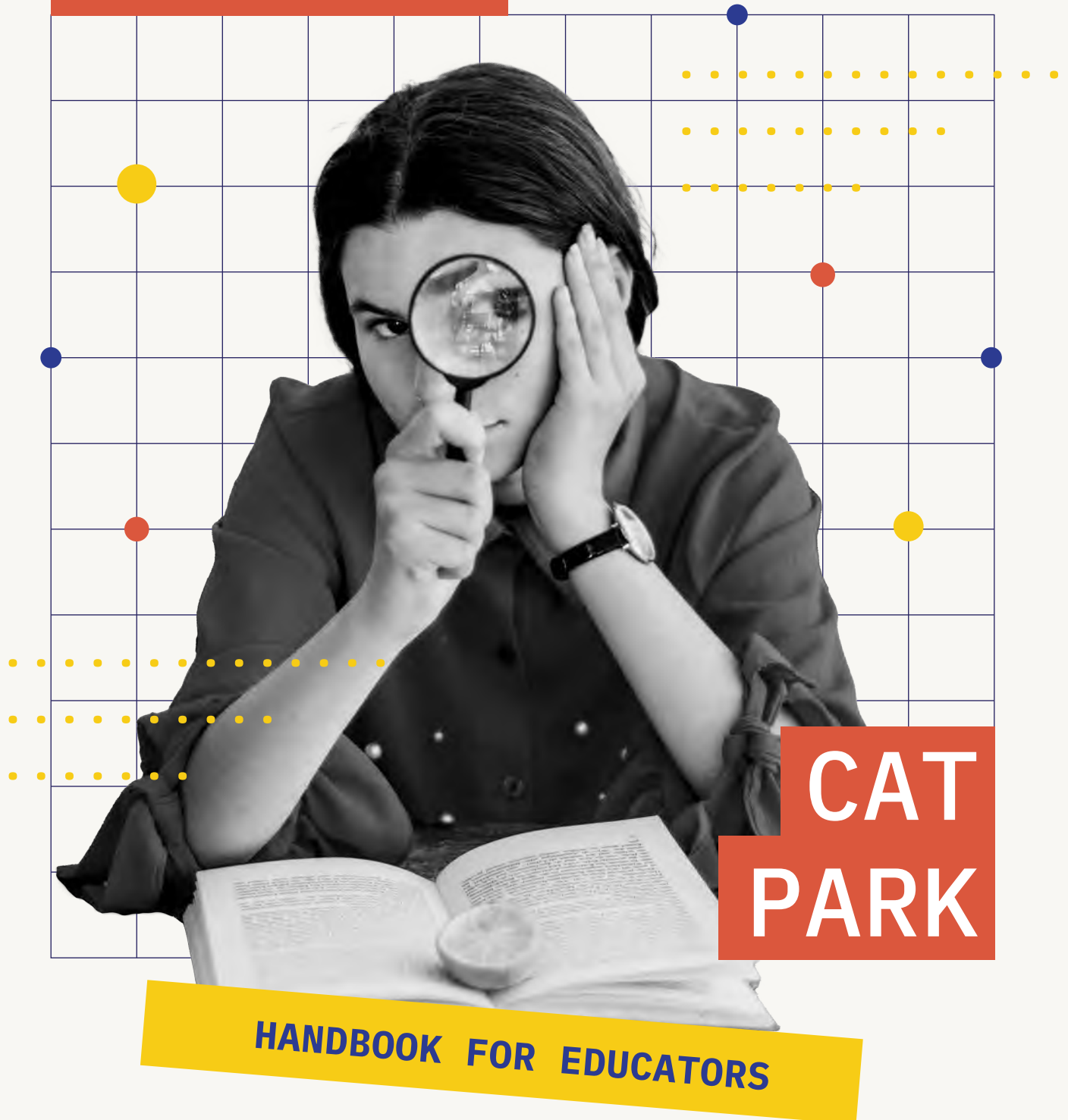# FAKE
NO MORE

CAT
PARK

HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS

FAKE NO MORE

Workshops to Develop Media and
Information Literacy Skills Among Youth

CAT PARK

An Online Game That Boosts
Your Defense Against Disinformation

INTRODUCTION

This handbook contains workshop examples aiming to develop critical thinking and media literacy skills among young people. Through various fun activities and tasks, this handbook encourages discussions about important issues, such as our media usage habits, our overall media environment, the manipulation of media, but also about the ways to withstand the challenges found in the complex information system.

