Truth and Dare: Kids vs. Fake News
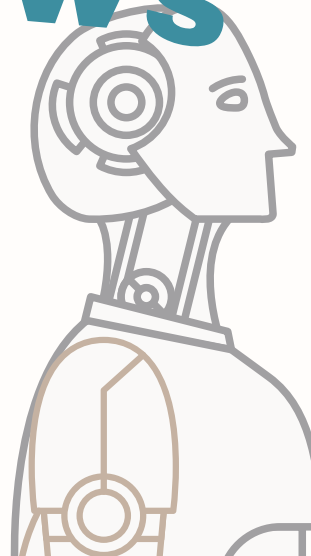
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WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

Fake news is another word for "disinformation". It means information that looks and sounds like true, but which is false or not totally true. Sometimes, even if statements might be false, the events they are referring to might be real.

Fake news is made to look like news: it is catchy so that it attracts the attention of more readers and gets more clicks or shares.
The aims of this content are different: sometimes it is to mislead and manipulate the public, for ideological or economic gains (Baptista & Gradim, 2022). However, sometimes it can happen that fake news comes from lack of understanding and full knowledge of a situation.

WHERE IS FAKE NEWS?

Often fake news is shared as a social media post (like a tweet, post, or comment) or in the style of a traditional news article. However, it can take many forms, including images and videos. Fake news is mostly found as hoaxes or deliberately false information.

GLOSSARY

Ideology, ideological = ideas, and beliefs shared by a group of individuals (usually referred to politics).
Gains = something one earns

Some say that satirical (a type of joke) content is also fake news. This is not correct, as the goal of satirical comments is to cause laugh on the basis of the ridiculousness of a situation: this means satire exaggerates things to make them sound funny.

Still, fake news can be found as clickbait, rumors, false content shared by accident, or even adverts.

Some fake news is easier to spot than others – it has spelling mistakes, is hosted on a suspicious site, or has been shared with no supporting evidence.

Sometimes fake news can look very realistic and may have been spread widely or picked up by lots of different sites – in this case, the best way to spot it is by looking for the original source of the news, checking for the story on reliable news services or use a fact checker.

GLOSSARY

Hoax = a fictional story shared online, usually to change people's beliefs or opinions. Hoaxes can seem more believable the more they are shared.

Satire = the art of making someone or something look ridiculous, raising laughter in order to embarrass, humble, or discredit the object.

Clickbait = any type of online content designed to convince you to click a link.

WHO MAKES FAKE NEWS?

What's tricky about fake news is that it does not only appear on untrustworthy sources, but we might see it on Instagram profiles, newspapers, and media channels that usually we consider reliable.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Fake news can spread because people want to deceive people or because people want to make money from clicks. This is very much the case on social media.

In practice, you may find yourself reading something you consider interesting, without knowing it is fake news. You might decide to share it with your friends and family via Whatsapp, or maybe you share the Instagram post on a story. Many people will see it and find it interesting as well, and might even share it in their turn. In this way, the information provided will be taken for accurate, when it is not.

WHY IS IT BAD?

- Fake news is bad for our lives for many reasons: It is bad for our society and community because it can distort the truth. *Let's make this easier. Fake news about people or groups of people can create hate and violence in a society.*

- It is bad for how we run our lives because as citizens *we might find ourselves making decisions based on wrong information.* It can be the case when casting a vote, or making an investment.

- It can poison the trust people have in institutions and undermine democracy. This can happen in health, politics, the economy but also in school. *Indeed, during an exam, we might give a wrong answer based on information we retrieved on the internet which is in fact fake news.*

GLOSSARY

Society = a big group of people who have something in common; for example traditions, language, culture, etc.

False beliefs = wrong ways of thinking

Institutions = a social structure with rules and norms in which people cooperate and which influences the behavior of people and the way they live.

Democracy = Greek words demos (people) + kratos (rule). It means a government that is ruled by the citizens of the society. People get the chance to say how they want the government to be run by voting on different issues.

