Anti-
RUMOUR

MODULE 3.
STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND COMBATING FAKE NEWS

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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Module 3. Strategies for identifying and combating fake news

Learning Objectives: To equip learners with basic skills and competencies for recognizing fake news and effectively combating it. This module uses interactive activities to help participants develop strategies for identifying misinformation and understanding its impact on marginalized groups, particularly immigrants and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Duration:
30 minutes

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Printed or digital examples of tweets with fake news
- ✓ Access to fact-checking websites and resources
- ✓ Whiteboard or flip chart
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Internet access for online activities

Theoretical background:

Disinformation, particularly in the form of conspiracy theories, poses a significant threat to social stability and informed decision-making. While some conspiracy theories might appear harmless, others can be dangerous, leading to political disengagement and fueling populist sentiments. Recognizing and countering these conspiracy theories is crucial because they often aim to create division, incite violence, and undermine scientific and medical understanding.

The challenge in addressing conspiracy theories lies in their deep-rooted nature among believers. These theories typically lack credible evidence and instead manipulate facts and events to fit their narratives, dividing the world into 'good' supporters of the theory and 'bad' conspirators. This dichotomy makes it difficult to counter conspiracy theories effectively, as they touch on various aspects of individuals' lives and there is no universal approach to addressing those who believe in them.

To counter conspiracy theories, several strategies have been identified by the COST Action research network, a European consortium focused on the study of conspiracy theories. These strategies include:

- ✓ Recognizing the Political Dimension: Understanding that conspiracy theories often serve political purposes, particularly in promoting populist agendas, is crucial. This awareness can help in developing targeted approaches to address the political motivations behind these theories.
- ✓ Containing the Spread: The proliferation of social media has made containing conspiracy theories particularly challenging. Social media platforms can disseminate information as widely and quickly as traditional media. Effective containment requires strategies to limit the spread of false information across these networks.
- ✓ Inoculating Against Conspiracy Theories: This involves warning individuals about conspiracy theories before they encounter them. By raising awareness and educating people about the tactics used in spreading conspiracy theories, we can prepare them to recognize and reject such falsehoods.
- ✓ Protecting the Public: Campaigns aimed at protecting people from conspiracy theories can be conducted both online and offline. These campaigns might include activities that foster a sense

of community and control over personal opinions, promote critical thinking, and provide workshops on verifying and researching information.

- ✓ Debunking Conspiracy Theories: Providing accurate facts and exposing the reasons behind conspiracy theories can help believers distance themselves from these false narratives. This involves presenting clear, evidence-based information to counter the misinformation.
- ✓ Exploring Deradicalization Programs: If other strategies fail, deradicalization programs can be considered. These programs, often used to combat political extremism, might offer insights into disengaging individuals from deeply held conspiracy beliefs.

To implement these strategies, particularly online, some practical steps can be taken. The European Commission suggests directly commenting with verified information and links on posts spreading conspiracy theories. This approach might not convince the staunch believers but can alert other readers to the false information. Additionally, contacting authors or website managers who share fake news to request corrections can help reduce the spread of misinformation. This can also be applied to print media by reaching out to editorial boards or writers directly. By employing these strategies, we can create a multi-faceted approach to identifying and combating fake news, ultimately fostering a more informed and critically thinking society.

Relevant sources:

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- Jolley, Daniel et al. (2022). Shining a spotlight on the dangerous consequences of conspiracy theories. (Current Opinion in Psychology Vol. 47). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352250X22000823.
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3.1 Activity 1: Fact-Checking Relay (15 minutes)

Learning objectives: To develop quick and effective fact-checking skills among participants. The activities will improve participants' ability to quickly verify information, a critical component of media literacy. It encourages the use of reliable sources and critical thinking in assessing news content.

Instructions: The facilitator will briefly explain the session's focus on recognizing fake news and its importance and highlight the significance of quick fact-checking in combating misinformation.

Fact-Checking Relay (10 minutes):

- Divide participants into two groups.
- Provide each group with a printed or digital example of tweets with misleading information.
- Assign each group the task of fact-checking the article using available online resources (e.g., fact-checking websites like Snopes, FactCheck.org, or national ones).

Groups must identify:

- The source of the article and its credibility.
- Any factual inaccuracies or misleading information.
- Verifiable evidence that contradicts the fake news.
- The first group to accurately fact-check their article and present their findings wins the relay.

Following the activity there will be a group discussion where each group will present their findings briefly and discuss the importance of reliable sources and quick fact-checking in daily media consumption.

3.2 Activity 2: Fake News Role-Play (15 minutes)

Learning Objectives: To practice identifying fake news and developing strategies to combat it through role-play scenarios. This activity engages participants in practical, real-world scenarios where they must apply critical thinking and fact-checking skills. It emphasizes the importance of being prepared to counter misinformation in various social contexts. By engaging in these activities, participants will gain practical skills in identifying and combating fake news, particularly regarding marginalized groups, thereby fostering a more informed and inclusive society.

The facilitator will:

- Introduce the concept of role-play as a method for understanding different perspectives and developing response strategies.
- Explain the scenarios will involve situations where fake news about marginalized groups is encountered.
- Divide participants into pairs or two small groups.
- Assign each group a scenario involving fake news about immigrants or LGBTQ+ individuals.

Examples:

Scenario 1: A social media post falsely claiming immigrants are responsible for a local crime wave.
Scenario 2: A viral message suggesting that LGBTQ+ rights movements are undermining traditional values.
One participant plays the role of someone spreading the fake news, while the others play the role of individuals debunking it using facts and logical arguments. Groups should discuss and plan their responses before acting out the scenarios. Each group will present their role-play and discuss the strategies they used to debunk the fake news.

Debrief:
After the activities, the debrief will involve:

- Participants reflecting on their key insights gained during the session.
- Exploration of the most successful fact-checking and debunking approaches identified.
- Encouragement for participants to brainstorm practical applications of these techniques in their interactions with marginalized communities.
- Opportunity for participants to offer concise feedback on the activities and suggest potential enhancements.

Possible Alterations:

- Combine the fact-checking relay and role-play activities into one integrated exercise.
- Increase the number of scenarios in the role-play activity for more diverse practice.
- Include a brief peer feedback component to enhance learning and collaboration.
- Utilize multimedia elements like videos or interactive quizzes to enhance engagement.