

**Forum:** Youth Assembly 2

**Issue:** Combating disinformation among youth through education

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## INTRODUCTION

Disinformation, the process of creating and sharing false information with intent, has been affecting politics, societies and particularly the youth for hundreds of years. Based on historical documentation of events that have been maintained to this day, the roots of disinformation lie in the end of the Hellenistic period (323BC - 30BC) when it was put to use to make one out of two political candidates in Rome look more favourable. As technology, ever since, has continuously evolved, so have the media through which information, or in this case disinformation, is disseminated. From the invention of the Gutenberg printing press to the invention of the internet, people have found different ways to spread fake news. We have all witnessed and experienced one of the most famous disinformation waves of our time, during the COVID-19 Pandemic regarding the methods through which one could protect themselves.

It is important to mention that the internet has attained a crucial role on this issue due to the freedom provided to its users. Although freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, many have exploited it on the internet to mislead others through false information either by accident or through intent. This consequence was further supported after the invention and rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) models ever since November of 2022 with the rise of ChatGPT. As its responses are based on internet posts, websites, articles and forums without any form of fact checking, AI has been prone to spreading misinformation.

Highly affected by disinformation and misinformation are youth. Limited experience, the fact that they are easily influenced by external factors or that they have yet to sufficiently develop critical thinking makes them vulnerable to it. Regardless of whether the false information they intake was posted through intent (disinformation) or not (misinformation), they are still affected by it, shaping their understanding of the world around them through the opinions and lies of others.

Of course, we can assume that this has a major social and political impact. Youth hold the future of the world in their hands. Their opinions and their understanding of phenomena will shape our future, so it is important to ensure that their beliefs are not based on fabricated information. To guarantee that youth are protected from disinformation, it is crucial that great emphasis is shown to education. For the same exact reasons that youth are influenced by the internet, they are equally influenced by their education. Throughout their academic years they cultivate their mind and critical thinking. Thus, it is of paramount importance that education provides them with adequate guidance to protect themselves from the threats of disinformation.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS**

### ***Disinformation***

“False information spread with the intent of deceiving others”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Fake News***

“False stories shaped and spread, usually through social media, in order to influence the political views of others or as a joke”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Misinformation***

False information spread without the intent of deceiving others.

### ***Media Literacy***

The ability to use critical thinking in order to perceive and evaluate the legitimacy of information.

### ***Yellow Journalism***

The creation of fabricated stories or misleading news with the sole goal of generating revenue.

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<sup>1</sup> *Disinformation*. 2 Jul. 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disinformation>.

<sup>2</sup> *Fake News*. 2 Jul. 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fake-news>.

### ***Dissemination of Information***

The act of spreading information to an individual or a group of people.

### ***Artificial Intelligence***

“Technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?* | IBM. <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### *Historical Background*

#### Dissemination of information and disinformation throughout the years

Prior to the invention of writing, the dissemination of information was most commonly done orally through, what is now called, oral traditions. Thus, the ability to acquire new knowledge or skills or the preservation of cultures, laws, religious beliefs, historical events or ritual practices was limited by the direct personal contacts of a person. Although this system was powerful in small communities, it was vulnerable to distortion over time, possibly altering historical events or even the fundamental principles of a religion.

The birth of writing systems was a monumental moment in the history of civilisation. Although the ability to read and write were originally limited to priests, scholars and rulers, it served as a medium to accurately record events, laws and preserve information for years to come. By the time the classical era came to be (500BC-400AD), in prosperous empires that had flourished such as Greece or Rome, the dissemination of information had taken a new, more devious, role. In 30BC, Octavian, the adoptive son of Julius Caesar, launched a campaign of disinformation against Mark Antony, his political opponent, questioning, through misleading writings, Antony's loyalty to the empire. This served as the first documented account of disinformation in history.

The invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century, revolutionised the way knowledge is spread. As people were now able to mass produce books or pamphlets, information was no longer gatekept by religious or political figures. This significant moment in history led to the creation of the first newspaper in 1609, "The Relation of Strasbourg", providing regular updates on politics and events, sparking a chain reaction that would lead to the United States alone having approximately 6.7 thousand individual newspapers in 2019.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the creation of the newspaper, although significant, paved the way for the creation of yellow journalism, one of the most widely used methods to spread disinformation.

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<sup>4</sup> "Vanishing Newspapers -." *The Expanding News Desert*, <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/news-deserts-and-ghost-newspapers-will-local-news-survive/the-news-lands-cape-in-2020-transformed-and-diminished/vanishing-newspapers/>.

Reaching the present, information is now disseminated through the internet, television and social media. People have the ability to share news or knowledge with anyone, anywhere at any time through social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, thus accelerating the speed of information sharing. Everyone has the freedom to publish anything including lies or conspiracy theories, as long as they abide by the Terms of Usage of the application in use. If a user were to not adhere to the Terms of Usage of an application it is certain that they would face punishment, for example through posting lies in the form of propaganda. However, in later years the rise of Artificial Intelligence has posed an even greater risk. AI-generated content, such as deepfakes, can fabricate people, mimic voices and falsify information making it difficult to discern real from fake.

### Global effect throughout the years

Disinformation, as previously mentioned, can alter the people's views on certain events, fabricating its understanding of said incident. Judging from Octavian's attempts to spread false information against his political opponent, Mark Antony, one can come to the conclusion that political disinformation has existed for thousands of years as a strategic tool to shift public opinion. Moreover, disinformation has been used during electoral campaigns, nowadays through social media, in order to create a more favourable public image for one of the candidates. Lastly, it appears in great waves during health crises, where anti-vaccination movements put the general public in danger. Ultimately, all these instances where disinformation is present, lead to mistrust between public-state or public-media relations.

### ***Disinformation on youth***

### Role of social media in disinformation

During childhood the mind of a person is "shaped". Influenced by their direct environment such as school or family, people in their early years form their opinions based on what they hear or see. Having not experienced life truly through "their own eyes", the youth can

easily be manipulated or swayed by any form of information regardless of its reliability, as they have yet to cultivate the ability to criticise information.

The internet is a medium where everyone has the ability to publish any form of information without taking into account whether it is truthful or not. In the present day, as social media have taken on a significant role in our lives, youths are exposed to a wide variety of knowledge, opinions, and messages, either true or false, all of which can impact the way they perceive the world around them. In a way, this massive intake of information often manipulates them into structuring their beliefs based on disinformation, setting not only themselves, but also the people around them in danger. An example that can be taken into account is the wave of disinformation that hit the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic. False and dangerous methods of seeking protection against the virus were spread online, many of which were believed to be true, such as drinking chlorine.

### Impact by artificial intelligence

Ever since the public release of ChatGPT to the public in 2022, Artificial Intelligence has been evolving constantly. Although it is capable of great feats, the information it produces is derived from countless sources on the internet. Due to the aforementioned freedom on social media, the information provided by AI models is not always factual and presents inaccuracies or lies. The applications however, do clearly mention the potential of errors existing within the response provided by the AI Model

Although AI has been used by youths widely for solving homework rather than finding answers to their ethical, political, social or any other miscellaneous question they might have, it has influenced not only their view on certain events that may have been misrepresented by AI, but it has also taken away their ability to do their own research and keep tabs on current world affairs. As AI Models act as a method of finding quick answers, most teenagers do not go through the tedious, but important process of searching and comparing information. Thus, their understanding of phenomena is limited to a singular, possibly fabricated, point of view and in a way, getting rid of their ability to shape their own individual opinion. However, it is important to

remember that disinformation is not only spread through the internet, but orally as well.

### Disinformation vs misinformation

As previously stated, there is a very thin line between misinformation and disinformation. The former takes place without intent, whereas the latter with intent. However, regardless of the publisher's goal, both can be equally harmful. Both misinformation and disinformation pose the exact same threats to youth as both of them represent false information. The usage of critical thinking in order to evaluate the reliability of information and compare sources carries the same importance in both instances. Thus, the detrimental effects of social media and yellow journalism making youth vulnerable to disinformation make them vulnerable to misinformation as well. That being said, all proposed solutions need to take into account not only disinformation, but a wider range in order to include misinformation.

