# FACT-CHECKING AMBASSADORS PROGRAM METHODOLOGY

Tools, applications, and methodologies

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*ATEITININKŲ FEDERACIJA, LITHUANIA*
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# Introduction

## About fact-checking

Fact-Checking is the process of verifying whether a claim, image, statistic, or story is accurate. It means tracing information back to credible primary sources, checking context, and clearly labeling what's true, false, misleading, or unproven—with transparent evidence.

Why does it matter so much today?

- Info overload: We're exposed to thousands of posts daily; falsehoods spread faster than corrections.
- AI-generated content: Deepfakes and synthetic text make fakes look convincing.
- High-stakes decisions: Bad info can sway elections, health choices, and public safety.
- Trust & accountability: Rigorous verification rebuilds trust in institutions and media.
- Civic resilience: A fact-literate public is harder to manipulate.

The Fact-Checking Ambassadors Programme was created to strengthen media literacy, critical thinking, and civic resilience across Europe. It offers a structured yet adaptable framework to help participants recognise, verify, and responsibly communicate accurate information. The methodology identifies nine guidelines and realizes them through four integrated implementation parts.

The theoretically enriched material was practically implemented in a live event — Media Literacy Workshop: How to recognise and Combat Disinformation held in Vilnius, Lithuania, on October 10–12, 2025.

We thank Prof. Dr. Darius Pilkynas and Assoc. Prof. Liutauras Ulevičius from the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University, Jovita Tautkevičiūtė-Kalinauskienė from the Debunk.org project for the theoretical material provided, and Arnas Jasinskas from Ateitininkų federacija for conducting a lively seminar on disinformation, whose insights were also useful in preparing this methodology.

Organisers may adapt duration, sequence, and tools to local contexts while ensuring all guidelines are addressed at least once.

## Vision

The main vision of Fact-Checking Ambassadors Programme methodology is to equip trusted community members to detect, verify, and responsibly communicate facts—so that communities become more resilient to mis/disinformation and can make better decisions.

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## Programme objectives

- Knowledge: Participants can define mis/disinformation/propaganda; describe common tactics; explain ABCDE and OSINT basics.
- Skills: Participants can run a 5–10 minute triage, verify images/videos/text, and document a transparent reasoning chain.
- Attitudes: Participants engage respectfully, avoid confrontation, and prioritize clarity, empathy, and accuracy.
- Practice: Each participant produces one short fact-check and one outreach action plan tailored to their community.
- Multiplication: At least one local micro-training (60–90 min) delivered within 60 days after certification.

## SMART targets & KPIs

- By Day 3: 100% of participants complete a documented fact-check (claim–evidence–decision table).
- Within 30 days: ≥80% publish a public-facing summary (website, social, newsletter) using Truth Sandwich.
- Within 60 days: ≥60% deliver a micro-training to a local audience (≥15 people) or run a community awareness activity.
- Quality threshold: ≥80% rubric score on verification accuracy, sourcing, and communication clarity.

## Target audiences & delivery formats

- Audiences: secondary schools, universities, youth NGOs, community centers, librarians, local journalists.
- Formats: live workshops (90–180 min), hybrid webinars, peer-learning circles, on-campus booths, teacher in-service sessions.

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# Methodological guidelines

For the implementation of the programme, we have identified nine basic methodological content guidelines, the consistent implementation of which would achieve the programme goals and which should be implemented in the programme event. For the implementation of each methodological guideline, an appropriate implementation part was provided as a way to transfer the programme theory into practice. The programme implementation parts we have prepared are intended as an element that changes according to circumstances and each implementer of this programme is invited to adapt them to their own needs, but it is not recommended to change the basic methodological guidelines.

Below we provide the methodological guidelines with explanations:

1. **Expert-led session on the mechanics of how misinformation and disinformation spread—and their societal impacts**

Explanation: Participants are introduced to the information ecosystem, including actors (state, non-state, bots), behaviours (impersonation, amplification), content types (fabrication, deepfakes, decontextualization), scale of reach, and effects on trust, polarization, and behaviour.

