

## Event Report

### Beyond Fake News – A Workshop on Media Literacy and Fact Checking

ECAS, Brussels – September 26, 2-3.30pm



We are now subject to media messages more than at any time in history. As the barriers for entry to create professional-looking multimedia content have been lifted, democratising content production and giving everyday people the opportunity to contribute, so too has the need to verify the reliability of this content.

Digital channels present remarkable opportunities, but also many challenges. Lately, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish credible news sources from unreliable ones. The UK referendum in 2016 and the US election popularised the term ‘fake news’, but what is fake news and how do we know when we see it?

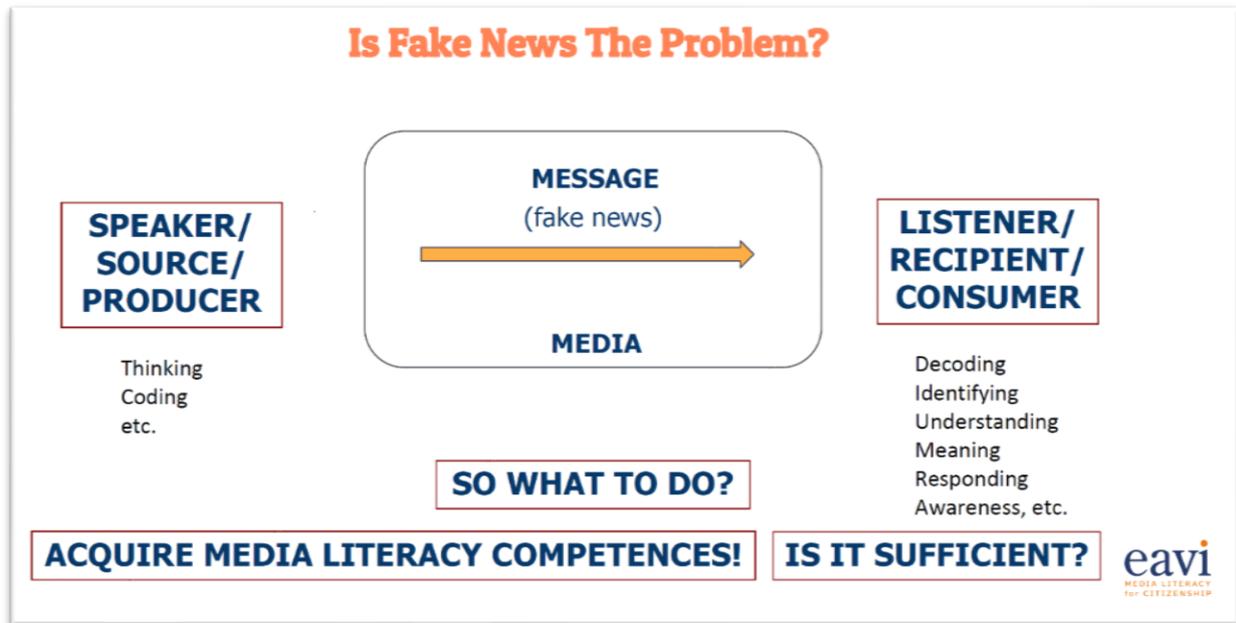
Fake news, and its effects, are subject to many debates. However, few organisations have proposed an effective training programme for individuals to learn how to evaluate information and check facts. For citizens to be able to effectively participate in the media and confidently curate their media consumption, the skills to discern between credible and bogus media message need to become second nature.

In collaboration with the **European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI)**, ECAS hosted a workshop in Brussels on September 26 on fake news, media literacy and the shifting media landscape.

20 professionals took part in the workshop, and it was viewed over 280 times online.

