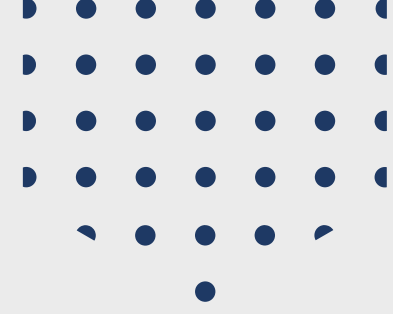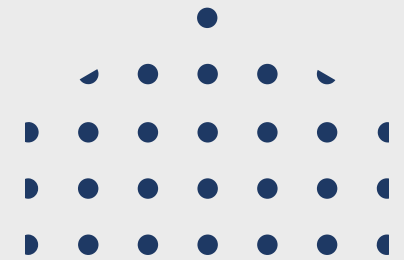# SPOTTING FAKE NEWS

How To Be A Critical Thinker

Zuzana Benková

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WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

Fake news is defined as intentionally misleading or false information that is presented as if it were true.
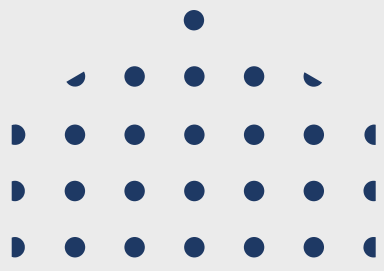
SOME OTHER DEFINITIONS

Cambridge Dictionary

False stories that appear to be news, spread on the Internet or using other media, usually **created to influence political views or as a joke**.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

False reports of events, written and read **on websites**.

Dictionary.com

False news stories, often of a **sensational nature**, created to be widely shared or distributed for the purpose of **generating revenue, or promoting or discrediting a public figure, political movement, or company.**

FAKE NEWS: MODERN PHENOMENON?

Fake news in history

- The spartan Pausanias' false letter to the Persian king Xerxes (4 centuries b.c.)
- "*Pasquinade*" in Italy (16th century)
- "*Canards*" in France (17th century)

Modern fake news

- Closely linked to the development of digital media and information and communication technologies.
- **In 2016, fake news was declared the official Collins Dictionary Word of the Year.**
- 2016 US Presidential Elections, Brexit...
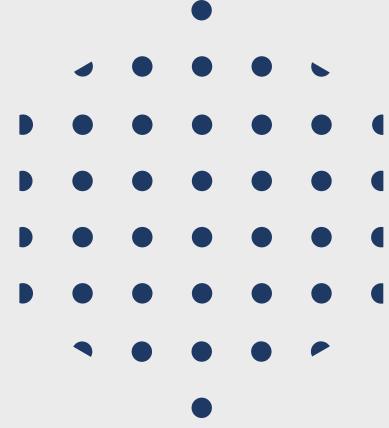
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Disinformation

- Deliberate, intentional lie.
- Often has its foundation partially based on reality or credible information.
- Person disseminating disinformation is aware of its untruthfulness.
- Disinformation ≠ propaganda.

Misinformation

- False or inaccurate information.
- Examples include rumors, insults and pranks.
- The person who shares misinformation is not aware of its untruthfulness and therefore makes an unconscious mistake.

Malinformation

- Based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country.
- Includes leaks, harassment, or hate speech.

The difference lies in intention and purpose of information.
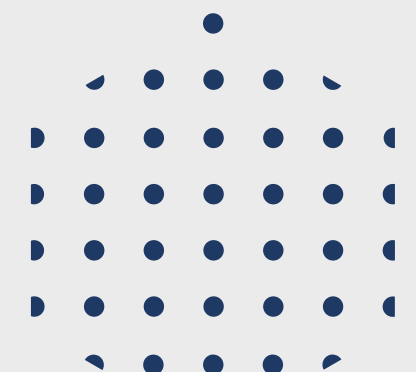
TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

Different types of disinformation and misinformation.

FABRICATED CONTENT

Completely false content.

MANIPULATED CONTENT

Genuine information or imagery that has been distorted.

E.g. a sensational headline or populist 'click bait'.

IMPOSTER CONTENT

Impersonation of genuine sources.

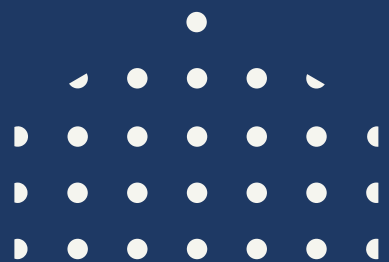E.g. using the branding of an established agency.

TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

Different types of disinformation and misinformation.

MISLEADING CONTENT

FALSE CONTEXT

SATIRE AND PARODY

Misleading information.

