BREAK THE CHAIN

MANUAL FOR (NOT ONLY) TRAINERS

PROVIDING WAYS
TO FIGHT FAKE NEWS
AND DISINFORMATION
ONLINE

FOCUSED
ON
ADULTS
55+

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The first project result Break the Chain manual, targeted primarily on media literacy trainers of adult courses, can offer important insights into the issue of disinformation to anyone interested.

Break the Chain aims to help adults identify the **impact that fake news and disinformation** have on our behaviour and find ways to alternate the situation. The project provides a **holistic approach**, focusing on introducing all the relevant information about fake news and disinformation, their impact on our decisions and ways to detect them.

In recent years, the disinformation scene has evolved from rather annoying spam to a serious threat that significantly manipulates public opinion, undermines democratic systems, puts citizens´ health in risk and eventually the disinformation campaigns have been included among hybrid warfare strategies and challenges of the following decade.

In any case, both creators of disinformation as well as fighters against disinformation have come to realise what radical power disinformation can have in the environment of technologically advanced society. At the same time, educators are discovering that the issue cannot be solved by mere ICT or media literacy training but it is also connected to **critical thinking** maturity of citizens that cannot be acquired overnight. Also, the **psychological aspect** plays an important role and represents a serious challenge for the educators. The fight against disinformation is a demanding, long and sometimes fruitless job. All the more, every single attempt to improve the situation and help citizens get oriented is worthwhile and deserves respect. This manual should serve all brave educators who embark on this journey.

We strongly recommend, for reasons explained in the theoretical part of the manual, to consider training on disinformation rather as a **discussion** than preaching from the teacher. Participants should understand that the trainer is here to help them recognize how disinformation is pervasive, spreads incredibly fast and can cause harm and how to prevent the manipulation. The discussion should lead to the **awareness of the responsibility** that comes with our use of internet space.

Most countries are now aware of the dangers of fake news and disinformation and are investing in **educational programs** and citizen training. However, they are mainly focused on schools and youth, lacking a more specific response for the elderly. That is why our team from six European countries decided to join forces, help break the chain and contribute to the fight against disinformation through the education of the vulnerable target group of **adults 55+** who might need even more assistance with ICT technology than younger generations.

We have to accept the fact that changing people's convictions is a long and challenging process. However, there is no better and more effective way than **education, patience** and **mutual understanding**. All these aspects have to be taken into account if you want the result to be effective. Prepare for the situation that the job of an educator in the field of disinformation is not just about transferring knowledge but more about the **rapport** with your students. Isolation and the lack of communication in the modern world is one of the reasons why adults 55+ yield to the convenient enticement that disinformers offer.

The manual is divided into two parts. The first one is considering disinformation from the theoretical point of view, explaining the phenomenon in historical context, as well as the contemporary media environment. A considerable part of the manual deals with the goals and techniques of disinformation. To be able to fight disinformation, it is necessary to understand the motives and tricks that are used to manipulate the public opinion.

In the second part, we offer examples of **lesson plans** on crucial topics and specific tips for teaching adults in an effective, sensitive and entertaining way. The theoretical part is inseparable from the practical part. The trainer should be familiar with the issue at least to the extent we provide in this manual and be able to apply the theoretical knowledge in practice. The same task is there for the participants of your courses.

The purpose of this manual is to prepare you for tasks and activities that oblige your students to deeply process the acquired information, to

apply it in practice and to integrate it within already existing knowledge and skills. At the same time, digital means that will facilitate the implementation of relevant training courses and help adults be a part of **virtual training** are also presented.

The manual is not intended for media literacy trainers only. Thanks to the easy-to-understand and concise (even though it is challenging for such a complex issue as disinformation) theoretical part, it can serve to the general public as a source to understand the basics of the issue or maybe find answers how to talk to people with a different world-view. We are all susceptible, after all!
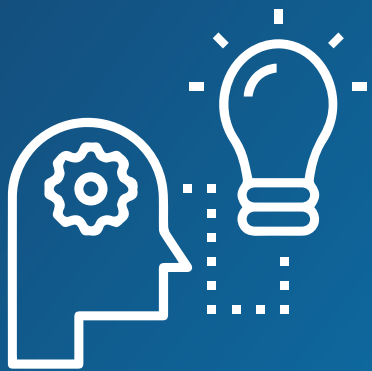
DISINFORMATION

THEORETICAL PART

DISINFORMATION:
THEORETICAL PART

What is needed to fight disinformation

Considering the danger that the spread of fake news and disinformation represents for the democratic world, it is obvious that the stakeholders from the state, non-governmental and private sectors have to join forces and invest in **strategies fighting disinformation**.

Although a lot of non-governmental initiatives are arising, the lack of fact-checkers, professionals dealing with verifying information, is a challenge identified by many countries. (iCmedia 2022, p. 20) With the rapid development of technology, more sophisticated techniques are used by the disinformers and it takes a lot of time, energy and professional skills to uncover all disinformation. A general problem seems to be the weak state collaboration with fack-checkers and/or the lack of fact-checking networks, except for the Netherlands. (iCmedia, 2022, p. 30) The situation requires **additional policies, verification tools** and **fact-checking processes**.

The proliferation of cases, mainly during electoral processes, Covid – 19 pandemic and also at an international level, such as in case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, heightened the urgency with which democracies must respond to disinformation. Therefore, many governments have introduced **national laws** to counter the hostile activities that disinformation represent,

even though it is evident that the level of will to regulate the disinformation scene differs – for example, Western European countries like the Netherlands are more active in defining themselves against disinformation, adhering to codes of conduct and criminalising attempts to harm society in comparison to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc like Bulgaria or the Czech Republic. (iCmedia, 2022, p. 20 – 29)

However, the role of the state and its **regulations** of the disinformation scene is problematic as it verges on the problem of **censorship**. In a civilised democratic society, the way to fight disinformation cannot be the regulation of public opinion by prohibition of free speech. Also, the freedom of expression complicates the imposition of sanctions on disinformers. You cannot punish anyone for reflecting and sharing information and opinions. As the crucial but also intangible factor of the difference between misinformation and disinformation is **intention**, the vast majority of disinformation eludes punishment and penalty.

So it seems that **education, patience** and **mutual understanding** are needed most in this challenging fight. It is more than obvious that protecting citizens from the negative effect of disinformation is not just about providing technological tools and rational explanation of the phenomenon. Especially us educators have to understand all aspects of disinformation and human susceptibility to it. We have to understand our fellow citizens´ point of view and help them overcome the stress of the **information overload** and chaos.

What we need to help the society achieve, in general, is **healthy scepticism** – a state in between two extremes of total gullibility, when people are easily manipulated, and total distrust, when

people doubt everything. This extreme division of attitudes leads to the **polarisation** of society and the inability to communicate. It is important to show your students why and how to train **critical thinking**.

For this reason it is important to keep in mind, and also remind your students, that media literacy education and the fight against disinformation is not based on the idea of teaching what information or sources are „good" and „bad" but on building skills that will enable the participants to judge the veracity of the content and to independently draw accurate conclusions concerning its reliability.

With the Break the Chain project, we want to contribute to the fight against manipulation and focus on the needs of media literacy teachers to make their challenging mission easier.

Questionnaire results focusing on current trainer´s needs

At the beginning of the Break the Chain project, we asked media literacy teachers, trainers and lecturers from all six countries to fill in the questionnaire focused on the reflection of current fake news and disinformation situation and educational practices that serve as an important input for developing this manual.

The questionnaire was filled in by 116 media literacy lecturers from six countries, most of them working for NGOs but also in adult training cen-

tres, media literacy organisations, research institutions or public educational bodies. As our report shows, they mostly provide courses to younger generations, as the general trend is, while **courses for the adults 55+** are not so frequent. At the same time, the vast majority of respondents agrees that the number of training offered to adults is not sufficient, taking into account they face disinformation almost every day. The questionnaire results also show that even media literacy trainers are careful when they assess their ability to identify disinformation and more than half of them consider themselves susceptible to disinformation. These findings are not surprising. Actually, the more you understand the principles of disinformation, the more you have to acknowledge how sly and subliminal the techniques are, how the speed of technological development makes it hard to keep up and how we are all susceptible to disinformation, no matter how skillful fact-checkers we are, due to the simple fact that we are human beings with specific cognitive and emotional processes. We propose this fact to be emphasised constantly throughout the training.

Regarding the question about the platforms where the respondents come across disinformation, **social networks** are at the cutting edge, followed by **television, emails** and **print media**.

An important part of the questionnaire dealt with the methods, tools and drawbacks trainers currently use to teach about fake news and disinformation. The most popular tools are researching activities followed by the usage of various articles or videos. Youth trainers also mentioned online or offline games as an attractive and interactive tool. Researching activities rank high in the most popular teaching methods, followed by enquiry based learning, peer-to-peer learning and blended learning. When asked about the methods in which trainers would like to improve or learn more about, EQL leads the list and other interactive methods like researching activities, blended and peer-to-peer learning aroused the interest to the similar extent. Some respondents also noted that it is always great to draw inspiration from new methods, tools and approaches.

As the main challenges that the respondents encountered in adult courses, they identified the **lack of methodology** the most frequently, followed by the **lack of ICT and media literacy skills and available resources**. A considerable number also mentioned the **lack of motivation** as the common problem. As the shortage forms an important part of our input, we want to give space to other comments at this point. One of the challenges of adult courses, mentioned by respondents from all countries, is students' distrust**, deeply rooted convictions, unwillingness to change their attitude or even the reluctance to participate.** The Break the Chain team considers this a serious matter and dedicates an extensive part of the manual to psychological aspects of work, as well as strategic communication tips to prevent conflicts during the training.

When asked about **media literacy** and the relation to disinformation of adults 55+ in comparison to other age groups, most respondents stressed the lack of skills due to the fact they did not grow up in the era of ICT technology as younger generations. They neither have experience with such a diverse media scene, understand the workings of social networks and they rarely compare more sources. Especially respondents from the Czech Republic even pointed out that a considerable amount of disinformation is shared orally, from friend to friend, or sent via email. Adults 55+ were also characterised as less flexible in changing their minds and less motivated to learn new things. The conclusions we thus have to draw from this practice is to provide methodology that will include terms, explanations and tools that will be as simple as possible, easy to understand and create a teaching environment that will be safe and pleasant.

The last two questions of the questionnaire focused on the respondents´ **experience with training or courses on disinformation**. Only a half of them admitted attending a training/course. The practices that were employed at the training mostly included a theoretical part focused on terms and dangers of disinformation and some activities on tools for identifying the origin and verification of photos and videos, real-life examples of disinformation campaigns and non-formal interactive educational methods. The training helped them incorporate new tools and methods into their teaching and realise how important it is to take into account **the specifics of each group** of students.

Break the Chain manual hopes to bring new perspectives and inspiration to all trainers on the challenging and intricate path of educating adults 55+ on the complex topic of fake news and disinformation.

List of terms
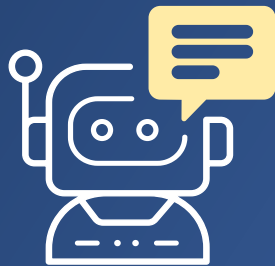
At the very beginning, let's summarise the pivotal **terms** that appear in the context of the **disinformation scene**. In the process of the training, participants should be aware of these expressions and understand their meaning. The **initial quiz, crossword** or other **fun game** on the terms can serve as a motivating lead-in activity as well as an **important input for your needs analysis**. It is quite probable that your students will be familiar with some terms but it may be necessary to clarify the meaning of others:

Bot

A **computer program** that automatically creates **fake profiles** on social sites and can be programmed to autonomously **spread, share and comment**.

Chain mail

A **bulk forwarded email** whose content usually consists of disinformation, hoaxes, propaganda or commercial offers and an appeal to forward the email further on. Chain emails can include attachments with dangerous computer codes (virus, Trojan horse) and the e-mail addresses of the recipients can be abused.

Clickbait

Sensationalized headline or a piece of text that generates **emotional response**, sometimes accompanied by a provoking or exciting photo/video. It is intended to attract attention and encourage people to click on links to particular websites that often include advertising. **Ragebait/rage farming** is a type of clickbait that provokes negative emotions like anger or fear in order to increase viewership or interaction.

Conspiracy theory

A theory that explains an event or a set of circumstances as the **result of a secret plot** by some elite authorities such as government, secret services or economical groups.

Disinformation

Misinformation created and shared **with the intention** to deliberately deceive the reader/listener in order to **manipulate or confuse** the public opinion.

Elves

Groups of people who emerged in cyberspace as a reaction to the activities and impact of trolls. They check facts and fight disinformation by debunking. Unlike in troll farms, their activity is not paid.

Fact-checker

Person whose job is to verify factual information, especially in something that is published.

False advertising

Any advertising or promotion that misrepresents the nature, characteristics, qualities or geographic origin of goods, services or commercial activities. Deceptive or false advertising can lead consumers to purchase products that are actually counterfeit, defective, or even dangerous.

Fake news

New term for a type of disinformation **that imitates the content of the news media**. It is partially based on credible information so it looks trustworthy but the tone is rather sensational.

Hoax

An example of disinformation in the form of alarming chain messages that encourage the reader to resend or share it.

Misinformation

False information shared **without the intention** to deceive. Typical examples are **urban legends** – folklore humorous or horrifying stories that happened „to a friend of a friend". The intention is to share an exciting story with the effort to draw attention rather than deceive and manipulate the reader/listener.

Propaganda

Spreading information in order to **deliberately form public ideas, attitudes and behaviour** so the reactions are in accordance with the propagandist´s intentions and needs. While **white propaganda** (= public relations) uses truthful and objective information to influence public opinion (e.g. vaccination campaign), the tools of **black propaganda** are disinformation or scandalisation with the intention to blemish or weaken the opponent. (Gregor, 2018, p. 15)

Spam

Unrequested message, usually an email, spread on a mass scale on the Internet. Originally commercial, now can include any sorts of manipulative content.

Troll

A person that participates in **online discussions** and stirs up **disputes, provokes and insults** other discussants, diverts from the topic and feeds cynicism and distrust in everything. Generally, trolls´ goals are to **manipulate public opinion** and **set the population against one another**. Some do it for fun, some of them are paid for this activity.

Troll farms

Organized groups of trolls whose main task is to produce a **huge amount of disinformation and overload the cybernetic space.**

Danger of disinformation

„With COVID-19, we realized very quickly we were in a communication crisis unlike any that we had ever been in before."

(Melissa Fleming, UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications)

Why is it so important to raise awareness about disinformation and point out its evident as well as covert dangers?

Modern methods of spreading disinformation are based on the **profound knowledge of psychology** and **human cognitive processes**. It helps target a specific audience and facilitate absorbing information through mechanisms that people are rarely aware of. The **subliminal characteristics** of disinformation together with **the lack of awareness** of the citizens becomes the weakness undermining the resistance of society.

Disinformation is no longer a domain of sensational tabloids that lure the readers into lapping up the juicy stories from the life of celebrities. The goals have become more far-reaching and techniques less decipherable. We are facing disinformation campaigns that can **dangerously affect our way of thinking, share false accusations, fear, hatred** and lead to **extremist tendencies** in society.

One of the recent examples of how disinformation **fuels negative emotions** and leads to **extreme consequences** is the insurrection and the attack on the U.S. Capitol in January 2021. The experts argue that this radical and aggressive behaviour is a direct result of a continuous drumbeat of disinformation starting before the Presidential elections. The technique is similar to so called „Big Lie" propaganda which has been in common use throughout history, for example employed by Nazi propagandist Goebbels before and during WW2, but never so effective as with the internet as a tool for dissemination. Basically, the disinformers were able to convince a large majority of Trump voters that in fact, Trump has won the election, there has been voter fraud and it is people´s civic duty to fight the injustice. (Rash, 2021)
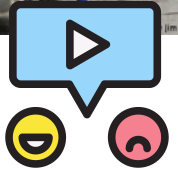
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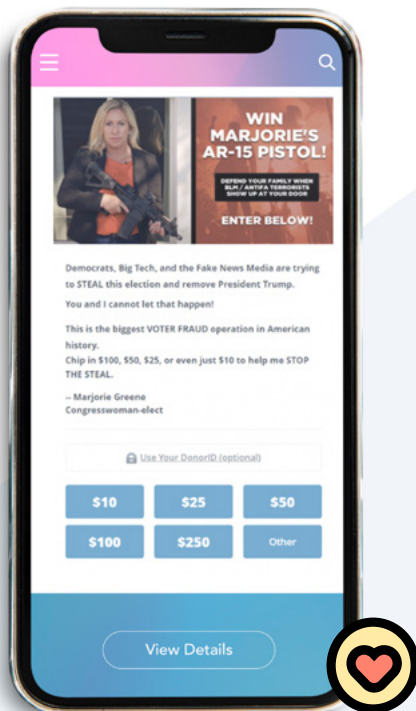
Source: Just Security

Moreover, disinformation represents **a threat to the protection of health, the environment and the safety of EU citizens**. Currently, this problem has turned out to be especially dangerous and harmful in the framework of Covid-19, which is not only a pandemic, but also an „infodemic" (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022) or „disinfodemic".

The attempts to disrupt the official findings, statements and recommendations regarding **Covid-19** pandemic have been numerous. The topics included the **origin and spread of the virus** (blaming 5G network, chemical weapons manufacturers or other actors), **false and misleading statistics** connected to the incidence of the disease and mortality rates, **economic impacts** (intentional isolation of citizens, scams designed to steal people's private data), **discrediting of journalists and credible news outlets**, **dangerous disinformation about prevention, diagnosis and treatment** (e. g. drinking cow urine to prevent virus reaching lungs), **politicisation** (one-sided information to negate the significance of facts inconvenient for the actors in power or information designed to mislead for political advantage) or **celebrity-focused disinformation** including false stories. (Posetti, 2020) Disinformers exploited the insecurity of the global issue of Covid-19 pandemic, which is a perfect topic for these purposes, and did not hesitate to put people's health and security in danger.
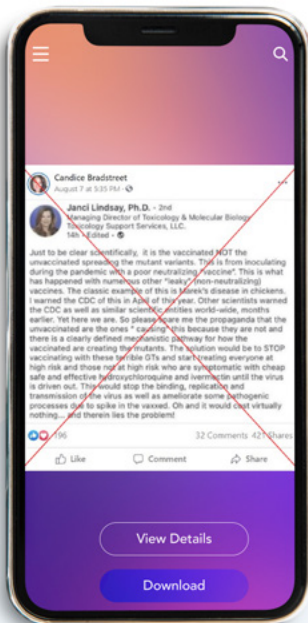
Disinformation has also become a dangerous weapon used in **hybrid warfare strategies**. In 2022 for the first time, given the conflict in Ukraine, NATO has included "disinformation campaigns, the instrumentalization of migration, and the manipulation of the energy supply and the use of economic coercion" among hybrid warfare strategies and challenges in the following decade. (González, 2022)

With the declining trust in mainstream media and the rising power of disinformation, **democracy itself is under a serious threat**. Democratic system is based on the voice of the public. But as soon as we cannot protect the public from being manipulated into making harmful decisions, democracy loses relevance and we voluntarily accept the supremacy of twisted facts and calculating lies.