2. **Real-life case studies of disinformation campaigns that influenced public opinion and democratic processes**

Explanation: Facilitators present documented operations (e.g., cloned media sites, cross-platform campaigns). Learners analyse objectives, target audiences, narratives, and measurable impact using the ABCDE or similar frameworks.

3. **Interactive training in practical tools and techniques to spot disinformation**

Explanation: Participants practice fast checks (reverse image search, source triangulation), metadata review, and basic geolocation; they build a personal checklist for rapid triage and deeper verification.

4. **Collaborative group work to categorize content as factual, misleading, or disinformation**

Explanation: Small teams assess mixed items, record decisions with justifications, compare inter-rater agreement, and reflect on sources of disagreement (bias, uncertainty, missing context).

5. **A workshop on using digital platforms and AI to assist in fact-checking**

Explanation: Learners test AI-assisted detectors and supportive tooling while discussing limitations, false positives/negatives, and the importance of human-in-the-loop review and transparent reporting.

6. **A clear articulation of the responsibilities and expectations of a Fact-Checking Ambassador**

Explanation: The role includes neutrality, transparency, accuracy, documentation of methods, respectful engagement, and safeguarding against harms; these principles form the Code of Conduct.

7. **Training on how to communicate facts to wider audiences, countering misinformation without confrontation**

Explanation: Ambassadors apply 'truth sandwich', counterspeech, and audience-tailored messaging; they avoid repeating myths without context and emphasise accurate, empathetic framing.

8. **A strategy session on creating awareness, engaging communities, and disseminating correct information**

Explanation: Participants design simple, feasible outreach plans (target groups, channels, timeline, metrics) that localise examples and align with national needs.

9. **Formal certification as Fact-Checking Ambassadors upon successful completion of learning and assessment**

Explanation: Certification validates knowledge, skills, and ethical commitments; processes may include short tests, practical tasks, and review of outreach plans.

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# Implementation

Five implementation parts are our proposed structure for implementing methodological guidelines and putting theory into practice. Anyone using this methodology can choose the appropriate places, methods and tools for implementing these implementation parts. Each implementation part is linked to one or more methodological guidelines in such a way that all guidelines are implemented (each part indicates which guidelines it implements). The presented structure was practically implemented during a live event, therefore it is recommended as a working and tested example of the Fact-Checking Ambassadors Programme.

Each implementation part is indicated by its focus, theoretical background, recommended practical session structure with time limits, and learning outcomes. Additional useful information is also provided: links to useful tools and resources, suitable methods and templates. For those who wish to adjust the recommended content, at least five short variants of specific exercises suitable for that implementation part are provided

## 1. Introduction to disinformation and its impact

*Implements methodological guidelines 1–2 (Understanding Disinformation; Case Study Analysis).*

### Focus

Define mis/disinformation, map spread and impact; analyse real campaigns using the ABCDE framework.

### Theoretical background

Disinformation is false or misleading content spread with intent to deceive; it rides on emotional hooks, cognitive shortcuts, and the velocity of digital platforms. It can masquerade as breaking news, decontextualized images, cherry-picked statistics, or authoritative-sounding "expert" quotes—packaged to fit narratives we already find plausible. Its impact is cumulative: it corrodes trust in institutions and journalism, distorts democratic deliberation and elections, fuels public-health risks, and fractures social cohesion. Responding isn't about censorship or "winning" debates; it's about equipping people and organisations with transparent, repeatable checks that slow the scroll and surface evidence. The sections that follow translate this stance into practice—combining source scrutiny, claim-by-claim verification, visual forensics, and basic network analysis—while acknowledging uncertainty and minimizing harm by avoiding unnecessary amplification.

### Session description

Using Debunk.org and EU DisinfoLab resources, participants learn the ABCDE Framework (Actor, behaviour, Content, Degree, Effect) and analyse Operation Doppelganger as a case study of cloned sites amplifying false narratives. Discussion covers AI's role in generation and amplification.

## Session structure (90 min total)

Step 1 (15 min) – Expert introduction: key definitions, intent, and societal impact.

Step 2 (30 min) – Small-group ABCDE analysis of a real case (e.g., Operation Doppelganger).

Step 3 (30 min) – Presentations and whole-group synthesis: risks and counter-measures.

Step 4 (15 min) – Reflection: vulnerability mapping for local communities.