This handbook is designed to provide educators with detailed instructions on how to structure their training and the many directions they can steer the discussions. The 'Cat Park' video game, referred to in this handbook, is an interactive story experience playable online and optimized for mobile devices.

✳ LEARNING GOALS

☑ DEVELOP MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS

☑ DETECT MEDIA MANIPULATION

☑ UNDERSTAND OUR OWN MEDIA HABITS

☑ UNDERSTAND MECHANISMS THAT HELP US WITHSTAND MEDIA MANIPULATION COMING FROM OUR OWN MEDIA HABITS

✳ METHODOLOGY

Activities in the handbook are created to leave enough room for each student to share their opinions and thoughts with the other participants. The important role of the educator is to lead the discussion in a manner that encourages participants to share their attitudes freely. It is also important to note that media literacy does not judge participants' preferences and it does not teach/indicate the good media from the bad. Activities and workshops should pave a way for critical reading of media messages, not tell us which media to consume. They should also help us gain the skills needed to analyze the said media messages.

✳ CONTENTS

✳ MOON LANDING (20 MIN)
✳ SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION (30 MIN)
✳ CAT PARK — A GAME THAT BOOSTS DEFENSE AGAINST DISINFORMATION (45 MIN)
✳ FINAL DISCUSSION (25 MIN)

✳ For successful training, you will need: flip chart paper, sticky notes, prepared handouts, PPT presentation, markers, and Cat Park game (computers with a link ready if you decide not to use mobile phones)

MOON LANDING

DURATION	20 min
MATERIALS	Prepared handout with the game

Warm-up activity 'Moon Landing' helps participants get to know each other better while having fun. Connection among participants is essential. It facilitates advancement of the workshop and encourages them to feel comfortable in the group, which leads to better quality discussions in the activities to follow.

Furthermore, the participants will reflect on their decision-making processes. How have they reached their decisions? On their own, defending their opinions? Have they reached their results based on diverse arguments? Or have they simply left the final decision to the other participants from the group?

ASK

Ask participants to state their names and to mention one field they know exceptionally well (e.g. history) and one field they barely know (e.g. painting). The question can be framed like this: If you were to apply for a game show, in which area would you excel, and which topic would make you anxious? Make participants remember their answers. We will need them for the final discussion. Share your own "strong" and "weak" areas.

Divide participants into teams of 2 or 3 and hand over the pieces of paper with the printed task. The use of mobile phones (internet) is not allowed while the tasks are being solved.

Your team has embarked on a trip to the moon fifty years after the last human had walked on the lunar surface. You have arrived on the light side of the moon, but due to a glitch on the spaceship, you have touched down too far from your original landing coordinates. Therefore, you will have to walk for miles.

One part of the team will have to stay near the spaceship, while the other part will have to move towards the original landing point and get back safely to the spaceship afterwards. Despite substantial damage on landing, 12 items remained in good condition after the incident.

In groups, sort the following 12 items into four levels of importance, from the most to the least valuable. Each level will have three items.

Most valuable:		
Second most valuable:		
Third most valuable:		
No value:		

You should arrange the items based on which ones you think are the most important and useful for your space mission. Your answers will be rated based on the rankings established by experts from NASA (US space program agency). You have **8 minutes** to solve this task, but you can use two hints: 1) you can pick one of the items and ask the moderator which group it belongs in; 2) you can pick one additional item and ask the moderator whether it belongs to a certain group (to get a definite "yes" or "no" answer).

a box of matches	one pack of food concentrate	50 feet of nylon rope
parachute canvas	a portable heating unit	signal flares
one carton of dehydrated milk	two tanks of oxygen	a stellar map
a solar-powered FM transmitter/receiver	a magnetic compass	5 gallons of water

GAME CONCLUSION

You can collect the pieces of paper from the groups or ask participants to estimate how successful they were. They are awarded one point for each item sorted into the correct category (level). The solutions are ranked based on the rankings created by NASA experts, as mentioned earlier.

DISCUSS

First level: Items that belong to the level of most importance are tanks of oxygen (it would be impossible to survive without them), bottles of water (extremely important to make up for liquid loss), and the stellar map (primary means of navigation).

Second level: Items that belong to the second level of importance are food concentrate (important for replacement of energy loss), FM transmitter/receiver (for communication with the spaceship), and the nylon rope (useful for scaling cliffs and tying off wounds).

