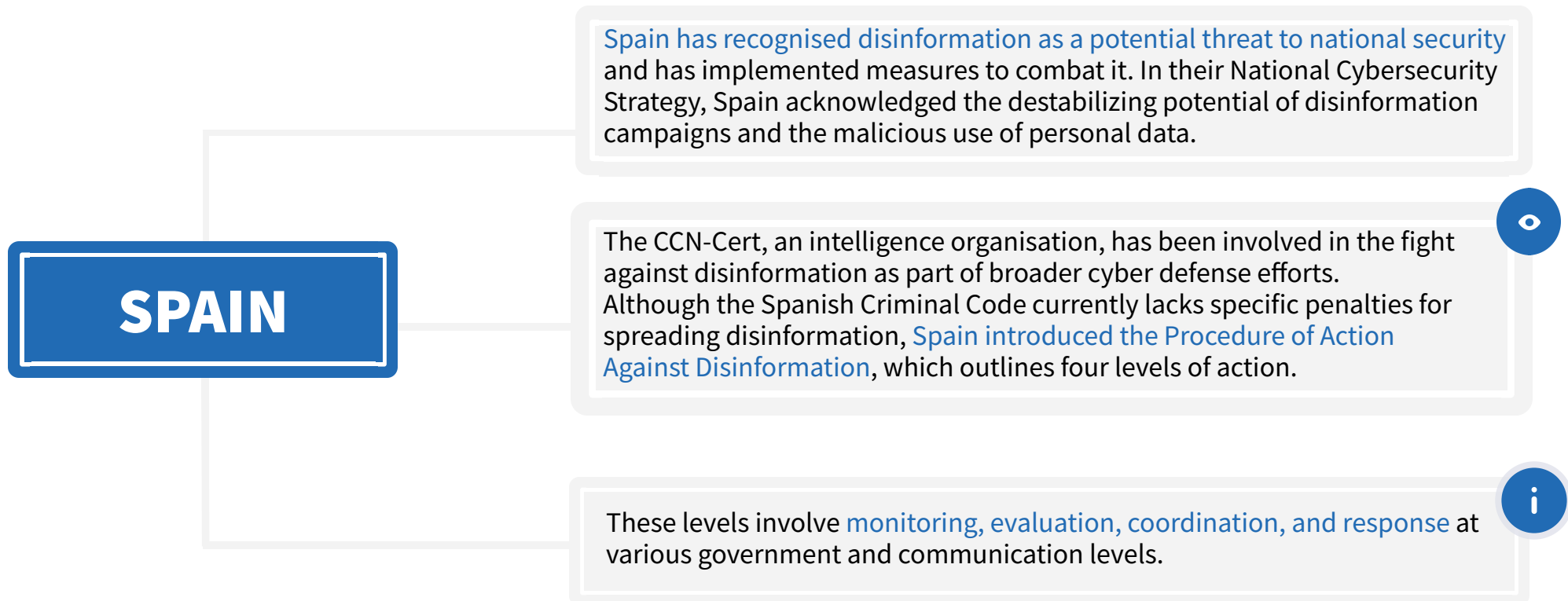
Romania followed the same approach as the before-mentioned countries, with one difference – it interlinked the spread of disinformation with the threats to national security. Precisely, Article 404, of the Romanian Criminal Code condemns the knowing spread of false information if it threatens national security, and establishes a sentence of between 1 and 5 years. National security is defined by the Law on National Security (51/1991) as:

“... a state of social, economic and political legality, equilibrium and stability that is necessary to the existence and development of the Romanian national state - a sovereign, unitary, independent and indivisible state, to the maintenance of legal order as well as of the climate for the unhampered exercise of the fundamental rights, freedoms and duties of the citizens, in accordance with the democratic principles and rules provided by the Constitution.”

Since the current definition of national security does not precisely define which acts might pose a threat, there is a question of where the authorities draw the line and how they determine whether the spreading of (specific) false information is a threat to national security. The lack of a clear distinction between what falls under the scope of this legal provision raises legal uncertainty. Enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression may be limited, however, such limitations must be precisely defined, otherwise, they constitute arbitrary and discriminatory influence.



## Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI





# Procedure of Action Against Disinformation

Has four levels of action:

**Level I.** Monitorization and surveillance: detection, early warning, notification, and analysis; 2. Participation in the European Union 's Rapid Alert System (RAS) and activation of protocols; 3. Research the possible origin, the purpose and tracking of its activity; 4. Deciding if the event is elevated to a higher body or if it is finished.

**Level II.** Call, tracking and evaluation of the alert by the Permanent Commission against disinformation; 2. Analysis of the situation and support for the definition of proposals for action; 3. Activating, where appropriate, a Coordination Cell against Disinformation activated ad hoc by the Director of the Department of Homeland Security; 4. Decision on its elevation or the carrying out of a public communication campaign led by the State Secretariat for Communication depending on the nature of the disinformation campaign.

**Level III.** Information at the political-strategic level by the Secretary of State for Communication; 2. Monitoring and evaluation of the alert by the Situation Committee or Public Communication agreed according to guidelines of the Situation Committee.

**Level IV.** Coordination of the response at the political level by the National Security Council in case of public attribution of a disinformation campaign to a third State.



### The CCN-Cert

The CCN-CERT is the Capacity for Response to incidents of Information Security of the National Cryptological Center, CCN, attached to the National Intelligence Center, CNI. This service was created in 2006 as a Spanish National Government CERT.

The CCN-CERT is responsible for cyber attacks on classified systems and systems of the Public Administrations and of companies and organizations of strategic interest to the country (those that are essential for national security and for the whole of the Spanish economy).



#### CCN-CERT

CCN-CERT is the Spanish national government computer security incident response...



# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

Similarly, to the Romanian example, Spain also approached disinformation as a possible threat to national security. In 2019, Spain introduced disinformation in their **National Cybersecurity Strategy**, arguing that “malicious use of personal data and disinformation campaigns have high potential to destabilise society.” As a result of recognising disinformation as a cyber threat, the **CCN-Cert**, an organisation of Spanish intelligence has become involved in the fight against disinformation, which is understood as part of cyber defence in the broadest sense. The CCN-Cert operates a national security centre whose aim is to achieve safer and more reliable cyberspace, preserving classified and sensitive information. According to the Regulation and Law on the Public Sector Legal Regime Currently, CCN-Cert is responsible for the management of cyber-incidents affecting any public body or company. Currently, Spanish Criminal Code doesn't have any punitive measures prescribed for spreading disinformation.

However, just a year later after integrating disinformation into the National Cybersecurity Strategy and nominating CCN-Cert to monitor the issues of disinformation, Spain introduced their Procedure of Action against Disinformation that was approved by the Department of Homeland Security (DSN). The Procedure of Action against Disinformation contains four levels of action:

Level I. 1. Monitorization and surveillance: detection, early warning, notification, and analysis; 2. Participation in the European Union ´s Rapid Alert System (RAS) and activation of protocols; 3. Research the possible origin, the purpose and tracking of its activity; 4. Deciding if the event is elevated to a higher body or if it is finished.

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# Regulatory response to disinformation and FIMI

- The relationship between disinformation and human rights is double-edged.
- Disinformation infringes a range of core rights. These include the freedom of thought; the right to privacy; the right to participation.
- Disinformation also weakens democracies, it has the potential to interfere with elections, and can feed digital violence.
- Counter-disinformation initiatives also carry risks for human rights and democracy.
- It is important to find appropriate ways for legislative and executive bodies to regulate the spread of disinformation, while at the same time being attentive to ways these may impact human rights.



Discussion





The relationship between disinformation and human rights is double-edged. Disinformation infringes a range of core rights. These include the freedom of thought; the right to privacy; the right to participation.

Disinformation also weakens democracies, it has the potential to interfere with elections, and can feed digital violence. However, counter-disinformation initiatives also carry risks for human rights and democracy. In some states measures against disinformation have constricted human rights. That is why it is important to find appropriate ways for legislative and executive bodies to regulate the spread of disinformation, while at the same time being attentive to ways these may impact human rights.



## Discussion

- *How would you assess the national laws of Malta, Spain, and Romania targeting disinformation?*
- *Do you see any potential infringements of human rights?*

# Resilience Building

European Commission in its [Action Plan against Disinformation](#) recognised that building resilience against disinformation and FIMI relies on the successful implementation of the whole-society-approach (European Commission, 2018).

To strengthen societal resilience to disinformation and FIMI, several different strategies can be employed:

- Member States should create strong legal and policy frameworks that specifically address disinformation and FIMI, and works towards building resilience.
- Member States should actively work on developing stronger public awareness on disinformation and FIMI.
- Member states should actively work on improving digital and media literacy.

- Member States should actively engage with civil society, media and online platforms, and information technology providers especially for the purpose of increasing transparency of elections.
- Member State should encourage the work of responsible and independent media.
- Member State should promote and strengthen fact-checking and verification.






## Resilience Building

In the face of increasing disinformation, European Union must implement comprehensive and cooperative strategies in order to prevent and counter the spread of disinformation and FIMI. In order to build resilience to disinformation and FIMI, Member States should employ a coordinated effort to prevent fragmentation among different actors and sectors which can contribute to detecting and preventing disinformation and FIMI. European Commission in its Action Plan against Disinformation recognised that building resilience against disinformation and FIMI relies on the successful implementation of the whole-society-approach (European Commission, 2018). This approach requires collaboration among academic institutions, civil society, governments, technological platforms, developers and media.

To strengthen societal resilience to disinformation and FIMI, several different strategies can be employed: 1) Member States should create strong legal and policy frameworks that specifically address disinformation and FIMI, and works towards building resilience. 2) Member States should actively work on developing stronger public awareness on disinformation and FIMI. 3) Member states should actively work on improving digital and media literacy. 4) Member States should actively engage with civil society, media and online platforms, and information technology providers especially for the purpose of increasing transparency of elections. 5) Member State should encourage the work of responsible and independent media. 6) Member State should promote and strengthen fact-checking and verification.

# Resilience Building

## 1. CREATING STRONG LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK THAT ADDRESS DISINFORMATION AND FIMI

- The **EU’s Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats** is an example of a policy framework aiming to counter hybrid threats (including disinformation and FIMI) and foster resilience building among the EU and its Member States, as well as other actors.
- According to the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats, **resilience to disinformation and FIMI** can be improved “through coordinated response at the EU level using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity [and] mutual assistance...” (European Commission, 2016). 
- An example of coordinated approach in responding to disinformation and FIMI is the transatlantic partnership between the EU and the USA, in the form of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).





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## 1. CREATING STRONG LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK THAT ADDRESS DISINFORMATION AND FIMI

The EU's Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats is an example of a policy framework aiming to counter hybrid threats (including disinformation and FIMI) and foster resilience building among the EU and its Member States, as well as other actors. In the words of the European Commission "while definitions of hybrid threats vary and need to remain flexible to respond to their evolving nature, the concept aims to capture the mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare...

**Massive disinformation campaigns, using social media to control the political narrative or to radicalise, recruit and direct proxy actors can be vehicles for hybrid threats."**

(European Commission, 2016).

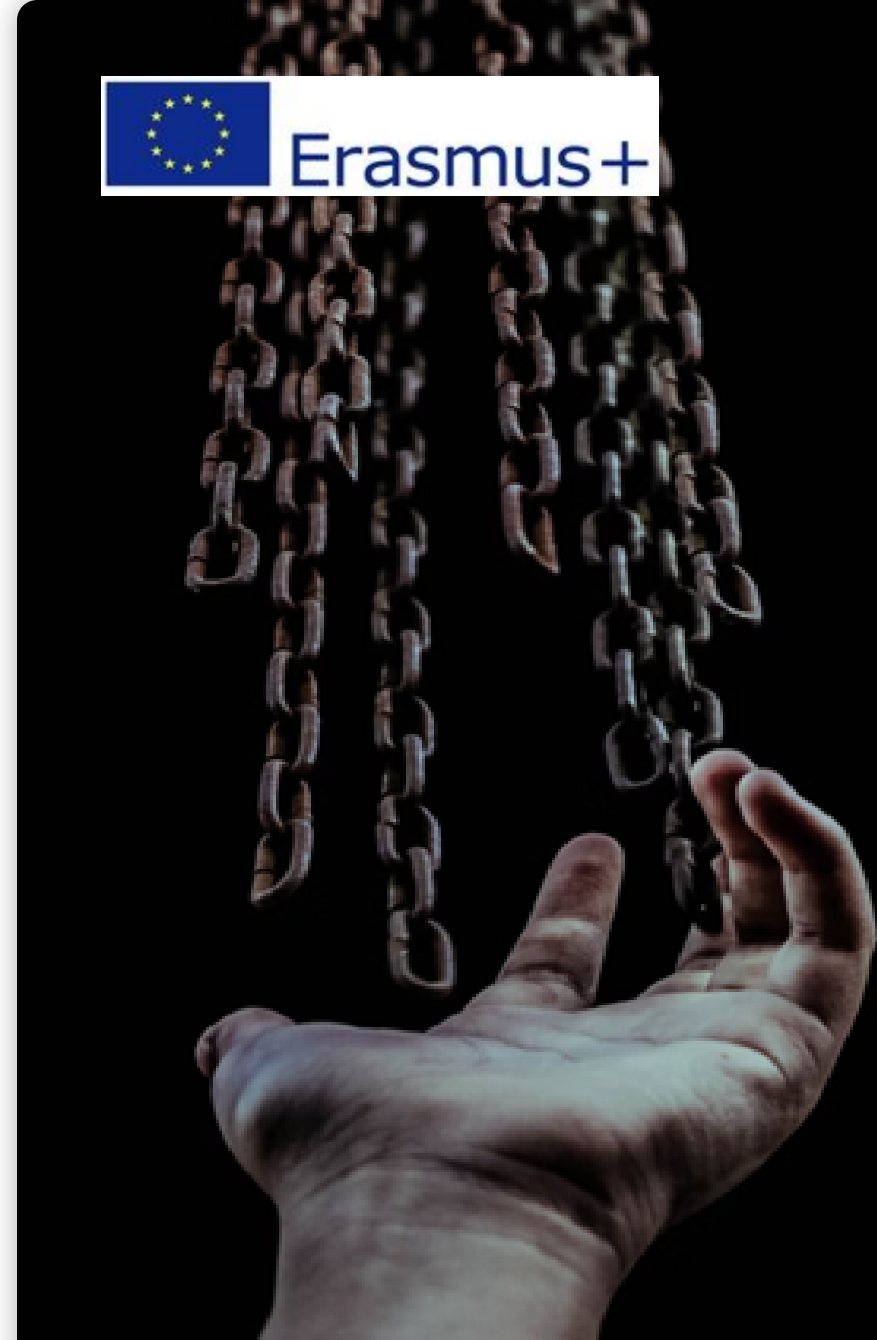
According to the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats, resilience to disinformation and FIMI can be improved "through coordinated response at the EU level using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity [and] mutual assistance..." (European Commission, 2016). Resilience building must be approached holistically, and include as many actors as possible, EU institutions, Member States and NATO. It is important to understand all the complexities and ambiguities of hybrid threats (including disinformation and FIMI) and design programs and campaigns which would offer practical solutions to these rising challenges.

An example of coordinated approach in responding to disinformation and FIMI is the transatlantic partnership between the EU and the USA, in the form of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).

# Resilience Building

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The **role of TTC**, among other things is to “to contribute to a coordinated and effective response to Russia’s war in ... including in areas such as sanction-related export restrictions and combatting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and disinformation campaigns which undermine human rights and threaten the functioning of democracies and the well-being of societies, including in third countries” (US Department of Commerce, 2023).






