Workshop
IN A BOX

BE MEDIA SMART

STOP I THINK I CHECK

SLIDES: STRUCTURE & DESCRIPTION

STRUCTURE AND DESCRIPTION

SLIDE 1 | Cover | 1 minute

Briefly welcome & introduce the session.

SLIDE 2 | Hello | 1 minute

Briefly introduce yourself and your credentials. Don't forget to mention that you participated in a Media Literacy training session and explain why you're qualified to lead the workshop and why the topic is important to you.

SLIDE 3 | Be Media Smart | 1 minute

Introduction of the workshop. Explain that the workshop is part of a broader media literacy campaign **(RF 1)**.

SLIDE 4 | Media Literacy | 30 seconds

Explain that media literacy refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (*you can point to the image on the slide*).

Media literacy involves, for example, acquiring digital skills to use the internet and digital technologies; the ability to communicate effectivity using digital media; developing creative skills to produce content;

understanding online opportunities (such as learning) and risks (such as cyberbullying and disinformation); etc.

The idea of this slide is just to show participants that media literacy is a complex field, but you are going to focus on a specific part of it (the next slide). **(RF 2)**.

SLIDE 5 | Media Literacy – the critical approach | 30 seconds

Explain that this media literacy workshop will focus on the critical approach to media content and information. If you want, you can simply read the text below:

"This critical approach to media literacy is about empowering citizens to make well-informed decisions about the content and information they consume. It aims to equip people with the knowledge and skills they need to critically evaluate the information they encounter, learn how to identify trustworthy sources, analyse media messages and use information in a responsible way". **(RF 2).**

SLIDE 6 | Learning intensions | 1 minute

Read out the leaning intensions.

SLIDE 7 | Your participation | 1 minute

This workshop is expected to be very interactive, with attendees participating all the time in discussions and hands-on activities.

Therefore, it is important that you explain that their engagement with the workshop is crucial for the success of the session. Some participants might be shy or feel that don't have enough knowledge to make comments and answer questions.

So, make sure you create a welcoming environment, explaining that you are here to facilitate this learning activity through dialogue and friendly discussions.

Also, there's always a chance that some sensitive or controversial topics emerge during the conversations. To avoid any problems with this, explain that participants should respect each other's opinions and points of view.

SLIDE 8 | Ice Breaker Intro | 30 seconds

The idea of the Ice Breaker is to start the session with a relaxed and interactive activity to help participants get to know each other and feel more comfortable.

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SLIDE 9 | Ice Breaker Details | 5 minutes

Ask participants to tell you some stories that happened in the past few years where they (or someone they know) came across some piece of information and were not sure whether it was true or false, or real or fake. If you have a good story, you can share it with participants as well.

Some points they should consider:

- What was the topic?
- What was the format? (Text, image, video etc.)
- What was the type of the content? (News article, advertising, meme etc.)
- What was the main reason (or reasons) why they were not sure about the veracity of this piece of information?

Remember that this is just a warmup activity to get people talking and sharing their first ideas. You don't need to discuss the topic in depth.

PART 1 – STOP: Information Age

This first part aims to discuss how *attention*, *focus* and *awareness* are crucial for the analysis and understanding of media content.

To do that, we are going to explore the challenges of consuming and interacting with the massive amount of information we encounter daily – a torrential downpour of news updates, social media notifications, emails, and more. To complicate things further, media content is not equal – it varies in format (text, images etc.) and types (news, ads etc.), and digital platforms use many techniques to keep us connected and engaged with their content.

The idea in **Part 1** is to create a sense of overwhelm among the participants, gradually intensifying issues and challenges and painting an intense picture of a world inundated with information.

It is important that they feel a sense of urgency in finding solutions to have a better relationship with the media content they consume.

SLIDE 10 | The Digital Revolution | 1 minute

Start this section by explaining that with the advent of the internet and the digital media technologies (the digital revolution), the way we access and

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use information radically changed. Here you can use some everyday illustrations to exemplify how even the most ordinary things were different before the internet (for example, we had to go to the library to find some piece of information, whereas now the same information can be accessed with one or two clicks).

