open your eyes

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

“CHECK IT OUT” HANDBOOK: MODULE 3

Developed by: OpenEurope – EUDisinfoLab

Version: 2.1

Project n.2018-1-BG01-KA204-047871 “Open Your Eyes: Fake News for Dummies”

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HOW TO TACKLE DISINFORMATION: TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

Get Ready

Introduction:

After having introduced the conceptual background of online disinformation strategies, this module will present the tools to debunk them, and present methodologies to assess the reliability of a news source with concrete examples and a case study. It will also provide adult educators with tips to spot disinformation networks and to verify the reliability and transparency of a Facebook page. For this training, we chose to focus on Facebook because it is a widely used social network, with 2 billion active users in the world.[1]
A large amount of the module materials are visual, so it would be a good idea to prepare a PowerPoint presentation, print some of the images/visual aids in colour or prepare handouts for learners to see the information and examples more clearly.

Contents:

- Analysing Internet-based information
- Analysing information on social networks
- Tools to verify information

Objectives:

By the end of this module, adult educators will have been able to:

- ☑ understand the strategy behind a typical disinformation campaign
- ☑ check and question written contents/images/videos
- ☑ identify indications of who is behind disinformation
- ☑ verify the reliability of a Facebook page
- ☑ verify the reliability of the information on Twitter

Methods:

- Desk research, visual verification of information
- Facebook transparency features
- Specific tools (InVid, CrowdTangle)

Equipment needed:

- Computer, tablet or smartphone
- Facebook account
- Internet connection
- Download the following tool: InVid, CrowdTangle

[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/

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CHECK IT OUT

Start by asking some open questions. You can do it by printing them out and give each learner one of the questions (face-to-face teaching) or by displaying them on the screen (online teaching). These are some of the suggested questions:

- Have you ever spotted disinformation on your social media feeds? If yes, what tools did you use to tackle disinformation? Were you able to identify who was behind the disinformation campaign?
- Do you usually check written contents, images, or videos in social networks? Why?
- What do you usually share on your Facebook page? Can you assess how reliable a Facebook page is?

To learn some of the basic vocabulary that will be used throughout the module, start by learning the definition of the following words: Bias, Cross-posting, and Fact-Checking.

Face-to-face teaching: print the words and definitions in separate pieces of paper and ask you students to match them.

Bias	The action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment.
Cross-posting	The act of sending a message to more than one internet discussion group or news group at a time, or the message that is sent
Fact-Checking	The act of checking factual information in non-fictional text in order to determine the veracity and correctness of the factual statements in the text.

Face-to-face and online teaching: Ask the learners to provide their own definitions or thoughts on each term and then discuss the actual meaning together as a group.

Bias: the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment[2].

Cross-posting: the act of sending a message to more than one internet discussion group or news group at a time, or the message that is sent.[3]

[2] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bias
[3] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cross-posting

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Fact-Checking: the act of checking factual information in non-fictional text in order to determine the veracity and correctness of the factual statements in the text. This may be done either before (*ante hoc)* or after (p*ost hoc*) the text has been published or otherwise disseminated.[4] Fact-checking can be done by journalists in media entities, or organisations dedicated to fact-checking such as:

- ☑ https://www.factcheck.org/
- ☑ https://www.politifact.com/
- ☑ https://firstdraftnews.org/
- ☑ https://factcheck.afp.com/

Use additional resources, which are specific to your country. You can show on a screen how to browse through some of them. Here is an example of fact-checking platforms in Spain:

- ☑ https://maldita.es/malditobulo/
- ☑ https://verne.elpais.com/tag/bulos_internet/
- ☑ https://saludsinbulos.com/

Theoretical Inputs

3.1 Analysing internet-based information

Start by providing some theoretical input to your learners. You can do so by printing the following information (face-to-face teaching) or by preparing a presentation with animation where each of the FIVE CHECK steps is displayed (face-to-face and online teaching).

If you are reading an article from a website, you have never heard before, it is important to dig deeper to try to understand who is behind it, and if the news is truthful.

These five CHECK steps will help you analyse the information you deal with every day and spot disinformation.

1. **Check** the content: read the article carefully to see if:
    - all the data is accurate
    - the article provides an unbiased (impartial) opinion
2. **Check** the website
    - Look at pages such as “Contact” and “About Us” to see if you can get more details about the owner of the website. Lack of such information is a sign that the source might be an actor spreading disinformation items.
    - Take a look at the URL of the website to check that it does not try to mimic the URL of a legitimate media.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fact-checking

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- Try to see if the website has been quoted by legitimate sources (e.g. known media outlets) in the past.

3. **Check** the author
    - Look for other articles written by the author.
    - If there is no name of the author, the information is likely to be less credible.

4. **Check** the sources
    - Look if the sources used in the article are from legitimate sources/media.
    - Check if the quoted experts are real people/specialists. Use Google to see if these individuals exist and have a good reputation.

5. **Check** the pictures
    - Use InVID to detect manipulation of videos or specialists.

Once you have discussed the CHECK steps, go to the following activity. Make sure that participants can use a computer, tablet or smartphone (individually or in groups).

Go through the steps described above to decide if this media outlet is real.

Here are some tips:

- ☑ Search for this media on Google. What do you see?
- ☑ Check the logo
- ☑ Have a look at the "About Us' page

