

# A WALKING DEBATE: FAKE NEWS

INFORMATION AND DATA LITERACY > 1.2 EVALUATING DATA, INFORMATION AND DIGITAL CONTENT

TARGET GROUP	AGE GROUP	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	FORMAT	COPYRIGHT	LANGUAGE
All, Job seekers, School drop outs, Students (secondary school)	Adults, Elderly citizens, Teenagers	Level 1	Activity sheet	Creative Commons (BY-SA)	English, French

During this workshop, the participants debate the subject of fake news : What is fake news? How dangerous is it? The debate takes the form of a walking debate, meaning that the participants first move in the room depending on their preferences or opinions and only then begin to debate with each other.

**General Objective** Knowledge acquisition

**Preparation time for facilitator** less than 1 hour

**Competence area** 1 - Information and data literacy

**Time needed to complete activity (for learner)** 0 - 1 hour

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**Resource originally created in** French

## WORKSHOP DIRECTIONS

### 1 Introduction

**What is a walking debate?** This is a debate in which participants will play a physical role. They will move around depending on their response to a given statement (agreement/neutral/disagreement). For example, to respond 'yes', they may take one step forward. For a neutral response, they could stay where they are and for a disagreement, a step backwards. Simple right? Prior to the statement being made and while participants are responding through movement, they should not speak in order not to influence each other. After the decisions are made, invite the participants to express their view on the question asked by explaining why they moved the way they did. Easy!

**Facilitation tips:** The statements listed below are examples tested by our moderators. We therefore know that they are good examples for debate encouragement. This shouldn't stop you from coming up with your own ideas! However, we would advise you to choose statements that don't have a clear response (in order to encourage the debate) and particularly to test them beforehand (with colleagues, friends, family) to ensure that they work well for this type of activity.

### 2 Statements - Debate on Fake News

*Tip : there's no need to go through this entire list for the activity if you feel it is unnecessary or you are short on time.*

**Statement 1: Social media is responsible for the propagation of conspiracy theories.** Belief in conspiracy theories did not begin with the internet. This comes often through families, social circles etc. Rather, social media amplifies this phenomenon. From a social point of view, we are often linked on networks with people who have the same point of view as us - people whose opinions we are more likely to trust. Because of this it is easy to allow them to influence us. To avoid following into this trap of the 'echo chamber', don't hesitate to search for other sources of information - go see what people are saying elsewhere. Always keep an open mind!

**Statement 2: Fake News has a real impact on voters' choices.** We have seen with the recent elections that fake news can influence votes. It is up to voters to be responsible and to make the effort to verify their information so they are not manipulated. You could talk about Cambridge Analytica scandal, a PR company that was accused of having harvested US voters' Facebook data in order to manipulate their choices in the 2016 election. An effective Netflix documentary was released on the

subject to be recommended: *The Great Hack*.

**Statement 3 : Conspiracy theories emerged as a result of the internet.** Conspiracy theories were not invented last week nor last year. They date back a lot further. Some classic examples from recent history can be found in the circumstances of the assassination of President Kennedy or the idea that the 1969 moon landing was faked. To illustrate this, prepare some information on specific conspiracy theories.

**Statement 4: The objective of fake news is always commercial.**

- There are three types of fake news: conspiratorial (e.g. ‘the earth is flat’), propagandist (see North Korean press for an ideal example) and commercial (e.g. on some ‘miracle product’ that can promote hair growth).
- Be able to differentiate satire (e.g. the Onion – a satirical newspaper) which is not meant to manipulate the reader or pass off their assertions for truth.

**Statement 5: Only verified information should be allowed to be distributed online. There should be a system put in place to control information.** A topical subject! Some states, such as Singapore, have explored the idea of legislating against Fake News. What could be more legitimate than taking on a phenomenon which, having exploded through online channels, has eroded democratic life by sapping the credibility of information and manipulating the beliefs of the unaware? However, would there not be then a risk of attacking one of the cornerstones of democracy: freedom of expression? What might happen if an ill-intentioned government came to power and used such a law to enact widespread censorship?

**Statement 6: Traditional media acts as a bastion against false information.** Traditional media remains vital for publishing reliable information. Some have even pioneered journalism with the sole aim of fact checking other sources ([BBC](#), [New York Times](#)). However, several agents of the mainstream have published fake news in recent years, knowingly or not. It remains important therefore to verify all news you read.