Factually accurate content combined with false contextual information.

Humorous but false stores passed off as true.

E.g. comment presented as fact.

E.g. when the headline of an article does not reflect the content.

There is no intention to harm but readers may be fooled.

TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

Different types of disinformation and misinformation.

HOAX

A humorous or malicious deception.

Often attempts to cause shock, disruption, aggravation, or intimidation.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

A belief that some secret but influential organization is responsible for an event or phenomenon.

DEEPFAKE

A video or sound recording that replaces someone's face or voice with that of someone else, in a way that appears real.

TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

Different types of disinformation and misinformation.
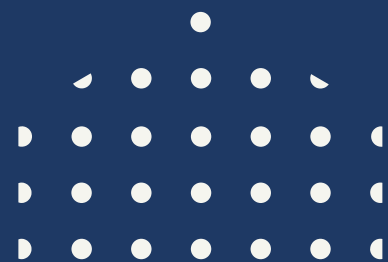
FALSE CONNECTIONS

When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content.

SPONSORED CONTENT

Advertising or PR disguised as editorial content.

ERROR

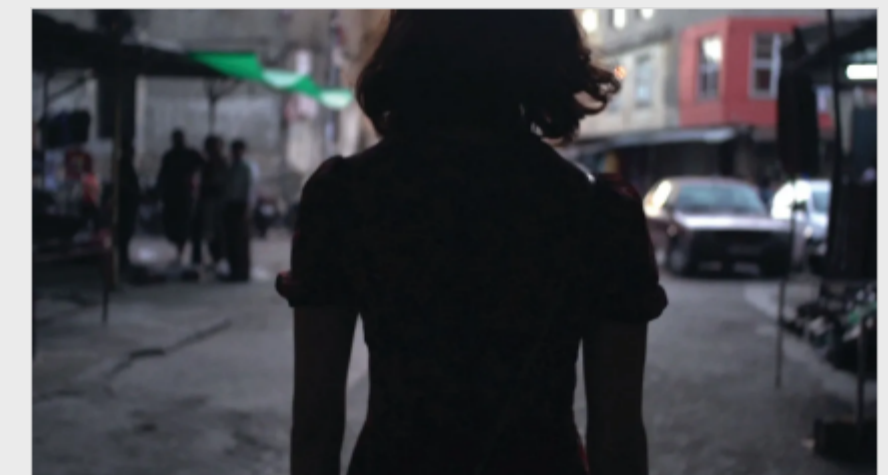A mistake made by established new agencies in their reporting.

BLOG "A GAY GIRL IN DAMASCUS"

The "First Hoax"
The connection of the term hoax with fake news and understanding its meaning as we know it today.

Amina Abdallah Arraf al-Omari, 25-year-old girl from Damascus, Syria

Tom MacMaster, a 40-year-old American Middle East activist

How to Hoax Yourself: The Case of A Gay Girl in Damascus

Why Tom MacMaster, a white man and publishing failure from Georgia, pretended to be an Arab-American lesbian.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA, FAKE NEWS SPREADS SIX-TIMES FASTER THAN REAL NEWS AND IS 70% MORE LIKELY TO BE SHARED.

APPEAL TO EMOTION

SENSATIONAL

CLICK-BAIT STRATEGY

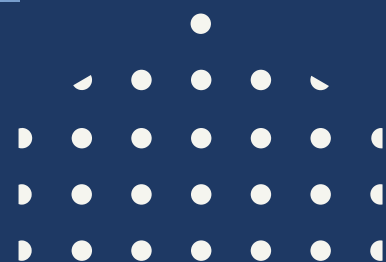ANYONE CAN BE A CREATOR/DISSEMINATOR OF INFORMATION

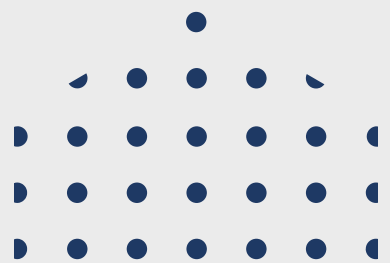ALGORITHMS AND SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

FILTER BUBBLES

ECHO CHAMBERS

COGNITIVE BIASES

FAKE NEWS
In Italian Context

A Demos-Coop Survey,
October 2022

40%

of Italians aged 15 + claimed to have encountered 'often or sometimes' news online that later turned out to be false.

23%

had personally shared fake news online.
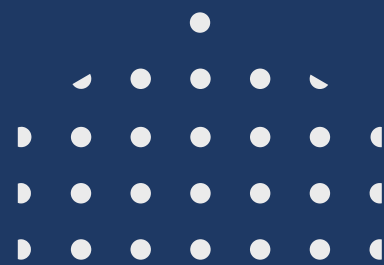
social media users

share fake news twice as often than users without a social media account.

young people

aged between 25 and 34 believe and share fake news the most.