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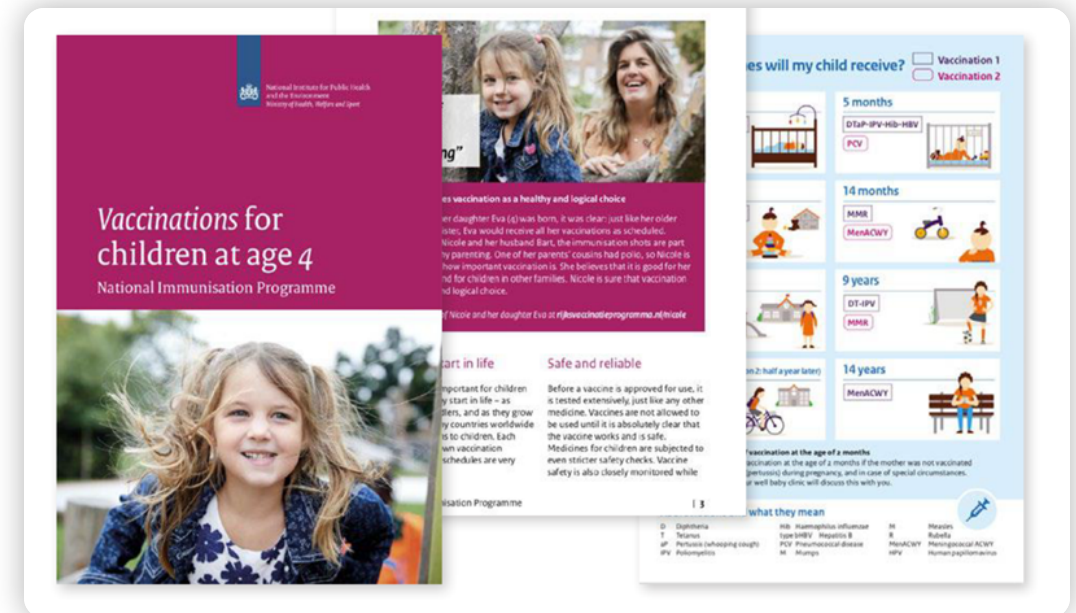
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# Resilience Building

## 2. DEVELOP STRONGER PUBLIC AWARENESS OF DISINFORMATION AND FIMI

- In today's digital era, raising public awareness about the **dangers of disinformation and FIMI** is essential for building societal resilience against them.
- Member States have the opportunity to **foster healthy-skepticism and critical thinking**, by informing end education people on how to recognise and flag instances of disinformation
- An example of a successful public awareness campaign that effectively tackled the dangers of, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the initiative led by the Dutch government (Hassain, J., 2022). 
- This campaign specifically targeted misleading conspiracy theories related






## **2. DEVELOP STRONGER PUBLIC AWARENESS OF DISINFORMATION AND FIMI**

In today's digital era, raising public awareness about the dangers of disinformation and FIMI is essential for building societal resilience against them. An awareness campaign has the power to empower individuals and educate them on becoming more vigilant information consumers. Member States have the opportunity to foster healthy-scepticism and critical thinking, by informing and educating people on how to recognise and flag instances of disinformation or

An example of a successful public awareness campaign that effectively tackled the dangers of, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the initiative led by the Dutch government (Hassain, J., 2022). This campaign specifically targeted misleading conspiracy theories related to the vaccination of children. To effectively combat this disinformation, the Dutch government implemented a pro-vaccination campaign that consisted of six distinct booklets, each tailored to parents of children in different age groups. These booklets were written in clear language, directly addressing the disinformation and providing advice to parents on the importance of vaccinating their children. (Hassain, J., 2022).

# Resilience Building

## 3. IMPROVE DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY

- The widespread accessibility of digital technologies has facilitated rapid information sharing and global connectivity.
- As digital technology becomes increasingly prevalent across different age groups, it is crucial to educate people about the potential risks.
- Resilient societies are those in which members possess the capacity to independently detect and respond to disinformation. With this objective in mind, the European Union has issued **Guidelines for teachers and educators on addressing disinformation and fostering digital literacy through education and training.** 
- These guidelines specifically **highlight the use of game-based learning and gamification**, leveraging online or offline games to enhance learning and engage individuals more effectively (European Commission, 2022b)







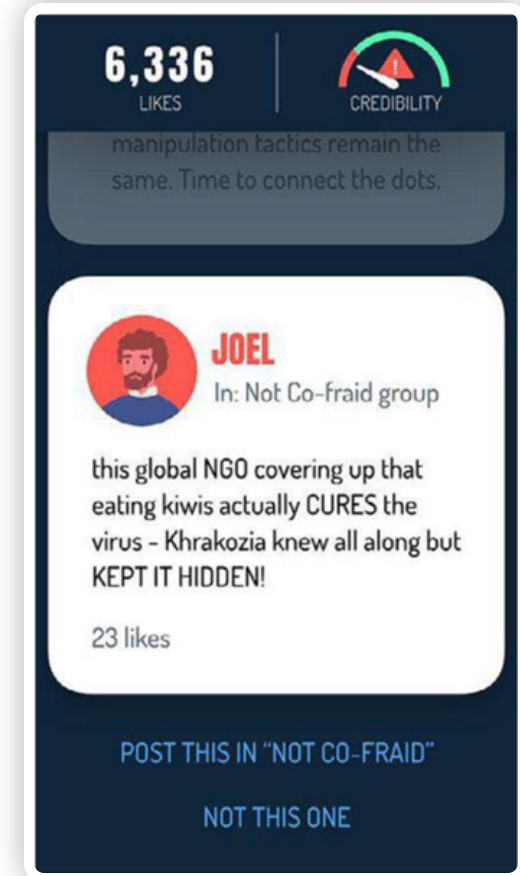
### **3. IMPROVE DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY**

In today's society, media and digital literacy play a significant role in cultivating resilience against disinformation and misinformation (FIMI). The widespread accessibility of digital technologies has facilitated rapid information sharing and global connectivity. However, it has also exposed individuals to online hazards, including disinformation, misinformation, and extremism. As digital technology becomes increasingly prevalent across different age groups, it is crucial to educate people about the potential risks, particularly in the context of information consumption. By promoting digital and media literacy, individuals can acquire the ability to critically evaluate and verify information, develop resilience against online threats, and restore trust in reliable sources. Resilient societies are those in which members possess the capacity to independently detect and respond to disinformation. With this objective in mind, the European Union has issued Guidelines for teachers and educators on addressing disinformation and fostering digital literacy through education and training. These guidelines specifically highlight the use of game-based learning and gamification, leveraging online or offline games to enhance learning and engage individuals more effectively (European Commission, 2022b).

# Resilience Building

## 3. IMPROVE DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY


- Educators have successfully employed this approach in campaigns aimed at raising awareness of media bias.
- One example of good practice is the **"Go Viral! Game"** developed by the University of Cambridge's Social Decision-Making Lab in collaboration with Project DROG (a think-tank focusing on counter-disinformation and the British Government's Cabinet Office).
- The game's objective is to expose users to techniques employed by actors who generate and disseminate disinformation, particularly related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hassain, J., 2022).



6,336  
LIKES

CREDIBILITY

manipulation tactics remain the same. Time to connect the dots.

 **JOEL**  
In: Not Co-fraid group

this global NGO covering up that eating kiwis actually CURES the virus - Khrakozia knew all along but KEPT IT HIDDEN!

23 likes

POST THIS IN "NOT CO-FRAID"

NOT THIS ONE



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# Resilience Building

## 4. ACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, MEDIA AND ONLINE PLATFORMS, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ESPECIALLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF INCREASING TRANSPARENCY OF ELECTIONS

- In order for Member States to effectively control disinformation and information manipulation during the election period, **a coordinated approach involving authorities, civil society, media, online platforms, and information technology providers is crucial.** One of the most vital steps in protecting against disinformation and information manipulation is timely identification, which can be achieved through the following measures:

1. **Mapping the information environment**
2. **Identification and mapping of vulnerable groups**
3. **Identifying threat actors**
4. **Identifying partners for detection and response**  
(Arunado, D. Bradshaw, S. et.al, 2021).





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- a) Mapping the information environment - This involves gaining an understanding of where people obtain political and election-related information.
- b) Identification and mapping of vulnerable groups - It is important to identify which groups are more susceptible to information manipulation.
- c) Identifying threat actors - Understanding the motivations and identities of actors who pose a threat allows for a more resilient response.
- d) Identifying partners for detection and response - Building a network of actors who can effectively respond to ongoing disinformation campaigns is essential (Arunado, D., Bradshaw, S. et.al, 2021).



## **Additional information on efforts made by online platforms:**

Tools that are being developed by social media platforms, like **CrowdTangle** developed by META that allow you identification and tracking of new trends on Facebook, or handbooks for detecting disinformation, such as **Verification Handbook**, are valuable solutions developed by different set of actors which can allow faster identification and response to disinformation and FIMI.

# Resilience Building

## 5. ENCOURAGE THE WORK OF RESPONSIBLE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA

- One of the most effective ways of tackling disinformation is building a safe and free environment for the media to operate in, while at the same time assuring that the media itself has the access to official information.
- **The newest EU Rule of Law Report emphasized the importance of protecting responsible and independent media, and enabling safe environment for journalists.** It is the responsibility of every Member State to promote media pluralism, and safeguard media from possible political pressures. Building of such environment entails:





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- a) Strengthening the independent functioning of media regulators – This is particularly essential for promoting impartiality, transparency and assuring that there are sufficient resources.
- b) Assuring transparency of media ownership – Special emphasis should be put on ensuring independent governance and independent editorial governance.
- c) Setting clear standards and guidelines for licencing restrictions – This would assure that all decision are made objectively and that the decision-making process is transparent.
- d) Access to information must be assured – Information held by public authorities must be shared with journalists.
- e) Assuring safe environment for journalists – Member States must take measures to address rising threats and attacks against journalists.
- f) Strategic lawsuits against public participation need to be prevented – Legal threats and abusive court proceedings which rise from strategic lawsuits against public participation need to be prevented, and Member States must adopt procedural safeguards to protect journalists (European Commission, 2022c).

A valuable tool for tracking the situation in EU on the topic of media freedom is the Media Pluralism Monitor, which provides a comprehensive and scientific assessment of media ecosystems, and gives oversight of threats to media pluralism and freedom across European Union member states and certain candidate countries.



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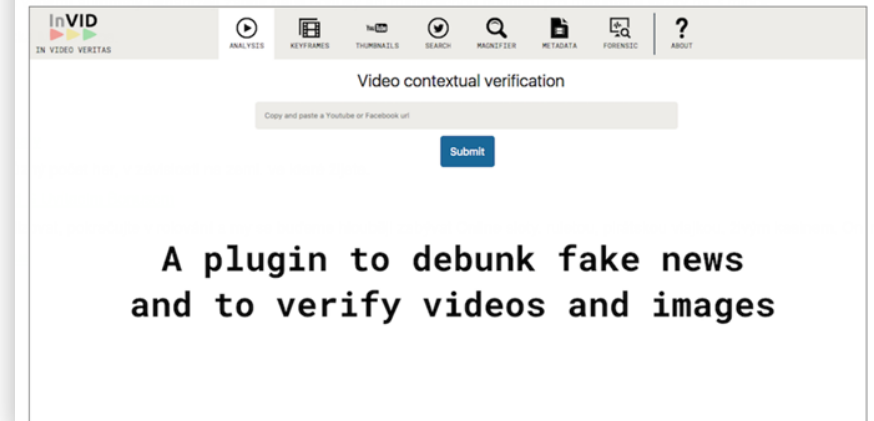
# Resilience Building

## 6. STRENGTHEN FACT-CHECKING

- One example of a good practice in promoting **fact-checking is the work conducted by Agence France-Presse (AFP) and its Medialab department.**
- AFP, a state-owned media agency, has established a team comprising journalists, computer scientists, and engineers who have dedicated their efforts to developing information verification tools. Medialab's primary objective is to empower citizens and decentralize the fact-checking process.
- Medialab has created the **InVID WeVerify browser extension**, which allows users to utilize various tools for a comprehensive content verification experience. These tools include cross-modal verification, social network analysis, micro-targeted debunking, and a blockchain-based database of known false information.



### InVID Verification Plugin





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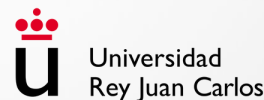


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# Transnational responses to disinformation/FIMI

3.1.1

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## Video sources

- 2016\_ Establishment of the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats . Source: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL
- 2018\_ Implementation of the Action Plan Against Disinformation. Source: European External Action Service - EEAS
- 2018\_ Implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. Source: European Commission
- 2022\_ European Commission adopted the Digital Services Act. Source: European Commission

# Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI

The European Union (EU) has been actively engaged in combating disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) through various initiatives and frameworks



Reflect





# Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI | 1

The European Union (EU) has been actively engaged in combating disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) through various initiatives and frameworks. One of the earliest steps taken was the establishment of the **Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats** in 2016 as a response to threats that seek to undermine fundamental democratic values and liberties. Recognising that hybrid threats are disseminated through massive campaigns and that social media plays a significant role in controlling the narrative and radicalizing individuals, the EU understood the necessity of a coordinated response at the EU level to enhance resilience and address common threats (European Commission, 2016).

By implementing, **the Action Plan Against Disinformation** in 2018, the EU stepped up its efforts to better identify, expose, and combat disinformation tactics, notably in the context of European elections. Within the Action Plan Against Disinformation, the European Commission for the first time defines disinformation as “**verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security**” (European Commission, 2018: 1). To protect its institutions and citizens from the effects of disinformation, the EU acknowledged the necessity for swift and decisive action. The Action Plan states that social media platforms and private industry, including civil society organizations, are essential in the fight against misinformation. The EU unveiled **the Code of Practice on Disinformation** that same year as a component of this strategy. Online platforms were urged by the Code to actively battle misinformation and advance accountability in political advertising. It set forth a number of platforms' voluntary commitments, including the creation of guidelines and instruments to combat misinformation, the empowerment of users, and the provision of transparency reports (European Commission, 2018).





## Transnational response to disinformation and FIMI | 2

In **2020**, the EU adopted **the European Democracy Action Plan**, recognising the negative impact of FIMI, which seeks to hinder democratic discourse, increase social division, and manipulate elections. The European Democracy Action Plan places emphasis on the demand for a strong and organised response for addressing these issues (European Commission, 2020).

In **2021** the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated the detrimental impact of disinformation on society. The European Commission has emphasized that the "infodemic," characterized by the rapid dissemination of false, inaccurate, or misleading information about the pandemic, has posed significant risks to personal and public health, crisis management, the economy, and social cohesion. The Commission, in response to the ever-changing conditions, has released its Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation, acknowledging the urgent need to address this issue. According to the Commission, it is critical that all parties involved, especially social media and other digital platforms, step up their efforts to remedy the gaps and flaws in the previous version of **the Code of Practice on Disinformation** in order to promote a more open, safe, and reliable online environment (European Commission, 2021).

In **2022**, the EU took another step towards creating safer digital space where fundamental rights of all users are protected. The adopted **Digital Services Act** assures the protection of users' basic rights while guarding the digital realm against the disinformation and misinformation. For suppliers of intermediary services, including social media, online marketplaces, very large online platforms (VLOPs), and very large online search engines (VLOSEs), the DSA outlines specific obligations and accountability. Stricter criteria apply to bigger intermediate services (VLOPs and VLOSEs) that have a significant impact on society (European Commission, 2022).

In addition to the Digital Services Act, the European External Action Service also adopted its **Strategic Compass for Security and Defence** in **2022**. In light of the Ukrainian war, the Strategic Compass provides direction for the growth of the EU's security and defence agenda. The Strategic Compass, which establishes the norm for the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox, attempts to identify, analyse, and respond to the danger, including by putting financial burdens on offenders (European External Action Service, 2022).



**EUR-Lex - 52016JC0018 - EN - EUR-Lex**

Brussels, 6.4.2016 JOIN(2016) 18 final JOINT  
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## European Commission adopted the Digital Services Act (2022)

To provide a secure digital environment that protects the basic rights of all users, the EU implemented the Digital Services Act (DSA) in 2022. The DSA protects users' fundamental rights and fights against false information and disinformation while setting specific responsibilities of intermediaries (e.g. social media and search engines).







## Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats (2016)

One of the EU's initial steps to combat disinformation and FIMI is the implementation of the Joint Framework. This framework serves as a response to threats that aim to undermine fundamental democratic values and liberties. The EU acknowledges that hybrid threats which include disinformation and FIMI are often disseminated through extensive campaigns and social media.





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# The European Democracy Action Plan is adopted (2020)

To combat the negative consequences of FIMI, the EU made an important step by adopting the European Democracy Action Plan. This strategy tries to combat activities that obstruct democratic discourse, promote social division, and manipulate elections. The European Democracy Action Plan emphasises the importance of a strong and carefully planned response to effectively tackle these issues.





## Discussion

*How effective do you consider the existing EU framework for combatting disinformation and addressing the issues surrounding foreign information manipulation (FIMI)? In your view, what are the primary limitations or shortcomings of the current framework?*



## Implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation (2018)

As part of the Action Plan Against Disinformation, the EU launched the Code of Practice on Disinformation in the same year. The Code urged online platforms to actively combat false information and increase transparency in political advertising. It outlined the voluntary pledges made by various platforms, including the development of policies and tools to combat false information, the empowering of users, and the publication of transparency reports.





