NEWSREEL 2

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NEW TEACHING FIELDS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

TEACHING GUIDE

VERIFYING AND ANALYSING FAKE NEWS

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About the Newsreel Project

An indispensable ability that journalists need to acquire is the creative and responsible use of digital tools. Journalists should be reliable and trustworthy sources of news amidst the digital din as they need to provide a counterpoint to the wealth of unverified information that affects the raw emotions and tempers of audiences around the world. The target audience of the EU-funded NEWSREEL2 - New Teaching Fields for the Next Generation of Journalists project is the millennial and post-millennial generations of journalists whose lifestyles are inherently linked to digital devices and social media. The primary aim of NEWSREEL2 is to improve their digital skills in a creative and responsible way to enhance the societal benefits of the digital era. To achieve these objectives, the NEWSREEL2 project team developed innovative teaching methods and materials for media and journalism students.

The project is the extension of NEWSREEL - New Skills for the Next Generation of Journalists, widening the scope of the original four journalistic fields covered (data journalism, collaborative journalism, new business models and ethical challenges) with nine new ones: (1) 'Storytelling in social media' enables students to learn how to present journalistic contents on social media networks. (2) 'Graphic journalism' helps students to get to know the basic tools and subgenres of comics journalism. (3) Improving students' 'democratic sensibility' enables them to be aware of their social role and responsibility in the democratic society of the digital age. (4) 'Covering migration' helps to improve their research and reporting skills and understanding migration in a global context. (5) 'Foreign coverage' enables students to contribute to a more balanced coverage of international topics. (6) 'Journalism for voice-activated assistants and devices' teaches students how to use them and see their potential in newsrooms. (7) 'AI and journalism, robot journalism and algorithms' teach their usage, and enables students to clearly see the potential benefits and risks. (8) 'Verifying and analyzing fake news' teaches students to be able to identify information and opinion going viral and to verify information with the help of suitable tools and software. (9) 'Debunking disinformation' helps students to get solid knowledge about the mechanisms used for debunking fake news and disinformation. The project aims to facilitate efficient international cooperation between university-based journalistic ecosystems. All educational materials produced by the project partners are open free and accessible through open licenses via the NEWSREEL2 website (https://newsreel.pte.hu/).

The project partners are the University of Pécs, in Hungary; the Erich Brost Institute, from the Dortmund Technical University, in Germany; the University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), in Portugal; the University of Bucharest, in Romania; the

Masaryk University, from Brno, in the Czech Republic; and Hostwriter, from Berlin, in Germany.

The Teaching Guides

There is a teaching guide for each field of the NEWSREEL2 project. The main goal of these teaching guides is to give some hints that can help teachers and trainers to implement the developed courses. The guides help understand how the courses are structured and showcase the complete courses and the e-learning or other teaching materials available for each course on the online platform. Through the guides you can have access to main goals of the course, for whom it was thought, bibliographical references and other contents that can help you get the most out of the contents the NEWSREEL2 team has prepared.

The structure

Besides the detailed syllabus, this course provides teaching materials developed to support the teaching process. You can find these materials in the syllabus and in this teaching guide.

The teaching guides structure is the following:

- The professional field
- Target audience
- General objectives
- Specific objectives
- Professional competences to be enhanced
- Course
    - Complete course
        - Contents according to the Syllabus
        - Advised teaching methods
        - Evaluation suggestion
        - Bibliography suggestions
    - E- Learning or other teaching materials

- Notes to teachers
- General observations
- The team

Verifying and Analysing Fake news

The professional field

This is a course for Journalism and Communication and Media Studies programs, at Bachelor and Master's level. Media all over the world has been invaded by fake news in recent years. In this context, given, it is important for the academic world to keep pace with the profession.

Target audience

We created this course for journalism, mass communication, and social studies undergraduate and/or graduate students. If necessary, the course can be adapted for other types of publics considering that the problem of disinformation affects everyone in the society.