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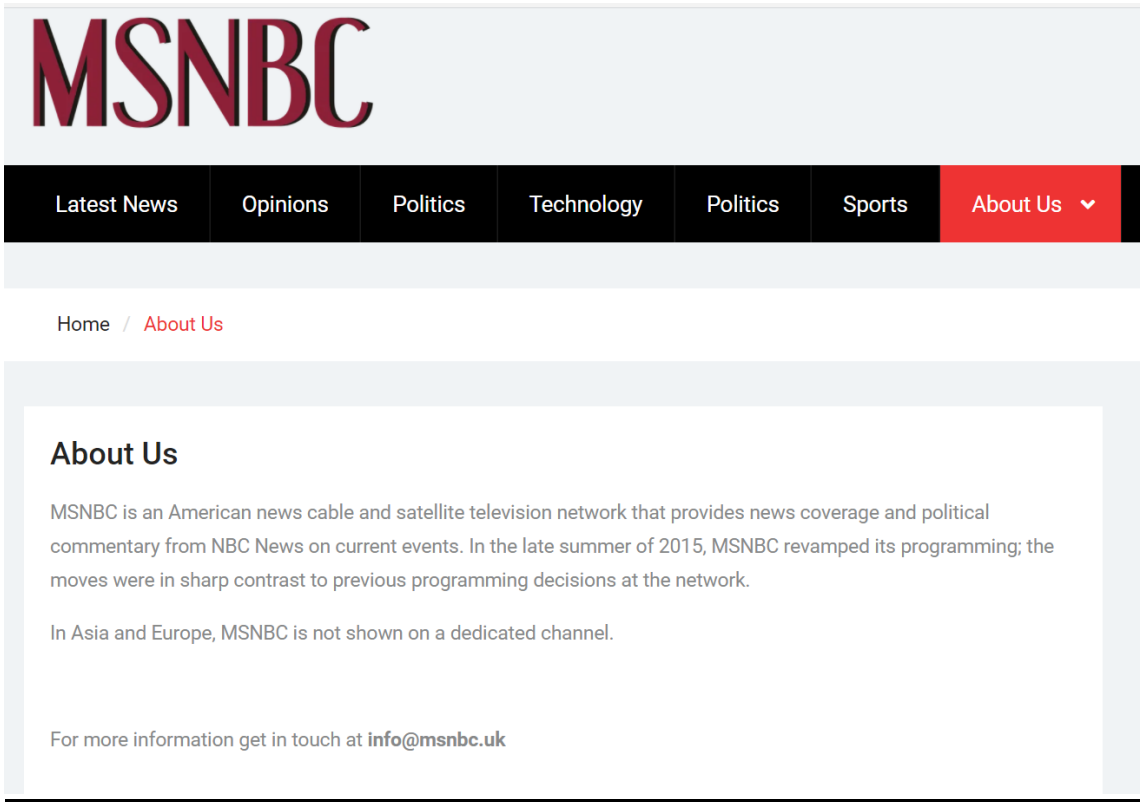
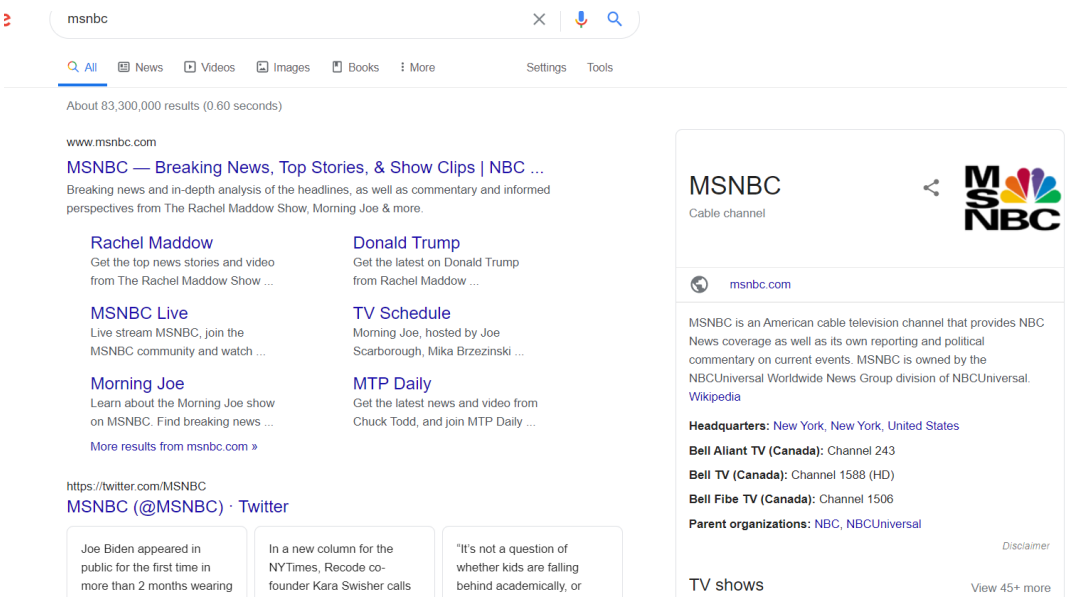


Correct answer:

This page is false, and it is impersonating the real American media "MSNBC".

If you search "MSNBC" on Google, you will find that MSNBC.com is a real American media, with a dedicated Wikipedia page.



☑ The logo is different.

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- ☑ The “About Us” page says the email address is info@msnbc.uk, whereas the real website is MSNBC.com

Show learners the following tips. If you want to do it more dynamic, you can organise, for example, a true/false quiz by adding false statements to the ones below.

ADVANCED PRACTICE:
Challenge the content you are reading

- ☑ Polarizing, divisive and shocking contents are often more likely to be false and should encourage to be vigilant.
- ☑ Spelling and grammatical errors, sloppy punctuation, partisan vocabulary are often a good sign that a source is probably not reliable.
- ☑ Lack of clear context, quotes, or references to some identifiable sources should encourage you to dig deeper to verify the information.
- ☑ Look at other media outlets and trustworthy sources to see if they report the same story.
- ☑ If the information concerns another country, try to check if local media’s reporting is similar to what your article describes.
- ☑ Verify that images are not used in the wrong context or manipulated.

Check that the information has not been already verified by a recognized fact-checkers.

If you want to know more how to spot bogus (= false, not real, or not legal) claims, watch this video from FactCheck.org:

https://youtu.be/Fm0LwscDYHs

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3.2 Tools to verify Facebook information

Facebook Page

To assess the reliability of a Facebook page, go to the **Page Transparency** section on Pages:

- ☑ Visit any Page's timeline.
- ☑ Scroll down to the Page Transparency below the *About* section.
- ☑ Tap *See All*.

The information in the Page Transparency section shows:

- The date of the Page creation
- The primary country locations where the Page is managed
- The number of people who manage the Page in each country
- The Page's previous name changes
- Any Page merges that happen on or after September 6, 2018
- The confirmed business or organisation that has claimed ownership of the Page or that has been granted access to help manage the Page.