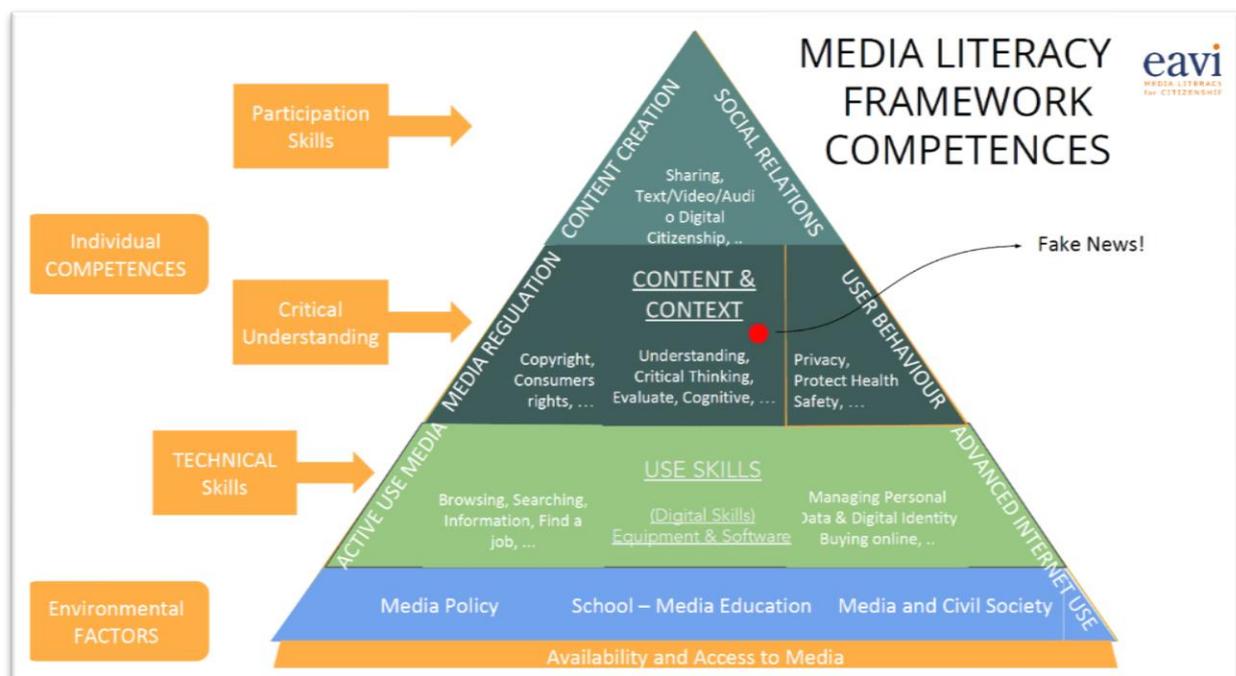
## Fake news is information that is designed to deceive

Paolo Celot, Secretary General of EAVI, opened the workshop by introducing the concepts of fake news and media literacy. Fake news, he said, is a piece of information that is designed to deceive, either for political or commercial reasons, and media literacy, in a broad sense, is the ability to use the media well, which applies to both producers and consumers of news.



Fake news exists at two different levels, affecting individuals and societies. It is a symptom of a sick society and has implications for democracy. It raises fundamental questions about our capacity to defend ourselves against fake news and the responsibilities politicians have in regulating the media.

