Young Reporters for the Environment

Media Literacy

Green-Schools
An Taisce

Media Literacy

Introduction

YRE emphasizes the importance of media literacy, encouraging young people to understand how to use media effectively to research and communicate environmental issues.

This resource explores misinformation, disinformation and greenwashing in relation to communications on climate change. You will cover each of the three terms looking at examples and types of print, broadcast and digital media.

Students should be able to differentiate between all three terms and understand why it occurs, how to spot it and tools for fact checking using credible sources. Students will be equipped to analyse sources and content for their YRE entry.

- What is Greenwashing? (what examples or brands come to mind?)
- Overview of concepts with examples
- Misinformation vs Disinformation

Questions to explore with your students

- Identify as many example of print, broadcast and digital media
- What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?
- Why do you think people share misinformation online?
- What is Greenwashing? How may we spot it?
- Identify a few examples of companies/brands
- Who benefits from Greenwashing?

Learning Outcomes / Curriculum Links (aligned to LC Climate Action & Sustainability):

Strand	Learning Outcome
Strand 3.4: Global Connections	Assess authenticity and trustworthiness of media • Print • Broadcast and digital (including social media)
	Define the following concepts in relation to communications on climate change: Misinformation, Disinformation, Greenwashing
	Evaluate how an issue related to climate justice is communicated through different media, taking into account political, economic, and cultural worldviews.

Lesson Structure

This lesson can take place over three class periods

Opening Discussion (5 - 10 minutes)

Worksheet 1 – Types of Media (5 - 10 mins)

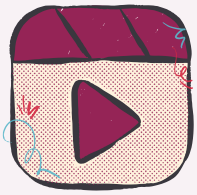
Hand out worksheet (5 mins):

In this worksheet you will explore different types of media (Print, Broadcast and Digital) and the type of information included in each. Check the fact sheet for definitions on completion.Hint: the fact sheet will support the answers.

Watch & Reflect (10 mins)

Video Suggestions:

- What is Disinformation? How does it Work? (3.16 mins)
- The Right Focus - Trócaire (7 mins)

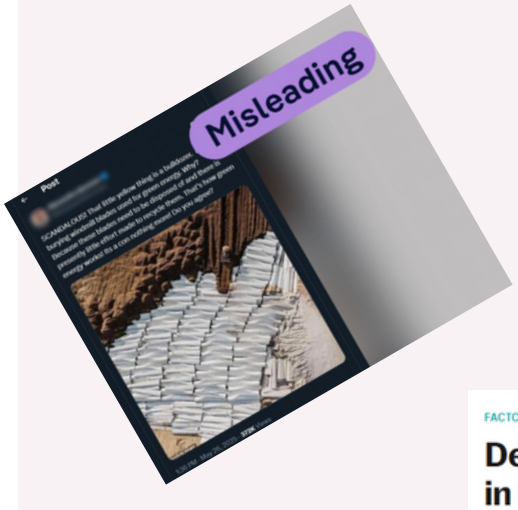


Discussion Prompt:

- What surprised you in the video?
- Why do you think people share misinformation online?
- What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?

Fake News

e.g.False claims that renewable energy caused the recent massive blackout in Spain.



Climate misinformation turning crisis into catastrophe, report says

False claims obstructing climate action, say researchers, amid calls for climate lies to be criminalised

There were false claims that renewable energy was to blame for the recent blackout in Spain. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

FACTCHECK

Debunked: No, the electricity blackouts in Spain and Portugal were not caused by a solar flare

A solar storm shut down telegraph systems in 1859, though no such flares were recently recorded.

2.52pm, 29 Apr 2025 ↗38.8k Share

Lesson Structure

Identify which of the following are misinformation, disinformation and greenwashing.