### ***Impact on Youth***

Youth often spend several hours on a daily basis on social media platforms, thus being particularly vulnerable to disinformation. This false information can vary from topics of political and social nature to mental health or academic integrity, shaping how young people view the world.

### Political and Social Impact

Social media platforms carry great amounts of misleading or fabricated political content in order to shape youths' opinions on world affairs or political figures. This leads to young people being apathetic towards politics, discouraging them from voting, protesting or exercising their political rights as citizens, thus limiting their freedoms. In turn, this apathy leaves the youth unrepresented inside the parliaments of nations endangering fundamental aspects of democracy.

The social impact of disinformation usually remains the same, no matter how many years pass. The relations between the public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or

governments will keep eroding, while young people will keep losing interest in politics and exercising their civic rights. In addition, the constant exposure to disinformation poses the risk of extremist ideas being normalised.

### Emotional Impact

Disinformation can also be present in the form of trends, such as methods to achieve true beauty standards or the reliability of inner social circles. Children that are easily influenced by the information they intake through social media, have presented signs of anxiety, social isolation, low self-esteem and identity crisis. Having been exposed to “toxic” and false content on the internet, without being able to ignore it, a lot of teenagers suffer emotionally as they are forced to struggle with internal conflict or feeling powerless and unsafe. Lastly, the low acknowledgement of this issue by communities has led to youths being scared or not knowing how to seek professional help.

### ***Role of Education***

#### Education models

Approximately 40 years ago, the internet did not act as an endless source of information, rather as a slow and highly limited aspect of people’s lives. At the time, educational institutes such as schools, colleges or universities promoted the usage of encyclopedias in order to look into any historical events or scientific facts that an assignment was based on. This educational model forced students to search, compare information, locate key points and achieve an in-depth understanding of each assigned topic. This not only broadened their horizons in general knowledge, but also cultivated their critical thinking.

As the internet evolved rapidly in a matter of years, encyclopedias no longer played a significant role in people’s lives. When working on an assignment, instead of having to search for the general event and slowly comprehend the topic in order to find an answer to a question they might have had, children input their question to a search engine such as Google Chrome or an Artificial Intelligence Model such as ChatGPT and receive a direct answer in a matter of milliseconds.

## Impact by education

Education plays a role of paramount importance as it holds the key to preventing disinformation. Several nations through national policies or international agreements, such as the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Frameworks by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have implemented specialised courses in their school curriculum in order to combat disinformation among youth. If faithfully implemented, this method of protecting teenagers can be quite effective, as proven by the fact that Finland continuously receives high ranks by the European Media Literacy Index. Studies conducted by the European Media Literacy Index have also shown that students that have received media literacy education had cultivated the ability to identify fake news and avoid manipulation.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### ***Republic of Finland (Finland)***

The Republic of Finland has been characterized by many as the global model for media literacy education. It has implemented one of the most powerful national education policies on the issue of disinformation, highlighting the need for media literacy across all ages. This policy was greatly successful as proven by the fact that Finland has consistently ranked at the top of the European Media Literacy Index which led to the nation becoming “the go-to example for many for addressing disinformation and misinformation” as stated in the 2023 report.<sup>5</sup>

### ***People’s Republic of China (PRC/China)***

The People’s Republic of China has acquired a significant role in the world of Artificial Intelligence and has created specialised regulations in order to combat disinformation. Most notably, in 2022, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) enforced regulations aiming to maintain mechanisms in place for the spreading of rumours and reporting illegal content.

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<sup>5</sup> “Media Literacy in Finland: National Media Education Policy.” *GCED Clearinghouse*, 29 Nov. 2020, <https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/resources/media-literacy-finland-national-media-education-policy?language=en>.

