

The Flat Earth Hoax

EXERCISE-IN-A-BOX LESSON PLAN (16-17 years old)

OVERVIEW

This lesson teaches students how to discern the credibility of online content by understanding internet hoaxes, deepfakes, and confirmation bias. By the end of the lesson, students will be better equipped to identify misleading information, avoid scams, and challenge their own beliefs to engage in constructive discussions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Identify the potential risks and consequences of deepfake technology on society, politics, and individuals.
 - Develop strategies for identifying and debunking internet hoaxes in digital media consumption.
 - Recognise the effects of confirmation bias in manipulated content, and understand how to fact-check and critically analyse information to avoid being misled.
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DURATION

60 minutes

KEYWORDS

- **Internet Hoax:** An internet hoax is a fabricated story or false information spread online with the intention of misleading or deceiving people. It often takes the form of a sensational news story or social media post that appears to be legitimate but is actually entirely or partially false.
 - **Confirmation Bias:** Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek out, interpret, and remember information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs, while disregarding or minimising information that contradicts them.
 - **Deepfake Content:** Deepfake content are videos, audio recordings, or images created using artificial intelligence (AI) to make it appear as though someone is saying or doing something that they didn't do.
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INTERNET INDEPENDENT FRAMEWORK

The learning objectives in this workshop are aligned with the **Digital Media Literacy** pillar of the Internet Independent Framework. Visit cyberlite.org for more information.

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WARM-UP 5 MINUTES

Slide 1

Say: Today, we will be learning about the topic of digital media literacy, and discover how convincing the internet can be with false information.

Slide 2

Ask: When you come across news on social media, how often do you fact-check the information? Do you go online to search for trustworthy sources to verify the information?

Have students share instances where they believed they encountered fake news. Discuss possible reasons why people might not fact-check information, such as time constraints, cognitive biases, or simply not knowing how to do it effectively. Students need to understand that simply searching on Google is not enough to verify the accuracy of information.

Slide 3

Ask: If you see 10 social media accounts reporting on the same news, does it make the news truthful and reliable?

Discuss how the popularity or virality of a piece of news does not guarantee its accuracy or reliability. People are more likely to share information that confirms their existing beliefs without verifying or fact-checking, which can contribute to the spread of false information.



DEFINE THE KEYWORDS 15 MINUTES

Slide 4

Ask: Does anyone know what internet hoax, confirmation bias, and deepfake content are?

Allow students to guess or extrapolate meanings. Guide students to think about these key concepts in the context of digital media literacy and social media.

Slide 5

Read the contents of the slide aloud.

Discuss: What are some common characteristics of internet hoaxes that can help you identify them?

Some characteristics of internet hoaxes include sensational headlines, lack of credible sources, and content that evokes strong emotional reactions. We can do

our best to avoiding falling for internet hoaxes by fact-checking and verifying the information against credible sources.

Slide 6

Read the contents of the slide aloud.

Discuss: How can confirmation bias impact the way we consume and interpret information online?

Confirmation bias can lead us to selectively seek out, interpret, and remember information that aligns with our existing beliefs, while ignoring or dismissing information that contradicts those beliefs. This can result in a skewed understanding of a topic and make us more susceptible to misinformation.

Slide 7

Read the contents of the slide aloud.

Discuss: What are the potential harmful consequences of deepfake content spreading online?

The consequences of deepfake content include the spread of misinformation and damage to the reputation of the individual who has been faked in the video's content. It is harmful because the likeness of deepfake content can easily trick and manipulate people into thinking it's real.



INVESTIGATE THE SCENARIO

30 MINUTES

Slide 8

Say: In this next section, we will explore a scenario about the Flat Earth conspiracy theory. Remember to keep the keywords we've just learned in mind as I show you five pieces of evidence we'll investigate together. Think critically about the information we're examining and consider the discussion questions.

(Optional) Select eleven students to read as these characters: Jack, Mika, Arusha, Hassan, FlatEarther87, DeepFake Hunter, SkepticalSamuel, PhysicsExpertEMC2, LakeWatcher33, Prime Minister Agave, and a reporter at Global News Daily.

Slide 9

Read this study group chat.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Jack believes that Mika should not trust credible sources such as schools, governments, or NASA for information. Why would this be dangerous?