From: https://www.facebook.com/help/323314944866264?helpref=about_content

When you look at the transparency of this Facebook page, you can see that it is managed from Ukraine, despite being a support page of French political candidate Marine Le Pen… this is suspicious.

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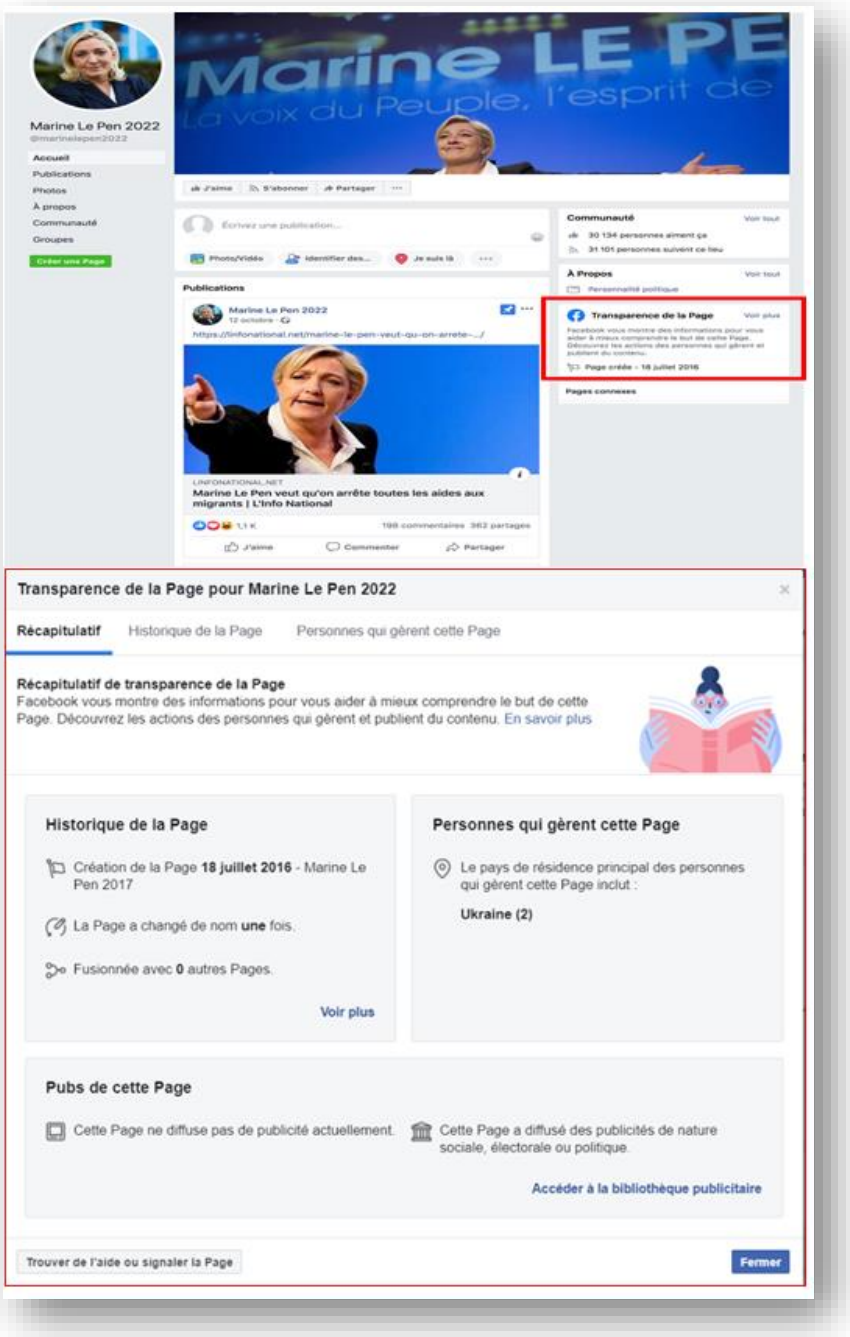

This page mainly shares content from the website “linfonational.net”.

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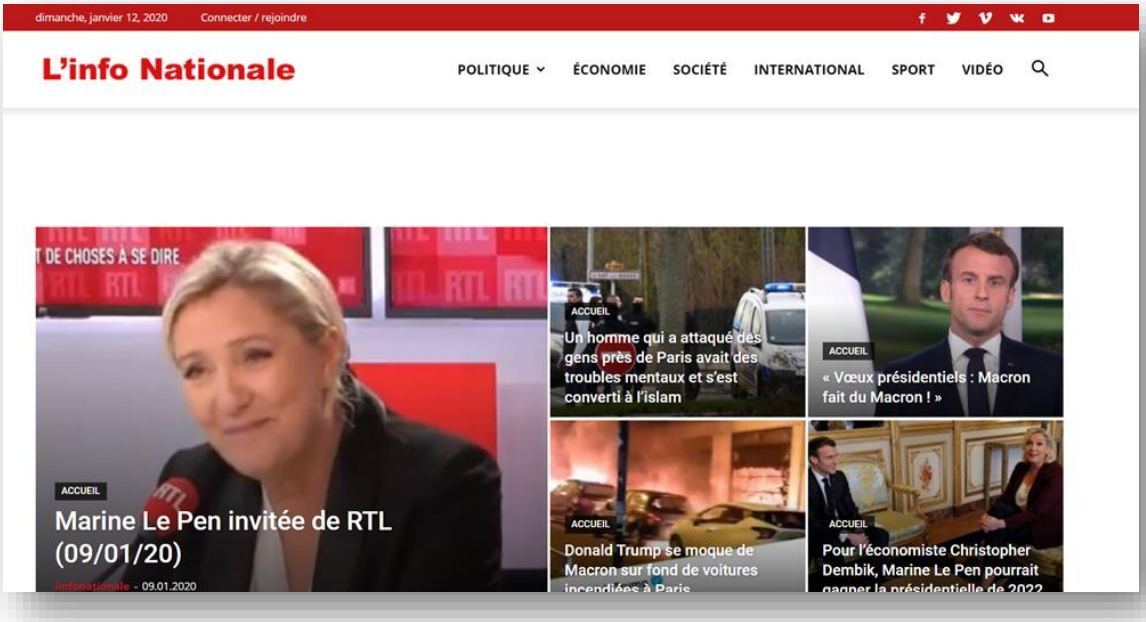
Linfonationale.net is a website that was identified in a French fact-checking article[5] as an alleged news website copying and amplifying disinformation items.