## Learning outcomes

- Distinguish misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda.
- Apply the ABCDE model to real-world examples.
- Identify factors that amplify false narratives, including AI.

## Tools & resources

- Debunk.org — https://www.debunk.org/disinformation-vs-misinformation
- EU DisinfoLab — Operation Doppelganger
- Google Fact Check Explorer — https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
- TinEye — https://tineye.com/ | Google Lens — https://lens.google.com/

## Practical checklists & recipes

- ABCDE worksheet: actor/behaviour/content/degree/effect table for any viral item.
- Narrative lens: identify protagonists, antagonists, moral framing, implied solutions.
- Impact map: list of plausible harms (individual, group, institutional) and mitigating responses.

## Concrete exercises

1. ABCDE Rapid Map (25 min)
    - Input: one trending claim (text or image). Teams fill an ABCDE table.
    - Deliverable: 1-slide summary per team with the clearest ‘Effect’ pathway.
2. Timeline Reconstruct (20 min)
    - Task: identify ‘first seen’ using search by date, cached pages, or archives; sketch 5-point timeline.
    - Deliverable: timeline + link list.
3. Vulnerability Heat-Map (25 min)
    - Task: on a flipchart, mark local audiences at risk and likely channels (FB groups, TG channels, local media).
    - Deliverable: photo of the heat-map and 3 mitigation ideas.

4. Case Swap & Peer Review (20 min)
    - Task: Exchange outputs with another team; add one risk and one mitigation they missed.
5. Instructor Debrief (10 min)
    - Emphasise data sources, uncertainties, and how to avoid over-claiming.
    - Materials: ABCDE worksheet, sticky notes, laptops; Tools: web search, date filters, Wayback/Archive.today.

## 2. Methods for recognising disinformation

*Implements methodological guidelines 3–4 (Practical Tools; Group Analysis).*

### Focus

Detect manipulation via language, imagery, logic and narrative; build a rigorous questioning habit.

### Theoretical background

Disinformation is false or misleading content shared with intent to deceive; it thrives on emotional triggers, fragmented attention, and the speed of digital platforms. It can appear as sensational headlines, decontextualized visuals, cherry-picked statistics, or plausible-sounding expert quotes—often wrapped in familiar narratives that confirm our biases. Recognising it is not about winning arguments but about reducing harm, protecting democratic deliberation, and preserving trust in reliable knowledge. The approaches that follow blend source evaluation, claim-by-claim verification, visual forensics, and basic network analysis, while acknowledging uncertainty and ethical limits (e.g., not amplifying harmful material). Think of them as a practical toolkit: transparent, repeatable steps that anyone can apply to slow down, check, and reach a fair, well-supported judgment.

### Session description

Participants study cognitive biases (confirmation, availability, motivated reasoning) and classic propaganda devices (Name Calling, Glittering Generalities, Transfer, Testimonial, Plain Folks, Card Stacking, Bandwagon). Layered analysis includes source & motivation, content & evidence, context & timing, and amplification. Narrative analysis examines roles, values, and emotional triggers.

### Session structure (120 min total)

Step 1 (15 min) – Mini-lecture: biases & propaganda

Step 2 (15 min) – Quick OSINT checks: reverse image, account scan, keyword filters

Step 3 (35 min)– Group Lab A: deconstruct a viral post using a checklist

Step 4 (20 min) – Gallery Walk & Peer Feedback

Step 5 (20 min) – Group Lab B: re-frame responsibly (balanced headline, 100-word summary, public notice)

Step 6 (15 min) – Reflection

## Learning outcomes

- Detect manipulation via language, imagery, and structure.
- Apply structured questioning and cross-checking to assess credibility.
- Identify fallacies and propaganda patterns; produce non-manipulative reframes.

## Tools & resources

- i-Intelligence OSINT Handbook — https://i-intelligence.eu/osint-handbook/
- Debunk.org — https://www.debunk.org/
- Google Fact Check Explorer — https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
- TinEye — https://tineye.com/

## Practical checklists & recipes:

- Bias triggers: checklist for confirmation, availability, and motivated reasoning.
- Propaganda quick scan: Name-calling? Glittering generalities? Bandwagon? Card-stacking?
- Language cues: hedging vs. absolutes; loaded adjectives; meme-ified imagery and symbols.