One of the most important changes in what we call *the information age* is the fact that before the digital revolution, we were simply consumers of information, as the production and dissemination of media content was concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and organizations, resulting in a more controlled and centralized flow of information.

Imagine a time when newspapers, television stations, radio networks, and publishers had the resources, infrastructure, and authority to decide which stories were worthy of publication and broadcast, with the power to shape public discourse and, as a consequence, our perceptions of the world around us.

The main idea that you should convey here is that, after the digital revolution, ordinary people became not only *consumers* but also *producers* of media content. Think of how easy it is nowadays to both create and spread content online. All you need is a smartphone, an internet connection, and an idea in your mind.

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SLIDE 11 | Too much information | 30 seconds

The fact that media content can be easily created and disseminated means that the amount of information online is staggering, and it only continues to grow. Even though there are many benefits in having more information available, such as for educational, research and collaboration purposes, in this workshop we are going to focus on its challenges.

The first important challenge is that we are **constantly bombarded with information** coming from many different sources. Other than the traditional media, such as TV, newspaper and radio, a lot of people are constantly connected to the internet accessing all types of content in different digital platforms and applications, such as social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok…), messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram…), search engines (Google, Yahoo…) and video-sharing platforms (YouTube, Vimeo…).

SLIDE 12 | Different formats | 30 seconds

And this huge amount of information not only comes from many different sources, but they also come in different formats. Text, images, videos, audios… These different formats convey messages in different ways, which means that the way we engage with these different formats varies considerably **(RF 3)**.

SLIDE 13 | Types of content | 1 minute

Media content also comes in different types, such as news, entertainment, advertising and others. Each type has different characteristics and, more importantly, different purposes and objectives.

For example, *news* aims to keep you informed on current events, providing updates on topics such as politics, business, sports etc. *Entertainment* provides content primarily for enjoyment and pleasure. This includes movies, TV shows, music, books, and video games. *Advertising*, on the other hand, aims to promote and sell products or services. And so on **(RF 4)**.

SLIDE 14 | Grab your attention | 30 seconds

Just to complicate things further, amidst this ocean of information in different types and formats, digital platforms and media organizations do everything they can to **grab your attention.** Let's watch a short video from Tactical Tech…

SLIDE 15 | Video | 3 minutes

Play the video.

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SLIDE 16 | Keep you hooked | 1 minute

The more time you spend on digital platforms, the more data they collect from you and, as a consequence, the more they learn about your personal preferences. This data is used for several things, but mainly to create detailed profile of users, which advertisers can then use to deliver more relevant and targeted ads. In a nutshell, that is the business model of the major digital platforms, where the users' data is gold.

For this reason, digital media platforms are designed to grab our attention and keep us engaged with their content for the longest time possible, so that they can collect as much data as possible.

As we saw in the video, they do this through a combination of user experience strategies, psychological principles, and data-driven techniques, such as the use of **algorithms** to push content that match your preferences. These strategies are designed to attract our interest, drive viewership or readership, and ultimately generate revenue, especially through advertising and subscriptions. **(RF 5).**

SLIDE 17 | More clicks | 1 minute

This business model also means that the more we engage with a content, the more we generate revenue for the creator of this content. This is easy to understand: if you have a website and you have a lot of people visiting

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it, this makes your website attractive to advertisers, because a lot of people will see their ads there. So, the more clicks you have, the more advertisers will pay to have their ads on your page.

For this reason, media organizations and other content creators use a variety of strategies and techniques to persuade users to click on their links, such as eye-catching headlines that evoke curiosity, or the use of sensationalist language that looks shocking and makes people want to learn more by clicking on the link. The goal is to grab your attention, spark your interest, and ultimately drive you to engage with their content.

SLIDES 18 and 19 | STOP | 3 minutes

Great! So, at this stage it should be clear to all participants how complicated the media landscape looks like. Ask participants to picture themselves waking up to a smartphone filled with notifications – news alerts, social media updates, emails. The amount is staggering. They begin to read news articles, watch videos, see photos… They come across sensationalist headlines trying to draw their attention, emotional comments making them feel angry, clickbait and trending memes everywhere. Have they ever felt their attention slipping away?