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## Implementation of the Action Plan Against Disinformation (2018)

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Brussels, 6.4.2016 JOIN(2016) 18 final JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN

## The European External Action Service adopts the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022)

Services pleads to develop the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox, which will allow to identify, analyse, and respond to the danger, including by putting financial burdens on offenders.





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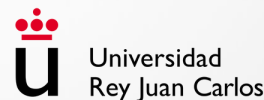
## European Commission publishes the Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation (2021)

In response to the "infodemic", the Commission has released its Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation, acknowledging the urgent need to address the rapid dissemination of false, inaccurate, or misleading information about the COVID-19 pandemic.





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# Regulatory responses to disinformation/FIMI

3.1.2

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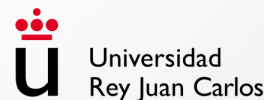


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# Resilience Building

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# Introduction

To strengthen societal resilience to disinformation and FIMI, several different strategies can be employed:

- 1 Creating a strong legal and policy framework that addresses disinformation and FIMI
- 2 Develop stronger public awareness of disinformation and FIMI
- 3 Improve digital and media literacy
- 4 Actively engage with civil society, media and online platforms, and information technology providers, especially to increase the transparency of elections
- 5 Encourage the work of responsible and independent media
- 6 Strengthen fact-checking

# Creating strong legal and policy frameworks that address disinformation and FIMI



## How can strong legal and policy frameworks be created to address disinformation and FIMI?

Each state implements its own rules for regulating disinformation and FIMI.

States learn from mistakes made by others and adjust their policies accordingly, fostering healthy competition.

States implement legislation and policies that are coordinated at the EU or international level.

SEND





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According to the EU's Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats, resilience to disinformation and FIMI can be improved **“through coordinated response at the EU level using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity [and] mutual assistance...”** (European Commission, 2016).

A recent example of a coordinated approach in responding to disinformation and FIMI is the transatlantic partnership between the EU and the USA, in the form of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC). The role of TTC, among other things is **“to contribute to a coordinated and effective response to Russia's war in ... including in areas such as sanction-related export restrictions and combatting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and disinformation campaigns which undermine human rights and threaten the functioning of democracies and the well-being of societies, including in third countries”** (US Department of Commerce, 2023).



# Develop stronger public awareness of disinformation and FIMI



## How can stronger public awareness of disinformation and FIMI be developed?

By ignoring the existence of disinformation and FIMI, it will prevent people to look into disinformation that has already been shared.

Through focus groups with people who have been affected by disinformation.

Through awareness campaigns.

SEND





In today's digital era, raising public awareness about the dangers of disinformation and **FIMI is essential** for building societal resilience against them. An awareness campaign has the power to empower individuals and educate them on becoming more vigilant information consumers. **Member States have the opportunity to foster healthy scepticism and critical thinking**, by informing and educating people on how to recognise and flag instances of disinformation.



# Improve digital and media literacy



## How can states enhance the digital and media literacy of their citizens?

By increasing the accessibility of digital technologies to a broader range of people.

By integrating digital and media literacy topics into the educational system.

By implementing measures to discourage citizens from sharing disinformation, including potential consequences.

SEND



In today's society, media and digital literacy play a significant role in cultivating resilience against disinformation and misinformation (FIMI). **The widespread accessibility of digital technologies has facilitated rapid information sharing and global connectivity.** As digital technology becomes increasingly prevalent across different age groups, it is crucial to educate people about the potential risks, particularly in the context of information consumption. By promoting digital and media literacy, individuals can acquire the ability to critically evaluate and verify information, develop resilience against online threats, and restore trust in reliable sources. Resilient societies are those in which members possess the capacity to independently detect and respond to disinformation.



**With this objective in mind, the European Union has issued Guidelines for teachers and educators on addressing disinformation and fostering digital literacy through education and training.**

**These guidelines specifically highlight the use of game-based learning and gamification, leveraging online or offline games to enhance learning and engage individuals more effectively (European Commission, 2022b).**



# Actively engage with civil society, media and online platforms, and information technology providers especially to increase transparency of elections



## How can civil society, media, online platforms, and information technology providers enhance transparency in democratic elections?

These actors should not be involved. Their participation may result in biased reporting and manipulation of information.

They can help authorities map the information environment and identify possible disinformation and the possibility of FIMI.

By involving these actors in the process, and insisting on transparency, the electoral process can be delayed which causes unnecessary complications.

SEND



**For Member States to effectively control disinformation and information manipulation during the election period, a coordinated approach involving authorities, civil society, media, online platforms, and information technology providers is crucial. One of the most vital steps in protecting against disinformation and information manipulation is timely identification, which can be achieved through the following measures:**

- a) Mapping the information environment - This involves gaining an understanding of where people obtain political and election-related information.**
  - b) Identification and mapping of vulnerable groups - It is important to identify which groups are more susceptible to information manipulation.**
  - c) Identifying threat actors - Understanding the motivations and identities of actors who pose a threat allows for a more resilient response.**
  - d) Identifying partners for detection and response - Building a network of actors who can effectively respond to ongoing disinformation campaigns is essential**
- (Arunado, D., Bradshaw, S. et.al, 2021).**

**Civil society, media, online platforms, and information technology providers can collect this information and timely inform authorities about any possible threats as well as vulnerabilities.**



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# Encourage the work of responsible and independent media



## How can states encourage the work of responsible and independent media?

Strengthen media monitoring and introduce laws that can resort to censorship.

Establish robust safeguards and standards for licensing and media ownership to ensure accountability and independence.

Facilitate legal recourse against journalists in cases where their statements may significantly deviate from widely accepted public opinion.

SEND



It is the responsibility of every Member State to promote **media pluralism** and **safeguard media** from possible political pressures. Building such an environment entails: Strengthening the independent functioning of media regulators – This is particularly essential for promoting impartiality, transparency and assuring that there are sufficient resources. **Assuring transparency of media ownership** – Special emphasis should be put on ensuring independent governance and independent editorial governance. **Setting clear standards and guidelines for licencing restrictions** – This would assure that all decisions are made objectively and that the decision-making process is transparent. Access to information must be assured – Information held by public authorities must be shared with journalists. Assuring a safe environment for journalists – **Member States must take measures to address rising threats and attacks against journalists.** Strategic lawsuits against public participation need to be prevented – Legal threats and abusive court proceedings which rise from strategic lawsuits against public participation need to be prevented. (European Commission, 2022c). A valuable tool for tracking the situation in the EU on the topic of media freedom is the Media Pluralism Monitor, which provides a comprehensive and scientific assessment of media ecosystems, and gives oversight of threats to media pluralism and freedom across the European Union.



# Strengthen fact-checking



## How can states enhance or reinforce fact-checking efforts?

State-owned and private media organizations should be incentivised through financial packages to establish dedicated fact-checking teams

Fact-checking is unnecessary, as citizens should be able to determine the truth on their own without relying on external verification.

States should discourage fact-checking as it hinders freedom of expression and imposes unnecessary restrictions on information dissemination.

SEND





One example of good practice in promoting fact-checking is the work conducted by **Agence France-Presse (AFP)** and its Medialab department. AFP, a state-owned media agency, has established a team comprising journalists, computer scientists, and engineers who have dedicated their efforts to developing information verification tools. **Medialab's primary objective is to empower citizens and decentralize the fact-checking process.** To achieve this, Medialab has created the InVID WeVerify browser extension, which allows users to utilize various tools for a comprehensive content verification experience. **These tools include cross-modal verification, social network analysis, micro-targeted debunking, and a blockchain-based database of known false information.** By providing journalists, fact-checkers, and the general public with access to this tool, they are equipped to differentiate between disinformation and truth (Hassain, J., 2022).



Media Pluralism  
Monitor



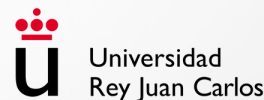
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# Critical thinking, media and digital literacies

Ruxandra Buluc | MVNIA - Roberta Răducu | NSC

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## CRITICAL THINKING, MEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACIES

The present section investigates critical thinking as one of the most recommended instruments in the fight against disinformation. Numerous European documents and courses point to developing critical thinking as a means of countering the effects disinformation has on the informational environment. The section examines the skills that need to be included in critical thinking curricula, the traits of a critical thinker, the processes and types of analysis involved in critically interacting with any kind of discourse (argumentative, rhetorical, conversational, narrative). The deliverable also puts forth concrete tools for students to develop their critical thinking competences. Employing the latest research in the field, the section focuses on the skills and competences that need to be developed in order for students to become proficient critical thinkers, providing them with clearly understandable checklists and questions, as well as examples and analyses to help them understand how critical thinking works.



## UNIT OBJECTIVES

- Defining critical thinking
- Understanding what a critical thinker does
- Practicing argument analysis
- Practicing rhetorical analysis
- Practicing conversation analysis
- Understanding what media literacy is
- Differentiating between fields of application for media literacy



# What is critical thinking?





## What is critical thinking?

“Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thought processes with a view to improving them. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcoming our native egocentrism and socio-centrism. It advances the character and ethical sensitivities of the dedicated person through the explicit cultivation of intellectual virtues.” (Paul & Elder 2020)

Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2020) *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools* Eighth Edition, Rowman & Littlefield

# What is critical thinking?



**Critical  
Thinking**

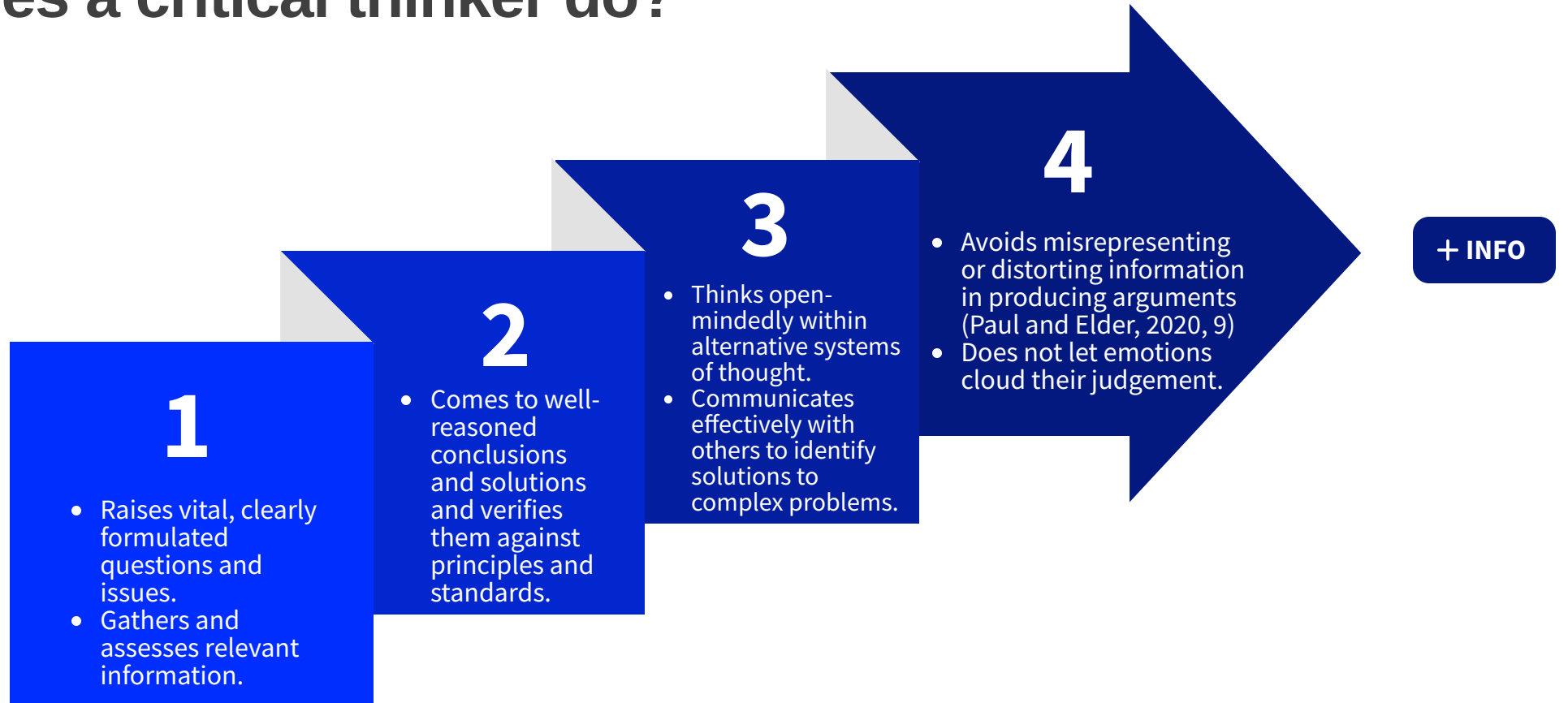
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Both types of principles are necessary prerequisites for effective critical thinking. It is not sufficient to know various facts in a particular subject if one is not able to operate with them logically; just as it is not enough to understand reasoning processes if one does not know the specific knowledge in a field that those processes could be applied to. More often than not, lack of knowledge in one of these areas leads to fallacies, to acceptance of dubious theories (be they fake news, unfounded rumors or conspiracy theories), to a lack of understanding of how the world and society function, which does not allow for a rational and constructive debate in the public sphere.

# What does a critical thinker do?





Hunter (2009) synthesizes the traits that a critical thinker should have under two encompassing categories: reasonableness and reflectivity. The former refers to employing and relying on reason and sound reasoning principles when analyzing and evaluating the arguments and discourses one is presented with. The latter means that the analysis process should be in-depth, exploratory and multi-level, which means it “involves thinking about a problem at several different levels or from several different angles all at once, including thinking about what the right method is for answering or solving the problem (Hunter, 2009, 5). Levitin states that employing reasonableness and reflectivity fosters the development and maintenance of intellectual humility: “Critical thinking trains us to take a step back, to evaluate facts and form evidence-based conclusions. (...)The most important component of the best critical thinking that is lacking in our society is humility. It is a simple yet profound notion: If we realize we don’t know everything, we can learn. If we think we know everything, learning is impossible” (2017, xiv). Being able to acknowledge that we may not know everything, that some things are beyond our understanding is the defining quality of a rational thinker, who is able not only to assess the limits of others’ judgements but also one’s own.

Hunter, David A. (2009) A Practical Guide to Critical Thinking. Deciding What to Do and Believe, Wiley, John Wiley & Sons Inc.  
Levintin, D. (2017) Weaponized Lies: how to think critically in the post-truth era, Penguin Random House.



# Critical thinking in action: argument analysis

Understand:

- how arguments are constructed according to the rules of reason;
- the ways in which they may be corrupted through sophistic reasoning

## Analyse real-life examples of fallacies

**SLIPPERY SLOPE**

**POST HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC**

**AD HOMINEM**

**CUM HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC**

**FALSE DICHOTOMY**

**RED HERRING**



# Ad hominem

## Definition of ad hominem

an attack directed against a person's character, integrity, reasons rather than the position they are holding or the arguments they are presenting.

## Example of ad hominem

"[I]f Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think she'd get 5 percent of the vote. The only thing she's got going is the woman's card, and the beautiful thing is, women don't like her." (Donald Trump in the 2016 election campaign)



# Slippery slope

## Definition of slippery slope

Claim about a series of events that will unstoppably occur and culminate in one major, negative event

## Example of slippery slope

Liz Wheeler, American news anchor for OAN presents an aquarium's decision not to announce the gender of a penguin.

“We should ask, where does radical leftist gender ideology lead? Do liberals want human children to be genderless? If so, why? Is this based on biology? And if not, then what? What happens when human children are raised genderless? If gender is destroyed, doesn't that destroy traditional gender roles? And if gender roles are destroyed, doesn't that destroy gendered relationships? And if gendered relationships are destroyed, doesn't that destroy traditional marriage? And if traditional marriage is destroyed, doesn't that destroy the family units? And if people aren't dependent on their families, then who do they depend on? That's right, the government. Which is the goal of liberals in the first place. Don't let transgender penguins fool you.



# Post hoc ergo propter hoc

## Definition of post hoc ergo propter hoc

“after this, therefore because of this”

a faulty causal relationship based on the idea that if something happened before something else, then the first event caused the second one

## Example of post hoc ergo propter hoc

5G towers became operational and then the COVID 19 pandemic started. Therefore, the 5G towers caused the COVID 19 pandemic.



## Red herring

### Definition of red herring

Something small or inconsequential distracts attention from a relevant aspect, idea, argument

### Example of red herring

The reporter's question: Can you envision a way of supporting the universal background checks bill? Senator Lamar Alexander's answer: Video games are a bigger problem than guns because video games affect people.





## Cum hoc ergo propter hoc

### Definition of cum hoc ergo propter hoc

“with this, therefore because of this” If two events are happening at the same time, then a causality is falsely assumed, and one is said to cause the other.