MOST COMMON TOPICS

- CLIMATE CHANGE
- MIGRATION
- SCIENCE
- POLITICS
- PUBLIC FIGURES
- HEALTH CARE
- VACCINES
- COVID-19
- SPORT
- NUTRITION AND DIET

THE MIGRATION ISSUE IS A FREQUENT TARGET OF FAKE NEWS.

FALSE

These aren't Syrians. They're Europeans trying to get to North Africa during World War II. So next time you think of closing the borders you might want to check with your grandparents.

Facebook post containing false claims.

TRUE

London Review OF BOOKS

Q Search

28 SEPTEMBER 2015

Across the Adriatic
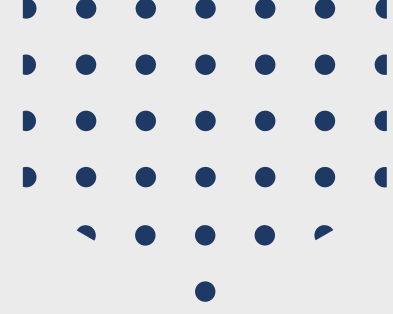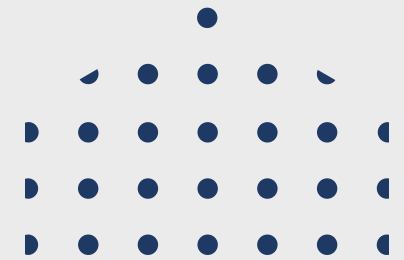
Thomas Jones

On 7 August 1991, the Albanian ship *Vlora* docked at the Port of Durrës, twenty miles west of Tirana, with a cargo of Cuban sugar. Thousands of people, desperate to leave Albania in the first throes of its 'transition'

Same image with accurate information.

CONSEQUENCES OF FAKE NEWS MIGHT BE SEVERE

What happens online often does not stay online.

#PizzaGate is a world-wide citizen investigation now. It cannot be stopped. At this point, the truth being brought to light is inevitable.

RETWEETS 5,297 LIKES 6,467

3:01 AM - 20 Nov 2016

367   5.3K   6.5K

COMET

PD source said its much more vile and s
ied material on Weiner's device. The e
by Weiner, Bill and Hillary on their pe
d's plane, the Lolita Express Yup, Hilla
umented predilection for underage gir
d not bear to see   details
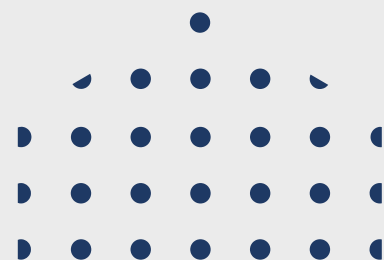ernational child e   ment a