Untrustworthy=dishonest, unreliable

IS THERE ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW THE TRUTH? IS THERE ONLY ONE TRUTH?

This is a very complicated but also very exciting question! Philosophers from the times of ancient Greece until our days are debating this question! There are many theories about the truth. It is important to remember that in some cases, such as facts, it is a matter of whether something is true or false. 2+2=4 is true. "A dog is a plant" is false. Wrong information about a person or situation is false. "Half truths", where only parts of something we say or read are true, can also be dangerous and misleading.

Another aspect is that the truth is not owned by any one authority or person. In our social lives the truth is made up of many parts, most often because people's lives and experiences are different. So in this case we talk about the "mosaic of truth", where many points of view help us get the whole picture.

These are the reasons why we need media and information sources that offer the voices of many experiences, this is called pluralism of information. The condition is that all information must be based on true facts and honesty.

HOW DO WE DEFEND OUR SOCIETY?

Fake news is a huge challenge for Europe. To fight against fake news everyone needs to work together. All EU countries, EU institutions, online platforms, news media and EU citizens need to support each other and tackle the issue of fake news.

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION DOING?

EU

The European Union has taken different steps:

(1) It has made an **"action plan against disinformation"**. The action plan raises awareness and motivates people with campaigns to participate in identifying and exposing fake news. The action plan improves the detection of disinformation by investing in digital tools, data analysis skills, and specialized staff that works against the problem of fake news within the EU and its Member States. A very important step is also that major Internet Companies like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Mozilla have agreed to support the action plan and work together against disinformation.

GLOSSARY

Awareness = knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists

2 The **communication on tackling online disinformation** includes the European goals in fighting against fake news and disinformation. A few of these goals are to
- ensure transparency about sponsored (payed) content
- support the efforts to close online fake accounts
- support users' assessment of content through labeling how trustworthy the source is
- establish marking systems and rules for bots to make sure bots cannot be confused with humans
- empower users with tools to report disinformation

3 The **2018 Code of Practice on Disinformation** brings together online platforms, the advertising industry, fact-checkers, research and civil society organizations to commit to an agreed way of working to counter disinformation (Code means that there are common rules people agree on and follow).

4 **EDMO - the European Digital Media Observatory -** is an independent observatory board, meaning a group of people from different sectors. Fact-checkers, researchers, social media platforms, journalists and media literacy experts from EU countries work together and publish reports about disinformation. EDMO projects help people to identify disinformation and understand its impact.

5 Establishment of **Safer Internet Centres**. They inform and advise children, parents and teachers on digital questions and fight for children's online safety. They offer three different kinds of services:

a. **National Awareness Centres**
- Raise awareness for online safety and risks that young people may encounter online
- Empower children, young people, parents, caretakers and teachers to develop necessary skills and strategies to benefit from digital technology and recognize its dangers
- Observe emerging trends and run campaigns
- Develop information material for parents, children and teachers
- Organize information events, the biggest is the yearly Safer Internet Day
- In Austria this is: Saferinternet.at (office@saferinternet.at)

b. **Helplines**
Offer advice for young people, parents, teachers and carers on harmful content or contact they may encounter online. In Austria, this is: 147 (Rat auf Draht)

c. **Hotlines**
They give the public the opportunity to report illegal content anonymously. In Austria this is: +43 (1) 409 55 76 (Stopline)

(6) The **Better Internet for Kids platform** offers information on online trends and technological developments. It brings together experts in child online safety and offers educational resources and videos to help children, young people, parents and teachers to discover the online world in a safe way.

(7) **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** helps the EU institutions and Member States to ensure that the rights of children, just like every other citizen, are respected and protected, including rights to truthful information. FRA helps protect children from fake news, disinformation, and hate speech by building resilience among young people and developing concrete technical tools for monitoring these issues.

