

## HANDBOOK

## News and Hoaxes

Project co-funded by European Union funds (ERDF, IPA, ENI)

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### **Project Summary**

Citizen's competence is of crucial importance for active political participation, which is one of the main components of good governance and sustainable democracy. Especially in the Eastern part of the Danube region, political participation is stagnating. Particularly worrisome are the apathy and lack of political interest on the side of younger population. Furthermore, in the last years, we witness political developments that result in deterioration of democratic standards in many parts of the region. The core element of the citizen's competence is high level of media literacy. It is necessary for citizens' reflection of social reality and their resilience to negative media phenomena, like hate speech and fake news.

The main objective of the project is to improve democratic transnational governance by developing transnational media literacy observatory, based on cooperation between different relevant stakeholders. In many countries of the Danube region the development of competences of media literacy and active citizenship are far behind more developed parts of Europe. This observatory will serve as a mechanism for increasing media literacy and thus strengthening citizens' competences what will contribute to development of sustainable democracy. The main target groups are the youth and the people who work with them. For the purpose of strengthening it, the observatory will provide tools, available for both young people as well as their educators.

The project will establish observatory for media literacy that will provide instruments for scrutinising media contents, training tools and policy recommendations for upgrading media literacy in relation with other civic skills. Outputs include: capacity building and training tools, web-based interface and policy recommendations. The core activities of the project are: mapping of practices and dissemination of information, developing learning system, designing web training platform, and pilot testing.

### How to work with this Handbook and interactive presentation

Dear pupils,

you have just received a handbook that is designed for you and for your work with the presentation in the class. You will find information on how to work with individual slides, what is their main goal and you will find some tips for a better understanding of the topic.

The handbook also includes a list of literature, thanks to which you can acquire or expand knowledge that relates mainly to a specific topic of the presentation.

If you see an "i" icon on the slide in the lower left corner, click on it. Under it, there is additional information or examples that will help you better understand the issue.

Some slides have interactive elements in addition to the "i" button. These elements are highlighted. When you click on them, you will learn more information (there can for example an audio sample, video or additional information). You will also find an audio icon in the presentation. Some slides contain sound. If necessary, you can click on the sound icon to mute or reactivate the sound in the presentation.

Click on the right arrow for the next slide. If you want to go back in the presentation, click on the left arrow. To go back to the very beginning of the presentation, click on the house icon.

For better orientation in the text, individual slides are gradually displayed with additional educational material and further expansion of teaching. The text is interspersed with **Definitions**, because you come across some terms for the first time and it is advisable to remember them. Also pay attention to the **Interesting Facts**.

Caption to the texts in the handbook:





DEFINITIONS

# Introduction to the lesson

The online world, as well as the printed media, are a source of unsubstantiated information and hoaxes. The ability to detect fiction in the online environment is also hampered by the rapid development of technology and its sophisticated use in the online media environment.

In the lesson, you will learn what the most important elements of media communication are and, with the help of a practical sample with a topic close to them, you will learn the difference between news and journalism.

In the next part of the lesson, you will learn to define and recognize disinformation and find out where they are used (propaganda, troll farms or conspiracy theories).

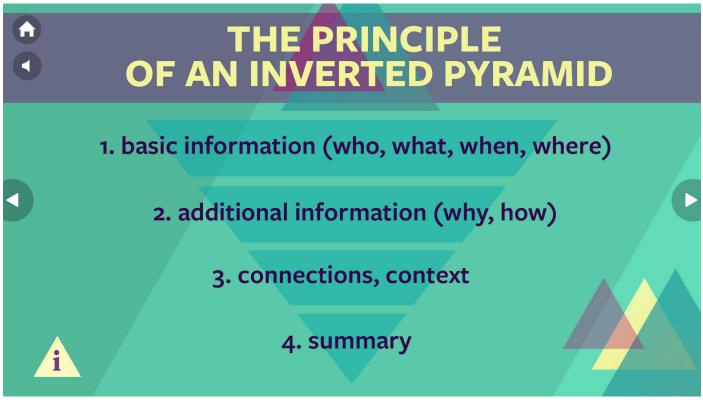
Disinformation is a big bait for a democratic society and therefore it is necessary to pay closer attention to this topic. How you can verify for yourself, recognizing disinformation or hoaxes is very difficult even for adults. Discuss with them what is happening in the country and in the world, ask questions, take an interest and look for information. Let us try to reduce the spread of disinformation and hoaxes together.