Third level: Items that belong to the third level of importance are parachute canvas (useful for protection from the sun's rays), signal flares (if an SOS call needs to be sent), and a case of dehydrated milk (good, although a bulkier source of energy compared to food concentrate).

Fourth level: Items that belong to the level of no value are portable heating unit (not needed unless you go to the dark side of the moon), magnetic compass (magnetic field on the moon exists, but it is quite weak, making the compass useless), and the match box (totally useless because there is no oxygen on the moon to sustain combustion).

QUESTIONS

How satisfied are you with your performance? Was there any decision that you initially felt was right, which you then changed due to group pressure? Which of the answers above surprised you? Were any of your selections completely wrong? If so, what made you place those items in the wrong category? If you had the chance to search the internet for a minute during your quest, what would you have searched for first?

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION

fake

fake

fake

fake

DURATION	30 min
MATERIALS	Sticky notes (post-it notes) and flip chart paper

'Sherlock Holmes and the Fight Against Disinformation' workshop helps us take a better look at our own media habits, and to get the picture of the media environment and the challenges we are facing. This workshop uses examples of cognitive distortions to make participants aware of their own approaches to certain media content types, and to offer them a deeper understanding of the reasons for susceptibility to media manipulation that all of us have from time to time.
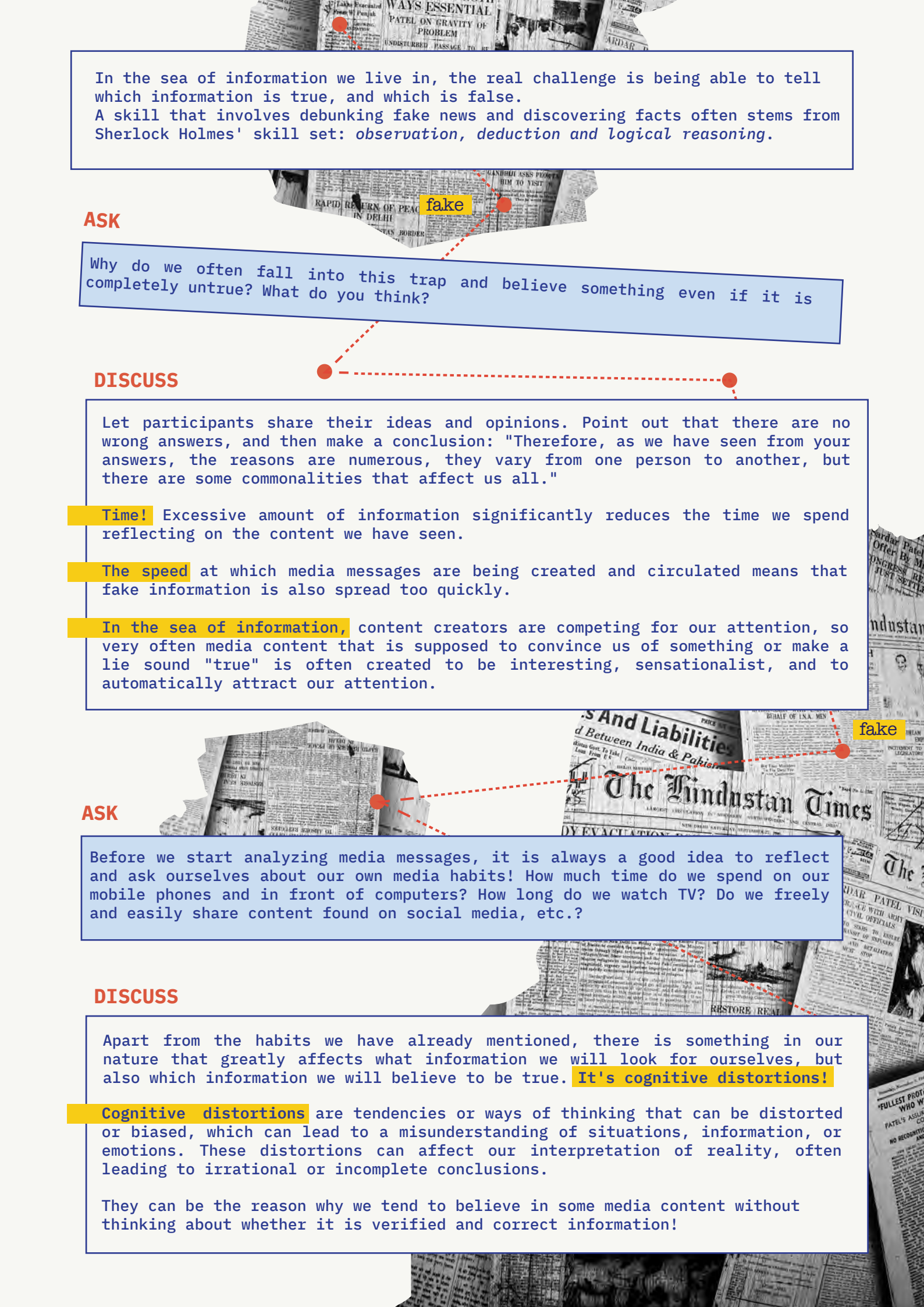
ASK

