Educator's Guide

CONNECTED

Social Media Literacy: Can You Tell What's Real?

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Introduction & framing

Social Media is an influential part of our society that is continuing to grow in its integration into every corner of public and private life. As social media evolves, users are faced with important questions and must develop a literacy that helps them overcome the hurdles and pitfalls of social media information.

One of the major challenges that social media offers is deep questions about the legitimacy of the information that users are receiving. There is so much content that it is often difficult for people to weave through the webs of disinformation and misinformation. Being versed in social media literacy provides a skillset to do so and helps someone develop key tools to combat these challenges.

This lesson will support students in their development of social media literacy and provide them with the skills and strategies to engage with social media in a productive, positive, and reliable way.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to enhance your students' engagement with the video. You can pause at the suggested "Stop/Do/Discuss" points to explore key concepts through discussion and reflection questions provided for each section.

Alternatively, you may prefer to show the entire video without breaks and use the discussion questions and activities at the end of this guide ("Summative Activities & Reflection") for a comprehensive post-viewing discussion.

You can also utilize a flipped classroom approach, assigning the video (in full or in segments) for students to watch at home, then using class time to unpack ideas together through reflection, discussion, or hands-on activities. Choose the approach that best fits your students and classroom setting, whether it's real-time engagement or a deeper dive after the video.

Link to video

Essential questions

1. How can we tell the difference between real, credible content and manipulated or AI-generated misinformation online?

2. Why do misinformation and disinformation spread so easily, and how do emotions and algorithms fuel their reach?

3. What responsibilities do we have when we consume and share content on social media?

Big ideas

1. **Misinformation vs. Disinformation:** Social media literacy begins with being able to determine the legitimacy of the information being shown and how to understand the bias and intention of information as it is being presented.

2. **Managing Credibility:** Social media literacy requires the skills and strategies to determine the credibility and legitimacy of information.

3. **Discerning Reality:** With so much information available, people must make informed decisions as to what information is real and what information is fake.

4. **Responsible Use:** Responsible social media use is a skill that must be learned to engage positively and avoid online challenges.

What is Social Media Literacy?

Video (01:55-03:27)

Discussion questions

1. **Benefits and Pitfalls of Social Media**
    What are some of the benefits and advantages of social media? What are the challenges that people can face as users of social media? Define these challenges below in your own words, and provide an example.
    - AI-generated video
    - Fake Headlines
    - Algorithms
    - The spread of disinformation

2. **Defining Social Media Literacy**
    Social Media literacy can be defined using five key components: (1) spotting misinformation, (2) understanding how algorithms shape our feed, (3) recognizing bias, (4) staying safe online, and (5) being intentional about the content we share. Which of the five components do you think is the most difficult to overcome? Which is the least difficult to overcome? Explain your opinions.

3. **Asking Questions**
    Analyze the following quote: "The heart of media literacy involves asking questions about the messages we see, read, and hear." What is the meaning of this quote?

    Take a look at the following "messages" that can be observed on social media. Discuss what questions someone should ask when faced with these media messages:
    - **FEMA Delivers RVs to North Carolina**
    - **The War in Ukraine**
    - **Mental Health in the Recruiting Process**

Misinformation vs. Disinformation

Video (03:28-08:49)

Discussion questions

1. **Understanding the Difference**
   What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation? What are the consequences of the spread of each type of information?
   Discuss the consequences of the two examples provided in the video—UFO in Miami and Plane Crash in the Potomac—and how this information can impact society.

   Come up with your own example of misinformation or disinformation and prepare to share it with the class.

2. **Algorithm Impact**
   What role do social media algorithms play in terms of impacting what kind of information users are exposed to? What kinds of consequences might this have? Think about both positive and negative outcomes as a class and make a list as a group.

3. **Avoiding the Trap**
   What are some strategies that you learned about in this video that can help you avoid falling prey to these social media traps, for example, believing in misinformation, endless scrolling, and accepting disinformation intended to manipulate? What are some potential obstacles that someone might face in terms of implementing these strategies on a regular basis?