PIZZAGATE IS

NVEST
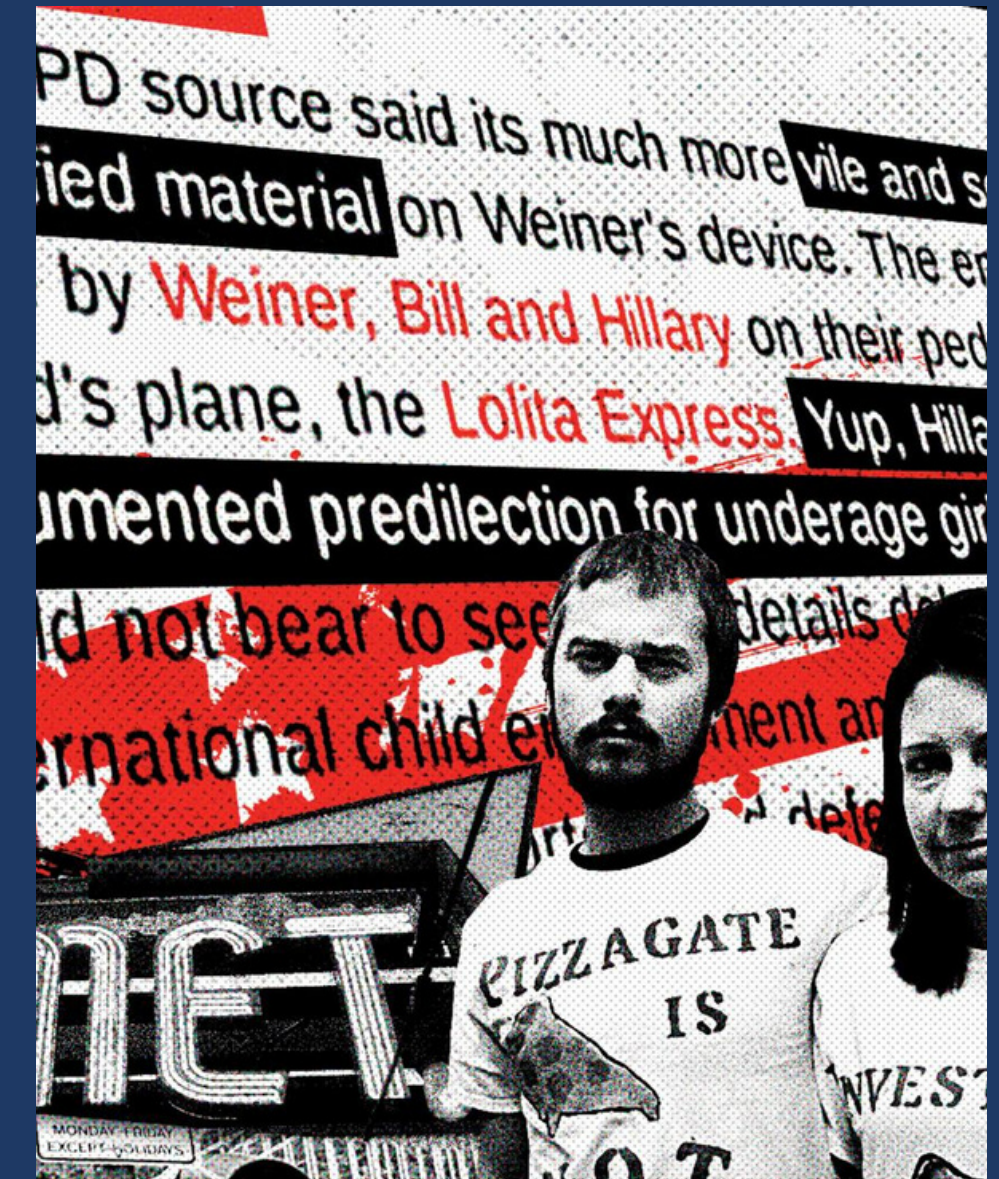
PIZZAGATE CONSPIRACY THEORY

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

15 tips how to provide credibility of information

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

1 CHECK IF THE AUTHOR OF THE CONTENT/NEWS APPEARS IN THE ARTICLE.

2 SEE IF WEB/MEDIUM IS KNOWN.

3 VERIFY THAT THE WEBSITE IS RELIABLE AND LEGITIMATE.

Spilled Oil Poses a Threat to Commercial Catch In Waters Rich With Cod, Flounder and Other Fish

The Argo Merchant oil spill would rank about 10th in total oil volume spilled from broken tanke... ...aks out, but its poten... ...a economic damage is far greater than its size might indicate.

CONTINUE READING: PDF

Title

BYLINE
By BAYARD WEBSTER

Author

PUBLISH DATE
December 22, 1976

Date

HOW TO VERIFY IF A WEBSITE IS LEGITIMATE?

01 | **Study the address bar and URL**

- Check for misspellings,
- Check https – "s" in https stands for secure (not always a guarantee, some have learned to spoof this security protocol),
- Check for domain extension – the most trusted: .com (in Italy .it), .edu, .gov, .org.

02 | **SSL certificate**

The most popular web browsers today recognize a website's Secure Sockets Layer (commonly called a security certificate.) A browser would display an icon of a closed padlock in the address bar.

03 | **Check the website for poor grammar or spelling**

Typos can occur, but very rarely on legitimate websites. Sometimes errors in grammar or spelling are not just an honest mistakes of the company.

04 | **Verify the domain**

There should be only one domain in the URL address. For instance, a website italia.it/pizza/account/italia.org would not be correct!

HOW TO VERIFY IF A WEBSITE IS LEGITIMATE?

05 **Check the contact page**

Are there any contact information? If so, how many? Just a contact form? Check if the website thoroughly provides contact information and not directs to other sites or websites.

06 **Look up company's social media presence**

Examine followers, there might be just empty profiles; read the content, a fake account might have shallow replies, lot of emojis, too many stock photos and posts without actual text.

07 **Check for questionable links**

Sometimes scammers want you to click another link that might have a malware or request personal information. Do not trust links in text messages or mails that you are not expecting! Always visit the official website directly to make sure you are not being sent to a fake website.

