Lesson 4.

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Lesson 4: Media Literacy – Protection & Empowerment

Modules

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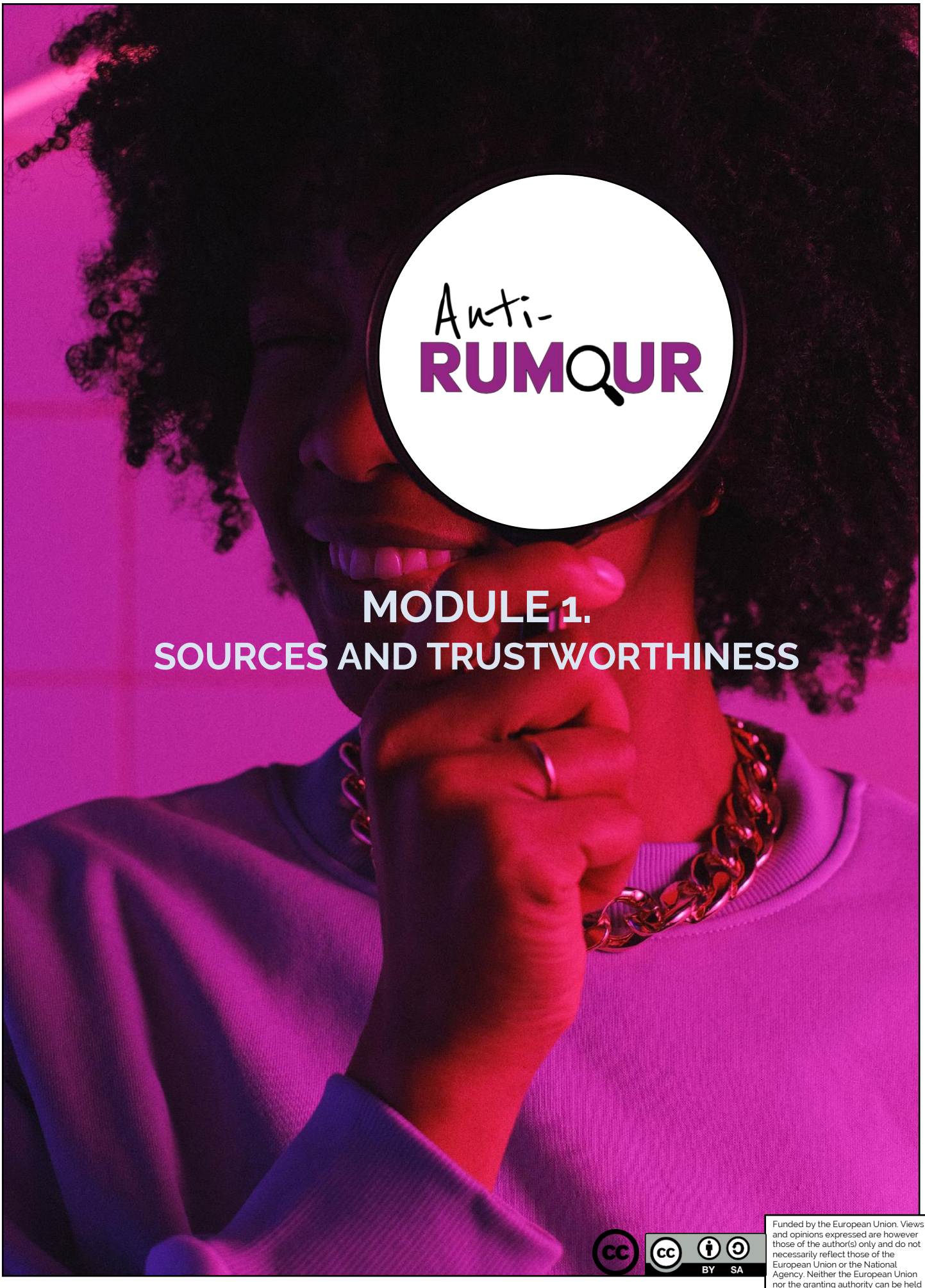

Anti-
RUMQUR

MODULE 1.
SOURCES AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

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Module 1. Sources and Trustworthiness

Any form of online content you may encounter while navigating the online world should be evaluated on two levels: On the level of the author/news outlet/source that is publishing the information (**who** is publishing the information?) and on the level of its actual content (**what** is being said?). Module 1 of this lesson focusses on evaluating the sources. Module 2 focuses on content and recognizing disinformation.

1.1 Activity 1: Input – Evaluating the trustworthiness of authors and the credibility of sources

Type: Input

Duration: 15 minutes

Learning outcomes:
Participants will gain insight into different factors that determine a source's trustworthiness. They will learn about different criteria and questions they can ask themselves when coming across online sources.

Materials/Resources needed:
Notebooks and pens for participants. Input script for facilitator. Optional: Facilitator can prepare a PPT adjusted to the group's age and background knowledge

The facilitator uses the following information for their input.

