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Handbook Combating Fake News

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Fake News on Social Media

Why fake news spreads: behind the social network .

Overall, the study involved 2,476 active Facebook users ranging in age from 18 to 89 who volunteered in response to online advertising to participate. They were compensated to complete a "decision-making" survey approximately seven minutes long.
Surprisingly, the researchers found that users' social media habits doubled and, in some cases, tripled the amount of fake news they shared. Their habits were more influential in sharing fake news than other factors, including political beliefs and lack of critical reasoning.
Frequent, habitual users forwarded six times more fake news than occasional or new users.
"This type of behavior has been rewarded in the past by algorithms that prioritize engagement when selecting which posts users see in their news feed, and by the structure and design of the sites themselves," said second author Ian A. Anderson, a behavioral scientist and doctoral candidate at USC Dornsife. "Understanding the dynamics behind misinformation spread is important given its political, health and social consequences."

Experimenting with different scenarios to see why fake news spreads.

In the first experiment, the researchers found that habitual users of social media share both true and fake news.
In another experiment, the researchers found that habitual sharing of misinformation is part of a broader pattern of insensitivity to the information being shared. In fact, habitual users shared politically discordant news — news that challenged their political beliefs — as much as concordant news that they endorsed.
Lastly, the team tested whether social media reward structures could be devised to promote sharing of true over false information. They showed that incentives for accuracy rather than popularity (as is currently the case on social media sites) doubled the amount of accurate news that users share on social platforms.

The study's conclusions:

Habitual sharing of misinformation is not inevitable. Users could be incentivized to build sharing habits that make them more sensitive to sharing truthful content. Effectively reducing misinformation would require restructuring the online environments that promote and support its sharing.
These findings suggest that social media platforms can take a more active step than moderating what information is posted and instead pursue structural changes in their reward structure to limit the spread of misinformation.



Ways social media platforms try to prevent the spreading fake news!

In the recent years social media started to be the most used way to find information. Which is why apps started paying a lot more attention on the content that is uploaded to it. That lead to apps having their own restrictions for information that are spread on their platforms. Here are some of your favorite apps and ways that they fight fake news.

TWITTER

To limit the spread of misleading information on COVID-19, earlier in the year Twitter issued guidance on how it was going to tackle the problem of spreading fake news and since has removed many tweets and challenged accounts. They also put a spotlight on credible information to make it easier to find on the platform. Twitter has also launched several campaigns such as Think before sharing prompt which notifies people before they share an article.

FACEBOOK

To tackle the spread of misinformation on Facebook and Instagram, Facebook launched its first fact-checking initiative in December 2016. Since then, the program is now in a range of countries around the world. The program involves the following: identifying false news by using a range of signals like feedback from people on Facebook, acting against repeat offenders in the form of restrictions on their page or account, reviewing content for accuracy and more… They also invested $100 Million in the News Industry to maintain reliable news reporting.

YOUTUBE

YouTube introduced a policy which tackles content that contradicts World Health Organization or local health authorities' guidance on issues related to the treatment, prevention, diagnostic or transmission of Covid-19.

TIKTOK

TikTok uses a three-step approach to combat misinformation. The first step is enhancing its misinformation policies. Second step is expanding reporting options and fact-checking. And the last step is countering foreign interference.

SNAPCHAT

To help young people on their platform access trusted news, Snapchat's Discover section which is the professional news and entertainment section is carefully curated by an editorial team. They carefully consider who should be featured in the section to make sure the information that is featured is credible.



The impact of fake news from social media on society

FN is increasingly affecting societal values, changing opinions on critical issues and topics as well as redefining facts, truths, and beliefs. To understand the degree to which FN has changed society and the meaning of FN, this study proposes a novel conceptual framework derived from the literature on FN, SM, and societal acceptance theory. The conceptual framework is developed into a meta-framework that analyzes survey data from 356 respondents. This study explored fuzzy set-theoretic comparative analysis; the outcomes of this research suggest that societies are split on differentiating TN from FN. The results also show splits in societal values. Overall, this study provides a new perspective on how FN on SM is disintegrating societies and replacing TN with FN.

In cascading news and sensitive information, the fundamental principles are embedded in the concepts of truth as well as the theories of accuracy in communication. However, in the past five years or so, social media (SM) has redefined the structure, dimensions, and complexity of the news. The impact of SM, specifically on political affairs, has been attracting more interest, as SM platforms, notably Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, enable the broad sharing of information and news. In addition to providing information, another main purpose of SM is to enable people to engage in social interaction, communication, and entertainment. Many SM posts are looking for support, whereas reposting aims to spread messages via the multiplicative effect.

By providing unlimited access to a large amount of information, people can share different beliefs and values. However, the risks and implications of this new resource remain unclear to most of the population. One such risk is fake news (FN). FN, although unvetted, has a credible and professional appearance, ensuring that people cannot always distinguish it from true news (TN). The effects of FN cut across society, for example, the spread of FN on SM determines how governments, organizations, and people respond to events in society. The majority of FN is targeted to a specific sample of the population with the aim of promoting a certain ideology by stimulating strong beliefs and polarizing society. FN has become a major part of SM, raising doubts about information credibility, quality, and verification. Studies investigating the influence of FN on SM have appeared in various fields such as digital media, journalism, and politics; however, in-depth analyses of the impact of FN on society remain scarce.

The way algorithms work

A social media algorithm is a set of rules and signals that automatically ranks content on a social platform based on how likely each individual social media user is to like it and interact with it.

Why are algorithms bad?

Because social media algorithms will serve up content related to what you've already interacted with, this can create a "rabbit hole" effect if left unchecked.

Why is social media harmful? It's not just because of what's being shared or what you might be exposed to; it's because your attention is what's for sale. Social media platforms are free because advertisers pay to get access to you. That's how advertising works. The problem is that these platforms have capitalized on what gets your attention: things that are shocking, extreme, inflammatory, emotional, and stimulating.



How To Identify Fake News on social media

The difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy news on public forums has become a frequently discussed topic over the last few years. Social media is an almost unavoidable part of our society now and it cannot always be a trusted news source.

There are two kinds of false information to be aware of—misinformation and disinformation. Social media is a public platform, anyone can post anything without being responsible for fact-checking. Misinformation is classified as “false or misleading content including conspiracy theories, fabricated reports, …

Misinformation is not deliberately intended to deceive. Instead, it aims to change public opinion on a given topic.

Disinformation can be spread using many of the same tactics as misinformation. Disinformation is created to deceive, and it can be dangerous. Social media platforms make money by selling user data to ad companies, which is why you’ll often see ads according to your interests. As an individual, being aware that the news you see on your feed is filtered based on previously collected data can help you be more conscious of your own bias. If you represent a business using social media as a marketing platform, it’s important to keep your posts consistent with your brand.