GLOSSARY

CSOs = civil society organisations, organisations that are not associated with the government, such as schools and universities, interest groups, professional associations, churches, cultural institutions. Together they make up civil society.

To advocate = to speak or act in favor of something

WHAT INDUSTRY COULD DO?

Academia, international organizations, CSOs and even technology companies are vital in creating a safer digital environment for children. They provide guidance, conduct research, and advocate evidence-based policies to protect children from the harmful effects of misinformation.

1. **Policy guidance for kids' protection:** Collaborate with leaders and tech companies to assess and minimize false information impacting children online. Work with policymakers to collect data for independent analysis and develop effective strategies.

2. **Ongoing research to protect kids:** Continuously study and analyze trends to understand the impact of misinformation on children. Use research findings to advocate for evidence-based regulations and children's rights.

3. **Policymakers:** Implement child rights-based regulations prioritizing safety online. Encourage technology companies to support oversight, audits, and proactive responses to minimize harm. Invest in media and information literacy programs and support independent media outlets. Utilize research for informed interventions.

4. **Technology companies:** Implement measures to prevent disinformation, including fact-checking and content moderation tools. Invest in combating mis/disinformation affecting children. Promote media literacy education and collaborate with stakeholders. Prioritize meaningful connections and plurality of ideas for children.

GLOSSARY

Audit = an official examination of records or financial accounts to check their accuracy

Media literacy = the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication

WHAT CAN I DO?

Sometimes, media try to trick you with false information or make up stories. The online world is full of false information and rumors that spread quickly. You can be a target of false information, someone who shares it without knowing, or even someone who stands up against it by finding the truth.

Here are basic questions to ask when you encounter a piece of media:

1. *Who made this?*
2. *Who is the target audience?*
3. *Who paid for this? Or, who gets paid if you click on this?*
4. *Who might benefit or be harmed by this message?*
5. *What is left out of this message that might be important?*
6. *Is this credible (and what makes you think that)?*

Older kids especially might enjoy learning tricks to spot fake news. Here are a few things to watch for:

- *Look for unusual URLs* or site names, including those that end with ".co" -- these are often trying to appear like legitimate news sites, but they aren't.
- *Look for signs of low quality,* such as words in all caps, headlines with glaring grammatical errors, bold claims with no sources, and sensationalist images .
- *Check a site's "About Us" section.* Find out who supports the site or who is associated with it.

- *Check Snopes, Wikipedia, and Google before trusting or sharing news* that seems too good (or bad) to be true.
- *Consider whether other credible, mainstream news outlets are reporting the same news*. If they're not, it doesn't mean it's not true, but it does mean you should dig deeper.
- *Check your emotions*. Clickbait and fake news strive for extreme reactions. If the news you're reading makes you really angry or super smug, it could be a sign that you're being manipulated. Check multiple sources before trusting.

But, to tackle this problem, we need a team effort. You, your parents, caregivers, teachers, and experts, all need to work together.

You as young and responsible citizens

While you may be targets and objects of misinformation, many young people like you are stepping up to fight against its spread. They actively participate in fact-checking initiatives, advocate for legislation that supports truthful journalism, and use social media to engage in civic and political issues.

Many children around the world contribute to online fact-checking initiatives and myth-busting efforts.

They play a crucial role in verifying information and exposing falsehoods. For example, organizations like UNICEF Nepal and Teens for Press Freedom in New York provide platforms for young individuals to challenge misinformation and protect the truth.
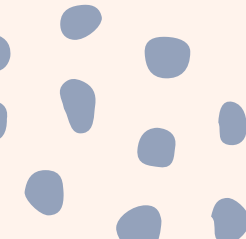
- **Question and Verify:** Always question the information you come across online. Don't believe everything you read without verifying its accuracy. Look for reliable sources and cross-check information from multiple trustworthy websites or news outlets. Remember, being curious and asking critical questions helps you separate facts from fiction.

