



NORDIS – NORdic observatory for digital media and information
DISorders

Disinformation and digital information literacy - pilot course at the University of Helsinki

Date: 12-07-2023



Action No:	2020-EU-IA-0189
Project Acronym:	NORDIS
Project title:	NORdic observatory for digital media and information DISorders
Start date of the project:	01/09/2021
Duration of the project:	24
Project website address:	https://nordishub.eu/
Authors of the deliverable	Minna Horowitz, Mervi Pantti (University of Helsinki) with Mikko Salo, Pipsa Havula (Faktabaari) NORDIS Consortium
Activity number	Activity 3
Task	Task 3.3

Funding:

The research was funded by EU CEF grant number 2394203.



Aims of the course

Disinformation is a recent scholarly area and topic of public discussions, incited by the emergence of right-wing nationalism exemplified by Trump's presidential victory, Covid-19 pandemic, deepfakes, and other AI-driven disinformation. The term 'disinformation' refers to deceptive information to create harm, gain profit, or advance political goals: While technology and social media platforms did not create the problem of disinformation, they have exacerbated the spread of disinformation.

Examining the larger media environment, including legacy media such as public broadcasters, this course aims to provide a critical and contextualized approach to disinformation studies and equip students to better understand the forms, narratives, policies, and technologies of disinformation as well as the history and role of propaganda in both authoritarian and democratic countries. Students will also gain knowledge of journalistic, policy and civil society attempts to combat disinformation.

This course is designed with the support of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and its Nordic hub NORDIS (<https://nordishub.eu/>). Drawing from collaborations of scholars and key professional stakeholders working in the fields of disinformation and digital information literacy, the course aims at providing a holistic picture of the societal, institutional, and civic/individual challenges, as well as policy, professional, and civic remedies to disinformation.

The course syllabus is suitable for Bachelor-level or equivalent and can be upgraded for other levels. All the material in this syllabus – academic literature, reports, audio, and video material – is open-access and utilises the work by NORDIS.

Learning goals

1. Identify and define different approaches to disinformation research, including current trends and challenges in the field.
2. Understand the different conceptualizations and critical concepts related to disinformation, propaganda, and information literacy.
3. Understand different forms of disinformation and their impacts on societies and the media environment.
4. Identify and understand the roles of different stakeholders in countering disinformation and promoting digital information literacy.



5. Apply literature and critical terms to analyse disinformation texts and campaigns.
6. Apply literature and critical terms to discover and analyse digital information literacy needs.

Learning units

Fundamentals of the theme, terminology, and academic field.

- Context of the course: EDMO/EU.
- Information disorder: mis-, dis- and malinformation.
- Digital information literacy.
- Stakeholders in disinformation and digital information literacy.
- Disinformation studies as a multidisciplinary field.
- Existing research: advances and gaps.

Approaches to fact-checking

- Fundamentals: development, actors, networks.
- Practices.

Forms of disinformation

- Forms of disinformation: history and present.
- Current cases of disinformation.

Approaches to literacy

- Digital information literacy: foundations, development, practices.
- Examples of literacy tools.

Approaches to governance

- Policy approaches and challenges (global, EU, national cases)
- Platform self-governance: practices and challenges



Suggested literature and other materials

Videos (by Faktabaari):

- [Digital Information Literacy: what, why, how.](#)
- [Fact-checking and digital information literacy.](#)
- [Check - 3 questions.](#)

Podcasts (by the University of Helsinki):

- Interview with prof. Risto Kunelius (University of Helsinki) on propaganda as a form of disinformation.
- Disinformation policies - an introduction (Docent Minna Horowitz, University of Helsinki).
- Interview with prof. Anja Bechman (Aarhus University) on disinformation, content moderation, and the challenges of small nations.
- Interview with prof. Steven Livingston (George Washington University) discusses the view on platform governance from the U.S.

The podcasts can be downloaded from [here](#).