### Example of cum hoc ergo propter hoc

Hospitals are full of sick people. Therefore, hospitals make people sick.



## **Critical thinking in action: argument analysis**

Most critical thinking courses focus on formal and informal logic, on producing correct and valid deductive and inductive arguments, which might, at times, appear to be cut off from the real world and all the issues that need to be considered. The present module will focus not only on argument analysis, but also on rhetorical analysis, conversation analysis and source analysis.



# False dichotomy

## Definition of false dichotomy

oversimplification of a complex situation and forceful reduction to only two options, out of which only one could be correct

## Example of false dichotomy

“I had a choice, as well: either to trust the word of a madman, or to defend the American people. Faced with that choice, I will defend America every time. “ President George W. Bush regarding the Iraq invasion to prevent Saddam Hussein from using WMD.



# Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis



focuses on public discourse;



examines how it is constructed;



focuses on rhetorical devices to discern persuasive mechanisms;



## **Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis**

Rhetorical analysis focuses on public discourse in all its forms, examining in more detail how it is constructed, with a special focus on the rhetorical devices that grant it persuasive power and capture the attention of the audiences. Rhetorical analysis calls for a piecemeal integration of various analysis criteria, focusing on broader mechanisms such as the ways in which discourse creates emotional connections to its audiences, either by employing narratives which stir the audience's reactions, or by relying on argumentation.

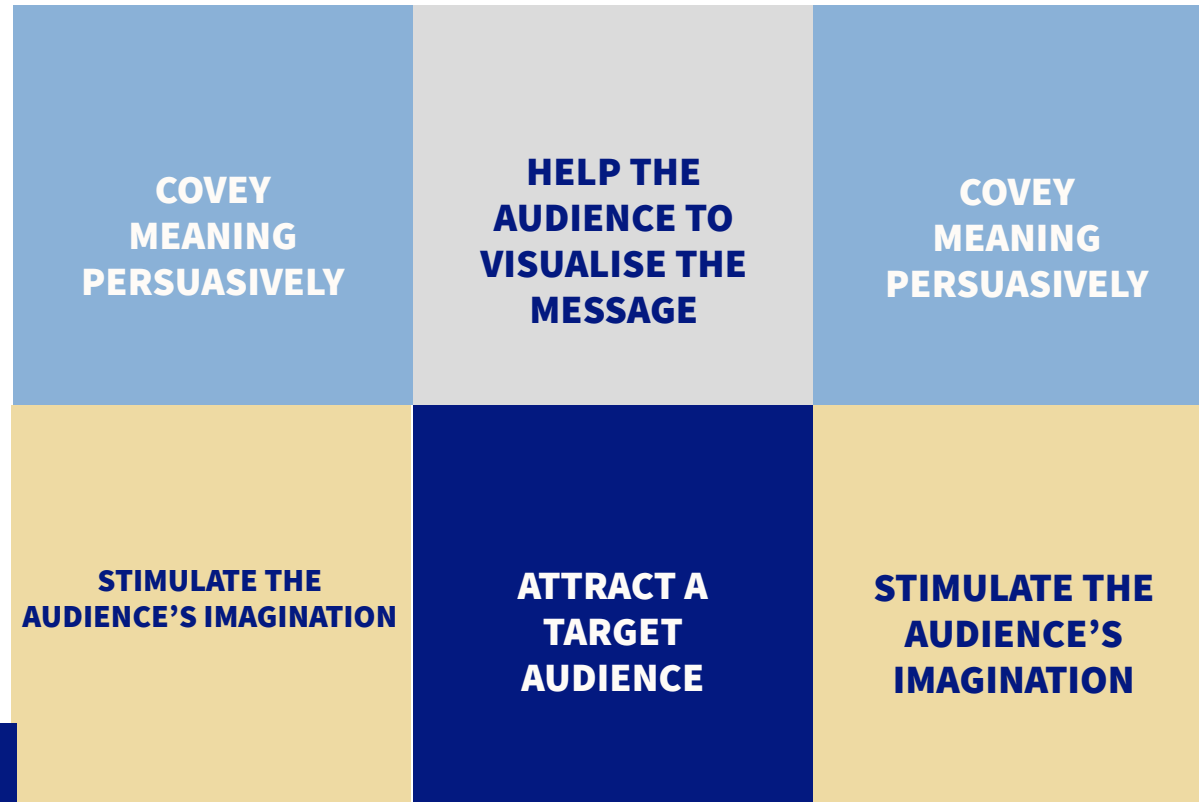


# Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis



## Rhetorical devices

They are tools employed to:





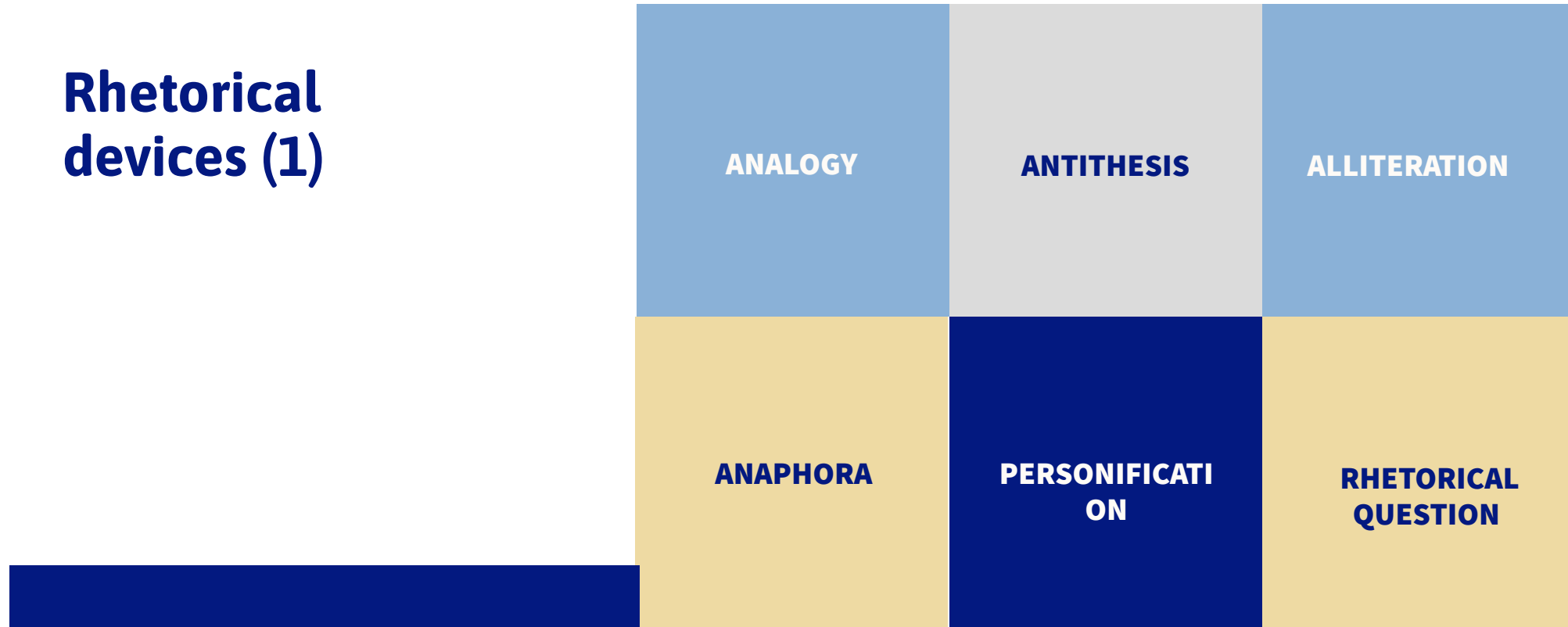
## **Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis**

Rhetorical analysis focuses on public discourse in all its forms, examining in more detail how it is constructed, with a special focus on the rhetorical devices that grant it persuasive power and capture the attention of the audiences. Rhetorical analysis calls for a piecemeal integration of various analysis criteria, focusing on broader mechanisms such as the ways in which discourse creates emotional connections to its audiences, either by employing narratives which stir the audience's reactions, or by relying on argumentation.

# Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis



## Rhetorical devices (1)

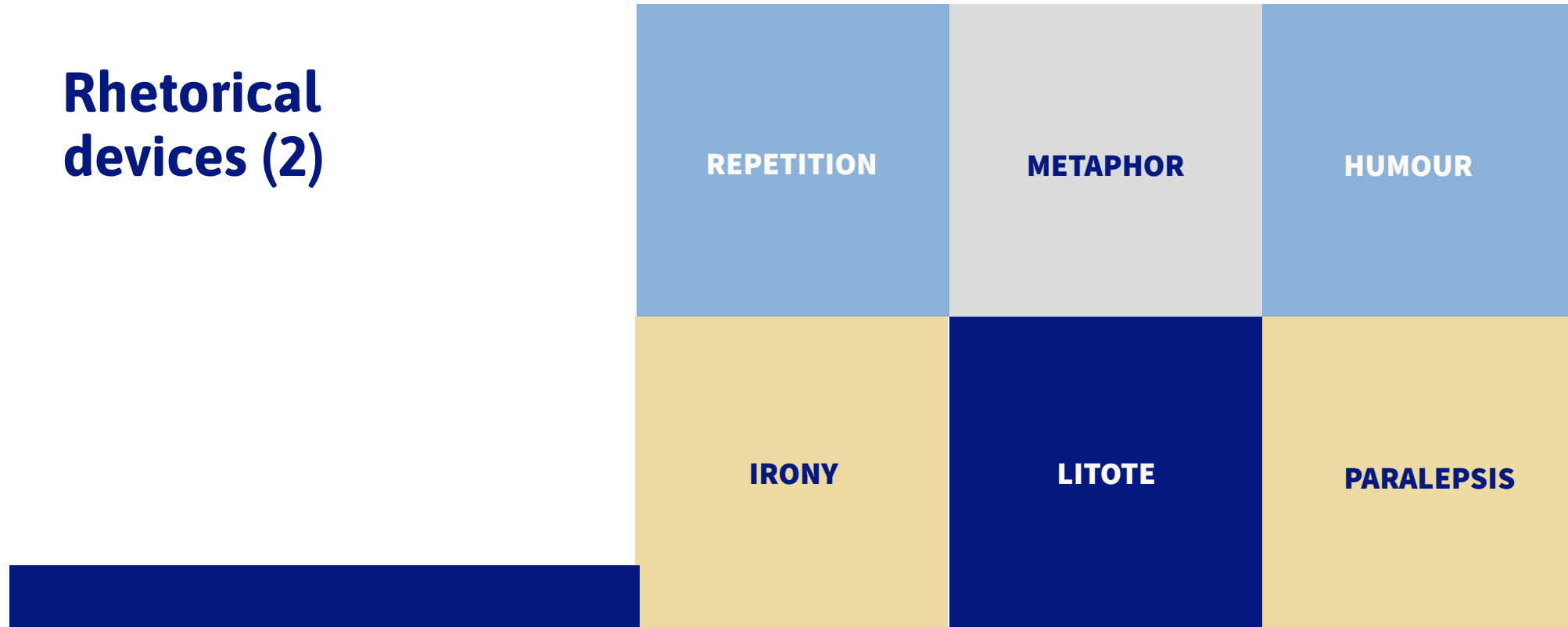




# Critical thinking in action: rhetorical analysis



## Rhetorical devices (2)





# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



## Challenges

### *Challenge 1*

#### **Spoken discourse - Analysed faster**

Spoken discourse needs to be analysed faster, as the speech or the conversation progresses, which requires more adept, attentive critical thinkers.

### *Challenge 2*

#### **Social and personal factors could affect the critical thinker's acuity**

Social and personal factors, such as social status and power relations, play a role in this type of analysis as they could affect the critical thinker's acuity.

### *Challenge 3*

#### **Real contexts are fast-paced**

Real contexts are fast-paced, images may disappear before they are properly interpreted, the conversation may move on to other points, and thus make effective analysis challenging.



## Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis

When it comes to analysing conversations, critical thinking provides a useful toolbox for the analysis of the claims, assertions, persuasive instances, trade-offs, information, facts presented so as to determine the best course of action or whether the dialogues proceed correctly, transparently, openly, responsibly. However, in many instances, analysing conversations and dialogues could present certain challenges, as they usually take place in real time and might overburden the critical thinker. Govier (1989 123) explains that it is sometimes more facile to analyse written discourse from a critical perspective than it is to apply the same methods to conversations and/or spoken language.

Govier, T. (1989) Critical Thinking as Argument Analysis?,  
Argumentation 3: 115-126.

# Applied conversation analysis



# Applied conversation analysis

**Kellyanne Conway answers Chuck Todd's question.**

True

False

SEND

# Applied conversation analysis

**Kellyanne Conway repeats part of the reporter's question (Why do that?) in her answer (the President did many things yesterday...) to make it seem that she is answering the question**

True

False

SEND

# Applied conversation analysis

**Kellyanne Conway speaks about the problems of President Obama's healthcare policy, known as Obamacare and about the number of people who voted for Donald Trump. She does this in order to:**

Indicate that President Trump had a larger audience at his inauguration than President Obama

Explain that crowd size matters when defining the popularity of a president

Divert attention from the issue she was asked about: presenting false information about crowd size at President Trump's inauguration

SEND

# Applied conversation analysis





# Applied conversation analysis

**Kellyanne Conway uses an argumentative fallacy in her answer: “I want to have a great, open relationship with our press. But look what happened the day before, talking about falsehoods. We allowed the press to come into the Oval Office and witness President Trump signing executive orders. (...) What happens almost immediately? A falsehood is told about removing Martin Luther King Jr.’s bust from the Oval Office.” Which argumentative fallacy is it?**

Euphemism – she replaces negative words with positive ones

Red herring – she diverts attention from the question by introducing an unrelated subject into the discussion

Post hoc ergo propter hoc – she presents an inaccurate causal relationship between two events.

SEND

# Applied conversation analysis



# Applied conversation analysis

**Kellyanne Conway says to Chuck Todd “don’t be so overly dramatic”.  
What type of argumentative fallacy is this statement?**

Ad hominem – she attacks the person asking the question, rather than answer the question

Red herring – she introduces an unrelated subject into the discussion

False dichotomy – she presents only two possible scenarios for the situation

SEND

# Applied conversation analysis

**In answer to Chuck Todd’s comment that alternative facts are not facts but falsehoods, Kellyanne Conway uses several statements beginning with “Do you think it’s a fact or not that...?” Why does she do this?**

To appear to answer the comment but without actually addressing the problem of the press secretary’s false statement

To distract attention from the falsehood

To promote a negative image regarding President Obama’s actions while in office.

All of the above

SEND



# Media and digital literacy



The ability to:

- understand mass communication processes;
- decode and understand media messages;
- develop independent judgments about media content;
- assess the impact and influence of those messages on human beliefs, feelings, behaviours, communities and society;
- understand how content is created and disseminated online;
- evaluate various sources of information;
- repost/ create mediatised content thoughtfully and conscientiously;
- understand the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners.





