Content: Understanding News and Bias

Discussion Guide: Media Reflection

Throughout, have students reflect on the **strengths and weaknesses** of different mediums. Here are some guiding questions that can be used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a medium:

- How much information can this medium convey? (E.g. TikToks are relatively short, articles would take longer to read and might provide more context)
- Do I trust it? Should I trust it?
  (WROTS - who, reason, other trustworthy sources)
  - Who created it? Who is this intended for?
  - Why did they post it?
  - Do other sources say the same thing?
- Is there any bias in these perspectives?
  - How might the same message communicated in different mediums be interpreted by different audiences?
  - Is that bias acknowledged?
- Is it fun?
  - Do I like the creators?
  - Do I find the ideas interesting?
  - Is it fun to watch/consume the content?

1. **Different formats are suited to different types of engagement, so the information or content you see will vary across platforms.**
   a. Looking at the image on the slides from Axios research, read a couple of the categories aloud, and have the class reflect on these categories. Preface that these are curated categories, so they may not be 100% reflective.
   b. Highlight that **different mediums have different standards** for what they publish
   c. Ask 2-3 students to share what platform they use the most, and whether they agree with the "purpose", "what you see", and "the bottom line" columns. Explain why or why not.

2. **Different platforms draw users of different demographics.**
    a. Show your class the first graph, ("[Who U35s pay most attention to when using each for news](#)" - Reuters Institute) and share this interesting fact with them:
    "This 2021 survey found that across all 3 of these platforms - Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, internet personalities were the most paid attention to when using each of these platforms for news." (Interesting!)
        i. Discuss this with the class - is this true for your students? Why or why not?
    b. Looking at the second graph, point the following key trends out to your class. According to this graph from the Dais,
        i. Facebook and YouTube are used the most for news. However, after the Online News Act was introduced in Canada, news is no longer accessible on Facebook.
        ii. Look at the age distribution column! There are clear age demographic differences in who tends to use certain platforms.
    c. Ask the class to discuss their thoughts on the following: Do you agree with the age distribution for the platforms listed? Where do you get your news from most frequently?
    d. Look briefly at the third image from Pew Research Center. Highlight the fact that each platform (listed on the top row) has different types of users, even breaking it down to political leanings.

==After going over the first two concepts, prompt students to consider the following:==
==If different people get news from different platforms, and different types of content are shared on different platforms, what might this do to people's understanding of the information they are looking at?==

3. **Online content often aims to elicit an emotional response.**
   a. Emotional appeals are often an effective way to capture peoples' attention, or to get a message across.
   b. Some mediums are particularly good at communicating emotional appeals (personal YouTube or TikTok video as opposed to text in an article).
      i. These emotional appeals are driven by platforms' algorithms.
         1. These algorithms are driven by how you react to content you see, which in turn shows you different types of content based on your preferences.
         2. These algorithms are designed to keep you on the platform, and engaged for long periods of time.
   c. If someone has an agenda for sharing/posting specific content, they can make use of emotional appeals — which can also often be used to spread content that's not true or has bad intentions!
   d. There are different types of emotional appeals — some headlines or claims might produce surprise, or disgust, or happiness. Walk through the examples provided in the slides.
      i. Examples: clickbait (surprise), satire (disgust, humor)
      ii. Have students think about which of these is most attention-grabbing
   e. For the purpose of this lesson, bias is defined in **two** ways: Media bias and user bias.
      i. Each news outlet also has bias - media has subjective processes to select and curate info presented within media, and also to present issues in different tones/stances
         1. This may not so much be emotional, but different media sources may have varied interests to promote different things
         2. However, credible and accurate news outlets have journalistic standards to follow, and generally produces news that is reflected accurately and similarly across multiple sources.
      ii. We as users are also biased in terms of the types of posts we might choose to share - this may be shown explicitly or implicitly

1. The threshold to posting or sharing something is much lower than a credible news outlet's sharing of news.
   f. Many reasons why someone might share fake news:
      i. Naiveness and laziness of users
      ii. Lack of information verification skills
      iii. Social engagement and enjoyment
   g. There's lots of different types of fake news out there - so it's important to verify that the news we see online is credible before sharing it.

✍️**Some facts to note**:
- Each medium has advantages and disadvantages - each is good for seeking out different types of content, depending on what you're looking for, and the level of background context you want.
- About 15% of Canadians have a high degree of belief in misinformation. This group is less trusting of mainstream news, more likely to trust social media and use it for news, and less likely to fact check ([Andrey 2023](#)).
- Trust levels in social media platforms are steadily declining
- Instagram (44% for Canadians aged 16-29) is the most popular online news source for young Canadians, and TikTok is growing (21%)
- Private messaging apps also play a role in spreading disinformation. A survey done in March 2020 found that 46% of people report receiving private messages that they suspect are false at least monthly ([Andrey et al. 2021](#)). Those who use private messages as a news source report seeing false information more frequently, with a majority of Telegram and WeChat users receiving false information at least weekly

After going over this final concept, discuss the following as a class:
Recognizing the emotional appeals used, and biases embedded in content we see on social media platforms, what might make the information/news we see on social media different from what we would see from trusted news outlets?

What might be some issues that could arise with people receiving and believing news solely from social media platforms?

Prompt students to consider the following examples:
- Polarizing beliefs: considering the algorithm-run nature of social media platforms, users may only be exposed to certain types of content and perspectives, while not seeing other perspectives at all
- Inaccurate information: news that is shared by friends, family, or internet personalities may not necessarily be accurate or from a credible source