The constant bombardment of notifications, videos, and updates undermines our ability to focus. In this situation, our attention drifts, making it difficult to dive deep into meaningful content.

This *information overload* can lead to stress, problems in making decisions, and difficulties in separating reliable sources from unreliable ones.

So, that's why we should **STOP**! But what exactly does STOP mean in this context? It means that we should consider everything that we discussed so far before jumping to conclusions about any piece of information we encounter, especially online.

STOP in this context means that we must be attentive, focused and cautious when we encounter media content. We are going to discuss this further in the next activity.

SLIDE 20 | Activity 1 – STOP: INTRO | 10 seconds
Introduce *Stop* activity.

SLIDE 21 | Activity 1 – STOP | 25 minutes
Reminder to Facilitators: in this activity, you will be primarily working as a learning facilitator. This means that your role is to instigate participants

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to engage in conversations, encouraging them to share ideas and think about the topic being discussed.

FIRST PART – GROUP DISCUSSION – 10 MINUTES

Divide the participants in groups of 3 or 4. In their groups, they should discuss strategies or best practices to **STOP** when they encounter information or media content. As we have seen, there are many things to consider when we come across information or media.

Ask participants to focus on the following:

- **Think about your everyday experience with digital media. What are the things that usually draw your attention? What distracts you the most?**

  Based on what you have discussed so far, tell participants to consider the different pieces of media content they come across daily and how they deal/engage with them. Can they get more easily distracted and less focused with some types of content that others? Does it have to do with the digital platform, the format, the topic?

- **Do you usually know the source of the information before engaging with the content? What is the importance of knowing the source? What makes a good source of information?**
Tell participants to consider the source of information (which is usually not the digital platform!) and what they believe is a reliable source of information.

- **What about your personal bias? Do you know what it is and, if so, do you think it affect the way you interpret/understand the content?**
Tell participants to consider how their personal inclinations, convictions and preferences may influence the way they engage with media content.

SECOND PART – SHARING INSIGHTS – 15 MINUTES
When time is up, ask the groups to share their thoughts on the 3 questions you presented.

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES – discuss their everyday experiences paying attention to what participants believe is problematic in their relationship with media content. The main idea is to get them to think about the problems and find solutions to them.

For example:

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- How do digital platforms influence the way they engage with information because of to their unique features, functionalities, and design principles?

- Are some pieces of content more important than others? If so, do they require more attention and caution?

- What happens if one mistakes an advertisement for a news article?

- What are the best practices to avoid being distracted and overwhelmed when consuming digital media content?

SOURCES – remind participants that digital platforms are rarely the original source of information. Even though platforms influence the way we engage and understand media content, they are not the ones who create it. The source might be a person, an organization, the government etc.

- Do they always know the source before engaging with the content?
- What is the importance of knowing the source?
- Discuss with participants what they consider a good source of information.

BIAS – even though you did not discuss bias during the presentation, it is worth asking them if they know how their personal bias can influence the way they interpret and understand media content. You can briefly explain to them how confirmation bias works and why it is important to be aware of it **(RF 6)**.

SLIDE 22 | Activity 1 – STOP - Conclusion | 1 minute

In conclusion, explain that we should **prepare** ourselves **before** we meaningfully engage with media content, and make sure we have full **attention** & **focus** when dealing with content. Also, we must 'run some checks' every time we come across information and media content, especially in relation to:

THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: its features & how it influences the way we engage with information.

THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION: If we don't know who created a piece of content, we cannot even start the process of assessing its reliability.

PERSONAL BIAS: we should ask ourselves: how my personal preferences may influence the way I understand the content? We cannot get rid of confirmation bias, but being aware of it helps a lot.

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These checks involve asking a few questions that help us understand the full context around the content and be more attentive and focused, especially in situations where we are dealing with important information.

SLIDE 23 | Break | 5 minutes

Give participants a 5-minute break.

PART 2: THINK

This second part aims to discuss how *critically understanding* how media messages are constructed and manipulated is important to avoid being deceived by false or misleading content.

To do that, we are going to explore the concept of **representation**, which is foundational knowledge in media studies, and also discuss different ways in which information and **media content** can be manipulated, including the role of algorithms.