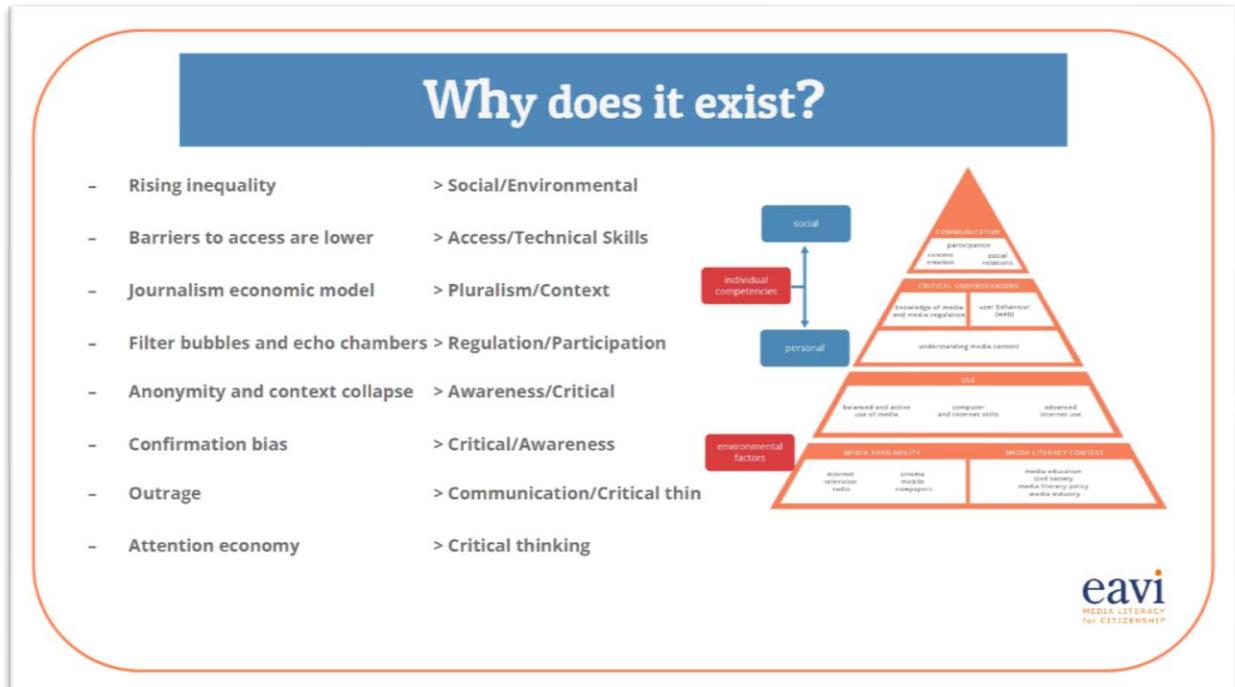
Media literacy, though not a solution on its own, is essential and can give people the technical and critical skills to understand the content and context of media, and thus recognise fake news.



The different factors underlying media literacy are policy, education, the media and civil society, but the core of media literacy is the capacity for analysing and understanding information.

## A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention

**Luc Steinberg**, Media and Project Officer at EAVI, followed with a discussion about the reasons why fake news exists and what we can do about it, putting fake news in the context of media literacy.



There are a number of reasons why fake news exists. Rising inequality has led to people losing trust in established media and looking for alternative sources of information and people are increasingly becoming creators of news as well as consumers. On top of that, social media algorithms are creating ‘filter bubbles’ and ‘echo chambers’, often confirming people’s existing beliefs and exposing people to biased and misleading information. Business models built around grabbing people’s attention and making money off their outrage are also fuelling fake news.

What can we do about it? Regulation, greater funding and transparency in journalism and fact-checking (debunking) all have an important role, but can sometimes be counter-productive. Regulation can be deemed antidemocratic if governments are seen to be the arbiters of truth, and fact-checking can also give fake news ‘oxygen’ and expose it to a wider audience. There is also a rise in ‘fake fact-checking’, which weakens the legitimacy of fact-checking as a tool for debunking fake news and the independence of fact-checkers can be called into question.

Media literacy, or ‘pre-bunking’, on the other hand, is a way of inoculating people against fake news.

There are five key concepts and questions at the heart of media literacy:

1. All media messages are constructed. **Who created the message?**
2. Media messages are constructed using creative languages with its own rules. **What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?**

3. Different people experience the same media message differently. How might different people understand this message differently to me?
4. Media have embedded values and points of view. What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Most media are organised to gain profit/power. Why is this message being sent?