Moreover in 2024 the CAC forced platforms to remove any form of unlabelled AI generated content to protect citizens.<sup>6</sup>

### ***European DisinfoLab***

The European DisinfoLab is a non-profit organisation (NPO) located in Brussels, Belgium, founded in 2018. Its goal is to combat disinformation and promote media literacy in Europe through monitoring, fact-checking, prebunking and network engagement. Through its research, the team behind this NPO, has identified trends and threats, providing experts with tools and resources in order to tackle the dangers posed by disinformation to citizens' integrity. Moreover, it raises awareness on the issue by holding tens of webinars throughout the year and an annual in-person seminar, where people communicate, exchange ideas and collaborate to counter disinformation.

### ***United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)***

UNESCO is a United Nations organisation promoting peaceful collaboration in education and science worldwide and serves as the global leader on this topic. Through the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiative this organisation has empowered countless nations, assisting them in combating disinformation alongside the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance. Moreover, its work led to the creation of the Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while Respecting Freedom of Speech, aiming to protect the entire globe from the wave of disinformation that had risen around the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF EVENT</b>
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<sup>6</sup> "APRSA 2024 | Chapter 5: Driving Wedges: China's Disinformation Campaigns in the Asia-Pacific." //ISS, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/asia-pacific-regional-security-assessment-2024/chapter-5/>.

approx. 30 BC	Octavian, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, launches a fake news war against Mark Anthony, during a civil war in the Roman Empire. This was the first documented case of fake news. <sup>7</sup>
approx. 1439	The Gutenberg printing press is invented by Johannes Gutenberg, thus revolutionising the way information is spread. <sup>8</sup>
November 16th, 1945	The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is established <sup>9</sup>
November 2nd, 2017	“Fake news” is selected as the word of the year with its use rising by 365%. <sup>10</sup>
2018	The non-profit organisation (NPO) European DisinfoLab is established in Brussels, Belgium dedicated to countering disinformation. <sup>11</sup>
September 13th, 2020	Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while Respecting Freedom of Expression
December 24th, 2021	Resolution A/RES/76/277 (Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental

<sup>7</sup> “A Brief History of Fake News.” *BBC Bitesize*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zwcqn9q>.

<sup>8</sup> *When Was the Printing Press Invented?* | *Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/question/When-was-the-printing-press-invented>.

<sup>9</sup> *UNESCO | Definition, History, Members, & Facts* | *Britannica*. 30 Jun. 2025,

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/UNESCO>.

<sup>10</sup> *What Is 2017’s Word of the Year?* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-41838386>.

<sup>11</sup> “EU DisinfoLab.” *Upgrade Democracy*,

<https://upgradedemocracy.de/en/perspective/highlights/eu-disinfoLab/>.



	freedoms) is adopted by the General Assembly with the goal of highlighting the importance of transparency, media literacy and the reliability of sources <sup>12</sup>
November 30th, 2022	ChatGPT, one of the most frequently used Artificial Intelligence Models, is released to the public. <sup>13</sup>

**RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

***Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while Respecting Freedom of Expression (UNESCO)***

In March 2020 the COVID-19 outbreak was officially declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Alongside it, erupted a wave of disinformation regarding the virus, ranging from how it can be treated or how people can seek protection to claiming that its existence was nothing, but a lie. A month later, in June 2020, in order to counter the spread of such false information, over 130 Member States of the United Nations met with the goal of creating the Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while Respecting Freedom of Expression, which came into force in September 2020. It promoted media and information literacy and encouraged public trust in science, facts and independent media, while respecting the freedom of expression and the freedom of press at all times. This Act is highly necessary. However, without the support of stronger national policies or regulatory frameworks and the increase of pressure on digital platforms to comply with its terms it became unable to take meaningful action.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Countering Disinformation and Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Resolution*. 2021. *United Nations Digital Library System*, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3955093>.

<sup>13</sup> *When Was ChatGPT Released?* <https://www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/when-was-chatgpt-released/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation While Respecting Freedom of Expression | UNESCO*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/balancing-act-countering-digital-disinformation-while-respecting-freedom-expression>.