- **Learn media literacy skills:** Education and learning is cool. Knowing how stuff works is even cooler. Develop your media literacy skills to become a smart consumer of information. Learn how to evaluate the credibility of sources, identify bias, and recognize red flags of misinformation. Understand the importance of fact-checking and use reliable fact-checking websites or tools to verify information before sharing it with others.

- **Be mindful of your online presence:** Think twice before sharing or reposting information. Consider the potential impact your actions may have on others. Be responsible and avoid spreading unverified information. If you notice misinformation, report it to the platform or inform a trusted adult who can help address the issue.Your presence on social media serves as a powerful tool for engaging in political and civic issues.

- **Think before you share:** Before sharing something online, ask yourself if it's trustworthy. Check if the source is reliable and if the information seems too unbelievable or strange. Only share things that you know are true and important. Remember, sharing false information can make it spread even more, so be careful and responsible when sharing things online.

- **Choose trusted sources:** Make a list of websites and people you trust for accurate information. Follow news sites that you know are reliable and trustworthy. Find experts or grown-ups you can trust to give you good information.
- **Stay informed and ask questions:** Keep yourself updated on what's happening in the world by following news for kids or websites made for children. Stay curious and ask questions when you don't understand something. Talk to grown-ups or teachers who can help you find the right answers.

Remember: if you're ever unsure about something you see online, don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted adult for guidance and support.

Parents and carers

In today's digital world, where information can sometimes be confusing or wrong, parents have an important role in helping their kids make sense of it all. By joining in their media activities and encouraging critical thinking, parents can teach their children how to tell fact from fiction.

- **First and foremost - make sure your child is aware that fake news exists.** It's important to understand that even though it may seem obvious, many children may not realize that not everything they read online is true. Children tend to be trusting and may not be as skeptical as adults. The first step is to make them aware that there are individuals who spread false information on the internet.

- **Join in and talk about media with your kids.** Have open conversations with your kids about what they see online, like news stories or videos. Make it a safe space where they can share their thoughts and ask questions. If you come across something that isn't true, talk about it together and figure out the real facts. This helps your kids develop their critical thinking skills.
- **Question and correct false information.** When you find false information, help your kids learn how to ask questions and check if it's true. Teach them to look for trustworthy sources and signs that something might not be reliable. By doing this, you give them the power to make informed choices.
- **Support fun learning.** Look for programs or activities that teach kids about media and how to be smart online. There are cool websites and classes that can help. You can find books for parents that give tips on helping kids think critically about what they see and hear. Or watch some Netflix documentaries together.
- **Speak up for better education.** Encourage companies that make technology, policymakers, and the government to give kids better tools to learn about media. They should have access to information that helps them stay safe and make smart decisions online. Let's ask for more support and resources to teach kids about media literacy in schools.
- **By following these simple steps, parents can fight against false information and help their kids** become smart media consumers. Together, we can raise a generation of critical thinkers who know how to navigate the online world.

MORE HELP!

- **Saferinternet.at** (Austrian awareness centre for children, carers and teachers) tel.: +43 1 595 21 12-51, email: office@saferinternet.at
- **Rat auf Draht** (Austrian helpline) tel.: 147, mail:office@saferinternet.at
- **Stopline** (Austrian hotline to report illegal online content) tel.: +43 (1) 409 55 76, email: office@stopline.at
- **fit4internet** (Austrian initiative to strengthen digital competencies) email: office@fit4internet.at
- **Digitaler Kompass** (Austrian non-profit organization to foster media literacy) email: office@digitalerkompass.at
- **Mimikama** (Austrian search engine for children) website: mimikama.org
- **Blinde Kuh** (German search engine for children) website: blinde-kuh.de
- **Epicenter.Works** (Austrian initiative for data safety) email: team@epicenter.works
- **Kijuku** (online platform for child related topics) tel.: +43 676 903 78 89, email: heinz@kijuku.at

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Notes

Notes

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Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence FREuDe

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