And even though the internet is an incredible source of information from the whole world and gives space to anyone who wants to spread his/her ideas, the algorithms on the internet eventually lead to **isolation in filter bubbles** which will be discussed in the following sections. Consequently, society is threatened by **polarisation**, the **disintegration of unity**, where each party is convinced of its „truth" and thinks the opposing party is blind to what is obvious. Polarisation is a serious issue because a society without the capacity to find a **compromise** is easier to manipulate.

Eventually, the deluge and the speed of information influx can lead to the **reluctance to believe anything**. And a society without a vision is weak. On the other hand, it is sufficient for the disinformers. The chaos is a fertile ground for them as they are ready to provide „clear answers" and manipulate the society with their „only truth".

Of course, different types of disinformation have a different level of potential danger to society. Below you can see a scale capturing types of mis- and disinformation with the respect to the harm they can cause.

SATIRE OR PARODY

No intention to cause harm but has a potential to fool. Originally a form of art that does not pretend to be true but should entertain and comment on social issues. The reason why it is on the scale of harm is the fact that sometimes it can be **mistaken for a fact**. Also, disinformers defending themselves like to disguise their real intentions as a satire that was not meant to be taken seriously.

FALSE CONNECTION

When headlines, visuals or captions don´t support the content. Typical examples are clickbaits that try to get the content to the widest audience possible. They rank rather low on the harm scale but they corrupt the reputation of serious journalism.

MISLEADING CONTENT

Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual. Typical techniques are presenting fragments of quotes to support a wider point, citing statistics in a way that aligns with a position, or deciding not to cover something because it undermines an argument.

Source: adapted from Wardle, 2019.

FALSE CONTEXT

When genuine content is shared with **false contextual information**. A typical example is a photo depicting another event, time and place than what is mentioned in the caption.

IMPOSTER CONTENT

When genuine sources are impersonated by using well-known logos or the news from established figures or journalists.

MANIPULATED CONTENT

When **general information or imagery is manipulated to deceive**. A part of the genuine content is altered. This relates most often to photos or videos.

FABRICATED CONTENT

New content that is **100% false**, fabricated and designed to deceive and do harm.

The omnipresence of disinformation does not affect only those who believe it but unfortunately, we are all affected. As stated before, the goal does not have to be to push through an opposing opinion. **Overloading public space** with disinformation that our brain has to deal with, leads to **paralysis of our critical thinking**. Even if we consider a piece of disinformation bizarre, one by one they will exhaust our capacity to think critically as our brain will be, let's say, tired and resign from searching for the truth. When critical thinking is paralysed, we often resort to our subconsciously imprinted „arguments", **convictions** in other words, that are conscientiously shaped by disinformation. Its techniques and forms are complex and will be described in detail on the following pages.

Historical context of disinformation

Even though the term is quite new, disinformation has been a part of our society since the very **beginning of the civilised world**. Traits of **propaganda**, originally used mostly in **warfare**, have been recorded since ancient times. Understanding how the human brain and emotions work, one could manipulate the public into whatever his/her intentions and goals were, no matter if they were beneficial or harmful for the society. Here are some famous examples of the usage of disinformation in the history:
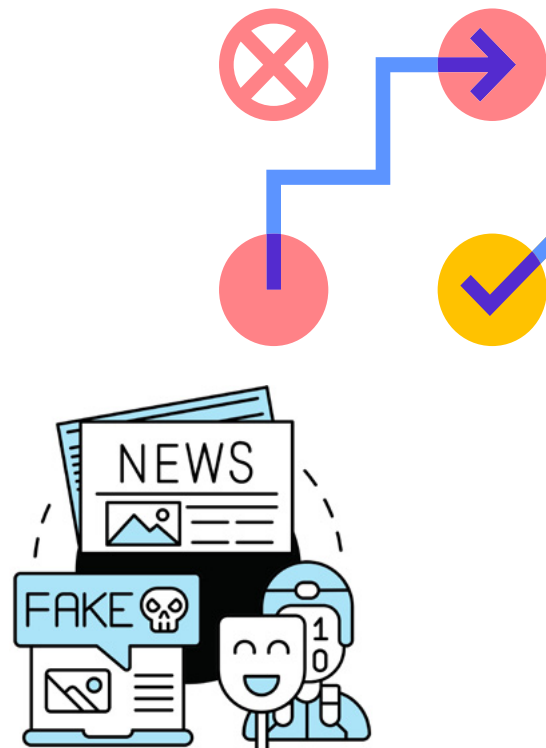
Alexander the Great is known for fostering the cult of his personality through exalting statues and poems and coinage with his portrait which was a privilege reserved to gods and legendary heroes like Hercules at that time. To boost morale of his troops he also faked „revelations" such as a snake with a mask of a human in a distance which should have made the soldiers believe that it was Asklépios, the god of healers appearing in a snake form, and they shouldn't worry about the injuries in the battle.

For more than a thousand years, **the Church** had the most powerful propaganda. One of the heights were the Crusades in the 11th century when Pope Urban II managed to attract soldiers to the First crusade by promising to forgive sins of those who joined in. Priests shared information about atrocities perpetrated on pilgrims by muslims such as castration, beheadings or gutting so the faithful have a pretext to fight the unfaithful.

History indicates what devastating consequences the disinformation had during **World War II.** The Nazis constantly repeated their theories about the superiority of Germanic race and other ethnic or political groups were depicted very negatively. The media boom in the form of numerous newspapers, radio and television has brought the ideas to the wide public and we all know the tragic outcome it has brought to Jews and other affected groups.

The decades of **Cold war** between the US and the Soviet union have shown how important the division of media ownership and political power is. However, both Eastern and Western blocs manipulated their citizens by providing black and white world: us - the defenders of everything good, and them – the evil enemies. Cold war propaganda was strongly based on **evoking fear, labelling and demonising** on both sides and it worked even though from our point of view it was still rather naive and recognizable.

Another phenomenon that is often associated with disinformation are **conspiracy theories**, basically stories about conspiracy, show how disinformers **exploit the human brain mechanisms** that we rarely are consciously aware of. They are usually based on a fact that is taken out of context and twisted or modified. While in the past they were supported by a small number of the population and represented a laughing stock for the majority, now the conspiracy theories have become a part of **mainstream culture**.

Although the content varies in response to **current issues**, the essence is always the belief that our lives are controlled by somebody else for different reasons (power, money, fertility reduction…) or at least we are the victims of lies. The absurd point is that, basically, the conspirators blame somebody else for what they are trying to do. By finding the „perpetrator" first, they divert attention from themselves and their intentions.

Examples of conspiracy theories:

• Earth is flat and history is forged.

• The world is controlled by a privileged elite group (reptilians, Illuminati, George Soros…)

• Chemtrails are not traces of condensed vapour but chemical spray that can cause various consequences (sterilisation, weather manipulation, spread of flu…)

• Hillary Clinton's paedophile gang abuses and kills children in the cellar of a pizza restaurant.

• Bill Gates is responsible for COVID-19 and he wants to control the population by microchip implants contained in the vaccine.

Source: manipulatori.cz

So disinformation is nothing new under the sun. However, now its creators have a tool that has no parallel in the history of media and that has eased the problem of how to get the disinformation to the widest audience possible – **the internet**. Almost unlimited freedom of speech and the possibility to share the content on social media or via e-mail has become a challenge and the dark side of this mass media. The content does not undergo the process of verification as in the traditional media and the creators of disinformation intentionally ignore the principles of serious journalism. Of course, they present this fact as an advantage in comparison to traditional „censored" media which, in their interpretation, hide the truth. However, the goal of disinformation and fake news is not to inform but to confuse, glut with information and foist what we should think.

The goals
of disinformers

We live in a world where affecting others is common: advertising, public relations, even politics and diplomacy are based on **the power of influence** and information is their legitimate tool. Disinformers pretend they act in the same way, however, they **intentionally use falsehood** to reach their goals.

Generally speaking, the common goal of disinformation is **to spread influence** and **to prevent the public from informed and reasonable judgement**. The reasons can be different as well as the significance of the harm caused to the society. Very often disinformers combine

the techniques and goals to reach the highest effect and remain unpredictable. That is why it is important to understand the motives and principles of disinformation. (Government Communication Service)

The most common reasons are:

Reason of disinformation	Features
Economic reasons	The goal is **financial profit**. Typical examples are *clickbaits*. As the reach of an advertisement on the internet is assessed by the number of clicks, the creators of clickbaits will use any effective methods to attract people to click on it.
Outsmarting the system	The goal is **to gain respect** or a **personal challenge** to be smarter than the system. Hacking critical systems, leakage of confidential material, misuse of algorithms or other digital systems are usually the secondary impacts.
Discrediting	The goal is **to affect the credibility**, **reliability and reputation** of a person or an organisation. Through lies or twisted truth, disinformers try to discredit the victim and shake public opinion. It is the most common goal of disinformation and complements other intentions like **polarisation of society and information influence operation.**
Polarisation	The goal is **to intensify the conflicts** by fueling them. The tactic is to provoke both parties of the argument so there is **no space left for a constructive moderate compromise**. Sensitive topics (migration, vaccination etc) are inflamed by trolls or bots so they cause conflicts instead of a constructive dialogue. It is a well-known fact that **a divided society** is easier to manipulate.
Undermining the national prosperity and security	The goal is **to damage the reputation of state institutions** and representatives and support the objectives of a foreign policy of a hostile state. The consequences are similar to polarisation – **distrust in authority**, divided population that cannot reach a compromise and disrupting alliances (and thus power) of states.

It is important to point out here that especially with the **intention of discrediting, polarising and undermining the national prosperity and security**, the goal is not to convince the public about the opposing „truth" and the full acceptance of the disinformation. But rather to **overload** with so much information that the brain just gives up and becomes distrustful to everything and everyone. Again, that's when manipulation can take hold.

Techniques of disinformation

There are so many examples of different ways, how content can be manipulated, that it is almost impossible to summarise them into one principle. It is easier to break the techniques down and describe them separately so your students have a better understanding of the challenges we are facing.

The techniques could be summarised into a basic model called **FIRST**:

1. **False content** – manipulated content, e.g. photos edited in Photoshop or forged documents

2. **Identity –** false or no source stated, fake profiles on social sites, author anonymous

3. **Rhetoric** – biassed, provoking or false arguments

4. **Symbolism** – exploitation of symbolic value of events, e.g. terrorist attacks, Nazism

5. **Technology** – exploitation of technological advantages, e.g. bots amplifying messages

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Source: Government Communications Service, p. 5

As with the goals, techniques can be, and usually are, combined, manipulating the content to be as convincing as possible.

Tricks of manipulation typical for disinformation
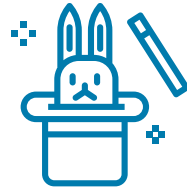
Remind your students that disinformers are trained professionals that use proven methods based on the scientific research of the human brain and cognitive processes. When assessing a piece of information, we should look out for the typical signs of manipulative tendencies:

The aim of disinformation is to stir up the emotions of its readers (fear, anger, defiance, aversion, ridicule, compassion, desire for wealth...) which switches off rational thinking. Expressions with negative connotations are used to fuel the emotions. (Nazis, cockroach...) Fake news is basically a genre of tabloid journalism which benefits from our tendency to be attracted by scandals, sensations, crime, story, other people's misfortunes – basically anything that can be presented **emotionally**.

Confirmation bias is a trait of the human brain that will be described in more detail in the chapter about the cognitive processes. Even though the disinformers do not have to believe it themselves, they will intentionally say what the target audience thinks (and thus wants to hear).

Exploitation and reinforcement of **stereotypes.** (e.g. Muslims are terrorists./ The Romany exploit welfare benefits...) Stereotypes are not bad in their core. They help us get oriented in a complex world by simplifying and assigning a category to things, events or people. However, we always have to keep in mind that generalising can be dangerous and nothing is black and white. NOT ALL Muslims are radical fundamentalists and NOT ALL Romany exploit welfare benefits. By claiming that we could hurt those who try to disprove the stereotype. The real problem comes when stereotypes **dehumanize** people which can eventually lead to discrimination and violence. A well-known example of victims of false stereotyping leading to dreadful consequences are Jews during WWII.

Labelling. Using a number of attributes and names for individuals or groups in order to provoke negative emotions like aversion. It is connected to stereotyping.

Blame-shifting. Blaming an inconvenient individual or group (like institution or organisation) for the current problems in society by using other tricks like labelling, ridiculing, humiliating or false interpretation of the „black sheep´s" opinions.

Photo and video manipulation. Photos and videos are used with articles to provide evidence and support the statement. While the younger generation can easily imagine what technology we have nowadays to modify the original, older generations can have troubles questioning what they can see „with their own eyes". Apart from editing colours, contrast and light or deleting unwanted items or people from a picture, it has never been easier to combine more shots or their parts into a completely new photo and make a **photomontage**. At the same time, if it is a quality job, it is simply not possible to recognize if it is an original photo or forgery. However, editing is usually not necessary. Putting audio-visual material into another context is often just enough. The danger of manipulated photos and videos is that we are all susceptible to disinformation supported by visuals. Visuals generally enhance our ability to recall information, that is why they are an inseparable part of all media content, including fake news.

Unverified or unverifiable evidence. („with my own eyes" evidence, no or fake source)

Polarisation. The gap between US vs THEM is intentionally deepened. There is a call to fight the opposing opinion parties instead of an encouragement to find a compromise.

Implying intent. Even though disinformers put themselves into the position of eye-openers, they indirectly propose what we should think. Rhetoric questions are sometimes used to imply how we should approach the issue. („Shall we put up with this?")

Call for action instead of merely providing information. It often implies radicalization, even violence.

Fallacy – Logical error in reasoning or invalid move in the construction of an argument. Some are unintentionally used because of some limitations of the speaker but disinformers use them **intentionally** to manipulate or persuade by deception. The most widely used fellacy examples are:

Whataboutism – counterattack argument that deviates from the point of the debate. It is a violation of a logical proof affecting emotions, not reason. The aim is to degrade the opposing discusant or the whole discussion.

Argument: „Women face sexism in workplace."
Fallacy: „What about men? They struggle, too."

False dilemma – an issue is simplified to the existence of two contradictory options only, nothing else.

„Who does not stand with us, stands against us."

The role of the internet and the changes in the media world

The world of media has changed rapidly in the past decades. Print media is on the verge of extinction, especially daily press because of its incapability to catch up with the speed of the internet. Globally, the trust in traditional mainstream media is declining. The inexhaustible number of media that flood the public space plus the influence of disinformation campaigns that try hard to discredit the traditional media are the most probable reasons. The strategy of disinformers is obvious: First – make people **doubt the traditional media**, second - offer a clear and all-explaining alternative.

Although disinformation is nothing new in the history of humankind, there has never been such a powerful and fast tool for its dissemination as the **internet**. In no time can the disinformer reach the audience from all over the world and the possibility and willingness to share it by one click enables the reach that was not even conceivable in the times of the traditional media. On one hand, it is amazing to have access to different world-views, theories and opinions. On the other hand, the sources offering the one

Confirmation bias – selection of arguments that support our stance and ignoring those that reject it

Biased sample – generalization based on a sample of the population that is biased and therefore not representative

and only „*uncensored truth*" do not undergo the processes that guaranteed the objectivity of the media in the past. Basically, now we partly have to do the job of journalists and fast-checkers if we don´t want to accept the fact that some media have committed to adhere to the **ethical code of conduct**.

Traditional objective media are in a difficult situation. Quality news has to face the competition of more entertaining platforms and unfortunately, serious journalism just „doesn´t sell". The audience got used to the fact that if we don´t like the content of the media, we just find another that corresponds to our opinion or life philosophy. The trouble is that the intention of **biassed media** is not to inform but to provide the content that the target audience wants to hear. This leaves almost **no space for critical thinking**.

When talking about serious journalism, it is important to emphasise to your students that nobody is perfect and the profession of a journalist is not an exception. Under the time pressure and high requirements and competition, it can happen that even serious media can make a mistake or be tricked by disinformation. Journalists are exposed to the constant dilemma between quality and speed which is principal in today's world of the internet. There is not always time to check all information and keep up with disinformers´ inventiveness. Sometimes even the verified information can later turn out to be untrue or

Source: Bezfaulu.net

THIS IS WHAT CLIMATE CHANGE LOOKS LIKE.
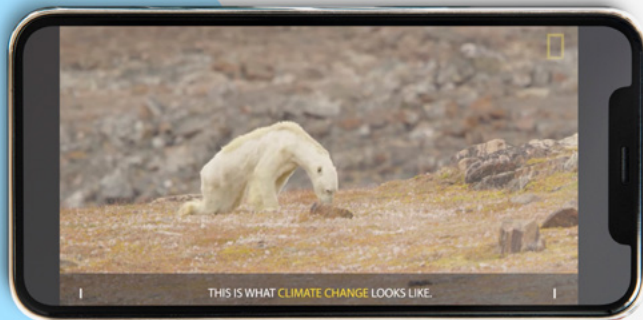
biassed. What is important is the journalist´s **intention** and **reaction to the mistake**. The willingness to admit the mistake and imperfection and set the record straight are crucial.

A well-known slip of serious media can be demonstrated by a case of polar-bear video for National Geographic from 2017. In an attempt to raise awareness and stir up emotions about the serious issue of climate change and global warming, reporters from otherwise one the most respected publications, provided the video with the caption *„This is what climate change looks like.“* Although there is solid scientific evidence linking melting sea ice and a decline in polar-bear populations, they had to face criticism from the scientific point of view that it cannot be proven what the cause of this particular polar bear´s condition is. National Geographic then apologised that they should not have linked the polar bear starvation directly to climate change and edited the video. (McGwin, 2018) However, the trustworthiness of the media suffered damage, although the intention to encourage discussions about the effects of global warming on the Arctic environment was noble. To sustain the media's **credibility**, they should totally refrain

from the manipulative methods and techniques that the disinformers use. And when a mistake occurs, they should explain the misconduct and set it right because disinformers are waiting for an opportunity to denigrate serious media.