Understanding Credibility
Video (08:50-13:41)

Discussion questions

1. **Real or Fake?**
   What is the difference between "credible" and "real" when it comes to the content that someone may encounter on social media?

   Can credible information be created by AI? How do you know if AI-generated information is accountable and legitimate? As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, how can we navigate this new world of information that comes from both people and machines?

2. **Navigating Credibility**
   How does emotion impact the way in which we react and perceive news stories? Describe how social media can play on emotional responses in order to spread information, whether it's real or fake, credible or unreliable.

   Ask the students to think about a story that they have seen on social media that evoked an emotional reaction. Did it impact the way that they understood the information? How might this be a dangerous way to portray news stories?

3. **Bias and Evidence**
   Understanding bias and evidence are two essential tasks in determining the credibility of the information on social media. How can someone ensure that the information they are consuming is unbiased and supported by evidence?

   As a class, come up with a checklist of items that an unbiased social media post must have. Pull up a social media post and test your checklist as a group.

PART 4
Is the News Real?
Video (13:42-18:18)

Discussion questions

1. **Determining Reality**
AI-generated information has reached unprecedented levels. What are some key questions that one should ask to determine if the content they are viewing is real or generated by AI? As AI continues to improve and become even more realistic, how will we continue to decipher real content from AI created content and what impact will that have on society?

2. **Images and Videos**
Images and videos can have a powerful impact on social media users. Often, information will not be believed without an image or a video to "prove" the information to be true. AI can generate images and videos that appear to be real. How do we navigate this new frontier?

   Read this **BBC article** and use the examples provided in the article to develop strategies to determine whether or not images are AI-generated.

3. **Social Media Community**
One way to determine whether or not the information being presented is real is to focus on the community reaction around the post. Look at the comments section of a post and analyze the responses. Take note of any anomalies, repeated comments, or inaccuracies that may illustrate an AI-generated post.

   Social media contains an infinite number of communities that engage with information at all times. How does absorbing information in a communal way both help and harm society? How does the advent of AI-generated information complicate this idea?

Summative activities & reflection
Reflection Questions

1. **Social Media Literacy**
   What does Social Media Literacy mean? Why is it important for users to be literate in how to properly use social media?

2. **Benefits and Challenges to Social Media Literacy**
   What are some of the challenges that users face when engaging with social media? How do these challenges manifest themselves across platforms and across topics?

3. **Combating Misinformation and Disinformation**
   What are some ways that users can combat misinformation and disinformation? How can you implement these in your life as a social media user?

4. **Artificial Intelligence**
   AI-generated content is perhaps the most important element of social media misinformation. How has AI both helped and hurt the user experience on social media and the impact that social media has on its users?

5. **Credibility and Reliability**
   How can you determine the credibility and reliability of the information you encounter on social media? Why is it so important to determine bias and the proper use of evidence when it comes to the information being disseminated on social media?

6. **Ethical Questions**
   With all of the pitfalls to social media use, should we as a society encourage the use of social media, mitigate it with political policy, or outright ban social media platforms?

Learning Activities

1. *The Social Dilemma*
   Watch the Netflix film *The Social Dilemma* in class. Consider these questions as you watch the film:
   - What kinds of consequences has social media had in changing our society?
   - What are some of the positives and negatives that social media has had on our world?
   - This movie was made five years ago - what has changed in terms of the continued evolution of social media, and how does it complicate the narratives presented in the film?
   - How has social media impacted your life?

   After the screening, have students prepare a "Movie Review" where they analyze the substance of the film. Students should:
   - Rate the film
   - Provide an opinion on how the information was presented
   - Encourage OR discourage others from viewing this film

2. **Social Media in Real Life**
   Create a real-life social media landscape in your classroom. Have each student create a profile by using a large poster board. Each profile should include the following:
   - The name of the student or a "handle" that they would like to go by
   - A picture of the student
   - Five pieces of information about the student (allow students to include any information they want)
   - A quote that best describes themselves

   Once created, hang these "profiles" around the room. Each day, students must post or share something on their posterboard, they must make two comments on other students' posts, and they must "reshare" something from someone else's profile by using colored sticky notes. The posts and reshares must be made on a different student's profile each round. After two weeks, track the information that has been disseminated in class.