# Inverted pyramid technique

#### Where do you most often read something from the news?

The rapidly changing technologies and popularity of internet media offer usa **really huge source of online information**, as well as news portals that **compete with each other**.

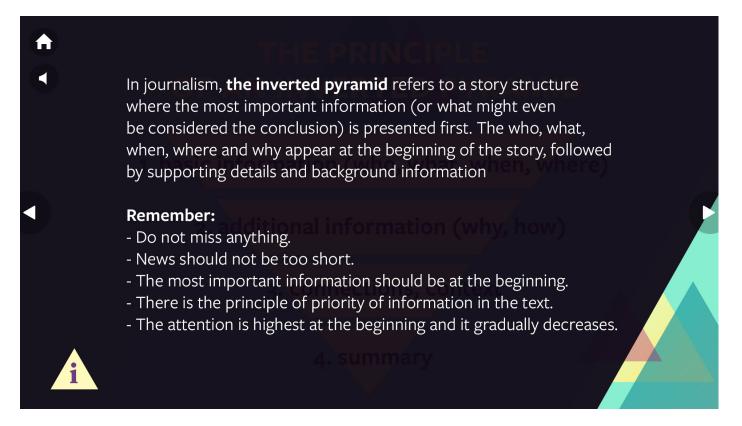
They must be the fastest, have the most interesting image or video and also a headline that will interest us and force us to read the article. How the article is written and divided is also important - if you wanted to read the news that your favourite singer is getting divorced, you would not be interested in a long introduction about where he was born and what hit made him famous. You want to know directly what happened and why he is divorcing! The authors use the so-called **inverted pyramid technique**.



This means:

- the most important information is at the beginning;
- less important follow;
- the context (so-called background) is at the end.

However, the inverted pyramid model is not typical for only online news, you can also find it in classic television and newspaper news.



#### When you hear some news, try to identify important informations

from the message:

who, what, when, where, why and how.



#### INTERESTING FACT

For memorization, you can use German words that begin with "**W**":

German language: wer, was, wann, wo, warum, wie

It is important to remain **objective** when creating report.



**Objective** = impartial, reflecting reality. An objective news provides impartial information about what is really going on.

The main features of objectivity include:

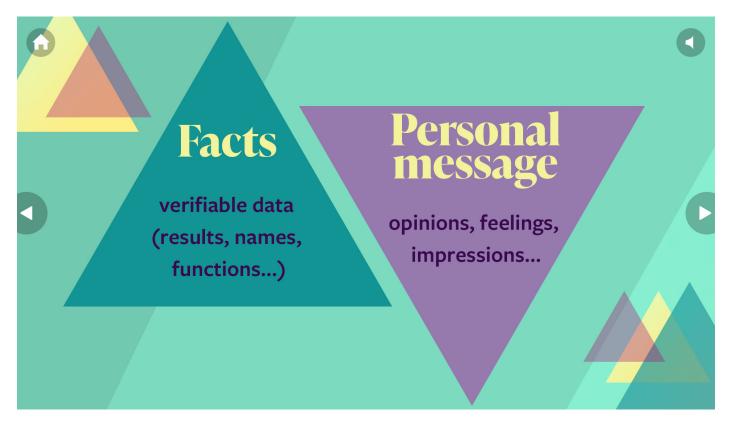
- distance and neutrality in relation to the subject of the news;
- impartiality (i.e. not be inclined to any of the parties in disputes);
- completeness of information;
- absence of hidden motives or third party services.

The report should be **factual**, **accurate**, **complete**, **reliable**.

