



PRESS RELEASE | European organisations and scientists join forces against consequences of disinformation with innovative teaching method

Organisations from several European countries are concerned about increasing polarisation and growing distrust towards mainstream media and institutions among young people. To combat these trends, they have teamed up to create Under Pressure, a teaching method that aims to reinforce democratic values and increase young people’s resilience against disinformation. Young role models, using their personal experience and an innovative game, foster an open conversation about disinformation and polarisation in classrooms throughout Europe.

As part of the Under Pressure teaching method, peer educators - young role models - engage in conversation with other young people, relating their own experiences with disinformation, conspiracy theories and media. The special *Under Pressure Game* also provides insight into the mechanisms behind disinformation, such as exploiting emotions.

The peer educators explain how the spread of disinformation works by sharing how certain conspiracy theories used to be attractive to them too, as well as discussing key democratic values such as freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Judging by some of the things said by young people during the guest classes, this is much needed, with one student saying: “Journalists only spread fake news nowadays. Freedom of speech should be banned.” Another student reported how they simply isolated themselves from diverging views online: “If I see something I don’t like, I just block it so I don’t have to see it again.”

Schools are enthusiastic about the teaching programme and stress the value of having their students engage with peer educators, with one teacher reflecting: “My students have started thinking for themselves (...), as is evident from the questions they ask during the lessons. They’ve also become more aware of disinformation.”

The Under Pressure Game casts young people as a *troll* who uses various tactics to spread polarising fake news as widely as possible. Research has shown that young people are less susceptible to disinformation after playing the game, because they learn the mechanisms behind it: the game works like a psychological vaccine of sorts. After playing the game, one student realised that: "Once people are caught up in their emotions, it's hard to put things in perspective, and they are less likely to question whether something is true or not. I had never really thought about how manipulative trolls are and how they play with people’s emotions.”

This marks the first time that European organisations have worked together to counter the polarising effects of disinformation among young people. Last year, the European Parliament warned of growing extremism and the spread of manipulative information, stating in their *2020 European Democracy Action Plan* that democracy in the European Union faces “major challenges’.

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Note to editors, not for publication: The Under Pressure method was developed by the Peer Education and Gamification against Polarisation (PEGAP) consortium, consisting of Diversion (NL), DROG (NL), the University of Uppsala, AEGEE-EUROPE, the Schwarzkopf Foundation and the Fryhuset Foundation. For more information about Under Pressure visit www.getunderpressure.com.