



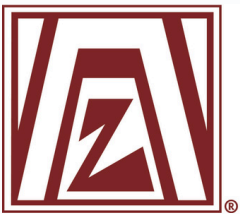
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# MEDEA

DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY TO DEBUNK GENDER-RELATED MEDIA  
MANIPULATION AND FAKE NEWS



PROJECT N. 2024-1-LV01-KA210-ADU-000243248



**ZONTA**  
CLUB OF  
JELGAVA



NOVOSADSKA  
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ŠKOLA





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# SUMMARY

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1. Module 1 - Understanding Meta-Level Critical Thinking
  2. Module 2 - Fact-Checking techniques and Information Verification
  3. Module 3 - Gender-Based Technology Driven Violence
  4. Module 4 - GBTDV - How to Prevent and Fight It
  5. Module 5 - Understanding media construction
  6. Module 6 - Media consumption and its impact on perception
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## Authors

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# **MODULE 6**

## Media consumption and its impact on perception

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Novi Sad School of  
Journalism



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# SUMMARY

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1.INTRODUCTION

2.LET'S LOOK AT THE NEWS

3.TRAINING MODULE

4.CONCLUSIONS

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# Media consumption and its impact on perception

In an era of overwhelming media content, our ability to critically assess information is often influenced by cognitive distortions – systematic patterns of deviation from rationality in judgment. These distortions shape how we interpret media messages, process information, and form opinions. Media consumers are not neutral observers; instead, their perceptions are filtered through biases, emotions, and pre-existing beliefs.

## Cognitive biases in media interpretation

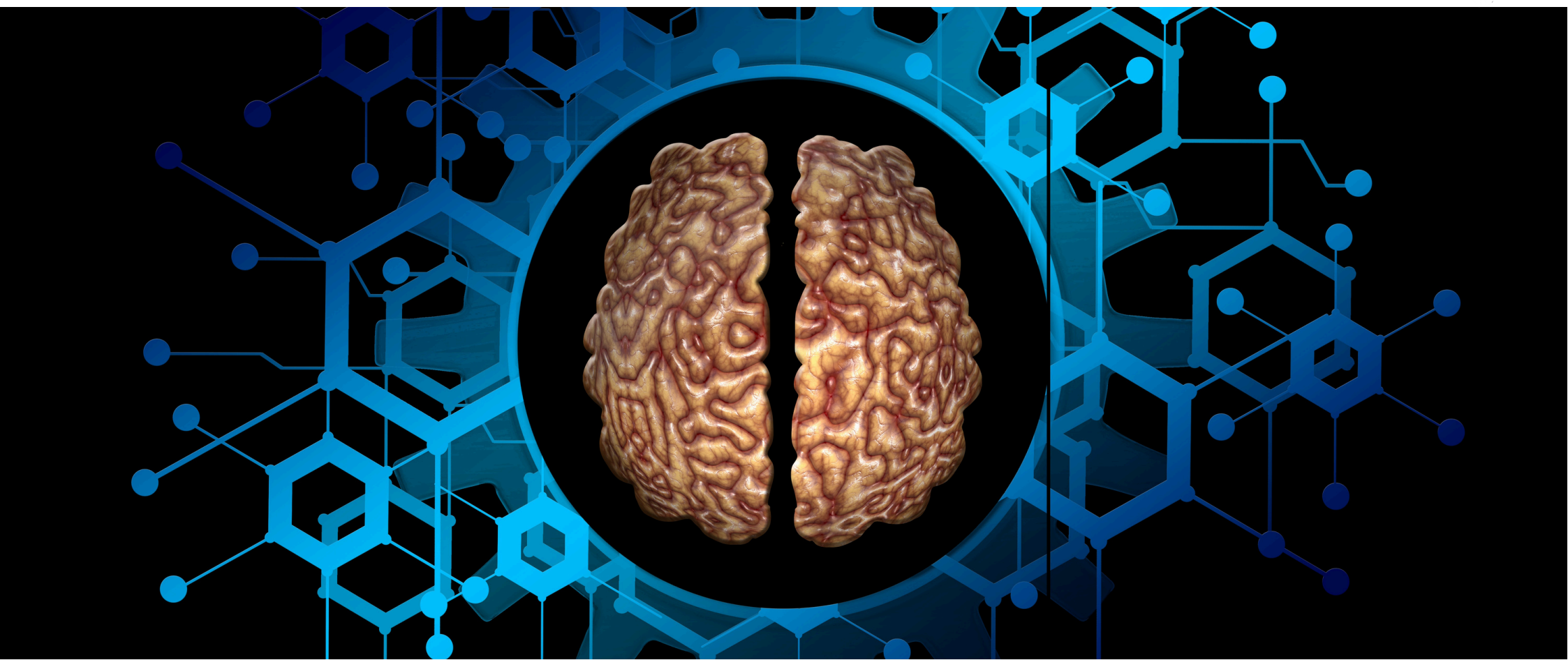
Confirmation bias – One of the most common distortions, confirmation bias leads us to seek out and favor information that aligns with our existing beliefs while dismissing contradictory evidence. For example, individuals with strong political opinions may prefer news sources that support their worldview, reinforcing their stance rather than challenging it.

