European Parliament

Fact-checking compass: How to spot information manipulation

Misleading information can throw any of us off course. Both *misinformation* – mistakes without ill intent – and *disinformation* – created and spread with the aim of fooling people – can make it hard to take informed decisions. Fast evolving technologies – including deepfake video and audio – make it too easy to produce and spread deceptive content very rapidly. Many of us worry about the effect: some 85 % of people worldwide are concerned about the impact of disinformation on their fellow citizens; 87 % think disinformation has already affected political life in their country;[1] and 38 % of EU citizens list false and/or misleading information as a threat to democracy.[2] These tips will help you steer around falsehoods.[3]

1. Check the temperature
Strong feelings can make false narratives go viral. Shocking developments – disasters, wars or terrorist attacks – can make us forget to check the facts.
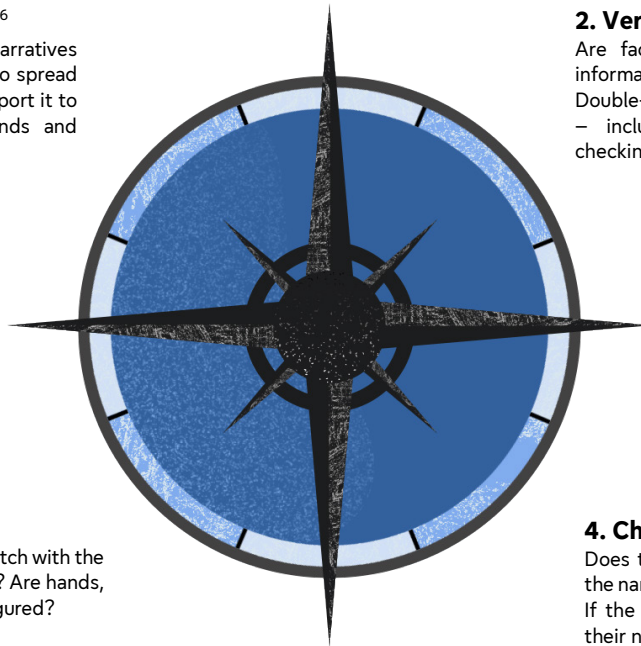
8. Join the myth-busters[6]
Keep abreast of the goals, the narratives and the techniques of those who spread disinformation. If you spot it, report it to the platform. Keep your friends and family in the loop.[7]

2. Verify the content
Are facts and figures accurate? Is the information old or taken out of context? Double-check with other, credible sources – including reliable media and fact-checking websites.[4]

7. Think before you share
Some stories and images are designed or spread to spark strong feelings and divide us. You could be looking at a distortion of real or old events – or it could be a joke. Keep a cool head.

3. Check the source
Do you know the source? Is the domain name dodgy? Beware of mirror websites that mimic trusted sources, but are fake versions.

6. Look for hidden signs
Does the light in people's eyes match with the location? Do the shadows line up? Are hands, ears and hairlines blurred or disfigured?

4. Check the author
Does this person really exist? Run a search on the name and the profile picture (see next step). If the author or content creator has made up their name, the rest could also be fake.

5. Check the images
Images and videos make deep impressions, and manipulation tools are evolving fast. Reverse image and video searches[5] can help detect if content has been used before in a different context.

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[1] Global survey on the impact of online, disinformation and hate speech, UNESCO/Ipsos 2023.

[2] Survey on democracy, Eurobarometer 2023.

[3] This is a revised version of a publication entitled, How to spot when news is fake, from 2019.

[4] European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN); European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO).

[5] For example, using the InVID-WeVerify verification plugin.

[6] EUvsDisinfo; EDMO; EFCSN).

[7] Brush up your skills by playing games: Detect Fakes lets you spot AI-generated content. The Bad News game puts you in the shoes of information manipulators. Cranky Uncle Vaccine helps recognise health misinformation.

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