General objective of the course

The general objective of the course is to improve the quality of today's news by increasing students' media literacy skills in order to raise public's trust in journalism. Future journalists and communication specialists will be able to discern true information from false ones and to build well-documented informative articles.

Specific objectives of the course

- By the end of the semester, students in this class will know what fake news and misinformation are and they will acquire the necessary tools to recognize real news from fake and false ones.
- Also, students will be able to distinguish the trustworthy sources from unreliable ones and will know to verify the information that they come across every day.
- Moreover, the course aims to help future journalists acquire the necessary skills to recognize quality media content from misleading and, in turn, produce well-documented news and material.

Professional competences to be enhanced

This course is developed in order to help students:

- To acquire the skills necessary to recognize quality media content, as well as deceptive media content (facts vs fabricated content).
- To have the ability to recognize the various types of fake news in the media.
- To have the ability of recognizing reliable and unreliable sources.
- To understand how journalistic stories are created vs fake news
- To develop critical thinking skills and to understand the professional ethics standards.
- To develop the necessary skills for verifying information before publication, as well as the necessary skills for fact-checking.

COURSE

Contents

Week 1. Course

History of Fake News. Presenting the objectives and the structure of the course, the assignments and evaluation methods. Definitions of „fake news". History of „fake news". Ground zero in fake news – 2016 the American elections. Dangers of fake news.

This first meeting represents the introduction to the course. Teachers will present the objectives, the main concepts and themes which will be discussed during the semester.

Seminar

Analyzing the definitions of fake news. Analyzing the most important fake news moments so far and the consequences of fake news.

In this first seminar students will analyze real life examples in order to understand the definitions of fake news. Moreover, we will talk about the rising of the fake news phenomenon, starting with the 2016 American elections.

Weeks 2 and 3. Courses

What is the news? Fake news typology. Differences between classifications. Actors of fake news.

In the second and third courses, first we will be talking about the differences between the news and the fake news. Teachers will present the most important classifications of fake news and will offer examples for each category.

Seminar

Comparing news and fake news. Finding and analyzing fake news according to the classifications. Topics and actors of the fake news.

This meeting will be used in order to compare examples of fake news and real news and to evaluate each of their main features. Moreover, students will identify the creators, consumers, and arbiters of fake news.

Weeks 4 and 5. Courses

Journalism and Fake News. Ethics and deontology. Low-quality journalism. How can journalism stop the development of the fake news phenomenon?

These two meeting will focus on the relationship between journalism and fake news and how the fake news phenomenon affects mainstream media. Teachers will also talk about the low-quality journalism and the repercussions on the credibility of the press.

Seminar

Examples and analyses of low-quality journalism. How can journalism stop the development of the fake news phenomenon?

This seminar will present, through real life examples, the most distinct features of low-quality journalism and its impact on the media public trust. Students will analyze concepts such as the neutrality, the relevance, the truthfulness or the completeness of different pieces of news from different types of outlets.

Week 6. Course

Digitalization and transformation of the news industry. Increasing online propaganda, disrupting advertising systems.

This week's course will deal with the extensive process of news digitalization, the spread of online propaganda and with the introduction of a new type of audience, the digital public.

Seminar

The challenges of the news digitalization process. The new advertising models and their impact on news/fake news.

In this seminar, the main topics discussed will be the difficulties posed by the development of news digitalization and the impact of the new advertising models on news and fake news.

Week 7. Course

Sources - Analyzing different news and fake news from the sources point of view. Analyzing the use of expert/ reputable sources, the use of direct quotes and other methods of verifying the sources.

This course is focused on the importance of sources. The teacher will present various news and fake news reports from the perspective of the sources, focusing on the use of reliable sources, direct quotes, and other techniques for writing well documented articles.

Seminar

Exercises in order to find the correct information and to identify reliable/unreliable sources.

During this seminar students will exercise different ways of verifying sources and information, as well as finding reliable sources.

Week 8. Course

Fake news and social media. How to detect fake news on social media. Journalism on social media and the promotion of news on social media. Actions taken by social media platforms to stop the spread of false news.