Another example, which may seem less serious than a political topic, is when someone enjoys coffee—they are more likely to read, accept, and trust information and media content highlighting its health benefits while easily dismissing sources that discuss its negative effects.

Availability heuristic– This bias causes us to overestimate the importance of information that is easily accessible or frequently reported. For example, sensationalist news about violent crimes may create the perception that crime rates are rising, even if statistical data suggests otherwise.

The overwhelming flood of information and the constant repetition of a particular topic across numerous media outlets or sources can significantly shape our emotional perception of that topic, making it seem more "credible" by default. The emotional response we develop based on media content can greatly influence our ability to think critically.

Framing effect – How information is presented significantly affects our interpretation of it. The same news story can evoke different reactions depending on whether it is framed positively or negatively. For instance, a report stating that "90% of patients survived a treatment" will be perceived more favorably than one stating that "10% of patients died."



Negativity bias – The human brain is wired to pay more attention to negative information than positive news. This tendency leads media outlets to prioritize shocking or fear-inducing content, as it attracts more attention and engagement, further distorting our perception of reality.

Cognitive distortions often overlap in practice, and rather than focusing on labeling them, it is more important to recognize the underlying mechanisms that shape how we perceive media messages. These mental shortcuts influence our interpretation of information, sometimes leading to biased thinking or misjudgments.

A common misconception is that a higher level of education or intelligence makes us immune to cognitive distortions. In reality, these thinking patterns affect everyone, regardless of their knowledge or expertise. They stem from deep-seated psychological tendencies and are reinforced by personal experiences, emotions, and social influences.





## Algorithms

In the digital age, media literacy is no longer just about understanding how newspapers, television, or websites communicate. Today, media literacy must also include an understanding of the invisible systems that influence what content we see, when we see it, and how we engage with it. These systems are known as algorithms.

An algorithm is essentially a set of instructions used by digital platforms to sort, rank, and recommend content. On social media, video platforms, search engines, and streaming services, algorithms decide what appears on your feed or homepage. They are designed to personalize content based on your behavior—what you like, watch, comment on, or search for. The more time you spend on a platform, the more data the algorithm has to refine your experience. While this personalization can make our online experience feel relevant and convenient, it also creates filter bubbles—closed environments where we are mostly exposed to content that reinforces our existing views, preferences, and emotional responses. This limits our exposure to different perspectives and may distort our understanding of the world.

Social media algorithms are designed to prioritize engagement, meaning they tend to amplify content that sparks strong reactions—especially negative ones. Studies have shown that posts generating outrage, controversy, or fear often receive more interactions, such as comments and shares, than neutral or positive posts. As a result, these posts are pushed further into users' feeds, creating a cycle where divisive or alarming content spreads more rapidly than constructive or positive messages.





