



EU DisinfoLab's methodology to classify fact-checked disinformation. A codebook

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Thanks to this technical document, you will get access to the codebook guiding the work of the EU DisinfoLab Research Team.



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By the EU DisinfoLab Research Team

EU DisinfoLab

Chaussée de Charleroi, 79

1060 Brussels, Belgium

E-mail: info@disinfo.eu

About EU DisinfoLab

EU DisinfoLab is an independent non-profit research organisation specialised in analysing disinformation. We uncover and expose sophisticated disinformation campaigns. We seek to amplify the voices of our community of counter-disinformation experts across the EU and contribute with collective expertise to policy making. You can find more information about our work on our website <https://www.disinfo.eu/>.

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A codebook

Over the past years, the EU DisinfoLab has been closely monitoring disinformation trends in Europe through fact-checkers' work, whose debunks were analysed according to an original methodology presented hereafter.

Using data from fact-checkers – currently in France, Germany, and Spain – is an efficient way to grasp the general evolution of disinformative narratives circulating online. Of course, fact-checkers can only focus on a portion of disinformation, but we believe this should not be understood as a drawback, as it offers an overview of the (dis)infosphere, grasping a variety of topics shared on multiple platforms by a plurality of actors in diverse formats. Moreover, relying on the work of expert verifiers assures us that the content is indeed false or inaccurate.

An added value of our methodology is that it favours the comparison of hoaxes in the countries being monitored, allowing us to identify both domestic features of the disinformation landscape and cross-national trends. On the one hand, this qualitative manual coding process accounts for nuances that no automation could replace. On the other hand, data harmonisation can be challenging, as it inevitably entails an element of subjectivity that can be minimised but not eliminated. Nevertheless, trained researchers try to be as consistent and unbiased as possible.

Our unit of analysis is the single piece of disinformation debunked by fact-checkers, from which we extract a set of variables that are collected in an original data storage tool. It is our goal to make the 2022 data available to the community upon request by the end of the year. For now, this technical document presents the codebook guiding our work.

As a first step, we defined a list of reliable fact-checking organisations. Fact-checkers may have official recognition from the [International Fact-checking Network](#) and the [Duke Reporters' Lab](#), or enjoy a good reputation in the country and can therefore be considered trustworthy.

Hence, each fact-checked article becomes an observation in our dataset, from which we draw the following variables:

- **FACT-CHECKING ARTICLE:** We keep track of the link of the fact-checking article, which generally regards a single piece of false information found online. A necessary disclaimer is that if multiple fact-checkers debunk the same piece of disinformation, this will be only coded once.
- **ORIGINAL SOURCE:** When available, we find the oldest link to the piece of disinformation. Especially with social media posts that are at higher risk of being deleted, we archive them. However, in some cases, this is impossible, for instance with disinformation transmitted on private messaging apps.
- **DATE:** The date refers to the first appearance of the disinformation content, matching the original source. If this is unavailable, the date of the fact-check is coded instead.
- **TITLE:** We translate the title or the first line of the disinformative content into English.

- **MEDIATIC EVENT:** This variable contextualises the debunked claim by connecting them to macro-events that characterise the news. A few examples are:
 - Covid-19 pandemic.
 - War in Ukraine.
 - French elections.
 - (...).
 - None, if the fact-check is not connected to any specific relevant event.

- **CATEGORY:** This can be understood as an overarching topic of the fact-check. We currently rely on the following categories:
 - **Alternative health mindset:** It includes medical and scientific misinformation, for instance anti-vax, anti-mask, or anti-swab stances. Moreover, we consider part of this category fake healing tips or inaccurate information based on holistic and new age stances, dietary choices, etc.
 - **Conspiracy theories:** A wide range of disinformation is included, e.g., hoaxes relating to the deep state and the New World Order, Big Tech or Big Pharma, QAnon, microchips, and 5G, etc.
 - **Economic issues:** Everything that is economy-related (including the Euro).
 - **Environmentalism and natural disasters:** This rising category considers disinformation about climate change and climate transition policies, chemtrails and claims about climate geoengineering, or the deliberate planning of natural disasters such as earthquakes and flooding.
 - **Foreign politics:** We consider this to regard disinformation about non-EU and EU countries (other than the one that is being monitored), including militarism and security. For example, most false news on the war in Ukraine will fall into this category.
 - **Gender:** False and inaccurate information about feminism and LGBTQ+.
 - **Historical revisionism:** Debunks focused on Nazi-fascism, communism, or other authoritarian eras (such as the Francoist dictatorship in Spain).
 - **Identity narratives:** Misinformation conveying nationalist, conservative, and religious identity values, including anti-migration, racism, xenophobia, and the discrimination against other minorities (e.g., anti-Semitism and Islamophobia).
 - **Mismanagement:** This regards, for instance, a negative evaluation of the management of the pandemic by authorities, such as opposition to containment measures.
 - **National politics and institutional distrust:** All content related to domestic politics (e.g., the negative portraying of a politician, scandals, and corruption), as well as expressions of distrust towards institutions and the media.
 - **Scams, phishing, vishing, and clickbait:** In these cases, specific content is just the pretext to convince the receiver to like, comment, share or click on the publication regardless of the topic.
 - **Social issues and social alarm:** This category addresses polarising matters accusing the alleged erosion of social values (e.g., euthanasia, child abuse) or that are simply fear-mongering (e.g., kidnappings).
 - **Others:** To be used if none of the previous categories apply. However, this is an exceptional case as researchers are incentivised to consult each other in case of doubts.