This exercise will illustrate how information can be presented and how it travels through the social media ecosystem that you have created. Students will journal on their experience during this activity and analyze what they are observing in terms of the information that is traveling through the social media platform.

3. **Around the Room Literacy**
Each student should bring in two pieces of social media: one that they deem to be truthful and credible, and one that they deem to be misinformation or disinformation. Students should print the posts on separate sheets of paper and place them in a hat or a bucket. Each student should pick one of the posts and conduct a "social media analysis" of whether the post is truthful or if it's presenting misinformation or disinformation.

The students' analysis should include the following strategies:

- Fact-check
- Question the source and intent
- Does the source show multiple sides of the story?
- Is there a clear bias to this story?
- Is evidence presented in this story which makes it credible?
- Is there anything that makes this source seem not credible?

4. **Analyzing the Benefits and Challenges of Algorithms**
Watch the **video** (0:00-10:39), "How TikTok's Algorithm Figures You Out | WSJ," and analyze the impact of algorithms across the landscape of social media. What are some benefits of algorithms? What are some negative outcomes that algorithms create? Pose this question as a debate: *should the use of social media algorithms be banned?*

Review Questions

1. Disinformation can best be described as:
   - **Information that is shared with the intention of deception**
   - Information that is unintentionally shared
   - Information that a user may disagree with
   - Information that contains inappropriate language

2. True or False: Artificial Intelligence can create false information that can appear to be real.
   - **True**
   - False

3. Which of the following strategies is the most important in terms of developing social media literacy?
   - Staying off social media altogether
   - Assuming that everything you see on social media is true
   - **Always asking questions about what you are viewing**
   - Only trusting some social media accounts because you know the account personally.

4. Misinformation can best be described as:
   - Information that comes from a business or a government
   - **False Information that is shared by accident**
   - Information that is so shocking it must be true
   - True information that is not backed by evidence

5. Algorithms mostly impact:
   - The accuracy of the information being posted on a specific platform
   - How a platform uses the information that is posted on it
   - What a user is blocked from seeing on their social media feed
   - **What a user is being shown on their social media feed**

6. Which of the following is _not_ an effective way to avoid the traps of misinformation and disinformation?
   - **Share information with the wider community**
   - Question the source and intent
   - Fact-check
   - Pause

7. Credible news stories on social media:
   - Do not exist
   - Are only shared from news organizations
   - Are overwhelmingly biased
   - **Are backed by solid evidence**

8. Practicing social media literacy:
   - **Encourages the responsible use of social media platforms**
   - Does not impact the way a user reacts to social media posts
   - Promotes disinformation across social media platforms
   - Is something that can be effectively learned in a weekend

Further learning resources

1. Video & Curriculum: ConnectED, [Media Literacy](#)
   - Explore the definition of media literacy, key factors that influence media production, and key media biases, and learn how to become a critical consumer of media.
2. Film: *The Social Dilemma* (2020), Netflix
   - This film will help students to understand the impact of social media on society and how social media literacy can combat the pitfalls and challenges that social media presents.
3. Resource Hub: [Common Sense Education](#)
   - Provides research-based lessons to support students' social-emotional learning and digital well- being.
4. Resource Hub: [PBS Technological Literacy](#)
   - Resource for educators to create new lessons on social media literacy
5. Website: [The News Literacy Project](#)
   - A nonpartisan education nonprofit dedicated to building a national movement to create systemic change in American education to ensure all students are skilled in news literacy, giving them the knowledge and ability to participate in civic society.
6. Website: [Media Literacy Now](#)
   - An advocacy site which encourages media literacy among students
7. Website: [Social Media Research Institute](#)
   - SMRI seeks to create healthy social media use through research, education, and support.