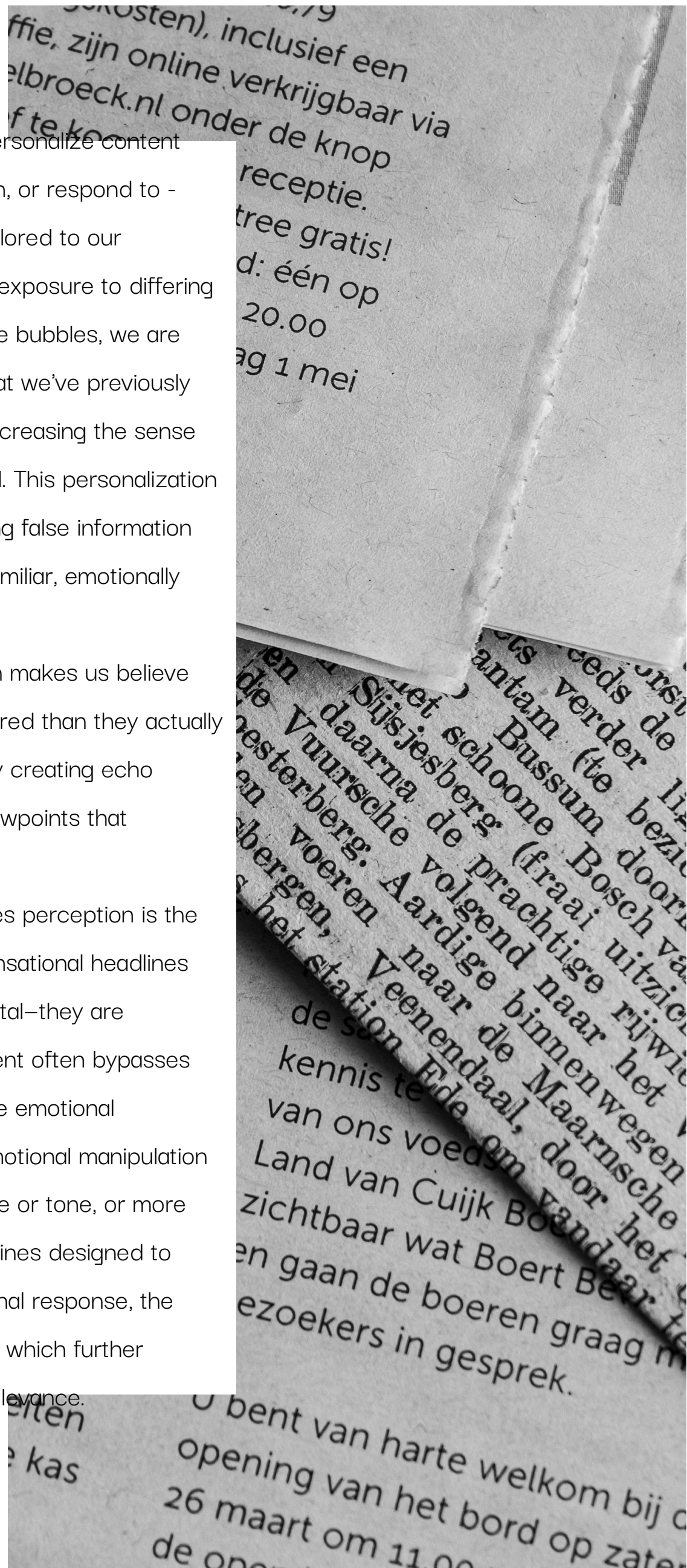
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In addition to reinforcing negativity, algorithms personalize content based on user behavior - what we click on, watch, or respond to - gradually creating a limited online environment tailored to our preferences and beliefs. Over time, this reduces exposure to differing viewpoints and fosters filter bubbles. Within these bubbles, we are repeatedly shown information that aligns with what we've previously engaged with, reinforcing existing opinions and increasing the sense that our perspective is the most common or valid. This personalization shapes our perception of reality, not by presenting false information directly, but by selectively emphasizing what is familiar, emotionally resonant, or attention-grabbing.

False consensus effect - This cognitive distortion makes us believe that our opinions and beliefs are more widely shared than they actually are. Social media algorithms amplify this effect by creating echo chambers, where we are primarily exposed to viewpoints that reinforce our own.

Another important aspect of how media influences perception is the strategic use of emotionally charged content. Sensational headlines and emotionally driven narratives are not accidental—they are optimized to capture attention. This type of content often bypasses analytical thinking and instead activates instinctive emotional responses such as fear, anger, or excitement. Emotional manipulation in media can be subtle, embedded in word choice or tone, or more overt, relying on exaggerated or misleading headlines designed to provoke a reaction. The more intense the emotional response, the more likely users are to click, share, or comment, which further increases the content's visibility and perceived relevance.







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Clickbait headlines are a common example of such techniques. They rely on vague or dramatic phrasing that withholds key information in order to generate curiosity and clicks. These headlines often distort the actual content or lead to low-quality articles, but they are effective at capturing initial attention. Repeated exposure to such formats conditions users to react before reflecting, gradually weakening critical engagement with content. This model of interaction is built into the economic logic of digital media, where attention is treated as a valuable commodity.

Gender bias in the media persists in both traditional and digital channels, often manifesting as distorted representations that reinforce outdated stereotypes and narrow perceptions of gender roles. In traditional news outlets, for example, women have historically been underrepresented as authoritative sources or experts, and when they do appear, they are often confined to topics such as lifestyle or human interest stories rather than hard news. In advertising, women have frequently been portrayed as decorative or passive figures, while men are depicted as decisive and dominant, reinforcing rigid notions of femininity and masculinity. Over time, however, there has been a gradual shift in the representation of women. Contemporary media increasingly features diverse portrayals, including women in leadership roles, entrepreneurial positions, and as voices in political and scientific fields.