It is also important to mention to your students that **disinformation sites** and **fake news** often imitate the **design of serious media** to confuse as many people as possible. For example, during the campaigns before the US presidential election in 2016, one of the sites that fired off the false news (e.g. Pope Francis forbids Catholics to vote for Hillary Clinton) was called NewYork-TimesPolitics.com and looked almost identical to serious daily press New York Times. In fact, the authors were a group teenagers from a small Macedonian town hungry for profits who shared their disinformation site into pro-Trump groups on Facebook. The „news" shared by the readers reached an avalanche-like speed and before Google and Facebook, under public pressure, reacted, the damage had been irredeemable. (Gregor, 2018, p. 48)

In the last couple of years there has been a rise of so-called **„alternative" media** offering „the one and only truth" that has been „intentionally kept secret from us" by the official media and the ruling elite. It is another example of how disinformers take advantage of the current situation and atmosphere in society and use it for their own benefits. This „new version of reality", unfortunately, is often built up on manipulative techniques, as research shows, with **fabulation, blame-shifting, labelling and playing with emotions** being the most frequently used techniques. (Gregor, 2018, p. 59)

The power of the internet and the fact that we can find answers to anything in a couple of seconds can lead us to the false conviction that we

don´t need experts anymore. Scientific language that builds a barrier between the results of scientific research and the general public does not help, either. That is why this era is sometimes called ***post-factual***. It does not mean that we don't have access **to** scientifically proven facts, it means we just do not trust them. Disinformers relish this situation as it is the ideal ground for manipulation. No wonder it is their tactics to kindle our distrust in existing official structures.

The popularity of disinformation and conspiracy theories, and especially their penetration into the mainstream media, are also **symptoms of a deeper social crisis**, an erosion of trust in traditional institutions, and confusion about changes in the information space. Therefore, to limit the negative impact of disinformation on society, it is not enough to refute it or repress its originators, but also to focus on long-term and sustained efforts to strengthen trust in institutions and quality independent media. (Hořejš, 2022)

Reliable sources

When teaching about reliable sources, be ready that there might be some voices questioning the official media – as the „alternative" media advise them to do. Research in the US shows, unfortunately, that Facebook users believe information more when it is shared by a „trustworthy person" (which is questionable) than when a source is a reliable agency. As a result, if the information was shared by a person that users trust, it did not matter that the source was fake. (NORC, 2018) This puts the **authority of serious media** into a tricky situation.

Teach your students how to identify the features of a reliable source but at the same time, discuss how difficult and time-consuming it is to check every single piece of news. If your students are in the phase when they trust fact-checking sites, remind them that there are **professional fact-checkers** who invest their time and energy into **debunking disinformation**. Before being absorbed into their own research, your students have a chance to check if the professionals have not done the job for them.

If your course allows, it is a good practice to **invite professionals** from the field of serious journalism or fact-checking to describe their own experience with disinformation and fake news.

Remind your students

We naturally tend to choose information that supports our opinion or world-view. Do not disregard an expert´s opinion only because it does not fit your conviction.

Be aware of the fact that experts and professional journalists are also human and can be mistaken. However, their education and practice are a guarantee that their expertise will be closer to the truth than somebody's opinion he has formed after reading a couple of articles on the internet. And the **intentions** are important. While an expert will try to push through the information that underwent **verification by legitimate tools**, the disinformer´s aim will be the exact opposite.

The same applies to reliable sources, in general. Point out that it is impossible to name one 100% reliable source. If people try to find certainty in this, they will be disappointed. However, the knowledge of the **principle of disinformation** will lower the risk of being manipulated into believing fake news.

To have a strong opinion does not mean we understand the issue! Try to differentiate between **an opinion** and **a fact**.

Your voice does have a value in a democratic society. However, you have to admit that your layman's analysis of the situation does not have to take all factors into consideration.

Basically, there is no right or wrong attitude because it is always judged against some standard. Generally, psychologists have seen attitudes as correct or proper to the extent that they are seen as **beneficial to someone's physical or psychological well-being**. (Nickerson, 2022) You can assure your students that the **well-being** of society is the priority for you.

Platforms spreading disinformation

In the previous chapter we mentioned the problem of **disinformation sites**, „alternative media" as they call themselves, that are presented as the sources of insight that „official corrupted media" want to conceal from the public. There has been a debate if to ban these sites and in some countries the internet providers really deactivated them (for example in the Czech Republic at the beginning of the war in Ukraine when the internet space filled up with pro-Kremlin disinformation).

The opponents are right when they say **censorship** has no place in a democratic society. Paradoxically, this attempt to protect democracy is counter-productive because it plays into the hands of disinformers. They use it as proof that the authorities want to conceal the truth and silence the opposing voices**. Education instead of censorship** is a more difficult but also a more effective way. Mainly in this turbulent period we should be careful about the trust that the democratic system has left.

However, according to the Break the Chain report, the biggest disseminators of fake news and disinformation are **social media platforms.** (iCmedia, 2022, p. 14 – 15) While traditional media like radio, TV and press are still considered the most reliable media (iCmedia, 2022, p. 6), there is a growing trend of free and easily accessible social sites becoming the only source of information.

It would not be fair to condemn social sites and give up their many benefits. However, it is import-

ant we understand how these sites operate and why they are mostly free. This awareness should filter the content we consume on social sites.

The operation of social sites is based on **internet algorithms**. These are the mechanisms that **personalise our internet space** on the basis of our preceding activity. If we look for or watch videos with dogs, in the future the algorithms will show us more videos of dogs instead of cats. Algorithms monitor our interests, even the time spent on individual posts, and then assign results that we are interested in. If you and another person search for a term at the same moment, the internet's individualised algorithms can provide different results to each of you. Each time you click, you are influencing the subsequent advertisements and news recommendations that come your way. The aim is to enhance your enjoyment of using technology but we should always be aware of this mechanism because, in the extreme, it can lead to the isolation in a filter bubble that will be discussed below.

A controversial issue of the workings of algorithms provoked discussion, for example, in the case of Brexit campaign, 2016 US presidential elections, covid-19 or recently the conflict in Ukraine. As the discussion is led mainly on Facebook or other social networks, the algorithms lead to **strengthening the supporting ideas** and **suppressing the opposing ones** which makes **objective view impossible**.

Another way to highlight a post, stir emotions and polarise the debate are comments by **trolls** or automatic **bots**. Generally, trolls are participants of online discussions whose goals are to manipulate public opinion and set the population against one another. Some do it for fun but most of them are **paid**, especially when they are

organised into **troll farms.** These are groups of trolls whose main task is to produce a huge amount of disinformation and overload the cybernetic space. A well-known Glavset agency in St. Petersburg, for example, employs more than 1000 full-time bloggers who handle a number of fake Facebook and Twitter accounts. Some also use so-called **bots**, computer programs that automatically create fake profiles on social sites and can be programmed to autonomously spread, share and comment. Due to these tactics it might seem that the public debate and arguments on social networks are more sharpened than they actually are in reality. And that is the goal.

In some cases in the last few years it has been revealed how significant the role Russian trolls played in influencing public opinion. The 2018 report by the UK communications agency found out that Russian pro-Brexit social media interference was worth up to €4.6 million during the campaign and Russian accounts posted over 45 000 Brexit messages in the last 48 hours of the campaign on Facebook. (Bentzen, 2019)

Under the pressure, Facebook, Google and other social networks committed to a more balanced and responsible approach in respect to disinformation. With the help of **fact-checkers**, they started marking posts which have been proven to be misinformative, especially those pushing the public opinion into political extremes. The internet giants are also trying to cut the disinformers off publishing advertisements on the platforms and weaken the algorithms but honestly, it is a tricky situation for them. Their profit comes from **personalised advertisements** where the number of clicks is what sells. So even though their moral stance is respectable, we cannot expect them to undermine their own business. Above all, any form of censorship will ever solve the problem of low media literacy and the lack of critical thinking.

Make sure that your students understand that nothing, not even on the internet, is for free. If a service, such as Facebook, Google and others, is free of charge, they most probably make profit on advertisement. **Targeted advertisement**, that fact the internet „knows" what we need or want, is, again, the result of algorithms and these operate on data collection from our internet activity. It is a price paid for the service we use.

While social sites are generally considered the most frequently used tool for spreading disinformation, the research shows that the older the people are, the more they use **email** as a means for sharing disinformation in comparison to younger generations. (iCmedia, 2019, p. 16) This problem has been detected mainly in the Czech Republic where e-mails replace or supplement social sites. In the past, the content of **chain emails** used to be mostly fun, with statements such as „send this email to ten people and happiness will come to you" which mostly served to abuse email addresses. However, the content

has become more serious nowadays, including dangerous hoaxes, disinformation full of hatred, commercial offers or attachments with harmful computer codes that can infect the device or network. As people often resend the e-mails to their like-minded friends, they also basically create the environment of echo chambers that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Social and filter bubbles
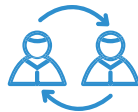
As it is not possible for a human being to embrace all information and social groups in depth, we naturally gather in different **social bubbles** that involve people with similar world-views or status. By being enclosed in our social bubbles, we refer to barriers between groups of society that differ culturally, socially or politically. Sometimes we feel like our social group must represent the whole society. But if the real world still offers opportunities to penetrate into another social bubble and understand other motives, the world of the internet has the potential to **isolate** people in incompatible opinion universes.

Filter bubbles are basically versions of social groups on the internet. The principal difference is that while in real life we wilfully regulate affiliation to specific groups of people and thus have control over it, in case of filter bubbles, algorithms do that for us as described in the previous chapter.

Another term that recently found a way to the public debate are **echo-chambers** describing enclosed groups on the internet where like-minded users re-assure each other that their viewpoint

is right while all alternative theories are excluded. (European Commision, 2021) People who are not satisfied in their life tend to hide in these echo-chambers where the environment is rather affirmative and they do not feel so anxious about the uncertainty of the real world.

Why are filter bubbles dangerous? They **limit our horizons** by **misrepresentation of reality**. It is more satisfactory to be presented with what we want to see, however, then the collision with the real world is tougher. The opinions and world-views of different filter groups can be so diametrically opposed that there is **n**o common ground for opening a debate. We become intellectually isolated.

It seems that the internet has played a crucial role in dismantling what we can call „**objective reality"**. From the sociological point of view, „reality" can be understood as a social construct, based on the habits of society. The legitimacy of reality then depends on the **agreement** of members of the society. And when we are enclosed in a bubble where people with the same opinion support each other, it is just enough to convince ourselves that this is the reality.

What can we do to **transcend the boundaries** between social and filter bubbles? Do not miss the opportunity to seek out **face-to-face communication** with people from different locations, cultural backgrounds, various age groups and opinions. Be open. Listen. Discuss. Try to understand. The essence of democracy is **discussion**. The disinformers know what to disrupt.

False advertising

False advertising or misleading marketing is any promotion that misrepresents the nature, characteristics, qualities or geographic origin of goods, services or commercial activities. Its harm lies in the fact that it can lead consumers to purchase products that are actually counterfeit, defective, or even dangerous.

EU citizens are protected against unfair commercial practices by the **Directive concerning misleading and comparative advertising** that provides for a minimum level of protection from misleading advertising throughout Europe. (European Parliament, 2006) Then each particular country has **national regulations** as well as **self-regulative codes of conduct** that the advertising industry is subjected to. However, there are still cases when advertisers try to get around the fair practices in order to increase profits and elderly citizens can be a susceptible group. It is for your consideration, based on the needs analysis at the beginning of your course, if training on traps of false advertising is desirable or not.

Let's have a look at the most frequent forms we know false advertising can take but don't forget to mention to your students that **marketing**, as well as the whole field of disinformation, is by its very nature a creative business. It means that its representatives will always strive to come up with **new ways to deceive or manipulate** a consumer and the tactics that may get around legal definitions across jurisdictions.

The most common form of false advertising is **mislabeling** that can include:

> Printing false or misleading information on a product's packaging, or in any form of advertisement in print or online.

> Claiming to offer a product or service at a certain price that it is never actually for sale at.

> Making false or deceptive claims about the manufacturing or origin of a product.

> False environmental claims, like saying a product is "recyclable" or "biodegradable" when there is no scientific evidence to back up those claims.

Incredible deals might be alluring but we have to be careful about **bait-and-switch** techniques that offer products or services at a particular price with no intention of ever selling them at that price.

> **Puffery** is a tricky method based on using exaggerated claims that can't be proven to be true or false. These claims such as „The best ready-to-eat meals in the world." are disputable but not illegal (if they don´t disparage a competitor) because this rating is more subjective than based on some scientific research.

However, **„scientific" claims without evidence** are forbidden but still practised. One of the recent cases has been caused by the huge food and drink processing corporate Nestlé. They have been accused of 'violating advertising claims and misleading consumers with nutritional claims' on baby milk formula. They presented their nutritional product as comparable to breast milk which has not been proven. Not only has this conduct been considered unethical but it can also have consequences on the health of babies because it disrupts objective, truthful information that enables women to make the best decision for themselves when considering breast milk versus formula. (Plüss, 2022)

False reviews or testimonials also appear in false advertising. Not only fake reviews but also a testimonial for a product you've never used (targeted especially at influencers) is not acceptable.

Extra charges and **hidden fees** are also a problem. Always remind your students to check if it is the final price.

Of course, jurisdiction is trying to protect the consumers and prevent manipulative methods. A number of legal regulations have been applied but sometimes they cannot compete with the speed of marketing inventiveness. And a crucial problem remains the inconsistent interpretation and application of the law or code of conduct, which is also the case of disinformation.

Cognitive processes

Cognitive processes: How our brain deals with disinformation

From the neurological point of view, we are ALL susceptible to disinformation and if we deny that, we deny our human nature. Our society has technologically developed very fast in the last years and we have not managed to adjust our way of thinking to this progress. We personally cannot change the advancement of technology and the abundance of information. But we can change our **awareness of the processes behind disinformation** and our **reaction** to them.

In an ideal world, the access to the unlimited amount of information that the internet provides, would lead to an informed and educated society. However, our brain is **NOT** designed to process a **constant supply of new information** that especially social networks bombard us with. The capacity of cognitive processes of our brain is simply limited. To be able to operate in the flood of perceptions, our brain is programmed to **generalise, simplify** and make **stereotypes**. When we see something we already have an experience with, the brain automatically connects the experiences so it does not have to assess it all over again. This process is necessary for **learning** and **categorization**. Without that we would not be able to find connections and relations.

However, this super-skill of our brain to use „**mental shortcuts"** and tricks to make its operation easier also negatively affects our ability to discern information from disinformation. In this aspect, it might be a bigger problem for an older person than for a younger one because the brain can insist on the rich life experience and refuse to use other mind maps than the ones it is familiar with.

Your students should understand that their way of thinking is not wrong, however, in a world which has never been so overwhelmed by information and the speed of life, we have to bear in mind how our brain works and regulate what we perceive. If we are not willing to do it ourselves, we can be sure that the disinformers will do it for us.

How does **intensity** and **repetition** of disinformation influence our brain? Immensely. Repetition is an essential learning aid from the moment we are born. It allows a conscious skill to transfer into one's subconscious, freeing up working memory and allowing for further skills learning. (iCan Dream centre, 2021)

Again, this capacity of our brain to transfer information from conscious to subconscious can be easily exploitable by the disinformers. **Constant repetition** and **frequency** is intentional and as significant as the content and form of disinformation. If every day we see or read how dangerous and harmful vaccination is – even if it is just a short heading and we decide to ignore the article – it is almost impossible for our brain not to be affected. And once the information gets to our **subconsciousness**, it is hard to rewrite it.

The same applies to the **constant exposure to certain emotions**. Even if we do not believe fake news, we cannot escape emotions that they are supposed to provoke. And if we are repeatedly exposed to fear, hatred, anger, contempt and other emotions for a long time, they become a part of our subconsciousness. That

is the dark side of the capabilities of our brain. And the disinformers know that very well. In the era when automatic bots can serve as the mass distributors of repeated negative messages and flood our brain with **unnatural amounts of biassed information**, our susceptible subconsciousness is in great danger.

In psychology, reactions of our brain to repetition and intensity can be explained by so-called a **mere-exposure effect**. It is a psychological phenomenon by which people tend to develop a preference for things or people that are more familiar to them than others. And repeated exposure increases familiarity. (Palumbo, 2021)

Emotional aspect

„The real problem of humanity is the following: We have Palaeolithic emotions, Mediaeval institutions and God-like technology."

(Edward Wilson)

„People love to think that „the facts speak for themselves", but they don't. They need an advocate. And the best way to do that is to frame them in a way the person will be open to."

(Phil Plait)

The experience and research in debunking conspiracy theories show that mere facts and data can rarely change beliefs that people have emotional connection to, especially when they are tied to a group identity.

Even though our rationally based civilization has troubles admitting that, the research shows that in the **decision-making process**, emotions play a more important part than logic. We basically decide through emotions first and only in the second step we use logic to justify that decision. So the whole process can appear to be a rational conclusion but in the root of the decision there is an **emotion only later processed by reason**. It explains why we are so attracted to emotionally tinged or shocking news and how important role emotions play when receiving and assessing information. That is also a reason why it is so difficult to disprove disinformation with facts – the **emotional bond** and the **opinion** resulting from it is in the foundation. (Gregor, 2018, p. 79 -80) That is also why so many disinformers build on already existing opinions

regarding emotionally-laden topics like immigration, war conflicts, abortion, feminism etc.

We are naturally inclined to information that again and again confirms our opinion. The reason is that this **feeling of confirmation** is connected to the release of **dopamine**, „happy hormone". On the other hand, an opposing opinion causes **unpleasant tension** so we tend to ignore it, or as the case may be, our brain quickly provides a „rational" reason why to disregard the opposing opinion (e.g. „Serious media is corrupted, anyway.")

What's more, our brain does not feel the need to doubt, question or verify what we already believe in. This natural process is even more disturbing when we realise the algorithms on the internet, especially social sites, imitate the workings of our brain. That encloses us all in a vicious circle and the only way out is to employ our **awareness** and **critical thinking**.

In the chapter about filter bubbles and echo--chambers we already ran into the tendency of people to favour (only) information that confirms their existing beliefs or hypothesis. In psychology we call this phenomenon **confirmation bias.** (Noor, 2020) When searching for evidence, naturally, we try to support our opinion instead of rejecting it. For example, when we are convinced that vaccination is bad, we focus on those few exceptions that led to health problems and ignore the high percentage of cases when vaccination helped to protect from serious issues. A balanced objective appraisal is thwarted.

Lecturers as well as students should be aware of this **selective function of our brain** so they are not surprised that providing „verified facts" does not change people´s conviction. It applies especially to complex issues that provoke strong emotional responses.

Assure your students that **confirmation bias is normal** and it **affects us all**. It primarily serves as an efficient way to process information because of the limitless information humans are exposed to. (Noor, 2020) We don't have the capacity to check every single argument but at least we should be aware how confirmation bias works and how disinformers take advantage of it.

