

YouthMythBusters | The New GhostBusters Against The FakeNews Ghost

An interview with George Koulouris, Communication Specialist at KMOP – Social Action and Innovation Centre

What exactly is FakeNews and how can we spot it? How can we identify it, especially now that ,due to the Pandemic, fake news has developed into a scourge spreading false and inaccurate information not only about the coronavirus itself but also about vaccines? Since many journalists - bloggers, influencers, wannabees... are acquiring a new “degree” in misinformation, since news reports falsifying skills are one step ahead of the news itself and since the hashtag #FakeNews is one of the top trends on Twitter,how can we tell fact from fiction?

How can a young journalist or even the readers themselves actually be trained to tell the difference between real and fake news? What are the elements that help you distinguish between a real news report and a fabricated one? How can you be sure that what you are reading is not trying to deceive you or “lead” you towards another perspective , most of the time, harmful and with no trace of ethics and responsibility towards what we once called a "real fact"? What exactly is #hatespeech, how did it come about, how is it spread - sometimes even funded - why has it led to hate crimes? How is hatred growing along with xenophobia, homophobia or phobia of anyone or anything different?

This year, KMOP, the Social Action and Innovation Centre, is giving a dynamic response to such questions that separate the weeds from the wheat via the Program "YouthMythBusters" which has been developed in collaboration with European Partners. It has just been introduced in Greece through a platform addressed to anyone interested in what FakeNews, propaganda, public opinion manipulation and echo-chambers are, how we define them, how they are put in practice, how they are spotted, how they are created, what tools are used to disseminate them but, mainly, how they can be fought off.

To Journalism’s benefit, in order to restore its reputation as it was at its zenith, every journalist ought to learn via what tools and methods one will be able to combat this scourge. While a covid-19 vaccine may have been discovered, "Laboratories" have just started their "Research" on FakeNews.

Prompt by the presentation of the All New Pioneer Platform introducing the European Program YouthMythBusters to the public, in early December 2020, George Koulouris,

Communication Specialist at KMOP (Social Action and Innovation Centre) took us into the magical world of #YouthMythBusters, a newly established "Army" against FakeNews. Thanks to modules that include the analysis of a news report, modern interactive technology, modern tech terms, acquaintance with social media and scientific material that Greece and 4 partner countries have gathered after a two-year research, the Erasmus Plus program YouthMythBusters is now a fact. In full operation, with a platform accessible to anyone interested, it allows young people aged 18-35 to learn how to read a news report properly, how to identify its pitfalls and how to debunk fake news via a toolbox and online workshops, all just a click away.

#echaritygr: Well George, now that the eLearning platform Youth Myth Busters is available to all those who want to be informed about FakeNews and other important issues concerning the proper reading of facts, could you tell us what exactly this platform is and how it can help us tell fake news from credible cross-referenced news reports?

KMOP: Actually, we are pleased to announce that, for a few days now, the free Youth Myth Busters eLearning platform has become available to all. First of all, we should mention that the platform has been developed in the context of the European project Youth Myth Busters which is coordinated by KMOP(Social Action and Innovation Centre) and is implemented in Greece, Italy, Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Hungary simultaneously.

FREE SIGN UP FOR THE PLATFORM HERE <https://elearning.youthmythbusters.eu/>

Are there any benefits to signing up?

One is able to improve his/her knowledge as it concerns media literacy, civic and political engagement, media influencers' behavior, dealing with fake news and detecting hate speech. These are the skills provided by the platform which ,along with various bibliographic references and exercises, can help everyone tell fake news from real facts much more easily.

#echaritygr: This eLearning platform was recently developed. What urged our country,Greece, KMOP and other partner countries to create and implement it?

#KMOP: Exactly two years ago these days, we were concerned about the reduced youth civic engagement along with the rapid rise of #fakenews. We were wondering how we could help address both of these important issues. So, we came up with the idea to create a platform that will spot and fight off fake news on the internet while our ultimate goal was to encourage more and more young people to participate and engage in public affairs.

#echaritygr: Who is your target audience? How can this platform help someone who is not involved in journalism?

KMOP: Youth Myth Busters platform is aimed mainly at young people aged 18-35. However, whoever wants to improve their knowledge about fighting off fake news on the internet can sign up for free and attend all modules. In fact, those who complete all 5 modules can obtain the corresponding certificate for free.

#echaritygr: How can anyone interested apply the knowledge they will acquire in their daily news reading?

KMOP: The navigation menu on the platform is quite simple and user-friendly. By simply creating a new account and logging in the "Young People" section, anyone can start their own journey to weed out fake news. Through educational modules, the user will learn what simple steps people should follow to evaluate the news they are reading.

For example, is the author's name included in an article? Are the news' sources available? These are just some of the steps we need to take to determine whether a news story is #fake or real.

#echaritygr: What follows after one's training on the platform ? Is there a prize for the participants?

#KMOP: The online platform is just the beginning, in other words, the first step in the Youth Myth Busters community to detect and combat fake news . Once the educational modules

are completed, our goal is to create groups that will cooperate in order to identify fake news and fight off its dissemination. Actually, what these groups will be asked to do, always in collaboration with our research team at KMOP and a group of people from the academy and the media, is to present real news in a different way. This can include creating a new article that highlights the actual fact or even myth dispelling via a photo, a video or any other medium. What makes us happy is the interest and the response we receive. A few days ago, we organized an online presentation of the platform, which 50 young people from all over Greece participated in. Young people from Crete, the Aegean and Thrace. This is exactly what we want to do through Youth Myth Busters groups; to join forces, pitch in and do our part to ensure that valid information reaches the public.