## **Media and digital literacy**

Media literacy represents a widely invoked solution facing the dangers of misinformation, disinformation and the use of information to cause harm. Also found as “information literacy” and/or in close relation with “media education”



## **Media and digital literacy**

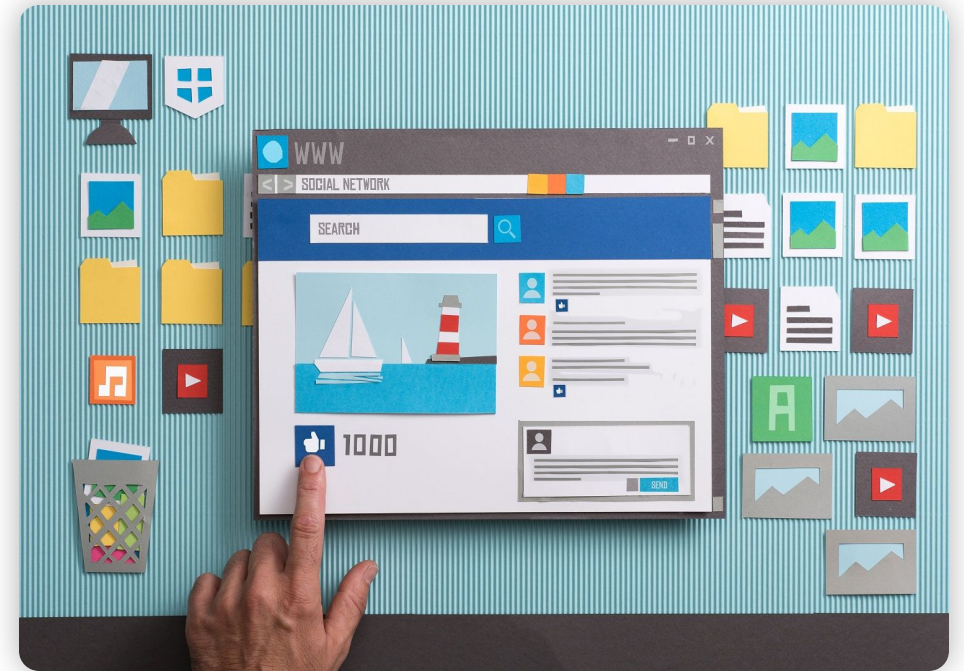
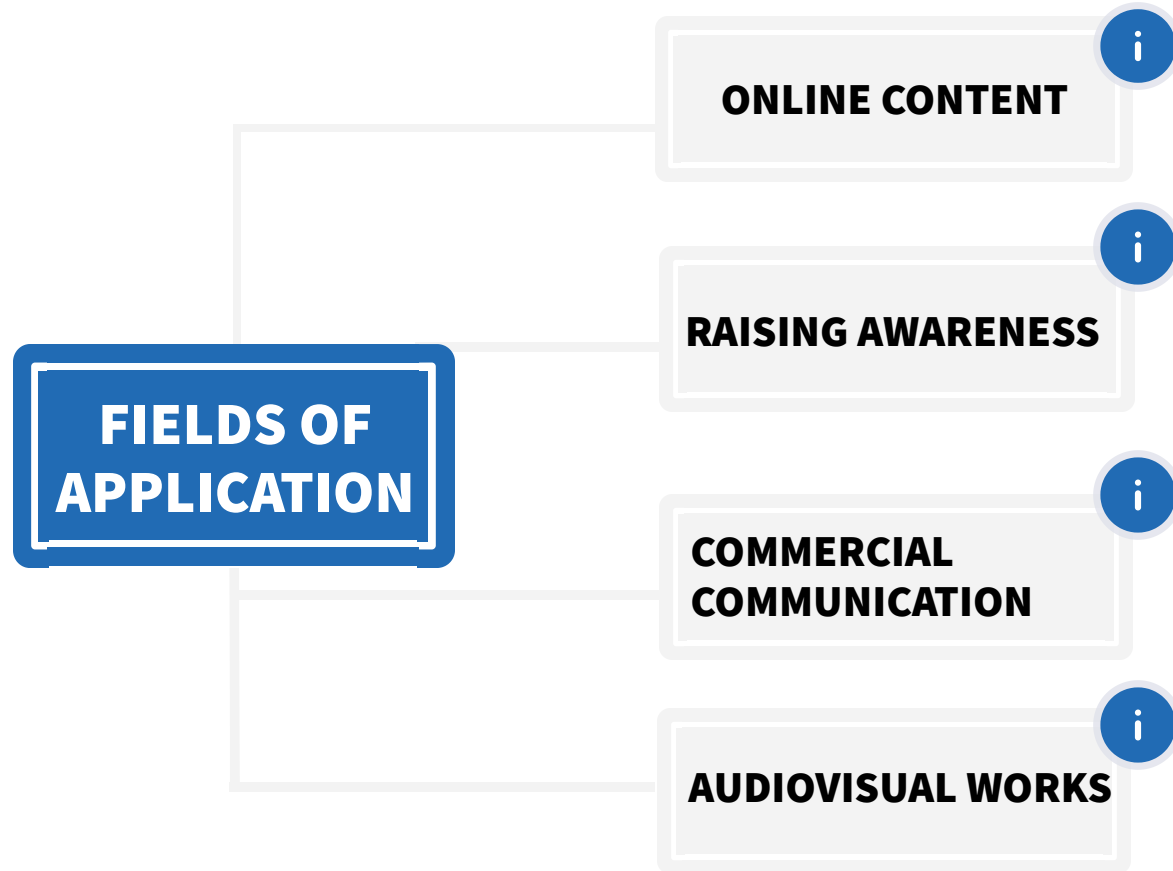
Mass communication processes include the political and economic ecosystems in which they are produced and exist. It enables audiences to decipher the information that they receive through the channels of mass communications and empowers them to develop independent judgments about media content.



Media literacy represents a widely invoked solution facing the dangers of misinformation, disinformation and the use of information to cause harm. Also found as “information literacy” and/or in close relation with “media education”, media literacy can be simply defined as the ability to:



# Media and digital literacy





## **Commercial communication**

Giving young audiences tools to develop a critical approach to commercial communication, enabling them to make informed choices - encouraging public/private financing in this area with adequate transparency



## **Raising awareness**

Explaining how search engines work (prioritisation of answers, etc.) and learning to better use search engines;



## Online content

Empowering users to critically assess online content, ensuring that the benefits of the information society can be enjoyed by everyone, including people who are disadvantaged due to limited resources or education (e-Accessibility) as well as those living in less fortunate areas (e-Inclusion)



## **Audiovisual works**

Providing better awareness and knowledge about film heritage and promoting the acquisition of audiovisual media production and creativity skills (ex: understanding the importance of copyright)

## Exercise



**Media literacy is characterised by which fundamental characteristic:**

The ability to create and promote false information

An understanding of the financial obligations of media practitioners

An understanding of the process of mass communication

An awareness of the impact of media on climate change and environment

SEND

## Exercise



**Media literacy is also found in close relation with:**

Cognitive information

Computer education

Mass education

Information literacy

SEND

## Exercise



**Media literacy fields of application are:**

Political science

Audiovisual works and online content

Fairplay system

Disinformation and misinformation

SEND



## Exercise



An important feature of a)\_\_\_\_\_ literacy pertains to the ability of general inquiry and b)\_\_\_\_\_ ; hence, highly media literate individuals usually are c)\_\_\_\_\_ of the media content due to their familiarization with media practice routines, and better understanding of the news production and dissemination environment

**A**

1. news media
2. digital platforms

**B**

1. emotional thinking
2. critical thinking

**C**

1. skeptical
2. attentive

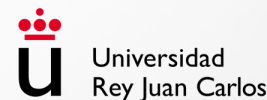
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# Critical Thinking 1

3.2.1

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064370](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064370)



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# What is critical thinking?



Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thought processes with a view to improving them

(Paul and Elder, 2020)

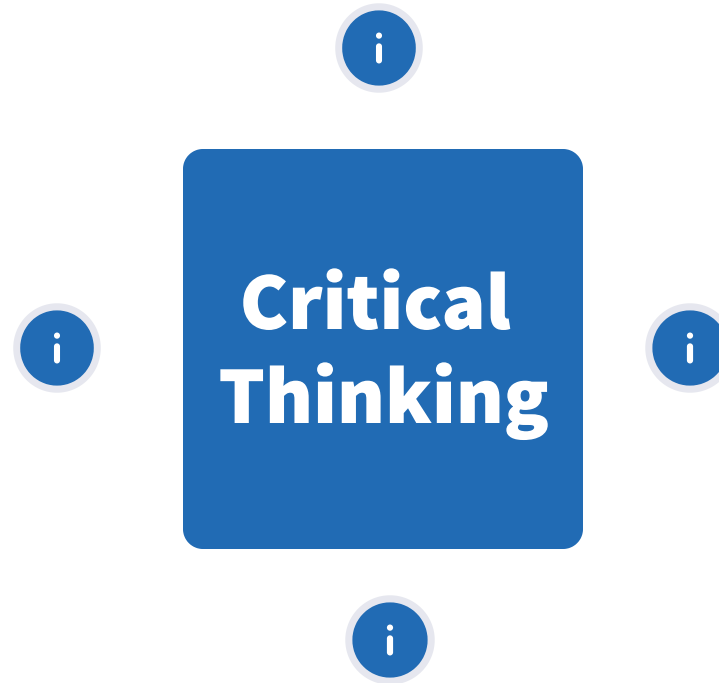


## What is critical thinking?

“Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thought processes with a view to improving them. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcoming our native egocentrism and socio-centrism. It advances the character and ethical sensitivities of the dedicated person through the explicit cultivation of intellectual virtues.” (Paul & Elder 2020)

Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2020) *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools* Eighth Edition, Rowman & Littlefield

# What is critical thinking?





# What is critical thinking?



**Critical  
Thinking**

[+ INFO](#)



Both types of principles are necessary prerequisites for effective critical thinking. It is not sufficient to know various facts in a particular subject if one is not able to operate with them logically; just as it is not enough to understand reasoning processes if one does not know the specific knowledge in a field that those processes could be applied to. More often than not, lack of knowledge in one of these areas leads to fallacies, to acceptance of dubious theories (be they fake news, unfounded rumors or conspiracy theories), to a lack of understanding of how the world and society function, which does not allow for a rational and constructive debate in the public sphere.

# What does a critical thinker do?



**1**

- **Raises** vital, clearly formulated **questions and issues**.
- Gathers and assesses **relevant information**.

**2**

- **Comes to well-reasoned conclusions** and solutions and verifies them against principles and standards.

**3**

- **Thinks open-mindedly** within alternative systems of thought.
- Communicates effectively with others to identify solutions to complex problems.

**4**

- **Avoids misrepresenting** or distorting information in producing arguments (Paul and Elder, 2020, 9)
- Does not let emotions cloud their judgement.

[+ INFO](#)



**Hunter (2009) synthesizes the traits that a critical thinker should have under two encompassing categories: **reasonableness** and **reflectivity**.**

The former refers to employing and relying on reason and sound reasoning principles when analyzing and evaluating the arguments and discourses one is presented with.

The latter means that the analysis process should be in-depth, exploratory and multi-level, which means it “involves thinking about a problem at several different levels or from several different angles all at once, including thinking about what the right method is for answering or solving the problem (Hunter, 2009, 5).

Levitin states that employing reasonableness and reflectivity fosters the development and maintenance of intellectual humility: “**Critical thinking trains us to take a step back, to evaluate facts and form evidence-based conclusions. (...)The most important component of the best critical thinking that is lacking in our society is humility. It is a simple yet profound notion: If we realize we don’t know everything, we can learn. If we think we know everything, learning is impossible**” (2017, xiv). Being able to acknowledge that we may not know everything, that some things are beyond our understanding is the defining quality of a rational thinker, who is able not only to assess the limits of others’ judgements but also one’s own.

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- Levitin, D. (2017) Weaponized Lies: how to think critically in the post-truth era, Penguin Random House.

# Critical thinking in action

## Argument analysis

Critical thinking focuses on explicitly **analysing arguments** employing the standards and principles that make it a fair, transparent, impartial skill.

**Argument analysis focuses on understanding how arguments are constructed according to the rules of reason**, as well as on the ways in which they may be corrupted through sophistic reasoning.

To this end, analysing real-life examples of fallacies, which are then critically examined and their flaws revealed, can help in tackling argumentative fallacies weaponised into fake news and disinformation.

We will look at **six types of fallacies**, explain why they are logically unsound and then identify them in real-life examples.



# Critical thinking in action: types of fallacies



**SLIPPERY SLOPE**

**POST HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC**

**AD HOMINEM**

**CUM HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC**

**FALSE DICHOTOMY**

**RED HERRING**



## Red herring

### Definition of red herring

Something small or inconsequential distracts attention from a relevant aspect, idea, argument

### Example of red herring

**The reporter's question:** Can you envision a way of supporting the universal background checks bill?

**Senator Lamar Alexander's answer:** Video games are a bigger problem than guns because video games affect people.



## Cum hoc ergo propter hoc

### Definition of cum hoc ergo propter hoc

“with this, therefore because of this” If two events are happening at the same time, then a causality is falsely assumed, and one is said to cause the other.

### Example of cum hoc ergo propter hoc

Hospitals are full of sick people. Therefore, hospitals make people sick.





# Post hoc ergo propter hoc

## Definition of post hoc ergo propter hoc

“after this, therefore because of this”

a faulty causal relationship based on the idea that if something happened before something else, then the first event caused the second one

## Example of post hoc ergo propter hoc

5G towers became operational and then the COVID 19 pandemic started. Therefore, the 5G towers caused the COVID 19 pandemic.



# Ad hominem

## Definition of ad hominem

an attack directed against a person's character, integrity, reasons rather than the position they are holding or the arguments they are presenting.

## Example of ad hominem

“[I]f Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think she'd get 5 percent of the vote. The only thing she's got going is the woman's card, and the beautiful thing is, women don't like her.”

(Donald Trump in the 2016 election campaign)



# Slippery slope

## Definition of slippery slope

Claim about a series of events that will unstoppably occur and culminate in one major, negative event

## Example of slippery slope

Liz Wheeler, American news anchor for OAN presents an aquarium's decision not to announce the gender of a penguin.

“We should ask, where does radical leftist gender ideology lead? Do liberals want human children to be genderless? If so, why? Is this based on biology? And if not, then what? What happens when human children are raised genderless? If gender is destroyed, doesn't that destroy traditional gender roles? And if gender roles are destroyed, doesn't that destroy gendered relationships? And if gendered relationships are destroyed, doesn't that destroy traditional marriage? And if traditional marriage is destroyed, doesn't that destroy the family units? And if people aren't dependent on their families, then who do they depend on? That's right, the government. Which is the goal of liberals in the first place. Don't let transgender penguins fool you.



# False dichotomy

## Definition of false dichotomy

oversimplification of a complex situation and forceful reduction to only two options, out of which only one could be correct

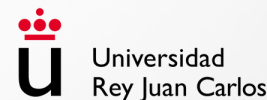
## Example of false dichotomy

"I had a choice, as well: either to trust the word of a madman, or to defend the American people. Faced with that choice, I will defend America every time"

President George W. Bush regarding the Iraq invasion to prevent Saddam Hussein from using WMD.



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# Critical Thinking 2

3.2.2

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## Rhetorical analysis

- 1 Focuses on public discourse
- 2 Examines how it is constructed
- 3 Focuses on rhetorical devices to discern persuasive mechanisms

## Rhetorical devices

- 1 Convey meaning persuasively
- 2 Attract a target audience
- 3 Help the audience to visualise the message
- 4 Stimulate the audience's imagination
- 5 Stir emotions
- 6 Create memorable images

# CRITICAL THINKING IN ACTION: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS



Analogy

Antithesis

Alliteration

Anaphora

Personification

Rhetorical  
question

Hyperbole

Repetition

Metaphor

Humour

Irony

Litote

Paralepsis

Euphemism





01

# Analogy

Indicates similarities between the features of objects, situations, events, persons and indicates that what is applicable to one instance, can be transferred to the other.



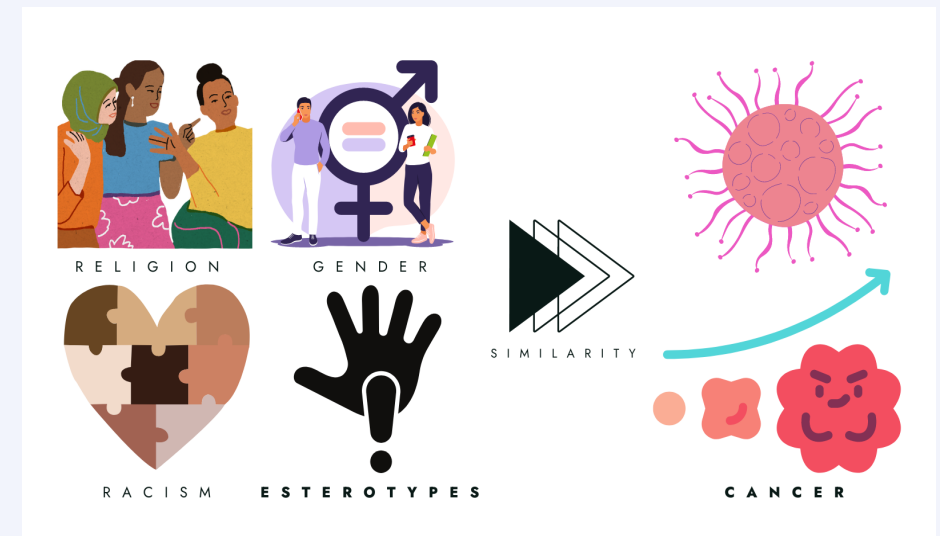
## Why does the author use it?

- a) To explain how cancer treatments function and how they should be approached by society.
- b) To present the types of stereotypes which still exist in the American society.
- c) To encourage people to fight against discrimination with the same conviction as they have when fighting cancer.

SEND

## 1.1 Activity

“Stereotypes about racism, religion, gender or anything else, they’re like cancer. If you had a tumour, you wouldn’t quietly hope that it slowly disappears. You would zap it with chemotherapy, and cut it out, and try every experimental treatment until it was gone. This is no different.” (Arnold Schwarzenegger 17.08.2017).

