

English

Walkthrough Lesson 3 | In what forms does disinformation appear on our screens?

The third lesson explains in what forms it appears on our screens.

Slides **3** to **18** contain preparatory information. From slide **18** onwards, there is instruction where students get to work on their own fake disinformation campaign using worksheets.. This assignment helps students understand how manipulation techniques work by creating various types of content. The goal is to make it easier for them to identify disinformation in everyday life, enhancing their resilience.

In this guide you will also find alternative examples and material to use in the lesson.

Preparation

Setting up the workshop (approximately 15 minutes)

- Chairs arranged in a classroom setup
- Testing sound for videos

Structure

- Theory and interactive activities about news, information, and opinion formation.
- Examples of disinformation.
- Worksheets to create a disinformation campaign.

Learning objectives

At the end of the lesson, students can answer the following questions:

- What manipulation techniques are used to spread disinformation?
- In what ways does disinformation appear on our screens?



2 minutes

- The students listen to the teacher.
- The teacher gives an introduction.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Welcome to the third lesson about disinformation.
- Today we are going to learn about the manipulation techniques that underlie disinformation.



2 minutes

- The students listen to the teacher.
- The Teacher introduces the lesson's learning objectives.

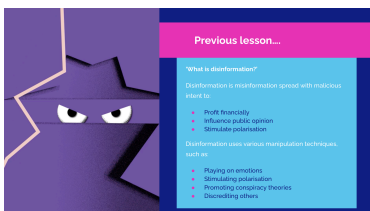
SLIDE EXPLANATION:

The students can answer the following questions at the end of the lesson:

- What manipulation techniques are used to spread disinformation?
- In what ways does disinformation appear on our screens?



Note: You can skip this slide and the next slide if you covered the previous lesson ('What is disinformation') in class.



2 minutes

- Students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher repeats the purpose of Lesson 3 on disinformation.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

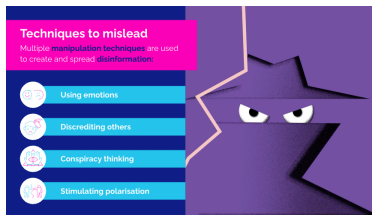
- Disinformation refers to misinformation spread with malicious intent. There are three main reasons people spread disinformation: to profit financially, influence public opinion, and promote polarisation.
- Disinformation uses various manipulative techniques, playing on emotions, stimulating polarisation, promoting conspiracy theories, and discrediting others, to influence people.



3 minutes

- The teacher explains that the question "What manipulation techniques are used to spread disinformation?" will now be addressed and that this is going to be a short recap of lesson 2.
- Students answer the question.
- The teacher discusses some of the answers.

Note: You can skip this slide and the next slide if you covered the previous lesson ('What is disinformation') in class.

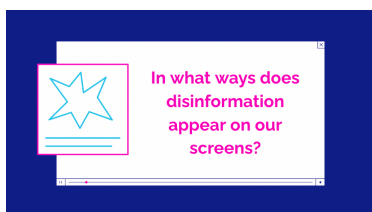


5 minutes

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- De leerlingen zitten en luisteren naar de docent.

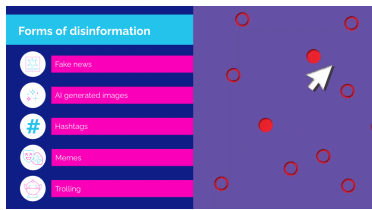
SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- To spread disinformation effectively, certain manipulation techniques are used. These techniques ensure that people believe the disinformation as well as spread such messages without paying close attention:
- **Using emotion:** is content that deliberately exploits people's basic emotions, such as fear, anger or empathy. People will feel the emotion and act accordingly (share it, end up voting differently, etc.). Emotional content is much more effective than facts because people have a short attention span online and emotion captures attention faster than facts. Consider the example from lesson 2, with the picture of the baby surrounded by syringes that was shared on social media.
- **Discrediting others:** is an important part of disinformation. It means speaking ill of someone or putting someone in a bad light. 'Mainstream media' is an example of a frame used to discredit established media. Discrediting people or organisations weakens the opponent's reputation. Consider the example of Lesson 2, which showed an example where Trump supporters held up signs with slogans such as "CNN = Fake News".
- **Conspiracy thinking:** this is an essential part of online fake news sites and alternative social media channels. Conspiracies can be defined as the belief that unexplained events are orchestrated by a secret group or organisation. Conspiracy theories are often used in disinformation campaigns to attract people who distrust government institutions or distrust other authorities. Consider the example from Lesson 2, where someone on TikTok talks about a 'zombie outbreak'.
- **Stimulating polarisation:** assumes an us-versus-them way of thinking. Disinformation involves deliberate polarisation to widen a gap between the political left and the political right, 'real media' and 'fake news media' and, for example, between citizens and government. Consider the example from lesson 2, with the meme about the climate strikers.