08 **Check for the website's privacy policy**

If there are not present, the website might not be legitimate.
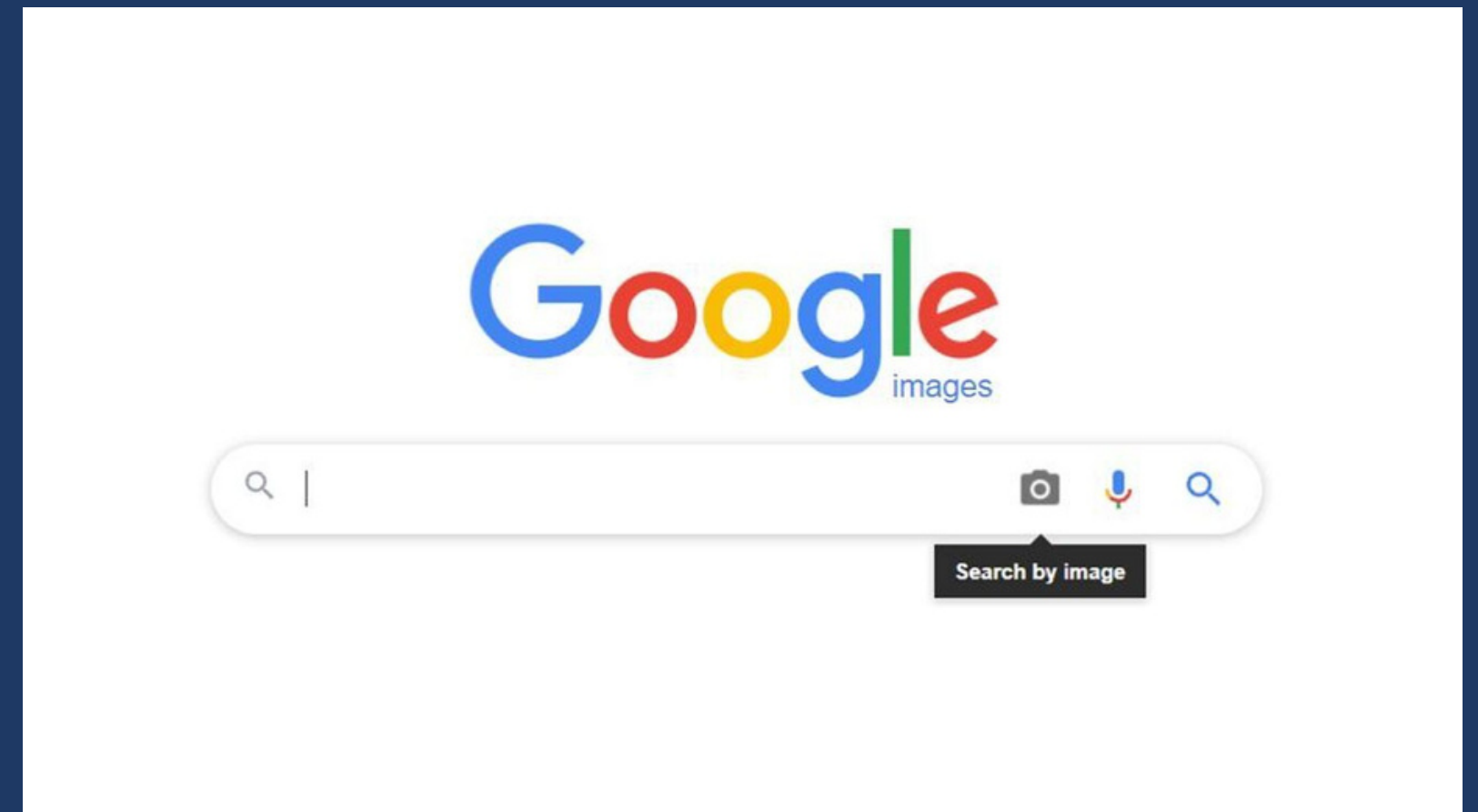
HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

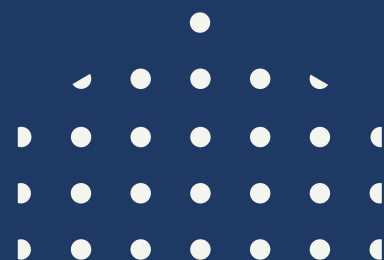**4**   IF IT IS A VIDEO, CHECK THE AUTHOR.

5   SEE IF THE INFORMATION IS RECENT.

6   CHECK IF THE PHOTO/IMAGE CORRESPONDS TO THE REST OF THE CONTENT.

Verifying images through Google Images.