# Facts and personal message

#### What we must distinguish?

Whether the content of the message reaches us as an article or as a video, we should always distinguish what we learn.



Facts are verifiable data, results, names, positions of named representatives...

The author's **personal messages** are what the author puts into the text based on his/her opinion and feelings about how he/she interprets the information.

# Facts and personal message - example

On the slide you can see the (slightly modified) text of the article.

$\bigcirc$						
	For 17-year-old pop singer Billie Eilish, 2019 was full of					
	success. She released her debut album, which rose to the					
	top of the world charts. She has thus become one of the					
	greatest singers on the contemporary music scene. But					
	now she's going through a big test of life. She has a mullet	C				
on her head after an accident at the hairdresser's!						
	Mullet = type of hairstyle (hair on the top of the head is short, the back lower part remains long - formerly worn by e.g. Jaromír Jágr).					
	Facts Personal message					
	r de bondi message					

You will first read the text together to know what we will be working with. What did you learn?

Now try to distinguish for each sentence whether it is a fact or a personal message of the author. Justify your answer.

Tip: Look for a photo of **Billie Eilish** from this period and, for example, hockey player **Jaromír Jágr** with this type of hairstyle.

### News service and journalism

Distinguishing between these two types of information is one of the basic preconditions for us **to be able to understand** the content communicated.



Why should we know the views of others when we can make our own?



#### What are the characteristics of News services and Journalism?

The basic difference between news and journalism is that in journalistic texts we also read the author's evaluation: what he thinks about the topic, how he perceives it, what his opinion is. And with that we have to approach the text as well. It is necessary to be able to distinguish which parts of the text arefacts and which are the author's personal message.

#### **News Service**

Basic genres: news, news report, news article, news interview...

#### Journalism

Basic genres: author's article, commentary, news report, reflection, column...



The form in which the news reaches us also depends on the author's ability to interpret (explain) the information correctly.

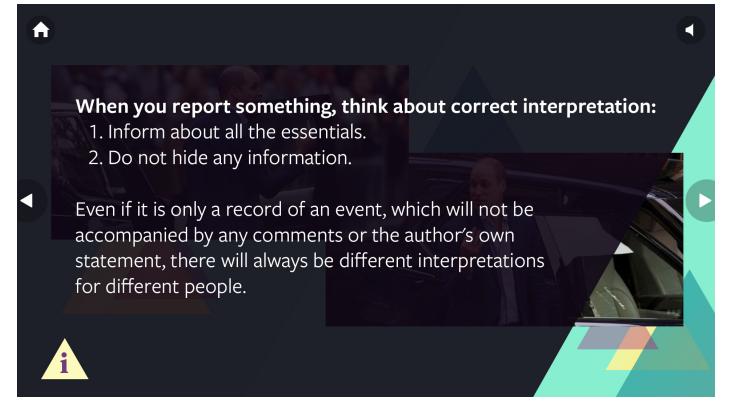


People can interpret the same event in different ways, which can be intensified, for example, by having different information about it.

Each news is basically a story that we can tell in different ways. Just by using the words, the photos, the sequence of events we mention..., we can influence its interpretation.



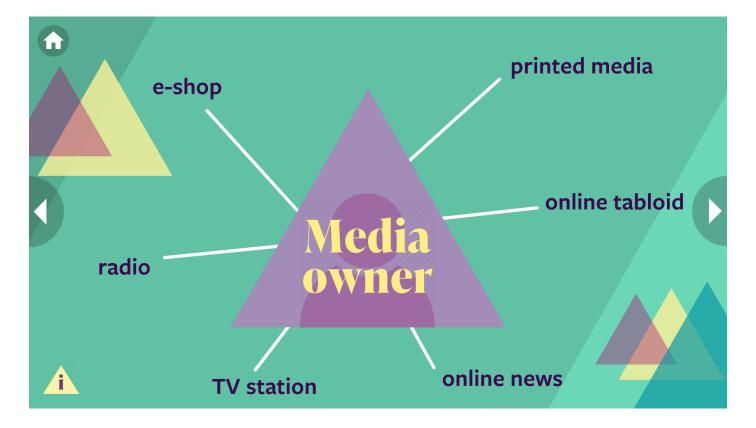
**Interpretation** = explanation (e.g. of the text). Reframing, or otherwise showing own understanding of something.