1

SUSTAINABLE AVIATION

SAF takes off: Virgin Atlantic makes the first commercial flight using 100% sustainable fuel

2

Fact check: Debunking Trump's false claims on wind energy

Sarah Steffen
06/07/2025

The US president claimed that "windmills are driving whales crazy" and "are not truly green," statements then repeated on social media to bash renewable energy sources. DW Fact Check takes a closer look at the claims.

3

Real climate solutions won't happen without natural gas and oil

By Mike Sommers, President and CEO, American Petroleum Institute
December 14, 2020

Content From

Energy from U.S. natural gas and oil is fundamental to economic recovery and addressing climate change goals.

Any student of U.S. history knows that America met the greatest challenges of our past – the Great Depression,

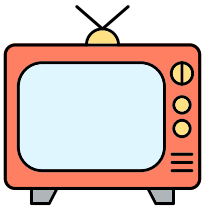
Key Takeaway Learning from this Lesson Plan

Throughout this resource we will explore the meaning of disinformation, misinformation and learn how to be climate literate. Students will see how to determine whether information is correct and sources are accurate. They will also learn how misinformation spreads and how to combat it.

Worksheet 1: Types of media

Identify as many examples of print, broadcast and digital media below

Media sources



Type of media

Print

Broadcast

Digital

Disinformation vs Misinformation

In this section, you will go through the meaning of disinformation and misinformation, and learn the difference between these two terms.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information—stating the facts incorrectly.

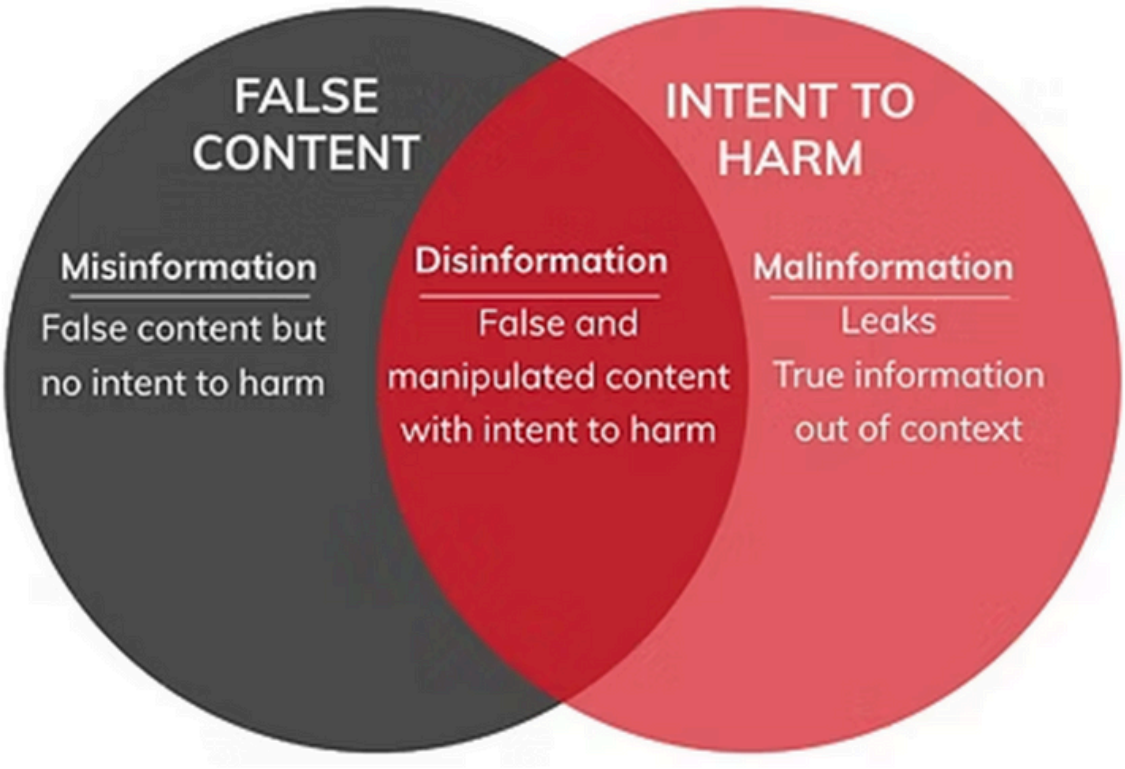
The spread of misinformation and disinformation has affected our ability to improve public health, address climate change, maintain a stable democracy, and more. By providing valuable insight into how and why we are likely to believe misinformation and disinformation, psychological science can inform how we protect ourselves against its ill effects.

