Distribution of Content Online

Module:	*Health and well-being*
Topic:	*Distribution of content online*
Title:	*Fake or fact?* *Why some messages are particularly attractive.*
Target group:	*Middle and high school*
Starting Point:	*News and messages differ in their appeal. So-called "fake news", for example, spread 6 times faster than true news (Dizikes, 2018; Mogk, 2022).* *Why is this the case? Because they attract our attention more strongly. Especially news that are very activating (e.g., make you angry or are very funny) are more likely to be shared than non-activating news (e.g., neutral or more depressing news).* *However, this makes it more likely that fake news as well as very one-sided news will spread and dominate the news world in the digital context, as these are often more extreme and thus more activating. If you do not aware of this, it can quickly become dangerous. Especially students who spend a lot of time online are confronted with news that often untrue. Moreover, they need to be aware that they themselves are contributing to this as well. Such news are not necessarily driven by external programmes, but we are all responsible for their rapid spread by sharing news with others and thus enhancing their visibility.*
Aim:	*The students know that news spread at different rates and what criteria lead to this (fake and/or activating). They know that one has to pay attention to whether news are true. They are also aware of their influence on the circulation of news by sharing it with others.*
Implementation:	*This interactive exercise is designed for classroom use.*
Estimated Duration:	*1-2 lessons*

More detailed content and instructions:

This exercise is a game in which the students pass on content they would like to share with their classmates in the form of cards. Which content is shared most often and is therefore the most attractive?
The aim is to simulate the situation in social media where one's decision to share a message contributes to its dissemination.

The cards containing the messages can be found at the end of this document.

1. Each student receives 2 cards, each with a message on it.
2. The students have to read both cards and then decide which of the two messages they want to pass on to another person so that they can also read the message. Students are asked to pass on the message they think the others should also see.
3. The students are given a total of 5-8 minutes to pass cards on to their classmates. During this time, students can pass one card at a time as often as they like. It is best if they are allowed to move freely around the classroom for the exercise.

4. A card may only be passed on if the student has two cards at hand to choose from. Hence, if they have just passed on a card, they have to wait until they receive a card from someone else before they can pass on another card. This means that the students are always forced to choose between two messages.
5. IMPORTANT: Each card they receive must be marked (draw a line on the card) before passing it on.
   It is not a problem if some students get a card more than once - they should still mark it each time and pass it on (if they want to).
6. When the time is up, the lines on the cards are counted.
7. Which cards have the most lines and have therefore been shared the most with classmates?
   Did some of the untrue or extreme/attention-grabbing messages spread the most? Which messages were hardly shared?

ATTENTION: A good understanding of the class is required here: Which cards are appropriate so that no student feels offended/emotionally burdened?

Class discussion:

- On the one hand, the game shows that news can spread at different speeds:
  - Fake and activating messages usually spread particularly quickly, as they attract the most attention and the desire to share them is reinforced.
    → This means that the digital world is often a very untrue place where emotions can be amplified, as especially news that lead to greater arousal spread widely.
  - Why is this a problem?
    39% of those who are extremely or very interested in news use social media as a news source; 32% of the somewhat interested and one in three of the not interested (33%) rely on social media as their source for news (Hölig, 2020).
  - *The lines on the cards should show how many people have seen this message. Have some of the untrue or extreme/attention-grabbing messages spread particularly widely? Which messages have hardly been passed on?*
  - *It is not a problem if some students get a card more than once - they should still mark it and pass it on (if they want to).*
    → When you receive a certain piece of information more often, you are more likely to believe it, even if it always comes from the same source and is just repeated many times. Hence, when a message is shared very often on social media, it is more likely to be accepted as true (Dessel, 2017).
- The game also shows that you yourself are partly responsible for the circulation of information, as you share messages with others.
  - Social media differs from traditional media in that it is far less controlled and any user can potentially become a source of news content by sharing or posting content that can potentially reach millions of other users.
  - It has also been shown that some users spread fake news simply because they do **not think about** whether a particular headline could be fake, and not because they lack the knowledge or competence to distinguish fake from real headlines (Capraro, 2022).

- Therefore, at the end of the game it is important to educate the students about the different messages that exist (e.g., fake, one-sided), and use the game to show them that they have an influence on what and how much is shared on the internet.
- **Recognising fake news: Checklist**
  1. The source: Who is the source of the message? Who sent this message?
  2. The facts: Is the content confirmed by other reputable sites?
  3. The pictures: What does the image really show? Does it also appear in other contexts?
  4. The timeliness: When was the message disseminated? Is there a date?
  5. Before you share: Can this really be true? Check the message against the first four points.
- Briefly checking pays off: Research confirms that a short pause to reflect on whether that headline is really true leads to people sharing much less fake news on social media (Fazio, 2020).
- Video on fake news: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6nQ_bq3xl4

TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT:

- It is important to discuss what can be learned from the exercise with the students.
- It is also very important to discuss the content of the messages with the students afterwards, especially regarding fake news and emotionally upsetting content. It should be clarified which of the cards contain untrue information.
- Which messages are used should always be adapted to the specific class in advance.
- This exercise can get a bit noisy and chaotic. It is helpful to make sure in advance that the students understand the task well.