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

7 SEE IF YOU CAN CONTACT THE AUTHOR OR FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HIM/HER.

8 CHECK THE INFORMATION FROM THE OTHER SOURCES.

9 CHECK IF THE INFO/NEWS CONTAINS DATA OR FIGURES FROM RELIABLE SOURCES OR IF SOURCES ARE CITED AT ALL.

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

10 BEWARE THE HEADLINES THAT ARE EXCESSIVELY STRIKING.

11 MAKE SURE IF THE INFORMATION/NEWS IS NOT INTENDED AS JOKE, HUMOR, SATIRE...

12 ANALYZE IF THE INFORMATION/NEWS, IN ADDITION TO INFORMING, HAS ANOTHER PURPOSE (POLITICAL, IDEOLOGICAL...)

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS?

13 CONSIDER WHETHER THE INFORMATION/NEWS MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO HARM SOMEONE OR SOMETHING.

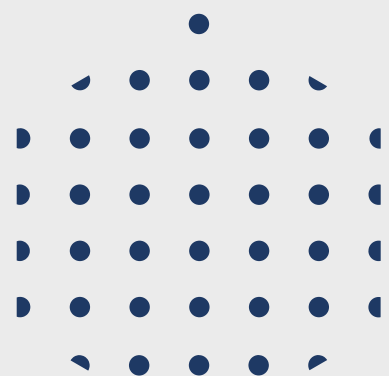**14** BE CAREFUL TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN INFORMATION AND OPINION.

15 BE CAREFUL TO SHARE INFORMATION/NEWS IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT CONTRASTING IT.

HOW TO BE A GOOD CRITICAL THINKER?

1. Chceck the source

Always verify the source of the information you are reading. Is it a reputable news outlet, a personal blog, or an anonymous source? If the source is not credible, then the information presented is likely not credible either.

2. Look for evidence

Any credible news story should have evidence to support it. Look for facts, figures, and data to back up the claims being made. If there is no evidence provided, then the story is likely not true.

3. Fact-check

Fact-checking is a crucial step in verifying the accuracy of any news story. Websites such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org, and PolitiFact.com are great resources to check the validity of a news story.

4. Be aware of bias

All news outlets have a certain bias, whether it be political, social, or economic. Be aware of this bias and how it may influence the way a story is reported. Try to seek out multiple sources with different biases to get a more balanced view of the story.

5. Avoid clickbait

Clickbait headlines are designed to grab your attention and get you to click on the story. Often, the headline is sensationalized and the story itself is not as interesting or important as it may seem. Be wary of clickbait and read beyond the headline to get the full story.

CHECK YOUR COGNITIVE BIASES, TOO

Biases = systematic patterns of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment.

Based on the perception of the input, we form our **subjective reality**.

Cognitive bias is a **limitation in objective thinking**, as the human brain perceives information through a filter of personal experiences and preferences.

Cognitive bias/biases may be one of the reasons people believe fake news and share it.
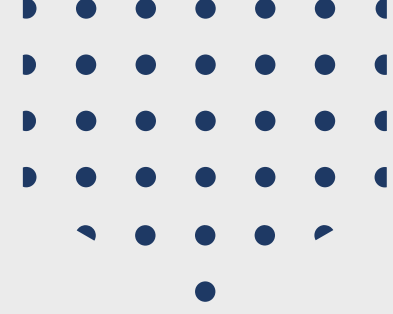
Confirmation Bias

The tendency to gather evidence that confirms preexisting expectations, typically by emphasizing or pursuing supporting evidence while dismissing or failing to seek contradictory evidence.

EVIDENCE WE IGNORE

FACTS AND EVIDENCE

OUR BELIEVES

EVIDENCE WE BELIEVE

→ People tend to select those bits of information that make them feel good, because they support and confirm their existing beliefs.

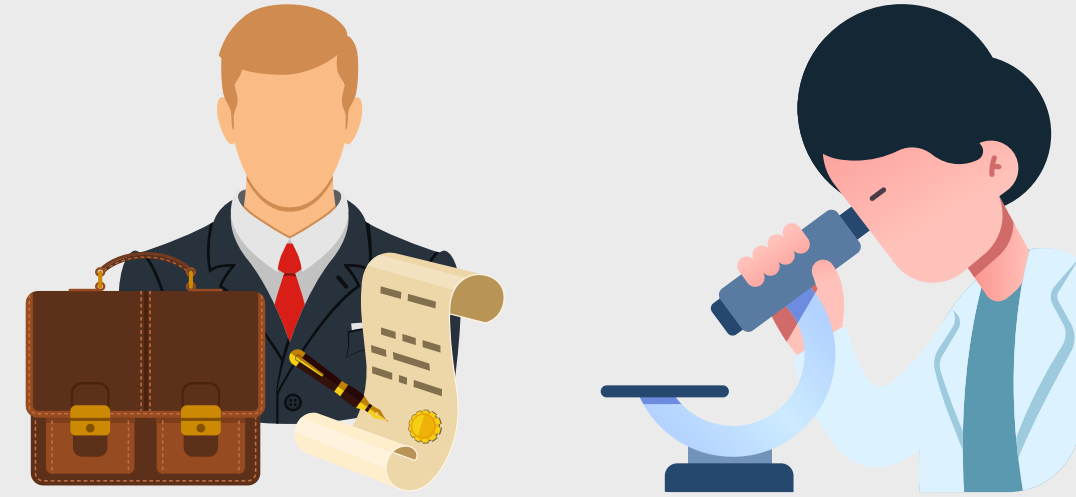*Examples of biased search for information:*

Are cats better than dogs?