I assume that all of you have heard about the detective Sherlock Holmes. Can anyone tell us what was behind his genius that made him so famous?

DISCUSS

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective. In the stories, he is also known as a "consulting detective", and is famous for his borderline superhuman knowledge of forensic science, skills of deduction, as well as his observational and logical reasoning skills.

Nowadays, with the rise of the internet and information technology, we are constantly surrounded with media content of all sorts. Unlike in the 20th century, an era when we were getting informed through traditional media outlets, these days we find information on our phones, tablets, computers, smart watches, etc. We used to go to schools and libraries to find information – today, it feels like information finds us.

In the sea of information we live in, the real challenge is being able to tell which information is true, and which is false.
A skill that involves debunking fake news and discovering facts often stems from Sherlock Holmes' skill set: *observation, deduction and logical reasoning*.

ASK

Why do we often fall into this trap and believe something even if it is completely untrue? What do you think?

DISCUSS

Let participants share their ideas and opinions. Point out that there are no wrong answers, and then make a conclusion: "Therefore, as we have seen from your answers, the reasons are numerous, they vary from one person to another, but there are some commonalities that affect us all."

Time! Excessive amount of information significantly reduces the time we spend reflecting on the content we have seen.

The speed at which media messages are being created and circulated means that fake information is also spread too quickly.

In the sea of information, content creators are competing for our attention, so very often media content that is supposed to convince us of something or make a lie sound "true" is often created to be interesting, sensationalist, and to automatically attract our attention.

ASK

Before we start analyzing media messages, it is always a good idea to reflect and ask ourselves about our own media habits! How much time do we spend on our mobile phones and in front of computers? How long do we watch TV? Do we freely and easily share content found on social media, etc.?

DISCUSS

Apart from the habits we have already mentioned, there is something in our nature that greatly affects what information we will look for ourselves, but also which information we will believe to be true. **It's cognitive distortions!**

Cognitive distortions are tendencies or ways of thinking that can be distorted or biased, which can lead to a misunderstanding of situations, information, or emotions. These distortions can affect our interpretation of reality, often leading to irrational or incomplete conclusions.

They can be the reason why we tend to believe in some media content without thinking about whether it is verified and correct information!

Have you ever decided to buy a product online because it had a better user rating? Or, have you ever felt happy when you came across information that confirmed your previous views?

These are just two out of the many examples when we might have reacted in accordance with our own cognitive distortions. For instance, we bought a product because we really wanted to have it, and the number of positive reviews had only encouraged us further to buy it – even though, deep down, we all know that this kind of online verification can be completely fake. :)

Prepare 3 pieces of flip chart paper in advance and write down 3 examples of cognitive distortions (one cognitive distortion on each piece of paper):

* **Black and white thinking**
* **Confirmation bias**
* **Motivated reasoning**

Hand out sticky notes to the participants and explain to them that it is important to be aware of our media habits as well as our cognitive distortions. We all have them, but the only way to become aware of cognitive distortions is to try and remember the situations when they drove our thinking.

Show them the first piece of paper and explain what the first cognitive distortion means. Ask them to write their own example on their sticky note. If they cannot think of a personal example, ask the participants to remember a time they saw someone fall for that cognitive distortion.

Using the same principle, go over all three instances of cognitive distortions. After each example, read several examples written by participants, without mentioning who wrote them. Leave the discussion of individual examples for the end.