1 minute

- The lecturer explains that the question "What manipulation techniques are used to spread disinformation?" has been answered and the question "How does disinformation appear on our screens?" will now be addressed.

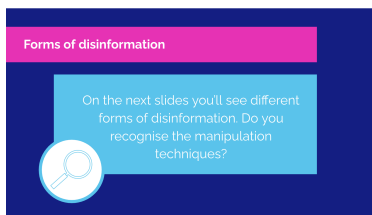


2 minutes

- Students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher briefly explains the different formats in which disinformation can be presented online.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Disinformation appears on our screens in many ways. Disinformation is created in different ways. These include news (fake news), images with AI, hashtags, memes and hateful comments under others' posts (trolls).

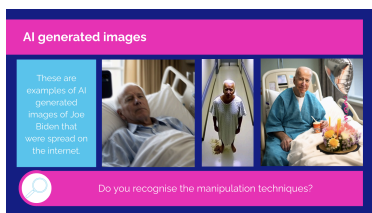


2 minutes

- Students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher gives an introduction of the following slides.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- On the following slides you will see examples of disinformation.
- Look for what is incorrect and think about which manipulation technique is used (emotion, discrediting, conspiracy thinking, polarisation).



5 minutes

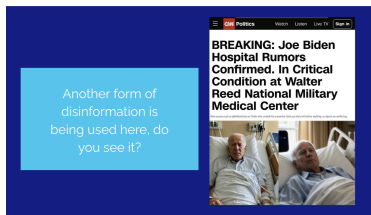
- The students listen to the teacher and answer the question.
- The teacher explains the slide and guides the conversation..

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Nowadays, with the access of generative AI, it is increasingly easy to generate images to deliberately mislead people. In the example, we see an AI-generated image of Joe Biden. A lot of AI pictures of Joe Biden were generated and spread on social media. Given the commotion surrounding Biden's health and age, some misleading information and images have been shared of Biden in the hospital. This portrays Biden as weak and incompetent: *"The president's mental and physical deterioration pose an existential threat to this country."*
- **What strikes you?** A closer look reveals that his face is not quite the same as Joe Biden's. Moreover, it is unlikely that Joe Biden would allow himself to be photographed like this.
- **Manipulation techniques:** We see a number of manipulation techniques recurring here. A politician is clearly being discredited. Also, these images possibly provoke disgust, pity or indignation in the viewer, thus involving the manipulation technique of appealing to emotion.

Meer achtergrondinformatie:

- [AI can be easily used to make fake election photos](#) (BBC)



2 minutes

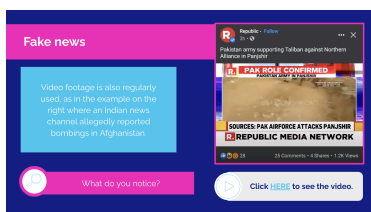
- Students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher explains the slide and then shows the video.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Another form of disinformation is being used here, do you see it?
- One form of disinformation is fake news, where misleading or inaccurate information is presented as a genuine news item. Sensational headlines are often used to attract people and induce them to click on them.

Read more

- Article fact check:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68471253>



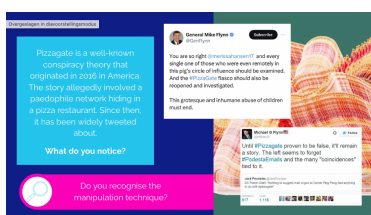
2 minutes

- Students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher explains the slide and then shows the video.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

Video footage is also regularly used, as in the example on the right where an Indian news channel allegedly reported bombings in Afghanistan.

