

# *The Growing Threat of Disinformation (and what to do about it), with Kip Knight.*

On the 18th of October, at the faculty of Economics in Tor Vergata University, the Global Governance students had the opportunity of having Kip Knight as a guest for the Global Conversation on “The Growing Threat of Disinformation (and what to do about it)”.

Mr Knight, being a well-known expert in marketing, communication and fake news, shared with the students some insights on how to identify and fight the increasing disinformation of our time.



The speaker defined fake news as a "deliberate attempt to lie or deceive" and continued his talk by pointing out numerous examples of fake news to show how damaging they can be in different environments. Among the examples, some regarded the meddling of fake news in the US presidential elections of 2016, the "flat Earth society" and the existence of fake websites with similar names to the originals like “abcnews.com.co”.

The speaker stressed the two main reasons behind the creation of fake news and invited the audience to "think as criminals", in order to do so. These reasons are either economic or political. In fact, a real business is made out of fake news: it is shocking to discover that every time we click on a catchy article or advertisement of fake news it generates a revenue to the creator of the post and to the websites hosting the post which are more than often either Facebook or Google. Furthermore, fake news can be used to alter the values of shares in the stock market by sharing fake information on a certain firm. Incredible amounts of profits can be generated through this process by buying and selling shares and bonds at the right time.

Politically, fake news can be a powerful instrument. Here Mr Knight, to make his point, used this heading of fake news "As WikiLeaks released several batches of emails in October 2016, partisans claimed they confirmed Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS". By publishing this story, US voters may have been less keen in voting for Clinton in the US elections.

## CLAIM

E-mails released by WikiLeaks confirm Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS. [See Example\(s\)](#)

## RATING



## WHAT'S TRUE

In a July 2016 interview, Julian Assange (founder of WikiLeaks) contended that leaked e-mails painted a "rich picture" of Hillary Clinton's hawkish tendencies with respect to the Libyan intervention and referenced ISIS as the eventual beneficiary of weapons provided for that intervention.

## WHAT'S FALSE

No WikiLeaks e-mails confirm that Hillary Clinton directly and knowingly "sold weapons to ISIS."

To conclude his speech, Kip Knight explained how to spot fake news:

1. Consider the source: click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.
2. Read beyond: headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?
3. Check the author: do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?
4. Supporting sources? Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.
5. Check the date: reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.
6. Is it a joke? If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.
7. Check your biases: consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.
8. Ask the experts: ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

Finally, he opened the floor for some insightful questions. Among other questions, the students asked for more information on the difference between disinformation and misinformation. Mr. Knight identified the first one is a deliberative spread of false news, while the second as a genuine misunderstanding on the matter of concern. He then added that the disinformation is aimed at creating confusion and doubts. To make his point clearer, he mentioned an episode in 2015, in which he believes the Russians spread some fake news about a catastrophe happening on the US soil, and he said that this "disinformation campaign" was simply aimed at confuse people and make them panic and compared the situation to a sort of "digital Pearl Harbor", he concluded.

Mr Knight ended the conversation by inviting the Global Governance students to start being the change because it is the entirety of the smallest actions that actually makes a big difference.

Sara Marcucci

Oliver Tomassi