## Concrete exercises

1. Fallacy Bingo (15 min)
    - Task: Given 8 short posts, teams mark fallacies/propaganda devices they spot.
    - Deliverable: bingo sheet with examples.
2. OSINT Micro-Drills (25 min)
    - Stations: (a) reverse image crop/re-search, (b) account authenticity scan, (c) keyword & date operators.
    - Deliverable: per station, 3 bullet findings + link/screenshot.
3. Deconstruct & Re-frame (35 min)
    - Task: Fill ‘Source–Claim–Evidence–Context–Bias–Missing–Alt’ checklist; then rewrite headline and 100-word neutral brief.
4. Gallery Walk (15 min)

- Task: Peer feedback: add one question + one improvement per board.

5. Reflection (10 min)
    - Prompt: Which indicators were most reliable? What will you add to your personal checklist?
    - Materials: printed checklists, sample posts; Tools: Google Lens, TinEye, platform search operators.

## 3. Artificial intelligence and fact-Checking

*Implements methodological guideline 5 (Technology Integration).*

### Focus

Understand AI's dual role—generation of synthetic content and assistance in verification.

### Theoretical background

Artificial intelligence is both a force multiplier and a stress test for fact-checking. On the one hand, generative models can accelerate verification—rapidly surfacing prior coverage, extracting claims, transcribing audio, flagging inconsistencies, and assisting with reverse-image workflows. On the other, AI can fabricate fluent falsehoods, synthesize convincing images and voices, and flood channels with near-duplicates that overwhelm human review. Effective use of AI in fact-checking means keeping humans in the loop: treat model outputs as leads, not verdicts; insist on traceable sources; and document uncertainty and limitations. The goal isn't to "automate truth," but to augment transparent, repeatable checks—so that evidence rises above velocity, and ethical safeguards prevent inadvertent amplification of harm.

### Session description

Address AI-generated content (LLMs, diffusion, voice cloning), platform amplification (recommenders, micro-targeting), and AI-assisted verification (classifiers, hashing, metadata). Key risks: dataset bias, over-trust in automated scores, adversarial manipulation. Safeguards: human-in-the-loop, transparency, audit trails.

### Session structure (105 min total)

Step 1 (15 min) – Systems overview

Step 2 (25 min) – Live demo of AI-assisted tools

Step 3 (35 min) – Hands-on triage lab with mixed items

Step 4 (15 min) – Ethics & risk discussion

Step 5 (15 min) – Draft an AI-assisted verification protocol

### Learning outcomes

- Recognise AI-generated artefacts and amplification patterns.

- Use AI-assisted tools critically and document results.
- Draft a responsible AI-use protocol with human oversight.

## Tools & resources

- Plikynas, D. (2023) Artificial Intelligence and Fake News (Žurnalistikos tyrimai)
- IEEE Access Review on Disinformation — https://epublications.vu.lt/object/elaba%3A218725963/218725963.pdf
- Deepware — https://deepware.ai/ | Hive Moderation — https://hivemoderation.com/
- Google Fact Check Explorer — https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
- Bellingcat Toolkit — https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/

## Practical checklists & recipes:

- AI artefacts: face/hand anomalies, lighting mismatches, inconsistent reflections.
- Triage rule: never trust single detector scores; require converging signals + human review.
- Logging: store screenshots, hashes, tool outputs, and a short narrative of the decision.

## Concrete exercises

1. Detector Reality-Check (20 min)
    - Task: Run 6 items through two detectors; record scores and disagreements; discuss false positives/negatives.
2. Mixed-Media Triage (30 min)
    - Task: Sort items into likely authentic / synthetic / uncertain; justify with converging signals (not a single score).
3. Metadata & Provenance (20 min)
    - Task: Extract keyframes, inspect metadata when available; compare platform re-encodes; note anomalies.
4. Risk & Ethics Roundtable (20 min)
    - Task: Draft a 6-point ‘responsible-use’ checklist for your organisation.
5. Protocol Draft (15 min)
    - Task: One-page AI-assisted verification flow (inputs, tools, thresholds, human review, logging).