- **What strikes you?** The video is from the game 'Arma III'. The original sound of the game has been modified, and the video has been edited and put into a format to give the impression of a news broadcast. This material was reused during the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022. Read more about this fake news video in [this article](#).



5 minutes

- The students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher explains the slide.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Pizzagate began when conspiracy thinkers started making strange connections based on leaked emails from John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager. In these emails, the owner of Comet Ping Pong talked about a benefit night at his restaurant, meant to raise money for Clinton's campaign. According to conspiracy thinkers, the emails suggested something quite different. They claimed that the restaurant was actually a front for a large satanic network of child abusers. Based on this misinformation, a 29-year-old gunman decided to raid the Comet Ping Pong restaurant to "save children". No one was injured and he was arrested.

'Pizzagate' is an example from the US, but examples can come from anywhere: from conspiracy theorists alleging that muslims set fire to the Notre Dame (Paris), to alleging that EU leaders were complicit in

the abuse of small children.

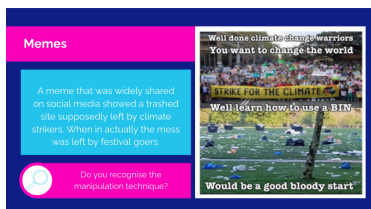
- **What strikes you?** The message contains the hashtag #pizzagate, increasing its reach for spreading false stories. While many genuinely believe the story and spread it without malicious intent, there are also those who deliberately use the hashtag to influence others. As a result of a tweet about this conspiracy theory, Michael G. Flynn, Donald Trump's intended national security adviser in 2016, had to resign his position on the transition team. His father, US general Michael Flynn, also spread this message.

Other example:

- *Russia allegedly attempted to influence the US presidential election through hacking, disinformation campaigns, and social media manipulation to increase political divisions, support Donald Trump, and undermine Hillary Clinton. In January 2018, controversy emerged over a secret memo by Republican House Intelligence Committee members, led by Devin Nunes, alleging FBI and DOJ surveillance abuses during the Trump-Russia investigation. The hashtag #releasethememo gained popularity on Twitter, initially spread by US conservatives but soon adopted by automated accounts and Russian-linked trolls.*

Read more here:

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/02/04/trump-twitter-russians-release-the-memo-216935/>



5 minutes

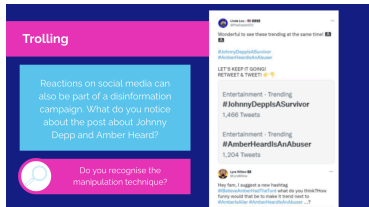
- The students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher explains the slide.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- *Explanation example: On Friday, 50,000 people took to the streets in Sydney as part of the Global Strike 4 Climate protest calling for action on climate change. It was captioned: "Look at the mess today's climate protesters left behind in beautiful Hyde Park. So much plastic. So much landfill." But the image turned out to be a fake. The photo was originally posted in April 2019 and is from an annual cannabis event called 420 held in London.*
- This is an example of polarisation, because one group is being vilified to cause outrage in another. This phenomenon can deepen social divides and create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that reinforces their existing views
- Polarisation involves deliberate attempts to widen the gap between the political left and the political right, 'real media' and 'fake news media' and, for example, between citizens and government. Anything to create two groups: left-right, for-against, rich-poor, etc.
- In disinformation, existing dissatisfactions are reinforced and can appear more important or popular than they really are. In disinformation, there is deliberate polarisation to widen a gap between the political left and the political right, 'real media' and 'fake news media' and, for example, between citizens and government.

Read more:

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/the-viral-photo-of-sydney-climate-strike-aftermath-is-a-fake/6plbkgoug>



