



# Game-based approach to critical thinking and media literacy education

Methodological guidelines for using the card game ***follow me***  
in education and youth work

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## Introduction

This brochure aims to provide a methodology and inspiration for the use of the game **follow me** as an educational tool for critical thinking and media literacy education. Our goal is to help educators and youth workers to effectively address these topics through an experiential and interesting form for young people, i.e. through a game. The game **follow me** teaches the importance of thinking before sharing information online and the importance of fact-checking. It builds the resilience of students against disinformation and helps them to orient themselves in today's complex online media world.

**The first part** of this document is devoted to the topic of game-based learning. We cover the benefits of this approach for students and for teachers. We also discuss why we believe this method is useful for developing various competencies, such as critical thinking.

**In the second part**, we look at the game **follow me** in more detail. We go through the key game mechanics and explain how they help to develop critical thinking and media literacy skills. We also connect these game elements to the real (media) world.

**In the third part**, we list specific activities and lesson plans suggesting how the game can be used in both formal and informal educational settings.

**In the last part**, we provide a theoretical overview with all the necessary information you as an educator or a youth worker should know before starting to work with **follow me** and the topic of critical thinking and media literacy with your audiences.

# 1 Game-Based Learning

Have Fun While You Learn

## What is a game?

All games share four defining traits – a *goal*, *rules*, a *feedback system* and *voluntary participation*<sup>1</sup>:

- The *goal* can be interpreted as the problem that the player is trying to solve and achieve the desired outcome.
- The *rules* are limitations put on the player that guide how they can achieve the goal.
- The *feedback system* constantly tells the player how they are doing and how close they are to achieving the goal.
- *Voluntary participation* means that each player voluntarily accepts the goal, the rules and the feedback.

## What is game-based learning?

**Game-based learning (GBL)** is a teaching approach which allows students to ‘*explore relevant aspects of games in a learning context designed by teachers*’<sup>2</sup>. In other words, it is a gameplay with defined learning objectives and outcomes. According to EdTechReview, this learning approach is designed to ‘*balance subject matter with gameplay and the ability of the player to retain and apply said subject matter to the real world*’<sup>3</sup>. Games allow us to make decisions, practice behaviors and processes which can be later applied to real life situations.

In game-based learning, students fulfill educational goals *through* the game, not before playing. The core idea of GBL is teaching through repetition, failure and the accomplishment of goals – the principles on which games are built. This method can be employed utilizing any type of game – digital, real life or board game.

An effective game-based learning is characterized by:

- a goal towards which we are working
- player-student making decisions and experiencing the consequences of their actions
- a risk-free environment which allows to make mistakes and to actively learn through experimentation

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<sup>1</sup> McGonigal, J. (2011). Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world. Penguin Press.

<sup>2</sup> EdTechReview, What is GBL (Game-Based Learning)? <https://edtechreview.in/dictionary/298-what-is-game-based-learning>

<sup>3</sup> EdTechReview, What is GBL (Game-Based Learning)? <https://edtechreview.in/dictionary/298-what-is-game-based-learning>

## Game-based learning vs gamification

Game-based learning is frequently confused with another popular method often used in class – gamification. Though they are similar, there is a significant distinction. In GBL, the 'learning process comes as a result of playing the game'<sup>4</sup>; gamification, instead, is about applying some game elements to traditional (non-gaming) activities in order to increase engagement and motivation. Badges, points, leaderboards, etc. can be used as extrinsic motivation to reward or document the activity. The features of gamification are typically a part of GBL, but not vice versa.

## The role of the educator

What is the role of the educator in the game-based learning environment? Hanghøj (2013) argues that when facilitating learning through games, teachers shift back and forth between four different roles. These are *instructor, playmaker, guide, and evaluator*<sup>5</sup>.

1. *Instructor* plans and communicates the overall goals of the game in relation to specific learning objectives.
2. *Playmaker* communicates the rules, tasks, roles, goals, and dynamics of the game as seen from the players' perspective. Educator needs to understand how the given game is played and how to respond to students' interactions with the game.
3. *Guide* supports the students in their effort to meet specific learning objectives when they play the game and answers questions students have while playing.
4. *Evaluator* re-plays relevant game events and provides a qualified response to students' game experiences. The evaluator goes over the game and asks evaluation/reflection questions.

However, Hanghøj points out that these roles should not be understood as 'ideal types' or as 'normative goals' for teaching with games. They are rather heuristic categories observed through empirical analysis of the game-based practices of teachers<sup>6</sup>.

