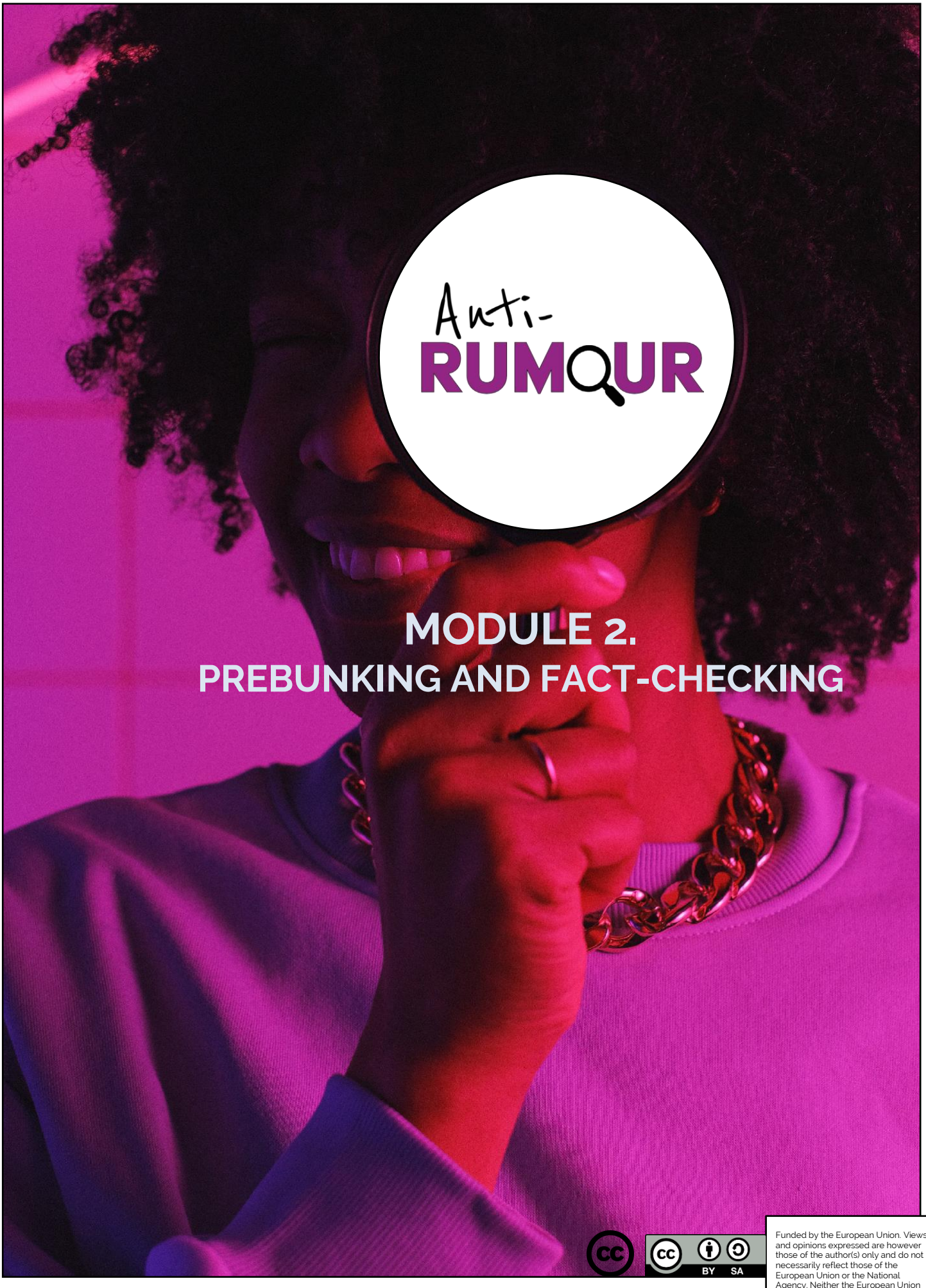

Anti-
RUMQUR

MODULE 2.
PREBUNKING AND FACT-CHECKING

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Module 2: Prebunking and Fact-Checking

Prebunking and fact-checking are both valuable strategies for combating the spread of disinformation, operating in different ways that complement each other effectively.

Prebunking involves exposing people to information about how disinformation works before they encounter the disinformation itself. This method is helpful because it functions like a psychological inoculation, making people more resilient to manipulative tactics used in disinformation. This proactive approach helps people recognize and question dubious information sources, promoting a behavioral change that makes them less likely to accept information at face value.