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SLIDE 24 | THINK INTRO: Video | 4 minutes

Explain that you are going to explore the concept of representation in the media, which is a basic but very important concept to understand media content.

Play the video.

SLIDE 25 | Media Representation | 1 minute

Explain that, as we have seen in the video, media representation refers to how various ideas, concepts, experiences, groups, individuals, identities, and cultures are depicted, portrayed, or shown in different forms of media, such as television, film, news, advertising, and online content. In the digital world, we have to think about how the digital platforms, such as social media, websites, and messaging-apps, present information to us, shaping our views and attitudes. The key idea here is that **all media messages are constructed** (**RF 7**).

SLIDE 26 | Editing | 1 minute

And how are media messages constructed? The key concept for us here is *editing*. Editing is crucial to understand how media content can be *manipulated*. Editing involves selecting, rearranging, and modifying

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content to create a specific narrative, evoke certain emotions, or convey a particular message. It plays a significant role in shaping how audiences perceive and interpret media.

Ask participants to think of how easy it is nowadays to edit a picture or even a video using their smartphone. On social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, for example, we can use editing tools to modify pictures, cropping, adjusting the colour and adding new elements such as filters, emojis and text. The combination of all these elements affects the *meaning* of the content that we create.

Through editing, we can tell the same story in many different ways, creating different representations of the reality around us.

SLIDE 27 | Algorithms | 1 minute

Finally, we need to talk about algorithms. Many digital platforms use algorithms to shape our experience online, such as social media, search engines, streaming services, and online news sites.

So, besides taking into consideration *representation* and *editing*, we also need to understand that the way in which digital platforms presents and delivers content to us also influences how we understand information and

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media content. For example, algorithms recommend content based on our past behaviour, interactions, and preferences.

They determine which posts will appear in our social media feeds first, suggest videos to watch, links to click, and articles to read. This highly influences what type of content we come across and engage with.

Algorithms also identify trending topics and content that is gaining popularity online, which means that our perception of what is important or popular can be influenced by how algorithms highlight content that is currently capturing the public's attention.

SLIDES 28 and 29 | THINK | 3 minutes

What does THINK mean in this context? It means that every time we come across media content, we must *consider* the fact that the message we are seeing has been constructed and shaped to convey specific information, ideas, or emotions.

These messages are *edited* using a combination of various elements, techniques, and strategies that aim to engage, inform, persuade, or entertain.

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Or, maybe, these media messages have been created to deceive us. Information and media content can be ***manipulated*** to mislead, deceive, and cause harm to people and institutions. If media messages can be easily ***edited*** to ***misrepresent*** ideas, ***subvert*** the truth and ***mislead*** the audience, how can we be sure that the content we are seeing is accurate or reliable?

To complicate things further, algorithms push content based on criteria that privileges your personal preferences or what is more popular at the moment, and not necessarily what is reliable or accurate. In this context, how do digital platforms influence what we see online?

SLIDE 30 | Activity 2 – THINK: INTRO | 10 seconds
Introduce *Think* activity.

SLIDE 31 | Activity 2 – THINK | 20 minutes
Reminder to Facilitators: in this activity, you will be primarily working as a learning facilitator. This means that your role is to instigate participants to engage in conversations, encouraging them to share ideas and think about the topic being discussed.

FIRST PART – GROUP DISCUSSION – 10 MINUTES
Divide the participants in groups of 3 or 4.

Ask participants to discuss in their groups the following:

What are the many ways in which media content can be manipulated to mislead or deceive us?

If you see that participants are struggling to come up with ideas, you can help them by asking some questions, such as:

How can people change the content of an image or video?

What are the editing tools that we have freely and easily available?

What are the techniques used to draw people's attention to a message or content?

What is the importance of *context* in a story?

SECOND PART (SLIDE 32) – SHARING INSIGHTS – 10 MINUTES

When time is up, ask the groups to share their answers. You are going to see that some of the answers will fall into one of the categories of content manipulation displayed on the slide. Use the image on the slide to guide participants through the different forms of content manipulation, briefly explaining each of them (**RF 8**).