When you report something (to your friends or family) remember to inform them about all the essentials and do not hide any information.

### Media owner

Imagine that there is an entrepreneur (a private entity) who also owns various media. He may own a radio, TV station, online news or online tabloid.



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What could that mean? He can easily advertise his eshop on the radio and even in the press, or highlight information that is useful to him in his other business.

In some states, there were/are state media - the state has power and control over state media. Find out how it is in your country - do you have access to state or public media?

What kind of private media do you know? For each bullet on the slide, try to find a specific example of private media in your country.

#### **Do you think media owners can influence the content of the media they own?** Take a look at the info button.



Search on the Internet to find out what media are available in your country and who owns them.

Answer the questions:

Are these owners active entrepreneurs? In what areas are they active entrepreneurs? In what other areas is the person active?

#### Example of a media owner from the Czech Republic

Mr. Babiš owns MF Dnes, a popular daily newspaper in the Czech Republic. Among other things, he is the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and a prominent businessman. At least once a month, this newspaper publishes an article about Andrej Babiš (he is also pictured on the front page).

This media owner clearly asks his own questions (the questions are not conflicting in any way) and it is basically a presentation of a political agenda rather than an objective interview. Mr. Babiš uses media as an agenda-setting tool.

### Hoax

In the first part of the lesson we focused on news. But hoaxes are also an essential part of the lesson. If you haven't heard of them before, read on to find out what they mean. We will introduce a topic that is important for all of us and we encounter it more or less every day.



Every day you encounter a huge amount of information, messages and statements. Sometimes there are so many that we don't even think about them. And that's a mistake.

It can easily happen that we overlook something, do not pay attention to it and later find out that we have been caught. It's usually too late to regret it. **Therefore it is good to train your mindfulness and ability to argue.** 

It often warns against non-existent danger.

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We already know what a hoax is. You can find hoaxes in tabloids but sometimes also in serious newspapers. They also often come to you during an innocent conversation with a friend. He or she may have heard the message somewhere and interpreted it further. And because you hear it from a friend, it may not even occur to you that it might not be true.

#### **INTERESTING FACT**

#### Dissemination of an alarm message is a crime!

The dissemination of an alarm message has been marked in the Czech Republic as a criminal offence since 2009 (Section 357 of the Penal Code). You can be convicted to up to 5 years in prison.

This example is from the Czech Republic. Try to find out what the law says in your country.



**Fake news** = fake messages that are written to look like solid information. They are created in order to influence public opinion.

### **Purposes of hoaxes**

There are existing several purposes of hoaxes. Some are harmless (such as to amuse or to impress). Others are intended to affect serious things (such as to manipulate is used a lot in politics).

Answer these questions in writing, make lists. What is the purpose of hoaxes? Why are hoaxes created?

### **Purposes of hoaxes**

- to influence
- to spread panic/false advice
- to impress
- to play a trick on someone
- to scare

- to amuse
- 💿 to amaze
- to do harm
- to manipulate
- to make money

#### **INTERESTING FACT**

#### **Bullshit Detector**

Google.com offers the option to install the "Bullshit Detector", which will warn you if you visit a page that is on the list of untrustworthy sources. Try it in your leisure time.

# Do you recognise hoax and truth?

You already know what a Hoax is and why it's made. But let's try it out in practice to see if you can recognize it. Do you know what to do when you hear a Hoax?



#### Hoax or true?

Decide whether the following examples are hoaxes or not. If so, think about what its goal is (amusement, manipulation, deliberate deception). Then click to the following slide and check your guess.

### Sample 1

Look closely at the video displayed on the tablet.

Would you share such a video (for example, by sending it to your friends in a message or on your profile)?