5 minutes

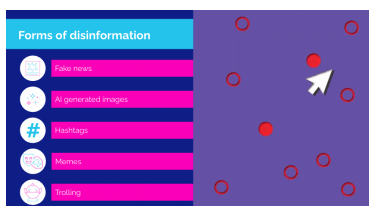
- The students sit and listen to the teacher.
- The teacher explains the slide.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Trolling is an online activity in which individuals deliberately post provocative, hurtful or misleading messages to provoke reactions and cause chaos in online communities.
- This can include anything from offensive comments to spreading false information, with the aim of causing confusion and division. A standalone comment need not contain disinformation, but it can be part of a disinformation campaign online.
- **Explanation example:** The online troll campaign against Amber Heard gained attention during her legal battles with Johnny Depp. Fake accounts and bots spread hateful hashtags like #AmberHeardIsALiar and #JusticeForJohnnyDepp to damage her reputation. These posts included memes, edited content, and harmful messages, making her a target of harassment. The podcast *Who Trolled Amber?* revealed how this disinformation campaign was organized, exposing the tactics and networks used to spread hate against her online.
- **Manipulation techniques used:** In the tweet and hashtags, you can see how polarisation and discrediting are used as manipulation techniques. Polarisation is created by framing the situation as a battle between two sides: supporters of Amber Heard and supporters of Johnny Depp. This "us vs. them" dynamic fuels division and encourages people to take extreme positions. Amber Heard is unfairly discredited through claims that portray her as dishonest or bad.

Read more:

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/amber-heard-trolling-johnny-depp-trial-b2509469.html>
- <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/2024/02/26/depp-v-heard-who-trolled-amber/>



1 minute

- The teacher repeats these common forms of disinformation.



1 minute

- The teacher explains that the class will now start working on creating its own campaign. Using the techniques will help students to understand the mechanics. Several printed worksheets are available for this purpose.

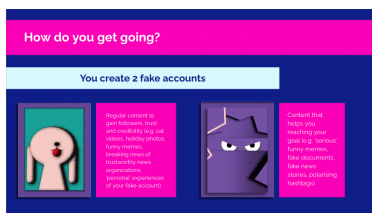


2 minutes

- The teacher explains the assignment.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- There is a plan to build a new amusement park on a site where there are still many trees and you can go for a nice walk. Our residents will soon be able to vote for a referendum: for or against the build. With your disinformation campaign (as a troll) you want to influence and disrupt public opinion. The main aim of your disinformation campaign is to convince young people that the referendum on the new theme park is corrupt and fraudulent; the 'for' camp will always win. Why vote? It's pointless!*



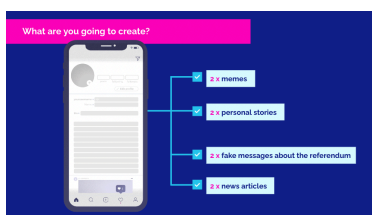
2 minutes

- The teacher explains the assignment.

SLIDE EXPLANATION:

You create two types of content:

- Regular content to gain followers, trust and credibility (e.g. cat videos, holiday photos, funny memes, latest news from trusted news organisations, 'personal' experiences with your fake account)
- Content that helps you achieve your goal (e.g. 'serious' funny memes, fake documents, fake news stories, polarising hashtags)
- By combining these two types of content, you gain followers and contribute to the main goal of the disinformation campaign at the same time.



20 minutes

- The teacher explains the approach to the assignment.
- Students perform the assignment.

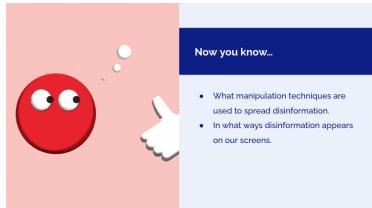
SLIDE EXPLANATION:

- Make groups of 4 and work together on the campaign consisting of memes, fake stories, personal stories and news stories. In your group, divide these tasks and discuss your campaign well together. Only in the next lesson will the fake profile be discussed. This worksheet may be skipped for now.
- Students receive printed handouts with detailed instructions on how to complete the assignment successfully.
- Pupils receive 5 different worksheets for this purpose:
 - An introduction worksheet with explanations
 - A posts worksheet
 - An image worksheet

- A meme worksheet
- A worksheet with news items (feel free to select and use current news examples from news outlets)

10 minutes

- The teacher asks the students about their campaign.
- The groups shortly present their results.



2 minutes

Repeat the learning objectives of the lesson.
See if there are any remaining questions.



This lesson was initially developed in the European collaboration project [SMILES](#), funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The three lessons developed in this project have been expanded with an introductory lesson on journalism, and the lesson has been updated, enriched, and translated by [BENEDMO](#).

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

