Project Theme 5: **Fake News and Virality on Social Media**

Misinformation and fake news spread rapidly on social media, influencing public perception and decision-making. The viral nature of fake news can have serious consequences, including political polarization, public health misinformation, and societal distrust. Addressing this issue requires designing interventions that help users critically evaluate information, recognize misinformation, and promote responsible sharing habits in social media.

Your team's goal is to choose a specific user group and design a product or system that empowers them to detect, analyze, and mitigate the spread of fake news. You may target relevant user groups such as high school students, social media influencers, elderly internet users, or journalists. However, we encourage you to pick a user group you are not part of to minimize personal bias in research and solution design.

Over the course of the semester, your team will work on designing a system that helps users become more media-literate and make informed decisions when engaging with online content. Your solution should not only provide a means to identify fake news but also encourage critical thinking and responsible online behavior.

It will be important to define the following:

- Who are the users affected by fake news?
- What are the key platforms where fake news spreads?
- What are the psychological and social factors that contribute to the virality of misinformation and fake news?
- What are the assumed challenges in addressing fake news?

Some broad directions:

- **Media Literacy Tools** (e.g., browser extensions, AI-powered fact-checkers, educational games)
- **Community-Driven Solutions** (e.g., reporting mechanisms, misinformation awareness campaigns)
- **Algorithmic and Technical Interventions** (e.g., detecting and flagging fake news, credibility scoring systems)

During this course, your team will need to conduct secondary research to understand how misinformation spreads and conduct qualitative research to identify first-hand experiences with fake news. This includes interviewing users, fact-checkers, or professionals working in media literacy.

As part of your project, you will need to define the specific needs of your chosen user group and design an intervention that helps mitigate misinformation. While your design may not completely eliminate fake news, consider how existing technology supports or fails to address this issue and propose an improved solution.

We encourage you to consider the intersectional aspects of misinformation—how factors such as age, education, socio-economic status, and digital access influence how people engage with fake news. Be specific in the community and users you select! Addressing a well-defined group allows for a deeper understanding of their challenges and how your solution can effectively support them.

Critical Considerations:

- Keep an open mind when researching the challenges of misinformation.
- Select a user group that you are either not part of or can remain neutral towards.
- Choose a local community that you can access for research and interviews.
- Explore innovative solutions beyond simple fact-checking apps.