CONFIRMATION BIAS

EVIDENCE WE IGNORE

FACTS AND EVIDENCE

OUR BELIEFS

EVIDENCE WE BELIEVE

Source: Noor, 2020

What can we do minimise the confirmation bias:

> Read **entire articles**, rather than forming conclusions based on the headlines and pictures.

> Search for **credible evidence** presented in the article.

> Encourage yourself and others to gather information in a **conscious manner**. (Noor, 2020)

The disinformers also take advantage of another human feature and that is so called **counterwill**, an ingrained opposition to any sense of being forced, an automatic resistance to coercion. It is triggered whenever a person feels controlled or pressured to do someone else's bidding. (Maté, 2018, p. 364) That is why fake news always finds an offender or convicts somebody else of manipulation and lies. Because they want to take the focus off their own intentions of manipulation.

Every lecturer should be aware of the **Thomas Theorem** – sociological concept that says „facts" do not have a uniform existence apart from the persons who observe and interpret them. Rather, the „real" facts are the ways in which different people come into and define situations. (Oxford reference) That is why the definitions of situations can be **subjective** for a specific group or subculture. Remember that when you talk about „scientific facts", your students can recognize **another authority than science** so be ready to explain what criteria you acknowledge as the evidence of a reliable source.

The basis of Thomas Theorem also explains why there is a danger in the interpretation of the reality based on disinformation. It says: „If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Oxford reference) So no matter what „facts" we ground our opinions and convictions on, the consequence, like our behaviour or action, will be real and affect the world. Again, the attack on the Capitol can serve as an example.

In recent years, another term has entered the discussion in relation to radical extremism. This phenomenon is called **retrotopia** and describes the irrational longing for „the past as the future" which was secure and easy to get oriented in. The **rapidity of changes** causes **anxiety**. Larger and larger segments of Western society share a sense of being abandoned, ignored (not 'listened to') and made redundant. (Önnerfors, 2019) It is a nostalgia for the **lost identity** in a rapidly changing world where, especially, elderly people feel left behind. We won't go into the details of the phenomenon as it is a complex issue but you as lecturer should be aware of these sentiments and be prepared that some of your students might find themselves in this state of mind. In these cases, mutual understanding, respect, preserving your students´ dignity and strategic communication will be more than necessary.

If we want to take a deeper look at the tendency to succumb to disinformation, it can explain what weak spots disinformers target at. The psychological research to date suggests that people are attracted to conspiracy theories and disinformation when important **psychological**

needs are unsatisfied. Such people are looking for knowledge and clarity about important events. They also need to **feel secure** and in control of their surroundings and to maintain a positive image of themselves and the groups they belong to. (Blue, 2021) When these needs are not fulfilled in society, people start looking for groups that offer satisfaction.

Was it the beginning of war with terrorism in 2001 since when the society feels to be in the constant **state of emergency** or is it the culmination of long-lasting tendencies? In any case, current threats like Covid-19, financial, ecological and energy crises plus imminent war conflicts unfortunately create an **insecure environment** that plays into desinformators´ hands. It is natural for a person with fear for his/her life and property to seek a saviour who promises to fight the danger and the enemy, be it a real intention or populism. And if you need to fight an enemy, you have to point at him first.

What is paradoxical, is that disinformers manipulate the public into believing that they are actually heroes fighting evil, corruption and manipulation. Biassed information and echo chambers support people´s convictions and determination so they don't see the reason why they should revise their opinion. It is a vicious circle.

So what can we, as trainers, také from all this? Maybe that learning is far from being simply a cognitive process. The quality of **positive motivation to learn** and **emotions** have to be involved.

From the neuroandragogy point of view, our actions as trainers in relation to the students' motivation can be reduced to the issue of **stimulating the release of dopamine**, which hormone is responsible for the sense of satisfaction and motivation to act, and limiting the release of cortisol, which is largely responsible for the feeling of stress. The common stimuli for dopamine in a learning environment is a contact with something interesting and surprising and social relations that give us support and a sense of security.

Also, all recent research ultimately disproves the myths about the mobilising **effect of stress** on the learning process. Maintaining a prolonged sense of stress among students is only destructive: it causes a number of psychosomatic disorders, reduces the efficiency of memory, causes the death of neurons in the hippocampus and blocks creative thinking completely. (Neuroandragogy against exclusion, 2019) Trainer´s role is then not only about the transfer of information but about creating a learning environment where learning will no longer be a traumatic experience but **pleasant joy of acquiring new skills**.

Positive narratives

„Most people are not looking for provable truths. As you said, truth is often accompanied by intense pain, and almost no one is looking for painful truths. What people need is beautiful, comforting stories that make them feel as if their lives have some meaning."

—Haruki Murakami

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In recent years, more than ever, scientists and hence teachers and trainers encounter the obstacles in delivering evidence-based scientific facts to the general public. What do they miss in comparison to conspiracy theories and disinformation which are generally more appealing to people? It is evident – they lack **an emotionally based story.** Storytelling has always been an important part of the communication that ensures the collective survival of our species. However, the dissemination of scientific findings does not traditionally include storytelling which would make the information more accessible to the average audience.

Disinformation, stirring up negative emotions, is based on **negative narratives**. To beat them, we have to offer the public positive narratives. It should focus on what society is FOR, not AGAINST. (Carthy, 2021, p. 4).

When facing the negative narratives, the alternative/positive narrative is **not intended to contradict** an extremist message and point out its inaccuracies. Instead, it should tell a story that cannot sustain the extremist message. (Carthy, 2021, p. 14)

To provide positive narratives, visions, to society has been a role of the leaders. Now, it is up to you as a trainer to try to knock down the barrier and instead of bare debunking of disinformation, you have to provide an **adequate compensation**. Positive narrative or storytelling is basically a psychological game of persuasion. The stories combine verified facts with the strength of emotions which is the only way to beat the power of disinformation.

Our lesson plan on positive narratives tries to give the participants of your course a chance to understand how positive and negative narratives work. It is inspired by **public narrative**, a leadership-development practice developed by Marshall Ganz. (Narrative arts, 2021) It should motivate the participants to join in on behalf of a shared purpose and prevent conviction disagreements. Unlike storytelling, public narratives are not a script but a process that incorporates stories of the participants. It is about telling, listening, reflecting and telling again. It helps to build a community feeling.

An interesting link has also been found between **spirituality and conspiracy theories** shared on social sites. In the virtual world, in fact, conspiracy theories often merge with spiritual nar-

ratives. What they have in common is their **holistic character** – they explain the role of an individual within the society. They also share a certain form of predestination and the conviction that they have the access to the truth that is hidden from the others. (Rahimi, 2022)

Do we miss spirituality if we are so susceptible to conspiracy theories? Maybe we just lack the positive narrative that would explain the chaos around.

SPECIFICS OF TEACHING OLDER ADULTS

SPECIFICS OF TEACHING OLDER ADULTS

In the following chapters, we will pay attention to the specifics of an educational process of adults 55+ and introduce the factors that might influence your lessons. Even though it is necessary to take them into account, you should avoid too much generalisation and always see your group of students as individuals with different skills, life experience and background.

Neuroplasticity

Brain is a subject to ageing as the whole body so the brain functions also change with age and we have to take the processes into account:

- **the speed of brain operations is decreasing**, a mature person needs more time to perform a specific mental operation than a young person

- functions such as: **inhibition, concentration, reflex reactions** (located in the frontal lobes, subject to degeneration in the first place) **are weakened**

- **the working memory capacity is reduced** – man is able to simultaneously process less information provided by the senses

- **mental flexibility is reduced** (the ability to quickly switch between one and another intellectual operation)

- **selective attention is subject to interference** (the ability to capture and focus on significant environmental events)

- **divergent attention is weakened** (the ability to focus attention to different actions happening simultaneously)

- **semantic memory** (responsible for rules and definitions) and **episodic memory** (recording events in time) are **weakened** (Neuroandragogy, 2019, p. 6 -7)

However, the good news is that although the brain undergoes significant changes and adults need different teaching methods than younger people, it doesn't mean that their learning is less effective. Adults´ advantage is that they can connect new information with existing experience and acquired skills. You can argue that these processes can lead to rigid thinking and the unwillingness to change deep-rooted convictions but the mental rigidity is more often influenced by a manifestation of obstinacy in thinking and the lack of self-criticism about how the average adult perceives his/her past experiences than about the biochemical process in our brain.

We cannot forget **neuroplasticity** - the attribute of the human brain thanks to which it is capable of **adaptation, changeability, self-repair** and **learning at all ages**. In the adult age, new neurons are still being produced but most often within the existing neural networks, not as new structures. That is why children are better at „thinking out-of-the box" than adults. However, by stimulating the neuronal networks with new information and experience, the teacher can make use of this life-long process of neuroplasticity because the learning of adults is a process of **constant modification of previous experience through the experience following it**.

Neuroandragogy

In order to adjust the teaching methods to the needs of our target group of adults 55+, we must take into account the findings of the latest research in neuroandragogy, the youngest and most dynamically developed strategy concerning adult education. It focuses on the **cognitive functions** and **graduation of the adult brain** and thus adjusts the process of learning. Let's have a look at the main principles:

MEMORY

The effectiveness of learning depends on the effectiveness of memorising and then extracting specific information from the memory. As memory is generally weakened in older age, we need to reinforce it by employing various cognitive, emotional and physical techniques so the information is stored in a long-term memory.

EXPERIENCE

Nothing new under the sun-an adult learns most effectively through direct experience or combining new information or skills with his/her previous experiences which is enabled by the brain neuroplasticity. Experience affects our perceptual and cognitive abilities through the reorganisation of brain structure. Adults and elderly people often believe only their own experience and that is why experiential learning

should be crucial for the training. Also, be prepared that adults have developed patterns of learning methods that can be an advantage but also a barrier in accepting new methods and tools. They mostly experienced frontal teaching and can have troubles accepting collaborative methods.

INFORMATION PROCESSING

Experience also contributes to a higher level of reasoning. Adults process information more slowly because they want to avoid mistakes. Reconstruction and retrieval of information is also slower as the adult brain needs time to make connections with the stored information. Be patient.

REPETITION

As mentioned in previous chapters, one of the techniques that makes disinformation so effective, is the constant exposure to it and frequent repetition. The same applies for the teaching process. You cannot expect to change your students´ convictions and teach them all techniques in one lesson. The more repetition, the faster transfer to the subconsciousness.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Elder people sometimes feel undervalued and lonely in our fast and changing world. Be respectful and understanding.

Do not point out their deficiencies but offer a helping hand. Try to find ways to make use of their life-long experience in new conditions and environments. Specific tips for strategic communication are listed in the practical part.

APPROACH TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The lack of ICT skills of adults 55+, or the reluctance and shyness to use technology, is one of the biggest challenges a trainer has to face. However, refrain from generalisations – not all elderly people have the same approach to technology. It is important to find out what the level of ICT skills of the particular group is. We can only suppose that the participation in a course on fighting disinformation entails basic knowledge and operation of technological devices.

THREATS AND OBSTACLES

Older people will often struggle with details that will prevent them from completing their online task. It is important to build up their confidence in managing obstacles and threats while online. One way to do that is simply with repetition in tasks with less support and encouraging independence in the use of ICT. You can show the trainees that the threats and obstacles are often similar and provide them with a standard safe way to overcome the stress and struggles resulting from using ICT. Adult learners, generally, set learning

goals before the actual learning process and consider if the content of the training is relevant for the goal achievement

MOTIVATION

The interest and motivation of the elderly while learning is a key factor for the success of a training. **Positive motivation** („Together, we will find out how to get oriented in the issue of disinformation.") is more effective than negative motivation („You need to learn how to tell fake news from serious news so you are not manipulated."). Trainers consider this piece of advice **extremely important**. More than being a trainer, you are coaching for proper motivation and making sure they feel included every step of the way! In order to maximise the results of the training, don't hesitate to make it interactive and use games. It is also important to make the trainees understand the relevance of digital technology to their needs and preferences. Adult learners, in general, have inner motivation for obtaining new skills and knowledge that will help them with every-day situations, tasks and problems.

Activity and deep data processing

The result of an effective learning process is that the new knowledge/skill is stored in **a long-term memory** of a student and then is extracted when solving a problem. If the new knowledge/skill fails to reach the long-term memory, it creates an **impermanent memory** trace and is forgotten. If the brain activity associated with working on a given information has a deeper character, it requires **direct physical, mental or psychological involvement** and engages **more affective and cognitive processes**. This memory trace in the neural network is fixed and information is stored in a long-term memory. (Neuroandragogy, 2019, p. 8 – 9)

What does it mean for the preparation of a teaching plan? The training should be based on **Kolb's cycle** which places the **learner's experience** into the centre of the didactic process:

The Experiential Learning Cycle
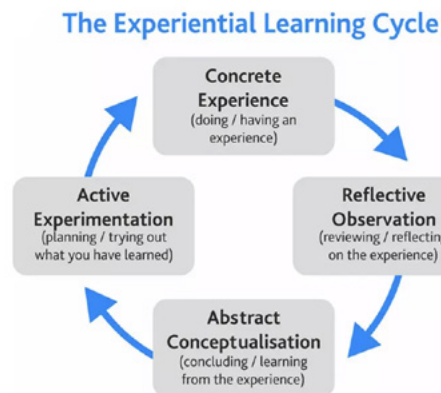
Source: McLeod, 2013

Your task as a trainer is to put the specific techniques and methods into the right phase of a sequence. Here are some examples:
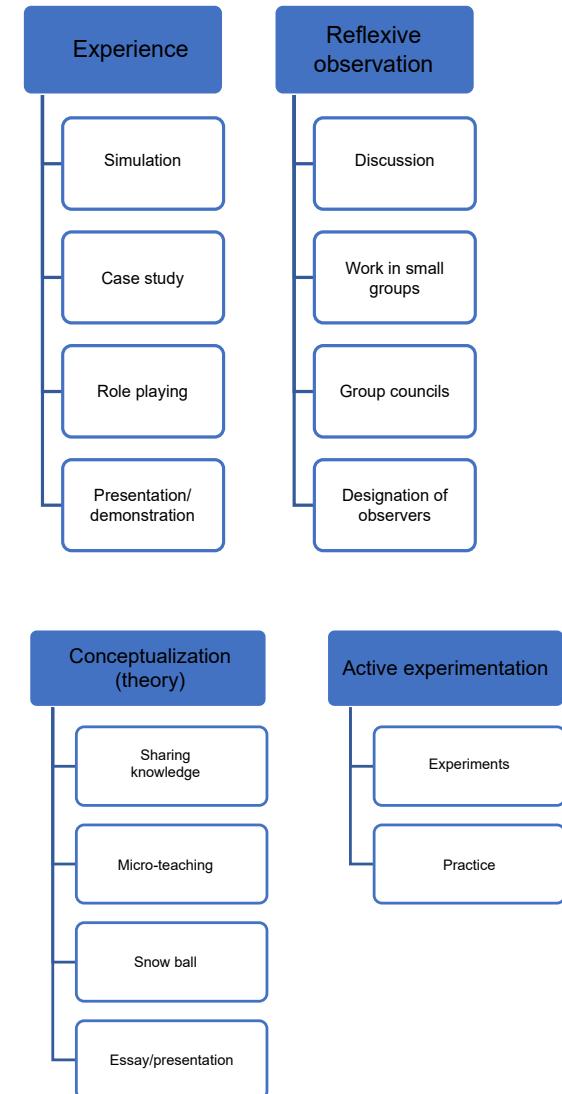
And what **principles** should a trainer use so the adult learners´ needs are met and the teaching process is effective?

o CRUCIAL! **Diagnose the needs** of your adult students – it defines the success of the training program. Each group will be different and have **diverse goals**, expectations, intentions and current skills and knowledge. Make your lessons **learner-centred** and reflect their needs.

o Create a **secure, trustworthy** and **welcoming learning environment** with the culture of empathy, respect, friendliness and authenticity. Sometimes **trust** is what people lack in relation to politicians, media or other authorities. Although it is a challenge for you as a lecturer, trust is essential.

o **Intimate environment** with fewer students is much better than big events. A sense of security is desirable.

o Be aware of your students´ struggle with **hearing or sight**. Use a louder voice but do not give the impression of shouting. Try to keep calm.

o Show **interest in students´ opinions** and encourage them to be a part of the learning process: ask questions, connect information with practice.

o Make sure all tasks are **feasible** so you don't stress your students during the lesson.

o Show a positive **attitude** and provide **constructive and positive feedback**.

o Make sure all content is **easy to understand**.

o **Respect** the feelings and perception of each individual student.

o Keep the lesson **dynamic**. Adult students are capable of listening and storing new information for about 20 minutes – have breaks and switch methods.

o Make a lesson an **exciting experience** based on experiential learning. By „learning by doing" an experience is tied to a personal reflection.

o Do not waste time explaining difficult theoretical concepts if your students are not particularly interested. The knowledge and skills your students learn should lead to **practical application** and **positive impact** on their every-day life.

o If you have a chance, **repeat** and **revise** to consolidate the memory.

o Use **clear language** and make **pauses** in your speech. Give your students time to process a question and think of the answer. DO NOT RUSH THINGS! Time pressure and speed requirements can be a serious stress factor.

o **Motivation** is a driving force. Be careful not to overstimulate your students and if needed, reduce the cognitive overload:

   • Present some information via the visual channel and some via the verbal channel

   • Break content into smaller segments and allow the learner to control the pace

   • Remove non-essential content

   • Words should be placed as close as possible to the corresponding graphics

   • Don't read on-screen text word-for-word

o In addition to the learning material, it is important to make **technology more inclusive** and to inform the elderly on how they can adapt their devices for a better and easier use. For example:Adjust text size: the majority of elders benefit from at least a slight increase intext size.

   • Adjust colour contrast: with age, our ability to distinguish between certain colour pairs diminishes, especially between white/yellow and blue/blue-grey.

   • Introduce the use of keyboard shortcuts: using a few common keyboard shortcuts can reduce frustration without requiring significant memorization.

   • Change mouse speed, colour and size: with age, mousing speed and precision generally decrease.

   • If your students struggle with English or other languages, help them install a translator into their browser. Then teach them to use the right mouse button to get the basic translation. These translators are not the best linguists but they help with the general idea of a text.

o Do not give **instructions** in imperatives. Use **indirect mode** like: „Let's check this article together."

o Create opportunities for practising acquired knowledge and skills. **Practice** is essential if you want your students to internalise the knowledge they gained.

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- o Adults, mainly because of the traditional education system they underwent, can be ashamed of making mistakes. Introduce the modern concept of making a **mistake** where it is understood as an **important input** experience defining the next steps of the educational process. Emphasise that it is not a failure to make a mistake but rather not to learn a lesson from it for the future.

- o If possible, **invite professionals** from the field of serious journalism or fact-checking to describe their own experience with disinformation and fake news.

