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WORK PACKAGE N° 16

CONFERENCE ON THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES IN CYPRUS

TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE OF INFORMATION: YOUNG JOURNALISTS AND FAKE NEWS IN CYPRUS

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EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	1st		
Event name:	<i>Towards a New Culture of Information: Young journalists and fake news in Cyprus</i>		
Type:	Conference		
In situ/online:	<i>In situ</i>		
Location:	Nicosia, Cyprus		
Date(s):	13/11/2025		
Website(s) (if any):	https://research.pacomonia.com/conference-report-towards-a-new-culture-of-information-young-journalists-and-fake-news-in-cyprus/		
Participants			
Female:	26		
Male:	67		
Non-binary:	1		
From country 1:	Cyprus		
From country 2:	Syria		
From country 3:			
...			
Total number of participants:	94	From total number of countries:	2



Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

Part I: Conference framework, objectives & structure

Introduction

The conference ***“Towards a New Culture of Information: Young journalists and fake news in Cyprus”*** was held at the University of Cyprus within the framework of the European project MEDMAS. The event was particularly significant due to the active participation of students and professors from two academic institutions, the University of Cyprus and the University of Nicosia. The coexistence of two university communities contributed to the broadening of the dialogue around disinformation, strengthening both the scientific and educational dimensions of the conference.

Particularly decisive was the participation of journalism and communication students, who are directly involved in the issue of disinformation as future professionals in the media field. Their presence strengthened the educational character of the event, allowed for fruitful dialogue between the academic community and professionals and highlighted the challenges they are called upon to face in today’s information environment. Furthermore, the discussion was enriched with modern, youthful perspectives, but also demonstrated the need to strengthen digital and critical literacy in journalism education.

Objectives of the Conference

Based on the theme and targeting of the MEDMAS project, the main objectives of the conference were the following:

- Understanding the phenomenon of fake news in Cyprus and the social, political and technological factors that reinforce it.
- Familiarizing students and citizens with disinformation techniques, such as manipulative headlines, altered visuals, bots and deepfakes.
- Strengthening the research and professional competence of Journalism students, so that they can deal with fake news in a timely and effective manner in their future work environment.



- Promoting cooperation between universities, organizations and the journalistic community to combat disinformation.
- Hands-on practice through a media manipulation workshop and an experiential activity (Media Masters board game).
- Raising awareness about the need for digital literacy at every age and cognitive level.

Conference Format and Structure (Duration ~4 hours)

The event was interactive and divided into four main parts:

3.1 Introduction (15')

- Presentation of the MEDMAS project.
- Reference to the objectives and theoretical framework of the conference.

3.2 Panel Discussion (approximately 90')

The panel with experts from the fields of journalism, communication, political science and digital media discussed:

- Forms and trends of fake news in Cyprus.
- The media ecosystem and the vulnerability of the audience.
- The role of students and young journalists in protecting the quality of information.

The participation of students and professors from two universities brought multiple perspectives and rich dialogue.

3.3 Media Manipulation Workshop (60'–70')

- Analysis of examples of disinformation.
- Deconstruction of fake news with real incidents.
- Practical application with fact-checking tools.
- Discussion on how the future journalist can protect himself, the audience and his organization.

3.4 Experiential Activity: Media Masters Board Game & Discussion (50')

Participants played in groups.



3.5 Final Reflection & Debriefing (20'–30')

- ❖ Discussion on what students learned.
- ❖ Highlighting common challenges identified.
- ❖ Emphasis on the journalist's responsibility as a “guardian” of the quality of public information.

Table of Participants

Foundation / Organization	Number of participants	Percentage %
University of Cyprus	40	43%
University of Nicosia	28	29%
Organizations / NGOs	11	10%
Journalists	8	12%
Rest	7	6%
Total	94	100%

Part II: Detailed session analysis & key outcomes

Panel discussion

The first part featured a panel discussion as the central point of the conference, bringing together experts in the fields of journalism, communication, political science and digital media. The aim was to offer an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of fake news in Cyprus and highlight the role of young journalists in enhancing the quality of information.