FLIP CHART I

BLACK AND WHITE THINKING

Someone who thinks like this usually sees the world in black and white. People who are opinionated about someone or something oftentimes cannot notice other nuances. Seeing only two possible outcomes or options, a person is not capable of an objective assessment of the situation.

Explanation: After participants write down their own examples, you can explain and clarify how black and white thinking was used in this situation, unless this was already mentioned:

An example of this opinion can be the attitude towards migrants that we created on the basis of negative campaigns that were conducted mainly on social networks, but also through other media.

FLIP CHART II

CONFIRMATION BIAS

The tendency to accept information that confirms our pre-existing beliefs, without putting any effort into verifying the credibility of the information.

Explanation: After participants write down their own examples, you can explain and clarify how confirmation bias was used in this situation, unless this was already mentioned:

For instance, let's consider a situation where a person who is very fond of coffee sees a newspaper article or a video about the proven health benefits or even healing properties of coffee. Led by a sense of satisfaction, they will accept this information as true (because it is desirable on a personal level) and probably get up to make another coffee. :)

FLIP CHART III

MOTIVATED REASONING

When we are convinced of something, we are motivated to keep searching for attitudes that further confirm our conviction.

Explanation: After participants write down their own examples, you can explain and clarify how motivated reasoning was used in this situation, unless this was already mentioned:

If we believe that HAARP technologies threaten us, we will try to find as much information as possible that confirms our beliefs and fears. In an attempt to find all the evidence we can, we will get lost in our quest for the truth and the right information, and unconsciously seek confirmation of our existing belief only.

CONCLUSION

These examples illustrate only a few of the most obvious cognitive distortions. Psychology tells us that there are about twenty. Recognizing these distortions can help change unhealthy thinking patterns and help us make more rational decisions. However, we have seen that they are not the only obstacles in the complex information system, making it difficult for us to differentiate a fact from someone's opinion or even completely made-up news.

CAT PARK

DURATION	45 min
MATERIALS	Cat park game https://catpark.game

Cat Park – A Game That Boosts the Defense Against Disinformation: The 'Cat Park' workshop introduces participants to the more complex process of media manipulation and fake news, and explains why media literacy is a necessary skill for people in the 21st century. Through guided discussion and examples from the media, participants will be able to detect various types of manipulation, but also the reasons behind their creation. The central part of this activity is the 'Cat Park' video game. It will help participants demonstrate their understanding of the basic principles and models of disinformation in a fun way.

ASK

How would you define the concept of media and information literacy? What does it mean?

DISCUSS

Media and information literacy is therefore an aspect of functional literacy in the 21st century. It is a skill set that helps us navigate the complex system of information that surrounds us. These skills incorporate, first and foremost, critical thinking and how to approach media content, as well as the knowledge needed to recognize what kind of content it is. Further, whether that content is there to inform us or represents a personal opinion or a point of view, who the source of the media message is and whether that source is credible, how to find factual and verified information and, finally, how to create media content.

ASK

We have already mentioned our media habits and how much time we spend exposed to the media. Now, ask the group which specific media we use the most to get our information and why do we trust it?

DISCUSS

When it comes to media literacy, it is important to note that it does not teach us what to read or watch and it does not suggest any particular media. Rather, it is a set of skills that acts like a shield, so that even if we come across content that may not be correct, it will not be able to affect our lives. There are various types of media with different purposes: to inform, to educate, to entertain, etc. It is up to us to learn these differences and not to look for accurate information about, say, science or politics, in some tabloids, but in media that specializes in or deals more seriously with the topics that we are interested in.

ASK

Have you managed to recognize some of the ways and models of manipulation that we find in the media?

DISCUSS

There are numerous types of manipulation that we often see in the media. Some of them are easy to recognize because they are there to grab our attention in a very obvious way, using sensationalism and clickbait, and headlines starting with the words, SHOCKING, HORRIBLE, YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS, and so on. Then there are completely fabricated stories that mimic information, which were made-up to convince us to think a certain way. However, there are also those that are more difficult to recognize: disinformation that contains truth and facts to a certain degree, but those facts are used to create a false or "distorted" context.

The lighthearted and satirical nature of memes often leads us to dismiss them as mere visuals meant to make us smile. However, we must be aware that under this guise, they are frequently used as tools for deliberate manipulation, harassment or propaganda. Through humor, we might carelessly accept or even share a message that, while funny, could carry serious and harmful implications.