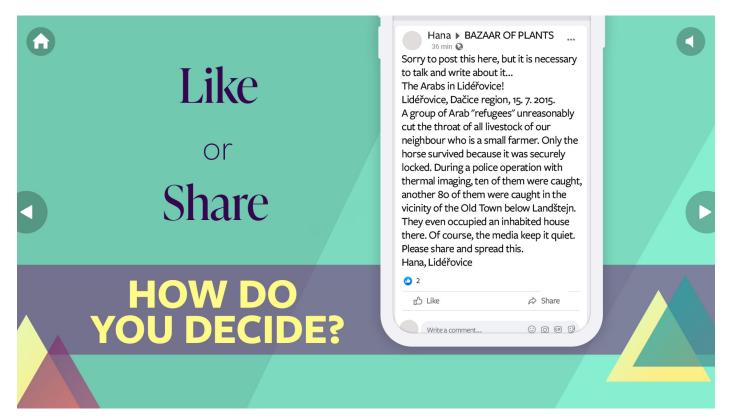
Click on the next slide to find out what the video really is about.



Such content would not be good to share. You'd be helping to spread alarm messages. Verify the content by searching the internet for credible sources.

### Sample 2

Look closely at the video displayed on the phone. Would you share such a post (for example, by sending it to your friends in a message or on your profile)?



Click on the next slide to find out what the text really is about.

Ô		You should		•
	Lilzo	"report"		
	Line	such post	Hana > BAZAR OF PLANTS Sorry to post this here, but it is necessary to taik and write about it The Araba in Lidéforciel Lidéforcie, Datcer region, 15, 7, 2015.	
•	or Sharo	Such content can be verified on trusted sources. If you squeezed the "share"	A group of Anb 'refugest' unreasonably cut the throat of all livestock of our neighbour who is a small farmer. Only the hores survived because it was securely locked. During a police operation with thermail imaging ten of them were caught, another Bo of them were caught in the vicinity of the Od Town below Landfein.	C
	Share	you would share the hoax!		
		The denial of this article		
		n be found on the official wel the Police of the Czech Repu		

Such content would not be good to share. You should even better report such a post. Conclusion is to verify the content by searching the internet for credible sources.

#### How do hoaxes reach us?

Hoaxes operate with potential danger. The feeling of danger is not pleasant for a person. In an effort to warn other people spread information further - by email, through social networks, applications, verbally... (the goal may also be not to be left with an alarm message alone, to be aware that we are in this together). Hoaxes can therefore be shared with you by your friends, but also by parents, grandparents, teachers... Foreign disinformation websites are a frequent source.

#### **INTERESTING FACT**

#### **Errors as indicators of disinformation**



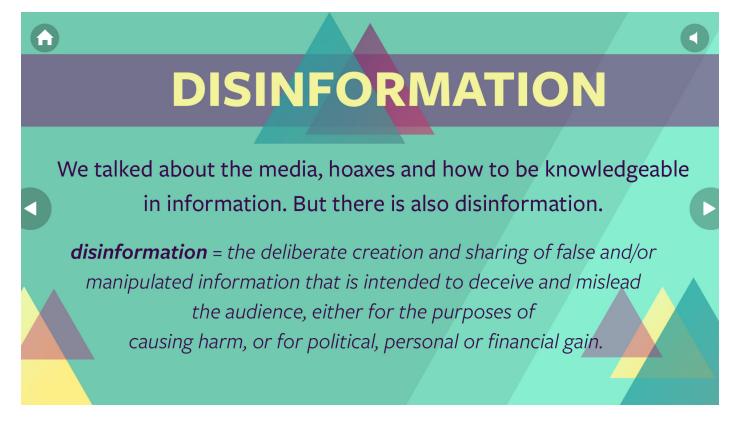
Errors in language used to be frequent indicators for readers to be careful. They often indicated a machine translation of unverified reports. Today we already encounter perfectly processed hoaxes and disinformation articles. Grammatical correctness should not be the main guide for us in recognizing misleading messages.

#### Conclusion

You were introduced to the term "hoax" - you can explain what a hoax is and for what purpose it is created. You tried to distinguish what a hoax is and what it is not.