The discussion covered:

- The dominant forms of fake news in Cyprus.
- The role of social media in the spread of disinformation.
- The geopolitical and social parameters that enhance fake news.
- The impact of fake news on social cohesion, political participation and trust in institutions.
- Statistical data regarding the attitude of Cypriots towards fake news and conspiracy theories in relation to the EU average.
- The challenges faced by young reporters, fact-checkers and media professionals.
- Proposals for citizen education and institutional countermeasures.

The presence of students and professors of the two universities enriched the dialogue, offering multiple perspectives, modern academic approaches and experiential examples from their studies. The speakers presented the main forms and trends of fake news, such as misleading political information, distorted or fragmented visuals, false posts on social networks and content aimed at emotional manipulation of the public. One of the experts emphasized: *“Disinformation in Cyprus is not an innocent online practice, it directly affects social cohesion and democratic processes”*.

At the same time, the vulnerability of the Cypriot public to low-credibility content was highlighted, mainly due to the dominance of social media as the main source of information and the limited familiarity with basic verification practices. The discussion also highlighted the difficulties faced by Cypriot media, such as the pressure to produce news quickly, the commercialization of information and the lack of institutionalized fact-checking mechanisms.

Particular emphasis was placed on the role of journalism and communication students, who are the future professionals in the field and a key pillar in ensuring the quality of information. The



students themselves, as “future journalists”, actively participated in the discussion, raising critical questions and highlighting the challenges they already face during their education. As one student from the room commented: *“It is not enough to know how to write a news story, we must learn to protect it from distortion.”*

The panel concluded that disinformation is a critical threat to democracy and that addressing it requires a collective and cross-sectoral effort, in which the academic community, journalists, organizations and citizens have an equal and essential role.

Media Manipulation Workshop

The workshop focused on a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of disinformation and on the ways in which participants can develop skills in identifying, deconstructing and countering it. The first part presented real examples of fake news, which had circulated in Cyprus and the wider European area. Participants explored the most frequently occurring forms of disinformation (out-of-context visuals, clickbait, fake user identities, emotional manipulation, deepfakes) and analysed the reasons for their success and speed of dissemination.

This was followed by a deconstruction of selected fake news, where participants were asked to identify the source, the argumentative gaps, the visual or verbal manipulation techniques, as well as the elements that create the illusion of credibility. It was discussed in detail how real events can be distorted through small content modifications or framing and recontextualization tactics. This specific exercise helped students relate the theory of disinformation to everyday examples that affect the information ecosystem of Cyprus.

The third section of the workshop was dedicated to fact-checking tools. Basic methodologies such as reverse image search, video origin verification, cross-referencing techniques and searching for primary sources were presented. It concluded with a practical exercise, during which the participants worked with real material. Special mention was made of Fast Check Cyprus, the first official Cypriot news verification platform, as well as its role in tackling fake news circulating at the local level.

The European initiatives that are currently underway to protect information and citizens were also presented. The Digital Services Act (2024) was analysed as the new regulatory framework that

imposes obligations on social media platforms, enhancing their transparency and responsibility in combating disinformation. The Code of Practice on Disinformation was presented as an important voluntary measure of cooperation between platforms, media outlets and fact-checkers, while special reference was made to EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory) and how it supports research, data analysis and the interconnection of fact-checking organisations at a pan-European level.

The workshop concluded with a discussion on the role of future journalists in ensuring the quality of information. The need to develop not only technical fact-checking skills, but also professional ethics, to protect themselves, the media outlets they will work for and, above all, the public, was highlighted. The students highlighted important concerns, such as the pressure of speed, attacks on journalists and the need for independent sources of information.

Table with Case Studies of fake news in Cyprus that was presented:

#	Subject / Claim	Who checked it/ Fact-check	Type of misinformation	Comment
1	Claim that “Healthcare professionals in Cyprus were NOT vaccinated against COVID-19”	Fact-Check Cyprus: article “It is NOT true that health professionals ...” (factcheckcyprus.org)	Misinformation / unscientific fake news	Indicative of how conspiracy theories/health scares have been widely circulated
2	Claims that the island is involved in foreign wars/military activities: reports that “Cyprus is taking part in the war” due to sanctions/circumstances	Publications about Russian disinformation targeting Cyprus. (Hellas Journal)	Propaganda disinformation	Example of geopolitical disinformation
3	Fake news that Volodymyr Zelenskyy (President of Ukraine) bought a casino or real estate in Cyprus	Reference to article/report that revealed the fabricated news, as part of a wider disinformation campaign. (Investigations)	Fake political-economic news / fabricated narrative	Indicative of how fake news with international & political content enters the Cypriot context