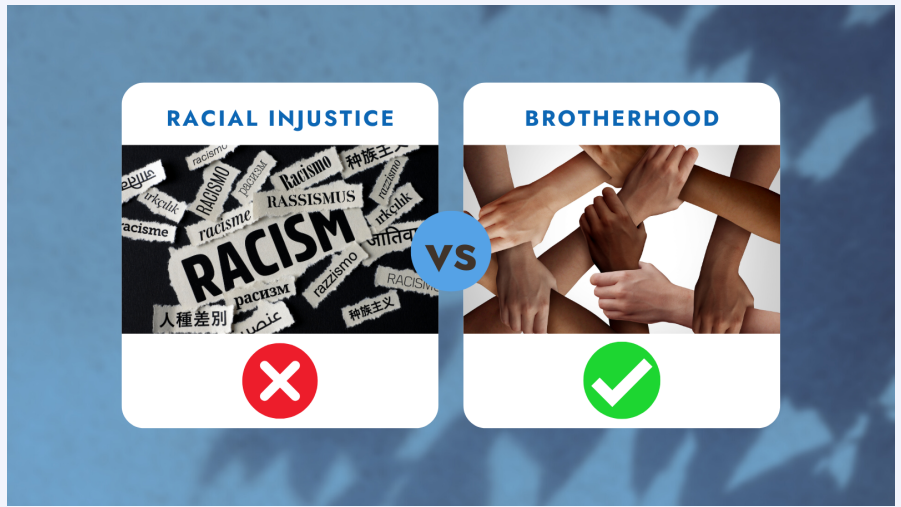




02

# Antithesis

Concepts, ideas, events, positions, situations are placed in a clear-cut opposition, so that only one option seems acceptable.



## Why does the author use it?

a) To starkly contrast the existing and the desirable state of society.

b) To show the path forward.

c) To present American society.

SEND

2.1

## Activity

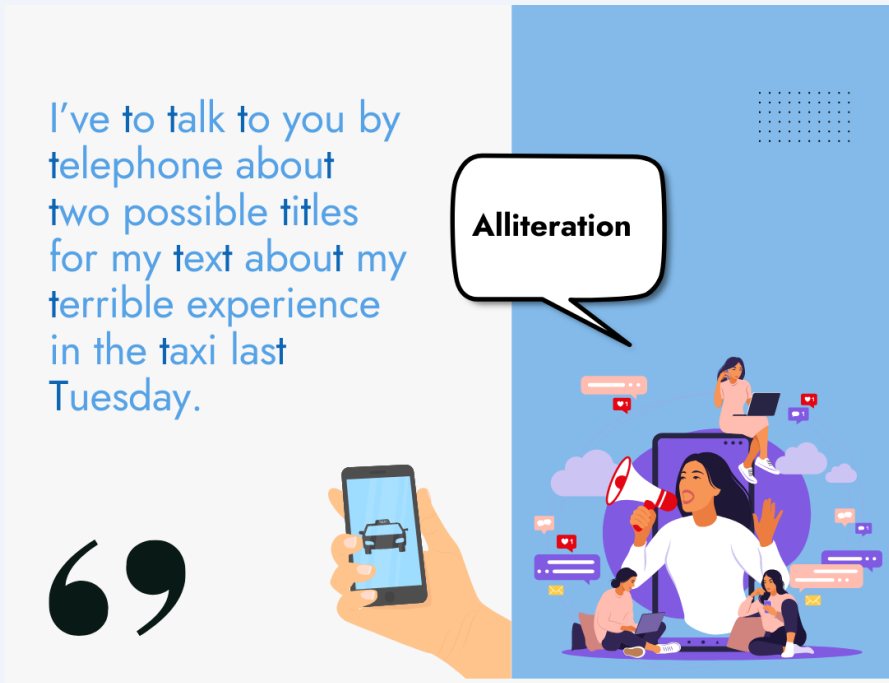
“Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.”  
(Martin Luther King Jr., I Have a Dream speech)”.



03

# Alliteration

Represents the excessive repetition of a sound or group of sounds in the same sentence to draw the attention.



I've to talk to you by telephone about two possible titles for my text about my terrible experience in the taxi last Tuesday.

**Alliteration**

## Why does the author use it?

a) To link the two words in each either/or sequence together and to guide the audience's choice to the one that favours the speaker.

b) To make the sentence sound good and have structure.

c) To enumerate the options that the audience has as far as his presidency is concerned.

SEND

3.1

## Activity

“We must choose between greatness or gridlock, results or resistance, vision or vengeance, incredible progress or pointless destruction.” (President Donald Trump, State of the Union speech, 2019).



04

# Anaphora

The repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of several, consecutive paragraphs/sentences to emphasise an idea and to make it more memorable for the public.



## Why does the author use it?

To explain in which areas of America there was racial injustice.

To create a rhythm to the speech and to make the envisioned rightful future more accessible and memorable.

To present his family dream for the future of America.

SEND

4.1

## Activity

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!"

(Martin Luther King Jr., I Have a Dream speech).





05

# Personification

Transfers human characteristics to inanimate objects or phenomena.



## Why does the author use it?

To provide a perspective on how money can be made on financial markets.

To make it easier for audiences to understand what is happening on the financial markets.

To explain how financial markets function.

SEND

5.1

## Activity

The financial markets fought hard to secure their gains this week.



06

# Rhetorical question

Question to which the answer is implied in the way it is formulated.



## Why does the author use it?

To explain how the immigration system in America works and what kinds of jobs immigrants can have

To present how and why children can be separated from their families if they immigrate to America

To guide the audience's answers and make them accept that immigrants should be given the chance to integrate

SEND

6.1

## Activity

“Are we a nation that tolerates the hypocrisy of a system where workers who pick our fruit and make our beds never have a chance to get right with the law? Or are we a nation that gives them a chance to make amends, take responsibility, and give their kids a better future? Are we a nation that accepts the cruelty of ripping children from their parents’ arms? Or are we a nation that values families, and works together to keep them together?”  
(President Barack Obama speech on migration, 20.11.2014).



07

# Hyperbole

Deliberate exaggeration for impact.



## Why does the author use it?

To emphasise how dangerous fear is.

To explain that fear itself is the only obstacle.

To express his own great fear.

SEND

7.1

## Activity

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt Inaugural address, 04.03.1933).



08

# Repetition

A word or several words are repeated to increase their impact and retention.



8.1

## Activity

### Why does the author use it?

To present all the places they will be fighting.

To emphasise the scale of their defensive systems.

To emphasise their determination to fight, no matter the conditions.

SEND

“We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.”  
(Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 04.06.1940).

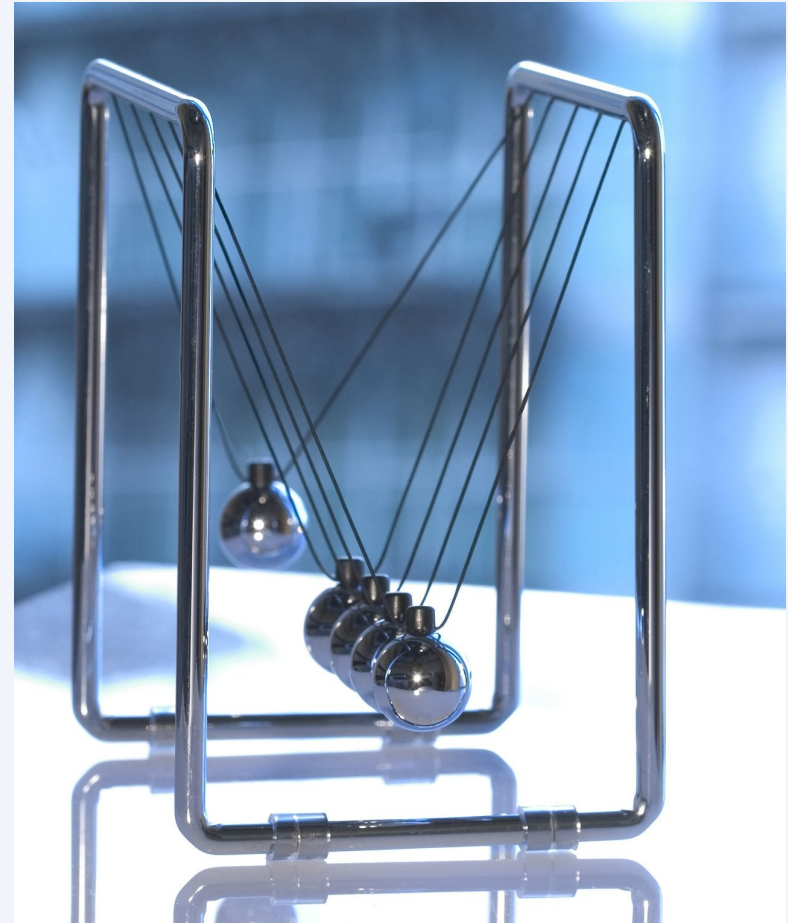




09

# Metaphor

Symbolically representing or associating concepts, ideas that would not or have not been associated before to draw attention.



## Why does the author use it?

To explain the process by which the international marketplace monetises humiliation online and offline

To stir people's emotions with respect to public shaming and humiliation in order to encourage them to be more empathetic

To propose an invasion of internet producers of shameful content in order to shut them down

SEND

9.1

## Activity

"This invasion of others is a raw material, efficiently and ruthlessly mined, packaged and sold at a profit. A marketplace has emerged where public humiliation is a commodity, and shame is an industry."

"Public shaming as a blood sport has to stop, and it's time for an intervention on the internet and in our culture."

"Online, we've got a compassion deficit, an empathy crisis." (Monika Lewinsky, The Price of Shame, TED talk).



10

# Humour

Unexpected associations, plays upon words, plot twists, situation reversals that generate laughter.



## Why does the author use it?

To gain the audience's sympathy and capture their attention.

To explain how to prepare a speech.

To market their books.

SEND

10.1

## Activity

"The first thing I would like to say is 'thank you.' Not only has Harvard given me an extraordinary honour, but the weeks of fear and nausea I have endured at the thought of giving this commencement address have made me lose weight. A win-win situation! Now all I have to do is take deep breaths, squint at the red banners and convince myself that I am at the world's largest Gryffindor reunion." (J.K. Rowling Harvard commencement speech 05.06.2008).



11

# Irony

Something is stated directly, but a different meaning, an evaluation, a judgment, an opposing view is transmitted indirectly and needs to be decoded properly by the recipient.



## Why does the author use it?

To make obvious the absurdity of giving up all airplane travel.

To offer an eco-friendly alternative to traditional planes.

To promote a new species of animal.

SEND

11.1

## Activity

“The Green New Deal calls for the elimination of all airplanes.

This might seem merely ambitious for politicians who represent the densely populated northeast. But how is this supposed to work for our fellow citizens who don't live between Washington and Boston? In a future without air travel, how are people supposed to get around the vast expanses of, say, Alaska during the winter? Tauntauns: a beloved species of repto-mammals native to the ice planet of Hoth. While not as efficient as planes or snow-mobiles, these hairy, bipedal space lizards offer their own unique benefits. Not only are tauntauns carbon-neutral, but according to one report “a long time ago” and “far, far away,” they may even be fully recyclable for their warmth on especially cold nights.” (Senator Robert Lee, Remarks on the Green New Deal, 2019).



12

# Litote

Deliberate understatement for impact.



## Why does the author use it?

To propose an analogy between solving political problems and raising a family.

To understate the impact of climate change and the drastic measures needed to counter it and to propose a pseudo-solution (in fact a red herring).

To overstate how important having children and raising them properly is for developing a functional society.

SEND

12.1

## Activity

“This is the real solution to climate change: babies. Climate change is an engineering problem – not social engineering, but the real kind. It’s a challenge of creativity, ingenuity, and technological invention. And problems of human imagination are not solved by more laws, but by more humans! The courage needed to solve climate change is nothing compared with the courage needed to start a family. The true heroes of this story aren’t politicians or social media activists. They are moms and dads, and the little boys and girls they are, at this moment, putting down for naps... helping with their homework... building tree houses... and teaching how to tie their shoes. The planet does not need us to “think globally, and act locally” so much as it needs us to think family, and act personally.” (Senator Robert Lee, Remarks on the Green New Deal, 2019).

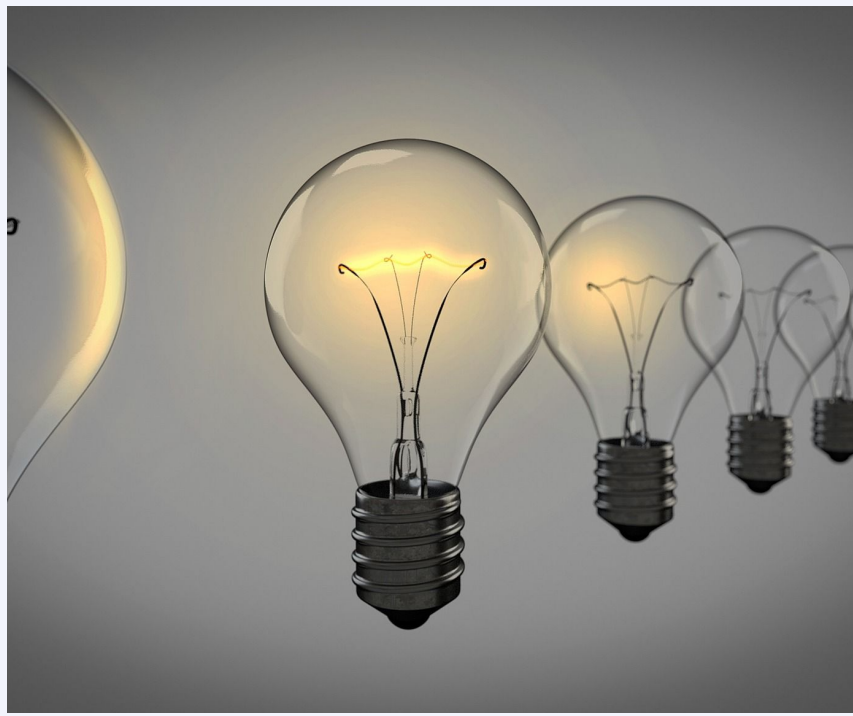




13

## Paralepsis

Introducing an idea, concept, event, etc. while at the same time claiming that it will not be discussed, thus allowing the speaker not to assume responsibility for said idea, concept, event, etc.



## Why does the author use it?

To subtly create an association between democrat presidents and epidemics and to suggest the latter are caused by democrat leadership.

To explain the cyclicity of different epidemics in America in the last half a century.

To give an example of coincidences that can occur on the grand scale of history.

SEND

13.1

## Activity

“I find it interesting that it was back in the 1970s that the swine flu broke out then under another Democrat President, Jimmy Carter. I’m not blaming this on President Obama, I just think it’s an interesting coincidence.” (Michele Bachmann, 28 April 2009).



14

# Euphemism

Replacing a negatively associated phrase with something neutral or positive sounding.



## Why does the author use it?

To explain that there are different versions of reality

To answer a reporter's question

To avoid using the word "lies"

SEND

14.1

## Activity

Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to the President, tells Chuck Todd that the US Press Secretary Sean Spicer used "alternative facts" in his first statement to the Press Corps, when referring to the number of people present at President Donald Trump's inauguration. (Kellyanne Conway, January 22, 2017).

# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



A screenshot of a video player interface. The main content area shows a split-screen news broadcast. On the left, a man in a dark suit and tie is speaking, with a location tag "WASHINGTON, DC" below him. On the right, a woman with blonde hair in a dark blue top is smiling, with a location tag "THE WHITE HOUSE" below her. Above the man's video, there is a red circular icon with "CI" and a black text box containing "1. Kellyanne Conway\_NBC\_News" and "Grupo Ciberimaginario". The video player controls at the bottom include a play button, a progress bar showing "01:30", and icons for volume, closed captions, subtitles, settings, and full screen. The "vimeo" logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the player. The background of the video player has a blue and gold gradient.



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



**Kellyanne Conway answers Chuck Todd's question.**

False

True

SEND

**Kellyanne Conway repeats part of the reporter's question (Why do that?) in her answer (the President did many things yesterday...) to make it seem that she is answering the question.**

True

False

SEND



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



**Kellyanne Conway speaks about the problems of President Obama’s healthcare policy, known as Obamacare and about the number of people who voted for Donald Trump. She does this in order to:**

Explain that crowd size matters when defining the popularity of a president.