AI technologies, capable of generating realistic fake texts, images, audio and videos like deepfakes, pose significant challenges in differentiating real from artificial content. A major discussion about it arose when the 2023 Sony World Photography Awards prize-winning image was revealed to be AI-generated. Still, AI also plays a vital role in fighting disinformation and understanding synthetic media is becoming pivotal for digital media literacy.

TASK

Ask the participants to think of one example of the above mentioned forms of media manipulation that they came across themselves in the media.

DISCUSS

In order for us as a society to be able to withstand these challenges, various organizations and institutions have spent years looking to establish media literacy learning models, so that the learning and development of these skills becomes available to each and every citizen. This topic is getting more and more present in schools, but it is becoming clear that efforts from various sides need to be made to achieve the desired results.

One way to check our knowledge and test our level of critical thinking is through the 'Cat Park' interactive video game. The 'Cat Park' game is available in several different languages, including English, French, Dutch, and more. By playing this game, you will get the chance to try your hand at creating some of the manipulative content types, thus showing your understanding of them. The more successful the team is in the game, the more virtual friends it will make.

TASK

Divide the participants into small groups of 2 to 3 and ask them to open the game link on their computers or phones. Once all the participants have set their language, the game can begin! Limit the playing time to 20 minutes. When the last group reaches the end of the game, go over the final scores of the groups.

ASK

After the participants have finished and assessed their scores, ask them to share their comments on the differences in learning through interactive games compared to, say, learning through video materials.

DISCUSS

Since we have finished our 'Moon Landing', learned about cognitive pitfalls and played the 'Cat Park' game, we can now think back to one of our first discussions. Think back to the areas you stated as your "strengths", but also the areas in which you did not think you excelled in. Let's assume that it would be easier for you to fall for disinformation on a topic you know very little about. However, have you ever believed a lie on a subject you are very familiar with?
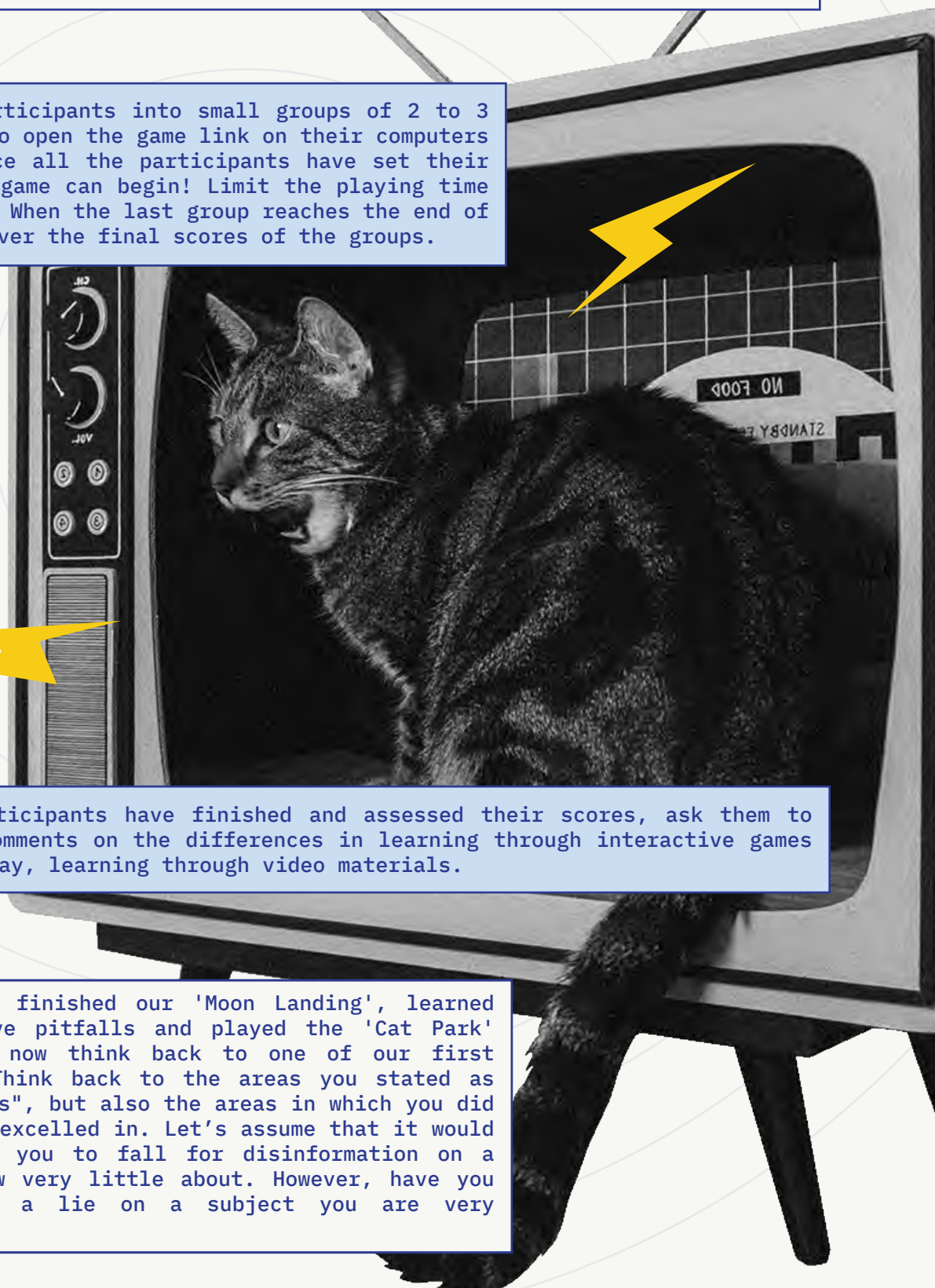
FINAL DISCUSSION