Verification toolbox that was presented:

Tool/Initiative	Level	Description
Fast Check Cyprus	Local	News verification platform in Cyprus. Used for cross-checking articles.
EDMO – European Digital Media Observatory	European	Collaboration platform that brings together fast checkers, researchers from universities and institutes, journalists and media dealing with digital policy issues
Digital Services Act (2024)	European institution	Regulatory framework for protection against systemic risks of disinformation.
EU Code of Practice on Disinformation	European	Representatives of online platforms, leading social networks (e.g. Facebook, Google and Tik Tok), advertisers and the advertising industry have agreed on a self-regulatory code of conduct to tackle the spread of disinformation and fake news online.
Reverse Image Search	Technical	It is used to verify the veracity of images, for example, to detect whether a photo has been used in disinformation or fake profiles ("catfishing").



Experiential activity: Media Masters board game & discussion

The experiential activity was based on the educational board game Media Masters, a tool developed within the MEDMAS project with the aim of enhancing critical thinking, distinguishing fake news and understanding mechanisms of digital manipulation.

Participants were divided into small groups to encourage collaboration and discussion. They supported collective decisions, through dialogue, argumentation and comparison of evidence. Additionally, they realized the psychological dimension of disinformation, i.e. how personal biases influence judgment and they connected learning with practical examples, understanding how disinformation can concern social, political or humanitarian issues.

The interactive nature of the activity demonstrated that the “traps” of the game often work as in the real environment of social networks, demonstrating how easily even an informed person can



be misled. During the discussion that followed, journalism students emphasized that their future professional status requires a high ability to quickly, evidence-based and ethically evaluate information, while teachers and NGO members recognized the usefulness of the game as a tool for schools, youth centres and lifelong learning programs. Overall, it emerged that playful and experiential education can be more meaningful and effective than traditional forms of teaching in combating disinformation.

The Media Masters activity contributed substantially to understanding disinformation on a practical level. Participants had the opportunity not only to recognize but also to feel how disinformation works, within a safe, collaborative and interactive environment. It is one of the most powerful experiential methods of the MEDMAS project and can be used more widely in university departments, schools, youth organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Final Review & Debriefing

The last part of the conference involved a structured debriefing process, during which participants shared what they had learned, understood and reflected on during the activities. The discussion revealed that many of them had gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of disinformation and the ways in which it can infiltrate even professional media environments. At the same time, common challenges were identified, such as the difficulty in immediately recognizing distorted audiovisual material, the tendency of the public to trust content that confirms pre-existing beliefs and the pressure that the fast-paced digital environment exerts on the modern journalist.

In this context, particular emphasis was placed on the ethical and professional role of the journalist, who is called upon to act as a "guardian" of the quality of public information, ensuring credibility, verification and transparency. The review concluded with a commitment by the participants to utilize the tools and skills they acquired and with encouragement for further participation in MEDMAS actions, recognizing the importance of continuous professional training in the face of constantly evolving forms of disinformation.



Part III: Overall conclusions of the conference

The conference was a comprehensive and multi-layered intervention on the phenomenon of disinformation in Cyprus, combining academic knowledge, practical information verification skills and experiential learning. The coexistence of journalism and communication students, academics and experts in the field created an environment of meaningful dialogue, exchange of experiences and critical reflection. The conference highlighted, through documented examples, that fake news remains an active and constantly evolving threat, which affects both public discourse and social cohesion.

The panel discussion demonstrated that Cypriot society, due to its small population and the strong presence of social media, is particularly vulnerable to disinformation. At the same time, students and young journalists were recognized as a crucial pillar of defense against the spread of fake news, with the academic community emphasizing the need to strengthen media literacy and critical thinking. The participants' interventions and their questions showed an increased awareness of the difficulty of identifying misleading information, but also the need for continuous training and access to fact-checking tools.

The media manipulation workshop provided an essential bridge between theory and practice, introducing participants to news verification techniques, European initiatives and local bodies such as Fact Check Cyprus. This activity gave participants the opportunity to confront real examples of fake news circulating in Cyprus, strengthening their ability to distinguish authentic information from artificially constructed narratives.