Are dogs better than cats?

Motivated reasoning

Tendency to find arguments in favor of conclusions we want to believe.

People think that they think like scientists but they really think more like attorneys.

→ People can draw self-serving conclusions not just because they want to but because the conclusions seemed more plausible given their beliefs and expectancies.

Why do we engage in confirmation bias and motivated reasoning?

To avoid or lessen Cognitive Dissonance.

→ The mental discomfort experienced when confronted by contradictory information.

Ostrich Effect

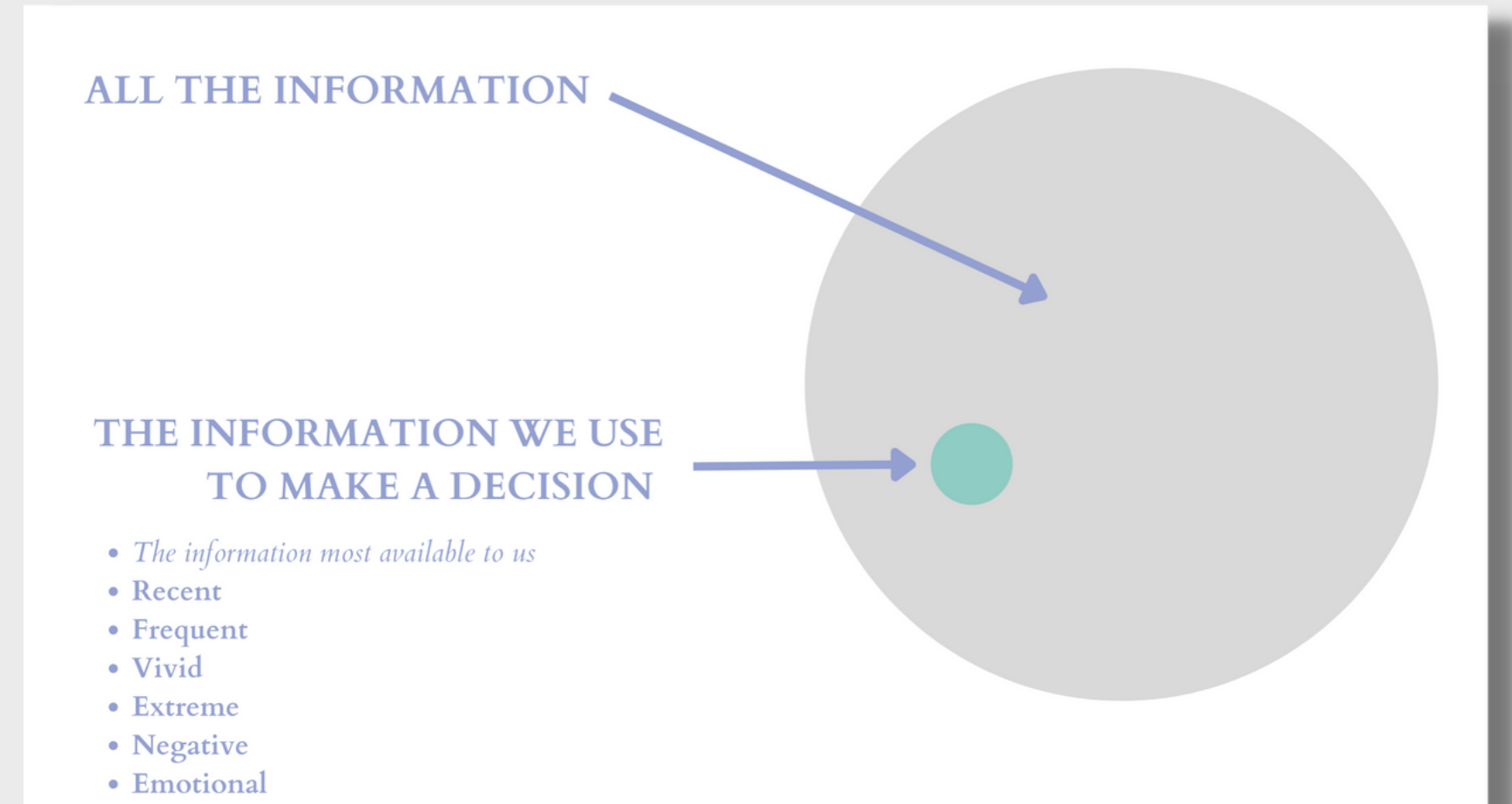**A cognitive bias that describes how people often** **try to avoid negative or unpleasant information**.

