False news
by the artistic and cultural education service of the BnF and the Center for Media and Information Education (CLEMI)

Story of fake news

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La fausse nouvelle, que l'actualité remet au goût du jour sous l'appellation de fake news ou d'infox, n'est pas, loin s'en faut, un phénomène inédit !

▶ Misinformation, lies, hoaxes, propaganda, "false news" has been brought up to date under the name of "fake news" then "infox". But it does not date from yesterday. The National Library of France and CLEMI (Center for Media and Information Education) propose to address this essential issue for our democracy by studying heritage documents. This educational poster exhibition offers tools and food for thought **to help locate, sort, identify sources and relevant information to cultivate the citizen exercise of methodical doubt.**

Pastiches and hoaxes. Truer than true

- In art, a pastiche imitates a work by play or with a parodic intention. From its inception, the press was parodied to make people laugh, make fun, make people react. Parodies or hoaxes are based, to function, on diverted or distorted facts. They are also rampant on radio, television and the Internet. While their goal is not to manipulate public opinion, some people unwillingly contribute to the circulation of false information, the second degree not always being understood by a distracted audience.

Sensational… and media crash

- In a competitive context, the news media seek to be as close as possible to the news, some not hesitating to disseminate spectacular information or to play on our fears and fantasies to reach a large audience or influence the opinion. The search for the scoop, the construction of buzz ("buzzing" in English, which everyone is talking about) sometimes cause media outbursts with definite impacts on the reputation of organizations or individuals.

Slander and defamation. Destabilization tools?

▶ Today, slanderous messages on social networks are destabilizing individuals, organizations or even political power. In the 15th century, slander spreads in an elusive way in the form of libels, small aggressive books close to clashes on YouTube. In the middle of the 18th century, poetry was chosen to circulate slander in Paris, among scholars and among the people. Sung to famous tunes and reworked according to the news, it spread virally at a time when few people can read.

Propaganda. Small state arrangements with the truth

▶ The dissemination of partial, partial or false information is a classic propaganda tool. In wartime, it is sometimes inspired by rumors circulating on the front or behind to discredit the enemy, legitimize the conflict, even launch the enemy intelligence services on false leads. It is also a strategic tool to establish or destabilize a State, particularly in regimes based on the personalization of power. Today, some countries are suspected of using digital networks to exert hidden influence on foreign countries, especially during the election period.

Rumors. Catalyst of community tensions

▶ False news can have the effect of pitting one community against another, thus revealing racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, fear of the other ... These rumors, relayed with a conscious will to harm or not, go so far as to provoke scenes of collective hysteria, even massacres. Today, digital networks are amplifying the phenomenon. Virtual communities linked together by SMS, messages on WhatsApp or Facebook, telephone conversations, share in real time and with great ease hate messages and slanderous denunciations.

Conspiracy and false news, dangerous connections...

▶ Many alternative accounts today challenge the commonly accepted version of an event on the grounds that it is "official". Thus, the legend of the Protocol of the Elders of Zion is still diffused today. It testifies, according to Umberto Eco, of a deep need to designate an enemy, by enclosing oneself in a Manichean vision of the world. Indeed, when confusion reigns, there is a great temptation to simplify by claiming that everything is manipulated by occult groups. Digital networks amplify this phenomenon and certain media are accused of collusion with political power.

Science without confidence is just media ruin

- Is the Earth as flat as a pizza? Pythagoras and Aristotle were already fighting against the idea ... In 2017, despite the satellite images, some French people would still adhere to this theory! If the sciences have long been the subject of contestation, this phenomenon has now become more marked. The number of sources available has never been greater. Information is less filtered by the specialized press. The difference between knowledge and information, science and opinion is sometimes no longer seen. In addition, the development of predatory newspapers casts doubt on scientific articles.

Info + intox = info. The fake news today

- Today, digital information is a boon as much as a risk. The challenge is to be discerning between official speeches and other claimed "truths" (post-truth). How then to develop a critical mind when international economic issues prevail, the complexity of information, the trivialization of certain beliefs? In addition, viral dissemination on the Internet (sites, blogs, social networks) no longer allows verification of the facts in real time.

To see more clearly. Collective tools

- How is information verified? Already in 1923, Time Magazine launched a fact-checking service which consisted in verifying the facts before publication. Today, this journalistic practice is revisited. Dedicated services verify a posteriori the veracity of the information circulating in public life. Indeed, the speed of propagation, the mass of information (one hundred million contents per day on the net!), The competition between traditional media and social networks complicate the profession of journalist and make the time of verification particularly short.

To see more clearly. Individual tools

▶ Maintenant, je suis prêt à échanger, argumenter et débattre avec les autres ! Je choisis de partager ou non l'information, je crée mon blog, je lance mon journal…

▶ Now, I am ready to exchange, argue and debate with others! I choose whether or not to share the information, I create my blog, I launch my newspaper …