Trustworthiness of the author

When evaluating sources, we should take two main factors into account: The author and the platform.

When evaluating an author's trustworthiness, it can help to look at the criteria set by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995). They describe *trustworthiness* as dependent on three characteristics: ability, benevolence and integrity.

Ability refers to skills and competencies that are related to the information an author is publishing. This includes their job experience, education and fields of expertise.

Benevolence refers to the intentions and motivations of an author. It takes into account their self-interest and their relationships.

Integrity refers to sticking to principles. In the context of online information, this can mean a set of moral standards that a reader agrees or disagrees with. This criteria is more subjective and based on individuals' moral compass and principles – as long as an author's principles don't go against human rights or are illegal.

When encountering information online, you should check if you can find any information on the author. Who is publishing the article? Which person, organization, news outlet or other group is responsible for its content? This information should be given either in the article or at the very least in the imprint of a website. If you can't find any information whatsoever, you should stay skeptical.

If you do find an author and want to check their ability, benevolence and integrity, you can ask these questions:

Ability	Benevolence	Integrity
➢ What is the author's education? ➢ What is their job? ➢ What kind of experience do they have in the field they're publishing information on?	➢ Does the author get personal gain by publishing this information, e.g. by making a profit through advertising? ➢ Are they part of associations, lobby groups, corporations, parties with certain interests? ➢ Is there a conflict of interest?	➢ Does the author stick to journalistic standards (e.g. citing sources, correcting errors, respecting personal rights)? ➢ Does the author respect human rights, the constitution and/or other ethical standards?

News Outlets' credibility

When checking a news source, the criteria of the rating system NewsGuard can be a valuable resource. NewsGuard is a tool that evaluates and verifies the credibility of news websites and online content with intensive background research. They provide simplified ratings as well as detailed reports on individual news outlets, based on a number of criteria.

Some criteria include:

- Does not repeatedly publish false or egregiously misleading content**:** The site does not repeatedly and currently produce content that has been found to be clearly and significantly false or egregiously misleading, and which has not been quickly and prominently corrected.
- Gathers and presents information responsibly
  Content providers are generally fair and accurate in reporting and presenting information. They reference **multiple sources**, preferably those that present direct, firsthand information on a subject or event or from credible secondhand news sources, and they do not egregiously distort or misrepresent information to make an argument or report on a subject
- Has effective practices for correcting errors: The site regularly identifies errors and publishes clarifications and corrections, transparently acknowledges errors, and does not regularly leave significant false content uncorrected.
- Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly**:** Content providers who convey the impression that they report news or a mix of news and opinion distinguish opinion from news reporting, and when reporting news, do not egregiously cherry pick facts or stories to advance opinions. Content providers who advance a particular point of view disclose that point of view.
- Avoids deceptive headlines: The site generally does not publish headlines that include false information, significantly sensationalize, or otherwise do not reflect what is actually in the content under the headline.

Users can keep these criteria in mind when looking at news outlets they are not familiar with. This more simplified checklist can help evaluating a source's credibility:

- Is there an imprint or any information on the organization / people / company behind the website?
  - Check the Imprint or the "About Us" section. Use search engines to double check the information

- Has the news website published false information in the past?
  - ➢ Use a fact-checking search engine to search for the news outlet's name, e.g. Google Fact Check Explorer

- Does the news website use multiple sources? Are the sources credible? Do they cite their sources correctly?
  - ➢ Look at some of the website's articles. Check what kind of sources they use and if they cite the sources truthfully without twisting the original information

- Does the news website correct its errors?
  - ➢ Can you find articles that correct previously published wrong information? Is there a dedicated sub-page for corrections?

- Does the news website indicate what is opinion and what is news?
  - ➢ Opinion pieces should be labeled as such. Opinion pieces include Editorials, columns, letters to the editor

- Do the headlines match the content of the articles?
  - ➢ Headlines are not sensationalized and summarize the article's content truthfully

Satire news websites are a special case. They intentionally create false information for humoristic purposes. Some satire news websites clearly state that they are satire, some don't. Satire is often identified by exaggerated, absurd, funny, politically incorrect headlines and content. A quick Google search for the website's name usually is sufficient to find out if a source is satire.

Participant Instructions: Listen to the facilitator's input, take notes and ask questions if anything is unclear.

Possible alterations: Depending on the participants' age, knowledge and background, the input can be simplified. For the part on trustworthiness of individuals, the criteria of integrity can be left out, since that is more complex (requires some background knowledge on journalistic standards, human rights). For the part on checking sources' credibility, the more complex definitions of NewsGuard can be left out and only the simplified checklist can be used.

In general, as a lecture-type activity, the facilitator can implement it in a way that best suits the group. However, all necessary information should be transmitted in order for the following activities to be feasible.

Debrief: Ask participants if they have any questions.