Disinformation is false information which is deliberately intended to mislead —intentionally misstating the facts.

Why?

- It is spread by individuals or organizations with vested interests in denying or downplaying the reality of climate change and its impacts e.g fossil fuel Industry

- Questioning mainstream science or promoting conspiracy theories can generate more engagement on social media, translating into ad revenue, online influence or political support or monetary gain.



Source: Wardle et al. [179]

Disinformation vs Misinformation

Climate Denial

Climate conspiracy

Greenwashing

Climate Delay

How does climate misinformation and disinformation spread?

- **Social Media-**through online platforms Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram, X.
- **Confirmation Bias-**interpret data and information that supports your own views or values.
- **Echo chambers**-Shared connections and pages online create an inclination to trust information from familiar sources leading to the formation of echo chambers, a closed community where the same idea is shared without question. This deepens divisions on climate change.
- **Algorithims-**Social algorithisms are designed to maximise engagement, promote content based on a user's past interactions, rather than its credibility or accuracy.
- **Malicious actors-** bots, trolls and co-ordinated disinformation campaigns deliberately create and amplify misleading narratives to shape public perception

Examples include historic statements, that human-generated greenhouse gases are not causing global warming, to modern day discourses such as:

- The impacts of global warming are beneficial or harmless
- Its too late for climate solutions or they don't work
- Climate science and the climate movement are corrupt or unreliable
- Discourses that delay climate action
- Facebook's algorithm amplifies climate denial
- TikTok "banned" climate denial in April 2023 but still exists
- You tube climate denials
- #climatehoax and #globalwarmingisfake spread on Instragram

Debunking fake news

Tips for countering disinformation:

Your debunking checklist

- Read beyond the headline ☑
- Look closely at the URL. ☑
- Check for TRUSTWORTHY SOURCES ☑
- Check the date ☑
- Check the author ☑
- Watch out for unusual, inconsistent formatting ☑
- Consider your emotion and biases ☑
- Look out for questionable quotes and photographs ☑
- Check whether it is satire ☑
- Think twice before you share ☑

Disinformation is dangerous for democracy because it distorts public debate, polarises society and hinders people's ability to make informed choice free from interference and manipulation

Fact check sustainability claims (e.g waste produced from end of life turbines are worse than fossil fuels) Question if it is a cover to continue business as usual

Verify stories on reputable fact-checking websites, such as:

- EDMO Ireland – A hub of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) monitors and reacts to disinformation through its hubs across the EU.
- The European Fact-Checking Strandards Network (launched 2023)
- Googles Fact Check explorer
- International Fact Checking Network list (launched 2015)
- Debunk EUvsDisinfo.eu
- The Reporters' Lab at Duke University

Greenwashing

The practice of giving a false impression of the environmental impact or benefits of a product, which can mislead consumers eg. "Packaging made of 30% recycled plastic", "Our emissions have reduced by 20% since 2023"

7 sins of Greenwashing

Hidden trade offs; highlighting one sustainable feature without addressing emissions

No proof; Producing statistics without supporting data

Vague statements without supporting data; Use of terms such as 'Green' 'Eco friendly', 'Natural'

False labels, using their own certification to appear credible

Irrelevance, taking credit for something that's already banned

Lesser of two evils; Promoting a sustainable feature within an industry that is hugely harmful to the environment e.g. aviation

Fibbing; Making claims without evidence or third party verification

What can we do?