If you have enough time, ask your learners to follow the same procedure with a Facebook page they think might be fake. When they finish, give each learner 5 minutes to present to the other his/her findings and start a debate if possible.

Facebook Group

Although Facebook groups may give a good opportunity to feel connected with people all over the world, they can also be a hotspot for spam, fake news, and misinformation.

If you are a member of a Facebook group, check who is active in this group. Look at suspicious behaviour:

- profile posting always the same type of content
- profile posting always the same website
- profile not interacting with each other or has no friends, looks blank

[5] https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/04/04/non-il-n-y-a-pas-eu-18-millions-d-immigres-en-europe-en-5-ans_1719500

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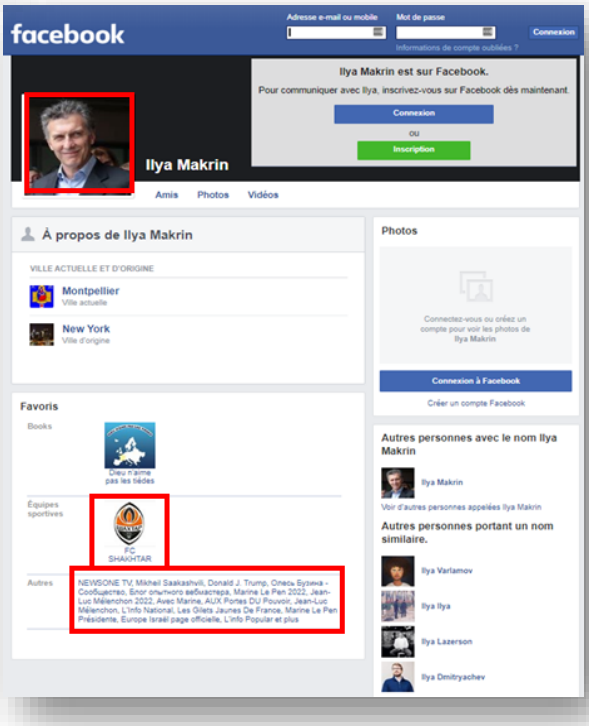
Example:

This profile shares content on French politics but never interacts in French. It has no friends and only likes a few pages in Russian.



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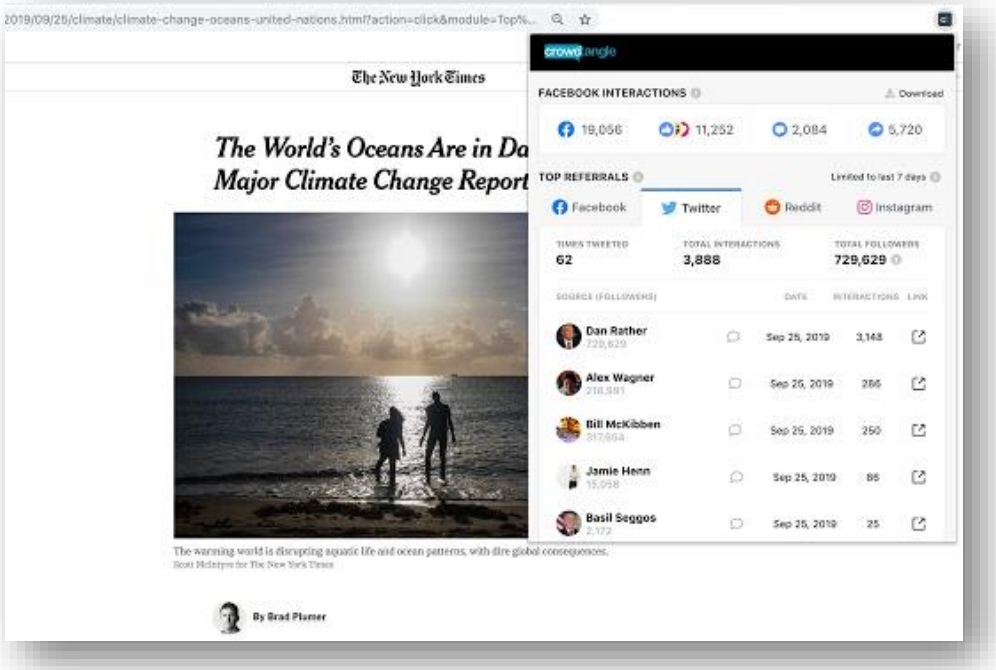
ADVANCED PRACTICE:

Assess how an article has been shared on social media with a social media analysis tool. Here as an example is used CrowdTangle

- ☑ Download CrowdTangle: www.crowdtangle.com
- ☑ Install the Plugin on your browser
- ☑ Check how an article has been shared online by clicking on the con



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You can do the following practical activity individually or in groups. A good idea would be to prepare several images in advance and provide each participant/group with an image for them to check. Another option is to ask learners to cross-assign images to each other.

3.3 Tools to verify images

Reverse search image with Google

If you want to verify where an image might come from or where it appears online, you can try a reverse image search with Google:

Upload a picture

1. On your computer, open a web browser, like Chrome or Safari.
2. Go to Google Images.
3. Click Search by image.
4. Click Upload an image > Choose file or Browse.
5. Select a picture from your computer.
6. Click Open or Choose.

Search with a URL

1. On your computer, open a web browser, like Chrome or Safari.
2. Go to the website with the picture you want to use.
3. To copy the URL, right-click on the picture.
4. Click the Copy image address.
5. Go to Google Images.
6. Click Search by image.
7. Click Paste image URL.
8. In the text box, paste the URL.
9. Click Search by image.

Search with a picture from a website

1. On your computer, open the Chrome browser.
2. Go to the website with the picture you want to use.
3. Right-click the picture.
4. Click Search Google for the image. You'll see your results in a new tab.

