

FACT CHECKING

INFORMATION AND DATA LITERACY > 1.2 EVALUATING DATA, INFORMATION AND DIGITAL CONTENT

TARGET GROUP	AGE GROUP	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	FORMAT	COPYRIGHT	LANGUAGE
All, Job seekers, School drop outs	Adults, Elderly citizens, Teenagers	Level 2	Activity sheet	Creative Commons (BY-SA)	English, French

In this workshop, the facilitator, through a fact-checking exercise, raises awareness around the issue of fake news and misinformation in general. Participants will be given a few tips on how to make sure information has not been fabricated before believing or sharing it.

General Objective Awareness building

Preparation time for facilitator 1 - 2 hours

Competence area 1 - Information and data literacy

Time needed to complete activity (for learner) 1 - 2 hours

Name of author Nothing 2hide

Support material needed for training Post-its - Computers or tablets - Internet Connection

Resource originally created in French

WORKSHOP DIRECTIONS

1 Introduction

Following this activity participants will understand what fake news is, how to identify it, and especially how to fact check it, i.e. verify whether information is true or false.

Facilitation tips: We advise you to study all the suggested sources so that you are familiar with them. If possible, save them to your favourites. You could even display them directly during the workshop using a projector.

2 Finding Fake News

Ask participants if, in their opinion, the following information is true or false. Note the statements on post-its and divide them into two columns according to whether they are true or false.

1. Canada legalised the use of recreational marijuana in 2017 (false)
2. Beyoncé is pregnant again (false)
3. Snapchat keeps your photos (true)
4. Starbucks once held a promotion proposing a 40% discount on all products off for undocumented migrants to the US (false)
5. The footballer Mohammed Salah received 1 million votes in the 2018 Egyptian presidential election (true)
6. In China, it was forbidden to have more than one child before 2015 (true)
7. Coronavirus can be spread by mosquitoes (false)
8. Tigers can be infected with coronavirus (true)

==> There can be more than 8! **Don't hesitate to choose information based on contemporary events, nor to modify it to be false. This was the case for example with '1. Canada legalised the use of recreational marijuana in 2017' - the real date was in 2018.**

3 What is fact checking?

You will ask participants to fact check, i.e. to verify the information in the first exercise. But first: Explain what it means to fact check and how it regards verifying information. Using several methods, it concerns looking at information and determining whether it is true.

- Ask: why did journalists start fact checking?
- Response: to verify what politicians say, particularly during election.
- Ask: why has this method developed?
- Response: with internet, then later with social media, information can be circulated very easily. But how do we know what is true and what is not?

Explain that the distribution of false facts is such that journalists have created instruments dedicated to their verification. This is so that rumours, as well as deliberate attempt to obfuscate the truth, can be corroborated. Present now some sources dedicated to fact checking. For example:

- Fact-check.org: <https://www.factcheck.org/>
- Snopes.com: <https://www.snopes.com/>
- BBC reality check: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/reality_check

Explore with the group one example from each site. Now ask the participants to go the computers in groups of three or four. They will have to verify the information from the previous exercise. If it is false, they will have to correct it. They will need to note sources that helped them corroborate or correct the information. Ask them to justify the viability of their sources. Here are a few elements to be taken into account. Discuss with them whether they have verified these things or now:

- Website/organisational source credentials: verify the viability by looking at the site (go to the 'about' section), check the date of the page's publication, whether the site has posted such kind of information in the past. Are there link towards other types of content? Are there figures to be referred to? Is this article copied from another source? Take an extract and search it on Google to determine whether it exists elsewhere.
- Author credentials: who is the author of this article; what legitimacy have they, what do they do professionally, are they recognised by their peers, do they have a history speaking on this kind of subject? Research the writer on social media and by going as far as sites such as Viadeo and LinkedIn.

Each group can present the results of their research.

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Fact checking several claims on one theme

You are in editing mode – like the writers at snopes.com or other fact checking bodies. Divide participants into groups. Together, they will have to first identify the claims to be checked and then verify them. At the end of the process, cross-check their sources. For this exercise, it is recommended to print the claims in advance. Quickly show an example before beginning. Here is a good one: ‘[FactChecking the March Democratic debate from factcheck.org](#)’ – an article that verifies claims made in the March debate the US 2020 democratic primaries.

Theme: cannabis.

This is just one example to explore. Adapt the material to the level of the participants by reducing the amount of the time for the exercise and thus the number of claims.

Claim 1 : Mirror – UK conservative tabloid newspaper

‘Cannabis responsible for quarter of new psychosis cases, scientists warn’ (16 February 2015) Source: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/cannabis-responsible-quarter-new-psychosis-5170287>

Facts to check :

1. From what study does this information come from and did it really conclude the way this claims?
2. Aside from the study, is there evidence to suggest a clear link between cannabis use and psychosis?

Responding:

1. The claim misrepresents the study. The researchers referenced south Londoners with psychotic disorders in south London, 24% of whose cases were linked to a stronger variety of cannabis called skunk. This is therefore not representative of the wider population. See more information from fullfact.org.
2. The evidence linking psychosis to regular cannabis use is unclear. See sources such as [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).

Note that frequently, as in this case, fact checking will not yield results that are totally black and white. There will not always be a clear ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and things will often not be totally true or totally false.

Claim 2 : The Times - UK broadsheet newspaper

‘More under-18s are being prosecuted for selling the drug [cannabis] even though the number of adult dealers taken to court is falling, a report has shown.’ (12 September 2018) Source:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-catch-11-year-olds-being-used-to-sell-drugs-5ktchfrts>

Facts to Check:

1. As of late 2018, were the numbers of under-18s being prosecuted for selling cannabis really increasing?
2. At the same time, were the numbers of adult dealers rising?

Response:

- Both claims are true, according to [this article](#) from fullfact.org.
- How easy or difficult is to verify this kind of information, i.e. numbers of people arrested; numbers of people taken to court. If difficult, should it be made more readily available to the public?
- Additional source: <https://volteface.me/publications/the-childrens-inquiry/>

Claim 3 : PoliticusUSA - US left-leaning magazine

‘The U.S. government’s department of health...[admitted] that marijuana kills cancer.’ (23 August 2015)

Source: <http://archive.is/BZPza>

Facts to check:

1. Did this government institution really make this claim?
2. Is there any truth to the idea that marijuana kills cancer?

Response: Study [this article](#) from Snopes.com

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Going further

So that participants’ searches will be more effective next time, follow this workshop with [Using and Differentiating Search Engines](#) and [Fake News and other Information Manipulation](#).