Divert attention from the issue she was asked about: presenting false information about crowd size at President Trump’s inauguration.

Indicate that President Trump had a larger audience at his inauguration than President Obama.

SEND



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



A video player interface showing a split-screen interview. On the left, a man in a dark suit and tie is speaking from "WASHINGTON, DC". On the right, Kellyanne Conway is speaking from "THE WHITE HOUSE". The video title is "2. Kellyanne Conway\_NBC News" and the channel is "Grupo Ciberimaginario". The video player includes a play button, a progress bar at 01:13, and various control icons (volume, closed captions, chat, settings, full screen, share) and the Vimeo logo. The background of the video player is blue with "MEET THE PRESS #MTP" branding.



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



**Kellyanne Conway uses an argumentative fallacy in her answer: “I want to have a great, open relationship with our press. But look what happened the day before, talking about falsehoods. We allowed the press to come into the Oval Office and witness President Trump signing executive orders. (...) What happens almost immediately? A falsehood is told about removing Martin Luther King Jr.’s bust from the Oval Office.” Which argumentative fallacy is it?**

Post hoc ergo propter hoc – she presents an inaccurate causal relationship between two events.

Red herring – she diverts attention from the question by introducing an unrelated subject into the discussion

Euphemism – she replaces negative words with positive ones

SEND



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



A screenshot of a video player interface. The video content shows a split-screen interview. On the left, a man in a dark suit and tie is speaking, with a location tag "WASHINGTON, DC" below him. On the right, Kellyanne Conway is smiling, with a location tag "THE WHITE HOUSE" below her. The video player includes a red "CI" icon in a circle at the top left, a title "3. Kellyanne Conway\_ NBC News" and subtitle "Grupo Ciberimaginario" in a black box, and a vertical toolbar on the right with icons for heart, refresh, and share. At the bottom, there is a play button, a progress bar showing "01:13", and various control icons (volume, CC, subtitles, settings, full screen) along with the "vimeo" logo. The NBC News logo is visible in the bottom right of the video frame.



# Critical thinking in action: conversation analysis



**Kellyanne Conway says to Chuck Todd “don’t be so overly dramatic”. What type of argumentative fallacy is this statement?**

Ad hominem – she attacks the person asking the question, rather than answer the question

Red herring – she introduces an unrelated subject into the discussion

False dichotomy – she presents only two possible

SEND

**In answer to Chuck Todd’s comment that alternative facts are not facts but falsehoods, Kellyanne Conway uses several statements beginning with “Do you think it’s a fact or not that...?” Why does she do this?**

To appear to answer the comment but without actually addressing the problem of the press secretary’s false statement.

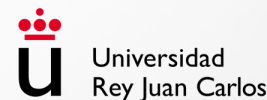
To distract attention from the falsehood.

SEND





# Digital cOMpetences INformatiOn EcoSystem



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Author of contents: **Ruxandra Buluc (MVNIA)**

Audiovisual and multimedia production: **CIBERIMAGINARIO**  
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# Media and digital literacies

3.2.4

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064447](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064447)



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The video player displays a title card with a dark blue background featuring a network of white lines and nodes. In the center, there is a logo consisting of three stylized human figures arranged in a triangle. Below the logo, the word "DOMINOES" is written in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Underneath that, the subtitle "digital resilience to disinformation" is written in a smaller, italicized white font. At the bottom of the player, there is a progress bar with a play button on the left, a time display showing "02:05", and a set of control icons including volume, closed captions, subtitles, settings, and full screen on the right.

# DOMINOES

*digital resilience to disinformation*

02:05

# Media literacy

**Media literacy** represents a widely invoked solution facing the dangers of misinformation, disinformation and the use of information to cause harm.

Also found as “information literacy” and/or in close relation with “media education”, media literacy can be simply defined as the ability to:

- Decode and understand media messages (including the political and economic ecosystems in which they are produced and exist)
- Assess the influence of those messages on human beliefs, feelings, and behaviours
- Repost/ create mediated content thoughtfully and conscientiously

**Literacy** is understood as a desirable state or “something we seek to achieve” (Leaning, 2017, 30), in which one has or aims for a level of understanding beyond simple competence based on cognitive skills and reasoning.

Definitions vary from the ability to access, understand and produce media content in a variety of contexts to an informed and skilful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages.



## Eight fundamental media literacy characteristics (Silverblatt, 2008):

- 1 A critical thinking skill enabling audience members to develop **independent judgments** about media content
- 2 An understanding of **the process of mass communication**
- 3 An awareness of **the impact of media** on the individual and society
- 4 Strategies for **analysing and discussing** media messages
- 5 An understanding of media content as a **text that provides insight** into our culture and our lives
- 6 The ability to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content
- 7 Development of effective and responsible production skills
- 8 An understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners





# Check your knowledge

## Media literacy is characterised by these fundamental characteristics

An understanding of the process of mass communication

An understanding of the financial obligations of media practitioners

The ability to create and promote false information

An awareness of the impact of media on climate change and environment

SEND

## Media literacy is also found in close relation with

Mass education

Cognitive information

Computer education

Information literacy

SEND

## Media literacy fields of application are:

Fairplay system

Disinformation and misinformation

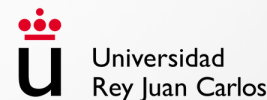
Political science

Audiovisual works and online content

SEND



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# Fact-checking, argument-checking, debunking and pre-bunking

Valentin Stoian | MVNIA

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## **FACT-CHECKING, ARGUMENT-CHECKING, DEBUNKING AND PRE-BUNKING**

This module 3.3. addresses the following contents:

1. The characteristics of fact-checking, de-bunking and pre-bunking,
2. The differences between these strategies to combat disinformation
3. The main advantages and disadvantages of each of these strategies
4. Practical exercises for each of these strategies



## UNIT OBJECTIVES

To understand:

- The main characteristics of fact-checking, de-bunking and pre-bunking
- The main differences between fact-checking and de-bunking
- To understand the main differences between de-bunking and pre-bunking
- At least two arguments for the efficiency of de-bunking as a strategy to combat disinformation
- At least two arguments for the inefficiency of de-bunking as a strategy to combat disinformation
- At least two arguments for the efficiency of pre-bunking as a strategy to combat disinformation
- At least two arguments for the inefficiency of pre-bunking as a strategy to combat disinformation
- Practical skills useful for de-bunking a piece of news that seems false
- Strategies used by disinformation actors to spread their message

# Ice-breaker

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION!

What is the name of the practice outlined in the following example?

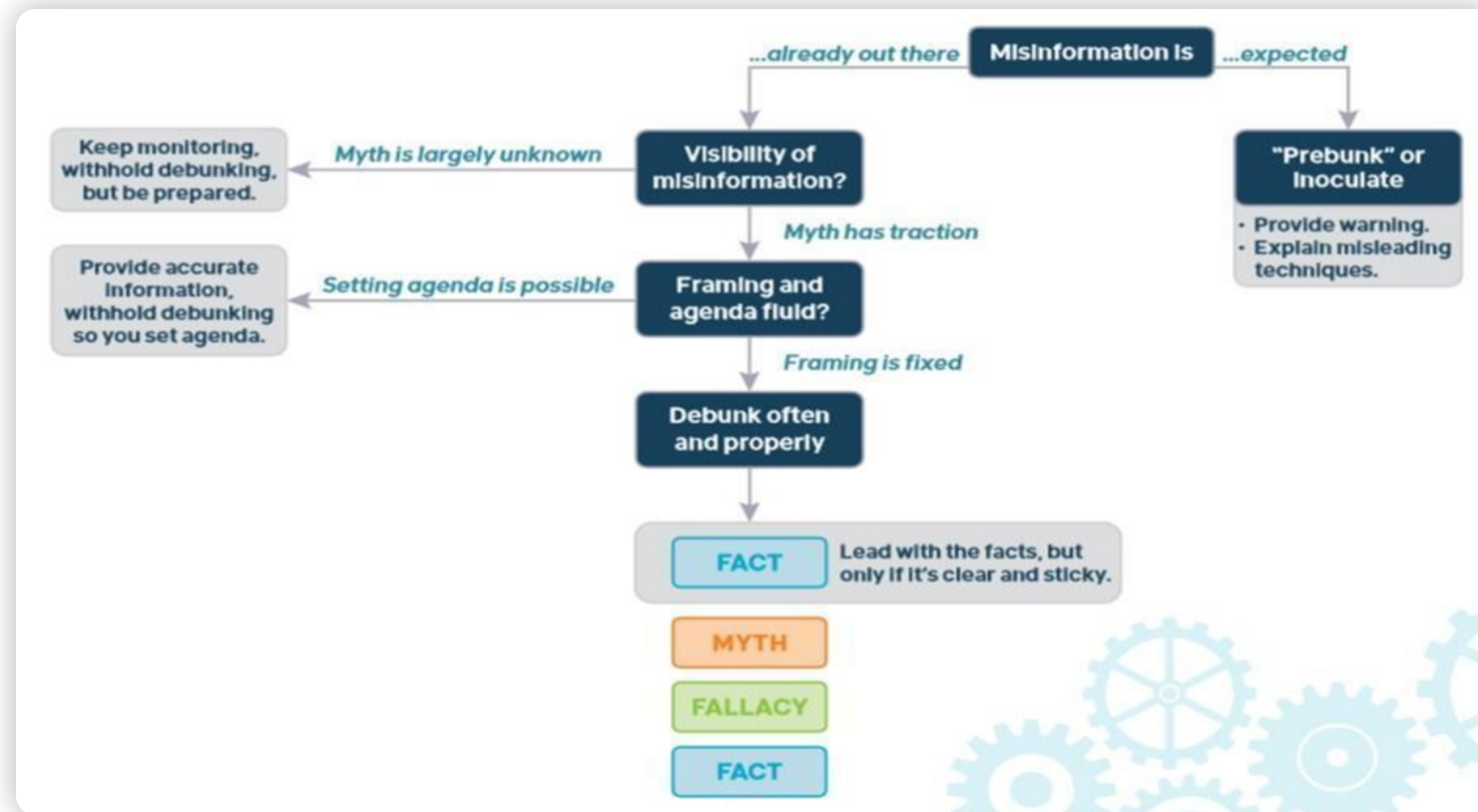
**Original news: “85% percent of university students university hate their professors”**

Follow-up statement by media watchdog NGO:

*The statement according to which 85% of students hate their professors is FALSE. The respective piece of news relates to a survey carried out two years ago, at two local universities, where students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their professors. 10% stated they were very dissatisfied, 30 % stated they were dissatisfied, 45% claimed they were mostly satisfied and 15 % claimed they were very satisfied.*



# The process of combating disinformation



# Fact checking and de-bunking

## Fact-checking

Can be defined as “continuous, consolidated practice of checking the veracity of public discourse” (Herrero & Herrera Damas, 2021, p. 51) or a “scrupulous analysis driven by one simple question – ‘How we do know that?’” (Mantzaris, 2018, p. 84).

Traditionally, fact checking, was associated with classical media, who would be involved in verifying claims made by different actors

The information landscape was, until recently, dominated by top-down communication by a few established actors such as states and large media producers







## Fact checking and de-bunking

- Fact-checking is not a simple “spell-checking process, since there does not exist a dictionary-style guidebook comprising all the possible facts or a software solution that can examine all documents and flag anytime something has been misstated as fact” (Mantzaris, 2018, p. 84).
  - Fact-checking does not limit itself only to correctly informing individuals, but extends to monitoring, spotting and disproving any piece of information
- Fact-checking represents an essential tool for online platforms, as they have transformed into the main source of information for the general public, keeping abreast of current events and news (Cotter, et al., 2022, p. 3).
- Fact-checking was initially the prerogative of media outlets but it has since extended to nonprofit entities, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations and academic institutions which joined the community of fact-checkers (Stencel, et al., 2022).
- In the 21st century, fact-checking begun to revolve around ensuring institutional accountability (Graves & Amazeen, 2019)
- Technological developments gave Internet users the opportunity to develop news-like content, and also allowed independent fact-checking sites (such as Snopes.com, Maldita.es) to establish in order to help dispel conspiracy theories and rumors while also trying to fill the role of watchdogs for politicians, journalists and other public figures (Cotter, et al., 2022, p. 3).
- In 2015 the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) was established at Poynter, “at the initiative of the checkers themselves who started to meet informally in 2014 in order to exchange good practices and also errors” (Herrero & Herrera Damas, 2021, p. 66).

# De-bunking – the retroactive approach

## De-bunking

A subset of fact-checking- aimed at pieces of news and statements considered to be disinformation


It is considered **the “retroactive” approach to combating disinformation.**

Aims to correct mistaken statements once they have spread in the media and to show people why these are, most likely, intentional mistakes.



# Fact checking and de-bunking

## *Main differences*

- 1 Debunking may be partisan** (if conducted by governments to expose certain actors), while **fact-checking is impartial**
- 2 Debunking is targeted on a particular actor or a specific topic.** The target is chosen in accordance to the effects it could produce if the mis- or disinformation is left unchallenged; while **fact-checking is broad in scope** and targets any mis- or disinformation.
- 3 Debunking is strategic**, as it prioritizes its targets and does not focus on everything with equal effort. Some mis- or disinformation attempts, which are not perceived as posing threats to the debunkers interests and/or priorities, are not addressed. 





## Fact checking and de-bunking

### *Main differences*

- Debunking is guided and informed by the principle that mis- and disinformation should not go unchallenged. Fact-checking, on the other hand, is more neutral.
- Debunking also exhibits additional traits:
  - a) **debate-shaping** as its efforts are directed at preventing or correcting manipulation of public debate.
  - b) **transparent** regarding the debunker's actions, objectives and funding.
  - c) **awareness-raising** because they also strive to educate with respect to manipulative techniques (Pemmet & Lindwall 2021 16-17).
- Fact-checking also employs debunking techniques in order to expose the process behind the falsehoods, as well as the process through which they have been revealed.

## Infodemics > *The result of excess disinformation*



The combination of fake information and easy dissemination created the phenomenon of infodemics - “superabundance or excess of information, including false or misleading information, regarding a topic” (World Health Organization, 2022)



This was especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic when the world was flooded with a mix of false and true information on the nature and transmission of the virus.

# Is de-bunking effective?

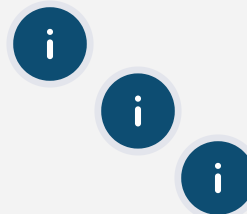
## DE-BUNKING

### **The speed of circulation argument**

False information travels at six times the speed of the later correction (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 2018)

**The cognitive bias argument** - Cognitive biases also make de-bunking less efficient.

- Confirmation bias
- Conspiracy mentality
- "Cognitive laziness"



# Is de-bunking effective?

## DE-BUNKING

### **The backfire effect**

A stronger adhesion to pre-existing beliefs or thoughts when people are confronted with corrective information that challenges these beliefs or thoughts (Pennycook et al. 2020; Walter et al. 2019, Nyhan 2021; Ecker et al., 2022; Ecker et al., 2020)

### **The political effect**

Vallone et al (1985) argue that there is a tendency for partisans to view media coverage of controversial events as unfairly biased and hostile to the position they advocate. Walter et al. (2019) claim that holders of partisan positions are more vulnerable to disinformation and misinformation consistent with their own views, but also will likely be more resistant to debunking and fact-checking processes, if the content challenges "pre-existing beliefs, ideology, and knowledge"

# Is de-bunking effective?

- Pennycook et al (2020) investigated whether people used to see pieces of news marked as “verified for accuracy” are more likely to be believed that news which does not have such a marker as more accurate.
- They conclude that unmarked headlines are viewed as more accurate and are more likely to be shared. **Therefore, debunking efforts should be undertaken to provide accuracy warnings regarding trending topics**
- Nyhan (2020) found evidence that that polarization on controversial topics can be reduced by explaining the scientific consensus on the topic. Once people have been told that consensus on climate change reaches 97%, then they tended to be more accepting of the fact that climate change exists.







## Is de-bunking effective?

- Evidence for the effectiveness of fact debunking has been mixed, as studies have found both evidence in favor and against the usefulness of de-bunking as a tool to combat disinformation. In addition to what has been discussed, some of the following issues have been identified in the literature on the effectiveness of de-bunking.
- Pre-existing attitudes and beliefs play a fundamental role in the acceptance of mis- and disinformation content by audiences (Ewoldsen & Rhodes, 2020).
  - o According to the priming theory (Berkowitz, 1984), people react to the messages they received depending on how they interpret the message, the ideas they bring with them and the thoughts that the message evokes.
- Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) - individuals, struggle to accept new information that challenges the previously accepted, and actively seek information that reinforces the previously accepted belief or behavior -to reduce the dissonance and reinstate the balance

- Brashier et al (2021) noticed that correcting misinformation may have an effect in the short term, but might fade in the longer term and tested which for of fact-checks produced the longest lasting results.
- The backfire effect has also been associated with emotional reactions. Trevors (2022) established a predictive relationship between the refutation of contents and the emotions provoked in individuals.
  - o Confrontation with information that provokes negative emotions might lead to that individual experiencing discomfort, and thus that individuals would try to avoid it, by forgetting the (fact-checked) information that is uncomfortable for them.
  - o By avoiding potential discomfort through customized fact-checking strategies, fact-checkers may be able to reduce the persistence of misinformation in holders of partisan positions.