- o **Monitor risk factors**. When a disagreement occurs in lessons, try to solve them in a dialogue. Emphasise that all opinions are acceptable but we have to differentiate them from facts.

- o Involve your students in assessing their own learning process. Encourage them to **evaluate** their performance and progress themselves.

- o Support your students´ **self-regulation** and **responsibility**. Your training should lead to students´ **individualization** and promote a life-long learning process that we are all a part of.

What to consider in needs analyses

Time devoted to the training. This factor will be determined by the scope and possibilities of your training. It is highly recommended to organise at least three separate sessions on the topic of disinformation so there is enough room for the theory and practice and participants have space to absorb new information and skills.

Skills. Essential part of all course preparation is to be familiar with the current skills of your students. It includes the level of ICT skills, media literacy and also the command of English. Elder people might appreciate a debate about the current situation on the disinformation scene as an ice-breaker at the beginning of the course. It helps to form **social bonds**, gives the students the opportunity to be heard and it gives you, the lecturer, the clues how to choose the strategy. It is also recommended to find out what **internet platforms** your students use and how much they think they face fake news and disinformation.

Interest/motivation. Define what **goals** and **interests** your students have and what tools and techniques to use in your course. The dominance of either internal or external motivation is also determinative as well as the identity of your students that they relate to. It can also be an interesting ice-breaking activity to reflect the **expectations** of the participants. What goals do they want to reach by attending your course?

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As soon as you have all input information about your students, decide if to proceed with the **central route** or **peripheral route**. Elaboration likelihood model explains this processing of information in more detail.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model seeks to explore how humans process stimuli differently and how the outcomes of these processes result in changing attitudes and, consequently, behaviour. (Barradas, 2021)

The **elaboration** refers to the amount of effort that any audience member of a message has to use to process and evaluate a message, remember it, and subsequently accept or reject it. (Barradas, 2021)

| Higher amount of time, skills and motivation | → | HIGH ELABORATION LEVEL | → | CENTRAL ROUTE |
| Lower amount of time, skills and motivation | → | LOW ELABORATION LEVEL | → | PERIPHERAL ROUTE |
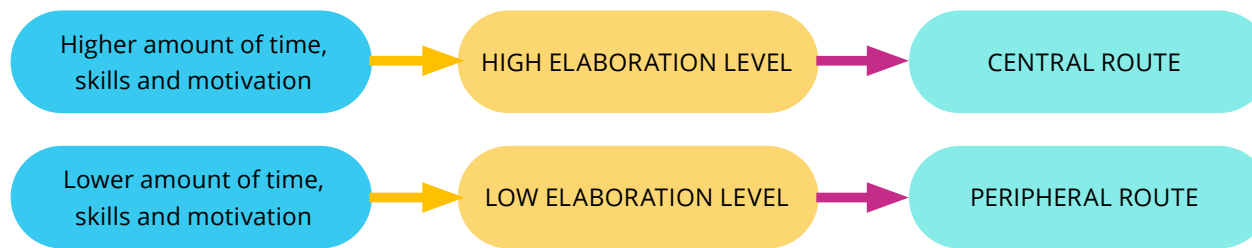
Taking the **central route** means that you focus on delivering **data** and **facts** to convince your audience about your message. It is logic driven and students are interested in analysing information and deep understanding of things. This route creates long-lasting attitudes and students are less distracted when following their goal.

Peripheral route, on the other hand, focuses on **cues** to associate **positivity** with the message.

The processing of information is not so in-depth and the attitudes are short-lived. It is more about the **context** than about the information itself.

Of course, there will be groups where the combination of both routes will be necessary depending on the specific conditions.

ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

Two Cognitive Path
Routes to Persuasion

High Elaboration Level

Central Route Persuasion

Going directly through the rational mind, influencing attitudes with evidence and logic

"My product has been proven more effective."

Low Elaboration Level

Peripheral Route Persuasion

Changing attitudes by going around the rational mind and appealing to fears, desires, associations.

"People who buy my product are happy, attractive!"

POWERSLIDES   2   WWW.POWERLIDES.COM

Source: Barradas, 2021.

How to plan activities

The choice of activities should be based on the results of your needs analyses. Define the problem first and than follow the procedure:

Define the need/problem

e.g. Participants are not sure how to verify a photo.

Identify the goals in terms of desired knowledge and skills (ideal state of what your students should learn)

e.g. Participants are aware of the issue of photomanipulation and are confident using tools to verify a photo.

Think of activities that will lead to improving knowledge and skills you identified in the previous step. Try to combine frontal instruction with various interactive activities as much as possible.

e.g. Distribute articles with images to be verified either in Google Reverse Search or TinEye. (see more in Lesson Plans)

More about the methods we recommend in our lesson plans

Usage of mind maps

Either you present a topic to your students or the participants are asked to work on a task, on a piece of paper or in an electronic form, individually or in a group, support using mind maps which are a **great tool** to enhance the learning process and remembering. Mind maps are **graphic representations of ideas** by means of **keywords** and usually also accompanied by **pictures**.

In the traditional learning process based on reading a text, mainly the left cerebral hemisphere is employed. But with graphic representation, pictures and colours, a bigger part of the right cerebral hemisphere is activated. Engagement of both hemispheres leads to awakening of bigger **creativity** so **new concepts** and **ideas** can occur.

Moreover, the clarity of the mind map allows us to see information in a **broader context**, not just in isolation, and makes us more aware of its **relationships**. (Posolda)

So mind maps help us create new ideas, understand better and they also significantly support our memory. We can use them, for example, for learning, planning, problem solving or creating projects.

So how does it work? Start with the **main topic** (word or picture) in the middle of a piece of paper/screen. From the main topic there are

curved lines (curved because of the stimulation of the right hemisphere) leading to **sub-topics**. From these there are smaller branches etc. It is recommended to use **pictures, symbols** and **different colours**. Mind maps are meant to be concise and clear so do not use full sentences but only **keywords**, **short headings** or **short phrases**.

The advantage of learning with mind maps is that if you draw a map, you are actually learning at the same time and you also relax while drawing. We can say that it is a way of learning in a natural way which does not cause the reluctance that can arise in some people during traditional learning.

It is recommended to draw by hand for bigger brain stimulation but there are various mind map generators online that you can use (such as https://www.mindmup.com). Their advantage is that you can also upload pictures from the internet if you are not a good drawer.

An example of a mind map with the main topic of Digital Citizenship

Source: DeWaard
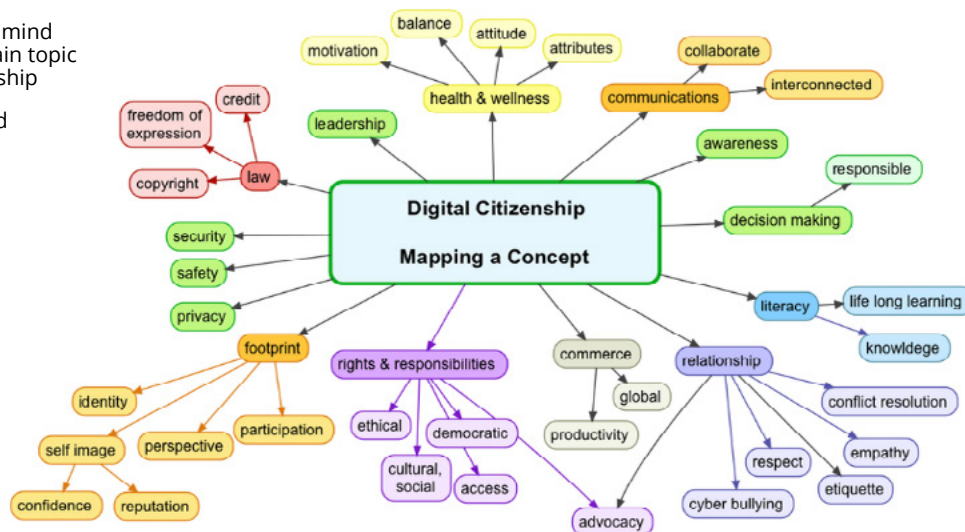
Jigsaw technique

Jigsaw technique is an effective alternative to the frontal teaching method. It incorporates **peer-to-peer learning and cooperation in a team** instead of merely passive listening to the trainer´s presentation. It can be applied to various activities, be it a theoretical research or practical activities.

It usually makes lessons **more enjoyable** and **motivates** participants because they actively contribute to the learning process.

The participants are divided into groups and each participant (or pair) is given a separate task in the group (e.g. to analyse the language of an article, the other to check the sources, etc.). After some self-study, make „expert groups" where the members with the same task from each group join together. Then give them some time to discuss the topic together and prepare presentations about the topic. Then send them

back to their original groups and let them present their topic. Encourage other members of the group to ask questions. In this way, for example when analysing an article for manipulative techniques, together they get a **full analysis** and they **learn from each other**. Also, by **explaining** the topic to other participants, the topic is attached more deeply in memory.

The role of a teacher employing this technique is more of a mentor than a trainer. He/she should assist and help when needed but the responsibility should be given to the participants.

Supporting adults in taking up self-study with the usage of ICT

An effective workshop should leave your students eager to continue the process of further discovery and self-study. In this respect, **self-motivation** will be the key factor in deepening students´ level of knowledge and skills.

Participants should also leave your workshops with a list of practical tools they can employ in their every-day life.

To support further practice, look out for the Break the Chain Web app and Dynamic demonstrator that will be available in all seven languages!

Hybrid/online learning

Although it is highly recommended to organise face-to-face training on disinformation due to the rapport and psychological aspect highlighted in this manual, the situation might demand **distant learning**, as in case of covid-19. Trainers as well as students should thus be ready that there might be a necessity to adopt an online training which could be challenging for adults 55+ and their trainers as some do not have experience with communication technologies and distance learning.

We share some tips that could prevent the shock from the changeover to the digital environment.

The format, participants´ skills and possibilities of your course define if to employ synchronous or asynchronous online learning – or both. **Synchronous learning** means that the participants as well as the trainer are engaged in learning **at the same time** and **can interact**. Typical examples are web conferencing or virtual classrooms. Among the most friendly are **Zoom, Google meet** or **Microsoft Teams.** The link to the conference room can be sent via e-mail and participants can basically join by a couple of clicks so even the less skillful can manage. A big advantage of synchronous learning is that a trainer can **assist** participants in solving various issues and **navigate** them in the online environment live via video call or chat. A great tool is also the function of **screen sharing** by which trainers can display pre-prepared material and presentations. The advantage of a training **being recorded** is that it can be accessed anytime or watched repeatedly.

Other benefits of synchronous learning are:

o Interaction between participants.

o Exchange of knowledge and experience between participants.

o Real-time feedback for the instructor.

o Training happens on a fixed schedule. (Priscila, 2020)

To prevent the one-way communication between a trainer and the participants during online classes, find out if the platform allows **break out rooms** - private space designed to facilitate group interaction. Zoom, Google meets and Teams support them. You can split your group into smaller teams and let them work separately. **Group work** is important and this can be an **online substitution**.

The benefits of asynchronous learning are:

o Participants can learn in their own time and schedule

o Less work for trainers

o Automated tasks reduce repetitive work such as giving online classes and grading exams (Priscila, 2020)

In **asynchronous learning**, on the other hand, there is no real-time interaction of participants. It involves pre-creation of online content that can be accessed by participants any time. Learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle where you can create the whole lesson plan are an example.

In the table below you can compare various forms of synchronous and asynchronous learning:

Synchronous learning	Asynchronous learning
Traditional classroom	Recorded class
Instant messaging	E-mail
Immediate feedback from instructor and peers	Sending a question and waiting for an answer
Phone call	Recorded voice message
In-person training	Online training courses (without live video)
Live webinar	Recorded webinar
Group-paced	Self-paced
Same time	Different times

(Priscila, 2020)

The best option for adults 55+ shall probably be the combination of both, synchronous and asynchronous learning – so called **hybrid or blended learning**. It is a combination of live classes/ webinars with pre-recorded lectures or presentations that can be accessed separately.

DISINFORMATION

PRACTICAL PART

PRACTICAL PART

Strategic communication: Tips how to talk to people with a different opinion and risk prevention

Prevention of conflicts is an important part of a lecturer´s equipment when entering the grounds of a disinformation topic. As the emotional aspect plays an essential role in this issue, a debate can easily escalate into a turbulent conflict. You cannot have total control over your students´ emotions but you should be ready that these situations can arise. The following tips can help you prevent the escalation of arguments.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND, NOT TO PERSUADE

Be strategic in terms of the purpose of the training – the goal should be *to understand* instead of *to persuade*. When you know what a challenging and long-term process it is to change somebody's conviction, you should lower the expectations of your teaching superpowers and focus on the appropriate conditions that can open the door to your student's awareness.

GOOD RAPPORT IS CRUCIAL

No matter how many facts you provide, it won't be effective if you don't succeed in building a good rapport with your students. You have to show respect to their opinions and establish the atmosphere of trust. Be a part of the group and don´t look down on their opinions and skills.

They need to feel it is not you vs them but rather we vs a problem. Don't challenge them but invite them to search for the truth together.

FREEDOM TO FIND THE MISTAKE

Once again, trying to persuade your students to change their opinion based on the facts you provide, will rarely be effective. Their reluctance is often caused by the fear that they are manipulated into another opinion so unless they really trust you, they might have trouble accepting what you are trying to teach them. Show them you trust in their abilities and let them find the mistake themselves instead of just preaching. You can gently navigate them by pointing out the inconsistencies in their view and discussing them.

DON´T PREACH, INQUIRE

As the precondition should always be the attempt to understand the target group, avoid lecturing and ask questions instead. Don't use „Why…?" questions that might stress your convinced students but support them in explaining their reasons. Ask them to provide more details by questions like: „What do you think of…?" „What is your assumption based on?" „What would change your opinion?" By this inquiry, you also get yourself a chance to assess the situation, adjust your expectations and adapt your methods.

LOOKING FOR THE AGREEMENT

Emphasizing differences and pointing out your students´ incompetence and the lack of skills will only lead to further frustration. Start on the firm ground and find what you agree on, e.g. „The Internet world is confusing and it's difficult to know one's way around it." „Nobody wants to be manipulated." Your students need to feel they have something in common with you. To reinforce your field of agreement, you can sacrifice the extremist viewpoints of your stance and admit that nothing is only black and white.

GOLDEN BRIDGE

It is important not to let your students, at any cost, lose their face and dignity. Show them that it is not a bad thing to change one´s conviction and opinion and that it is natural to learn and grow.

DON'T PUSH THEM

It takes much time and effort to change one's conviction so don´t push anyone. You can only provide navigation and assistance but the final decision has to be done by students themselves.

GIVE A LEAD

Be honest with yourself. You have to accept that we are all susceptible to cognitive bias and we all make mistakes that are natural for our brain. Admit to yourself how hard it is to change what we believe in or want to believe. We are on the same boat, only our degree of openness is different. The only thing that can save us in these troubled waters is empathy and the awareness of our vulnerability. Explain what made you form your opinion and that you are willing to change your own convictions.

How to tell if it is fake news

Remember to point out that there is no guaranteed recipe for identifying disinformation in all cases. The situation changes very quickly and with the help of technology, disinformers find new ways to camouflage disinformation. Topics also change as they reflect burning issues stirring up public debates. If it was easy, fact-checkers would not need hours to verify facts and disinformation would not be so wide-spread and effective. There are a couple of tips, though, how to tell quality news from fake news.

QUALITY NEWS	FAKE NEWS
News should reflect facts that have been detected by witnesses. There should be no evaluation, comments or speculations by the reporter. If it is a report focused on fact analyses or evaluation, ALL facts should be introduced first, not only one point of view.	Evaluation, comments, speculations, only one point of view.
Lets us form our opinion ourselves.	Imposes an opinion on us.
The name of the author is present.	Anonymous (nobody wants to be responsible).
Sources are mentioned and traceable.	There are no sources mentioned or are fake.
Other media also deal with the information.	There are no other media dealing with the information.
Text is neutral, informative and includes proper arguments.	Text includes labels, derogatory expressions, poor or no arguments and is persuasive.
Provides rational arguments.	Elicits strong emotions.
Photos are in the right context and the author is mentioned.	Photos are edited, in the wrong context and the origin is questionable.
Does not impose obligation on the recipient.	Calls for action.

5 QUESTIONS to assess media content

The biggest human rights NGO in the Czech Republic, People in Need, advocates and leaders of media literacy at primary and secondary schools, created a practical tool (JSNS, 2018) that we adapted for the purposes of this manual. To assess a media content, you should consider **5 basic questions**:

HOW?

How does the message attract attention? What is the **language** and the **audiovisual form** like? What **emotions** does it evoke?

Focus on clickbaits and photos and videos used. The language of disinformation is emotional, judgemental and the author speaks directly to the reader.

WHOM?

Who is the **target audience** and how does the message get to them? How is it shared? How can it affect opinions, attitudes and behaviour of the recipients?

The disinformation targets a specific audience. The content and form is tailored exactly to its peculiarity that is determined by data collection and algorithms.

WHO?

Who is the **author**? Can you find any information about him/her? Who authorises the publication?

Specialisation of the author (marketing, journalism...) and the person responsible for the publication of the media can help us set the context for the information and the possible reasons why it was published. If the author hides his/her identity, we should be wary about its content.

WHY?

Why was the message created? Who **benefits or profits** from it?

The reason why information was created helps understand the motives and intentions of the author. Benefits can be various: publicity stunt, commercial profit, empowerment, education, etc.

WHAT?

What is the **content** of the information and what **opinions** and **values** are present? Are **other points of view** missing? Are the **sources** mentioned and are they verifiable?

The purpose of the message should be evident and separated. Is it news, commentary or a paid advertisement? Sources should always be mentioned as the reader is able to check its reliability. Otherwise, anyone can fabricate anything.

A couple of notes on the content of disinformation examples

Be open to your students´ needs. Ask them to send you/bring to class examples of disinformation they came across on the internet or a piece of information/post they would like to verify. It makes the relationship with your students stronger and you demonstrate that your primary intention is to help them get oriented in the internet jungle.

Even though it is tempting, try to avoid examples of disinformation that deals with the current nr. 1 controversial political issues laden with stormy emotions. You always have to be ready to deal with students with different opinions and beliefs but if you, for example, feel that some political issues might bring an undesirable atmosphere, try to choose examples from different topics. It is recommended to include examples of false advertising because older adults can be susceptible to it.

On the other hand, the motivation and elaboration is higher if the information is **personally relevant** to the audience and somehow relates to the identity of its members. People will be more willing to discuss the information dealing with the safety of their family than political tendencies on another continent. Hence, your choice of the topics should be **well-balanced, motivating** but **not stirring up unpleasant emotions**. You can try to start with advertising disinformation that is usually not linked to any beliefs or opinions and where the techniques of

manipulation can be more evident. And only later, apply the same principles to other targets of disinformation. In the lesson plans in the second part of this manual we will be using some general examples in English, however, trainers are expected to prepare their own disinformation examples in the **participants´ native tongue** and with respect to the cultural background of the country and the groups´ other characteristics.