Fake news on social media may be unavoidable. You can help stop the spread by thinking critically. Social media is a powerful tool, for both businesses and individuals.



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Stereotypes

Stereotypes can be the cause of a lot of misinformation, disinformation, and even malinformation, and is a tool used by many creators of fake news to convince the audience that the content they spread is real. Stereotypes are also responsible for irrational judgment and they can cut short the connection between people because of false assumptions. First, we would like to define that there are “three levels" to stereotypes and explain what they are:

* The first level tends to be first thoughts by people uneducated about the country. Because of this, level 1 stereotypes tend to not be based on much truth as they are just that, presumptions. Because of this, Lv 1 tends to be negative (eg: “Eastern European means 3rd World").

* Level two stereotypes, are stereotypes engraved in culture, usually because of History. Lv 2 can be based on truth, usually an outdated one, but has been morphed ever since. French being associated with beret or UK with tea and top hats are level 2 stereotypes (“every French person wants a beret” however leans on to level 1, I like to call this level 1.5)

* Level 3 however tend to be based on some or full-on truth.

Bulgarian stereotypes from a Bulgarian's perspective

In the case of Bulgaria, for example, level 3 are things people who have studied Bulgaria tend to associate with it. Some may say Lv 3 shouldn't count as a “stereotype", but there are some examples of stereotypes for Bulgaria and Bulgarians such as:

1. Oh, Bulgaria! You use the Russian alphabet, don’t you?
2. Bulgaria was a Soviet republic during communism.
3. The geographers haven’t fixed the location of Bulgaria yet, but it should be somewhere there. Ou est la Bulgarie? was a question on duty to me in France.
4. Yogurt is typical in Bulgaria. The first thing most Japanese associates Bulgaria with is yogurt.
5. Bulgarian girls are beautiful - slim, feminine, and charming.
6. Bulgarian men are macho, rough, and bulky like bulldozers.
7. The dark communist regime fell down and now Bulgarians are happy to acquire democracy in their country.
8. Bulgaria benefits from the EU.
9. Bulgarians are very poor.
10. Bulgaria or Romania, it doesn’t matter, it’s actually the same.

Now that we have covered my terminology and examples, it’s time to answer the question.

Level 1 Stereotypes:

Remember, Lv1 tends to be the first presumption by uneducated individuals and can be based on truth, but that isn't always the case.

* Bulgaria is an Eastern European country, and for that matter, a Balkan one. Naturally, people hearing Bulgarian assume that Bulgaria is poor. Bulgaria is obviously not as rich as the US or UK, but defining it as “poor" is a complicated issue for another time.

* Along with being “poor", other negative Lv1 stereotypes, possibly deriving from being East European include: Bulgaria being unsanitary, dangerous, 3rd World, etc. None or little of these are true.

* To people who aren't Anglo/American-centric and assume that all other countries but their own are poor, another big stereotype is that Bulgarians are racist. Once again, depending on your source; every person is different, whether you look at Bulgaria, the UK, Spain, or whatever.

* Rather than stereotypes, some other presumptions by less educated include “does Bulgaria speak Russian?”, “is Bulgaria Asian?”, etc.



Level 2 Stereotypes:

Lv2 Stereotypes tend to be (usually although not always more accurate) clichés engraved into the culture, similar to French being associated with beret and baguettes. Bulgaria however isn't that well known by the English-speaking world, so “engraved in (pop-)culture” is hard to dig out. So many Bulgaria lv2 stereotypes tend to be “general Balkan stereotypes". These include:

* Horrible Politic(ian)s that messed up the country (this one is relatively true)
* Hates Turks (again)

My definition for Lv2 is “engraved in culture", this means that Lv2 Stereotypes vary by country. Non-English speaking Lv2 Stereotypes of Bulgaria include:

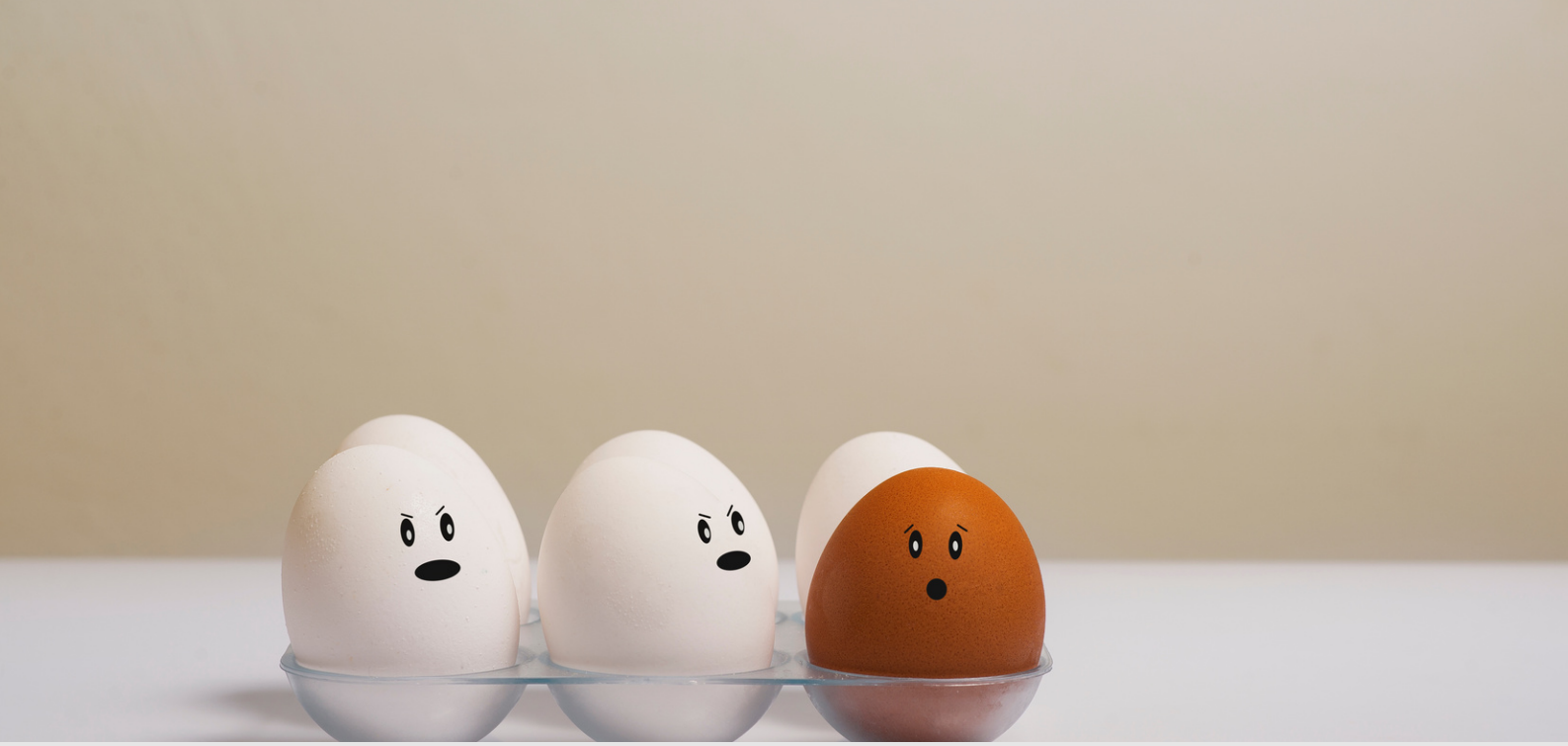
* Bulgaria is Neo-Nazi (many N Macedonians view Bulgaria this way, as there is a rivalry between the two, and Bulgaria was on the Axis)
* Bulgaria is a backstabber (Serbian view of Bulgaria because of 2nd Balkan war. Bulgarians reciprocate back, although nowadays the two are mostly fine)
* “Mongol” stereotype. The two major people groups Bulgaria was founded between include the Slavs and the semi-nomadic steppe peoples known as “Bulgars”. People’s first association of “semi-nomadic steppe peoples” is instant “Mongols”, and that misinterpretation grew into an online meme between Balkans. They presume the entire country is a certain concept.
* Other possibly 1.5 stereotypes include: Bulgarians being stubborn, Bulgarian men being overprotective, etc.
* I’ve noticed “Bulgarians are mean”, “depressed”, and “self-hating” to be a common theme. This may have arisen from the fact that anything Eastern European has been made negative or the villain by Hollywood.
* Positive stereotypes include: Bulgarian women are pretty. Bulgaria is a common ski and beach destination.
* Cheap Holidays.
* Possibly 2.5 and 3 stereotypes:

You may notice that when people actually start researching Bulgaria, many begin to associate Bulgaria with the same things (hence why I consider Lv3 a stereotype).

I have also included many Lv 2.5 as well, ie: Stereotypes that should go in Lv2, but compared to other Lv2 stereotypes, they tend to be either more true or get revealed to you only post-research (Lv3 trait).

* Roses. Bulgaria is famous for the Rose Valley, and many Bulgarians tend to brag about their Rose oil production, enforcing the “stereotype". I've noticed Barbs from Geography Now also feeds this “stereotype" to the world.
* Nods for No, Shakes for Yes. Quite self-explanatory, could even pass as an Lv2.
* Yoghurt. Bulgaria is famous for its Yoghurt, especially due to containing a bacteria unique only to Bulgaria. A “stereotype" (see below).
* Bulgarian folk music. I’ve always assumed it was underappreciated outside Bulgaria, but I’ve noticed many music theory buffs tend to be fond of Bulgarian music. A more vulgar genre of music is “pop-folk”, or “turbo-folk” in Serbian.

Notice how I wrote stereotypes in quotation marks several times across my Lv3 examples. This is because many might not consider these stereotypes, as a lot of the Lv3 examples I gave are facts, not just stereotypes. I however do not share the same definition for the stereotype, truth is not a stereotype factor for me.



Romanian stereotypes from a Romanian perspective

Romanians are one of the people who suffer regularly because of stereotypes and it is common for them to have lower chances than other populations to obtain a job just because of what employers assume of them based on their nationality. This is also linked to the impact of social media, as many news websites can profit from this situation to make their point of view more convincing. One of the stereotypes that Romanians have to face is that they all steal. Of course, the stereotypes don't come out of the blue sky, there is a grain of truth that starts them, but the main problem is the way they generalize a whole population. So, if social media or even a TV channel portrays a case of theft, there is a greater chance to assume and convince the audience that a Romanian is responsible for it which is many times not true because crimes are not based on nationalities, but on personal education and mindset.

There are many more stereotypes that are spread by social media about Romania which have a negative impact on the population's well-being. Some of them are that Romania is a very poor and dirty country, that the political parties are all corrupt, that the roads are terrible, or that the streets are full of stray dogs. As mentioned before, they all have a grain of truth, but they are the cause of generalization. In fact, recently a 43-year-old woman was killed by stray dogs in the capital city of Romania. (source 2) Although this information is true, this type of case is extremely rare nowadays and the population of stray dogs has decreased drastically in the last few years. However, this news can be used by social media to convince people that Romania is a dangerous country to visit, which will obviously lead to a negative impact on the way the country is seen and its tourism.

Polish stereotypes from a Polish perspective

In Poland, women are judged all the time, and stereotypes can be seen even on the Internet. Women are constantly being judged on their dress and appearance. People associate women's age with what they should be wearing. They repeatedly pay attention to whether a given style is age-appropriate, ignoring the fit of the figure. Most often, young women are criticized for dressing too provocatively. (source 3) Polish society is open to new things but still follows traditional patterns. In social media, they try to break these stereotypes to present themselves from a different perspective, to oppose them. New stereotypes are also emerging (e.g. typical Janusz, typical Grażyna), which refer to the social and cultural situation. These sayings refer to the primitive attitude of Poles and evoke their negative features. A typical Janusz is considered to be a person who does not know his field, and a typical Grazyna is a person who is not very intelligent and likes shopping and gossiping. (source 4) Such people are often the subject of jokes on the Internet, memes are created with their participation. Stereotypical Poles are known for complaining, and drinking vodka, they are all conservative Catholics, and Polish cuisine is famous for pork chops with potatoes. There are many myths about Poland and Poles, but modern society is trying to fight them. (source 5)



Greek stereotypes from a Greek perspective

In my life, I have heard many things about Greece and its people, especially through social media that didn't really correspond to reality. The stereotypes that the media promote do not represent our culture and our country at all

The first one is the most common one. All Greek Islands are like Santorini. It is understandable to expect that all Greek islands have the typical white houses with blue windows since the most known and promoted Greek island in the world is Santorini. But no they are not. Every single island is different as far as the architecture, landscape, or cuisine and it's beautiful and unique in its own way. The second stereotype that usually comes from social media is that Greece is always warm. It is but not all the year. In Greece, it can get really, really cold. Especially in some villages, every year it reaches around -20 degrees. Ok, it is not for a long time but still. In Greece, there are mountains where you can go skiing and do snow activities. This stereotype was formed due to movies and ads that represent Greece as a place of warmth and sun. Also, the beautiful beaches and the island contributed to this kind of stereotype.

