



Take control of AI and Information
to Investigate, Teach and Act

Training

Fake news and conspiracy theories: understanding and resisting manipulation

How biases, emotions and digital platforms shape what we believe

Overview

Fake news feed on our emotions and biases. Social media platforms amplify their impact by capturing our attention and favoring content that generates strong reactions. Understanding these mechanisms is a first step towards maintaining a critical mindset.

This course combines understanding with hands-on practice. Using real cases, participants learn to identify the mechanisms behind fake news and conspiracy narratives, observe how social media amplifies certain content, and apply simple verification and analysis techniques.

The course is fully customisable. Content, level, case studies, duration and tools are tailored to the participants' profiles and the client organisation's needs. Examples and techniques are updated to reflect rapidly changing digital practices.

Target audience

Journalists and information and communication professionals, teachers, trainers, librarians and information specialists, researchers, civil society professionals and, more broadly, anyone wishing to better understand misinformation and strengthen their critical thinking.

Prerequisites

No specific prerequisites are required for introductory formats beyond everyday use of the Internet and social media. Exercises and level of depth are adapted to the participants.

Learning objectives

Depending on the needs identified, the course can help participants to:

- identify cognitive biases, emotions and framing effects that shape our perception of information.
- understand how the attention economy, algorithms and social dynamics influence the visibility and circulation of certain content.
- recognise common features of fake news, conspiracy narratives and manipulation strategies.
- verify the source, context, origin and circulation of content published online.

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- develop simple habits to slow down, question, verify, correct and explain without unnecessarily amplifying misleading information.

Course content

The content is built from thematic blocks selected according to the objectives, participants' level and the time available.

1. How our brain processes information

- understand how cognitive biases, emotions, intuition and motivated reasoning can shape our judgements.
- observe how words, images, framing and context can change our perception of the same fact.

2. How platforms capture our attention

- unpack the mechanisms of engagement, recommendation, repetition and virality that structure social media.
- identify group effects, polarisation and amplification without confusing signals, hypotheses and evidence.

3. Anatomy of fake news and conspiracy narratives

- recognise recurring narrative devices, simplifications, selective evidence and assumptions of hidden intent.
- understand why certain narratives persuade, evolve and spread, including in the age of AI-generated content.

4. From doubt to verification

- trace a source or original publication, reconstruct a timeline and place content back in its context.
- cross-check clues, seek independent sources and document a verification transparently.

5. Resist, correct and explain

- develop simple habits to manage attention and suspend judgement when necessary.
- learn to correct, contextualise or pre-empt misleading information without unnecessarily increasing its reach.

The precise selection of modules and exercises is agreed with the client organisation after a needs assessment. A short session may focus on cognitive biases or conspiracy narratives; a longer course can include social media research, verification and complete practical exercises.

Tools and techniques covered

Tools are selected according to the session objectives and may include:

- advanced search on search engines and platform-specific social media search functions;
- web archives, including the Wayback Machine, to recover deleted or modified content;
- reverse-search tools to trace the origin and context of an image or publication;
- simple methods for analysing accounts, publication timelines and the circulation of content.

As platforms and tools evolve rapidly, the selection is regularly updated and adapted to participants' professional or educational uses.

Duration

From 2 hours to several days depending on the objectives and participants' level. A focused awareness session can be organised over half a day; a practical course combining understanding of mechanisms, case analysis and verification generally requires one day or more.

Delivery format

Training can be delivered in person at the client organisation's premises or another agreed venue, or remotely by videoconference. The format is defined according to the objectives, number of participants and desired proportion of practical exercises.

Access arrangements and lead time

Training is requested by telephone or email. A discussion with the client organisation, supplemented where necessary by a preliminary questionnaire, is used to assess needs and establish the programme, duration and quote. The date is agreed according to availability.

Equipment required

Each participant needs a computer connected to the Internet and a recent web browser. Any accounts, software or resources required for exercises are specified before the course. For in-person sessions, a projector and reliable Internet connection are required.

Teaching methods

The course prioritises hands-on learning and combines:

- short methodological inputs illustrated with real cases and recent research;
- exercises to identify biases, framing, misleading arguments and signs of manipulation;
- demonstrations and practical scenarios involving social media research and verification;
- collective analysis and experience-sharing adapted to participants' needs.

Assessment methods

Assessment is adapted to the objectives selected for each session and may include:

- an assessment of participants' needs and level before the course;
- practical exercises and knowledge-check questions during the session;
- a practical scenario or case study to assess achievement of the objectives;
- a separate satisfaction questionnaire on the quality and usefulness of the course.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

Specific needs are identified in advance so that possible adaptations can be considered. For in-person training, venue accessibility is organised with the host organisation; materials and teaching arrangements can be adapted where possible.

Course recognition

This is a non-certifying course. Participants who complete the session receive a certificate of attendance.

Funding

The course may be eligible for funding from an employer or funding body, subject to its rules. A personalised quote and programme can be provided to support the application.

Outcome indicators

Satisfaction and learning-outcome indicators are based on end-of-course assessments. Available consolidated results are published and updated periodically on bourgoing.com.

Fees

On request, depending on duration, number of participants, format, level of customisation, specific preparation and any travel expenses.

Contact

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Last update: September 2026