## Why use games in education?

Games have been used in education for centuries. Chess was used to teach strategic thinking as early as the Middle Ages and the game Kriegsspiel<sup>7</sup> was created in the 19th century in order to teach combat tactics to the officers of the Prussian army. There is a rising trend to work with games such as Minecraft, Dreams, Portal or Civilization in schools. These and many other games can be used in pedagogical practice as a support tool that

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<sup>4</sup> Europass Teacher Academy, Game-Based Learning: What Is It? GBL vs Gamification: Types and Benefits. <https://www.teacheracademy.eu/blog/game-based-learning/>

<sup>5</sup> Hanghøj, T. (2013). Game-based teaching: Practices, roles, and pedagogies. In *New Pedagogical Approaches in Game-enhanced Learning: Curriculum integration* (pp. 81-101). IGI Global.

<sup>6</sup> Hanghøj, T. (2013). Game-based teaching: Practices, roles, and pedagogies. In *New Pedagogical Approaches in Game-enhanced Learning: Curriculum integration* (pp. 81-101). IGI Global.

<sup>7</sup> Kriegsspiel. <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kriegsspiel>>

complements traditional teaching methods. If the game is implemented in the educational setting correctly, it can bring several benefits to students and educators/youth workers.

### **GBL benefits for students:**

- ✚ Motivation
  - A well-designed game motivates the students and stimulates further learning.
- ✚ Key competencies of the 21st century
  - Games help build skills such as adaptation to a rapidly changing environment, agility, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, creativity, and teamwork.
- ✚ Bridging the abstract with the concrete
  - Games help students to connect abstract concepts with concrete ones, thus encouraging thinking in context and remembering better the newly acquired knowledge.

### **GBL benefits for educators:**

- ✚ Processing of complex topics and phenomena
  - Games foster an interest in the topic of the lesson and positively influence the student's relationship to the subject<sup>8</sup>.
- ✚ Getting to know the student/workshop participant
  - Games make it possible to simulate various situations and see human characteristics that are not normally visible. They make it possible to assess the student's behavior under stress<sup>9</sup>.
- ✚ Making the work easier
  - Games make it possible to transfer a certain volume of the pedagogical activity from the educator and their teaching to the students and their independent activity. In this case, the educator takes on the role of a facilitator or a mentor.

## **Games as a educational tool of the 21st century**

Besides the massive popularity of the games (not only) among the youth, game-based learning as an educational approach is also in line with the changes in modern society as well as the developments in the labor market as it responds to the increased demand for digital skills and critical thinking. Today's students will hold a large number of positions which have not yet been invented. However, it is safe to say that living and working in the 21st century will be largely linked to the use of technology, the need to solve complex problems, resilience to change, tolerance to stress and the ability to respond effectively to

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<sup>8</sup> Gulińska, H., 2008. Gry edukacyjne w nauczaniu chemii [in:] Homo communicativus red. Surdyk, A., Szeja, J.Z., 2(4)/2008. Poznań: UAM.

<sup>9</sup> Kaszkowiak, N. 2017. Games as teaching method <<http://cometaresearch.org/educationvet/didactic-games-as-teaching-method/>>

rapid developments in our society. The form of the education will be just as important as its content.

Games are a perfect tool to help us build the skills and competencies needed for the 21st century. Overcoming obstacles, solving tasks or evaluating information are all common features of most of the games. They teach us to think in context, to think analytically and critically, to solve problems. Critical thinking is essential for building media literacy skills since it helps the student to acquire the ability to understand not only the superficial, but also the underlying media messages. Games are also a highly experiential medium. Their ability to immerse a person deep into 'action' is extremely useful for the purpose of education. Ensuring such a level of immersion in the school environment is not easy at all.

## Games and critical thinking

Critical thinking is a complex concept and the history of its research dates back as far as 2,500 years ago. Various definitions of the term were formed from the mid-late 20th century. One of them defines critical thinking as '*the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action*<sup>10</sup>.' In a short and simplified way, to think critically means to process the received information and adjust our behavior accordingly. This definition allows us to see why games and critical thinking go hand in hand. Because the process described as critical thinking by the above definition is exactly what a regular player is doing in a regular game all the time. When one considers the defining traits of games (see above), they are by their nature built to teach critical thinking. There is a problem (*goal*) the player tries to resolve and they are doing so by processing the information (received through *rules* and *feedback*), which guides their actions and decision-making process. Without this constant information gathering and evaluation which fuels the behavior adjustment, one would not be able to meet the goal of the game.