From: https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?co=GENIE.Platform%3DAndroid&hl=en

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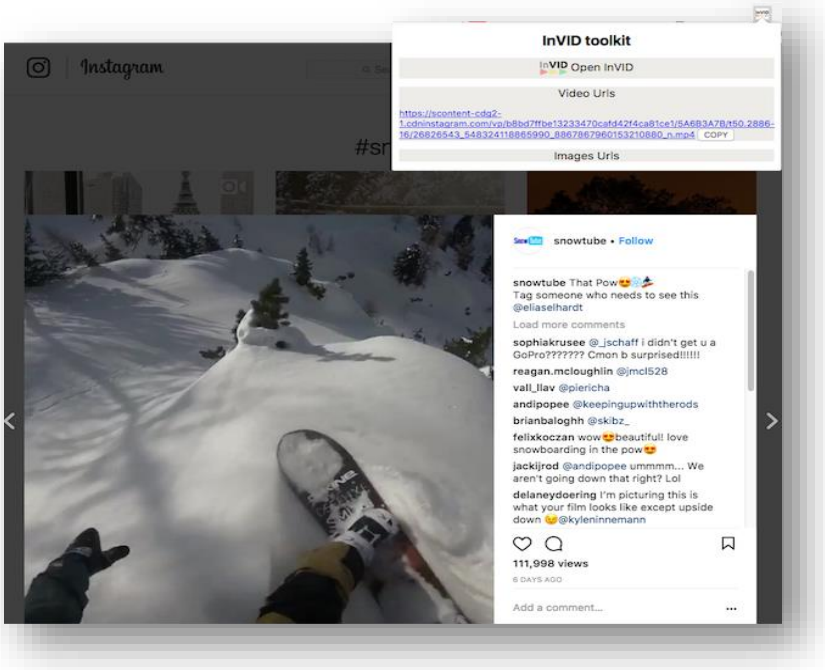
ADVANCED PRACTICE:

Verify pictures directly from your Browser with InVid (EU Horizon 2020 Project)

☑ Download the plugin: **https://www.invid-project.eu/tools-and-services/invid-verification-plugin/**

☑ Watch this video on how to use the plugin:

https://youtu.be/nmgbFODPiBY



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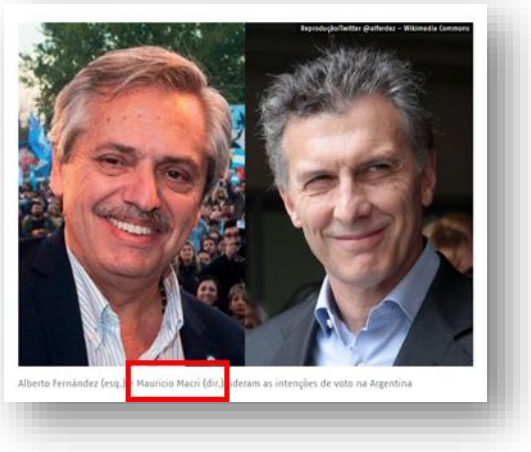
If you use InVID to verify the profile picture of Ilya Markin, you will figure out that it is actually a public figure from Argentina.



VERIFY

1. Bias is prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.
   Is it true or false?
   Correct answer: True
2. To verify the reliability of a website, check if there is a section “Partners”. Lack of such information is a sign that the source might be an actor spreading disinformation items.
   Is it true or false?
   Correct answer: False. You have to check the section “Contact” and “About us”

3. To spot disinformation, you have to:
   a. To read the article attentively
   b. Check the URL website
   c. Look for other articles written by the author
   d. All of the above
   Correct answer: d

4. A profile that always posts the same website or the same type of content in a Facebook group is highly probable to be bogus.
   Is it true or false?
   Correct answer: True

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5. If you want to verify where an image might come from, try a reverse image search with Google:
    a. Uploading a picture
    b. Searching with a URL
    c. Searching with a picture from a website
    d. All of the above
    Correct answer: d

Activity 1. Discussion in pairs or small groups. Recommended for face-to-face and online sessions. You can provide students (using a projector or in paper format) with the fake image first and ask what they think about it. Then, provide or display the second one and start a group discussion. To prompt participation, keep asking questions like:

- Why do you think someone would manipulate a photo like that?
- Do you think that it was spread intentionally or that those who shared it did not know it was fake?
- Would you share this photo if you saw it on your Facebook Feed?

Activity 1. *Look at these images. Which one is a fake?*
Correct answer: the second one

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Answer:

The second picture is manipulated. The original picture of a meeting between Greta Thunberg and Al Gore was edited to claim falsely that the young Swedish activist met George Soros.

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Activity 2. Discussion in pairs or small groups. Recommended for **face-to-face** and **online** sessions. You can provide students with all the questions at a time, or separately in small pieces of paper (face-to-face teaching). You can also prepare a PowerPoint presentation with a different question on each slide (face-to-face and online teaching). Ask the following open questions or any other you think appropriate, and start a group discussion.

Activity 2. *Answer the following questions*:

- Have you ever spread disinformation?
- What channels do you trust when looking for information?
- Do you know fact-checking services in your country?
- How harmful do you think disinformation can be to you?
- What do you think of the information from the example below: is it reliable? "Coronavirus is an offensive biological weapon"

Activities 3 and 4. Discussion in pairs or small groups. Recommended for **face-to-face** and **online** sessions. For this activity, you can also look for more images, maybe some that has been spread in your country. Display only the fake image on the screen and ask them if they have ever seen this image before. Ask them to discuss in pairs or small groups whether they think it is true or false. Then display the real one and have a short discussion with the whole group. You can ask them, for example "Why do you think someone faked this piece of news?", "Would you believe it if you saw it on Social Media?", "And if you saw it in another media channel?", etc.

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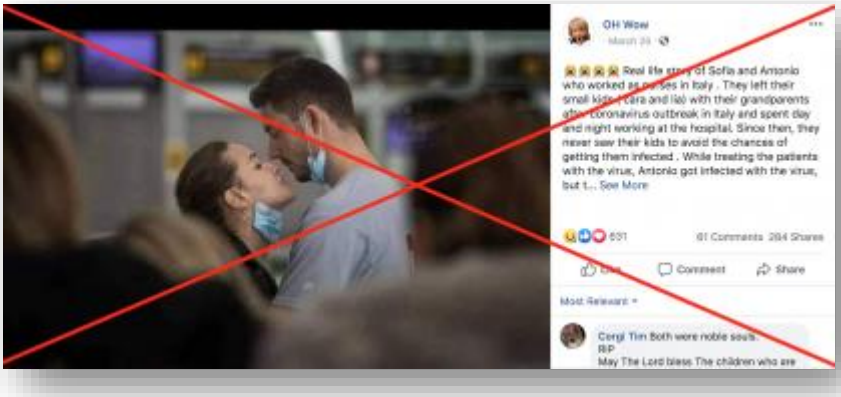
Activity 3. Discussion in pairs or small groups.