The Media Masters experiential activity offered an innovative, playful way to understand the dangers of disinformation. Through simulated scenarios, participants experienced in a safe environment how decisions are made under pressure and uncertainty, recognizing the biases, cognitive errors and emotional traps that can lead to the spread of false content.

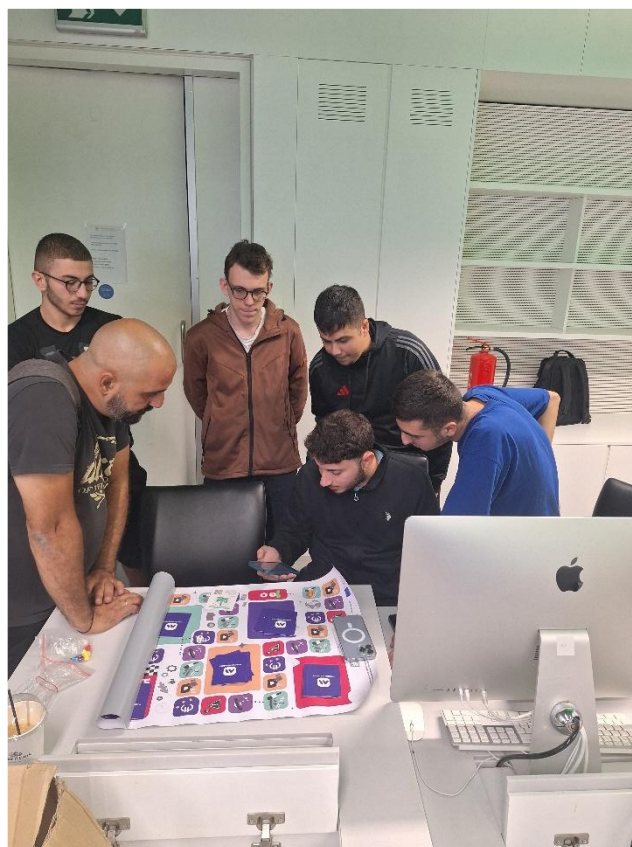
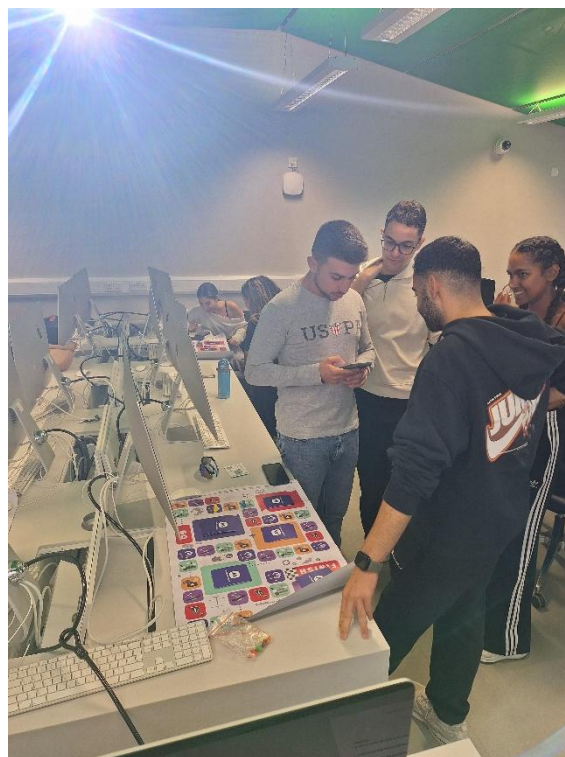
In the final review, it was noted by all that tackling fake news is not just a technical skill, but a democratic obligation. The conference highlighted the importance of cooperation between universities, journalists, civil society organizations and institutions, while at the same time emphasizing that the professional journalist must act as a "guardian" of the quality of public information, ensuring transparency, accuracy and accountability.

Overall, the conference contributed substantially to strengthening the professional identity of young journalists, creating a critically thinking audience and forming a strong network that can act against disinformation in Cyprus. Its success demonstrates the need for systematic continuation and expansion of such initiatives in the future.



Photos of the event







HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0		Initial version