IMPORTANT: you might not have time to discuss all the 8 categories on the slide, and this is not a problem. The main aim of this activity is to show participants that there are many ways to manipulate media content and encourage them to seek more information about each of these categories.

PART 3: CHECK

This third and final part aims to discuss some of the *actions* we should take and build *practical strategies* to analyse and investigate whether the media content can be trusted. These actions involve some techniques to evaluate the reliability and accuracy of the information presented. The goal is to make sure that the content is based on verifiable facts, rational reasoning, and credible sources, rather than rumours, false information, or biased perspectives.

SLIDE 33 | Activity 3 – CHECK INTRODUCTION | 20 seconds
Introduce *Check* activity.

SLIDES 34-36 | Activity 3 – CHECK ACTIVITY | 35 minutes
Reminder to Facilitators: in this activity, you will be primarily working as a learning facilitator. This means that your role is to instigate participants to engage in conversations, encouraging them to share ideas and think about the topic being discussed.

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FIRST PART – GROUP WORK – 7 MINUTES

Participants will be divided into groups of 3/4. Ask participants to share with you some strategies and best practices to check if a piece of information or media content is accurate or not. This includes content in any format (text, image, video etc.).

During this practice, you should expect participants to come up with ideas such as:

- Verifying the source and its reputation/credibility
- Checking if there are experts supporting the claims being made
- Cross-checking: check the information in multiple sources
- Language: check the language used to understand if it is too informal or contains multiple errors
- Bias: check if the publication is biased and how this affects the credibility of the information

Listen to participants and write down their suggestions (you can use a flipchart or a white board, for instance).

THIRD PART – BUILDING STRATEGIES – 20 MINUTES (SLIDE 35)

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Give participants a handout with best practices to check the accuracy of information online.

This resource will be divided into 3 categories:

- Lateral reading
- News source evaluation
- Images and videos verification

Below a quick summary of each category:

LATERAL READING - This is a fact-checking strategy where individuals take the role of 'investigators of information'. To do so, they must check additional online sources and perspectives to evaluate the credibility of information. Instead of just engaging with the original material (vertical reading), people leave the source and look for other relevant information and context on the topic from different, often more authoritative, sites. Lateral reading provides a broader understanding of the topic, cross-checking facts, identifying potential biases, and ultimately supporting more informed and critical consumption of media content.

NEWS SOURCE EVALUATION – This is the process of critically assessing the credibility, reliability, and bias of news sources and the content they disseminate. This practice involves considering various

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factors such as the source's reputation, history of accuracy, transparency about ownership and funding, and adherence to journalistic standards. Engaging in news source evaluation allows people to make informed judgments about the validity of the news they consume.

IMAGES AND VIDEOS VERIFICATION - To assess the legitimacy and validity of images, people can employ some online tools, such as *reverse image search*, using platforms such as Google or TinEye, which help find the origin of the content. Also, analysing metadata can provide insights into the date the image was created, its editing history, and sometimes even its location.

For videos, examining the audio, understanding the context, and cross-referencing with credible sources are very helpful. Looking for signs of editing or manipulation, such as inconsistencies in lighting, shadows, or sounds, also helps in verification. Given how easy it is nowadays to edit images and videos, checking the accuracy of visual content is crucial to avoid deceit and manipulation.

Ask participants to spend **5 minutes** checking all the tips in the handout against the ideas they came up in the brainstorm. You should expect participants to realize that there are many more actions to check the accuracy of information than they had previously anticipated. Then, in the

following 15 minutes, you are going to facilitate a conversation to build strategies to check information and media content in general.

Go through the content of the handouts discussing the best practices with the participants. It is important to show that the practices range from basic attitudes and actions to more complex ones, depending on the case.

No one can fact-check every piece of information they come across, so it is important to discuss *priorities*.

Priorities should be defined taking into consideration two main aspects:
1. What is possible to do with the technology we have and the time available?
2. The importance and the potential impact of the piece of information being analysed.

Some questions you should consider to facilitate the discussion:

- Did you know all these tools/practices to check the accuracy of information before the workshop?
- Which of these tools/practices do you normally use?
- Do you think all of them are useful? Why?

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▪ We don't have time to evaluate every piece of information we come across. How would you establish priorities in relation to what should be checked or not?