Background reading/External resources:

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20, 709-734. DOI: 10.2307/258792.
https://www.newsguardtech.com/de/bewertungen/bewertungsprozess-und-kriterien/

1.2 Activity 2: Who's trustworthy

Type: Group Activity / Discussion

Duration: 10 min

Learning outcomes: Participants will know how to apply the questions on trustworthiness of authors.

Materials/Resources needed: Annex 1, laptop/computer, ideally shown on a large screen (projector/TV)

Participant instructions: Look at these sources and apply the questions on trustworthiness of authors. How trustworthy are they?

Facilitator instructions: Show the three examples from Annex 1. Ask the group how they would evaluate the ability and benevolence of the author(s). Collect a couple of responses. Add more points if needed.

- Leila Schmidt-Khan:
  - Generally trustworthy
  - Ability: Is a professional journalist. Has several years of work experience as a journalist. Italian politics is her field of expertise.
    An Instagram bio is a very short overview of a person. You can note that Instagram bios are not necessarily correct since it is a person's own self-description. Ideally, users should check if the information she gives is correct – is she really a foreign correspondent for The Guardian? This could be double-checked by researching her name, researching her previously published articles
  - Benevolence: As a professional journalist, she likely has no conflict of interest. She likely has no personal gain from publishing false or misleading information.

- Claudia Alves:
  - Generally not trustworthy
  - Ability: Works in the industry. Has expertise in SweetLife's products.
  - Benevolence: When publishing information on the health impact of SweetLife's products, she does have a conflict of interest. As a director of marketing, it is her job to advertise the brand and make sure the brand has a good reputation.
  - You can note that the claim in the tweet does not necessarily have to be wrong. It could also be partially true. It is also possible the claim came from a study that the brand itself has financed. Additional sources should be used.

- Wikipedia:
  - Somewhat trustworthy
  - You can discuss the difficulty of evaluating Wikipedia authors' trustworthiness, since everyone can edit Wikipedia articles and not every author provides detailed information on themselves in their profile. It is possible that authors with a conflict of interest edit information. It is also possible that authors with high expertise in the field edit an article.
  - You can note as a plus that other users constantly review Wikipedia articles. Everyone can check and see who edited which part of an article and when.
  - Wikipedia can be a good starting point for getting information, but the sources should be double-checked.

Possible alterations: The examples in Annex 1 can be used by anyone, regardless of national context. Facilitators can also use their own examples, if they prefer real-life examples (example 1 and example 2 are fictional characters and posts) or concrete examples from their national context. This way, it is possible to adjust this activity to specific topics, age groups or countries.

Debrief: Did you find this activity challenging or easy? What is your main take-away from this activity?

Background reading:

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20, 709-734. DOI: 10.2307/258792.

Giles, J. (2005). Internet encyclopaedias go head to head. *Nature*, *438*, 900–901, https://doi.org/10.1038/438900a.

1.3 Activity 3: Checking news websites

Type: Group Work / Discussion

Duration: 20 min (2 x 10 min)

Learning outcomes: Participants will be able to apply the criteria and questions from activity one in practice. They will be better equipped to evaluate a source's credibility themselves.

Materials/Resources needed:

- At least one device with internet connection per group. One laptop/computer and a large screen (projector, TV) for the facilitator.
- Pen & Notebook for participants
- Facilitator should prepare two news outlets in their country that participants are going to evaluate. To prepare the discussion, the facilitator should know these news outlets themselves and know about their credibility and political leaning. NewsGuard ratings may help prepare this activity. An explanation on how to use NewsGuard can be found in the Anti-Rumour toolkit.
- We recommend using credible sources in this activity to show the participants good practices and make them aware how trustworthy journalism looks like. Using populist or untrustworthy sites could backfire since time might run short in this activity to discuss their flaws in detail. If time is not an issue and the facilitator feels well-prepared to debunk and discuss, less credible sources can be used as well.

Participant instructions:
Each group is assigned one of the two news outlets. In 10 minutes, each group should look at these websites and note anything they find regarding the questionnaire on the credibility of news outlets: History of publishing fake news, use of sources, declaring opinion pieces, correcting errors, deceptive headlines.

After 10 minutes the facilitators collects these findings for each website. The participants share with the group what they found. They can discuss their findings and discuss if the news website is generally credible or not.

Facilitator's instruction:
Explain the task. Project the checklist on news outlets' credibility onto the large screen and explain that this should be the basis for the research. Divide the participants into groups of 3 - 4 people. As discussing the findings would take too long if more than two news outlets are researched, if there are more than two groups, multiple groups can be assigned the same outlet.

After 10 minutes of research, collect the findings of the groups and try to come to a consensus whether the news outlet is generally credible or not.

Possible alterations:
This activity heavily relies on the news outlets that the participants evaluate. Depending on participants' knowledge and the facilitator's ability, the examples can range from well-known high-quality news outlets to smaller blogs with populist tendencies, where credibility is not as black or white.

Debrief: What is your main takeaway from this activity?

Background reading/Additional Resources:
https://www.newsguardtech.com/de/bewertungen/bewertungsprozess-und-kriterien/

https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer