PUBLIC JOURNALISM CLUB

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR "HACK2CHECK" MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY HACKATHON

This document will assist you in generating ideas for more targeted solutions, enabling you to better address the issues within the field. "HACK2CHECK" applicants may be guided by, but not restricted to, the subclauses outlined in these Terms of Reference (ToR). It has been developed based on expert studies and discussions, involving participation from prominent local specialists.

PART I

"HACK2CHECK" HACKATHON AND THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Hackathon's Goal

The "Hack2Check" hackathon aims to promote media and information literacy (MIL) challenges in Armenia and to develop innovative solutions to combat propaganda by engaging youth, technology professionals, education professionals, and media experts

The Hackathon's Objectives

- Generate innovative solutions during the hackathon to address propaganda and media literacy issues.
- Enhance Armenian society's resilience to propaganda and misinformation by adopting and implementing effective solutions.

The Goal of the Terms of Reference (ToR)

The purpose of this ToR is to address the challenges and issues of the media and information literacy hackathon, define directions for digital solutions, and propose approaches based on local expertise. This ToR aims to support applicant teams in more comprehensively visualizing the deep problems and solutions in the field, along with their expected results.

The Objectives of the Terms of Reference (ToR)

The ToR presents the following problems:

- Presenting the problems in the Armenian context in an accessible way.
- Defining the target audience and the needs of the hackathon.
- Proposing a specific field and environment of solutions that can be considered during the generation of ideas and also during the implementation stage.
- Bringing forward existing resources and possible forms of initiatives that can be applied during the ideation phase.
- Presenting best practices in the field of media and information literacy.

PART II

THE CONTENT OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND BEST PRACTICES

Please note and remember that this is an advisory document which was developed with the support of local expertise.

Context of the Problem

Globally, media and information literacy in Armenia are below average. Disinformation, mushroom websites, fake news generated daily, propaganda, as well as the influence of automated digital systems, bots, algorithms, and finally, artificial intelligence play significant roles in these processes. In the digital landscape we live in, it is difficult to navigate and separate sources of information, and make informed decisions if you are not sufficiently aware of media and information processes, which, in turn, can lead not only to propaganda targeting but also to occasions for cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and the leakage of personal data. In this sense, four main directions are considered in the context of the problem:

1. ***Preschool and general education field:*** the development and updating of educational materials, the training of the pedagogical community, early childhood education, the introduction of practical tools, the integration of media and digital literacy into educational subjects, promoting financial literacy, and fostering partnerships and initiatives between the government, civil society, and the private sector.
2. ***Identification of misinformation, propaganda, and efforts to combat them:*** the ability to distinguish fact from opinion, identify misinformation, and counteract it, the ability to manage heightened emotional responses, address the challenges through digital solutions, tackle misleading content through media and numerous websites, confront media field polarization, and address the neglect of the media's educational role.
3. ***Challenges in digital security and ensuring a safe online environment***: issues with social media, the ongoing rise and reliance on technology, a sharp increase in digital security risks, widespread online threats, numerous instances of personal data leaks, insufficient parental controls, cyberbullying, and a lack of cyber protection.

4. ***Supporting digitization and enhancing civil society initiatives:*** the lack of synergy among various civil society actors, quality control mechanisms for developed resources, evaluation mechanisms for initiatives, coordination and mapping of created resources and content, implementation of search engine optimization (SEO) strategies for enhanced visibility, and ensuring accessibility for both mainstream and marginalized groups within society.

Context of The Target Group

Based on the context of the above issues, the ToR suggests targeting ideas to the following groups:

- ***Education workers*** (pedagogical community of the preschool and general education field, pedagogical faculty students).
- ***Adults*** (unemployed citizens aged 18 and above, not engaged in further education, not employed in the public sector, and experiencing a high level of social, economic, and educational vulnerability).
- ***Elderly individuals*** (representatives of the middle-aged group who primarily utilize mainstream media, citizens who follow traditional media).
- ***Minors*** (teenagers and pupils, who utilize modern media tools the most, are not only consumers of media content but also creators).
- ***Parents of students*** (specifically those with preschool and primary school-aged children, find themselves grappling with various challenges. These include constraints such as limited time, knowledge, and resources, compounded by social, economic, and educational factors. Therefore, they not only become the primary targets of these issues but also find themselves unable to adequately support their children.
- ***Displaced individuals from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and targeted populations*** (Artsakh residents who relocated to Armenia during 2020-2023. This category also encompasses individuals from Syunik, Vayots Dzor, and Gegharkunik regions -areas susceptible to disinformation campaigns regarding sensitive topics, such as the "Zangezur Corridor."
- ***Civil society and its beneficiaries*** (organizations that specialize in activities related to media and information literacy, digital security, identification of disinformation and propaganda, and combating them. These organizations possess extensive thematic content and resources, and they engage with at least three of the above-mentioned target groups).