- Research vague facts and statements
- Does the product or service have a sustainability page or policy?
- Look for Third Party certifications, research the label they are using eg Fair Trade, B Corp
- Be vigilant in the use of nature and green imagery
- Be cautious of new 'eco'friendly' initiatives used to divert your attention away from their carbon footprint
- Use resources like 'Good on you' or the Fashion Transparency Index

As part of the European Green Deal, one of the actions of the Circular Economy Action Plan is a proposal for companies to substantiate their environmental claims using robust, science based and verifiable methods.

Worksheet 2: Media Literacy

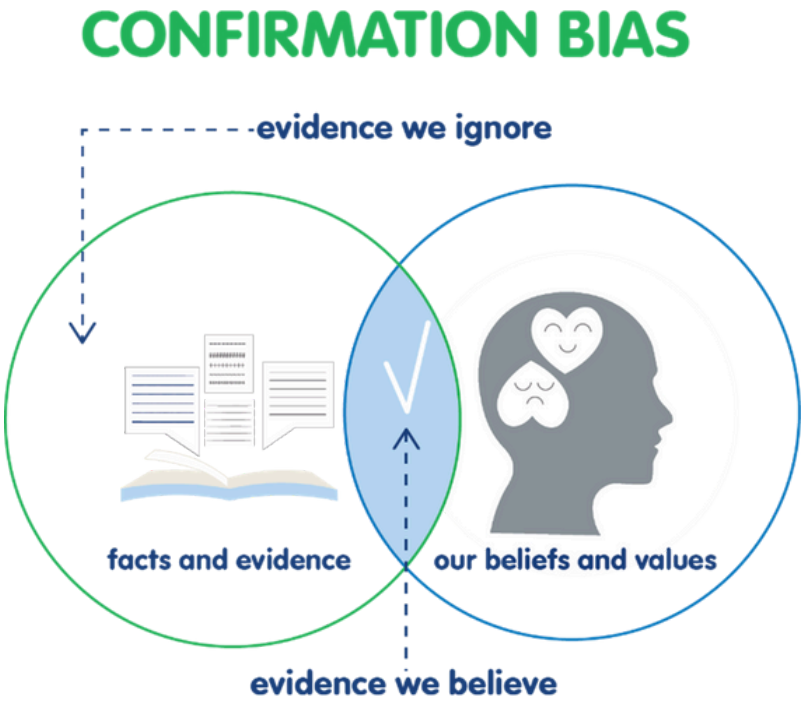
In Groups, discuss

- The bias in each of the articles (Tone and what is omitted)
- How media bias affects the understanding of climate change.

1. Article Name *"Climate Change Alarmism: A Dangerous Agenda Pushing Global Control"*
Excerpt from the article:
"Politicians and environmental activists are using the climate change agenda as a way to increase government control over industries, limit personal freedoms, and impose higher taxes. While climate change is real, the science behind the apocalyptic projections is often exaggerated, and the solutions proposed could harm the economy."

2. Article Name *"The World Could End in 12 Years – Are We Ready for Climate Armageddon?"*
Excerpt from the article:
"A new report from the UN suggests that if immediate action isn't taken to reduce carbon emissions, we could face an environmental apocalypse within a dozen years. Are we prepared to face the collapse of society as we know it?"

3. Article Name *"Climate Change: Is the Hype Just a Political Power Play?"*
Excerpt from the article:
"While it's true that the earth has warmed over the last century, the debate continues on whether human activity is the main driver of this change. In fact, the climate has always fluctuated naturally, and many scientists still dispute the catastrophic predictions associated with human-caused climate change."



YRE programme 2024/2025

Young Reporters for the environment

10 TIPS TO avoid disinformation

1. READ BEYOND THE HEADLINE.
Make sure to read the whole story. Check the grammatical standards.

2. CHECK FOR TRUSTWORTHY SOURCES.
Check the domain name of the publisher and google it. Make sure to read the "about us" section.

