TOOLS TO DECODE DISINFORMATION



Antagonist foreign powers can use disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda to harm the Republic of Moldova. Get the tools you need to strengthen your resistance.

1. BE WARY

Be wary of information, images or other materials that seem suspicious, disturbing, or arouse fear or other strong feelings. Antagonist foreign powers frequently play with your emotions to manipulate you.

There are a lot of different methods that can be used to create and spread disinformation, misinformation and propaganda. Often, several methods are used simultaneously to achieve greater impact.

A standard method involves **creating stories or narratives**, which may be completely false or only partially true, but which are distorted and taken out of context to mislead, polarise, and divide. A narrative is designed to influence our perception of the world we live in and how we choose to act in different situations.

Another common method involves **targeting certain groups of people**. This is known as targeted disinformation. A malicious third party, often referred to as an external threat actor, will adapt the information to a specific group of people and then will work methodically to specifically reach them - and only them - through social media or other channels.

Be wary of the following characteristics of disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda if:

- It is deceptive and often has a hidden agenda;
- It targets our vulnerabilities;
- It is designed to disrupt and manipulate public discourse and destroy trust in our society.

2. THINK TWICE

Avoid becoming part of the spread of disinformation, misinformation and propaganda. Think twice before sharing information with friends or on social media.

Antagonist foreign powers can use recurring stories (narratives) about Moldova. They want all of us living in Moldova to worry more, to conflict with one another, and feel that Moldova is a country difficult to live in. A polarised society is more vulnerable, which makes it easier for anyone who wishes us harm to achieve their goals.

Who are they targeting?

Antagonist foreign powers can tailor their communications and then target specific segments of the population. If you see something and think "There's something about that," it might be because you're part of the target group, which is why it's essential to think twice.

Images and videos that evoke strong emotions

Images are a particularly persuasive way to mislead someone. The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) means that manipulated images, videos, and voice recordings have become more realistic. These images can spread very quickly when something happens.

Authentic images and videos from an event can also be used, but out of context. Even basic recordings from a cell phone can be used to influence people. The spread of disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda increases when a significant event takes place or when something important happens that is reported in the news.

3. CHECK THE SOURCE

Learn how digital platforms work and how to assess the validity of information. In an era when algorithms control much of our feeds, it's easy to get drawn into a particular narrative - but remember to step back and double-check the information.

Social media is built on algorithms. These algorithms can manipulate us on a large scale and control much of what we are exposed to in our feeds. It is designed to create ongoing engagement that can be used to spread both positive and negative messages. This means being mindful of how you react when you see something that excites, saddens, or angers you. It's also important to double-check your sources, look for information in multiple places, and not share unverified news.

Questions you can ask yourself when you receive new information:



Is the information accurate? Is it reasonable? Can I double-check it with other sources?



Where does the information come from? Is it usually a credible source?



How old is the information? Is it new or is it a reuse of old data?



Why is this information being sent right now? Who benefits if you react to it in a certain way?

How to spot a fake website:



1. **URL:** Imitation of well-known platforms is a common tactic. Take a closer look at the website address (also known as the URL) to check if it is correct.



2. **Title:** The goal is to pique interest and trigger a response from the reader. Always read more than just the headline and make sure that any statement is supported by the content.



3. **Content:** Is this an opinion or a fact? Read the entire text before sharing it or forwarding the information.



4. **Author(s):** Think about who wrote the text and why. Be wary of texts or websites that have no author.



5. **Images:** Image manipulation is easy and you can't be sure that it has a real connection to the content. Perform an image search to find out if the image has been used previously in a different context.



6. **Sources:** If the text makes references to other sources, check them out.



7. **Comments:** Who makes comments? Most of the time they are regular people, but bots and troll accounts are not uncommon.



8. **Warning:** The fact that a text has many likes or shares does not guarantee that the content is correct.

How to identify a bot

A bot (from "robot") is a computer program that performs automated tasks, such as spreading information on social media. A bot can be used to reinforce certain messages, to spam forums and comment sections, to like or share social media posts, or to carry out cyber-attacks. Nowadays, bots are harder to identify because they take on the appearance of authentic accounts with the help of artificial intelligence.



1. **Profile picture:** Bots often use a stolen image or don’t have a profile picture at all. Perform an image search to verify that it’s real. With the advent of generative artificial intelligence, creating images that look real is easier than ever. When this happens, an image search will not return any results, and the image is not actually classified as stolen.



2. **Activities:** Many bots are extremely active. Be wary of accounts with a suspiciously high number of posts per day.



3. **Name:** Most bots use random usernames, such as combinations of random numbers and letters.



4. **Account creation date:** Many bot accounts are created immediately before becoming active. Sometimes older accounts are used, but usually all older posts are removed beforehand, which creates a time gap between the creation date and the first post.



5. **Foreign languages:** Bots sometimes use machine translation to spread their messages in multiple languages. This results in obvious grammatical errors or incoherent sentences.



6. **Information:** Bot accounts often lack personal information or use made-up or false information.



7. **Interactions:** Check the posts and other users the account interacts with. Bots are often coordinated and mutually reinforcing, while having few followers who are real people.

4. SEEK OFFICIAL INFORMATION

Pay attention to the information provided by authorities. This is especially important when something happens that stirs up strong emotions.

Most of us get our information from a personal selection of sources, out of pure habit. When something important happens in society, most people want information immediately! In such situations, relying only on official and confirmed information is especially important.

In our digital age, disinformation, misinformation and propaganda are very common. Therefore, it is important to remember that authorities only communicate official and confirmed information. It is quite possible that your patience will run out before you receive confirmed information. In this situation, you need to remain calm - this is the best thing you can do for yourself and for Moldova.

Remember the four tools we reviewed:

1. Be wary
2. Think twice
3. Check the source
4. Seek official information