→ We are driven by the desire to maintain a certain self-image.

→ A deep-rooted need to feel good about ourselves results in bending our perceptions of reality or **avoiding information that does not conform to our beliefs**.

Availability heuristic

A specific mental shortcut that says that what is **easiest to come to our mind**, and therefore what is most accessible, is true.

ALL THE INFORMATION

THE INFORMATION WE USE TO MAKE A DECISION

- *The information most available to us*
- Recent
- Frequent
- Vivid
- Extreme
- Negative
- Emotional

→ People view incorrect claims as true because they can recall them easily. The easier is to remember of examples of something, the more prevalent, frequent, or large people think it is.

Bandwagon effect

The tendency for people to align themselves with the **majority opinion** and do or believe things because many other people appear to be doing or believing the same.
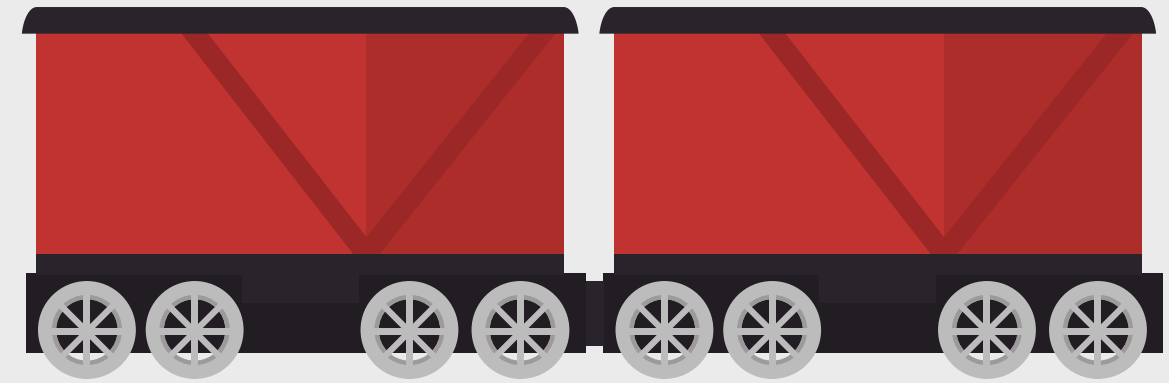
➤ Leads users to focus on the repetitive nature of content sharing, not the content itself.

➤ The popularity of given information or content allows users to bypass the responsibility for verifying information.

Availability cascade

A self-reinforcing process in which a certain attitude **becomes** more and more important in public discourse**, increasing its** availability **and increasing the** likelihood that people will believe it and spread it.

→ new information that explains complex phenomena simply,

→ growing popularity and prominence in public discourse,

→ others share,

→ information seems credible,

→ adoption of new views.

Blind spot bias

A cognitive bias that makes people *less aware of their biases* than others and assume that they are less prone to bias than others.

→ People think their attitudes are entirely rational, while various biases influence the attitudes of others.

→ However, many of our decisions are made and influenced by biases and cognitive shortcuts.

→ Biases are undesirable, so people tend to consider their perceptions and judgments rational, accurate, and unbiased.

FINAL DISCUSION
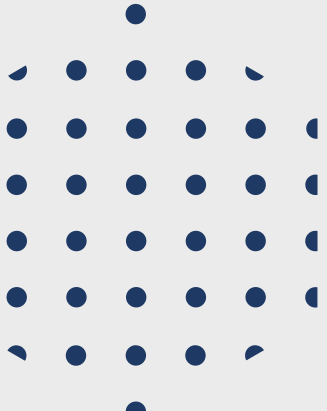
SOME EXTRAS

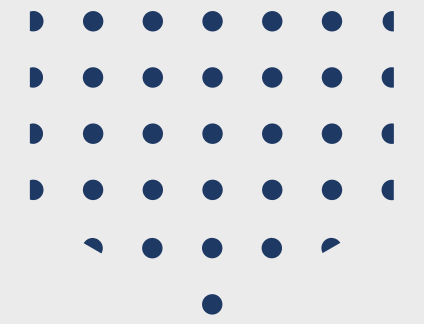**Google Images**

FactCheck.org

PolitiFact.com

Snopes.com

Edmo.eu

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Zuzana Benková

zbenkova@unite.it