Greeks are lazy. Ok, this is a sad topic, especially highlighted in the crisis years. Actually, if someone checks out the working hours per year, will find out that Greece is in the top 20 countries globally with the most working hours per month. (source 6) I would say that we are not lazy, we just have our own pace and this can be misunderstood. I think the laziness stereotype is based upon the typical Greek public servant that let’s say, she/he is not so excited about the job. But let’s be honest, this public servant phenomenon, unfortunately, happens in many countries. Another famous stereotype is that Greek people smoke a lot. Unfortunately, this is mostly true. A survey taken by the European Commission for World No Tobacco Day in 2017 found that approximately 37% of Greeks are regular smokers and only 44% of Greeks had never smoked a cigarette. (source 7) The survey concluded that Greeks are more likely to smoke than people in any other European country and are far less likely to have never smoked a cigarette than people in any other European countries. This stereotype came from many different factors but the most famous and sad one was when Greece’s deputy health minister Pavlos Polakis—who is a professional surgeon—broke the law against smoking in public buildings by smoking indoors at a press conference inside the Ministry of Health headquarters where he knew there were cameras and he would be photographed**.**



Croatian stereotypes from a Croatian perspective

Croatian culture values community over being an individual. This means family and friends are more important than ambition and work, because of this, and how much Croatians spend time with their family, social media uses it for advertising Croatia as a perfect place for tourists. It's a perfect place if you want to go somewhere and feel at home and feel safe.

Some Croatian traits have become stereotypes, such as our carefree coffee drinking which can take up to a couple of hours. For example, people order the cheapest coffee for 1,50€ and some two or three packs of cigarettes and stay at the coffee shop for at least 2-3 hours.

Croatians are proud of their country, generous with their friends, and easy on themselves. We're passionate people, especially about sports.

1. Croatians are passionate people and swear a lot
2. Personal Insults will be returned 2x back at you
3. Almost all young people know English (if not Italian and german as well)
4. Some people take sports very seriously so expect crowded bars when events are on TV (source 8)

Croatians like to mock everything that I've mentioned, and those stereotypes are very funny to us, even though they are true. People like to post tiktoks imitating those stereotypes, how we swear, how passionate, loud, and open we are. Because of that, people from a lot of opinions about us, sometimes bad, but mostly good. Those videos get so many views and they become a hit in our country.

Conclusion

As you can see, stereotypes are common to every nationality and they affect many people. News and social media can easily use stereotypes to do harm, but when you actually talk to people from inside the stereotype, you are surprised to discover that they are exaggerated or simply not true. So our advice is to always make your own research and don't believe in generalizations.

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Fake News

What is fake news?

Fake news is false stories that appear to be news, spread on the Internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views. Fake news is created with the intent to manipulate someone or something.

Misinformation is false information but the person who is spreading it believes that it is true.

Disinformation is false information that is shared with the intention of misleading people. The sharer of the “news” knows that it is false unlike misinformation, the purpose of disinformation is not good faith.

Malinformation is the publication of private information that is true but it is intentionally harmful to a person, organization, or country.

Fake news exists because:

- political programs with the use of made-up information can help certain political parties or figures validate their opinions.

-sometimes it can be easier to believe in fake news than real news

-fake news with controversial headlines generates more attention

How to evaluate fake news?

In evaluating the credibility of an information source there are several key areas to consider:

•the Authority of the author and the background of the publisher

•the Objectivity of the author

•the Quality of the work

•the Currency of the work

•the Relevancy of the work

How to find Authority:

Ask these questions:

-Who is the author?

-What are the author's credentials?

-Who is the publisher?

What is Objectivity?

-Does the author state the goals for this publication?

-Does the author exhibit a particular bias?

-Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched?

To evaluate Quality:

-Is the information well-organized?

-Are the graphics (images, tables, charts, diagrams) appropriate?

-If a web page, is the information reliable?

The Currency of the work:

-When was it published?

-Is your topic one that requires current information?

-Has this source been updated in a subsequent edition?

How to evaluate the Relevancy?

Ask the question:

-Is the content appropriate for your research topic or assignment?



Tools for fact-checking „fake news“

There are various ways to check whether the news is fake or not, including using tools that were created just for this purpose. Some examples could include:

■ FactCheck.org – created by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It can be used for checking the accuracy of political speeches, interviews, debates, news stories, and other communications done by major U.S. political players.

■ Politifact – created by Tampa Bay Times. It is an independent fact-checking website that rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials and others who speak about American politics.

■ Snopes – created to fact-check urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation. Snopes got its start in 1994, investigating urban legends, hoaxes, and folklore.

How does fake news spread?

Nowadays as "USC News'' has discovered social platforms are the biggest influencer in spreading fake news. It is spread there to reach receptive audiences. "CITS" tells us that the people responsible for fake news are bots and trolls. Trolls are people who set up social media accounts for the sole purpose of spreading fake news and fanning the flames of misinformation. Bots help to propagate fake news and inflate the apparent popularity of fake news on social media. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have become home to millions of social bots that spread fake news. According to a 2017 estimate, there were 23 million bots on Twitter (around 8.5% of all accounts), 140 million bots on Facebook (up to 5.5% of accounts), and around 27 million bots on Instagram (8.2% of the accounts). That's 190 million bots on social media – more than half the number of people who live in the entire USA! Research by Tandoc et al. Suggests an additional social dynamic from popularity indicators: "When a post is accompanied by many likes, shares, or comments, it is more likely to receive attention by others, and therefore more likely to be further liked, shared, or commented on".But research also shows that people are more likely to share fake news than real news, for several different reasons. Human Twitter users are 70% more likely to retweet fake news than truthful stories because they are funnier and seem to grab more attention.

Why is Fake News harmful? An impact on different aspects

In the last years, Fake News has had a large impact on people, politics, and the Internet.

One of the largest events of fake news propagating and causing distress was the COVID-19 pandemic.

A meta-study has found that the presence of both medical information and Fake News on social media can have negative effects on people's mental health with symptoms like anxiety, fatigue, depression, and even psychological disorders.

In politics, disinformation can help a politician or a political party influence the opinion of the voters. This was exemplified during the 2020 United States presidential election.

In October 2020 a news agency wrote an article about illegal materials found on Hunter Biden's (Joe Biden's son) laptop. The materials also involved unlawful business deals, that Joe Biden was involved in. It was later found out, that the story was heavily suppressed by social media. Current surveys showed that if the voters knew about this story, he wouldn't have been elected.

When it comes to the Internet, people started to use it as a primary source of information. Fake news has always existed, but in recent years it has taken a new form. Nowadays anybody can say something and it can be seen by millions.

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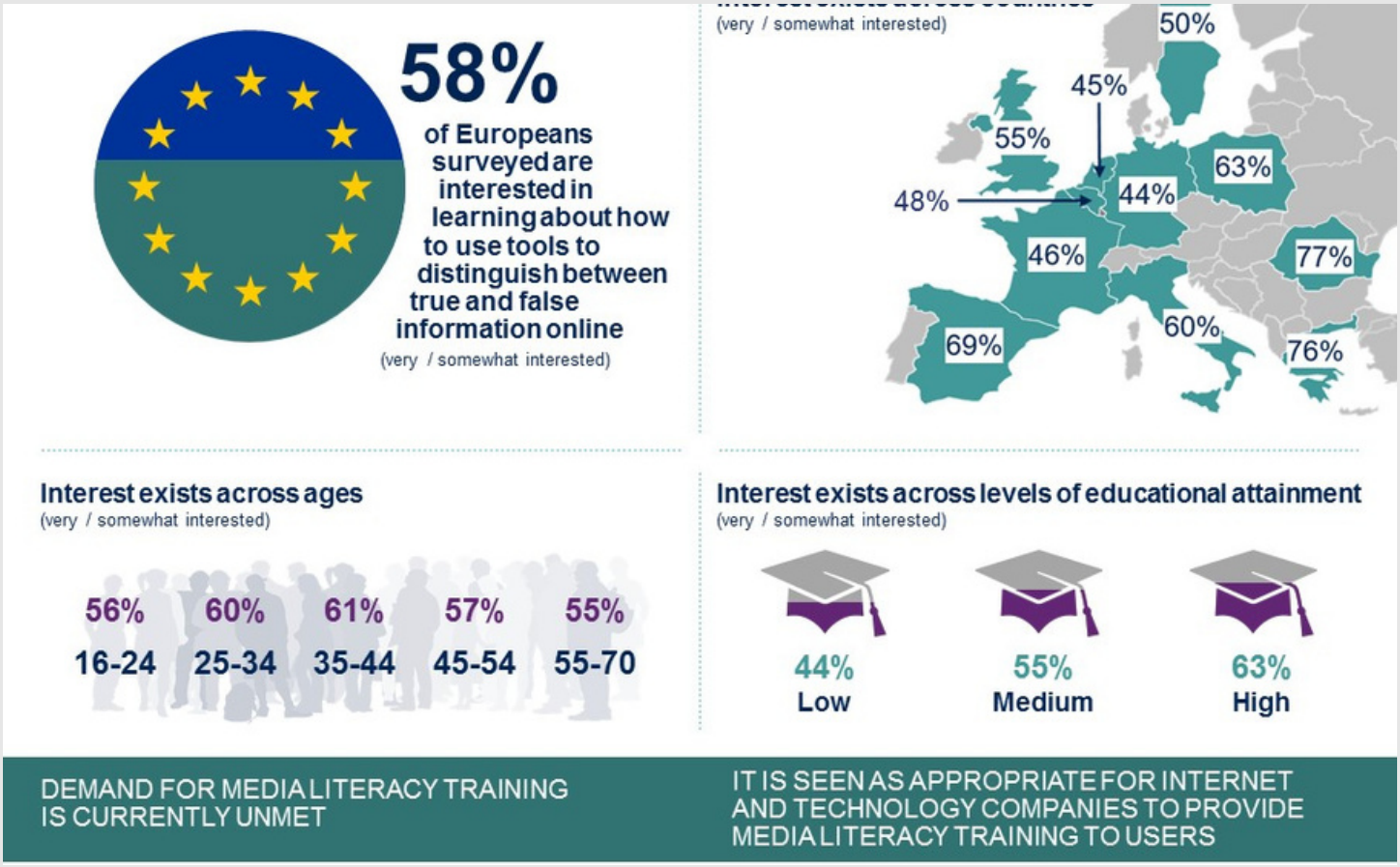


Bad Education

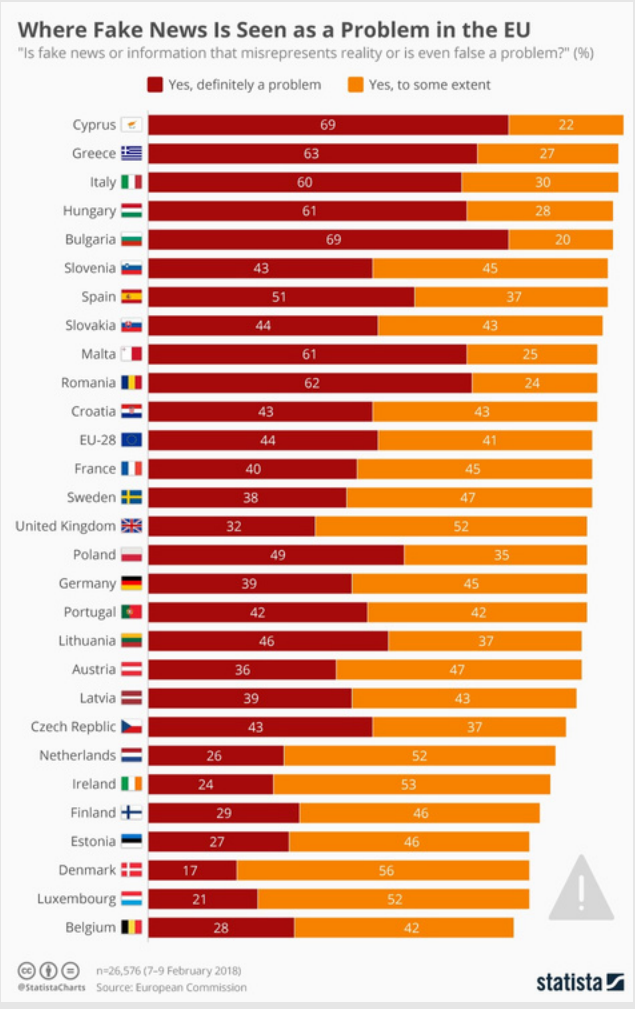
Fake news refers to the spread of false or misleading information, often through traditional news media or online platforms. It can be spread intentionally or unintentionally and can have serious consequences for individuals and society.

Bad education is linked to poor quality of education, which can include insufficient funding, inadequate resources, poor teacher training, and lack of access to educational opportunities for certain groups of people. This can result in lower literacy rates, fewer job opportunities, and a lack of critical thinking skills.

There is a connection between fake news and bad education in that both can lead to a lack of critical thinking and the spread of misinformation. A poorly educated population may be more susceptible to falling for fake news, and the spread of fake news can further perpetuate bad education by spreading false information. Additionally, a lack of access to reliable information can make it difficult for individuals to make informed decisions and can lead to the reinforcement of misinformation and stereotypes. Therefore, addressing both issues is important for promoting a well-informed and critical thinking society.







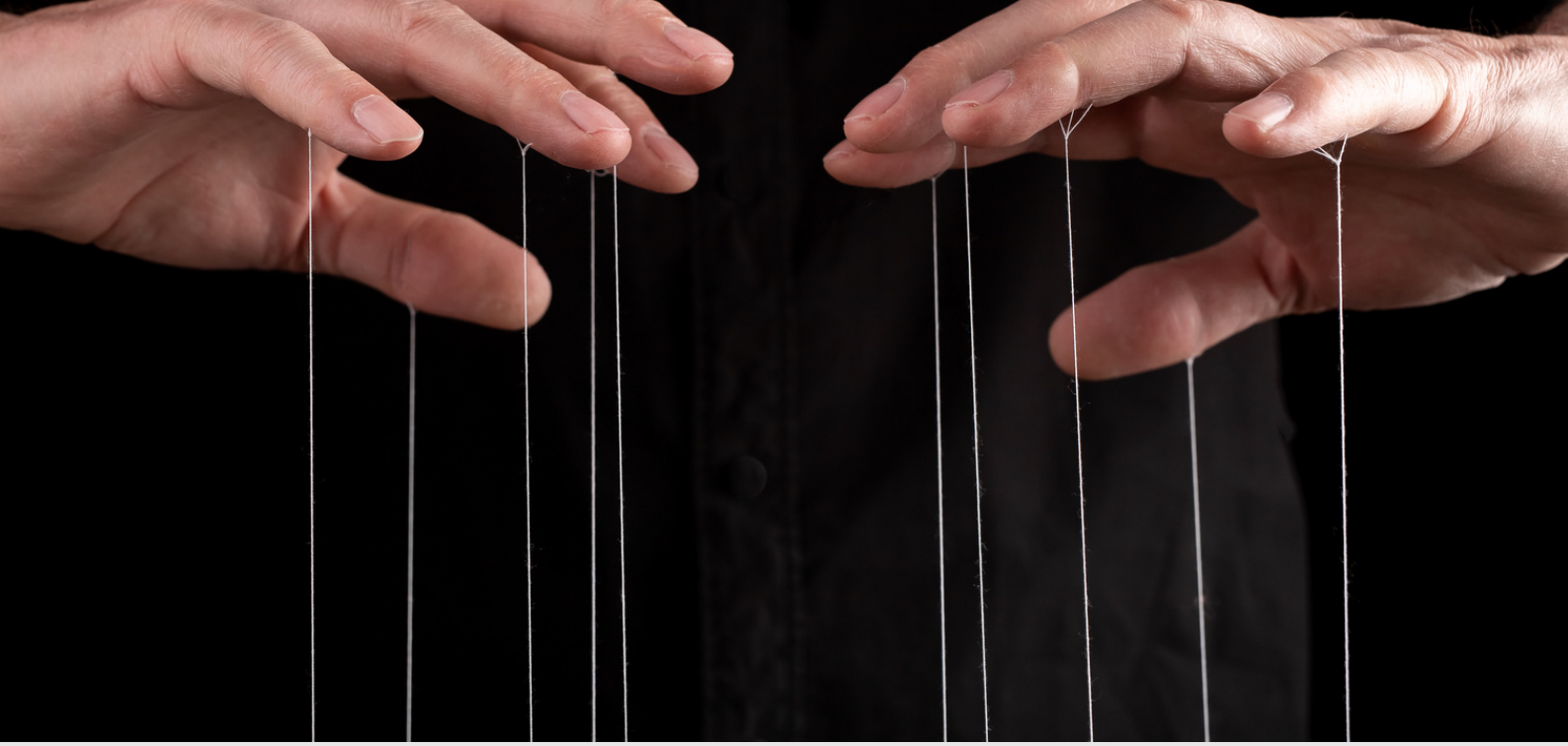
According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, at least seven in ten respondents in all 28 EU member states perceive fake news to be a problem in their country.

There are several ways to deal with bad education. One way to deal with this issue is to teach critical thinking skills, such as fact-checking and source evaluation. Additionally, teaching media literacy, including understanding how news is reported and produced, can help individuals better understand and identify fake news. Furthermore, providing access to reliable sources of information and encouraging the use of those sources can also help combat the spread of fake news.

Another way to fight fake news through education is to provide training and resources for educators on how to teach media literacy and critical thinking skills in the classroom. This could include workshops, lesson plans, and online resources that educators can use to integrate these skills into their curriculum. Also, another approach is to promote digital literacy, especially among the younger generation, and educate them on how to discern credible information from misinformation and disinformation on the internet. This includes educating them on how to verify the authenticity of news sources and the information they find online, and how to identify misleading or manipulated content.

To sum up, it is clear that fake news is closely correlated to bad education and is a severe issue in many European countries. It can't be solved in the immediate future, as there are many factors involved and, for this reason, it requires effort from many different sides.

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Facts Manipulation

Introduction

Nowadays, the word "manipulation" is used all over the world by a variety of people. This term has been used in 1827 for the first time and referred to "a skillful action by hand" including actions such as: moving, operating, and guiding. Nevertheless, the meaning of the term "manipulation" has changed over the years. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as " behavior that controls and influences somebody/something often in a dishonest way so that they do not realize it". According to Ruchu Sinha (2022), there are different tactics of manipulation, for instance: casting self-doubt, superficial charm, social comparisons, and misinformation. The word "manipulation" usually has negative associations.

Manipulation

Example of manipulation in Poland: Influence of the church in Poland

In Poland from the Middle Ages people of the church were strongly connected on a friend level with the rulers of the country. People that attend church are usually persuaded during priests' speeches for the most profitable political parties. These parties are usually supporting churches with taxes placed on citizens. What is more, this party is also in favor of the church due to its strongly conservative approach, regarding abortion laws and the general freedom of citizens.

Clerks are using advanced techniques of manipulation. An example of this kind of influence is that, when the donations during mass begin, the priests are walking around praying to people with a tray for money, so everyone can see how much is already given. Moreover, during the donation, there are religious psalms sung, about giving up everything to God. Prayers and psalms said and sung during masses are directly mentioning that faithful citizens should be poor, and give up everything, it's usually about that humans are nothing, and only God and the church matters. These kinds of mantras are introducing people into numbness by continuously repeating those phrases. This state is also amplified with incense, which declares the ability of decision-making. Priests are elevated during masses above believers, in this way the hierarchy is imposed, and people are supposed to follow the leader.

Fact manipulation in Poland

One example of fact manipulation in Poland is the statistics of people who were infected with Covid-19. Marek Nowicki (2020) stated that the highest number of infections was registered in Poland when the government made the biggest amount of tests. After some time, when fewer PCR tests were made and the number of antigen tests increased, the statistics showed that fewer people were infected with the virus.