In this course, teachers should explore the strong connection between fake news and social media. They should also explain why social media is such a fertile ground for fake news as well as what social network' strategies are in order to stop or at least to slow down this process.

Seminar

Analyzing different fake news in social media. Verifying the sources in social media. Identifying fake accounts. Analyzing fake news gone viral.

In this seminar students will examine several fake news examples from social media - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube. They will learn to discover the features of fake accounts and they will also examine the ways in which several fake news have spread all over the world.

Week 9. Course

The economic dimension. Local Fake News. Clickbait. The discovery of digital fingerprints, online influencing techniques, bots. Digital frauds.

This course should analyze the local fake news from the countries where the course is taught, and also the economic effects of fake news in the media environment.

Seminar

Ways to fight fake news through media literacy. Analyzing subliminal messages.

This seminar will focus on deconstructing media messages and examining different kinds of subliminal messages.

Week 10. Course

The need for digital literacy.

This course will explain what digital literacy means and why digital literacy is more important than ever.

Seminar

How to find the facts.

During this seminar students will write a fact check report of a certain news story.

Week 11. Course

Verifying information and fact-checking.

In this course students will learn how to detect fake news, how to check information and how to fact-check texts, photos or videos.

Seminar

Final discussions and preparing the final presentations.

During this seminar the students and teachers will talk about last details for the final presentations

Week 12. Course

Trends for tackling fake news in the future - creating a model to detect fake news on social media. Web interface for detecting "sensational" headlines. Other solutions to combat misinformation.

During the last course the teacher will challenge the students to discuss possible solutions to encounter the fake news phenomenon.

Seminar

Evaluation

During the last seminar the students will present their own case study on a topic that they've chosen on any of the course topics.

Teaching methods

For the courses, the main teaching methods are lectures combined with discussion. The seminars are based on discussions and exercises. International, but also local examples of fake news should be presented, analyzed and discussed with the students.

Evaluation

The evaluation method is a combined one. For the course, 10% is represented by active class participation (the ability to answer questions during the lecture or/and discuss topics) and 40% is represented by a written academic essay (max. 10 pages) focused on one of the topics of the course. For the seminar, the students should present a case study on a topic of their choice from any of the course subjects.

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Teaching materials

You can find the following classes on the project portal: https://newsreel.pte.hu/verifying_and_analysing_fake_news

- Course – week 1 - Introduction of the course. History of Fake News
- Courses - weeks 2 and 3 - What is the news? Fake news typology
- Course - week 8 - Fake news and social media
- Course - week 11 - Verifying and fact-checking

Notes to the teachers

The public has less and less trust in the press due to the fake news and to low quality journalism that both have flooded the media in the last years. This course tries to teach students to question information and sources and that is why it is important for teachers to find as many examples as possible about fake news (also local and international). The examples (whether text, photo or video) should be used at every course and seminar in order to correlate the theory and practice. This way, the students will be able to identify easier false information and will be able to write well documented stories.

Also, for students we recommend exercises about finding and sorting fake news in different classifications, in order to learn the typology faster.

General observations

The "Fake News" course is important for students and also journalists because in recent years the spread of false information has become a global phenomenon. The news environment changed especially with the development of social media and the internet, so the new generations of journalists should be ready to tackle disinformation, misinformation and other communication disorders.

Also, active or experienced journalists should be prepared to identify and debunk fake news, so they should have proper training in this domain. In order to fight against the spreading of false information, the "Debunking" and "Fake News" courses are related, with a lot of common elements.

And in a world where the information can be accessed with a touch of a button, the sorting criteria and the identification of "communication monsters" become a vital ability also for journalists or the public.

The team

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Marian Popovici is a PhD student in Communication Studies and teaching assistant at the Faculty of Journalism and the Communications Sciences within the University of Bucharest. He is also a sports journalist and a graduate of both the Faculty of Journalism and Communications Sciences (University of Bucharest) and the Faculty of Finance, Banks and Accounting (Dimitrie Cantemir University). He also has two MA degrees: Thematic Journalism and Financial Banking Management.