During this discussion, you are going to move to **SLIDE 36** and display two priority spectra. Ideally, you should also draw the two spectra on the flipchart/whiteboard so that you can write down the priorities according to the responses of participants.

In the first spectrum, you are going to write down the priorities in relation to the tools and practices we must use to check the accuracy of information online. Some things are easier and require little time to do; others are more complex and require more time. You can tell participants they can think of all the ideas and practices that were discussed during the workshop, not only in Part 3.

In the second spectrum, you are going to write down the priorities in terms of the most important topics that should be checked because they have more relevance and are more impactful at both personal and community levels (for example: health issues, political events etc.).

IMPORTANT: Even though you will be primarily facilitating the discussion, it is crucial that you guide participants towards best practices that they should take away with them.

PART 4: CONCLUSION

This final part aims to bring the content discussed in the 3 previous parts together in a coherent and productive way. Many different topics have been discussed in the last 2 hours and it is important to organize the knowledge and skills that we want participants to take away with them.

Also, this final segment should encourage participants to seek further information to learn the topics that were discussed in the workshop in more depth.

SLIDE 37 | CONCLUSION: KEY TAKEAWAYS | 20 seconds

Introduce conclusion with key takeaways.

SLIDE 38 | STOP – Best Practices | 1 minute

STOP refers to best practices to prepare yourself before you meaningfully engage with media content.

With so much information around us, coming in various types and formats, we need to make sure we have full attention and focus when dealing with content. It is like running some checks in our mind to make sure we are aware of the following:

SLIDE 39 | STOP – Best Practices | 1 minute

- The **media environment,** its features, and how it influences the way we engage with information. The objective is to keep us 'hooked' and engaged, which can severely affect our attention and focus.

- **The source of information:** If we don't know who created that piece of content, we cannot even start the process of assessing its reliability.

- **Personal bias:** Ask yourself: how my personal preferences may influence the way I understand the content? We cannot get rid of confirmation bias, but being aware of it helps a lot.

SLIDE 40 | THINK – Best Practices | 1 minute

THINK refers to key concepts that we must understand to begin our process of engaging with media content:

- **Representation:** all media messages are constructed.

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- **Editing:** media messages can be easily manipulated to convey specific meanings.
- **Algorithmic manipulation:** the content we see in many digital platforms are carefully curated and organized based on popularity and our personal preferences, regardless of their accuracy and reliability.

SLIDE 41 | THINK – Best Practices | 1 minute

Once we fully understand these basic concepts, we must **think** about the different categories of content manipulation (point to the graphic on the slide).

This makes us more cautious, alert and, consequently, more resilient to manipulative media content.

SLIDE 42 | CHECK – Best Practices | 2 minutes

CHECK refers to key steps we must take once we need to assess the accuracy and reliability of media content, such as:

- Check the reliability and reputation of the source;
- Check the author's qualifications and expertise on the topic;
- Check if other sources are reporting the story (cross-reference);
- Check if reputable fact-checking websites have assessed the story;

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- Check for signs of deceptive editing, especially with images and videos;
- Check the quality of the text and presentation – be aware of poorly written messages; sensational or exaggerated headlines; and overly emotive content.

SLIDE 43 | Media Literacy for Citizenship | 2 minutes

Citizenship involves actively participating in civic life and contributing to the well-being of society. It encompasses responsibilities such as staying informed about current events to meaningfully engage in public debates, participating in democratic processes, such as elections, and advocating for positive change.

Media literacy for citizenship means that individuals should be empowered to critically engage with media content, navigate the information landscape, and actively participate in the society as responsible and well-informed citizens.

Disinformation and other forms of content manipulation are a real threat to democratic societies. As citizens, we must look after our information diet and make sure we access, use and share information in a responsible manner.

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SLIDE 44 | Resources | 2 minutes

Tell participants they can find resources to learn more about Media Literacy to tackle the disinformation problem in the Training and Development section on the Media Literacy Ireland website.

SLIDE 45 | Thank you & Questions | 30 seconds

Thank the participants and invite questions.

SLIDE 46 | Acknowledgements | 10 seconds

This slide acknowledges main contributors of the project.