Make sure your students understand that you are not here to tell them what information is right and wrong. You are here to pass on the knowledge of techniques and tools that the disinformers use. For the same reason, stay objective and avoid expressing your personal beliefs and inclinations. On the other hand, stay human and acknowledge that it is a real challenge to keep track with the inventiveness and craftiness of disinformers and that your students are admirable for their courage to face disinformation.

Evaluation

For the **revision** of acquired knowledge, but also for other activities, you can use the **online quiz platforms**. Checking understanding in the form of a quiz game is not as stressful as tests and usually motivates students, young or old, to learn through play. On platforms like **Join a Quizizz** or **Kahoot** you can easily prepare your own test or choose out of a quiz database on various topics and in different languages, including fake news and disinformation.

To check factual knowledge, fact-checking skills, identifying manipulative strategies and the ability to use digital devices effectively, you can give

your students very similar or same entry and final tests and measure the progress.

Another method that helps students structure their knowledge and skills and enables the trainer to check understanding, is called **3-2-1.** At the end of the lesson participants are asked to write down:

- **Three** things that they have learned from this lesson or from this text.

- **Two** questions that they still have.

- **One** aspect of class or the text that they enjoyed.

Use students' responses to guide teaching decisions. 3-2-1 responses can help you identify areas of the curriculum that you may need to review again or concepts or activities that hold special interest for students.

Sharing 3-2-1 responses is also an effective way to **prompt a class discussion** or to **review material from the previous lesson.** (Facing history and ourselves, 2014)
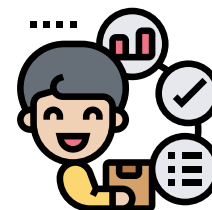
LESSON PLANS

AND TIPS FOR TEACHING

Lesson plans and tips for teaching

Next part of the manual contains some **l**esson plan tips on the most important topics that can inspire your courses. In the process of the lesson, there are **links to the theoretical part** of the manual to support abstract conceptualisation.

The order of the lessons is recommended but can be adapted to your needs. The lessons work individually so you can only choose separate parts.

After the training participants should be able to:

- understand and explain basic terms used in the context of disinformation and fake news

- understand why negative narratives are used in disinformation

- understand how stereotypes and confirmation bias influence our decisions

- discern when stereotypes and confirmation bias are exploited by the disinformers understand the basics of information verification

- understand the goals of disinformation and the techniques used

- apply the knowledge to the independent verification of information

- understand the consequences of sharing false information for the society and oneself

- verify a photo or video online

- discern a photo/video depicting another event, time and place (in the wrong context)

- understand how a photo can be edited

- differentiate between an opinion and a fact used in the media news coverage

- understand what role facts and opinions play in a functioning democracy

- assess the trustworthiness of media

- understand the operation of free social sites

- is aware of the existence of fake accounts on social sites – trolls and bots

- is aware of the dangers social sites can represent

- understand how algorithms affect what we see online

- is aware of the nature of chain mailing

- understand how to react to chain emails and disinformation

- develop further critical thinking and analytical skills for assessing media content

For examples in English on various topics from pandemic to politics, you can find, e.g. on Demagog page

DISINFORMATION:
BASIC TERMS

TOPIC: GETTING FAMILIAR WITH THE WORLD OF DISINFORMATION – BASIC TERMS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
To introduce the topic of disinformation in a playful way.

To create a pleasant motivating environment where acquiring new knowledge is fun.

To be able to understand and explain basic terms used in the context of disinformation and fake news.

(Trainer: To check the current knowledge and attitudes concerning disinformation.)

RATIONALE:
The lesson is not to make adults learn the terms by heart. However, it is important they understand their meaning and are able to match them with examples. It is recommended participants keep the list of terms as a personal reference and use it whenever needed.

TIME:
45 – 60 min. depending on the discussion

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:

crossword on disinformation printed out – use one of the user-friendly online crossword generators (e.g. https://crosswordlabs.com), real-life examples demonstrating the terms that can be projected on a screen, name tags, stationery

Lead-in

Frontal

- Welcome your audience in the fast-changing world of technology and media. Assure them that with its pace, it is definitely not a shame not to keep track with all the changes. However, there are some principles that will help them not to get lost in the overwhelming influx of information and limit the negative effect of disinformation.

- Invite them to go through **the most important terms** in the field of disinformation and understand what they mean.

- If participants don´t know each other, use **name tags** until they (and you) remember the names.

Exposition / experience

Groups

- Divide participants into groups.

- Provide each individual with a **crossword**.

- Give them space to read through and solve it individually first, then check and discuss together in groups.

- Monitor the activity and assist if needed.

Reflective observation + Abstract conceptualisation

Class / frontal

- Elicit the answers from participants and check the answers together.

- Use a board and put the terms into a **mind map** for a better understanding and more effective remembering.

- Check the results together and encourage a **discussion** on how your students understand the concepts. Invite them to provide **examples** they have experience with.

- It is recommended to have a pre-prepared **presentation** of examples demonstrating the attributes of each term. The more senses involved, the better retain of information. The discussion can evolve if the terms are connected to real-life examples.
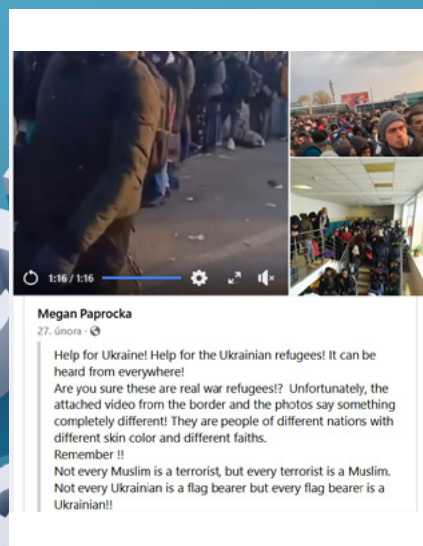
Active experimentation

Groups / frontal

- Switch participants in groups and give each group a set of disinformation examples (clickbaits, spam, fake news, false advertising, troll´s contributions on social sites, etc).

- Let them write down the **features of the examples** and name the **attributes** together.

- Check understanding. Do not ask „Do you understand the topic?" but use **specific questions** checking understanding of the content of the lesson, e.g. „What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?"

Example of a crossword in English:
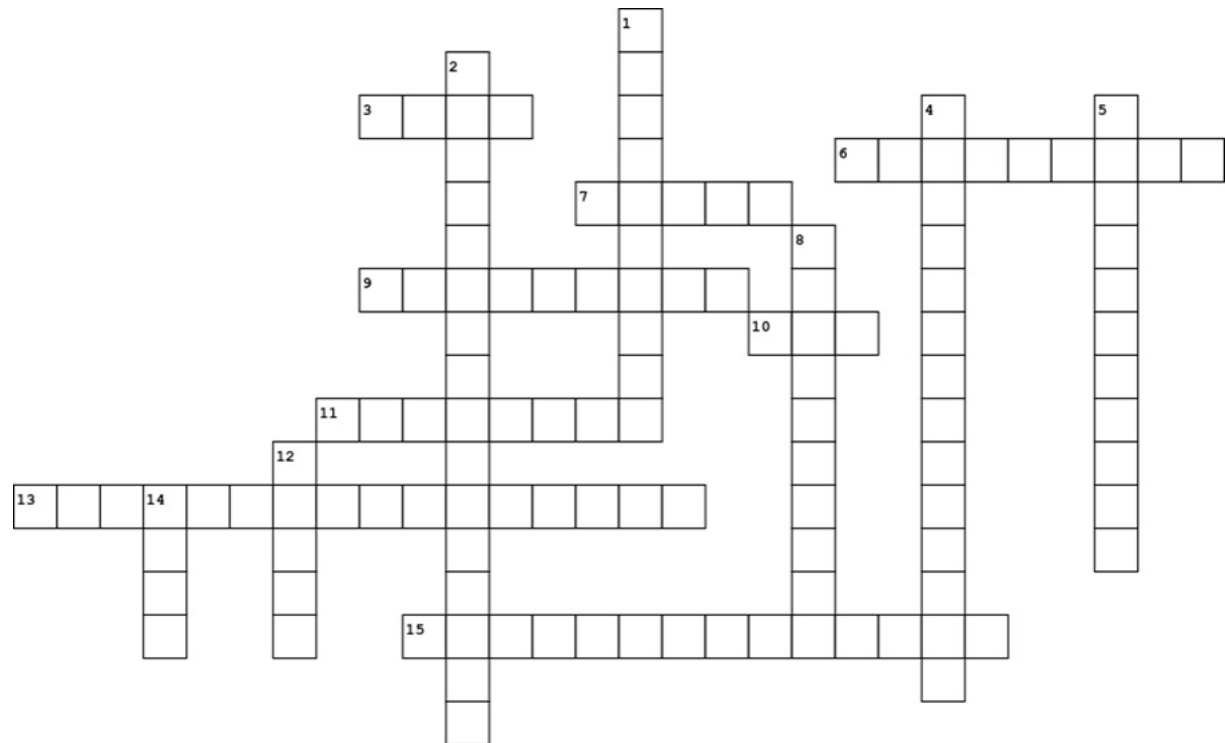
Across

3   An example of disinformation in the form of alarming chain messages that encourage the reader to resend or share it.

6   Sensationalized headline or a piece of text that generates emotional response, sometimes accompanied by a provoking or exciting photo/video. It is intended to attract attention and encourage people to click on links to particular websites that often include advertising.

7   Groups of people who emerged in cyberspace as a reaction to the activities and impact of trolls. They check facts and fight disinformation by debunking. Unlike in troll farms, their activity is not paid.

9   A bulk forwarded email whose content usually consists of disinformation, hoaxes, propaganda or commercial offers and an appeal to forward the email further on. They can include attachments with dangerous computer codes (virus, Trojan horse) and the e-mail addresses of the recipients can be abused.

10   A computer program that automatically creates fake profiles on social sites and can be programmed to autonomously spread, share and comment.

11   New term for a type of disinformation that imitates the content of the news media. It is partially based on credible information so it looks trustworthy but the tone is rather sensational.

13   A theory that explains an event or a set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by some elite authorities such as government, secret services or economical groups.

15   Misinformation created and shared with the intention to deliberately deceive the reader/listener in order to manipulate or confuse the public opinion.

Down

1.   Organised groups whose main task is to produce a huge amount of disinformation and overload the cybernetic space. A well-known Glavset agency in St. Petersburg, for example, employs more than 1000 full-time bloggers who handle a number of fake Facebook and Twitter accounts.

2.   Any advertising or promotion that misrepresents the nature, characteristics, qualities or geographic origin of goods, services or commercial activities. Deceptive or false advertising can lead consumers to purchase products that are actually counterfeit, defective, or even dangerous.

4.   False information shared without the intention to deceive. Typical examples are urban legends – folklore humorous or horrifying stories that happened „to a friend of a friend". The intention is to share an exciting story with the effort to draw attention rather than deceive and manipulate the reader/listener.

5.   Person whose job is to verify factual information, especially in something that is published.

8.   Spreading information in order to deliberately form public ideas, attitudes and behaviour so the reactions are in accordance with somebody´s intentions and needs.

12.   A person that participates in online discussions and stirs up disputes, provokes and insults other discussants, diverts from the topic and feeds cynicism and distrust in everything. Generally, their goals are to manipulate public opinion and set the population against one another. Some do it for fun, some of them are paid for this activity.

14.   Unrequested messages, usually an email, spread on a mass scale on the Internet. Originally commercial, now can include any sorts of manipulative content.

TIPS:

- If the needs analysis shows that the knowledge of the issue is very low, consider introducing and discussing examples first and then proceed to the crossword task. The reason is that for some participants it can be frustrating to be confronted with so many new terms at the same time.

- Depending on the level of knowledge the participants, provide the crossword **WITH or WITHOUT hint** = the list of terms to choose from. With the target group 55+, we recommend including it in the task for easier orientation.

- Emphasise the concept of **intention** as the difference between misinformation and disinformation.

- Remind your students that it is definitely not necessary to remember the terms and definitions by heart. On the contrary, the list should serve as a **reference** that students can go back to in the process of the training. Encourage them to take the list home so they can use it as a dictionary when needed.

SPAM   BOT   CONSPIRACY THEORY   TROLL FARMS   FAKE NEWS   MISINFORMATION   TROLL   CHAIN MAIL   ELVES   DISINFORMATION   PROPAGANDA   FALSE ADVERTISING   HOAX   CLICKBAIT   FACT-CHECKER

POSITIVE NARRATIVES

TOPIC: BUILDING UP A GOOD RAPPORT, TRUST AND MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO FIGHT NEGATIVE NARRATIVES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To motivate participants to join you in action on behalf of a shared purpose.
To understand why negative narratives are used in disinformation.

RATIONALE:

The lesson plan is inspired by public narrative, a leadership-development practice developed by Marshall Ganz. (Narrative arts, 2021) The social aspect of the lesson is evident: unfortunately, sometimes even the lack of communication might lead adults to disinformation susceptibility. A group finds a common positive narrative and understands how it could be used to fight disinformation which commonly contains negative narratives.

TIME:
90 min (+ 30 min) – can be split

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:

flip chart/screen, pre-prepared topic for an activity: „controversial" event or situation in history that has been misused for spreading disinformation (e.g. origin of COVID-19, 5G network etc.)

Lead-in

TIPS:

- You can use this lesson at the beginning, as well as throughout the whole course. The advantage of using it as the initial activity is **the rapport building** and **motivation** while later or at the end of the course, after acquiring some knowledge about disinformation, it gives participants more chances to be aware of the impact of disinformation on our behaviour.

Groups / class

- According to the number of participants, elicit a discussion either in small groups or as a whole class.

  o What is a conspiracy theory?

  o Do you know any examples?

  o Why do you think conspiracy theories can become successful? What techniques do conspirators use?

- Discuss together. You should come to the topic of <u>negative and positive narratives</u>.

Concrete

experience

Class

- If you feel your students are still ashamed to speak in class, start with smaller groups and then discuss together.

STORY OF SELF

- Sit in a **circle** and give participants a minute to think about a question:
- *„Why are you, personally, here?" (In another context than a class you can ask: „Why were you called to what you have been called to?"*
- Everyone has a **story to tell** and an experience that led him/her to the cause. It is important to learn to **listen** to other people's stories and this exercise invites listeners to **connect** with the teller.
- It is recommended to **write down** the answers for the next steps.

STORY OF US

- In the second part you create **a collective story** which can be also described as **„shared purposes, goals and visions".**
- Let participants define the collective story together: *„Why are we here?"*

STORY OF NOW

- In Ganz´s words, this stage should define the **challenge this community now faces**, the **choices** it must make and the **hope** to which we can aspire. (Narrative arts, 2021)
- This story should reflect the preceding stages, including the values
- You can also lead the debate to the **values** they want to follow. Most probably, you will get the positive ones (security, freedom, peace etc. - basic human needs)
- This step creates a **sense of community** important for building **trust**.

LINKING THE STORIES TOGETHER

- The last stage of the activity is linking the stories together.
- Each person will now have their positive narrative including a **unique personal story**, as well as, the **community story**.
- Your **public narrative** can change over time, for example, according to the challenges your community faces – this process is beneficial as the goal is not to produce a final script but rather to **learn the process**. Then you can generate the narratives again and again depending on your needs.

Reflexive observation

Class

- Reflect and discuss what was happening in the previous activity.
- Encourage participants to express how they felt in individual stages.

Abstract conceptualization

Class

- Once again, return to the topics of negative and positive narratives. Based on the experience from this lesson, participants should be aware of the benefits that narratives bring to our lives and how disinformers and conspirators can exploit this tendency.

Active experimentation	**Groups / class**	• Find a „controversial" event or situation in history that has been misused for spreading disinformation (e.g. origin of COVID-19, 5G network etc.) • Participants will have a task to browse the internet and **find an article reporting the news.** • One group (groups) will focus on finding an article based on positive narratives and the other group (groups) will focus on news using negative narratives. • When finished, let them present the articles. • Compare and contrast the results together. Discuss how what we read can influence our behaviour.

Active experimentation (activity 2 – optional)	**Groups / Individual (set as a homework)**	• You can finish your lesson with a **creative and fun** task but as it might be challenging for the participants, make sure they understand the objective of the activity. • As in the previous stage, divide your students into groups responsible for either positive or negative narratives. • Set one topic, e.g. MOON LANDING • Instruct groups to **write a short article** – one group using negative narratives, the other group positive narratives. (If you feel writing would be too difficult for your students, you can instruct them just to analyse articles on the topic and prepare arguments if positive or negative narratives are used as they did in the lesson .) • Read, discuss and have fun.

STEREOTYPES AND CONFIRMATION BIAS

TOPIC: HUMAN SUSCEPTIBILITY TO DECISION-MAKING BASED ON STEREOTYPES AND CONFIRMATION BIAS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand how stereotypes and confirmation bias influence our decisions.

To be able to discern when stereotypes and confirmation bias are exploited by the disinformers.

To develop further critical thinking and analytical skills for assessing media content.

RATIONALE:

Our decision making is influenced by many factors. Stereotypes and confirmation bias, that usually help us get oriented in the complicated world, are frequently exploited by the disinformers because they know how our brain works. The lesson is to demonstrate that it is not easy to escape the influence of stereotypes and confirmation bias, however, the awareness of this phenomena helps limit their negative consequences.

TIME:
90 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:
screenshots/articles videos of disinformation exploiting stereotypes, screen/board/flipchart

Lead-in

Frontal / class

- Elicit a discussion on **stereotypes**. *What are stereotypes? What are they for? Are they good or bad? In what ways can they be harmful?*

- As an example, you can create a mind map and elicit stereotypes about a nation, e.g. Czechs.

| Concrete experience / Reflexive observation | Groups | • Distribute some examples/screenshots/videos of **stereotyping** in disinformation, e.g. immigrants in Europe as in the debunked news below. You can use one example (easier) or each group can work on a different one.

• Instruct them to analyse the article and find examples when stereotypes have been exploited to **foster hatred**. |

Source: EU vs. Disinfo, Demagog

Stop The Islamisation Of Europe

Stop the islamisation of europe

In Sweden, Swedish women have no protection from sexual assault by men of colour. Raping Swedish women is becoming a right for men of coulour. Swedish women are afraid to report rapes because they might be accused of hate crimes by the police just because they denounced sexual assault by a man of colour.

The Swedes are such sheep that they reelect governments that favor immigrant invaders over ethnic Swedes.