3. CHECK THE DATE.
You should consider the age of the article and the publication date on the website

4. CHECK THE AUTHOR.
Do some research on the author of the story. Check the author's affiliation and use Google Scholar to check his work.

5. CONSIDER YOUR EMOTIONS AND BIAISES.
Fake news often appeals to our emotions so look out for stories that play heavily on emotions.

6. THINK CRITICALLY.
We are more likely to trust content that confirms our opinion so make sure to read stories that oppose your beliefs.

7. LOOK OUT FOR QUESTIONNABLE QUOTES AND PHOTOS.
It is extremely easy to use quotes or photos from other events in order to create a fake news story.

8. CHECK WHETHER IT IS A SATIRE.
If the story you are reading sounds too outrageous, have in mind that it might serve satirical purposes

9. THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU SHARE.
The best way to reduce disinformation is to share responsibly valid and true facts.

10. VERIFY STORIES.
Make sure to cross-reference information and sources.

"Think before engaging.
Use your critical thinking before you share."

AI and Climate Change Disinformation

With the rise of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), students need to be aware of how such a tool can be used to push certain agendas, and where it fails in terms of climate communication.

For example request "an image of climate change" from chat gbt and you get this image of a polar bear. Polar bears clinging to ice is a common example of a visual cliché in climate change photography, a visual representation that we know from our research prompts cynicism and fatigue in audiences.

- Text-to-image AI models; Chat gbt, OpenAI's DALL-E,Midjourneym Microsoft Bing Image creator tools generates images from text prompts input by its user.
- Photography has the potential to communicate detailed, complex narratives, particularly in photojournalism. Images generated by AI are reduced to purely illustrative, surface level, content.
- These images reinforce cliches and harmful stereotypes.
- The images and data used to train the models are almost entirely unknown.

The YRE competition recognises the ever-evolving world of media technology and the potential of AI in environmental reporting. When used correctly AI can be a powerful tool for future generations to raise awareness and advocate for positive change environmental change when greening communities.

From 2024 the YRE programme embraces the next 30 years by allowing AI entries in the Staged Campaign Photo and Short-form Campaign Video categories. Allowing young people to explore the creative possibilities of AI while showcasing their environmental messages.

Have a look at these guidelines on how to work with Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Worksheet 3: Media Literacy

Discussion: Which image, AI generated (left), or photograph (right) do you find more impactful?

Fish eat microplastics driven by their odour. Above, debris found in the stomach of a fish in Portugal. Photograph: Paulo Oliveira/Alamy

A1 image of the year, 2025, YRE international competition

Article from the guardian

Activity (30 mins)

Find articles, headlines and social media posts that feature climate change or climate justice. Identify at least one example of misinformation, disinformation and greenwashing.

For each, highlight how you determined If the piece included misinformation, disinformation or greenwashing.

- Discuss how can disinformation and or greenwashing be regulated?
- What involvement should tech companies have in managing their sites for ensuring the correct information is spread?
- How can international bodies, such as the EU, take action in this regard?

Additional learning

- Toolkit for teachers on disinformation.pptx
- Debunking handbook
- Today's+Fake+News.+How+to+spot+it.pdf
- Fact-Checking Sites Around the World - Reporters' Lab
- EDMO Ireland – A hub of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)
- Disinformation & Misinformation Research Project
- Disinformation: 10 steps to protect yourself and others | Topics | European Parliament
- A quick guide to spotting misinformation | UNICEF Europe and Central Asia
- Staying vigilant online: can you spot information manipulation? - European Union
- Green claims - European Commission
- Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims | United Nations
- University of Cambridge S2059479820000137jxx 1..5
- Stopping greenwashing: how the EU regulates green claims | Topics | European Parliament
- The Right Focus - Trócaire
- A teachers' guide to Greenwashing - DevelopmentEducation.ie
- What does AI imagery mean for climate change photography? - Climate Outreach
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED
- https://www.gapminder.org/