

# Very Verified: Online Critical Engagement Course



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to equip citizens with critical thinking and media engagement skills to navigate the flood of health-related information, and protect themselves from deadly diseases. Miracle cures, hate speech directed at individuals of Asian descent, and conspiracy theories about the disease's spread constitute an "infodemic" that threatens to make the pandemic worse. Malign actors propagate this misinformation by exploiting human vulnerabilities, including emotional and cognitive biases, limited attention spans in the context of over-saturated information environment, and media sector incentives (algorithms prioritizing engagement, 24-hour news cycle, etc.). The need for critical information engagement – suppressing immediate intuitive and emotional reactions, assessing the credibility of information, and recognizing one's own "gatekeeping" role on social media – has never been more important. IREX's Very Verified course can build these skills through an interactive online learning platform at a time that in-person learning opportunities are limited.

## Very Verified Remote Learning Course

[Very Verified](#) is an online, interactive media and information literacy course developed by IREX for English language learners. Based on our [Learn to Discern](#) curriculum, Very Verified focuses on critical and analytic thinking skills, with an emphasis on teaching **how** to consume news without dictating what to consume. It is tailored to its user context in every way possible, from its UX design to approach to topics covered. Topics include:

- Media and information landscape
- Human cognitive biases
- The incentive structures behind the media and information sectors (ranging from media ownership to social media algorithms)
- How information structures and human cognitive biases can make those who engage with information vulnerable to manipulation

## Format and Design

### Learning format



**Espresso**  
2-3 minutes

Small coffee with short, concise reads and informative visuals



**Cappuccino**  
Up to 10 minutes

Detailed videos and articles go well with medium coffee



**Coffee with Croissant**  
Up to 30 minutes

In-depth longreads, and interviews. Get your big mug of coffee and enjoy!



**Dessert**  
Up for more?

We have quizzes, games, tests, and additional materials

The variety of offerings reflect media engagement patterns among youth and use strategies to engage and extend attention and motivation of participants. The formats are diverse and include:

- Short videos
- Animations
- Text
- Quizzes
- Memes

## Meet Catbot

Catbot is a friendly nudging chatbot that reminds users through their social media messaging apps to turn on their "executive brain" function. Catbot encourages users to practice techniques such as "Label to Disable": Naming the emotion one feels while reading a headline to disable bias- and emotion-driven reactions and enable critical thinking.



## About IREX

IREX is a global development and education organization. We strive for a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world—where individuals reach their full potential, governments serve their people, and communities thrive. With an annual portfolio of \$100 million and 400 staff worldwide, we work with partners in more than 120 countries in four areas essential to progress: cultivating leaders, empowering youth, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to quality education and information.

## Results

Over 8,000 people engaged with Very Verified within three months of its launch. Learning outcomes show improvements in all areas of media and information literacy and ability to detect and resist manipulation.

Among blended learners (those taking the course in addition to in-person trainings), we found:

- 24% increase in participants' ability to identify fact versus opinion
- 31% change in media analysis skills (ability to identify different points of view, omitted information, and the purpose of an article)
- 69% increase in news media knowledge
- A two-fold increase in participants' ability to identify hate speech



## Very Verified Course Adaptation – Solution to “Infodemic”

# VERY VERIFIED

online course  
on media literacy

Very Verified is now available in English and Ukrainian, with a Russian-language version coming soon. IREX can also adapt and translate the course rapidly and efficiently to other countries and audiences. Any future adaptations of Very Verified will apply design thinking principles to ensure that training tools reflect target beneficiary needs, providing culturally relevant context, examples, delivery formats, and other materials.

IREX accompanies its learning materials with targeted promotion and social media campaigns

- In Ukraine, a media literacy public service announcement was broadcast 870 times on national TV channels. 20.7 million viewers saw the PSA at least once; 12.6 million saw the video at least three times. The PSA was also uploaded to YouTube and received 71,468 views
- In Indonesia, IREX's social media literacy materials have over 19 million impressions by those prone to spreading mis- and disinformation. They garnered 78,000 hits in the first 8 months

Contact Katya Vogt, IREX's Global Lead for Media and Information Literacy at [kvogt@irex.org](mailto:kvogt@irex.org) if you are interested in an adapted version of Very Verified.

— Visit our website: [www.irex.org](http://www.irex.org) —

To learn more about Very Verified and other digital media and information literacy content, contact [kvogt@irex.org](mailto:kvogt@irex.org)