ACTIVATING LESSON SCENARIO
developed as part of the project

'INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION'

TOPIC

Fact-checking – How Do Organisations Verifying Information Work?
(Working Methods, Sources, Social Responsibility)

1. Lesson objectives

The student:

- explains what fact-checking is and its role in combating disinformation,
- knows examples of fact-checking organisations operating in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the EU,
- understands how to professionally verify the credibility of information,
- can distinguish opinion from fact and check sources,
- develops critical thinking, information analysis, and responsible sharing skills.

2. Target group

Primary school students

3. Teaching methods

- Brainstorming
- Mini-lecture with presentation
- Group exercise "How do professionals check it?"
- Moderated discussion
- Individual work – final reflection

4. Teaching aids / sources

- Projector or interactive whiteboard
- Printed short news items (some true, some false)
- Infographic: "Fact-checking Process in 5 Steps"
- Flipchart and markers
- Access to fact-checking websites:
  - **Poland:** Demagog.org.pl, Konkret24
  - **Czech Republic:** Manipulatori.cz, Demagog.cz
  - **Slovakia:** Demagog.sk, Infosecurity.sk
  - **EU:** EUvsDisinfo.eu, EDMO.eu
  - **Global:** IFCN – International Fact-Checking Network

5. Lesson procedure (45 min)

1. Introduction – Is every celebrity rumour true? (5 min)

Format: brainstorming

Procedure:
The teacher begins the lesson with a short introductory conversation:

Questions for students:

- Have you ever heard a shocking rumour about celebrities that later turned out to be false or fabricated by the media?
- Why do news about celebrities spread faster than other information on the internet?
- Does the fact that someone is very famous and often appears in the media make us more likely to believe any story about them?
- What emotions do such news items usually evoke – curiosity, surprise, outrage, laughter?

Background information (for the teacher):

Mechanisms of rumour creation:
Celebrity rumours often arise without reliable fact-checking. They may be based on:

- a single photo taken out of context,
- an incomplete or altered quote,
- information from anonymous "witnesses" that was never confirmed.

Why do they spread?

- Celebrities attract attention because they are popular and recognisable.
- Stories about their private lives grab attention, spark emotions and curiosity, and are eagerly shared – even without verification.
- Entertainment media and gossip portals often publish unchecked information because speed and sensation matter more than truth.
- Social media algorithms favour emotional content, making rumours spread rapidly.

Consequences of false celebrity news:

- They can damage a person's reputation and harm their private and professional life.
- They mislead fans and the public, reinforcing a false image of the person.
- They may lead to harassment, hate, cyberbullying, or loss of sponsorship and career opportunities.

2. Definitions and examples (10 min)

Format: mini-lecture with oral quiz element (questions and answers from students)

Definitions – discussion of key terms:

1. **Fact-checking**
   - The process of verifying facts in news items, public statements, or online posts.
   - Involves comparing information with reliable sources: statistical data, scientific research, government documents, independent organisation reports, expert statements.
   - The goal of fact-checking is to determine whether the content is true, partially true, or false, and to publish a reliable explanation for the audience.
2. **Fact-checking organisations**
   - Independent entities (e.g., portals, foundations, journalist groups) engaged in systematically verifying the truthfulness of information.
   - Operate under ethical codes (e.g., IFCN – International Fact-Checking Network), ensure transparency of sources and working methods.
   - Often cooperate with social media platforms (Facebook, TikTok, X/Twitter) to label or remove false content and protect users from disinformation.
3. **Reliable sources**
   - Signed author or institution (e.g., WHO, European Commission, Eurostat).
   - Official documents, research reports, academic publications.
   - Professional media outlets following journalistic verification rules (providing sources, quotes, statistical data).
4. **Suspicious sources**
   - No author signature ("anonymous expert", "internet sources").
   - "Secret documents" inaccessible to the public, or no evidence provided.

- Sensational headlines like "The truth they don't want you to know!" or "Explosion of shocking facts!" – based on emotions rather than facts.
- Websites publishing only controversial content without confirmation from other media.

Examples of fact-checking in practice:

1. **Demagog.org.pl (Poland)**
   - Checks politician's statement: "Taxes in Poland increased by 30% in one year."
   - Verification: GUS data shows a 5% increase, not 30%.
   - Result: false – publication of an article with justification.
2. **EUvsDisinfo (EU)**
   - Analyses Russian disinformation: "Ukraine plans to use biological weapons on the EU border."
   - Verification: UN and WHO deny such plans, no evidence found.
   - Result: fake news, correction published in EUvsDisinfo database.
3. **Manipulátoři.cz (Czech Republic)**
   - Verifies social media story: "Czech schools banned Christmas trees to avoid offending religious minorities."
   - Verification: Ministry of Education's communication – no such decision.
   - Result: false information, example of deliberate social division.

Oral quiz element (2–3 min)
The teacher reads short headlines, students respond "reliable / suspicious" and explain why:

- "WHO experts publish report on effectiveness of new vaccines."
- "Anonymous doctor reveals: vaccines cause body magnetism."
- "Eurostat: in 2023 Czech inflation fell by 2% – full report online."
- "Secret source: EU will ban home gardens by 2026!"

3. Exercise – "How do professionals check it?" (15 min)

Format: group work (3–5 people)
Objective: to teach students the basic approach of a fact-checker – step-by-step verification to separate facts from manipulation.

Teacher's instructions:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3–5.
2. Give each group a set of 4 short news items/headlines (2 true, 2 false – printed or displayed on a slide).
3. Explain that their task is to act as fact-checkers – journalists and experts who verify information step-by-step.

Example news items for groups:

1. "The European Union plans to ban the sale of paper books from 2026."
2. "The Ministry of Health published a report on the effectiveness of new vaccines – available on gov.pl."
3. "Secret document reveals that Czech schools will punish students for using mobile phones."
4. "Next week all school football league matches will be cancelled due to forecast storms."

Tasks for groups:

1. Mark news items that might be false.
   - Watch for: no source, sensational tone, anonymous quotes, secret documents, strange promises.
2. Write down questions a professional fact-checker would ask, e.g.:
   - Who is the author?
   - Are sources provided (report, official site, expert name)?
   - Do other portals report the same data?
   - Can it be confirmed by reliable institutions (WHO, Eurostat, ministry)?
   - Is the content playing on emotions or resembling a conspiracy theory?
3. Suggest places to verify:
   - Fact-checking portals: Demagog.org.pl, Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.sk, EUvsDisinfo.eu
   - Official institution websites: gov.pl, ec.europa.eu, WHO, Eurostat
   - Image search: Google Images (checking photos)
   - Compare content in several major media outlets
4. Fill in the table:

News content	Suspicious? (YES/NO)	How to check? (sources, questions)	Can be confirmed? (YES/NO)

News content	Suspicious? (YES/NO)	How to check? (sources, questions)	Can be confirmed? (YES/NO)

Discussion:

- Each group chooses one example and presents their verification steps and results.
- The teacher adds that professional fact-checkers use similar methods but have access to larger databases, experts, and tools.
- Emphasise: fact-checking = analysing evidence, not opinions or emotions.

4. Discussion – Can fact-checking be wrong? (8 min)

Format: guided conversation, moderated by the teacher
Goal: to make students aware that even fact-checking is not infallible, but it remains a key tool in the fight against disinformation.

Questions for students:

1. Do fact-checking organisations always get it right?
    o What could cause them to make a mistake (e.g., lack of access to complete data, conflicting information, time constraints)?
    o Do mistakes also happen in science and journalism?
2. What is needed for information verification to be reliable?
    o Credible, official sources (reports, official documents, scientific research).
    o Checking information in several independent places.
    o Clear and transparent explanation of why the news is true or false.
3. Why do some people continue to believe fake news despite corrections?
    o **Confirmation bias** – preferring to believe things that match our existing beliefs.
    o Lack of trust in experts or media.
    o Strong emotions (fear, anger) that block logical thinking.
    o Fake news spreads faster than corrections.
4. Should fact-checking be mandatory on social media?
    o **Pros:** quicker detection of lies, user protection.
    o **Cons:** risk of censorship, limiting free speech, difficulty in defining a single "truth".

Additional reflection question:

- Would you like every suspicious video, meme, or post to be verified before publishing?
- How could this change the internet we use today?

Teacher's conclusions:

- Fact-checking is a tool based on evidence, science, and source analysis that helps distinguish truth from falsehood.
- Even fact-checkers can be wrong, so it's important to use multiple sources and verify information ourselves.
- The best defence against fake news is critical thinking, asking "who wrote this?" and using reliable verification portals (e.g., Demagog, EUvsDisinfo, EDMO).

5. Summary and reflection (7 min)

Format: individual work + joint board work

Students complete the sentences:

- "I have understood that fact-checking…"
- "The most important question I will ask before sharing news is…"
- "In the future I will check information on the website…"

At the end, the class creates a list of **"5 rules of independent fact-checking"**, for example:

1. Check the author and the source.
2. Look for confirmation in other media.
3. Avoid anonymous "sensations."
4. Use fact-checking portals (Demagog, EDMO, EUvsDisinfo).
5. Do not share unchecked news.

6. Glossary – Fact-checking

Term	Definition
Fact-checking	The process of verifying the truthfulness of information based on reliable sources and evidence.
Fact-checking organisation	An independent institution whose task is to verify facts in the public sphere.
Reliable source	Author identified, confirmed by data, documents, scientific research.
Suspicious source	Anonymous, without evidence, based on emotions and rumours.
Correction	Information that rectifies a false news item, published after verification.

7. Methodological guide for the teacher

1. Examples and selection of materials

- Use fictional or neutral news items inspired by real situations to avoid political or local controversies.
- You can use examples from health, science, sport, education, the environment – to make exercises relatable to students without causing disputes.
- Ensure variety of forms: newspaper headlines, social media posts, excerpts from politicians' statements, graphics, short videos.

2. Teaching materials

- Printed news items: true and false posts for group analysis.
- Source analysis tables: columns "Author", "Sources/evidence", "Can be confirmed?", "Credibility assessment".
- Infographic: "5 steps of a fact-checker" (e.g., check author, look for sources, compare with other media, ask an expert, use verification tools).
- List of fact-checking portals:
    - **PL:** Demagog.org.pl, Konkret24
    - **CZ:** Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.cz

- o **SK:** Demagog.sk, Infosecurity.sk
- o **EU:** EUvsDisinfo.eu, EDMO.eu
- Additional online tools: image search engines (Google Lens, TinEye), archived sites (Wayback Machine), link checkers.

3. Moderating the class

- Ask open-ended questions, such as:
  - o "How would a professional fact-checker verify this?"
  - o "What evidence is given here, and is it credible?"
  - o "Is one article enough to accept something as true?"
- Emphasise the process – show that fact-checking means analysing sources, not expressing personal opinion.
- Encourage working in pairs or small groups so students can exchange ideas and arguments.
- Introduce short examples of misleading clues that can deceive even journalists, to show that mistakes are natural.

4. Safe atmosphere

- Emphasise that anyone can make mistakes – we learn to avoid repeating them.
- Avoid grading students for wrong answers – instead, ask:
  - o "What made you consider this information true/false?"
  - o "How else could we check this?"
- Support an evidence-based sceptical attitude rather than blind trust or rejection of information.

5. Possible lesson extensions

- **Class project "Fact-checking Station"** – for one week, students bring various online news items, choose the most suspicious, and verify them together, creating a "facts and myths" board.
- **Educational game "Fact-checker vs Fake news"** – teams compete to see who finds confirming or debunking evidence faster.
- **Mini-interview with a local journalist or fact-checker** – inviting an expert to the school (or online) to show what professional work looks like.

8. Scientific and educational sources

- **EDMO – European Digital Media Observatory**
  https://edmo.eu
- **EUvsDisinfo – project of the European External Action Service**
  https://euvsdisinfo.eu
- **IFCN – International Fact-Checking Network (Code of Principles)**
  https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/
- **Demagog.org.pl (Poland)**
  https://demagog.org.pl
- **Konkret24 (Poland)**
  https://konkret24.tvn24.pl
- **Manipulatori.cz (Czech Republic)**
  https://manipulatori.cz
- **Demagog.cz (Czech Republic)**
  https://demagog.cz
- **Demagog.sk (Slovakia)**
  https://demagog.sk
- **Infosecurity.sk (Slovakia)**
  https://infosecurity.sk

Project cofunded by the European Union