A necessary disclaimer is that the choice is not often straightforward as it is possible that more than one category fits, which aligns with disinformation's tendency to overlap polarising issues. Moreover, it can be tricky to classify a fact-check according to one of the proposed categories. For example, pandemic denialism can be classified as "alternative health mindset" if the hoax denies the existence of the virus. At the same time, it can be considered "mismanagement" if the disinformation challenges the legitimacy of lockdowns or curfews. Nonetheless, researchers are asked to make a choice and select only one category in the list and apply it consistently (they often consult one another in difficult cases).

- **TRANSMITTER ACTOR:** The transmitter is classified as:
 - **Named:** When a real person is identified behind the disinformation (e.g., a journalist, a public personality, or a regular social media user). Noting down if the actor is a celebrity is recommended in case the researcher wants to calculate the [impact-risk index of disinformation](#).
 - **Pseudonymised:** In the presence of nicknames, false personas, admins, or editorial boards that sign the content.
 - **Undefined:** If there is no reference to the author(s).
- **TRANSMITTER PLATFORM:** The platform where the disinformation was first seen, such as:
 - Facebook (or name of any other social media platform).
 - Telegram (or name of any other private messaging app).
 - Mainstream media (i.e., newspapers, TV, and radio).
 - Junk sites: i.e., outlets that oppose mainstream information.
 - (...).
- **AMPLIFIER:** This variable lists the names of the social media platforms on which the content was shared.
- **COMMUNICATION SUPPORT:** Reference to the format is made:
 - Plain text.
 - Photo.
 - Video.
 - Infographic.
 - Audio.
 - (...).
- **TPOLOGY:** For this, we rely on [First Draft](#)'s classification:
 - Fabricated content.
 - False connection.
 - False context.
 - Imposter content.
 - Manipulated content.
 - Misleading content.
 - Satire.

An additional category for when fact-checkers lack evidence on whether the content is false are classified as "unproven claims".

To illustrate the practical use of this codebook, we selected one example for each country whose fact-checked disinformation landscape the EU DisinfoLab currently monitors.

FRANCE

Fact-checking article	“No, abortion is obviously not authorised until the 9th month of pregnancy in France” (FT1 INFO)
Original source	https://twitter.com/DufrenoyYves/status/1540751905835520001
Date	25/06/2022.
Title in English	“To include abortion in the constitution, at 9 months, is to constitutionalise infanticide”
Mediatic event	Roe v. Wade
Category	Gender
Transmitter actor	Named
Transmitter platform(s)	Twitter
Amplifier	/
Communication support	Plain text
Typology	Fabricated content

GERMANY

Fact-checking article	“Low water level of 1904 does not disprove man-made climate change” (AFP)
Original source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3096583523989055&set=a.1462950844019006
Date	27/05/2022.
Title in English	“Historically low Elbe level in Dresden in 1904 is evidence that global warming is not man-made”
Mediatic event	Climate change
Category	Environmentalism and natural disasters
Transmitter actor	Named
Transmitter platform(s)	Facebook
Amplifier	/
Communication support	Photo
Typology	Misleading content

SPAIN

Fact-checking article	“The authors of the deadly assault in Warsaw were not Ukrainian refugees” (Efeverifica)
Original source	https://www.facebook.com/104655354903118/videos/795002494803877
Date	13/05/2022
Title in English	“Ukrainian refugees beat a Pole to death in Warsaw, Poland”
Mediatic event	War in Ukraine
Category	Identity narratives
Transmitter actor	Pseudonymised
Transmitter platform(s)	Facebook
Amplifier	Twitter
Communication support	Video
Typology	False context