Abstract conceptualization

Frontal / class

- Elicit findings from the groups.
- Discuss the usage of **stereotypes in disinformation** and try to find more examples that the participants encountered.
- Explain that stereotypes are reinforced, among other things, by confirmation bias. In the next part of the lesson, participants will learn what it is and how it is connected to the issue.

Exposition / Concrete experience

Frontal / groups

- Divide your students into groups or work all together.
- Start with a little **problem-solving game/puzzle**. Tell the participants to complete the sequence of numbers and guess the rule the sequence obeys:

2	4	8	?	?	?

- Give them a minute to think about the answer in groups or alone.
- Elicit the answers. First, ask about the numbers. Confirm by saying YES or reject by NO. In most cases, the answer will be confirmative. Second, ask about the rule (tell them to be careful with the answer) – and again confirm or reject.
- Your rule is extremely easy: *Each number must be larger than the one before it.* Most adults, trained by experience, will come up with a tricky answer: *Each number is double the previous number.* And then they make a classic **psychological mistake**. They don't expect to hear the answer "no." Sometimes, the reactions can be **emotional**. Let them guess until somebody guesses the rule right or the class gives up.
- For English speakers, the puzzle is also available online here.
- You can also suggest (maybe as homework) trying out **Mahzarin Banaji** tests if they are available in your language **(online here)**. They are widely recognized implicit association tests, or IAT, which help point out the "thumbprint of the culture on our brain."

Reflexive observation / Abstract conceptualisation	Class / frontal	

- The reaction following the moment when the answer is „no" is called **confirmation bias.** People are more likely to believe information that fits their **pre-existing beliefs** and they are also more likely to go looking for such information. It also shows how we decide based on our previous experience. In this exercise, the overwhelming majority of people gravitate toward **confirming their theory rather than trying to disprove it**. We make decisions under the influence of our pre-existing beliefs – confirmation bias. It is not bad but we should be aware of the fact that there are **other points of view**, maybe contradictory.

- Discuss the process of our decision making with the whole class. Explain what happened during the puzzle solving and how confirmation bias works.

- Elicit a discussion about the **message** we should draw from this knowledge: When we want to test a theory, we cannot only look for examples that prove it. Even if we think that we are right, we need to make sure we're asking questions that might actually produce an answer of „no". We´re just humans, though.

- If you know the topic of **COVID-19/vaccination** won't disturb your class, use it as an example and point out how the disinformation scene has been fuelled by the two **opposing parties** while each tended to defend their stance by focusing only on choosing the **supportive arguments.**

Active experimentation	Groups / class	

- Divide participants into groups and distribute **articles/posts** which intentionally use stereotypes. Instruct them to look for examples of **stereotyping**.

- Ask them to describe what type of **reader** would be inclined to click on this article and believe its content.

- Discuss together.

OPINION VS FACT

TOPIC: MERGING AN OPINION WITH A FACT AS A METHOD OF NEWS MANIPULATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To differentiate between an opinion and a fact used in the media news coverage

To develop further critical thinking and analytical skills for assessing media content.

To understand what role facts and opinions play in a functioning democracy.

RATIONALE:

The public often mistake opinions for facts and disinformers exploit this situation. In a democratic society, nobody can be punished for their opinions, thanks to the freedom of speech. But when disinformation intentionally passes opinion/distorted reality off as facts and the audience perceives it like that, we have to understand it as a form of manipulation. In this lesson participants will practise differentiating between opinions and facts in media content.

TIME:
60 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:
examples of opinions vs facts

Lead-in

Frontal / class

- Encourage a discussion on these topics:

    o   What is journalism? Do opinions have a place in journalism?

- Point out the difference between the **news reporting** and **opinion pieces.**

Concrete experience

Groups

- Distribute mixed up examples of opinions and factual statements in the groups, such as:

  Humans need oxygen to survive. X Oxygen is the most important element.

  The capital of Italy is Rome. X Rome is the nicest city in Italy.

  People keep cats as pets. X Cats are the best pets.

  New Year's Eve is on 31st December. X New Year's Eve gives you a chance to change your life.

  In 2021, 95 % of young people in the EU made daily use of the internet. X Teenagers use the internet to waste their time on social media.
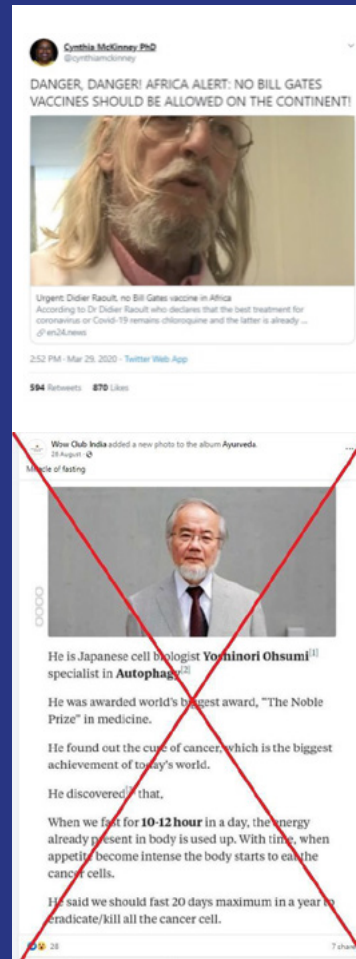
  The legal drinking age is 18. X The legal drinking age should be lowered to 16.

- Easier version is to provide variations on the same topic as in the examples above. In a more difficult version, use different topics.

- Instruct participants to decide if a statement is a **fact or opinion** and why they think so.

Reflexive observation / Abstract conceptualization

Class

Source: Facebook / Twitter

- Elicit answers from the groups. Let them define how we can tell a fact from an opinion. Here are some hints:

OPINIONS:

o Usage of biassed words (best, better, good, worst, bad, worthless...)

o Usage of qualifiers (always, might seem, shouldn´t, never...)

FACTS:

o Can be proven or demonstrated.

o Can be verified by trustworthy documents or witnesses.

- For better understanding and the connection to journalism you can provide examples of disinformation articles based on **opinion and news reporting based on facts** and discuss if facts or opinions are used.

66

Active experimentation

Two groups

- Invite participants to play a little game called **Reporters and commentators**. Divide them into two groups.

- Encourage them to write a short article for their newspaper using the same hints but reporters will create a **news report**, while commentators an **opinion piece**. Of course, participants can source information from the internet.

- Set one topic, e.g. WHAT ARE CHEMTRAILS.

- Encourage both groups to read their articles aloud. Discuss

TIPS:

- The lesson is also a great starting point for a discussion about <u>freedom of speech</u>.

  o *Are we free to say anything about anyone, even though it is just our opinion?*

  o *Are there any limits freedom of speech in a democratic society?*

DISINFORMATION GOALS AND TECHNIQUES

TOPIC: IDENTIFICATION OF DISINFORMATION GOALS AND TECHNIQUES IN MEDIA CONTENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand the basics of information verification

To understand the goals of disinformation and the techniques used

To practise skills necessary for independent and critical assessing of media content

To understand the consequences of sharing false information for the society and oneself

RATIONALE:

Especially older people, used to some level of morality in society, often argue: „Why would they do it? Why would they lie?" That is why we consider it important to lead a discussion about the possible motives and goals disinformers can have.

Media content can be manipulated in so many ways that it is impossible to summarise the techniques into one principle. Even though it might sound like a difficult challenge for your students, it is important to calm them down by offering a way to focus on the techniques separately with the usage of a concise manual.

TIME:
90 – 120 min + 30 min optional task

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:
articles/videos in which participants will be able to identify various disinformation techniques, summary of goals and techniques *(included in the manual – links in the lesson plan)*

TIPS:

- Advice participants to use **5 questions manual** until they feel confident enough to assess the content without its clues.

Frontal / class

Lead-in

- Elicit a discussion about the **motives and goals** that could lead to creation of fake news and disinformation, in general.

- Give examples and list the possible reasons in a visual form.

- Explain why information **verification** can be a difficult job and discuss the profession of a **fact-checker**.

- Introduce the tools participants can use to verify information. Direct them to the summary of **5 questions** from the manual.

Concrete experience

Groups

- Distribute **examples of disinformation media content** in groups.
- Instruct groups to look for **suspicious techniques** that might signal the **manipulative content**.
- Encourage them to verify the information from **other sources**, on Google maps, etc. depending on the type of content.

  With social media posts, do not forget to turn participants´ attention to the commentary of the one who shared the post, esp. If it is a public figure. Disinformers share disinformation with a specific intention, not just to inform.
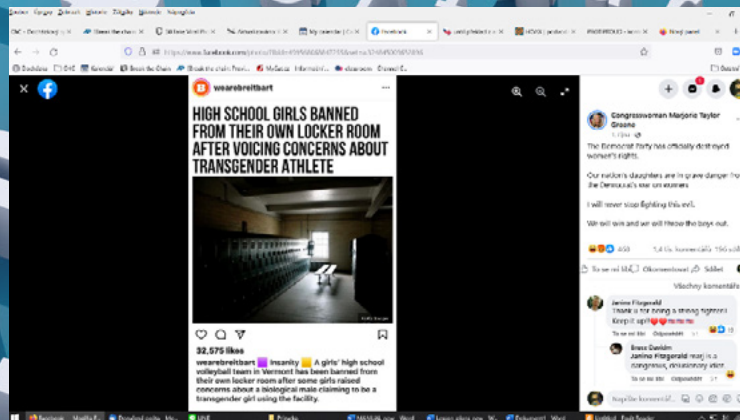
Source: Facebook / Twitter

Reflexive observation	**Class**	• **Screen** the examples so everyone can see and **analyze** them together. • Check understanding in the process and explain new concepts. • Elicit a **discussion**: o *What could be the goal of the author of the article, in your opinion? Why do you think so?*
Abstract conceptualization 70	**Class**	• Provide a <u>visual list of techniques</u> and <u>tricks</u> and go through them together. Explain if needed and provide more examples. 70
Active experimentation	**Individual**	• This task can be done as a part of the lesson or as homework. • Instruct participants to create an **article/post** using **disinformation techniques and tricks**. They can provide their article with a **visua**l. • The topic can be random or you can set one like: *A group of adults regularly gather at….* (complete with the name of your location). • The brave ones can share their results in class. It is usually a fun activity.

SOURCES

TOPIC: QUALITY CRITERIA OF ASSESSING SERIOUS JOURNALISM IN COMPARISON TO UNRELIABLE SOURCES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To be able to assess the trustworthiness of media

To introduce criteria of reliable sources

RATIONALE:

Although it might be a matter of conviction and beliefs, it is essential to discuss the topic of the media credibility with your students. In every-day life, people do not usually verify each single piece of information but rely on a specific source they consider trustworthy and independent. Although it can be tricky to find out, there are signs that should warn us that the source is rather subjective and manipulative than objective and informative. This lesson helps adults tell the difference.

You can also mention that the advocates of serious, quality and objective journalism in Europe deal with the issue of media rating which can serve as a reference for your students. *(You can find the links to national media rating in the annex)*
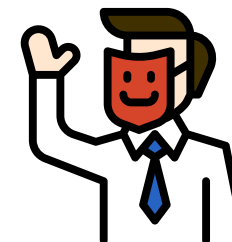
TIME:
 45 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:
links to reliable as well as unreliable/biassed sources in your country, summary of reliable sources criteria *(included in the manual)*

Lead-in

TIPS:

- If interested, you can draw attention to the world **Press Freedom Index** by **Reporters without borders** on their webpage <u>here</u>.

Pairs / class

- Start with a **discussion in pairs** (participants can switch in pairs if you are fostering relationships or want them to get to know one another):

o *What media/platforms do you use to follow news?*

o *What other media do you read/watch/listen to?*

Concrete experience	**Groups**	• Distribute **links to media web pages/sites** operating in your country. For better comparison, we recommend to give each group two links – one to a serious quality media and the second one to less serious or even disinformation platforms. • Instruct groups to analyse the pages and comment if they consider the media to be **reliable** and **why**. Work with the concept that nothing is black and white and while reliable sources do not always fulfil ALL criteria, the unreliable can fulfil some of them. It is up to us to conclude which characteristics prevail. • In case you know the level of skills is low, you can provide participants with **a summary of <u>reliable sources criteria</u>**. For a more challenging task, you can leave the summary for the Abstract conceptualization phase.
Reflexive observation	**Groups**	• Ask groups to **reflect on their experience** and introduce the media to other groups.
Abstract conceptualization	**Frontal / class**	• Go through the summary of reliable media criteria together. Use the media platforms from the task to demonstrate the features. • Point out the **difference** between **traditional mass media** and **social media** – there is a separate lesson on algorithms

PHOTOMONTAGE AND PHOTO MANIPULATION

TOPIC: VERIFICATION OF PHOTOS AND VIDEOS ONLINE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To be able to verify a photo or video online

To be able to discern a photo/video depicting another event, time and place (in the wrong context)

To understand how a photo can be edited

To practise peer-to-peer learning in small groups

RATIONALE:

Especially participants with lower level of ICT skills can hardly imagine how powerful tools technology uses for photo/video manipulation and photo/video montage. The technological progress and the possibility to share photos and videos out of their original context make us all susceptible to manipulation. After the lesson, participants should be aware of the tools disinformers have in hands and ways we can verify photo/video content. In the lesson plan, as videos are not so common for disinformation, we work with photos but they can always be replaced by videos.

TIME:

60 – 90 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:

examples of photo/video montage and photo/video manipulation, plug-in InVid installed on the devices for verifying videos

Lead-in / Experience / Reflexive observation

Class

- Find some **examples of photomanipulation** and mix them with **objective photojournalism**. We include some suggestions below.Nice online tools include generating fake (nonexisting) faces - https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/ or a game where the task is to tell if the face is fake or real - http://www.whichfaceisreal.com/

- Organise a **voting session** about the veracity of the photo documentation. Screen the photos and/or let the participants view the photos on their devices.

- Vote – either traditionally to get a bit of physical exercise to class or if the participants are eager to use technology, use some **online polling tools**, e.g. *Slido*.

- Check the answers together.

- Elicit a discussion why the participants think photos and videos can be a dangerous source of disinformation.

- The aim of the ice-breaking activity is to demonstrate how it is impossible to tell if a photo is not fake with the naked eye without the verification.

Abstract conceptualization	Frontal	
	• Explain the **easiest methods** to verify a photo is through **Google Image reverse search** or **TinEye.**	
	• Use an example to instruct the participants how to proceed.	
	• After uploading the photo to **Google search bar**, don´t forget to mention the Tools button that enables you to search for various size versions of the photo.	
	• TinEye can even find edited versions of photos. Recommend your students using a *Biggest Image* option to find the possible initial picture, because every edit reduces the size and affects the quality of the photo.	
	• For the verification of videos, first instruct participant to look for **suspicious signs** – distorted proportions, shadows, if car numbers, store signs and street names match the city they are supposed to be filmed in, you can also check the place on **Street view of Google maps** (also applicable for photos), check out the **weather** for the specific time and place using the archives of weather forecasting websites (e.g. *Weather Underground*)	
	• To find an original video, you can use Amnesty International's *YouTube Data Viewer* which allows to clarify an **exact upload date and time** and verifies if a YouTube video has been posted on the platform before.	
	• Show the participants that you can also make **screenshots of a video** and then use the same procedure as with images.	
	• More advanced students can also install the *InVid plug-in* on their devices that will provide all sorts of information about the video, including when it was uploaded.	
Active experimentation	Groups	
	• Distribute articles in a digital form with images to be verified.	
	• You can either give each group the same photo (easier option) or use different ones (more difficult).	
	• Instruct groups to **verify the images**.	
	• Observe and assist if needed.	

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- Ask each group (speaker) to present their results and describe the steps they have taken. Let them comment on the **process of verification.**

- Check understanding. Do not ask „Do you understand the topic?" but use specific questions checking the understanding of the content of the lesson, e.g. „How and why can a photo be manipulated?"

Example of photo manipulation **BEFORE** taking the photo:

- scene arrangement, different angles/perspectives – view from above, view from below, zoom in or out...

An example of how **perspective** matters. While it seems that Prince William is giving a middle finger from one perspective, in fact he was showing that now he is a father of three.

Example of photo manipulation **AFTER** taking the photo.

- photo editing – cropping, modification of colours, retouch, photomontage (combining more photos into one)...
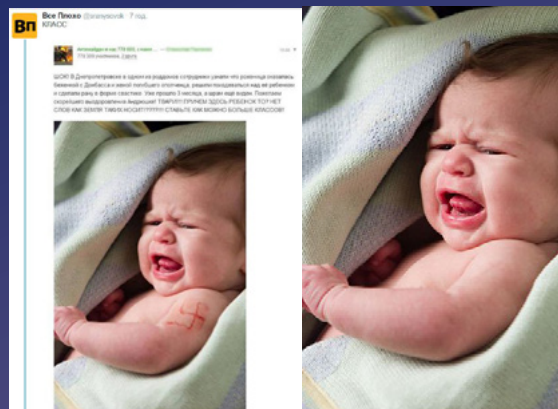
Example of **photomontage**. A post which was shared with the caption: *"Shock! Personnel of one of the maternity hospitals in Dnipropetrovsk learned that the birth mother was a refugee from Donbas and the wife of a dead militia man. They decided to make a cut in the form of a swastika on the baby's arm. Three months later but a scar can still be seen."* The second picture shows the original which can be easily found on the internet.

Another example of **photomontage** is this viral image (meaning circulating rapidly and widely from one internet user to another) depicting frozen Venice. In fact, the ice surface is originally from Lake Baikal in Russia.

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Sources of photos: E-bezpeci.cz, Global Investigative Global Network, Facebook, Twitter.

- Example of **contextual photo manipulation**: real photo in another context – different time, place or occasion, usage of illustrative photo...

A collage from Czech Facebook claiming the immigrants have been expelled from Germany to one of Czech towns. At the same time the post blames Czech Television for not covering the news and hiding it from the public. It is an example of **photomontage and the wrong context** – below you can see the original photos – the first one is an empty railway station in Cheb, the other photo was taken in Indonesia.
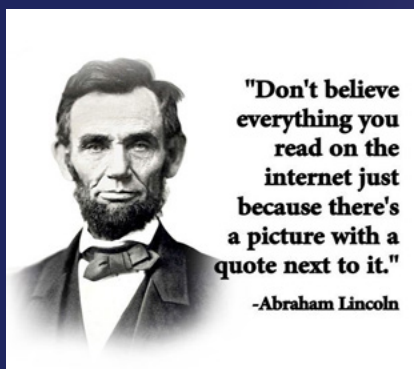
Text-based memes are popular mainly on social sites. Nothing is easier than taking an image and pair it with text that is made up or at least with words that the pictured individual never spoke.

Although it can be tricky to find the original photo, remind your students that if they can find an **earlier use from a different situation**, then they know they are dealing with misinformation and should be cautious.