Sources:

Capraro, V., & Celadin, T. (2022). „I think this news is accurate“: Endorsing accuracy decreases the sharing of fake news and increases the sharing of real news. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1461672221117691. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221117691

Dizikes, P. (2018, März 8). Study: On Twitter, false news travels faster than true stories. *MIT News.* https://news.mit.edu/2018/study-twitter-false-news-travels-faster-true-stories-0308

Fazio, L. (2020, 10 February). Pausing to consider why a headline is true or false can help reduce the sharing of false news. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review.* https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/pausing-reduce-false-news/

Hölig, S., Hasebrink, U., & Behre, J. (2020). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020 – Ergebnisse für Deutschland (Bd. 50)*. Hans-Bredow-Institut.

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Potential content of the cards

- These messages are suggestions. They may need to be adapted depending on age and year. The messages may also become outdated (last updated November 2022).
- Some of the content is deliberately provocative. Here it is important to consider whether this is appropriate for the specific class or whether you want to change/not use some of the cards. Such content should be discussed and clarified afterwards.
- There are 60 cards in total, 18 neutral, 18 fake news, 18 negative, 18 positive. This means that in a school class with 30 students, each student can get 2 messages. (Alternatively, it would also be possible to use each card twice - after all, news on social media sometimes exist more often. Then you would only need half of the statements).
- All content is true, except for the content on the fake news cards.

Neutral content:

For humans, the mosquito is the most dangerous animal in the world.	The sun is shining today.	Austria has around 9 million people.	Vienna has been named the most liveable city nine times.
The Beatles sold the most records.	Angela Merkel was chancellor of the Germany for 16 years.	Facebook, WhatsApp & Instagram are all owned by one company.	The city of Tokyo is the most populated city in the world.
In 2021, there were 1.04 billion users on Instagram.	Charli D'amelio is the most famous Tik-Toker in the world.	There are over 4000 Playstation games.	The internet exists since 1990.

According to a study, people reach for their mobile phones 84 times a day.	There are about 4,420 cities in the world.	There are about 800 dog breeds in the world.

Fake News:

The Pope supported Donald Trump in his election campaign.	A Swedish study shows that Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine alters the DNA of recipients.	Man in China sues his wife for bearing him ugly children.	Bibi's Beauty Palace has had an affair before.
Merkel hopes for 12 million immigrants	The actor Morgan Freemann is dead.	Vaccines against COVID-19 are not safe because they were developed too quickly.	Linkin Park singer Chester Bennington was murdered.
Corona vaccines affect fertility.	Princess Diana had an affair.	Dagi Bee is pregnant again.	A minister wants widows to get less money.

6 refugees brutally beat a young girl.

You can learn a foreign language in 30 days.

Refugees are more criminal than the rest of the population.

Negative news:

In Austria, women earn one fifth less than men.

In 2021, there were 73 shark attacks worldwide.

40% of LGBTQI* people experience discrimination in public.

Anyone who has an abortion in Indonesia must serve 10 years in prison.

In 15 countries worldwide, homosexuals face the death penalty.

Worldwide, 160 million children have to do child labour.

Men in Iran are allowed to rape their wives.

In 2021, extreme storms forced 30 million people to flee their homes.

In 2021 alone, there were 355 wars/conflicts.

49% of Germans believe in the existence of human races.

380 children have already died in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Every 10 seconds a child dies of hunger.

10 million dogs are slaughtered in Southeast Asia every year.

By September 2022, there were 6.5 million deaths due to Covid 19.

200,000 calves are killed illegally every year.

Positive news:

Infant mortality has decreased by 36% in the last 200 years.

142 countries have abolished the death penalty by law or practice.

90% of girls are enrolled in school worldwide.

Since 2005, the number of deaths caused by AIDS has decreased by 40%.

In the last 40 years, the proportion of one-year-old children who receive at least one vaccination has quadrupled.

Since 1977, women have been allowed to work in Germany without the husband's permission.

92.1 % of the world have finished school.

Women have been allowed to vote in Austria for over 100 years.

Since 1970, the number of undernourished people has more than halved.

In 1816, only 1% of people lived in a democracy, today it is 56%.

Germany's share of global CO^2 emissions has halved since 1990.

There are only 3 countries left in the world where forced labour is legal.

Since 1 January 2019, homosexuals in Austria have been allowed to marry in a civil ceremony.

African rainforests are more resilient than assumed.

Germany bans disposable plastic products.