## ***A/RES/76/227 (Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms)***

During its 76th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed resolution A/RES/76/227 on the topic of Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the 24th of December 2021. The aim of the resolution is to acknowledge the threat posed to democracy by disinformation and promote international cooperation in combating it, while emphasizing the importance of media literacy, free expression and access to reliable information. This resolution highlights the importance of enabling young people with media literacy competence and encourages national governments to integrate Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Frameworks to schools. Although this resolution is a great milestone of recognition of how disinformation threatens democratic societies, there has been weak enforcement and weak implementation attempts by several nations.<sup>15</sup>

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### ***UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Frameworks***

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) means to have the ability to understand and evaluate, to use and create information in all formats in an ethical and critical way. Based on that principle, UNESCO has implemented MIL Frameworks in order to deescalate disinformation, combat threats and attacks against freedom of expression and information and the growing mistrust presented by the public to mass media. The goals of MIL Frameworks can also be represented by three terms: information literacy, digital literacy and media literacy, with each and every one of them branching out into separate subsections such as computer literacy, games literacy, archival literacy or advertising literacy. The Media and information literacy

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<sup>15</sup> *Countering Disinformation and Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Resolution. 2021. United Nations Digital Library System, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3955093>.*

curriculum for teachers<sup>16</sup> serves as an example to these Frameworks as it outlines core competencies teachers should attain in order to educate and protect their students from disinformation. Moreover, they led to the creation of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance, previously known as the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy during the Global Forum for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy. This Alliance's work and effort have been characterised as groundbreaking in promoting international cooperation to ensure that all people across the globe have access to media and information literacy.

### ***National Media Education Policy (Finland)***

In 2019, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published the Media Literacy Policy and the National Media Education Policy Document, extending and updating to the current standards the cultural policy guidelines for media literacy published in 2013. This programme highlighted the need for media skills for all age groups, trying to improve citizen's opportunities to develop their media literacy. It was formed in a certain way in order to allow ministries, agencies, organizations, associations, foundations and educational foundations to participate in the promotion and implementation of the actions it proposes. It is widely regarded as one of the most successful efforts in combating disinformation through education, something supported by the continuous high placements of Finland in the European Media Literacy Index.<sup>17</sup>

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### ***Curriculum integration of media literacy education***

The way a person acts, behaves or thinks is shaped during their earlier years, until the beginning of puberty. As children develop they also form habits on how they interpret the world around them or process new information. Schools can implement in their curriculum courses

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<sup>16</sup> *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers* | UNESCO.  
<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/media-and-information-literacy-curriculum-teachers>.

<sup>17</sup> *Media Literacy in Finland: National Media Education Policy*.  
<https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/rules-guidelines/media-literacy-finland-national-media-education-policy>.

that focus on media literacy and critical thinking taught by educators specialising on the issue. Such courses could cover the history and evolution of the dissemination of information, what algorithms influence the content presented to us online, how the media can influence public opinion and of course methods on how students can protect themselves from disinformation and misinformation. It is highly important to introduce these classes as early as possible to ensure the protection of youth from the youngest age possible. It is also crucial to ensure that students do not view these classes as an irritating and boring subject. Methods such as interactive learning could be implemented to peak the interest of children.

### ***Institutional support to achieve protection***

Institutions such as schools, colleges or universities have to assist in achieving the protection of youth from disinformation, due to the critical role they have attained in people's lives. Thus, it is significant to implement specialised policies with the sole aim of discouraging the usage of disinformation by permitting the usage of only certified sources provided to students by the institution itself and requiring citations. Moreover it would be highly meaningful for institutions to attempt creating partnerships with organisations specialising on the issue, such as the European DisinfoLab or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in order to organise seminars or workshops with media experts to inform youth on the issue.

### ***Awareness campaigns on social media***

Youth spend several hours every day, mindlessly scrolling through social media apps, such as Instagram or TikTok. A way to approach the issue at hand, would be for awareness campaigns to be launched on social media, similar to advertisements, that users stumble upon and inform them regarding the dangers of disinformation. This could be implemented through short games or posts. Applications could either be forced to present those posts with the condition that they choose how many times a viewer encounters them per week or have the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provide the needed funds for them to appear.

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