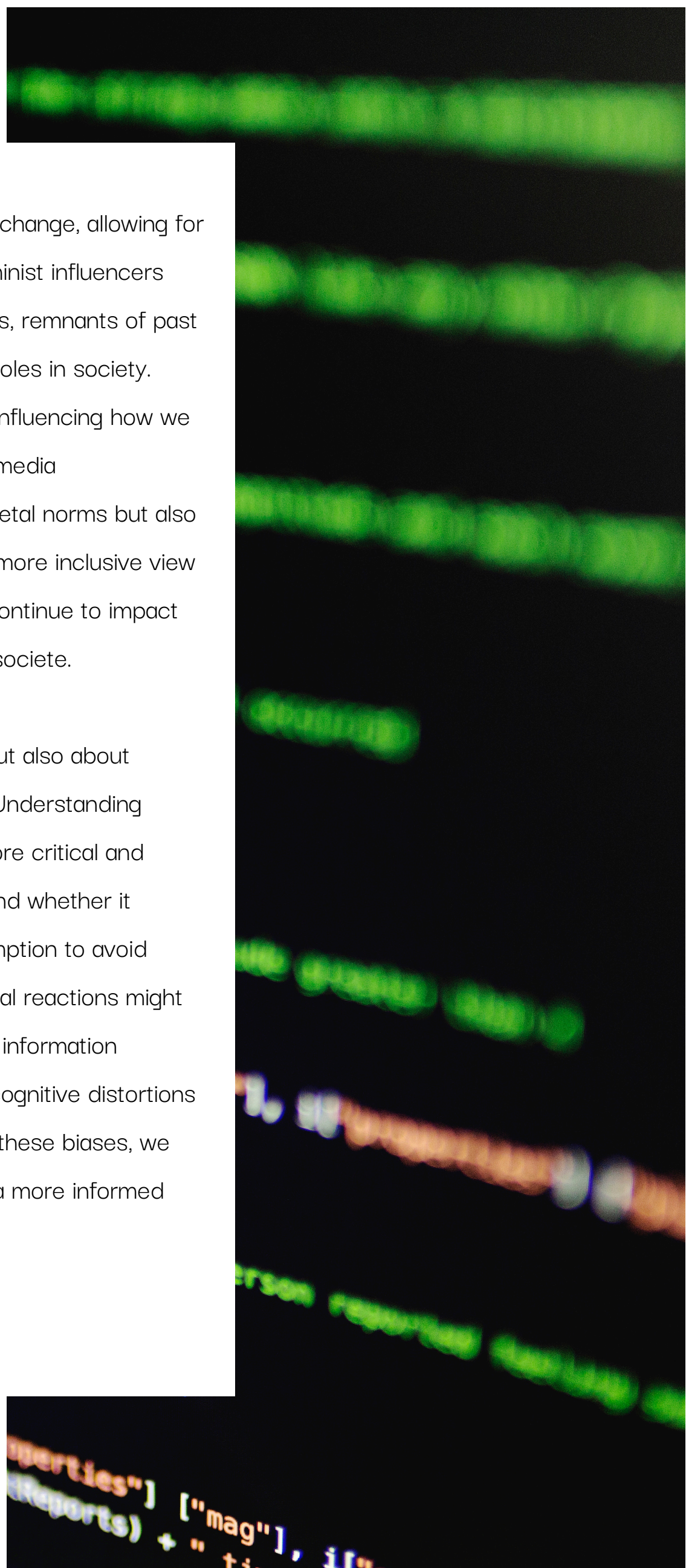


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Digital media and social platforms have accelerated this change, allowing for a broader range of narratives and the emergence of feminist influencers who challenge stereotypes. Despite these positive trends, remnants of past distortions still influence our understanding of women's roles in society. Persistent stereotypes can subtly shape public opinion, influencing how we value female contributions and leadership. The evolving media representation of women not only reflects changing societal norms but also plays a critical role in shaping perceptions—promoting a more inclusive view of gender roles while challenging long-held biases that continue to impact our collective understanding of women's role in today's society.