This photo was circulated before Ukraine's National Flag Day in 2015 with an article entitled The day of the Slave. In fact, it was taken taken in 2010 in Tajikistan and the soldier kissing the flag is a Tajik customs official. The Ukrainian flag on his sleeve was added later in a photo editing program and the photo was horizontally inverted using a mirror effect.

TIPS:

- Although the aim is to teach your students to be able to verify photos online, make them aware of the fact that sometimes it is not an easy job which always ends up with a satisfactory result. The internet is an ever-changing space and the disinformers as well as technology are getting more and more sophisticated every day.

- To save time and energy, advise your students to use **fact-checking sites** (the list of recommendations for each country is in the annex). **Professional fact-checkers** have skills and tools to analyse disinformation in depth.

CHAIN MAIL

TOPIC: SHARING DISINFORMATION VIA E-MAIL OR ON SOCIAL SITES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
To be aware of the nature of chain mailing

To understand how to react in case we receive chain emails

To understand the consequences of sharing false information for the society and oneself

RATIONALE:
Even though chain emails are not as common as before the social sites boom, they are still the case, especially with people who don't have an account on social sites. We consider it important to raise the issue in your class, particularly if you know that the participants read chain mails. The danger is that the readers can play the role of algorithms and be even more susceptible to disinformation as it comes from a person they know personally. In the last few years, people also started sharing this type of messages on communication platforms like WhatsApp and social sites so the attention should be paid mainly to the form of the messages to help participants identify them on different platforms.

TIME:
45 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:
examples of chain mail/messages, screen/board/flipchart

Lead-in

Frontal / class

- Start with a discussion about the participants´ experience with receiving emails:

  o *If you looked into your mailbox, what type of emails would you find?*

  o *Do you think you ever receive dangerous chain mails? Who do you get them from? How do you react?*

Concrete experience

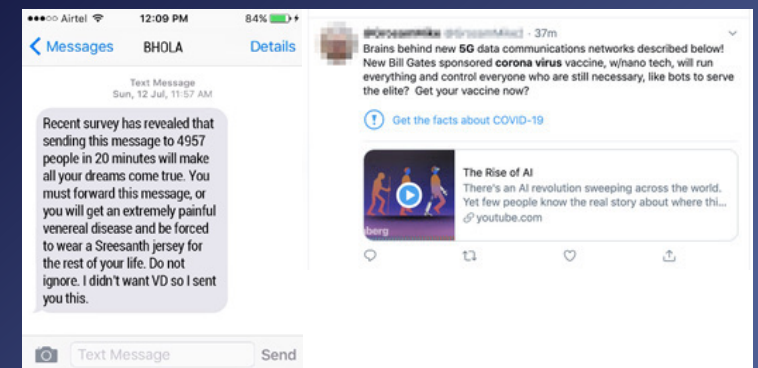## Frontal / class

- Show some **examples of chain mails/messages** including misinformation or disinformation

- Leave some time to read them through.

- Point out that the content must always be **verified** as with other media content.

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Reflexive observation

Groups

- Divide participants into groups and instruct them to discuss what the proper reaction to chain mail should be

  a. in case we care about the sender

  b. *in case we don't care about the sender*

Abstract conceptualization

Class / frontal

- Elicit the answers from the groups and discuss together

- Explain why we should follow the advice:

  a. empathetic reaction, understanding rather than arguing with facts and counter-arguments, support if the sender is panicking, intention of resending is usually not bad, personal (ideally face-to-face) dialogue, trust in the good intentions of your acquaintances, but doubting the intentions of the perpetrators

  b. *marking as spam/disinformation, no sharing – **breaking the chain***

- Point out that this **easy but effective rule** is the best piece of advice concerning **reaction to disinformation**.

TIPS:

- The best examples are real-life examples. You can use your or your participants´ mailbox as a source but be careful to instruct them **NOT TO OPEN ANY ATTACHMENTS**!

SOCIAL SITES AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

TOPIC: HOW SOCIAL SITES OPERATE (ALGORITHMS, TROLLS AND BOTS, CLICKBAITS)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

To understand the operation of free social sites

To be aware of the existence of fake accounts on social sites – trolls and bots

To be aware of the dangers social sites can represent

To understand the consequences of sharing false information for the society and oneself

To understand how algorithms affect what we see online

RATIONALE:

As the concepts of **artificial intelligence** might be interesting but also hard-to-understand for the adults, try to explain only the most significant and important features without going into much detail and confusion. The enquiry learning method is employed in this lesson on the topics of **trolls, bots** and **clickbaits**, easier concepts, to support the motivation of adults to do research themselves. The result of the lesson should be a list of responsible behaviour on social sites.

TIME:

60 - 90 min

TRAINER PREPARATION/MATERIAL NEEDED:

screen/flipchart, devices with access to the internet for three groups


Lead-in

Groups / class

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- Encourage participants to speak about the following topics in groups:

  o What are your hobbies and interests?

  o Who might be interested in targeting you online and how can they reach you?

  o What can the reasons be?

- Elicit the answers from groups. Lead the discussion to the topic of **online marketing.**

- In the easiest way possible, discuss how **algorithms** work and mention its **advantages** and **disadvantages.** Point out **personalised online experience**, as well as, **personalised advertising.** If participants struggle to understand YES, IT IS A COMPLEX ISSUE, you can watch some explanatory videos on YouTube, such as: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prx9bxzns3g

- Elicit a discussion on how else can social sites be exploited in order to manipulate the public. Bring up the topic of **trolls, bots and clickbaits**

|		

Concrete experience/
 Reflexive observation
	Groups	• For this activity, you can use **inquiry based learning methods**.
		
		 • Divide participants into three groups and give each a <u>topic</u>:
		
		    1. *Who is a troll and what are its typical signs?*
		
		    2. *What is a bot and what are its typical signs?*
		
		    3. *What is a clickbait and what are its typical sights?*
		
		 • Instruct the groups to do research and prepare a short **presentation** for their classmates. More advanced participants can also prepare some **visual material**, like a poster or Powerpoint/Keynotes/Google slides presentation.
		
		 • For English speakers, a great source is DW webpage: <u>shorturl.at/ bcefs</u>
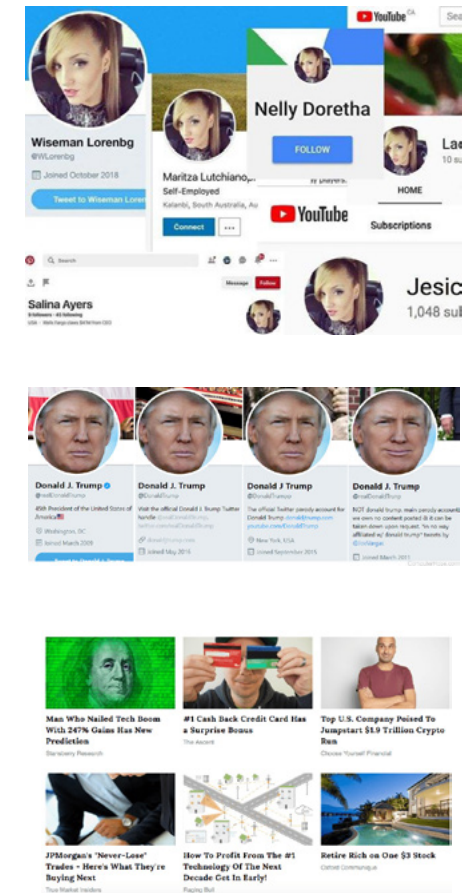
Abstract conceptualization	**Class**	• Groups give **presentations** and the trainer comments and clarifies if needed. • Discuss if **technology itself can effectively spread disinformation**.
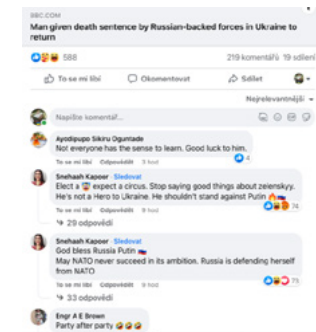
Active experimentation

Groups / class

- Based on the findings from today's lesson, **brainstorm** how we should **behave on social networks** and what we need to be aware of.

- Make a **visual representation** of the **responsible behaviour on social sites**, e.g. a mind map.

- This way the trainer also checks understanding.

NEWS

Recommended links

IN ENGLISH:

- **AFP FACT-CHECK** - European program to fight disinformation, real-time fact-checks on the main fake news stories of the week, access to research conducted by academics on disinformation, how to debunk fake news themselves thanks to tools and tutorials available, available in 6 languages https://factcheck.afp.com/

- **BAD NEWS** – a free-to-play online browser game in which players take the perspective of a fake news tycoon. Now available in 18 languages! https://www.getbadnews.com/books/english/

- **CEDMO (Central European Digital Media Observatory)** - an independent non-partisan multidisciplinary hub, the aim of the international project is to detect, investigate and reduce the spread of misinformation and to use artificial intelligence to make fact-checking faster and more efficient https://cedmohub.eu/

- **EUvsDISINFO -** project of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Forces. core objective is to increase public awareness and understanding of the Kremlin's disinformation operations, and to help citizens in Europe and beyond develop resistance to digital information and media manipulation, media monitoring services in 15 languages, EUvsDisinfo identifies, compiles, and exposes disinformation cases originating in pro-Kremlin media that are spread across the EU and Eastern Partnership countries https://euvsdisinfo.eu/

- **GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT** - a toolkit for educators and trainers, the result of a European project on media literacy education through disinformation workshops for young people and their parents, available in 9 languages https://www.alldigitalweek.eu/get-facts/

- **STOP FAKE** – a journalistic initiative focused on fact-checking and refuting verifiable misinformation about Ukraine that appears in the media and analysis of Kremlin propaganda, available in 14 languages.https://www.stopfake.org/en/main/

- **STREET EPISTEMOLOGY** - ways to help people reflect on the quality of their reasoning through civil conversation. Offers tools to discuss the most difficult topics and better understand the views of others, and maybe change a mind or two along the way. https://streetepistemology.com/

- **THE GLOBAL DISINFORMATION INDEX** - a web-based tool that rates news outlets based on the „probability of disinformation on a specific media outlet." https://www.disinformationindex.com/

BULGARIA:

- **CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF DEMOCRACY** - fact-checking, with a special focus on disinformation related to politics https://csd.bg/

- **THE MEDIA LITERACY COALITION** - aims at increasing media literacy in Bulgarian society and integrating relevant actions into the educational process https://gramoten.li/

CYPRUS:

- **ANTIBODIES TO MISINFORMATION** (Open University Cyprus) – a project aiming at designing, developing, and applying a model experiential program for media education against misinformation to pilot schools https://misinfoantibodies.cyi.ac.cy/

- **CYBERSAFETY** – the aim is creating a secure internet culture, empowering creative, innovative and critical citizens in the digital society, an awareness platform containing information, resources, and helpful tools, shared experience, expertise, and good practice https://cybersafety.cy/

- **YOUTH MYTHBUSTERS (YMB)** – a project aiming at promoting the engagement of youth and those at risk of social exclusion in democratic and civic life; it also aims at enhancing their critical thinking and media literacy in order to strengthen democracy and fight manipulation, propaganda and fake news https://www.youthmythbusters.eu/

CZECH REPUBLIC:

- ČEŠTÍ ELFOVÉ – civic initiative and an internet group that aims to combat foreign disinformation campaigns and Russian propaganda in Czech cyberspace. Their activities include fighting and exposing trolls on social networks, analyses and periodical reports, database of disinformation chain e-mails and popularising the issue of disinformation campaigns among journalists, politicians and the general public.https://cesti-elfove.cz/
- **DIGIKOALICE** - connects the world of schools and ICT in digital education with a focus on the development of digital skills for children and adults https://digikoalice.cz/
- **FAKESCAPE** – learning about media literacy and critical thinking through online or offline games https://www.fakescape.cz/
- **JSNS (Člověk v tísni)** – educational program of the biggest Czech non-profit organisation targeted at primary and secondary schools, created their own teaching material on media literacy and critical thinking, provide support and education to teachers https://www.jsns.cz/projekty/medialni-vzdelavani
- **OBČANKÁŘI** - association of Social Science teachers whose goal is to increase the quality of education at Czech schools https://www.obcankari.cz/
- **PROJECT FAKT?** – implemented within the framework of the Active Citizens Fund programme which aims to support civil society and strengthen the capacity of non-profit organisations, cooperation of Elpida, an organisation dedicated to the education of seniors, and Transitions, strengthening the independence and professionalism of investigative journalism, media, digital and civic education for seniors and older adults, prepare and organise courses https://medialka.elpida.cz/
- **ZVOLSI.INFO** - a group of students, graduates and educators from Masaryk University, platform about fighting disinformation, organise lectures about media literacy and published a book called "The Best Book about Fake News, Disinformation and Manipulations"

  https://zvolsi.info/
- **PROJECT NELEŽ.CZ** - alerts advertisers that their advertisements may appear in a negative context and thus jeopardise the reputation of the advertised brand itself, the aim is not to fund misinformation and manipulative websites whose content divides society https://www.nelez.cz/
- **HOAX.CZ** - informs users about the pitfalls they encounter online on a daily basis and that make their normal use of the Internet uncomfortable or threatening

  https://hoax.cz/cze/
- **FOUNDATION FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM** – independent assessment of the credibility of Czech news websites based on compliance with journalistic standards, intention is to provide an overview of how the analysed media handle and deliver information to readers, as well as a guide for companies advertising in specific media (their tool Media rating classifies Czech media into several categories including Market-driven media and Anti-system media) https://www.nfnz.cz/rating-medii/

FRANCE:

- **ARCOM** - carries out educational support actions: drafting reports and recommendations for information platforms, also provides online resources through a „Media Education" page
- **DISINFO** - free and open tools to empower all public, private and civil society actors fighting against information manipulation, including regulators seeking to ensure the reduction of vulnerabilities among large private actors https://disinfo.quaidorsay.fr/fr
- **EUROPEAN COMMISION (Les Décodeurs de l'Europe) -** tracks and trace false information about the European Union rectifying it with well researched articles. https://france.representation.ec.europa.eu/les-decodeurs-de-leurope_fr

  https://odil.org/politique-publique/france/

  https://www.arcom.fr/nos-ressources/education-et-citoyennete-numerique#collapse-QR3962
- **LA FRANCOPHONIE** - an online platform called **ODIL : « La plateforme francophone des initiatives de lutte contre la désinformation »** lists all the initiatives to fight fake news (actions, tools etc.) developed among the members of La Francophonie. https://odil.org/

  o n cooperation with the Ministry of Education, provide a teaching kit for education staff on media literacy - https://www.csa.fr/Proteger/Education-aux-medias-et-a-l-information-EMI/Ressources-pedagogiques
- **The Centre de liaison de l'enseignement et des médias d'information (CLEMI) -** mission is to train teachers in media and information literacy, to produce or co-produce educational resources and to promote media literacy in schools. https://www.clemi.fr/

NETHERLANDS:

- **DUTCH MEDIA LITERACY NETWORK (Netwerk Mediawijsheid)** - a network that works towards enhancing media literacy through knowledge and the development of the necessary skills. It is a government initiative that helps children, young people, parents, and educators to use media safely and responsibly, through a multi-level approach that brings together various expert organisations and promotes their cooperation https://netwerkmediawijsheid.nl/over-ons/about-dutch-media-literacy-network/

- **SLO** (Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling) - continuous learning in digital literacy that pays attention to media literacy, information literacy, computational thinking, and basic IT skills https://www.slo.nl/

SPAIN:

- **BE CRITICAL** - an educational program for media competence and critical thinking offered by Educaixa, includes a pedagogical orientation guide for first and second level students of compulsory secondary education https://educaixa.org/es/programa-be-critical

- **FUNDACIÓN LUCA DE TENA** - research and training activities aimed at studying and mitigating the effect of disinformation https://fundacionlucadetena.org/

- **ALFA-MEDIA** - non-profit association, made up of experts from the associative, professional and academic fields in the different technological, educational, legal and communication fields, whose main objective is to promote and collaborate in the development of initiatives related to media and information literacy http://alfamedia.es/

- **EXPERTCLICK** - a training program to provide older people with the necessary tools that allow them to take full advantage of new technologies in order to increase their quality of life https://expertclick.org/

- **VERIFICA2** - a program by Fundación Cibervoluntarios, in collaboration with Newtral Educación to fight misinformation and fake news, free cyber training to raise public awareness, provide the necessary tools to verify information and stop the viralization of false content on social networks https://www.cibervoluntarios.org/en/news/post/verifica2-launched-eng

- **LEARN TO CHECK -** an educational and informative project that aims to reflect on disinformation and bring digital verification and media education closer to society. In addition to training for all audiences, offers open resources https://learntocheck.org/

Fact-checking sites

BULGARIA:

- **FACTCHECK.BG** – an independent platform for fact-checking, developed on the initiative of the Association of European Journalists https://factcheck.bg/

CZECH REPUBLIC:

- **DEMAGOG.CZ** - fact-check of the factual claims of the political elite https://demagog.cz/

- **MANIPULATORI.CZ** - fact-checking is the main activity, debunking hoaxes, politicians´ statements and other disinformation, also point out scams (fake competitions, fraudulent e-shops and products), regular monitoring of disinformation scene, media education and other initiatives dealing with media literacy and fighting disinformation https://manipulatori.cz/

- **STOP FAKE** - journalistic initiative focused on fact-checking and refuting verifiable misinformation about Ukraine that appears in the media and analysis of Kremlin propaganda. https://www.stopfake.org/cz/domu/

- **CEDMO (Central European Digital Media Observatory)** - an independent non-partisan multidisciplinary hub, the aim of the international project is to detect, investigate and reduce the spread of misinformation and to use artificial intelligence to make fact-checking faster and more efficient https://cedmohub.eu/cs/

NETHERLANDS:

- **EDMO** (European Digital Media Observatory) - an international network of hubs in which experts in the field of disinformation join forces and share knowledge, expertise and various research and publication activities https://edmo.eu/

- **NIEUWSCHECKERS.NL** - a student-centric project operating from the University of Leiden with the scope to fact-check news articles https://nieuwscheckers.nl/

- **NUCHEKT** - a fact-checking initiative from the Dutch news agency NU.nl https://www.nu.nl/nucheckt

SPAIN:

- **IBERIFIER** - a digital media observatory in Spain and Portugal, promoted by the European Commission and linked to the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), media research and fact checking https://iberifier.eu/

- **LA CHISTERA** - fact-checking blog of the El Confidencial, they verify truths, lies and magic tricks of the main protagonists of current political and social affairs https://blogs.elconfidencial.com/espana/la-chistera/

- **NEWTRAL** – fact-checking, media literacy courses for adults https://www.newtral.es/zona-verificacion/fact-check/

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