DURATION	25 min
MATERIALS	PPT slide with five questions (found in the text)

The final activity will summarize all the important information the participants learned and conclusions they reached during the training. It will also create more room for discussion during which the participants will share their impressions about everything they have learned during the training. During this activity, educators will, together with participants, draw conclusions about the skills that will help us become resistant to media manipulation.

DISCUSSION

If we talk about the thematic variety of (dis)information, which of the following six news stories would you believe first, and which one seems the least believable?
(Prepare a slide with the following 5 news stories and show it to the participants)

1. News about new kiwi-based medicine which slows down the growth of cancerous cells in laboratory mice
2. News about a medieval historian who wrote down the exact location of Attila the Hun's hidden tomb
3. News about a discovery of living microorganisms on Callisto, a moon of Jupiter
4. News about a lottery winner who spent all his winnings on a cat shelter
5. News about a soccer match between the national youth teams of South Africa and Eswatini, where the latter lost 107-0

DISCUSS

Let the participants briefly elaborate on their answers. You can summarize each of their conclusions.

Here are some doubts we might have about the first piece of news: What are the medicinal properties of kiwis? Who conducted the experiment and on how many mice? What exactly does the "slowdown" of cancerous cell growth mean? Is there a reason to hope that the experiment on mice will bear significance for humans?

Regarding the second news item, we can ask ourselves: What is the name of that historian? Was he a contemporary of Attila? Do we know about any of the historian's other works and, if so, how relevant are they? What can be found at the said location of the tomb and in which present-day country is it? Why are we only now learning about this discovery?

The third piece of news might lead us to the following questions: Knowing that no spacecraft has ever landed on Callisto, how were those microorganisms discovered? What type of microorganism was found? Is there a chance that something inanimate was mistakenly identified as a microorganism? Are conditions on Callisto hospitable to life?

When it comes to the fourth news item, these questions come to mind: Is there an official lottery confirmation of the jackpot amount? Is this part of some wider marketing move or campaign? Are the sources of this story credible? Is there an increase in the number of cat shelters lately? Could it be that only part of the story is true - that some benefactor opened a cat shelter but did not actually spend all the winnings from the lottery on it?

Finally, the news about the lopsided soccer match inspires us to consider the following questions: Is it possible to find the official match report anywhere? Is there any recording of the match? If the game lasted 90 to 95 minutes, how many goals per minute did the winning team have to score in order to achieve such a result? What's the history of the two teams? Is the first team known for having blowout wins and the second team a tradition for heavy defeats?

CONCLUSION

Sometimes we naively fall for disinformation, just because it is phrased convincingly, in an interesting way, or because we lack sufficient prior knowledge about the subject area. Still, due to various cognitive pitfalls, we can easily find ourselves believing a fake news story related to our favorite field as well. Therefore, it is essential to think about the sources of information, the quality and verifiability of the evidence, as well as about cause and effect relationships.

The most successful disinformation is the one which makes us believe its authenticity.