You have seen in specific examples that hoaxes occur very often, and that their intention may be to entertain (for example, April Fool's jokes) or even to manipulate the reader.

## Disinformation

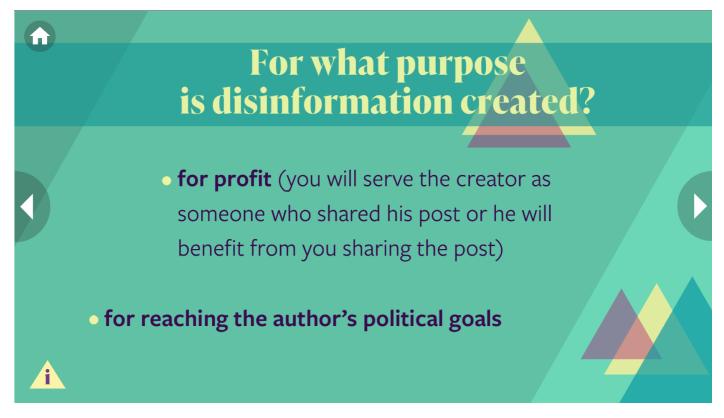


In today's world, however, we must also be able to deal with disinformation. They are hard to spot because they are cleverly inserted between the true news.

Why? Because someone is making them for a **purpose**. See the next slides for more information.

# For what purpose is disinformation created?

You should know the purpose of disinformation. It may come in handy when you doubt the validity of information in an article or report.



How does disinformation relate to the internet and social networks?

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Once **disinformation** has been initially published online by its creators, it can be spread by individual social media users. Ordinary people may propagate the material on their own social network accounts through deliberate sharing – it is a core function of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Other interactions, such as 'liking', also trigger the algorithms of social media platforms to display it to other users. This is a phenomenon known as 'organic reach'. It can lead to exponential spreading of false information.

### Video about disinformation

The spread of disinformation is a major problem in today's world. You can watch this video by the **European Commission** official Youtube channel. (The advantage of watching the original is that you can choose the language of the subtitles.)

The video is longer, try to concentrate and discuss with your classmates later.



## **Conspiracy theory**

One of the tools used to create conspiracy theories is disinformation. You've probably heard the term Conspiracy theory before. If not, these two explanations should help you understand what it's all about.



#### Can you think of any conspiracy theories?

Think before you click on the Info button. Here you can find examples.

#### Examples of conspiracy theories:

**Chemtrails:** also known as SLAP (Secret Large-scale Atmospheric Program). This theory alleges that water condensation trails ("contrails") from aircraft consist of chemical or biological agents, or contain a supposedly toxic mix of aluminum, strontium and barium, under secret government policies.

**Global warming is not real:** a global warming conspiracy theory typically alleges that the science behind global warming has been invented or distorted for ideological or financial reasons. Many have promoted such theories, including former US President Donald Trump..

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Flat earth: The Flat Earth Society promotes the idea of a "flat earth."

Have you ever heard of them? Did you know that wasn't true?

Look at an example from the Czech Republic.

### Disinformation news in Czech media focusing on COVID-19 related issues can be divided into two categories.

### 1. The origin of the virus itself, discussing whether the virus is artificially constructed:

The story strongly suggested that the virus has been made artificially as a new type of weapon in biological warfare set up by China. These claims have been indirectly supported by the World Health Organization report which offered results of investigation done in laboratories in China. The impact of such fake news was the mistrust in regulation forced.

#### 2. The bulk of fake news about vaccination:

As the leading story it is claimed that vaccination is a hidden application of new forms of power and digital surveillance (undercover micro-chipping) forced by global organizations with a pragmatic goal to trace people's activities and behaviour.

This is one of the arguments which people, who are against the vaccination, use on social media.

### Disinformation in political propaganda

### Disinformation in political propaganda are used for the purposes:

- to spreading rumours or political ideas (false or correct) in order to influence the opinion of society.
- to distract attention from one's own problem.
- to damage a political opponent.