Another reason why games are suitable for critical thinking development (or almost any skill development) also relates to their very nature. Games eliminate our fear of failure<sup>11</sup>, because in games it is OK to fail. You can always try again. Thus, the negative stress is replaced with positive stress and a person can focus more on learning rather than performing<sup>12</sup>. The constant feedback allows you to see how you can get better over time. The chance of success is always present. The prospect of success motivates you to continue, to try harder until the very end when you meet the desired goal.

### **Other games that teach critical thinking and media literacy**

Here are some examples of games from other producers dedicated to building critical thinking and media literacy.

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<sup>10</sup> The Foundation for Critical Thinking <<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>>

<sup>11</sup> McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. Penguin Press.

<sup>12</sup> McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. Penguin Press.

- [Get Bad News](#)

You take on the role of a fake news monger. Drop all pretense of ethics and choose a path that builds your persona as an unscrupulous media magnate.

- [Go Viral](#)

GO VIRAL! is a 5-minute game that according to its creators '*helps protect you against COVID-19 misinformation*'. You'll learn about some of the most common strategies used to spread false and misleading information about the virus.

- [Harmony Square](#)

The player is 'hired' as Chief Disinformation Officer, whose job is to disturb the square's peace and quiet by fomenting internal divisions and pitting its residents against each other.

## 2 Game follow me

**follow me** is a card game developed to help educators and youth workers to address the topic of critical thinking and media literacy. After the cards are dealt, the players turn into the users of the social media platform *Duckface*. They share News or create their own Original

Content with the goal to attract Followers. They need to be careful about what kind of content they share because sharing information which is not true can cost them Credibility and then also their Followers. The game simulates social media. It teaches the importance of thinking before sharing and the importance of fact-checking. When used in an educational setting together with these methodical guidelines, it helps a person to understand how social media work and how they can spot disinformation online.

### Why did we develop *follow me*?

Disinformation has an increasing impact on our society and more and more people believe conspiracy theories. There is a lack of quality educational tools addressing the topics of critical thinking and media literacy on the market. With the game *follow me*, we intended to partly fill this gap by developing educational and engaging tool that would help educators to work with these topics.

### How to play?

Game rules can be downloaded [here](#).

### How does the game work?

In this section, we will go through key game mechanics and explain how they develop critical thinking and media literacy skills. We will also connect these game elements to the real (media) world.

### Context of the game

The game tries to mimic how modern (social) media work. In the *Introduction* (see page 1 of the rules) we immediately open two big problems of today's social media platforms.

1. The conspiracy theories and false information (unfortunately) became so prevalent on social media that these claims are capable to influence the reality and even cause harm. The story of WEnom and little rabbits in the basement is inspired by real life events.
2. The business model of (the majority of) social media is built around advertisement placements. Since social media make money out of advertising, they strive to make users spend as much time as possible online and heated discussions (conflict and arguments between users) are doing exactly that. Since posts that create these heated discussions produce a lot of engagement, the algorithms of the social media platforms favor them. As a result, polarizing topics, hoaxes that stir up fear and anger (and motivate users to write and read long comments = a lot of time + engagement) and conspiracy theories get disproportionately more space than regular ('boring') posts.

Players can choose which strategy they plan to employ in the game – being a responsible user careful about what kind of content they produce and share OR being a user who favors profit (represented by *Followers*). The game was developed so that the former (person who only shares Facts) has much higher chances of winning.

## Game contents

Follow me contains 4 different types of cards – News, Followers, Action and Event cards. Each card has a different role in the game.

### News Cards

The main component of the game that players use to gain Followers. News can be either a Fact or a Hoax. Each News covers one or two of the following topics: Health, Science, Society and Geopolitics.

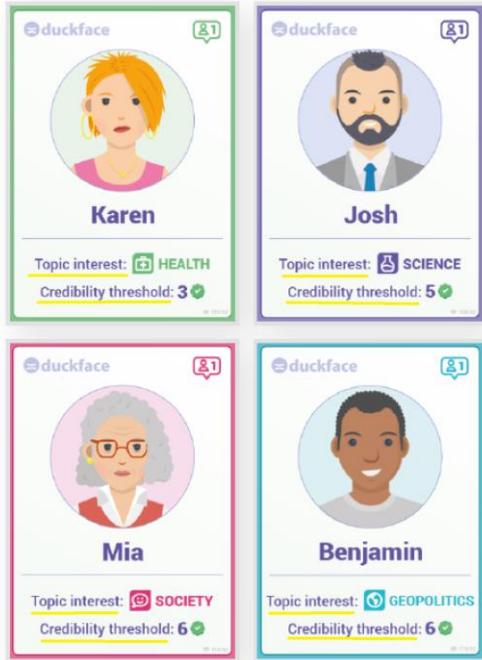


**We designed News Cards following this logic** (this should be revealed to students only after playing the game):

- ✚ For the News to be a Fact, all of these must apply
  - the website looks legitimate
  - the author is always mentioned
  - the illustration (picture) corresponds with the text
- ✚ For the News to be a Hoax, at least one of these must apply
  - the author is missing or the author is only a nickname, a combination of random letters and numbers
  - the website does not look legitimate
  - the picture does not correspond with the text
  - the text contains mistakes or expressive language (e.g. exclamation point)

How does this relate to the real-world media?

We designed the features a Fact or a Hoax News Card must fulfill based on the details you should look for when analyzing the information in the real-world (online) media. See more under the section '*Theoretical Overview - Can I trust this information?*'



## Follower Cards

Followers are the key 'resource' the player is trying to acquire during the game. To gain Followers, players have to share the News Cards or create Original Content of the topic relevant to Followers' interest. If a player's Credibility is lower than the Credibility threshold value of the particular Follower, they won't follow that player, even if the topic condition is fulfilled.

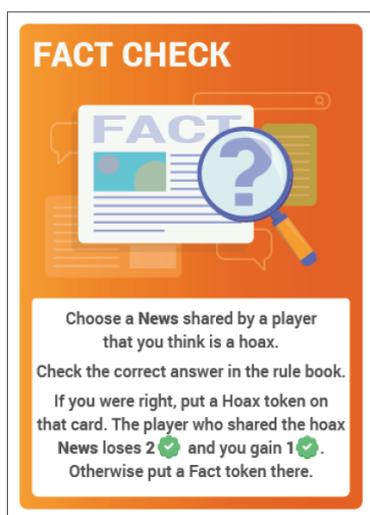
How does this relate to the real-world media?

The '**Credibility**' feature was designed in order to make the player think about what kind of content they produce and share in the game and in real life. Sharing information which is not true can cost the players their Credibility, which can lead to loss of their Followers or inability to attract new ones. This game mechanic demonstrates

that even though sharing disinformation can have its benefits in the short run (one can make a nice profit out of this in real life), in the long term it can harm you and the society in general.

## Action Cards

These cards affect the game in a certain way written on the card itself. We will look at a couple of these cards below.

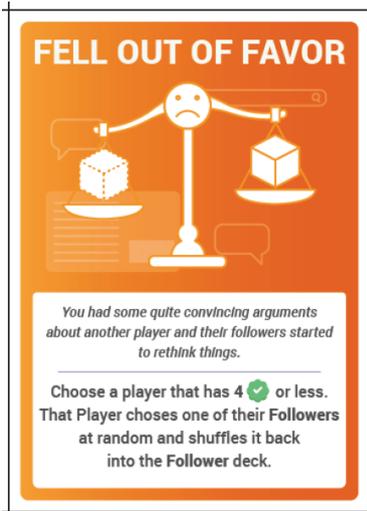


### Fact Check

This is the most important action card in the game. It allows the players to check what kind of content are other players sharing. If somebody shares a Hoax, this person loses 2 Credibility points and the player that did the fact-checking gains 1 Credibility point. If a player fact-checks another player but the News turns out to be a Fact, nothing happens. We designed this mechanic in a way that motivates players to fact-check content shared by others, because there is no harm to do so – as well as in real life.

How does this relate to the real-world media?

The act (mechanic) of fact-checking is taken directly from the real world. Every individual can (and should) fact-check information they encounter online. There are also professional fact-checkers whose job is to analyze the information online.



### Fell Out of Favor

This card reinforces the Credibility feature and thus the importance of being careful about the content one shares online. It targets the player who (probably) shared dubious News, which resulted in the loss of Credibility points and now also a loss of a Follower – the key ‘resource’ of the game.

#### How does this relate to the real-world media?

Most people are interested in truth and prefer accurate information. Therefore, they can change their opinion – such as unfollowing the page or stop visiting certain websites – if they realize it is not a reliable source. It might be hard, but continuous effort (e.g., fact-checking) can result in the loss of

‘popularity’ or, in most extreme cases, the page or a person can be totally banned from certain platforms, which prevents them from spreading false narratives.



### Voice of Reason

This card is the exact opposite of the previous one. It tries to communicate that sharing accurate information and establishing oneself as a reliable source of the News pays off – at least in the long run.

#### How does this relate to the real-world media?

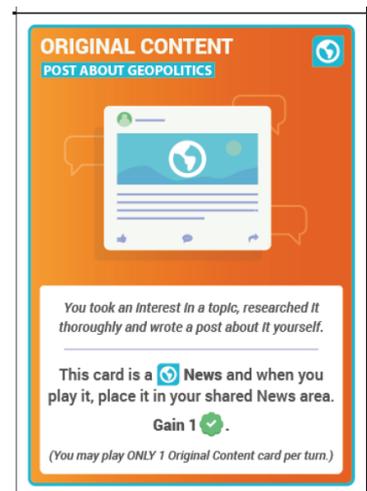
It is very similar like with the previous card. People generally do not like being lied to. Therefore, they prefer listening to somebody they believe will not deceive them. It is necessary to remember that even the people who read conspiracy media and spread hoaxes most often do so because they believe them to be true.

### Original Content Cards

A special type of an Action Card. By playing this card, the player creates an Original Content about a particular topic. Unlike the regular News Cards, these are never hoaxes. It is because before posting it, the player made a thorough research about the topic.

#### How does this relate to the real-world media?

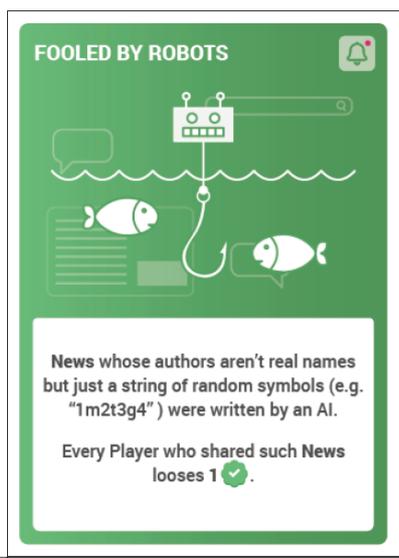
It was not our intention with follow me to argue that posting or sharing something on social media is bad and players should not do it; rather that the person should be careful about the content they put online. This card was designed exactly for



getting this message across to the player. If you are genuinely interested in something or have thoughts you would like to share with others, it is absolutely alright to post it on social media of your choice.

## Event Cards

Each turn, one Event Card is revealed by the Active Player to all Players and its effect is resolved immediately. Besides the educational content that comes with these cards – we look at selected examples below –, it also has an additional value added. This game mechanic encourages communication and collaboration between the players, since they have to work together to resolve the effect of this card.



### Fooled by Robots

This card reveals that some News in the game were not written by real people, but by artificial intelligence. All cards written by AI in the game are Hoaxes. Not noticing that 'the author' is just random symbols put together costs the player their Credibility.

#### How does this relate to the real-world media?

Over the last few years, the writing created by AI has improved immensely in quality and became more widespread. Robot-generated texts are nowadays being used in newsrooms globally. AI enables companies to generate content quickly and cheaply. However, these tools are also used to create and spread fake news and disinformation.



### Wake up Call

This card reveals that the author of the website *Wakey Wakey Sheeple* was making up all the News in order to sell ad space. Sharing News from this source means that the player shared hoaxes and loses their Credibility.

#### How does this relate to the real-world media?

Making profit is sadly often the reason why some decide to produce false content. Shocking disinformation lures people to websites which subsequently gain revenue through ad placements. Advertising is also how social media make money, which is a problem we discussed more in the section *Context of the game*.

## 3 How to work with *follow me* in an educational setting?

Follow me was designed in a way so it delivers the main messages during the gameplay (see above description of content and different game mechanics). However, the game has the biggest educational impact if you organize a debriefing after the gameplay. Below, you can find practical ideas and lesson plans on how to implement the game in practice in youth work or in formal educational settings. This is followed by theory and suggestions that you can use for the debriefing.

### 3.1 Practical lesson plans and ideas

This section includes practical activities and suggestions on how to work with *follow me* in any type of educational setting – informal, non-formal (youth work) as well as formal (in school).

#### 3.1.1 Working with *follow me* in informal and non-formal education (youth work)

##### Activity 1

###### Educational goals:

- 🚧 To develop the ability to interpret and analyze game content in the context of modern online media
- 🚧 To understand the importance of fact-checking the information before sharing it
- 🚧 To improve the resilience towards disinformation

###### Activity time: 90–180 minutes

You can easily shorten or prolong the time frame by using or developing the right methods. The time also depends on the size of the group and their need to process and practice certain parts.

###### Instructions:

##### 1. Introduction (30 minutes)

It is of great necessity to prepare an introductory activity right, which asks for a lot of thinking about the aims, participants' abilities to understand and use the content, as well as your ability to choose or develop methods that support critical thinking. Statement- and question-based activities containing certain dilemmas are great tools for different education purposes.

###### Different dilemmas

- Debate topics

- Questioning/Critical thinking

You can prepare questions like: Are you able to find the right sources for informing yourself and/or others? Could fake news or misuse of information possibly cause serious harm?

The activity is meant to put the participants in the center of critical thinking and exchanging opinions. It builds the knowledge and raises awareness about possible damages.

## **2. Explanation of the game (15 minutes)**

- Rules
- Core concepts: hoaxes/misinformation/fake news
- Real-life examples

You can choose what methods you want to use for the purpose of clarifying what is expected in the game. We suggest some dynamic method where participants will actively discuss and/or reflect and ask questions on presented rules and terms like hoaxes/misinformation/fake news.

## **3. Play time (60 minutes)**

Let the participants play the game. Groups can make use of facilitators.

## **4. Reflection/debriefing (60–75 minutes)**

After playing the game, participants should reflect on experience with the game and their key-learning points.

Participants can get directions to think about, such as: *How did you feel during the game? What was the most interesting for you? Were you able to follow the rules? What do you think about the news in the game? Have you heard about it or about the sources of that information before? What did you learn from the game?*

As an addition to reflection, participants could be asked to find the news from the game and search whether they are true or false, as well as to think what news they would use for this game. It would be also valuable to give them a chance to work on new cards.

- **Find the news from the game**
  - Own fact-checking, etc.
  - What news would be relevant? Which news would you use? (working on new cards)
- **How can they teach others? (peer-support campaign) + families**

Participants could be asked to think about possibilities to pass this knowledge on to others and to participate in small peer-support campaigns, as well as to spread the word among their own families and transfer the awareness to their family members.

### 3.1.2. Working with *follow me* in formal education

#### Educational goals:

- ✚ To develop the ability to interpret and analyze game content in the context of modern online media
- ✚ To understand the importance of fact-checking the information before sharing it
- ✚ To improve the resilience towards disinformation

#### Activity 1: Discussion

**Activity time:** 60–110 minutes

#### Instructions:

1. Introduction to the game (15 minutes)
  - a. explain the core concepts (see *Useful vocabulary* in section 3.2)
    - hoax
    - social media
    - follower
    - fact-checking
  - b. introduce the rules of the game
2. Play time (30–60 minutes)
  - a. divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 and let them play the game
3. Discussion (20–30 minutes)
  - a. Discuss with students the game as such and topics covered by it. Encourage students to express their impressions of the game. You can use the questions listed below. Read through the theoretical part of this methodology to make sure you will be able to answer and follow up on students' responses.
    - Ask students to freely express their opinions about the game by asking: *What do you think about this game? What was it about?*
    - Inquire about the gameplay: *Who won? What strategies did you use? What was the strategy of the winner? Was there anyone in your playgroup who ended up with low Credibility and was not able to win anymore? Did you figure out why this happened?*
    - Go deeper into the game mechanics:

- *What was your decision-making process behind sharing the News? Were you able to tell which one was a Hoax and which one was a Fact?*
- Reinforce the learning objectives of the game: *What message did you take away from this game? What did you learn? What are the benefits of sharing facts? What harm can you cause if you share a hoax?*
- Discussion can be followed by a lecture based on the information provided in the *Theoretical Overview*.
- You can end the discussion with this message: Every day we receive a huge amount of information. We cannot often choose what we see online, because algorithms built into websites, social media and apps decide this for us. However, we can still decide how we will approach the information received. Will you simply reshare it without deeper thought about its credibility? Or will you research more about the topic before sharing? The game **follow me** shows us that the latter pays off more in the long run.