Context of Digital Solutions

To simplify the process, the context of digital solutions is aligned with the classification of problems. Regardless of the chosen group, it should be noted that solutions should aim to enhance the target group's awareness, knowledge, skills, and experience. They should have two important characteristics: **value attitude and behavioral change.**

These are the crucial factors that a digital solution must possess to have longevity. From the perspective of value attitudes and behavioral change, it is especially vital to emphasize the significance of their role in combating disinformation among the target audience, as apathy towards this issue is widespread nowadays.

As a starting point (value attitude), it is imperative to focus on implementing actions that will lead the audience to appreciate checked information and recognize the harmfulness and potential consequences of misinformation. This process forms clear ideas and perceptions about the problem among the beneficiaries. Then, moving forward (behavioral change), actions should encourage immediate participation in disseminating accurate information and countering misinformation.

It is important to consider that any digital solution must prioritize maximum simplicity and accessibility. It should be easily understandable for the target group(s), precisely tailored to their needs, and have a broad reach. Moreover, it should include incentives for periodicity and repetition, ensuring continual engagement. Additionally, the solution can be integrated into offline life, gamified, and incorporate elements such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and other technological advancements. However, these features should not overly complicate the user experience. Eventually, any solution must be adapted to the needs and capabilities of the target group.

Additionally, the digital solution must be engaging and conducive to collaboration within the community. It should foster a sense of community, encourage involvement and interaction among the target group, and maintain a continuous presence. It should prioritize reliability, stability, responsiveness, and accessibility. This context also underscores potential synergies with the private sector, such as internet and telecommunications providers/operators, which can serve as both additional resources for project implementation and a guarantee of viability.

1. ***Pre-school and general education field***

In this context, there might be digital solutions available that include, but are not restricted to:

- Developing new content or resources, digitizing existing materials, and adapting international content for Armenian audiences using innovative and gamification techniques.
- Implementing digital solutions to build communities, foster engagement and interaction among professionals, share experiences, facilitate ongoing education, and integrate practical tools into classroom activities.
- Standardizing media and information literacy, ensuring **quality control** in processes, assessing performance, providing specialist training, and offering certification solutions.
- Utilizing digital solutions to create, share, enhance, and consistently update syllabus in alignment with the Digital and Media Competency standard in Armenia.
- Establishing synergies between state, public, and private sectors, pooling resources, and employing digital solutions to ensure quality control.
- Implementing digital solutions that foster digital skills, media literacy, and critical thinking, and are accessible, affordable, and practical within the general education setting.

2. Identifying and combating disinformation and propaganda

In this context, there might be digital solutions available that include, but are not restricted to:

- Implementing effective digital solutions to detect and counter disinformation and propaganda, tailored for developing and analyzing content in Armenian.
- Employing digital tools for media literacy and fact-checking.
- Utilizing digital platforms for marginalized groups, including those not reached by state education systems or public sector initiatives, to identify misinformation and analyze content in traditional media.
- Implementing digital solutions to bolster society's resilience against deceptive websites, applications enabling channel creation (e.g., Telegram, Viber, WhatsApp), and misinformation spread on social media, with automated detection capabilities.
- Deploying digital tools to counter disinformation and propaganda by public figures, government officials, and influencers on social media platforms.

- Utilizing digital solutions for automated content monitoring, control, and analysis across online and traditional media outlets.
- Implementing digital strategies for rapid response, forming professional communities to combat and address misinformation, providing advisory services, and fostering public support initiatives.

3. Challenges in digital security and ensuring a safe online environment

In this context, there might be digital solutions available that include, but are not restricted to:

- Implementing digital solutions to counteract or reduce social media and technology addiction, as well as associated risks.
- Introducing digital solutions for parental control, restricting minors' access to the internet and mushroom websites, and monitoring communication tools while maintaining minors' privacy.
- Developing digital solutions that minimize the risk of personal data leaks, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking through informative and educational means.
- Addressing the widespread and negative impact of gambling, drug trafficking, and other threats in the digital area.
- Implementing digital solutions in accordance with international standards to ensure a safer online environment, including filtered content and communication, as well as age restrictions.
- Develop digital solutions to identify and analyze Armenian content, address current and potential threats associated with it, and employ rapid response and notification mechanisms.

4. Supporting digitization and empowering civil society initiatives

In this context, there might be digital solutions available that include, but are not restricted to:

- Implementing digital solutions to digitize the resources and content of civil society media organizations.
- Employing digital solutions to map the initiatives, resources, and content of civil society media structures.
- Utilizing digital solutions to enhance the visibility of initiatives, developed content, and resources implemented by civil society media organizations.

- Implementing digital solutions to foster the formation of professional communities, facilitate synergies, and exchange of experiences, and train new personnel within civil society media structures.
- Digital solutions to reach diverse target groups within the public, address issues, and enable effective communication within the framework of initiatives conducted by civil society media organizations.

Ideas for digital solutions should consider, but not be limited to, these components:

- Elements for developing critical thinking skills.
- Components to encourage responsible digital citizenship.
- Components to developing skills to navigate the digital world.
- Elements dedicated to establishing digital security and fostering a safe online environment.
- Foundation for fact-checking software, enabling real-time analysis and access to open sources.
- Interactive and innovative features including gamification elements (VR/AI), adaptive learning capabilities, and multimedia resources.
- User-friendly interface ensuring accessibility across platforms and devices, catering to diverse user groups.
- Framework for continuity and stability, outlining a clear vision for future development.
- Linguistic access and inclusivity features.
- Functionality for identifying and analyzing propaganda.

When developing ideas for solutions, it's crucial to consider their potential for stability and ongoing development, including:

- Subscription system.
- Registration system.
- Gamification and prize distribution system.
- Engagement mechanism in professional communities and advisory.
- Service package system.
- Paid certification system.
- Collaboration mechanism with responsible businesses.

- Competition, point system, and promotions.

Context of Best Practices

Here are some examples of advanced experiences that serve as positive models for solving similar problems.

- NewsGuard is a browser extension designed to evaluate the credibility of news websites. Its concept revolves around assisting users in determining the trustworthiness of the websites they visit. The extension employs journalistic criteria to rate news websites according to their reliability and transparency.
- DoNotBelieveEveryTweet: this initiative was a unique campaign that used the influence of social media to educate users about the dissemination of misinformation. It leveraged the irony of its message, urging users to question every tweet, even those from the campaign itself.
- KQED's Above the Noise: “Above the Noise” is a YouTube series produced by KQED, a public media outlet based in San Francisco. The series aims to involve teenagers in critical thinking and media literacy by delving into current issues.
- MisinfoQuest: MisinfoQuest is a digital game crafted to educate players about misinformation and how to identify it. By employing real-world scenarios and interactive challenges, the game imparts valuable media literacy skills.
- Jules: Jules is an award-winning platform for Computational Thinking, offering a curriculum that delivers comprehensive, innovative learning experiences through gamified educational activities.
- Gaptain: A personalized digital education platform.
- Fobizz: A professional development and digital tools platform powered by artificial intelligence.

PART III
TOR-DEFINED EVALUATION CRITERIA

Please take note and remember that this section of the document is not advisory; it is mandatory.

Selection Criteria for Hackathon Applicants

The applications of hackathon entrants will be evaluated by an independent and professional committee according to the following criteria:

- How effectively does the digital solution proposed in the application address issues of ToR?
- Does it incorporate the approaches and principles outlined in ToR?
- Is the proposed innovative and technological solution feasible?
- How forward-thinking is it, and does it underscore the vision of continuity and stability? Does it include elements of business development?
- Is the target group correctly identified, and does the digital solution genuinely tackle the group's needs?
- **To what extent is the digital solution grounded in the concept of value attitude and behavioral change? Can it bring changes?**
- Do the individuals involved in the applicant group possess the relevant experience and capabilities to execute the proposed digital solution?
- Does the conceptual design thoroughly assess risks and potential challenges to be overcome during the implementation phase?
- Does the idea offer an opportunity for community engagement and extensive feedback, fostering involvement from the target audience in the project?
- To what extent are existing popular technologies, social media platforms, etc., integrated into the proposed idea?
- Is it possible to achieve the initial minimum/necessary result with the current financial and time resources? What is the expected implementation timeline? Is it adaptable to the challenges of the rapidly changing digital landscape?