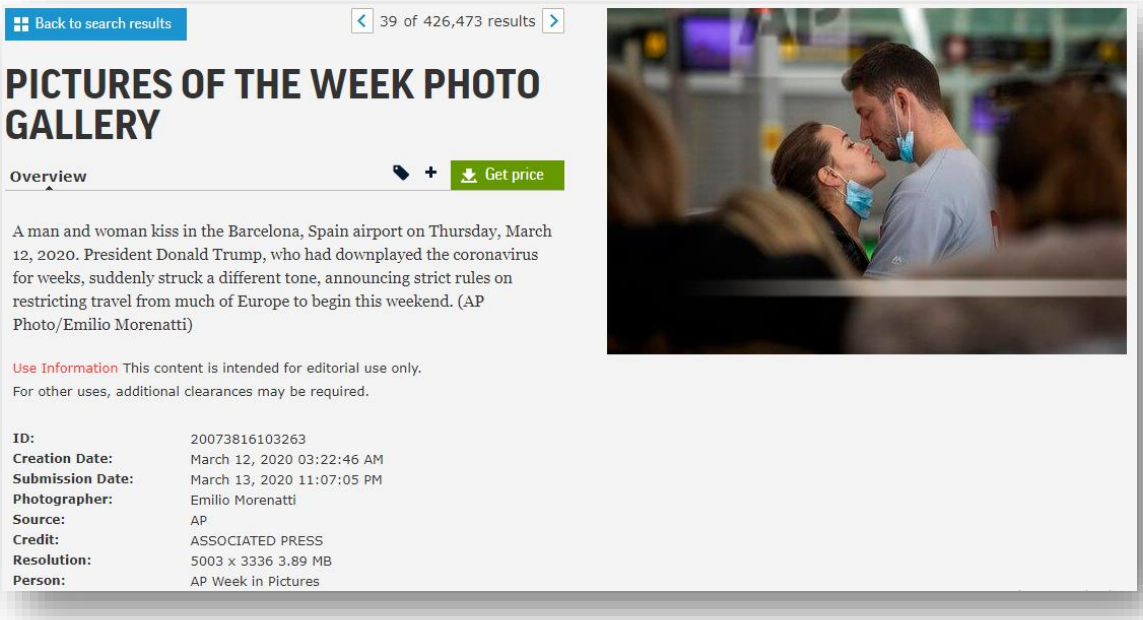
Verify real images/videos: are they true or fake?



In March 2020, an intimate moment between nurses in a hospital during Coronavirus pandemic.

True or fake?

Correct answer: Fake



Reverse image search shows the image has been taken by an “Associated Press” agency photographer at Barcelona’s Airport.

The claim has been fact-checked by Agence France Presse: https://factcheck.afp.com/photo-does-not-show-nurses-treating-covid-19-patients-italy

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Activity 4.

In March 2020 in Italy, banknotes have been thrown on the street in a gesture to show the futility of money during the pandemic.

True or fake?

Correct answer: Fake

A reverse image search shows that banknotes of currency no longer in use due to hyperinflation in Venezuela.

The story has been fact-checked by Agence France Presse: https://factcheck.afp.com/these-photos-have-circulated-online-least-march-2019-covid-19-pandemic

To conclude the session, you can ask learners if they have ever seen an image on social media that they knew was fake. What did they do? What would they do now?

Ask them to share with the other participants:

- What do they think were the most interesting aspects of this module?
- What have they learnt?
- Will their behaviour towards fake news change somehow from now on?

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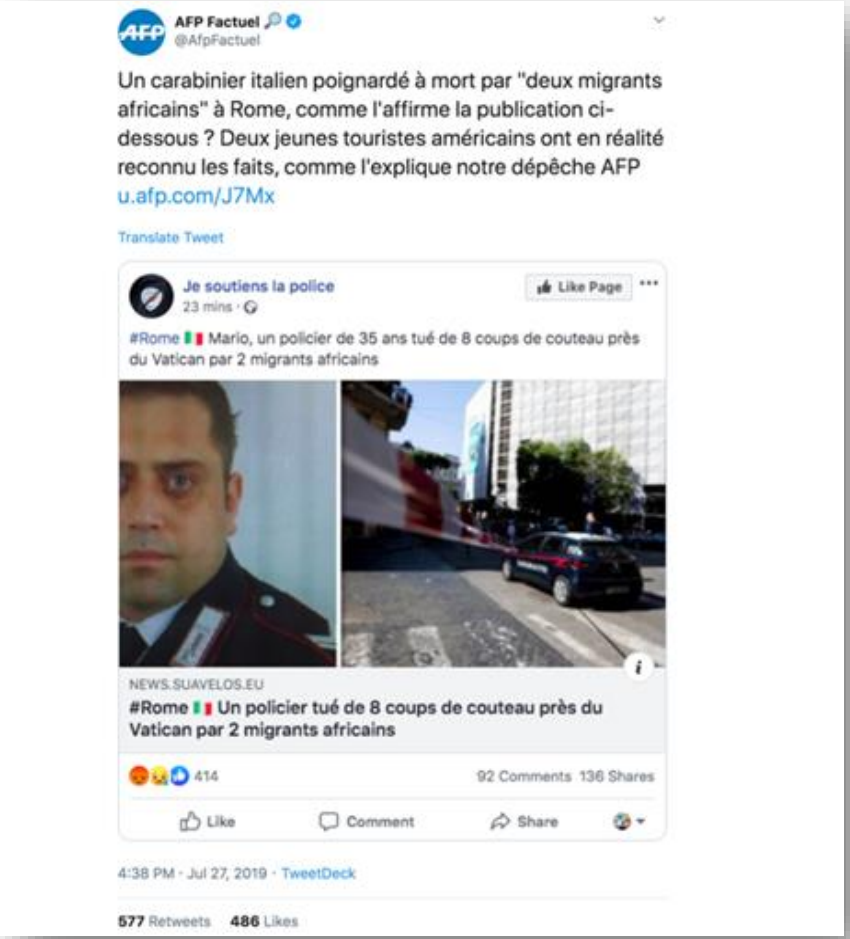
Case study

Suavelos, a white supremacist network



A Facebook page “I support the police” shared an article from a website called Suavelos about “the alleged murder of an Italian policeman by two Italian migrants near Vatican City.”