Readings:

Fundamentals

- Freelon, D. & Wells, C. (2020) Disinformation as Political Communication, *Political Communication*, 37(2), 145-156, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2020.1723755>
- Altay, S. et al. (2023). Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges. *Social Media + Society*. January-March 2023: 1–13, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/20563051221150412>
- Wardle, C. & H. Derakshan (September 27, 2017), [Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Council of Europe.](#)



- Harvard Misinformation Review, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/>.

Approaches to fact-checking

- Kyriakidou, M., Cushion, S., Hughes, C. & Morani, M. (2022). Questioning Fact-Checking in the Fight Against Disinformation: An Audience Perspective, Journalism Practice, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2022.2097118>
- NORDIS report - State of the art in fact-checking technology: https://nordishub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Report_task_4.1_The_State_of_Art_of_Fact-Checking_Tools.pdf

Forms of disinformation

- Benkler, Y., Farris, R. & Roberts, H. (2018). Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics, 3-43, <http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/28351>
- Wijermars, M. & Lokot, T. (2022) Is Telegram a 'harbinger of freedom'? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2030645>
- Wijermars, M. (2021) Russia's law 'On news aggregators': Control the news feed, control the news?, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1464884921990917>

Approaches to literacy

- Frau-Meigs, D. (2022). How Disinformation Reshaped the Relationship between Journalism and Media and Information Literacy (MIL): Old and New Perspectives Revisited, Digital Journalism, 10(5), 912-922, [10.1080/21670811.2022.2081863](https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2081863)
- Basol, M., et al. (2020). Good News about Bad News: Gamified Inoculation Boosts Confidence and Cognitive Immunity Against Fake News. Journal of Cognition, 3(1): 2, pp. 1–9, <https://journalofcognition.org/articles/10.5334/joc.91>



- NORDIS/Faktabaari Guide on Digital Information Literacy, <https://faktabaari.fi/dil/digital-information-literacy-guide/>

Approaches to governance

- Bechmann, A. (2020): Tackling Disinformation and Infodemics Demands Media Policy Changes, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21670811.2020.1773887>
 - Frischlich, L. & Humprecht, E. (2021). Trust, Democratic Resilience, and the Infodemic. Policy Paper | February 2021. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, <https://il.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Frischlich%20%26%20Humprecht%20-%20Trust%2C%20Democratic%20Resilience%2C%20and%20the%20Infodemic.pdf>
 - NORDIS report - Assessing Information Disorder in the Digital Media Welfare State: A Rights-Based Approach, https://nordishub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/NORDIS_Policy_Brief_Assessing_Information_Disorder.pdf
 - Gorwa, R., Binns, R., & Katzenbach, C. (2020). Algorithmic content moderation: Technical and political challenges in the automation of platform governance. Big Data & Society, 7(1), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053951719897945>
 - Fighting Disinformation: 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>
-

Sample programme

Piloted at the University of Helsinki, Spring 2023, 4. quarter term, with 37 Finnish and international students.



Tue 14.3. Introduction: classifications and approaches

14.15–15.45, Language centre, Fabianinkatu 13, room 203

- First assignment: Challenges of disinformation research

Thu 16.3. Digital information literacy (Mikko Salo, FaktaBaari)

10.15–11.45, Soc&Kom, Snellmaninkatu 12, room 210



Tue 21.3. Games as literacy tools

14.15–15.45, Language centre, Fabianinkatu 13, room 203

- Second assignment: Game review (bring your laptops to class)

Thu 23.3. Legacy of propaganda research in the era of social media (Risto Kunelius)

10.15–11.45, Soc&Kom, Snellmaninkatu 12, room 210



- Third assignment: Ukraine Case Study

Tue 28.3. Accountability and resilience: policy approaches to disinformation
(asynchronous, on Moodle)

- Respond to the discussion thread on Moodle

Thu 30.3. Fact-checking institutions and politics

10.15–11.45, Soc&Kom, Snellmaninkatu 12, room 210

- Final essay instructions

Tue 4.4. Independent fact-checking in practice (Pipsa Havula, Faktabaari)

14.15–15.45, Language centre, Fabianinkatu 13, room 203



FaktaBaari Forum 5.4.