# BEYOND 'FAKE NEWS'

## 10 TYPES OF MISLEADING NEWS

Type	Description	Impact	Motivation
<b>propaganda</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adopted by governments, corporations and non-profits to manage attitudes, values and knowledge</li> <li>appeals to emotions</li> <li>can be beneficial or harmful</li> </ul>	medium	politics/power
<b>clickbait</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eye catching, sensational headlines designed to distract</li> <li>often misleading and content may not reflect headline</li> <li>drives ad revenue</li> </ul>	low	money
<b>sponsored content</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advertising made to look like editorial</li> <li>potential conflict of interest for genuine news organisations</li> <li>consumers might not identify content as advertising if it is not clearly labeled</li> </ul>	low	money
<b>satire and hoax</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social commentary or humour</li> <li>varies widely in quality and intended meaning may not be apparent</li> <li>can embarrass people who confuse the content as true</li> </ul>	low	humour/fun
<b>error</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>established news organisations sometimes make mistakes</li> <li>mistakes can hurt the brand, offend or result in litigation</li> <li>reputable orgs publish apologies</li> </ul>	low	money
<b>partisan</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideological and includes interpretation of facts but may claim to be impartial</li> <li>privileges facts that conform to the narrative whilst forgoing others</li> <li>emotional and passionate language</li> </ul>	medium	politics/power
<b>conspiracy theory</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tries to explain simply complex realities as response to fear or uncertainty</li> <li>not falsifiable and evidence that refutes the conspiracy is regarded as further proof of the conspiracy</li> <li>rejects experts and authority</li> </ul>	high	politics/power
<b>pseudoscience</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>purveyors of greenwashing, miracle cures, anti-vaccination and climate change denial</li> <li>misrepresents real scientific studies with exaggerated or false claims</li> <li>often contradicts experts</li> </ul>	high	money
<b>misinformation</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>includes a mix of factual, false or partly-false content</li> <li>intention can be to inform but author may not be aware the content is false</li> <li>false attributions, doctored content and misleading headlines</li> </ul>	high	money
<b>bogus</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>entirely fabricated content spread intentionally to disinform</li> <li>guerrilla marketing tactics; bots, comments and counterfeit branding</li> <li>motivated by ad revenue, political influence or both</li> </ul>	high	money

**DIG DEEPER...**

<b>false attribution</b>	authentic images, video or quotes are attributed to the wrong events or person	<b>misleading</b>	content does not represent what the headline and captions suggest
<b>counterfeit</b>	websites and Twitter accounts that pose as a well-known brand or person	<b>doctored content</b>	content, such as statistics, graphs, photos and video have been modified or doctored

N.B. The impact and motivation assignments are not definitive and should just be used as a guide for discussion

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Luc finished with an examination of the different kinds fake news, from propaganda and sponsored content, to conspiracy theories and misinformation, and the motivations behind them. Money is always a motivational factor, but other motives include politics, passion and humour.

## Beyond the Headlines – The Online News Verification Game

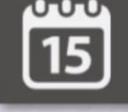
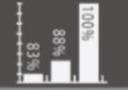
The participants were then asked to analyse some examples of fake news in the ‘Beyond the Headlines’ fake news game, scoring the articles according to criteria relating to different aspects of fake news.

Examples included a hyperpartisan article by Breitbart News, a flat earth satire from the Huffington Post and a piece by Sputnik International about Emmanuel Macron being an American agent.

# BEYOND THE HEADLINES

## THE ONLINE NEWS VERIFICATION GAME

RULES: START WITH 36 POINTS AND SUBTRACT OR ADD POINTS ACCORDINGLY AS YOU ANALYSE YOUR CONTENT. COMPARE YOUR RESULTS WITH OTHERS.

<b>headlines</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the headline makes use of ALL CAPS or excessive punctuation!!!???</li> <li>■ the headline promises secret information, surprise, happiness, outrage?</li> </ul>	<b>images</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ these are stock images or there are no captions on the images</li> <li>■ the images have been doctored or relate to different events</li> </ul>
<b>url</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the publication does not have its own domain name or uses a free blog platform</li> <li>■ the domain is counterfeit, eg. bbc.com.co</li> </ul>	<b>ads</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the article is sponsored by a company or organisation</li> <li>■ there are many intrusive banner or pop-up ads or the ads look questionable and cheap</li> </ul>
<b>author</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ there are no examples of their work elsewhere online</li> <li>■ there is no identifiable author or the author is using a pseudonym</li> </ul>	<b>text</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ there are many spelling or grammar errors or the appearance looks unprofessional</li> <li>■ the text frequently uses emotional, hyperbolic or sensationalised language</li> </ul>
<b>date</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ there is no date on the article</li> <li>■ the information in the article is no longer relevant or current</li> </ul>	<b>search</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ there are no links or the links point to questionable sources</li> <li>■ there are no examples of this story elsewhere online</li> </ul>
<b>BONUS ROUND</b>			
<b>interviews &amp; opinions</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the content quotes sources and names them</li> <li>■ the interviewee is qualified to speak with authority on the topic or more than one opinion was represented in the article</li> </ul>	<b>graphs &amp; statistics</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ refers to a study which is named and linked or you can find the study online</li> <li>■ represents accurately the results of a study or graphs and statistics are clear and precise</li> </ul>
<b>BONUS QUESTION</b>			
Can you find out who owns the publication? <b>YES +3 NO -3</b>			
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