AFP Factuel, a French fact-checker, showed that the story was not true and that the policeman was in reality killed by two American tourists.

The disinformation item is used there to try to increase the fears related to migrants.

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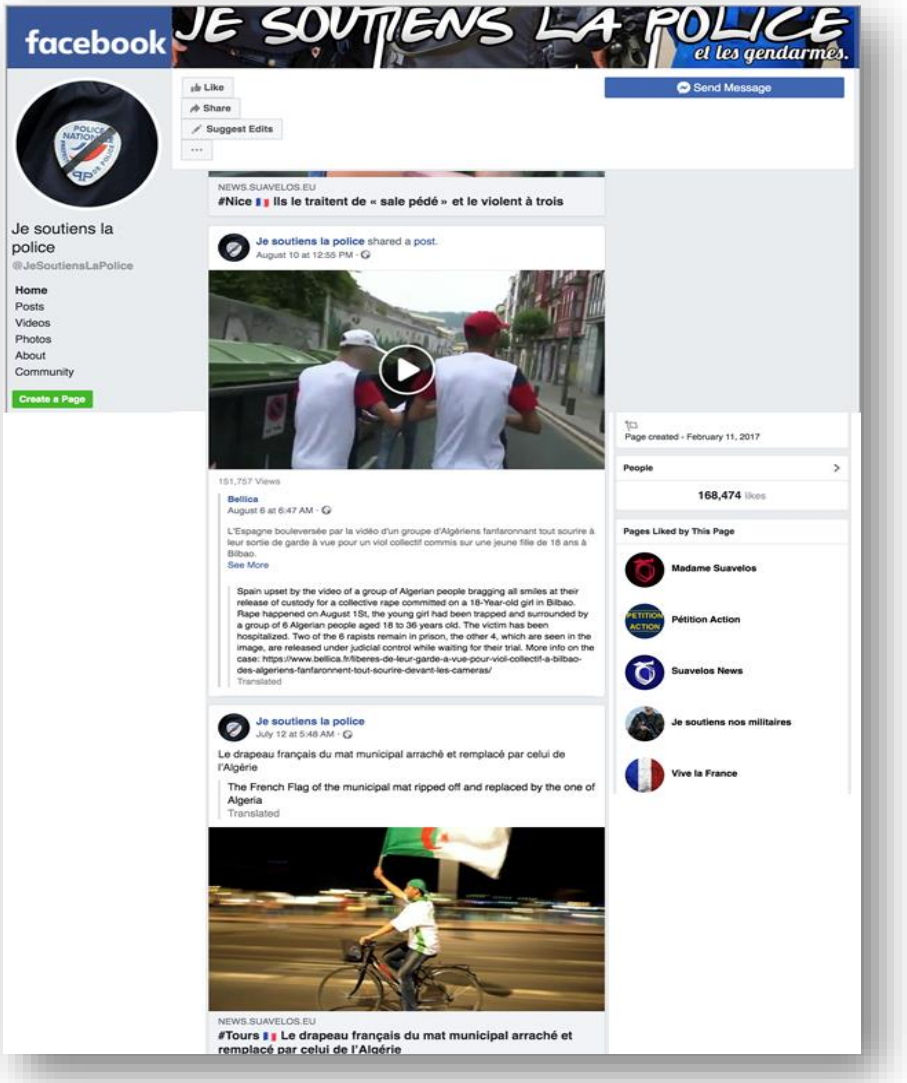

"*I support the Police*" Facebook Page:

- Created in 2017
- 172 000 fans on Facebook
- A name which can attract a large audience but can't allow us to clearly identify the owner of the Facebook Page
- Publishes content from two websites called Suavelos.eu or Bellica.fr
- Also republishes content from other Facebook pages called "I support"
- A lot of the content is linked to controversial issues (migration, violence, identity….)
- This page likes pages called Suavelos (Suavelos News, Madame Suavelos), another "I support" page and a page called "Vive La France"
- Website: Jesoutienslapolice.com

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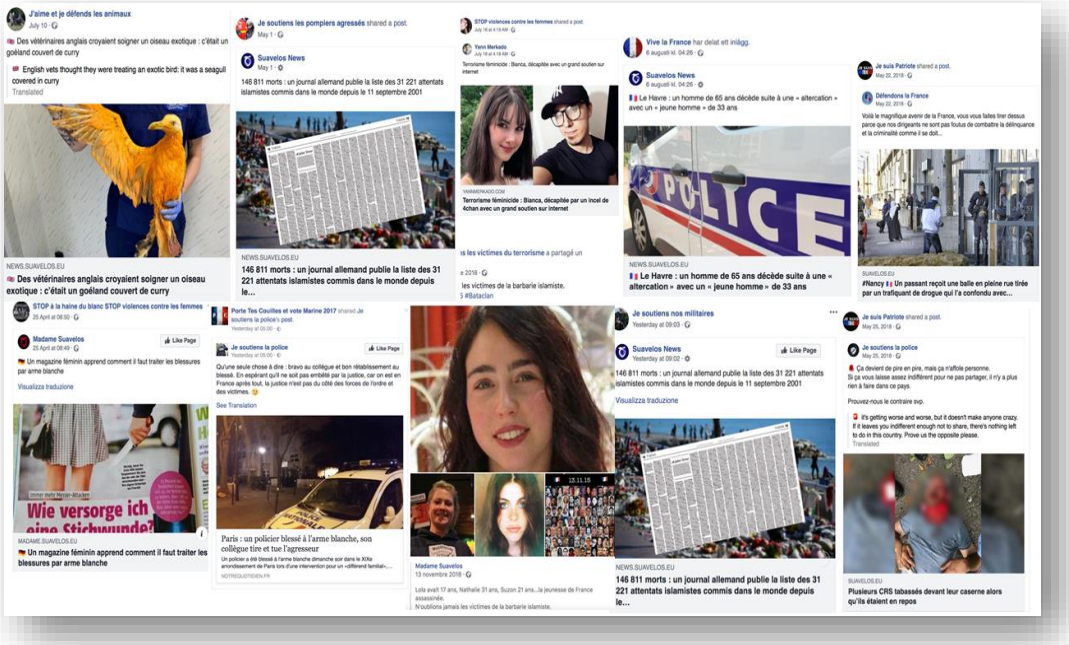
What do you observe?

