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DISINFORMATION – HOW TO COMBAT IT?

Recent events have shown what an effective tool disinformation is for spreading fear and panic. Just think of the queues of cars at petrol stations after the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

FAKE NEWS

According to the [Cambridge Dictionary of English](#) disinformation means “false information spread in order to deceive people”. The Internet allows data to be transmitted and found quickly, but it does not separate truth from lies. Disinformation does not spread by itself – there are people behind it.

Disinformation and causing panic are effective tools for controlling others. In the current conflicts, electronic means are also used to disrupt the normal lives of citizens. Just think of the huge queues of cars at petrol stations – the panic caused by false information paralysed traffic in towns.

The same happened at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, when necessities such as food with a long shelf life and toilet paper began to disappear en masse from shop shelves. With time it became clear that such actions were completely pointless. Too many media stimuli can cause overload, confusion, anxiety and the feeling that we can't even take our eyes off the incoming news. It is paralysing.

HOW TO RECOGNISE DISINFORMATION?

The [Panopticon Foundation](#), which researches forms of surveillance of society, has created a great guide on disinformation. According to its tips, it is first and foremost worthwhile to familiarise yourself with what to look for when reading media information. If in an article:

- there is a flashy title indicating sensation,
- there are emotional pictures and expressions,
- no known and verified source is given,
- there are visible spelling mistakes, linguistic errors, phrases which are calques,
- there is no mention of the author or the editor,

it is very likely that this is unreliable information.

In addition, let us be sensitive to:

- the presence of clickbaits,
- the multitude of junk adverts (e.g. „lose weight fast”, „earn £10,000 in a week”),
- a suspicious-looking URL (e.g. no dot after www),
- domain registered in a country other than the country of publication.

These factors should make us cautious and critical. It is best to simply avoid such sites and use reliable and verified sources of information.



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Propaganda is as old as the world, but previously there was no technology that allows it to spread so quickly.

Natalie Nougayrède

FAKE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

You also need to be attentive on sites like Facebook and Instagram. These are the things that should alert you:

- discrepancy between URL and account name or suspicious characters – it is probably a fake profile,
- a stock photo used as the profile picture. Using the [TinEye.com](https://tineye.com) website you can check on which other sites this photograph appears,
- high account activity, especially at one particular time,
- published posts – usually not original content, just forwarded clickbait,
- number of followers – it is usually quite small compared to the accounts followed by the fake profile.

HOW TO DEAL WITH FAKE NEWS?

The [DEMAGOG](#) Association has written down 12 rules for dealing with false information in the media. In a nutshell:

1. Comment and react with caution – don't spread questionable news.
2. Pay attention to your emotions. Do not comment or share contents under their influence.
3. Do not respond to content if you are not sure it is genuine.
4. Pay attention to the linguistic correctness of the text, as errors may indicate duplicated fake news.
5. Trust only reliable sources.
6. Read not just the title, but the whole article.
7. Look at the publication date – the best material is the most recent one.
8. If you have doubts, please report them e.g. [here](#).
9. Use the image search engine to check out the photos.
10. Do not get involved in discussion. Sometimes there are bots on the other side (the more comments, the more popular the post).
11. Get familiar with disinformation narratives, for example Russian propaganda efforts.
12. Help wisely. Only donate to verified fundraisers.

Disinformation is a powerful weapon that spreads at lightning speed. It accompanies us every day, but its increased intensity in recent times coincides with Russia's attack on Ukraine. Each of us is more or less susceptible to media manipulation. So let us approach everything we read on the web with caution and healthy criticism. A closer look at the activities of the [Panoptikon Foundation](#) and the [DEMAGOG Association](#) can be helpful.

***Don't wait, call now! When you feel that disinformation makes you excessively anxious, consult a specialist.
We are here to support you!***