On the other hand, *fact-checking* (or debunking) involves verifying the factual accuracy of specific claims or pieces of information after they have been published or circulated. Fact-checking is helpful because it directly addresses and corrects false claims. This method also holds individuals and organizations accountable for spreading false information, which can potentially prevent future disinformation.

Together, prebunking and fact-checking create a valuable defense against disinformation. Prebunking helps prevent initial deception by fostering critical thinking, whereas fact-checking provides immediate corrections. By combining the educational approach of prebunking with the reactive approach of fact-checking, individuals can more effectively recognize, resist, and combat disinformation.

2.1 Activity 1: Input – Prebunking as an "inoculation" against disinformation

Type: Input

Duration: 15 minutes

Learning outcomes: Participants will learn about different manipulation tactics used in disinformation

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.

> Prebunking is like giving your mind a toolkit to spot and resist disinformation before it even appears. It works by educating you on the common tactics used to spread false information. For instance, if you learn that disinformation often relies on emotional manipulation or fake authority figures, you'll be more skeptical when you encounter those tactics in the real world. By understanding these strategies ahead of time, you're less likely to be fooled by them. That's why some call it "inoculation" against disinformation.
>
> Think of it as building up your defenses: you're training yourself to recognize the red flags of disinformation, such as sensational headlines or dubious sources. This way, when you come across misleading information, you can critically evaluate it.
> Here are some of the most common manipulation tactics:

Emotionalization:

Emotionalization is a manipulation tactic to exploit your feelings and sway your opinions. It works by presenting information in a way that triggers strong emotions like anger, fear, or joy. When you're emotionally charged, you're more likely to react quickly and share the information without thinking critically about its accuracy.

For example, a piece of disinformation might use a heartbreaking story or a shocking image to provoke an immediate emotional response. This tactic can be especially effective because emotions can cloud your judgment, making you more susceptible to accepting false information as true and more inclined to share and interact with the content on social media.

Emotionalization does not necessarily have to be a tactic used only in text. Images that evoke emotions are also an often-used way to manipulate audiences.

Scapegoating:

Scapegoating means to blame a person or group for problems or negative events. This tactic works by targeting a specific individual or group and portraying them as the cause of various issues, even if there is no factual basis for the blame. The purpose is to divert attention from the real causes of the problem and to create a common enemy that people can unite against. It is often used to deliberately harm or discredit certain groups of people or parties (e.g. smear campaign).

This manipulation leverages existing biases and prejudices, making it easier for people to accept the false narrative without questioning it. Recognizing this tactic helps you see through attempts to simplify complex issues by unfairly targeting others.

False Authority:

False authority is when someone tries to appear knowledgeable or credible on a topic, even though they don't actually have the expertise or qualifications. They might employ various tactics such as using technical jargon, name-dropping, claiming affiliation with prestigious institutions, or highlighting their expertise in areas that seem to be related, but aren't really.

By leveraging these strategies, they seek to persuade others to trust their opinions or advice, despite the absence of genuine authority. Recognizing false authority helps you see through attempts to manipulate opinions by relying on fake credentials or unwarranted expertise. It's about questioning whether someone truly has the knowledge or qualifications to speak on a particular topic and not being swayed by their false claims.

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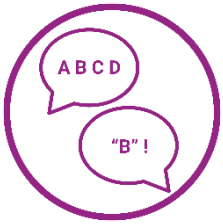
Decontextualization:



Decontextualization occurs when information is presented without its proper context, leading to a distorted understanding or interpretation. This tactic involves selectively highlighting certain details while omitting others, thereby distorting the overall meaning or significance of the information. By stripping away the context, individuals can manipulate perceptions, influence opinions, or reinforce preconceived beliefs.

Decontextualization is often used to frame narratives in a particular light, emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying or disregarding others to serve a specific agenda or viewpoint. It's like seeing a piece of a puzzle without knowing where it fits, making it difficult to grasp the full picture and potentially leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

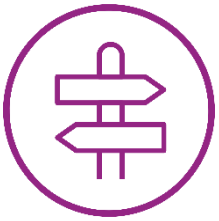
Decontextualization can also be used in images: Photographs of events are used in a different context than they were originally produced. Or an image of a single action or scene can be shown without showing the full context of what happened.

Ad Hominem:

Ad hominem is a Latin term (lit. against the human) for a pretty straightforward concept: attacking the person instead of their argument. It's a manipulation tactic to discredit someone's ideas by criticizing their character, personal traits, or background, rather than addressing their actual argument.