Cross-posting and algorithmic hijacking



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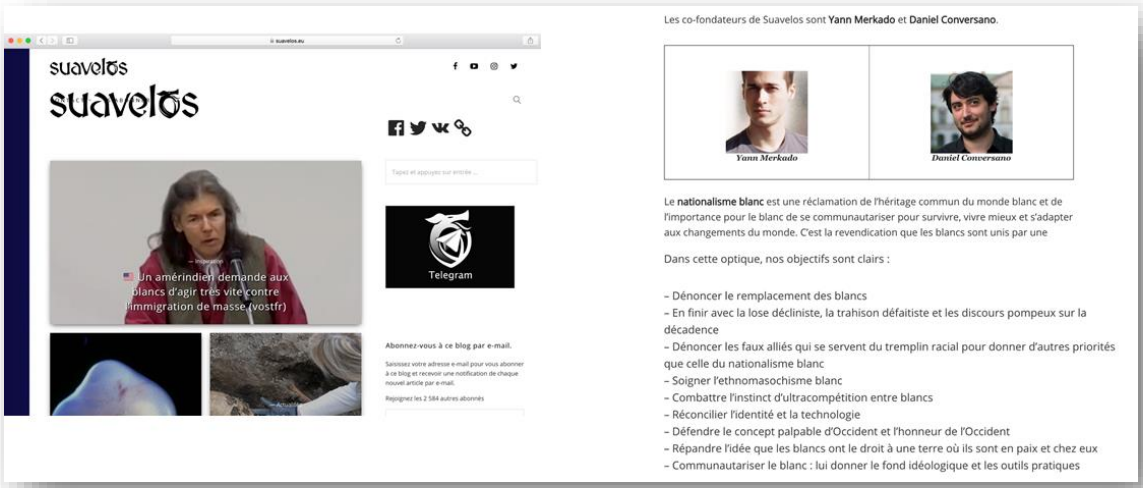
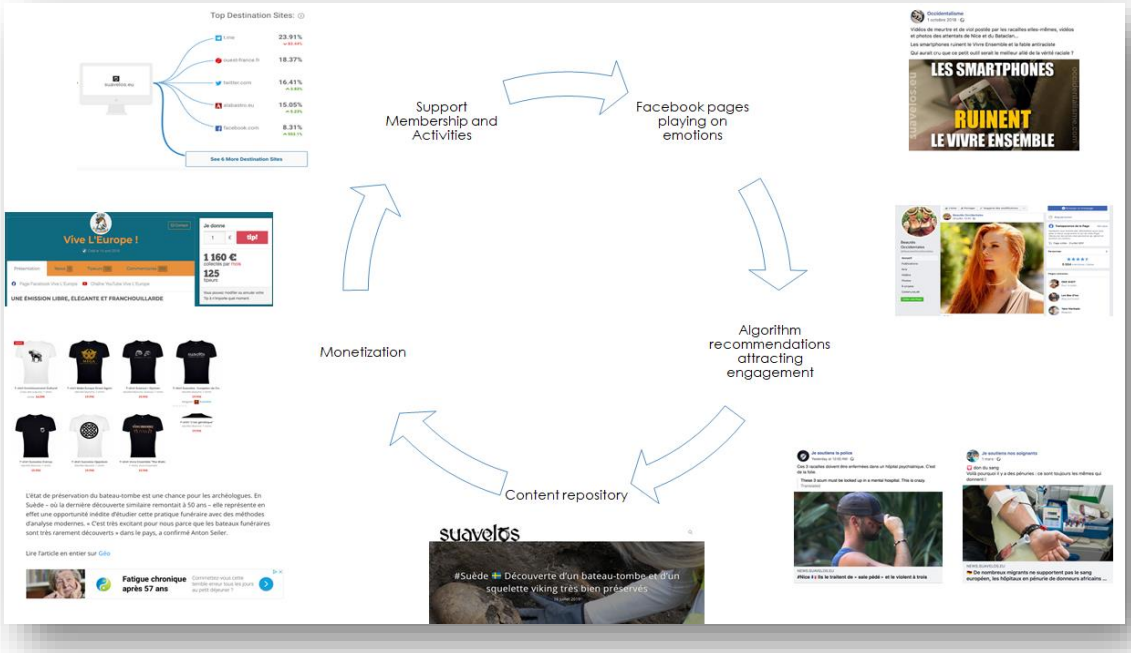
What is Suavelos?



The disinformation cycle



Project n.2018-1-BG01-KA204-047871 "Open Your Eyes: Fake News for Dummies"

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SOURCES

- How to Spot when News is Fake: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599386/EPRS_ATA(2017)599386_EN.pdf
- Facebook Transparency page: https://www.facebook.com/help/323314944866264?helpref=about_content
- Crowdtangle: https://www.crowdtangle.com/
- InVid: https://www.invid-project.eu/
- EU DisinfoLab, list of tools to monitor disinformation
- https://www.disinfo.eu/resources/tools-to-monitor-disinformation
- EU DisinfoLab list of initiatives tackling disinformation
- https://www.disinfo.eu/resources/initiatives-tacking-disinformation
- AFP Factuel: https://factcheck.afp.com/

FURTHER READING

- Facebook Discovers Fakes That Show Evolution of Disinformation https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/business/facebook-ai-generated-profiles.html
- Evaluating News Sources: https://libguides.utm.edu/newssources/evaluating
- Claire Wardle (2017). 'Fake news, it's complicated': https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/fake-news-complicated/
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- http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/624278/EPRS_STU(2019)624278_EN.pdf

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