

Refresher: Navigating the News

What does it mean?

- Critically assessing news content from all sources
- Differentiating real, reported news from speculation, opinion, misinformation, stereotypes, fabricated material

What does it involve?

- Approaching news actively, not passively
- Questioning your initial reactions
- Looking at many sources w/different audiences, contexts
- Getting out of your comfort zone

Why does it matter?

- Being misinformed leads to making faulty choices
- Being informed – positive impact on others, society
- ‘Garbage in, garbage out’

Navigating the News

Three important concepts:

- **Critical Thinking**
- **Media Literacy**
- **News Literacy**

Navigating the News

News Literacy

- The ability to judge whether news and other information is trustworthy
- Applying critical thinking skills to news stories and outlets, to analyze their credibility and reliability
- Understanding how items are chosen and designed to appeal to the outlets' audiences & communities
- For individual stories:
 - Consider the source – did this information come from a credible news source, or parts unknown?
 - Verify the information – can you find confirming info from reliable news outlets elsewhere?
 - What techniques and types of media are used?
 - Does it pass the smell test? Does it seem like clickbait?

Fake News – Consequences

Example: Alex Jones and InfoWars

- Built huge following with conspiracy theories, but made most of its money selling vitamins and dietary supplements
- Focused on shootings at Sandy Hook in 2012 – 20 young children and six staff killed
- Claimed for years shooting was a hoax, staged with actors by the government, to undermine gun rights in the U.S.
- Traffic to site grew exponentially, as did product sales
- Victims' families harassed by followers – sued Jones
- In court, Jones admitted the attack was '100% real'
- Across two trials, juries ordered Jones to pay more than \$1.4 billion to families of victims
- Last year The Onion won auction to take over InfoWars
- In spite of this, many still believe shootings were a hoax

Navigating the News

Misinformation vs. Disinformation

Misinformation

- False, misleading or inaccurate info presented as fact
- People pass on bad information all the time
- Not created or shared with intent to deceive
- Can spread incredibly rapidly in digital age

Disinformation

- False or misleading information deliberately spread with intent to deceive, misguide or manipulate
- Takes advantage of information overload
- Usually done to push a political or social agenda
- Can spread incredibly rapidly in digital age

Navigating the News

Why is disinformation used?

Political gain and destabilization

- Influencing elections, shifting political discussion, foreign interference, justifying actions

For financial profit

- Clickbait revenue, market manipulation

Social and psychological manipulation

- Exploiting emotion & biases, sowing division, creating chaos

Exploiting traits of digital media

- Low cost/high speed, algorithms/bots, information overload, '4D Approach' (Dismiss, Distort, Distract, and Dismay)

Research shows it's tremendously effective

Navigating the News

Why is disinformation effective?

Plays on emotions

- Provokes anger or fear – compelling – lowers our defenses, prompting us to click, comment, or share without thinking

Floods information space

- Crowds out real info – creates confusion, disillusionment

Creates & worsens polarization, chaos

- It aims to create division, turn fellow citizens into enemies, incite physical conflict – chaos weakens resistance

Exploits confirmation bias

- People look for info that agrees with them – often eager to assume things are true regardless of evidence

Attacks & silences voices that disagree

- Trolling, personal attacks, intimidation, harassment
- Aims to suppress dissent, create self-censorship

Early concept: Ongoing public discourse

Ongoing Public Discourse: Digital Age Issues

- Citizens' discussion of social and political topics
 - Online 'echo chambers' limit discussion to one point of view, shout down all who disagree
 - Anonymity can remove accountability
- Best ideas evolve into consensus
 - Consensus within groups can become intolerance for other opinions, disbelief that anyone rational could disagree
- Discourse both fuels democracy & responds to it
 - Single-mindedness can question democracy
- Makes ordinary people feel involved
 - Most powerful element of echo chambers
- Considered a vital element of democracy
 - Believed by many to be threat to democracy

**So what can I do
with all this?**

How this all adds up:

Approaching news stories with an open mind +

Understanding how news is made +

Taking cultural & social contexts into account +

Checking reliability of the news outlet +

Verifying info with other outlets +

Applying the 'smell test' =

Being a discerning news consumer

Navigating the News

Discerning News Consumer

- Discerning: Perceptive; having or showing keen insight; makes intelligent judgments
- Approaches news with an open mind
- Views news stories critically
- Can identify various types of news & opinion content
- Can identify most misinformation, disinformation, stereotypes, fabricated material, etc.
- Is wary of stories that aim to drive fear or anger
- Is willing to listen to different points of view
- Is willing to learn about unfamiliar things, places