Propaganda & Disinformation

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THEME

Introduction to propaganda and disinformation and the way they influence individual and public opinion

CONTEXT

This lesson plan serves as an introductory class on propaganda and disinformation and it is meant to introduce these concepts to students/participants. It is advised that the second class, building on this one, uses the "History of Propaganda & Disinformation" cards set and one of activities suggested in the brief Just Now guide "Using the Timeline Method"*.

Please note the definition of the key terms:

Propaganda is the manipulation of information to influence public opinion.** Prior to the 20th century, pictures and written media were the principal instruments of propaganda (television, radio, motion pictures, newspapers), with the Internet and social media becoming its important instruments in the 21st century.

Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose of causing harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological or social motivations.*** There is often confusion between different terms related to disinformation, see the image below:
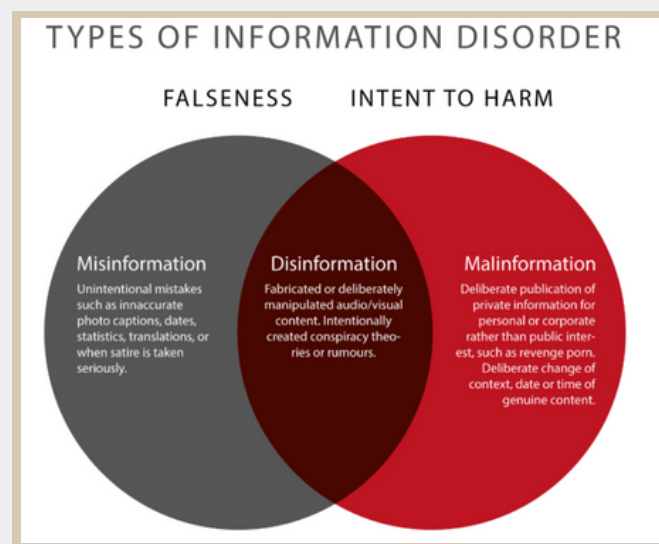

Figure: 3 Types of Information Disorder. Credit: Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakshan, 2017****

* https://teachjustnow.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/9.-Using-the-Timeline-Method.pdf
**www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda
*** Wardle, C. & H. Derakshan (September 27, 2017) Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making, Council of Europe, https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c
****https://medium.com/1st-draft/information-disorder-part-3-useful-graphics-2446c7dbb485

GOALS

- Introducing students/participants with the concepts of propaganda and disinformation
- Raising awareness about the way propaganda and disinformation influence our opinion
- Building critical thinking through discussion about the dangers of disinformation

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students/participants are able to define and explain what are propaganda and disinformation
- Students/participants are able to identify and explain the ways propaganda and disinformation influence our opinions and affect society

METHODOLOGY

- Group discussion;
- Small group work and presentations
- Timeline cards (in the follow-up class)

MATERIAL & EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Projector and computer, internet; "History of Propaganda & Disinformation" card set (printed/hard copy)

Overview of activities (process)

Duration: 90 minutes (two school classes)

Group brainstorm: 10 minutes
The teacher/educator starts the lesson with a few brief questions:

1. When you hear the word, 'propaganda', what is the first thing that comes to mind?
2. How would you define 'propaganda'?
3. What about 'disinformation', what comes to your mind when you hear that word?
4. How would you define 'disinformation'?

Watching short films and discussions: 30 minutes
In order to fully de/construct both terms, the instructor introduces two short films:
- Eudaimonia You Tube channel, "Propaganda – Edward Bernays", at: https://youtu.be/8Q-3qwEDyPM (2015, length: 8:30 minutes)
- Noah Tavlin, "How Fake News Can Spread", TED-Ed, at: https://youtu.be/cSKGa_7XJkg (2015, length: 3:41 minutes)

After watching both short films, the following discussion questions could be used to guide the group reflection in plenary setting:
- Did anything surprise you after watching these two short films?
- What elements of propaganda do you notice in society today?
- What contemporary examples of disinformation do you know of?

- What is something that propaganda and disinformation have in common? (note: both try to convince/persuade/impose a certain agenda, a point of view and inspire a certain course of action for e.g. buying X product, supporting/voting for X political party, choosing to (not) get a vaccinated, etc.)
- In what ways can both propaganda and disinformation influence individual opinion and actions?
- What about on societal level – in what ways can these two phenomena affect public opinion, collective decisions and actions?
- How can we improve our media literacy and protect ourselves from disinformation?

Announcing the next class: 5 minutes
The teacher/educator announces that the next class will delve deeper into the topic of historical and contemporary forms of propaganda and disinformation by using timeline cards.

ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION OPTIONS

You can evaluate the students'/participants engagement in the group discussion, or the quality of their homework assignments following the second class (for e.g. brief essays or presentations doing further research on one of the timeline cards/topics).

ADAPTATION FOR ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION

The class is fully adaptable for online implementation, as the short animation films as well as the group discussion can be done in plenary with all students/participants participating.

SOURCES

- NewseumED is an excellent resource for educational materials about media literacy, at: https://newseumed.org/