

## 26 Check your facts!

Topics: **safety online, critical thinking, media literacy, digital citizenship**

**Recommended age group:** 15+

**Participant count:** up to 20 participants

**Activity duration:** 60 minutes

**Methods of education:** simulation, group work, discussion, reflection

**Aims of the activity:**

- assess accuracy and reliability of available information,
- select and classify information according to the purpose of its use and justify the selection process,
- compile a list of aspects to be considered during an information survey,
- notice signs of manipulation within information processing and dissemination,
- provide feedback concerning how information is processed and handled,
- present the results of an information survey,
- understand the difficulty of the situation that targeted groups face (such as LGBT and others),
- reflect on personal attitudes towards virally spread information.

**Equipment:**

- Internet access and ICTs (cell phones, tablets, PCs – at least 1 for each group),
- printouts of the tasks for the researchers (1 print cut into pieces) and a sheet for the observers (2 pieces for each group),
- stationery, flip chart paper and markers.

**Keywords:** information sources, information verification, online campaign, information spreading, hate speech

### Activity process:

**Preparation before the activity:** We find volunteers to play the role of observers. This should be about half of the group. We give them the sheet for the observers (Annex 1), explain the instructions for completing it and make sure they understand and know what information they are supposed to record.

#### Tips for leading the activity:

- The activity will go more effectively if the observers are briefed before the activity starts. If possible, designate only one observer per group, thus increasing the number of researchers.

Topics



Age category



15+

Group size



up to 20

Time



60 minutes

- The researchers should not feel that they are being “tested” by the observers. Explain to them that the role of the observer is to evaluate different methods of working with information, and the task itself is not based on a single correct solution.
  - We may or may not show the observer sheet to the researchers. If we do not show it to them, their attention will not be drawn to the areas under observation and the results could prove more interesting. However, this step may create more pressure on the researchers. Conversely, providing the sheet in advance will result in a better working relationship between observers and researchers.
  - During the final reflection, we can raise the issue of bias in the survey with results we “wanted to find”. We will use this to discuss attitudes towards information that we may know about but do not want to believe.
  - One of the risks of misinformation or strong prejudices spread on the internet is that they can easily be mistaken for fact. We can find out whether participants think that including such a ‘fact’ in a survey may have contributed to the spread of prejudice against groups or individuals.
  - We can also use hoax debunking sites in our discussions with participants to show how fake news contributes to fueling hate speech.
1. Explain to the participants that the activity focuses on the use of the internet as an information resource. We ask how often they use the internet for this purpose and which sites they use most often to get information.
  2. We put them in the following situation: *Following several homophobic attacks (mainly via websites and videos) against young gay men and subsequent strong lobbying by NGOs to address the situation, a parliamentary debate is being prepared. The government has come up with a legislative proposal to create a fund to provide education in terms of facing homophobic attitudes and acts and to create support mechanisms for young gay men. Opposition parties have declared that they will not support the proposal. You hold the position of research assistant to a Member of Parliament who plans to speak in the debate. You have 30 minutes to compile a preliminary survey of the issue.*
  3. Explain to the participants that they are going to work in groups of four (2 research assistants and 2 observers who follow the researchers’ methodology). Explain that all research requires the use of appropriate working methods. Therefore, before starting to work on the assignment, we should try to suggest a list of important considerations when setting up a survey. We record the participants’ suggestions on a flipchart and add essential points where necessary. We choose the observers of the group and divide the rest of the group so that there are approximately equal numbers of representatives from the opposition and the government parties. Give an assignment specification to each group (Annex 2).
  4. The participants have 30 minutes to complete the survey. We suggest that they use the first 20 minutes to find relevant information and the remaining 10 minutes to jointly outline the main points they will show to their representatives.
  5. When the groups have completed the task, we give them a further 5-10 minutes to receive feedback from the observers who summarise their key findings. They try to assess how objective and useful the information search was.
  6. Invite the researchers to present the main discussion points for the speech of their representatives. They can present these in bullet point format as they are only preparing the speech and not delivering it themselves.

7. After each presentation, set aside time for the observers to summarize their findings and take any questions from the other groups.

## Final analysis:

### Briefing questions for research assistants

- *How did you perceive the difficulty of the task? What was the most difficult part of it?*
- *What made you decide on the particular website you were using to find information? To what extent did you consider the credibility of the information you used?*
- *Did you focus more on finding information supporting the position of your representative's party or did you try to find an objective viewpoint? What do you think a real researcher would do?*
- *Did you search for individual cases of attacks against gay people? If not, would this be relevant?*
- *Do you think real government representatives would be happy with your work? Would the voters of a specific party be satisfied?*

### Questions on the use of the internet for research purposes

- *Did you realise anything important when using the internet for research purposes? Would you add anything to the list of recommendations you were given at the beginning of the activity?*
- *Were you surprised by the variety of information that the different groups came up with? How do you explain this?*
- *What methods can you use to check the credibility of the site or the information given? Do you use them routinely?*

### Questions about homophobia and online hate speech

- *Did you find examples of discrimination or insults?*
- *Do you think you found information that was false or misleading?*
- *What are the risks of uncontrolled online postings? Can you think of ways to reduce the risk of other people taking these views and treating them as „fact“?*

## Activity variations:

- We can choose a different target group about which participants will collect information. It can be women, Roma, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, etc.
- The activity can be carried out without the use of observers. In this case, everyone would record their activity. Before starting the activity, it is necessary to explain to the whole group how to fill in the observer sheet.
- Participants could revise the list of recommendations for conducting an online survey and create their own guide. They could also compile a checklist for sharing the information with others.

**Source:** KEEN, E., GEORGESCU, M. *BOOKMARKS - PRÍRUČKA BOJA PROTI NENÁVISTNÝM PREJAVOM PROSTREDNÍCTVOM VZDELÁVANIA K ĽUDSKÝM PRÁVAM*, [Aktivita: Over si fakty! str.48–52]. Rada Európy, 2016. Available at: <[https://www.iuventa.sk/files/nove\\_pdf\\_bookmarks\\_okok\\_final.pdf](https://www.iuventa.sk/files/nove_pdf_bookmarks_okok_final.pdf)>

## ANNEX

### Annex 1 - OBSERVER'S SHEET

Keywords entered into the search engine	
RECORD EACH WEBSITE YOU VISIT:	
Web name	
Number of minutes spent at the site	
„Focus“ of the website (neutral, pro-LGBT, homophobic)	
Why was this site chosen?	
Was the site's authenticity verified? How?	
Was there a source for all information? Was the source verified?	
Additional information	



## Annex 2 - Assignment specification

(cut)

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### REPRESENTATIVE 1:

Your government representative is a member of a coalition party. They have spoken out strongly in favour of the new legislation. Search the internet for information for the speech and make a list of 5 key points that should be addressed in the speech.

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### REPRESENTATIVE 2:

Your government representative is a member of the opposition party. They are to speak strongly in opposition to the establishment of a fund and the earmarking of funds from the state budget to address this issue. Search the internet for information for the speech and make a list of 5 key points that should be addressed in the speech.

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### REPRESENTATIVE 3:

Your government representative is a member of a minor party that has not yet decided whether to support the government's proposal. Search the internet for information relevant to their decision and make a list of 5 key points that should be addressed in their speech.

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### OBSERVERS

Your task is to analyse the researchers' approach to the survey. Try to capture as much information as possible and record it on the observer sheet. You can interact with the researchers to the extent that you do not distract them too much from the research tasks. Ask them what they are doing and why they have chosen a particular course of action.

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