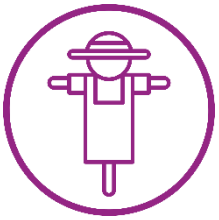
Recognizing ad hominem attacks helps you see through attempts to undermine legitimate arguments by attacking the people making them. It's about focusing on the actual content of discussions and debates rather than getting sidetracked by personal attacks.

False Dichotomy:



False dichotomy is when someone presents only two options as if they are the only possibilities, ignoring the existence of other alternatives. It's like saying you're either with us or against us, leaving no room for middle ground or nuance. This creates a false sense of urgency and limits the debate to only two extreme options, ignoring other potential, more balanced solutions. Recognizing false dichotomies helps you see through attempts to oversimplify complex issues and manipulate opinions by limiting choices.

Straw Man:



A Straw Man is when someone misrepresents their opponent's argument to make it easier to attack. Instead of addressing the actual points, they create a distorted version of their opponent's position and attack that instead. They argue against something the opponent didn't say.

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 adjusted. 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:

https://inoculation.science/inoculation-videos/
https://www.klicksafe.de/desinformation-und-meinung/prebunking-schutz-vor-desinformationen
https://populismus.online/
https://www.zdf.de/show/mai-think-x-die-show/maithink-x-folge-31-populismus-100.html

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2.2 Activity 2: Spot the manipulation tactic

Type: Quiz / Group Discussion

Duration: 10 min

Learning outcomes: By checking concrete examples and analyzing them, participants will have a better understanding of manipulation tactics and be better equipped to spot them in their everyday media usage.

Materials/Resources needed:
Lesson 4 Annex 2;
Either show the posts on a large screen (projector/TV) via a laptop and PDF/PPT file.

Or Preferably: Mentimeter Poll (PC + Projector/TV, one smartphone / tablet per participant)

1. Set up a Multiple Choice poll on http://www.mentimeter.com (or comparable platform).
2. Set up seven slides and add the seven manipulation tactics as options, all with the question "Which manipulation best describes this tweet?"
3. Add one post image per slide (it might not be displayed ideally in the slide due to the format, but participants will see it correctly on their devices.
4. In the section "Interactivity", disable "Show responses live"

Instruction for Facilitator:

When using a menti poll, share the code with the group. Show the "Present" mode on mentimeter.com on the large screen. Ask participants to select the manipulation tactic that best describes the post that is shown. When everyone has voted, press "H" to reveal the answers. Briefly discuss with the group why they have chosen their answers. Multiple answers can be true.

If you're not using a menti poll, show the posts one by one on a large screen and ask participants which manipulation tactics can be found in each and why they think so.

Please note that all of these posts are fake. All names and texts are made-up. The pictures are stock photos.

Some points to bring up:

Lukas Schäfer:

- Most fitting answer: Scapegoating
- Puts the blame for a complex problem that is influenced by many different factors, on a singular group.
- New tech employees might contribute to a higher volume of traffic, but they are most certainly not solely responsible for the problem.

Thalia Katsaros:

- Most fitting answer: False Dichotomy
- Speaking in two absolutes: either, or
- Alternative solutions could be an option, e.g. making changes to the reform
- "doom our children's future" can also be counted as emotionalization

Andrea Christou:

- Most fitting answer: Ad Hominem
- Instead of arguing why he thinks the minister's calculations are wrong, he attacks her on a personal level

Julienne Dupont:

- Most fitting answer: False Authority
- While she does have a PhD in science from a reputable university, a degree in physics does not make her an expert in medicine
- "better than any vaccine" could also be counted as false dichotomy – when it comes to boosting the immune system in general, there are other options than vaccines and cow's milk

Frank Tonmann

- Most fitting answer: Emotionalization
- Creates anger and fear by using strong language such as "destroy lives", "innocent children"
- "Chinese toy companies" could also be seen as scapegoating: The blame is put on one particular group of companies and one nation

Maria Bader / Valentina Flores:

- Most fitting answer: Decontextualization
- Valentina only cites a portion of Maria Bader's original statement, making an argument that Bader is against the transition to renewables. However, Bader did say "renewables are the future".

Diego García / Elena Gonzalez:

- Most fitting answer: Straw Man
- Elena argues against something Diego didn't say: that the economy should be ignored. She distorts his original statement.
- "extremists, radical" could also be counted as emotionalization

Instruction for Participants:
Open menti.com on your handheld devices. Enter the code the facilitator gives you. Look at the post that shows on your device and choose the manipulation tactic you think best describes this post.