Materials: curated test set (text/image/video), detector links, keyframe extractor; Tools: InVID, reverse search, logs.

## 4. Hands-On fact-Checking exercise

*Implements methodological guidelines 6–8 (Ambassadorial Responsibility; Strategic Communication; Community Outreach).*

### Focus

Apply verification tools and responsible communication in realistic scenarios; design community actions.

### Session description

This workshop focuses on practical application of disinformation verification techniques. Participants will learn to use OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) tools to verify claims, images, and social media content. The session emphasizes hands-on practice rather than theoretical frameworks, complementing earlier seminar sessions.

Working in small teams, participants select a live or recent claim and run a structured workflow: define the claim precisely; break it into checkable units (who/what/where/when/how); locate the closest primary sources; triangulate with at least two independent, credible outlets; verify visuals with reverse-image/video search and basic geo/chrono cues; and assess data or quotes for cherry-picking and context loss. Roles rotate—lead checker, source-tracer, visual analyst, note-taker—to keep the process transparent and repeatable. Model outputs (from search or transcription tools) are treated as leads, not verdicts, and every step is logged with links, screenshots, and a brief confidence rating. The exercise ends with a concise, non-amplifying write-up: the claim, what was found, what remains uncertain, and how you'd monitor for updates.

### Session structure (120 min total)

Step 1 (10 min) – Warm-up & baseline

Step 2 (20 min) – Tool demonstration

Step 3 (45 min) – Fact-checking lab

Step 4 (30 min) – Communication challenge

Step 5 (15 min) – Reflection & outreach plan

### Learning outcomes

- Perform structured verification and document reasoning.
- Communicate verified information clearly and empathetically.
- Draft a community outreach plan grounded in verified evidence.

## Tools & resources

- Bellingcat Toolkit — https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/
- Google Fact Check Explorer — https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer
- InVID — https://www.invid-project.eu
- TinEye — https://tineye.com/
- Sleuthing Social Media Posts training module - https://firstdraftnews.org/training/
- Google Earth (geolocation tool) - https://earth.google.com

## Concrete exercises

1. Hands-On Exercise: Image Verification
    - Activity: 9-image sorting challenge
    - Image Categories:
        - AI-generated images
        - Misattributed photos (real images, false context)
        - Street View location challenge
    - Tools Introduced:
        - TinEye.com (reverse image search)
        - Google Lens (visual search & identification)
2. Advanced Tools Overview
    - Resource: Bellingcat verification toolkit
    - Tools Demonstrated:
        - OpenStreetMap Search (geolocation)
        - Shadow Finder (time/location verification)
        - Verification Toolbox (comprehensive resource)
    - Approach: Brief demonstration with emphasis that these are available for deeper investigation. Provide URLs for self-guided exploration.
3. Case Study: The Hellhouse of Martinez
    - Resource: Jimmy Akin's Mysterious World podcast episode
    - Why This Example:
        - Demonstrates how assumptions color investigation
        - Shows importance of considering multiple explanations

- Balances skepticism with open-mindedness
- Non-political context reduces defensiveness

- Format:
  - Play pre-selected 12-15 minute excerpt showing key investigation moments
  - Focus on methodology and critical thinking approach

4. Discussion: Investigation Methodology
   - Discussion Questions:
     - How is investigating a mystery similar to/different from verifying social media posts?
     - What role do assumptions play in our verification process?
     - How do we balance skepticism with genuine inquiry?
     - Key Takeaway: Avoid both credulity and dismissiveness - maintain critical thinking while staying open to evidence.
5. InfoShield Interactive Quiz (12 min)
   - Resource: Debunk.org "InfoShield" course. Link: https://www.debunk.org/infoshield-course
   - Format:
     - Participants work through quiz
     - Focus on pattern recognition and tactic identification
     - Not necessary for everyone to complete all questions
   - Purpose: Reinforce recognition of common disinformation tactics encountered throughout the workshop

### Assessment rubrics

- Verification accuracy (0–4): evidence sufficiency, cross-checks, correct conclusion.
- Documentation (0–4): sources linked, screenshots/logs, reproducibility.
- Communication clarity (0–4): factual, non-confrontational, audience-appropriate.
- Ethics (0–4): respect, privacy, no harm, transparency about uncertainty.