The Finnish fact-checker Faktabaari invites everyone to participate in Faktabaari Forum 2023: Eduskuntavaalien opetukset – Digisivistys, digitaalinen informaatio- ja vaalilukutaito sekä faktantarkistus Suomessa - Lessons from the elections - Digital information and election literacy and fact-checking in Finland



Wednesday 5.4. 15–17 hr
Päivälehdien museo, Ludviginkatu 2-4

Partly in Finnish, but some presentations in English, e.g., Thomas Hedin from the European Fact-checking Standards Network and the Danish fact-checker Tjekdet
Register: toimitus@faktabaari.fi

Thu 13.4. Social media content moderation and platform responsibility
(Tuomas Heikkilä)

10.15–11.45, Soc&Kom, Snellmaninkatu 12, room 210

Tue 18.4. Censorship and propaganda in Russia and Belarus (Marielle Wijermars)

14.15–15.45, Language centre, Fabianinkatu 13, room 203

Thu 20.4. Workshopping final essays

10.15–11.45, Soc&Kom, Snellmaninkatu 12, room 210



Assignments

1. Challenges of disinformation research

Assess one study from the Harvard Misinformation Review: <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/>

- (a) What is insightful
 - (b) what is unclear/missing/should be focused on more
 - (c) based on this study, what should be studied in the future?
- HMR features short summaries of all types of research on mis-, dis- and malformation. Choose a study that especially interests you.

Use the lesson insights and discussions and **the critical assessment of misinformation research** (Altay et al., 2023) as your guides.

Write a short commentary based on your assessment.

Begin with a short description of your chosen study and then elaborate on (a)-(c).
2-3 paragraphs are enough.

2. Game review

Based on the teamwork in class, write your own (individual) **review of one of the games** you played from the perspective of digital information literacy education.

The review should be:

- (a) targeted for a specific group (teachers, youth groups, parents, scholars, the elderly, fact-checkers...) and
- (b) focus on what that group could learn from the game in terms of DIL and DigComp 2.2, and (if applicable) how to utilize it in their specific context.

2-3 paragraphs are enough.

3. Ukraine case study

Public Service-Spirited Media Takes on the Memory Wars (a case study by [Peter Pomerantsev](#)).



Please read the case study discussing the propaganda in Ukraine (uploaded on Moodle). Drawing from all the previous lessons, think about literacy approaches and especially the role of public-service-spirited media in countering propaganda. Respond to the questions in the case study (no right or wrong answers but your ideas and insights).

Given the context described in the case study:

- How would you define which audiences you would try to engage in different sides of the memory wars?
- How would you choose which topics to cover?
- What types of storytelling would you choose?

2-3 paragraphs are enough.

4. Moodle discussion on policy approaches to disinformation

To what extent do **policies work in countering disinformation**? What should be regulated? Can one size with all; what are some contextual considerations? – Join the conversation with your views based on the asynchronous lectures.

5. Final essay

Disinformation and Digital Literacy: A Burning Issue

Based on the course material and discussions, as well as your own interest and related research, write a short academic essay of appr. 2500 words + references that in some way address one of the overall themes:

- (1) Infrastructures/technology
- (2) (Bad) actors
- (3) Content

Choose any topic that interests you most (AI; young people and DIL; disinformation and war...) or even a specific case. Many topics entail elements from more than one of the above themes but focus your essay primarily on one theme.



During the last session of the course, 20.4. we will workshop your final essay ideas together.

You are informally expected to share your focus (what and why), how you approach it (including what kind of research you have found), and the tentative conclusions/insights/takeaways.

We will discuss your final essay ideas and initial outcomes in thematic groups. We will then share summary ideas and outcomes by themes with everyone.