Possible alterations:
Facilitators can also use their own examples and create additional posts. It's also possible to use screenshots from real posts or articles.

Debrief: How can you apply this knowledge about manipulation tactics in your daily online media usage?

2.3 Activity 3: Fact-Checking Content

Type: Group Activity / Group Discussion

Duration: 20 min

Learning outcomes: Participants will learn how to identify and verify the authenticity of information and develop critical thinking skills necessary for discerning credible sources from disinformation.

Materials/Resources needed: Laptops/tablets/smartphones with internet access, Access to fact-checking websites and tools. Pre-prepared fake and real news articles (Annex 3 or facilitator's own material), notebook and pen for recording findings

Instruction for Facilitator:

Divide the participants into small groups of 2-4 members.

Give a short introduction to the importance of fact-checking:

> In today's world, we're constantly bombarded with information from social media, news websites, and various apps. With so much content out there, it can be hard to tell what's true and what's not. Prebunking can help you prepare yourself to recognize disinformation and be more skeptical about the content you encounter online.
>
> However, it is often still not that easy to know on your own if a piece of information is true or false. Recognizing manipulation tactics can be helpful in giving you an idea if content is generally trustworthy or manipulative. If you want to be completely sure if a piece of information is true or not, you should practice fact-checking: Verifying the information you come across.
>
> There are several websites and tools that can help you with that. We will use a couple of them in the next activity.

Show a slide with fact-checking tools they can use to verify the information. If needed, you can watch a short tutorial from the Anti-Rumour toolkit explaining how to use the tool (English with subtitles in German, Greek, Spanish).

- Google Fact Check Explorer:
  - https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
  - A search engine only for fact-check articles
  - Anti-Rumour Toolkit Tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooJi97a8i5M
- TinEye:
  - https://tineye.com/
  - A reverse image search engine
  - Anti-Rumour Toolkit Tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwfqNRD2UmE
- Google Reverse Image Search:
  - https://images.google.com/
  - A reverse image search engine
  - Tutorial (Insider Tech): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7IF5Su9DZI
- Prominent Fact-Checking Websites from your country

- Germany: dpa Faktencheck, Correctiv Faktencheck, Tagesschau Faktenfinder, AFP Faktencheck
- Spain: Maldita, Newtral, Google Fact Check Explorer
- Greece: Fact Finders, Greece Fact Check, Greek Hoaxes Detector
- Cyprus: Cyprus Fact Check, AFP Fack Check

Give the participants access to three pieces of content they should verify. You can do so by granting them access to an online document (e.g. Google Docs, Word 365) or by sending them links and images into a group chat in a messenger of your choice.

To choose fitting examples and fact-checking tools, we recommend

- Choose false posts / articles / images in the native language of your participants. It should be false information so the participants can have a sense of accomplishment when debunking it
- Test first how reliable each tool is to find a solution. Does Google Fact Check Explorer bring up a fitting fact-check article with relevant keywords? Does a reverse image search engine bring up relevant websites debunking the information? The activity should work as seamless as possible for the participants
- If you prefer not to use your own examples or don't have much time, you can have a look at Lesson 1 - Module 3 - Activity 1, Lesson 2 - Module 3 - Activity 2 or Lesson 2 - Module 4. Those activities provide several examples related to social and environmental issues

Participants have 10 minutes to first write down their first judgement (real/fake/partially true), fact-check the information and then give a final judgment (real/fake/partially true) for each of the three articles / images. After 10 minutes, collect their findings and discuss how they approached the task.

Participants instruction:

- Look at the three articles and images. Write down your initial judgement for each of them. Do you think they are real, fake or partially true?
- Use one or more of the fact-checking resources your facilitator showed you. Look for fact-checking articles by fact-checking organisations and use the reverse image search to find out more about the photos.
- After doing your research, write down your final judgement for each information / photo: real, fake or partially true?
- You have 10 minutes to complete this task

Possible alterations:

Facilitators can use the articles and photos from Annex 3. However, we highly recommend using your own examples: Adjust them to your country's context, find examples that are more recent, find information that is especially relevant to your participants' demographic.

Debrief: Did you have trouble fact-checking the information? Was your initial judgement correct or not?

Background reading / External resources:
You can find more information on fact-checking tools in the Anti-Rumour toolkit: http://www.anti-rumour.eu