## 5. Programme summary and certification

*Implements methodological guideline 9 (Certification).*

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## Focus

Consolidate learning, reflect on ethics and assessment, and award certification to ambassadors.

## Session description

The closing module aligns outcomes with ambassadorial responsibilities: neutrality, transparency, accountability, community service. Participants demonstrate mastery of the full fact-checking cycle (claim intake → verification → communication → reflection → outreach). A Code of Conduct underpins certification; organisers use rubrics to ensure consistency across contexts.

## Session structure (90 min total)

Step 1 (20 min) – Group reflection

Step 2 (20 min) – Ethics & Code of Conduct

Step 3 (25 min) – Action plans

Step 4 (15 min) – Certification criteria & assessment

Step 5 (10 min) – Closing & networking

## Learning outcomes

- Demonstrate ethical standards and responsible communication.
- Produce a concrete local action plan.
- Understand certification criteria and collaboration pathways.

## Tools & resources

- EDMO Media Literacy Guidelines — https://edmo.eu
- UNICEF C4D resources — https://www.unicef.org/communicating-for-development
- Council of Europe media & journalism ethics — https://www.coe.int/en/web/media-freedom
- Google Fact Check Explorer — https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer

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## Conclusion

This methodology translates nine clear guidelines into four integrated parts that move from understanding to practice, from individual checks to community impact. By standardising short (5–10 minutes) and full (30 minutes) verification workflows, it helps participants document transparent reasoning, cite primary sources, and communicate findings without amplifying harm. The built-in ethics and assessment rubrics align certification with real-world competence: accuracy, reproducibility, clarity, and care.

organisers are encouraged to localise tools, cases, and delivery formats while keeping the core principles intact—human-in-the-loop verification, evidence over speed, and respectful, audience-aware messaging. Success is measured not only by completed fact-checks, but also by downstream effects: better information habits in partner NGOs, micro-trainings delivered to local audiences, and a steady cadence of quick-checks that reduce the spread of misleading content.

In short, the Fact-Checking Ambassadors Programme is a practical path for trusted community members to detect, verify, and responsibly communicate facts—building civic resilience one well-documented check at a time.

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# Appendixes

## Appendix a — quick-Reference tool cards

• Reverse Image: Google Lens, TinEye — crop distinctive regions; compare timestamps; look for earliest match.
• Video: InVID (keyframe), YouTube DataViewer — reverse frames, check upload chronology.
• Metadata: ExifTool (when available) — camera/device hints; note that platforms strip EXIF.
• Geolocation: maps, Street View — signage, language, shadows, landmarks; sun azimuth for plausibility.
• Archiving: Wayback Machine, Archive.today — reconstruct first-seen and edits.
• Accounts: WHOIS, handle history, follower patterns; cross-platform presence.
• Networks: CrowdTangle (FB/IG), X/Twitter advanced search, Telegram directories.
• Logging: claim–evidence–decision table; screenshots; links; hashes.

## Appendix b — rubric sheets

Rubric 1 — Fact-Checking Task (0–4 each):
• Verification accuracy: evidence sufficiency, triangulation, correct conclusion.
• Documentation: sources linked, screenshots/logs, reproducibility.
• Communication clarity: neutral tone, audience fit, truth-first framing.
• Ethics: privacy, dignity, safety, transparency about uncertainty.

Rubric 2 — Outreach Plan (0–4 each):
• Relevance: target audience & need; context-specific.
• Feasibility: timeline, roles, resources.
• Metrics: clear indicators (reach, engagement, feedback).
• Risk mitigation: safeguards for participants and subjects.

## Appendix c — workshop materials checklist

• Venue & AV: projector, speakers, stable internet, extension cords.
• Stations: laptops (1 per team), printed worksheets (ABCDE, checklists), flipcharts, markers, sticky notes.
• Datasets: curated claims/posts (text/image/video), detector/tool links, QR codes.
• Admin: sign-in sheet, consent notes for photos, certificates, feedback forms.
• Logistics: water/coffee breaks, accessibility considerations, space signage.

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