According to Tomasz Anyszek - board attorney for laboratory medicine in "Diagnostyka" company, many antigen tests were not made by laboratories. They were conducted e.g. directly by hospital emergency departments and their results were not reported. It was denied by the Polish Health Ministry, nevertheless the findings of the editors of "Facts" has proven that the results of the antigen tests were not included in the statistics (for instance, the results of the test that were conducted by "Diagnostyka" company).



Truth manipulation and use of the media in Italy (opinion)

The Italian media system and the manipulation of news in Italy make it all so complex and articulated.
In recent times, crimes and political scandals are at the center of all broadcasts, and some of this news is manipulated for specific purposes.
The Italian media sometimes modify reality by combining information with something that it's not news; it's just a trick to influence public opinion, without saying anything important.
Our media, in most cases, also omits critical reflection to give more space to emotional comments: there are lots of commentators and criminologists who talk without no clear evidence of the facts.
They do breaking news about crimes committed by non-EU-citizens, just to let politics use that news as an advantage for their purposes and to have bigger support (just look at the comments from the far right, like Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni, the actual Prime Minister).
Heated discussions and protests are used to foster ignorance, and mediocrity and to let people not be careful about the important things that happen every day in Italy.

Conclusions

Manipulation of society is present in many different countries and different environments. It's extremely difficult to avoid it, but it's possible to share the awareness so that people could be more careful with following the 'easy' path and protect themselves. Manipulation should be also limited from the media and different sources of it.



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Discrimination noticed in different countries

People all over the world are coping with discrimination in daily life. It may happen at work, school, home, or on the street. But what actually the discrimination is? It is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

The Polish Minister of education Przemysław Czarnek is well-known for his really conservative beliefs. He points out the old-line role of women and his animosity to the LGBTQ+ community. He believes that women's vocation is to bear children. Przemysław Czarnek also spoke about informal relationships and same-sex marriages. He said that "there is no such thing as homosexual marriage in nature." He stated that marriage is only a relationship between a man and a woman. He says that we should "protect families from this kind of depravity and absolutely immoral behavior." He added that "we should defend ourselves against LGBTQ+ ideology and stop listening to this nonsense about some human rights or some equality. These people are not equal to normal people" he said on TVP in June 2020.
It can be said that he shows discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, actually any other family model than the Christian one. His statements may also activate conservative citizens to show hate or even violence to people with different beliefs than them.

"There is no discrimination if the potential employer asks the candidate to remove her veil during an interview or once hired in the company. Provided that there is an internal regulation that "applies generally and without distinction to all employees". That is, it does not affect a single religion. The judges of the European Court of Justice established it yesterday."
"According to the latest Istat note on homicide victims, 303 homicides were committed in 2021. In 184 cases the victims are men and in 119 they are women (39.3% of the total). The victims killed in a couple or family relationship are 139 (45.9% of the total), 39 men and 100 women."





In Veneto in the city of Mestre on January 19, 2020, a 19-year-old student of Chinese descent was publicly spat on by a group of teenagers, who hurled insults at her and told her to "go back to her country".
The young woman recounted the incident on her Facebook page: "I was returning home from Mestre when the kids kept bothering me at the platform saying 'try to pronounce the R, you won't be able to'". Once on the train, the insults continued.
"Today I had proof that racism still exists, especially among kids", wrote Valentina Wang.
All this under the eyes of another boy traveling in the same carriage who, however, did not intervene in his defense.
Then the 19-year-old, who has already been targeted by bullies on other occasions, concluded: "I don't know what to say, I'm dejected, above all because perhaps nothing can be done"
A child with Down syndrome was accepted to a state kindergarten, but after a week the mother was called to withdraw her child because the director did not want the child to stay with the other children.
My opinion is that a law is needed to force public institutions to accept integrating these children if they do not have a high degree of disability.
In order to combat this phenomenon, parents must, first of all, document the rights of their children. It is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed to every child. Besides this, there is no law that prohibits the integration of children into the community if they are able to follow the curriculum



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Critical Thinking

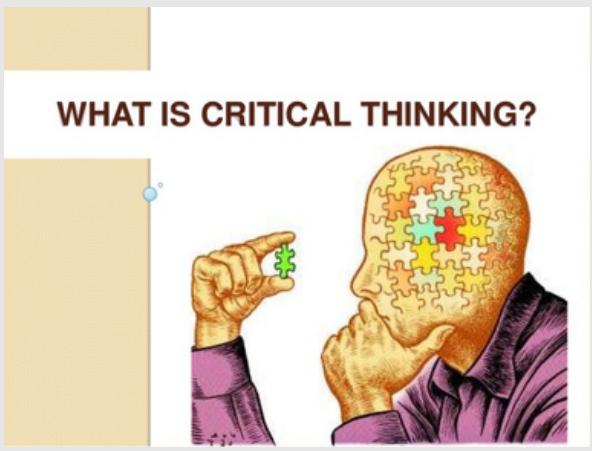
According to Robert Sternberg, critical thinking can be understood as „the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions and learn new concepts". (1) On the other hand, it is defined as the process of actively and skillfully analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. It is a way of thinking in which one doesn't take things for granted but questions examine and evaluate the assumptions, reasons, evidence, and implications of any belief or action.