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• to create a problem and then offer a solution to it.

Propaganda uses disinformation very often, especially political propaganda. Disinformation in political propaganda should spread rumours or political ideas (false or correct) in order to influence the opinion of society. Also to distract attention from one's own problem, to damage a political opponent or to create a problem and then offer a solution to it.

In the info button, read a real example from the Czech Republic. You can find more information and videos on the internet.



You have just read a proven case of the dissemination of political propaganda from within the Czech Republic.

You can read another one, this time from the United States:

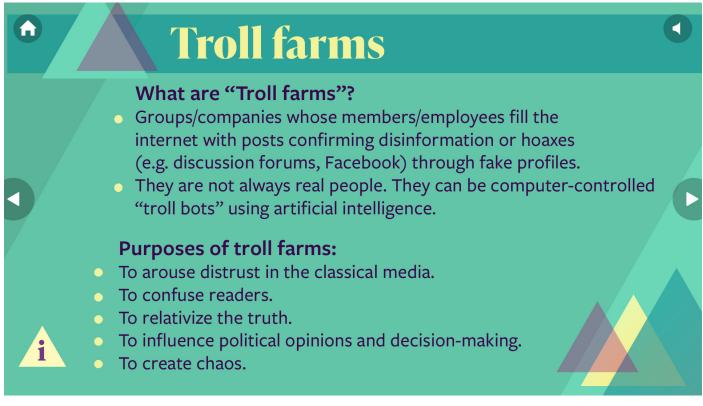
#### **Heart of Texas**

During the 2016 US presidential election, a number of fake accounts, fake social media pages and various scams were used to manipulate politically engaged social media users. One of these sites was called ,Heart of Texas' and was run by a fake account belonging to the Internet Research Agency in St Petersburg. The site focused on discussions on various topics related to migration, using symbolism, rhetoric and false identities to reach recipients. It managed to attract 350 000 supporters. In addition, more than 40 closed Facebook groups were identified as falling under the same influence operation.

## Troll farms

#### Do you know what troll farms are? For what purpose are they created?

You've probably heard the term Troll farms before. If not, these explanations should help you understand what it's all about.



Can you think where they are located? Think before you click the Info button.

### ♠

The existence of troll farms has been proven by Finnish investigative journalist Jessikka Aro, who has specialised in exposing Russian internet trolls spreading fake news among the Finnish population since 2014.

She has mapped their activities in detail and also managed to expose and describe the work of a "troll farm" based in St. Petersburg.

The spreaders of disinformation took severe revenge on the journalist for publishing details of their activities. The persistent cyberstalking included, for example, the publication of her medical records and private photographs from her holidays, modified in a way that was disparaging. In these manipulated presentations, the journalist was portrayed as a NATO agent or a drug dealer.



To relativize the truth. To influence political opinions and decision-making. To create chaos. The existence has been proved already several times. If you see a suspicious amount of social media posts, remember that they don't have to be made by a human.

### Conclusion

You learned what news and disinformation are and how they are used and also what hoaxes are. Remember a few rules.



How do hoaxes get to us? Have you ever shared/spread a hoax? Describe the characteristics of a person who shares/spreads hoaxes. Hoaxes work with potential danger. The feeling of danger is not pleasant for any person. In an effort to warn others, people spread information further - by e-mail, through social networks, applications, orally... (the goal may also be not to be left with an alarm message alone, to be aware that we are in this together).

#### other media keep quiet about it

Therefore hoaxes can be shared by your friends, but also by parents, grandparents, teachers...



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### The End

Remember, hoaxes work with potential danger. The feeling of danger is not pleasant for any person. In an effort to warn others, people spread information further - by e-mail, through social networks, applications, orally... (the goal may also be not to be left with an alarm message alone, to be aware that we are in this together).



## **Reading list**

Hintalovon Gyermekjogi Alapítvány. Web source: https://hintalovon.hu/

#MedijiZaGrađane: Lažne vesti Youtube channel, web source: <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qREwfc9xgv8</u>

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