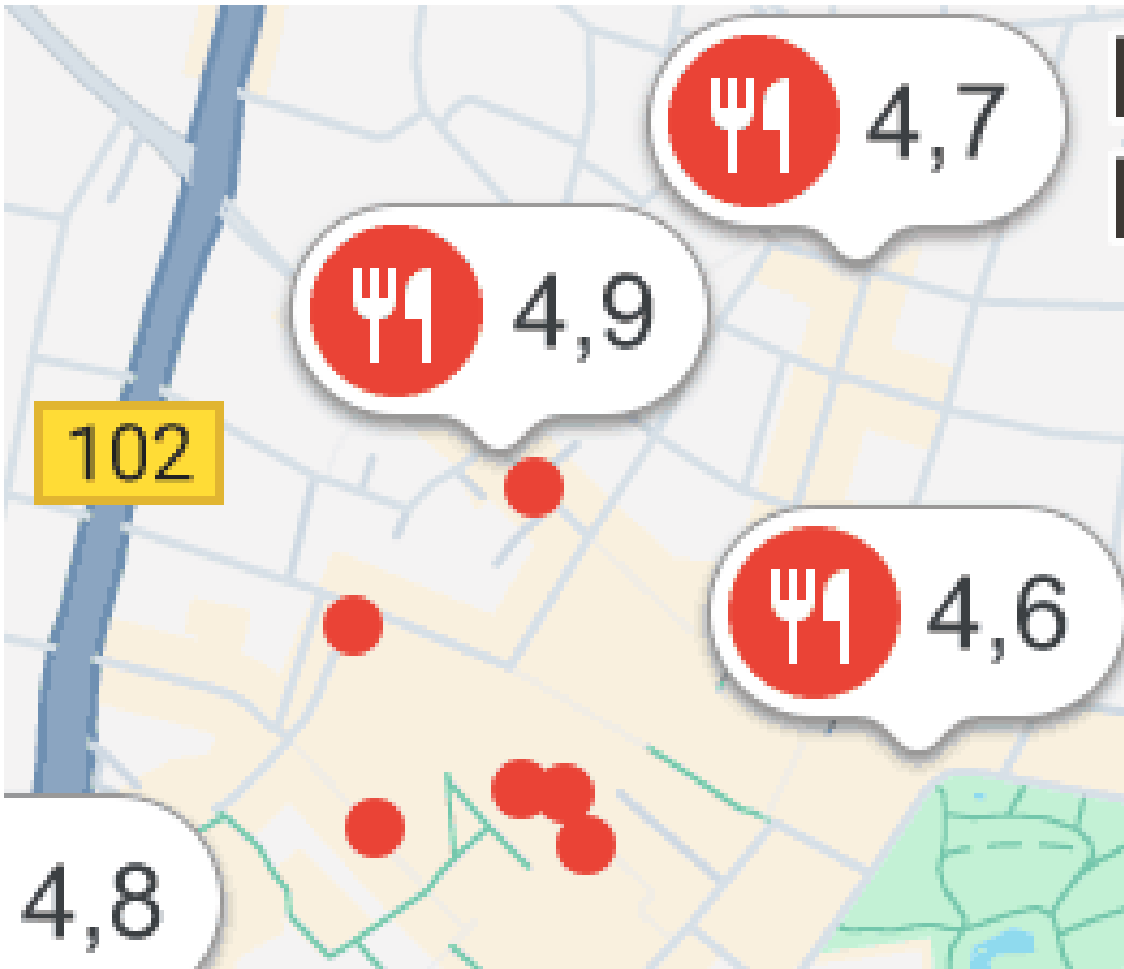
Media literacy is not just about consuming information but also about recognizing the distortions that shape our perceptions. Understanding these biases helps us approach news sources with a more critical and analytical mindset, question how information is framed and whether it presents a complete picture, diversify our media consumption to avoid falling into echo chambers, and recognize when emotional reactions might be clouding our judgment. As media formats evolve and information becomes more fragmented and fast-paced, the risk of cognitive distortions influencing our understanding grows. By being aware of these biases, we can engage with the media more thoughtfully, fostering a more informed and balanced perspective.





# LET'S LOOK AT THE NEWS

Lets discuss reviews as a phenomena and how do we aproach to them



How do you write a review on cosmetic products?



What website reviews skin care products?



Which brand of cosmetics is best?



Is cosmetics a consumer good?



Which is the No 1 beauty brand in world?

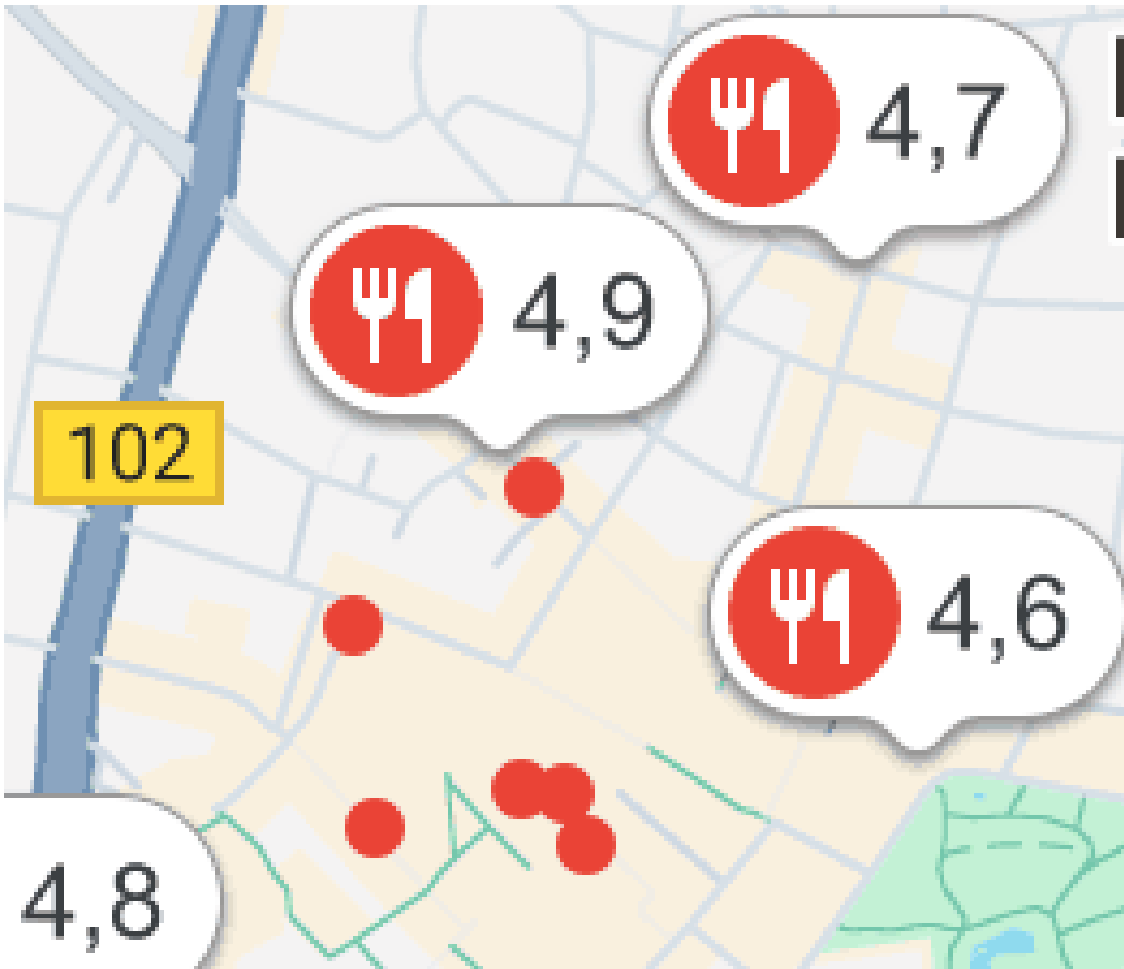


What are the top 10 cosmetic companies?



# LET'S LOOK AT THE NEWS

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What are the top 10 cosmetic companies?



# Media consumption and its impact on perception

## Introduction of the topic

In today’s digital era, media literacy is vital as we navigate an overwhelming flood of content. Cognitive distortions like confirmation bias and framing effects, along with algorithm-driven filter bubbles, shape our perceptions by reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting diverse viewpoints. Additionally, evolving media representations—shifting from outdated gender stereotypes to more diverse portrayals—demonstrate how media influences our understanding of societal roles. Mastering media literacy empowers us to critically evaluate the information we consume and engage thoughtfully with the digital world.

## Mediatic materials

Insert the script here on how to use and present the mediatic materials of the module

## Time needed

90 minutes

## Materials needed

PPT, flipchart, sticki notes





# Media consumption and its impact on perception

## Question

Have you ever experienced this?

- Choosing a cosmetic product simply because it has better reviews on a website than the others?
- Or feeling inspired to visit a travel destination after reading a blog, shaping your experience based on the way it was described?

Note for the trainer: - Encourage participant discussion using these questions. Ask them to share their experiences and prompt them to mention other examples where they have noticed a similar pattern. If no one has purchased a cosmetic product based on reviews, ask if they have bought something else or assumed a product was good simply because of the reviews they saw on a website.

## Answer

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Most of us have found ourselves making judgments based on these factors, even though we are aware that online reviews can be completely unrealistic or deliberately manipulated.

Similarly, in the case of travel blogs, even when we recognize that they reflect someone's personal opinion and experience, the way a destination is presented—its appeal, storytelling, or simply the fact that we were already considering traveling there—makes us more likely to accept that perspective and shape our expectations accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, cognitive distortions often overlap, and there are many reasons why we sometimes overlook the fact that what we're reading or seeing isn't necessarily an objective truth. Visual elements such as color tones, sound, and the overall style of a media message can influence how much we trust it, depending on our existing preferences and biases.

Of course, this doesn't mean that online reviews are always misleading or that a highly-rated product isn't genuinely the best option. The same goes for travel destinations—maybe the place truly is as wonderful as described in the blog. The key is to remain aware of these psychological mechanisms and to always take a step back, question our perceptions, and consider different angles before fully adopting a belief or accepting a media message as truth.

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# Media consumption and its impact on perception

## Question

When we consider the cognitive distortions that frequently shape the beliefs we adopt from media, let's discuss how these intersect with our own media consumption habits based on insights we gained in the previous module.

## Answer

Due to the speed at which information spreads and the increasingly brief formats of media content, we can easily fall into the role of passive consumers—even though our technological tools clearly offer us the chance to engage actively in public discourse. We often skim through content superficially without verifying sources, making us more vulnerable to cognitive distortions. In doing so, we tend to accept, without deeper analysis, what simply confirms our preexisting biases.

## Question

Instruct participants to spend 5 minutes reviewing their home feed on a social media platform they frequently use—whether it's Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter/X. Ask them to note:

- What types of content appear most frequently (news, videos, opinions, ads)?
- Whether the content comes from a variety of sources or revolves around the same themes and viewpoints.
- If they notice posts that trigger strong emotional reactions, confirm their own opinions, or prompt them to share the content."

Ask the participants to share with the group their finding?

## Answer

Algorithms are not neutral—they reflect and amplify our previous choices and habits. Although our digital space may seem personalized and relevant, it is often limited and ideologically homogeneous. This creates the illusion that 'everyone thinks like me,' significantly impacting our decision-making, worldviews, and attitudes toward diversity. Understanding how algorithms work and shape our perspective is crucial for developing media literacy. Breaking filter bubbles starts with deliberately seeking diverse content, checking alternative sources, and actively exploring different viewpoints



# Media consumption and its impact on perception

## Question

How can we actively step out of our algorithmic bubble to access a broader range of information and diverse perspectives?

## Answer

To break free from algorithm-driven filter bubbles, it is essential to intentionally diversify your digital consumption. This can be achieved by following news sources and social media accounts with varying viewpoints, periodically clearing your browsing history or adjusting your recommendation settings, and using unbiased news aggregator platforms. By seeking alternative sources and engaging with content that challenges your existing beliefs, you can cultivate a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the world.

## Question

CLICKBAITS are motional triggers over facts. Ask participants to reflect on how often they click on articles without reading the full text or checking the source. How do the headlines make them feel? Do they notice any patterns in the type of content they are drawn to?  
Ask participants to name the emotions triggered by the clickbait.

## Answer

Clickbait uses emotional manipulation to draw attention quickly. It often withholds key facts and exaggerates content. The emotional response it triggers — fear, anger, shock — makes us more likely to click and share without verifying. This undermines critical thinking and spreads misinformation.

Even if the article itself contains accurate information, the headline frames our expectations and affects how we interpret the content. This can create misunderstandings, reinforce biases, or make the original issue seem more extreme or more trivial than it really is.





# Media consumption and its impact on perception

Ask the participants to make the factual headline based on the “clickbait”, and also to try to identify which emotion is been triggered bt the clickbait. There are no correct answers it is just about guessing

Question

Clickbait headline	Factual headline	Triggered emotion
"This everyday food is silently killing you — stop eating it now!"		
"He took a photo of his dog. What he saw later made his jaw drop!"		
"They don't want you to know this simple money-saving trick!"		
"She walked into the room — and what happened next broke everyone's heart."		
"Doctors HATE this woman for discovering a cure Big Pharma is hiding!"		

Answer

Clickbait headline	Factual headline	Triggered emotion
"This everyday food is silently killing you — stop eating it now!"	"Study suggests excessive processed meat consumption may increase health risks."	Fear
"He took a photo of his dog. What he saw later made his jaw drop!"	"Dog owner discovers unexpected animal in background of photo."	Shock/Curiosity
"They don't want you to know this simple money-saving trick!"	"Consumers report positive results using budget-planning apps."	Outrage
"She walked into the room — and what happened next broke everyone's heart."	"Local student surprises teacher with emotional thank-you speech."	Sadness/Empathy
"Doctors HATE this woman for discovering a cure Big Pharma is hiding!"	"Viral video promotes unproven remedy not supported by scientific research."	Anger/Disbelief



# Media consumption and its impact on perception

Question

How do media portrayals, particularly in commercials, reinforce stereotypes about women, and what impact do these stereotypes have on our understanding of women's roles? Can you think of an example that might spark a debate on this topic?