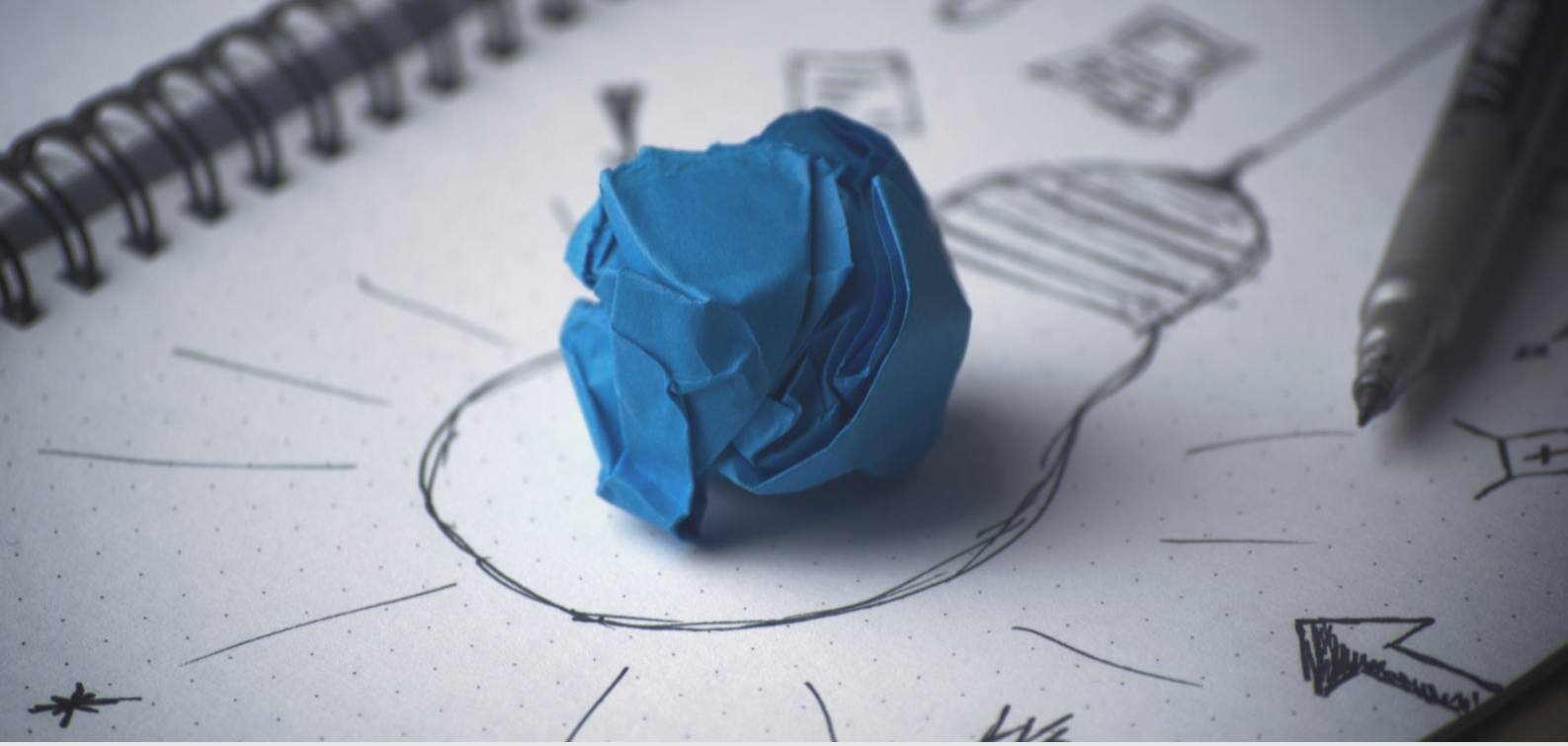
EVALUATION

Evaluation is a form of critical thinking that involves examining evidence to make a judgment. Critical thinkers are able to identify the main components of an argument and determine whether there is adequate support for the conclusion. (2) It is widely accepted that drawing conclusions based on intuition is not evaluation. Neither is personal opinion or speculation. Each of us makes evaluative judgments on a daily basis. Sometimes these are quick assessments that do not matter much, like what to order for lunch. In other circumstances, there is a need to slow down our thought processes and weigh up all the factors carefully.

ANALYSIS

One of the main benefits of critical thinking is the ability to provide better decisions. By synthesizing information, critical thinkers are able to identify the most important issues and make well-informed decisions. People should check a few information sources and know how to analyze data properly based on the used ads, references, the number of viewers, and comments. For most Balkan countries, the number of people not being able to properly sort through information is so big it has become the reason their nations have given up on forming a political opinion. As Balkan analyst Tim Judah points out, "They have such problems to deal with at home, so they think: what's the point in having an opinion on these issues?" (3) Apart from being an important factor politically, critical thinking can also help individuals improve their problem-solving skills and increase creativity.





IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING

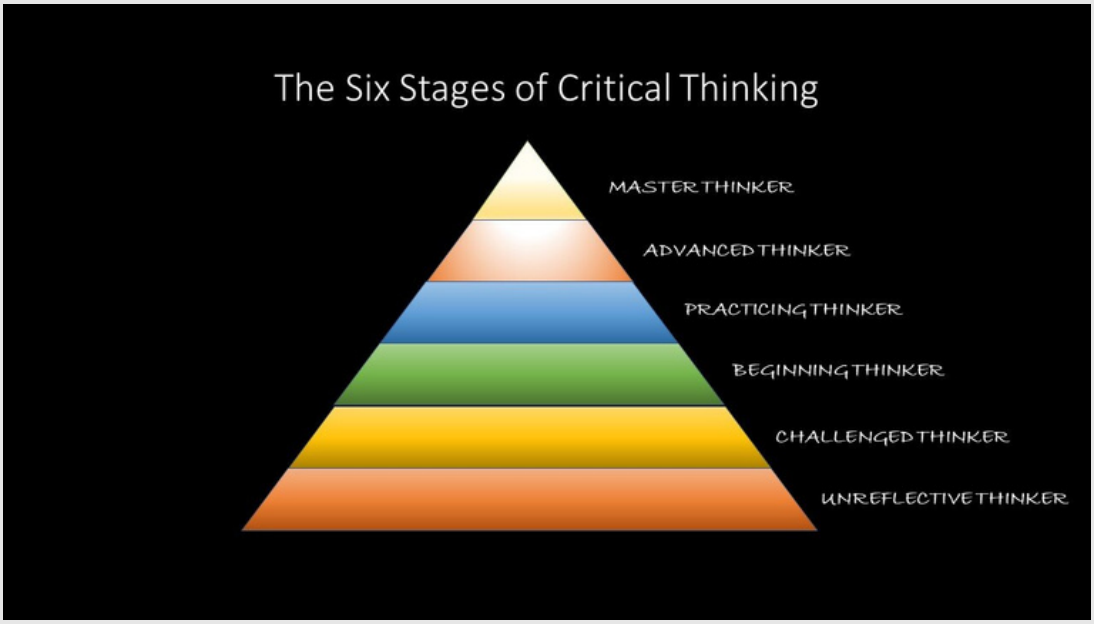
Critical thinking is an important element of all professional fields and academic disciplines (by referencing their respective sets of permissible questions, evidence sources, criteria, etc.). However, critical thinking is not only important for individuals but also for organizations and society as a whole. Organizations that promote a culture of critical thinking tend to be more innovative, efficient, and effective. Furthermore, critical thinking is crucial for a healthy democracy, because, as previously mentioned, critical thinkers make wiser decisions at the ballot box.

A CRUCIAL SKILL

As Oxford Learner's Dictionary Online states, critical thinking is the analysis of information that aims at producing a logical decision about whether a fact is true or false. It is also a vital skill that allows individuals to consider multiple perspectives, and make better decisions. Furthermore, it is crucial for the functioning of organizations and society. Developing and encouraging critical thinking should be a priority in education, work, and in our daily lives.

As it is believed that critical thinking improves students' flexibility as well as learning skills, rendering education more interactive and encouraging youth to question more at the same time.

Albert Einstein: "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing."



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