It's dangerous because it encourages a dismissal of authoritative sources that are generally reliable and accurate. It can lead to people becoming more susceptible to misinformation and conspiracy theories. Trusting credible sources

is essential for building an accurate understanding of the world and making well-informed decisions.

2. Are Reddit, Wikipedia, or Youtube credible and trustworthy sources for facts and information? Why or why not?

While Reddit, Wikipedia, and Youtube can contain credible and trustworthy information, they are also platforms of user-generated content. This means anyone can upload or post anything to these sites, making it hard to distinguish which information is factual and which are opinions or inaccurate information.

Slide 10

Read this forum discussion.

Discuss the following questions:

1. How does this forum on the Flat Earth theory contribute to the spread of misinformation?

This forum provides a platform for users to share and discuss unverified and misleading information without proper fact-checking. Users like LakeWatcher33 may share their opinions based on personal beliefs but frame it in a way that sounds like factual information. The open nature of this platform allows misinformation to spread quickly and easily.

2. How can we recognise and overcome these confirmation biases?

We can overcome confirmation bias by first recognising that everyone is subject to bias because of our personal beliefs and experiences. Unlike the people in this forum, we have to expose ourselves to diverse viewpoints that challenge our assumptions and be open-minded. The people are stuck in an echo-chamber of like-minded thinking because they have confirmed each other's belief that the Earth is flat.

Slide 11

Read the comments for this video.

Discuss the following questions:

1. How would you judge whether or not this video is credible?

To judge whether the video is credible or not, we can first look at the uploader to verify the credibility of the YouTube channel (FlatEarth87) and research the uploader's background or any potential biases. An announcement by a government leader will be available on government sites and reported by reputable news stations - we can verify on those websites to determine if this is real or not.

2. What is the purpose of posting a deepfake video of Prime Minister Agave?

The purpose of this video is intended to promote the flat earth theory by manipulating viewers into believing that a high-ranking government official supports the idea.

3. What is the relationship between deepfake videos and internet hoaxes?

Deepfake videos and internet hoaxes both involve spreading false or misleading information online. Deepfake videos can appear really convincing and show people saying or doing things they never did. They can be a powerful tool in spreading internet hoaxes as a piece of supporting "evidence" to deceive people.

Slide 12

Read this social media post.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Why are sensational internet hoaxes harmful to our society?

Internet hoaxes like this are harmful to our society because they spread misinformation and erode trust in credible sources and institutions like governments and schools.

2. Why do people fall for internet hoaxes, even when there is no evidence to support them?

People can fall for internet hoaxes for various reasons. Jack has fallen for this hoax because of his confirmation bias of the Flat Earth theory. The deepfake video has evoked strong emotions in him and the community around him, which can override rational thought and lack of critical thinking.

Slide 13

Read this article in Global News Daily.

Discuss the following questions:

1. How have Flat Earthers created an internet hoax in this case?

Flat Earthers created an internet hoax in this case by using deepfake AI-generated videos to fabricate false information, making it appear that Prime Minister Agave confirmed the validity of the Flat Earth theory. They then circulated this false information on various social media platforms, gaining traction among Flat Earth communities and perpetuating the hoax through a social media campaign.

2. What impact does the spread of misinformation have on the credibility of the government and scientific community?

The spread of misinformation in this case undermines the credibility of the government and the scientific community. When people are led to believe that a government has been concealing the truth, it leads to mistrust in the government and its institutions.

3. What is the responsibility of highly respected newspapers in relation to misinformation? Why are they credible sources of information?

Highly respected newspapers are considered credible sources of information because they generally adhere to strict journalistic standards, including thorough fact-checking, verification of sources, and a commitment to

objectivity. By maintaining these standards, they can help counteract the spread of misinformation and promote an informed and educated public.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

10 MINUTES

Slide 14

Say: Here are some things we've learned from this lesson.

1. Deepfake content can be dangerous and perpetuate confirmation bias by presenting false information as real.
2. It is important to fact-check anything you read online by verifying information with trustworthy and reliable sources so you don't fall for internet hoaxes.
3. User-generated content websites such as Reddit, Wikipedia, or social media are not reliable sources of news and facts.
4. Confirmation bias can be a harmful type of cognitive bias that perpetuates extremism if it isn't balanced with diverse opinions and checked against factual information.

Ask: What are some key takeaways you've learned from this lesson?

Call on volunteers to share what they've learned.