## Activity 2: Make your own News

**Activity time:** 90–150 minutes

### Instructions:

1. Introduction to the game (15 minutes)
  - b. explain the core concepts (see *Useful vocabulary* in section 3.2)
    - hoax
    - social media
    - follower
    - fact checking
  - c. introduce the rules of the game – you can use this video that explains the basic rules of the game
2. Play time (30–60 minutes)
  - d. divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 and let them play the game
3. Discussion (20–30 minutes) – see Activity 1 for example discussion questions
4. Make your own News
  - i. Take the blank cards that are part of the game package or [this online version](#) and ask each student to create their own News Card. It is up to them whether they choose to make a Fact or a Hoax.

- ii. Give each student a space to share the news story on their card. After the content of the card is shared, let the rest of the students vote whether it is Fact or a Hoax.
- iii. Discuss with the students what they created (you can also play another round using student-made cards). Bring their attention to the different parts of the card, such as Source, Website, Headline (see section 3.2). The News Cards structure refers to an actual website structure, so this exercise can be used to teach students what they should be looking for when they visit actual websites.

## 4 Theoretical Overview

Below, you will find all the necessary information you as an educator or a youth worker should know before starting to work with **follow me** and the topic of critical thinking and media literacy with your audiences.

### Can I trust this information?

The things you should look for when you encounter information online.

#### 1. Evaluate the source –ask yourself questions such as:

- a. What is the site's purpose?
- b. What is the site's reputation?
- c. Who wrote the article? Is the author reliable?
- d. Is it an opinion or does the author describe facts?
- e. Is the information current?
- f. Do visuals (pictures, videos) correspond to the text?
- g. Are claims backed up with reliable sources?
- h. Is the source primary or secondary?

#### What is the difference between primary and secondary sources?

*Primary sources* provide firsthand, raw information. These can be interview transcripts, statistical data, etc.

*Secondary sources* provide second-hand information, a commentary; they interpret or describe primary sources. These can be articles, reviews, etc.

Both sources can be fine to work with; however, if you want to be really sure that the information is correct, it is better to look at the primary source.

***It is best to always look at multiple sources!***

## Posts on social networks as a source?

Posts on social networks are a separate category. It is necessary to differentiate if the post is just a commentary (an opinion of the author) or if the post is based on/leads to a reliable source. In that case, it is best to click on the original source that the author refers to and double-check if their interpretation of the source is accurate.

### Useful vocabulary

- ✚ *Social media* – forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, personal messages, etc.<sup>13</sup>
- ✚ *Follower* – a person who follows or subscribes to somebody's posts on social media.
- ✚ *Hoax* – a plan to deceive someone<sup>14</sup>
- ✚ *Disinformation* – deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts; propaganda<sup>15</sup>
- ✚ *Fake news* – purposefully crafted, sensational, emotionally charged, misleading or totally fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news<sup>16</sup>
- ✚ *Misinformation*<sup>17</sup> – false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead

## 2. Never base your opinion just on the title of the article.

Titles of articles can be misleading, often intentionally. People often do not have enough time to read the whole article. Websites or people producing dubious content know this and often use this strategy to manipulate the reader.

### Useful vocabulary

- ✚ *Clickbait* - A sensationalized headline that encourages you to click on a link to an article, image, or video. Its purpose is to draw as many clicks as possible, because once you click, the website hosting the link earns revenue from advertisement.
- ✚ *Fact-check* - To verify the factual accuracy of information

## 3. Consider your emotions.

If an article or a post causes you to feel too many emotions – it makes you very angry or terrified – , probably it was meant to do it. Some websites or content producers intentionally play on basic human feelings such as fear or anger in order to manipulate the reader. You should be careful with this content and always look for facts and not catastrophic hypotheses or conspiracy theories.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media>

<sup>14</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hoax>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/disinformation>

<sup>16</sup> [Fake News: understanding media and misinformation in the digital age](#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/misinformation>

### Useful vocabulary

- ✚ *Conspiracy theory* - An attempt to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors.<sup>18</sup> (Most) conspiracy theories comprise of 3 principles<sup>19</sup>:
  - nothing is a coincidence
  - nothing is as it seems
  - everything is interconnected

## 4. Image manipulation – do not instantly trust what you see

Visual content can be also manipulated and modern technology has made it really easy to do, which contributed to the image manipulation being really common. Always keep a critical eye on even with the visual content; checking up the details of a picture briefly can save you a lot of trouble. There are also online tools, such as <https://images.google.com>, which can help you find out more information about the picture or a photo. However, these tools are also not always reliable and the safest option is to double-check the picture using the source you really trust.

### Useful vocabulary

- ✚ *Deepfake* - A synthetic (artificially produced or modified) media that uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to manipulate or generate visual and audio content.

## 5. Consult your local fact-checking website

Evaluating every piece of information we encounter every day is nearly impossible. Fortunately, there are fact-checking websites that can help you with this task. Here is a list of some such websites, but there are certainly more of them and you should definitely look for local fact-checkers in your country.

- ✚ [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)
- ✚ <https://factcheck.afp.com>
- ✚ [www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)

## 6. Be aware of your biases

We are all biased. This is the first thing we need to consider when we enter the online world. Below we explain why.

**Cognitive bias** is a subconscious error in thinking. Human brain makes these errors or mental shortcuts in order to simplify the complex world in which we live in. The problem with these biases is that it leads us to misinterpret information and affects the rationality and

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<sup>18</sup> Aaronovitch, 2010; Byford, 2011; Coady, 2006; Dentith & Orr, 2017; Keeley, 1999

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.atlaskonspiraci.cz>

accuracy of our judgments<sup>20</sup>.

Our biases fuel a lot that is going on online. Especially the so-called **confirmation bias**, our tendency to interpret any new information as a confirmation of our opinions and preexisting beliefs<sup>21</sup>, is very common on the internet and social media. Online world and especially social media help to reinforce this bias. Below we explain how.

In order to be able to consider several sides to the story and see a bigger picture, it is important to see other perspectives and get information from various sources. However, this does not happen when you are trapped in the so-called echo-chamber<sup>22</sup>.

**Echo-chamber** is an environment in which a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own. Such an environment does prevents the person to be confronted by different opinions and distorts their perspective, which makes it difficult for this person to consider opposing views and discuss complicated topics<sup>23</sup>.

When you enter a website or a social media site, your online activity is basically constantly being tracked by algorithms. **Algorithms** keep track of what you like, what you click on, how much time you spend looking at something, etc. Based on this data, algorithms serve you the content they think you will be interested in. This process leads to the formation of the so-called **filter bubble**, which is a type of the echo chamber that exists in the online world<sup>24</sup>.

Two sides to filter bubbles:

- ✚ Its positive side is that algorithms provide personalized content specifically to you. You see mostly what interests you, thus they are saving your time wasted looking at things you do not necessarily enjoy.
- ✚ Its negative side is that it isolates you from the information you have not expressed interest in or opinions and perspectives that oppose your views, e.g., by hiding posts on social media from friends or pages with which you – according to algorithms – might not agree.

### How can one escape from being trapped in bubbles?

So, on the one hand, it is our own psyche, our brain seeking information that supports what we already believe in, which is later being even more reinforced by the algorithms serving us what they think we want to see. Is there any way out?

Truly, nowadays it is really hard not to become trapped within a filter bubble, since algorithms are such an integral part of the internet and you cannot really escape them. Even though there is a limit to what you as an individual can do, it does not hurt to at least try.

First step is to recognize this problem and educate ourselves about our own biases and about how modern media work.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-bias.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-bias.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/what-is-an-echo-chamber/1/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/what-is-an-echo-chamber/1/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/what-is-an-echo-chamber/1/>

## Overcoming bias

Even though biases are inherent to the way we think, we can work towards overcoming them by<sup>25</sup>:

- ✚ recognizing that we are biased
- ✚ strengthening our memory
- ✚ slowing down our decision-making
- ✚ improving our reasoning skills
- ✚ 'thinking about thinking'
  - acknowledging the limitations of memory
  - seeking perspective while making decisions
  - being able to self-critique
  - choosing strategies to prevent cognitive error

Secondly, we can make conscious decisions, such as reading articles from newspapers we would not normally read, critically examining the content we encounter online and considering there can be another side to the story.

Even though it might seem like a lot of work, the alternative – each of us believing we are getting the full story and seeing the same things other people are seeing, even though we absolutely are not – is much worse. This scenario leads to polarization of society to such an extent that people are unable to have a reasonable conversation.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-bias.html>



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*follow me* – Methodological guidelines for using the card game *follow me* in education and youth work

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