## What would you do in order to verify the accuracy of the claims?

**For this exercise, course participants will be divided into 4 groups**

Each group should answer the question in maximum 10 minutes and to provide at least three actions they would undertake

### Imagine the following scenario:

Imagine that you have been recently employed by a fact-checking organization and that you now have to evaluate the veracity of a piece of information regarding the possibility that the COVID-19 virus was released from a laboratory where biological experiments were conducted by a state actor. The news is promoted by a so-called university professor, who claims that he has recently published findings on this topic. At the same time, locations of the biological laboratory” are presented in a film on the topic, accompanied by ominous music.

## Pre-bunking > *The pro-active approach*

**Pre-bunking** aims to make the person more immune to disinformation before he or she is exposed to it.

**Similar to a vaccine** - once a person comes in contact with a "weakened" version of the practice of disinformation, then they will become immune when encountering that practice in the real world.

Based on the **premise of reverse psychology** – when an agent has to play the role of the opponent, in this case a spreader of disinformation, one better understands the techniques used and then becomes immune to them

## Pre-bunking > *Some strategies attempted*

Used to be conducted through **teaching in class on logical fallacies** – studies have shown a positive effect of pre-bunking on fake news detection – if one is taught about logical fallacies, then one will recognize them when exposed to them

In order to reach a wider audience, the use of **serious gaming has been found to be very useful** for pre-bunking – these rely on reverse psychology – Go Viral!, Bad News!

The approach is premised on the idea that it **is better to create correct mental models** than to try to fit correct information in already mistaken models

## Pre-bunking > *The effects discovered*

### The inoculation treatment applied

- Van den Linden et al. (2017) and Cook et al. (2017) both conducted an inoculation experiment where people were presented with disinformation about climate change as well as an inoculation treatment through warnings about disinformation techniques.
- **Those who had received "inoculation" before seeing the particular piece of disinformation tended to rate the accuracy of the false statements as much lower than those that had not been exposed to the inoculation treatment.**

### Pre-bunking also exhibits certain limitations

- Moderated by partisanship as the effect is diminished for people from one side of the political spectrum.
- **Setting:** pre-bunking interventions are considerably more efficient in a laboratory setting than in the real world. Finally, the inoculation tends to wane after a while, as people are again exposed to the usual disinformation (Roozenbeck and van den Linden 2022).





- Cook (2016), strongly criticises the debunking approach.
  - o He argues that debunking is inefficient because people build mental models in which the false information fits neatly.
  - o According to Cook, people prefer complete, even if incorrect, mental models over incomplete ones.
  - o The alternative is to help people build correct mental models through inoculation, especially by preemptively exposing the logical fallacy employed to spread a particular piece of disinformation
- A series of studies summarized by Lewandowsky and van den Linden (2021) have shown the efficiency of inoculation against fake news.
  - o van den Linden et al. (2017) and Cook et al. (2017)- inoculation experiment where people were presented with disinformation about climate change as well as an inoculation treatment through warnings about disinformation techniques.
  - o Those who had received "inoculation" before seeing the particular piece of disinformation tended to rate the accuracy of the false statements as much lower than those that had not been exposed to the inoculation treatment.
- Inoculation or pre-bunking has shown consistent results in stopping people from believing and sharing disinformation. By giving people a forewarning about the strategies that actors spreading disinformation use, pre-bunking convinces people to stop and think about what they are seeing.

# Inspiring practices to combat disinformation

Counter-disinformation toolkit overview ([available at RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)) - a freely available toolkit for communicators to help them develop the necessary skills and competences to tackle disinformation and its effects on companies, campaigns, society as a whole.



**The following six stages need to be taken into consideration when fighting a disinformation campaign:**

- 1 Recognise** - understand the types of disinformation that exist in the overcrowded media environment
- 2 Early warning** - overview of the tools available to spot disinformation in a timely manner and monitor the media environment
- 3 Situational insight** - refers to the ways in which communicators can turn information into actionable insight for decision-makers

- 4 Impact analysis** - presents the structural analysis techniques that can assist communicators in predicting the potential impact of disinformation and produce objective assessment
- 5 Strategic communications** - maps the communication skills that could be employed to develop communication strategies meant to increase credibility, create proactive, engaging content for the target audience.
- 6 Tracking effectiveness** - tools to measure the effectiveness of strategic communication campaigns

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and useful resources

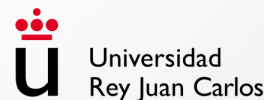


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# Fact-checking and de-bunking

3.3.1

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064516](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064516)



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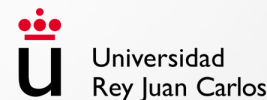
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# How to overcome the weaknesses of de-bunking

3.3.2

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064551](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064551)



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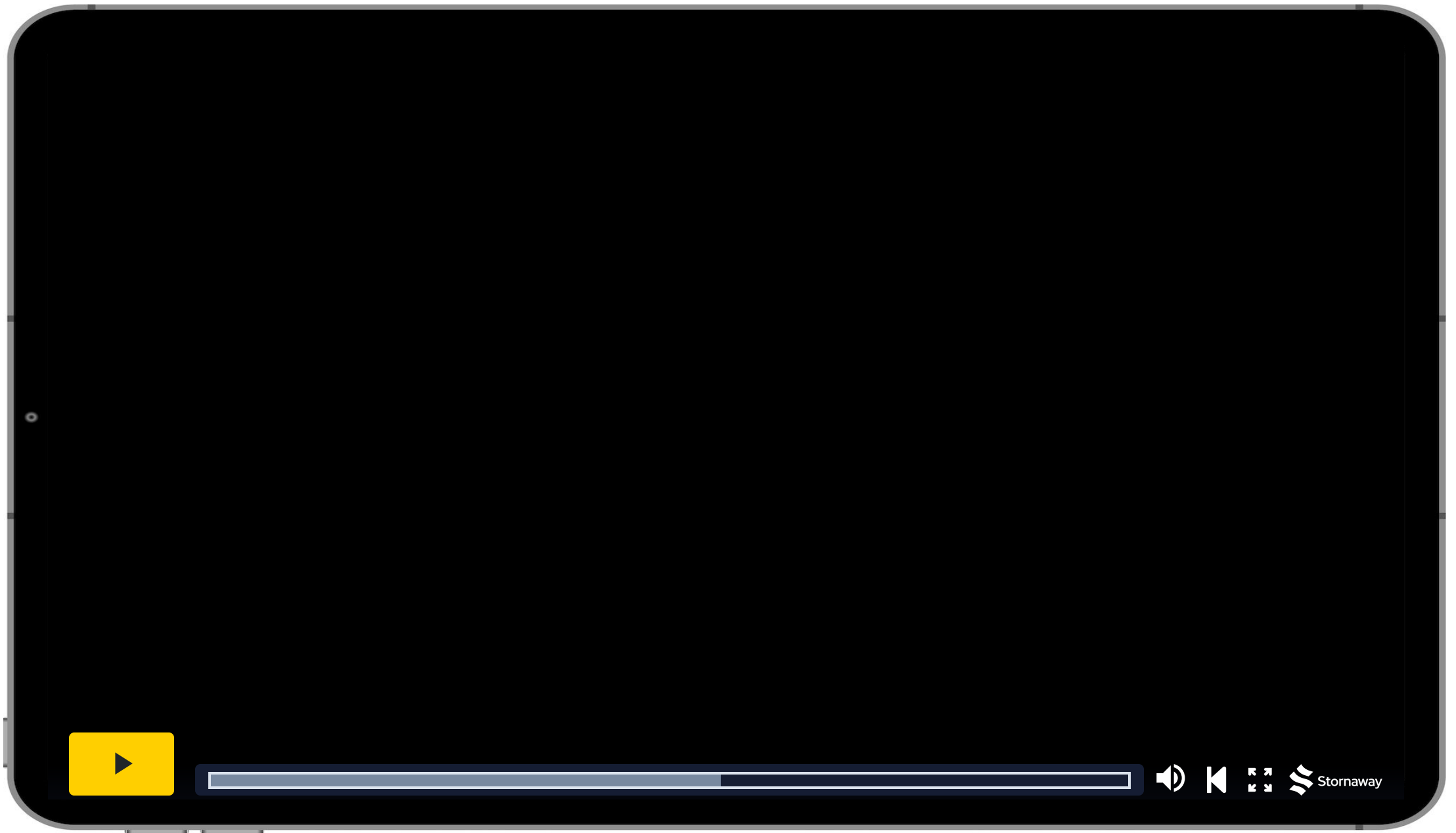


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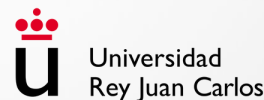
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# Pre -bunking - the pro-active approach to combating disinformation

3.3.3

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064562](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064562)



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PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

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Similar to a vaccine - once a person comes in contact with a "weakened" version of the practice of disinformation, then they will become **immune** when encountering that practice in the real world.



PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

Based on the premise of **reverse psychology** – when an agent has to play the role of the opponent, in this case a spreader of disinformation, one better understands the techniques used and then becomes immune to them.

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# PRE-BUNKING

The approach is premised on the idea that it is better to create **correct mental models** than to try to fit correct information in already mistaken models

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# PRE-BUNKING

Used to be conducted through teaching in class on logical fallacies – studies have shown a positive effect of pre-bunking on **fake news detection**.

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# PRE-BUNKING

The use of **serious gaming** has been found to be very useful for pre-bunking –these rely on reverse psychology –

***Go Viral!***

PLAY ▶

***Bad News!***

PLAY ▶



PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

- **The inoculation treatment applied:**
- Van den Linden et al. (2017) and Cook et al. (2017) both conducted an **inoculation experiment** where people were presented with disinformation about climate change as well as an inoculation treatment through warnings about disinformation techniques.
- Those who had received "inoculation" before seeing the particular piece of disinformation tended to rate the accuracy of the false statements as much lower than those that had not been exposed to the inoculation treatment.

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[+ INFO](#)



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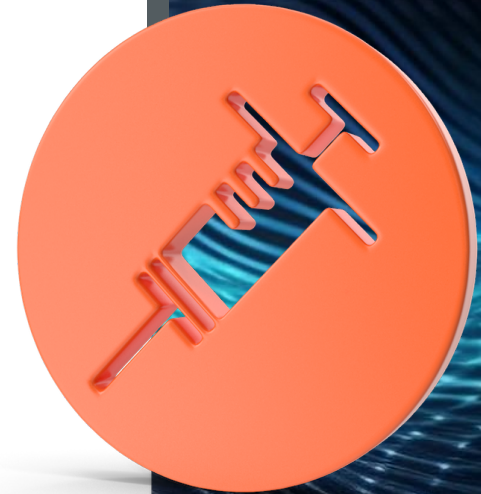
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# PRE-BUNKING

- **Pre-bunking also exhibits certain limitations:**
- **Moderated by partisanship** as the effect is diminished for people from one side of the political spectrum.
- **Setting:** pre-bunking interventions are considerably more efficient in a laboratory setting than in the real world. Finally, the inoculation tends to wane after a while, as people are again exposed to the usual disinformation (Roozenbeck and van den Linden 2022).

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PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

- Inspiring **practices to combat disinformation**
- **Counter-disinformation toolkit overview** (available at RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit - GCS): a freely available toolkit for communicators to help them develop the necessary skills and competences **to tackle disinformation and its effects** on companies, campaigns, society as a whole.

 LINK

PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

- The following six stages need to be taken into consideration when fighting a disinformation campaign:

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PROGRESS:

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# PRE-BUNKING

## Congratulations!

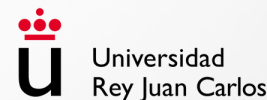
Now you know what pre-bunking is  
and how it is used to combat  
misinformation!!



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# Evaluation activity 3.4

## S3. Mitigating the threats and building resilience to disinformation

[doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064267](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10064267)



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# Exercise in Groups



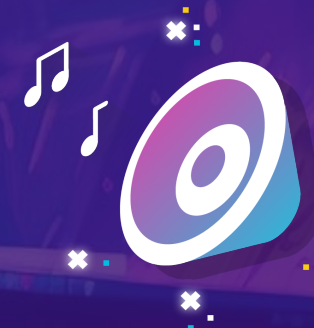
Running time:  
**40 minutes**



Students split into  
**groups**



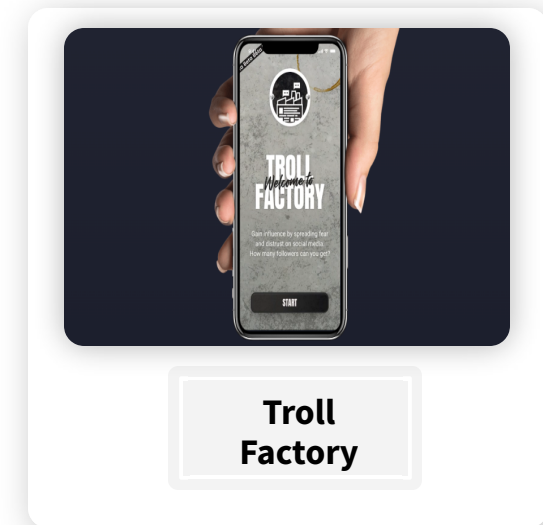
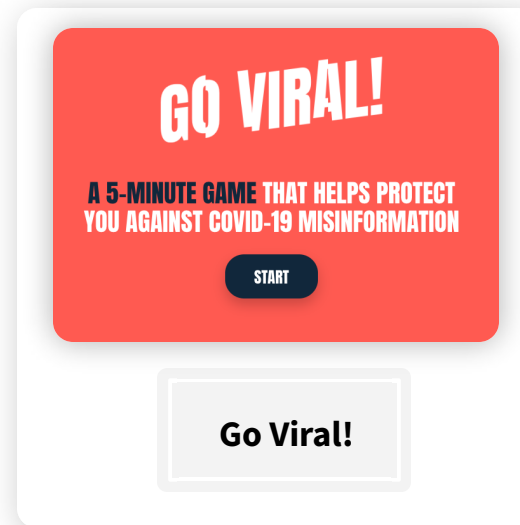
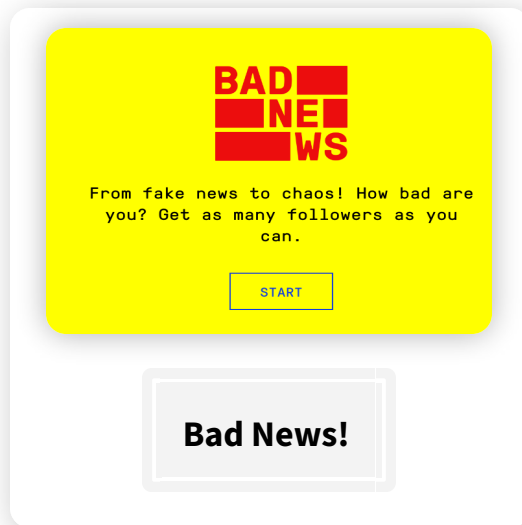
Students try out a series of games designed to show how misinformation spreads and how to recognize the strategies and techniques used to do so.



Each group should appoint  
**1 representative** for taking notes (in addition to engage in discussion) and present the results

# Method

- 1** Students in each group distribute these games so that they have played all three together to compare them.  
The students should play one of these games for about 15 minutes.





## Method

- 2** In each group, participants discuss:
  - What are the similarities and differences in the approach of the each game?
  - What strategies the spreaders of disinformation represented in the game used to enhance the reach of their message.
  - Why do you think they are effective?
  - How can they be counteracted?
  
- 3** A representative of the group presents their results in a maximum of 5 minutes.

## How to arrive to Móstoles for tomorrow session

### Location

<https://goo.gl/maps/WkNur55eV4Tfskrp6>



**9:00 at the University main  
entrance**

Mentrot station  
**Univerdad Rey Juan Carlos**

0034 660546985

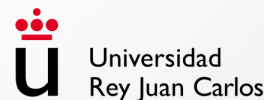
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