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MODULE 4
Media Literacy

Examples on disinformation and emotions

lunaria

AFRICAN MEDIA ASSOCIATION MALTA

Associazione CARTA di ROMA

FUNDACIÓN MALDITA.ES

ANTIGONE
INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE
on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence

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The examples provided are based on existing sources in national online media, serving as representative case studies for analyzing disinformation mechanisms.

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Sudanese man jailed six years for exposing himself to two boys in bus

- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Fear
- ❑ Calmness

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Sudanese man jailed six years for exposing himself to two boys in bus

RIGHT ANSWER

- [x] Anger
- [ ] **Fear**
- [ ] Calmness

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How anger is being used in the example

Narrative mechanism at work

This headline reports a crime, but also **implicitly links criminal behaviour to national origin** by foregrounding identity in the very first word. When nationality is mentioned in cases involving serious offences, it can reinforce:

- dangerous outsider narratives
- migration as security threat
- generalised suspicion toward a wider group

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Verification

If the same structure were applied differently by using the alternative headline:

"Man jailed six years for exposing himself to two boys in bus"

The crime remains equally serious, but the **migration cue is removed**, reducing the likelihood of collective attribution.

ANGER is used in disinformation by:

- Provoking outrage
- Simplifying blame
- Polarizing groups
- Repeating emotionally charged claims
- Pushing for rapid actions

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The use of emotions to disinform

- Momentary emotion, is predictive of increased belief in disinformation and decreased discernment between real and fake content.
- Inducing emotional thinking using a simple induction manipulation may impair the ability distinguish disinformation from real.
- Reliance on emotion appears to be underlying susceptibility to disinformation above and beyond a simple lack of reasoning.

Martel, C., Pennycook, G. & Rand, D.G. Reliance on emotion promotes belief in fake news. *Cogn. Research* 5, 47 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-020-00252-3

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WHEN YOU RECEIVE A CONTENT REMEMBER TO ASK THE QUESTION:

“HOW DOES IT MAKE ME FEEL?”

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Police have arrested over 30 migrants found to be living in Malta illegally. Detainees arrested will appear in court

- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Fear
- ❑ Calmness

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Police have arrested over 30 migrants found to be living in Malta illegally. Detainees arrested will appear in court

RIGHT ANSWER

- ☐ Anger
- ☒ Fear
- ☐ Calmness

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How fear is being used in the example

This headline and its framing activate fear by immediately labelling the people as *living illegally*, which invokes the idea of lawlessness and lack of control.

The emphasis on *"police arrest"* connects migration with criminal justice, encouraging readers to see migrants as a security concern rather than a humanitarian issue.

Suggested alternative headline:
"Police identify 30 individuals without valid residency status in Malta"

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Residents complain of migrants sleeping rough and loitering.

Migrants sleeping rough and loitering make residents feel unsafe and frustrated.

- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Fear
- ❑ Calmness

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What emotion does the content evoke?

Residents complain of migrants sleeping rough and loitering.

Migrants sleeping rough and loitering make residents feel unsafe and frustrated.

RIGHT ANSWER

- [x] Anger
- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Calmness

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How anger is being used in the example

This article stokes anger by quoting residents who frame migrants' presence as a nuisance and a public order problem ("sleeping rough," "loitering"), with emotional language about feeling *unsafe* and *frustrated*.

This frames migration as an imposition on locals' daily lives, making it easier for readers to align with resident frustration.

The suggestion that migrants are a visible source of discomfort reinforces in-group/out-group distinctions and encourages resentment rather than empathy.

Suggested alternative headline:
"Local residents raise concerns about public spaces and shelter access for people experiencing homelessness"

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DISINFORMATION AND EMOTIONS

CONFIRMATION BIAS

Confirmation bias strongly influences disinformation about migrants. When people already have negative ideas or fears about migration, they are more likely to believe information that shows migrants as dangerous, criminal, or responsible for social problems. Even when these claims are false or exaggerated, they can feel true because they fit with what the person already thinks, so they are accepted and shared without being checked.

At the same time, information that challenges these beliefs is often ignored or distrusted. Data that shows the real situation, official statistics, or stories about migrants' positive contributions may be dismissed simply because they do not match existing opinions. Social media can make this worse by showing people more of the same type of content, which reinforces one-sided views and repeats misleading narratives.

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