Answer

Media often depicts women through narrow stereotypes—such as emphasizing beauty, passivity, or nurturing roles—thereby limiting the perception of their capabilities and contributions. For example, many perfume commercials portray women as delicate and alluring objects whose primary appeal lies in their appearance, rather than as multidimensional individuals with diverse skills and ambitions. This kind of portrayal reinforces superficial beauty standards and can shape societal expectations about women's roles. In our debate, consider whether these stereotypical representations restrict women's identities and discuss potential ways to promote more empowering and inclusive depictions.

Question

How do stereotypical portrayals of women in media contribute to gender-based violence in digital spaces, and in what ways can these narratives facilitate online harassment and abuse? Can you provide an example that illustrates this connection and prompt further debate?

Answer

Stereotypical portrayals that objectify and dehumanize women can normalize attitudes which make digital violence more acceptable. When media repeatedly depict women as passive, overly emotional, or primarily valued for their appearance, it reinforces harmful beliefs that women are less capable or deserving of respect. This normalization can lead to an environment where digital harassment, hate speech, and other forms of gender-based violence are tolerated. For example, on social media platforms, women who challenge these stereotypes may face targeted abuse or silencing, as attackers use these preconceived narratives to justify their harmful behavior. Such dynamics underline the urgent need to critically assess media representations, as transforming these narratives can contribute to reducing digital gender-based violence.



# Media consumption and its impact on perception

## Question

How does the example of “Midjourney” AI creator of content—where a prompt to create an illustration of a girl results only in versions depicting white girls—highlight ethical issues in AI, and what does this reveal about the deep-rooted nature of stereotypes? How should we approach this challenge in our discussions?

## Answer

This example illustrates that AI systems can perpetuate existing societal biases because they are trained on data that reflects historical and cultural stereotypes. When Midjourney only generates images of white girls, it reveals how deeply embedded these stereotypes are, even in advanced technologies. It demonstrates that without careful oversight and diverse training data, AI can reinforce narrow and exclusionary representations. In addressing this challenge, we must critically evaluate the datasets and algorithms used in AI, push for more inclusive models, and continuously question the ethical implications of automated content creation.





# TO SUM IT UP

## Media consumption and its impact on perception

### TOPIC OVERVIEW

In the digital age, our perception is shaped by cognitive distortions and algorithms that create filter bubbles, reinforcing our pre-existing biases. Media messages and stereotypical portrayals—such as those seen in gender representation—further influence how we interpret reality. Developing media literacy is essential for critically evaluating these influences and broadening our perspectives.

#### KEY POINT 1 – COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

- We favor information that aligns with our existing beliefs.
- The way information is presented alters our interpretation.
- Negative content often attracts more attention and shapes our view.

#### KEY POINT 2 – ALGORITHMS AND FILTER BUBBLES

- Content is tailored based on our online behavior.
- We are often shown similar viewpoints, restricting diversity.
- Platforms prioritize engaging, often emotionally charged, content.

#### KEY POINT 3 – STEREOTYPICAL PORTRAYALS IN MEDIA

- Women are frequently depicted in narrow, outdated roles.
- Repeated representations shape societal expectations and self-image.

#### KEY POINT 4 – IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY

- Assess sources and question how information is framed.
- Identify cognitive distortions and algorithmic influences.





# ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

## NOTES

- Encourage participants to openly talk about examples of their own cognitive distortions.
- Remind them once again that we all have some form of cognitive distortion and bias.
- Remind them that seemingly harmless stereotypes can sometimes lead to discrimination, and eventually to violence or the endangerment of certain groups.

## BRAINSTORM

Discuss with the participants other formats such as film and literature, and explore how they perceive the role of women and female characters, how these roles have changed over time, and how digital media influence these portrayals.

## ADDITIONAL MULTIMEDIA

Always company campaign:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joRjb5WOmbM>

New York Magazine:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTvGSstKd5Y>





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DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY TO DEBUNK GENDER-RELATED MEDIA  
MANIPULATION AND FAKE NEWS



If you or someone you  
know have been victims  
of technology-facilitated  
gender based violence,  
know that you can find  
support and report it:

- 
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You are not alone.

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