

Chapter 7.2 Activity 1: Evaluate the News From All Sides

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Topic selected for Allsides media source bias activity: COVID Vaccine safety and effectiveness.

- All of the articles selected (Right, Left, and Center leaning) mostly followed the Inverted Triangle model, with the Right-leaning article running out of evidence quickly and moving to the tail instead of strengthening arguments.
- The Left-leaning article mostly cited right-wing conspiracy theorists online, who made claims on the danger of the COVID vaccine on young athletes. The Center-leaning article contrasted quotes by a conservative influencer on twitter with differing opinions from the dean of a medical school as well as the head of the Centers for Disease Control. The Right-leaning article cites an infectious disease doctor in a single study, wherein the study disproves the headline of the article.
- The left-leaning article uses a lot of language that insinuates the weakness of the position that right-wing conspiracy theories hold when it comes to the vaccine debate. The right-leaning article presents itself as neutral, using very objective language to mask the contradictory evidence that it presents. The center-leaning article also uses the inquisitive tone of the left-leaning article, as it directly confronts quotations from right-wing anti-vax advocates.
- The imagery shared across these articles is surprisingly identical, all three simply using a stock photo of a vaccine bottle marked "COVID-19 Coronavirus Vaccine".
- The audience for the Left-leaning article are sports fans who believe that the vaccines are safe and effective, those following the Damar Hamlin story, and people who follow vaccine misinformation. The audience for the right-leaning article is anyone who doubts the effectiveness of the vaccines. The audience for the center-leaning article is for people interested in misinformation, right-wing conspiracy circles online, and the statistics that support the effectiveness of the vaccine.
- The right-leaning article cites Dr. Amesh Adalja, a primary source as he worked on the study, and a Senior Scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security. Though the source is of some academic acclaim, the article argues against itself using his data. The left-leaning article cites several investigative efforts into debunking baseless conspiracy theories that fuel the debate of Athletes and the vaccine, using peer-reviewed studies and accredited sources. The center-leaning article cites multiple Food and Drug Administration trials, as well as contradictory statements to the misinformative quotes presented in the article, occasionally even from the conspiracy theorist himself.

Informative Video Script:

on a studio set, flashing to logos of news companies mentioned, and b-roll stock footage

JM: Hi, I'm Juan, a Junior Communication student from the University of Massachusetts. In today's video, we're going to talk about the differences between right-leaning, center-leaning, and left-leaning news sources.

In Critical Media Studies in the United States, it is helpful to analyze news sources and their biases by breaking them down into right-leaning, left-leaning, and center-leaning. Recognizing the differences between these media sources, and knowing the intent of a piece of media helps you be a more actively engaged participant in media, as well as the political systems that surround us daily.

Right-leaning news sources are those that typically have conservative or Republican leanings. These news sources often prioritize individual rights, personal responsibility, and free-market capitalism. In extreme examples, these media advocate for rigorous religious reform, increase in militarized policing, and xenophobia. Examples of right-leaning news sources include Fox News, Newsmax, and The Daily Caller.

Center-leaning news sources, as the name suggests, are those that try to remain neutral and objective. They present both sides of the argument, without showing any political bias. These news sources value moderation, balance, and fairness, and typically will compare and contrast evidence from both sides of the aisle. Examples of center-leaning news sources include The Associated Press, Axios, and Reuters.

Left-leaning news sources are those that typically have liberal or Democratic leanings. These news sources prioritize social justice, government intervention, and equality. They are often critical of big business and the wealthy. In extreme examples, these media outlets advocate for forceful redistribution of wealth, radical overhauls to government systems, and destruction of fossil fuels production. Examples of left-leaning news sources include MSNBC, The Huffington Post, and Jacobin.

So, why is it important to understand the differences between right-leaning, center-leaning, and left-leaning news sources? Well, by knowing what is at stake for the media outlet who is telling you information, you can make an informed decision on what information to consume. Additionally, diversifying your media intake by broadening the spectrum of news you consume can make you a well-rounded, better informed American citizen!

Thanks so much for listening, folks, and have a great rest of your day.

Chapter 7.2 Activity 2: Write the News From All Sides

News Topic: Legalization of psychedelic drugs for medicinal and research purposes.

Favorable:

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to legalize the use of psychedelics for medical and therapeutic purposes. Besides facing massive opposition from government bodies, religious organizations, and cultural ideas that demonize these drugs, the movement for psychedelics is finally achieving some traction. Across the nation, state governments are realizing the powerful and positive impact these drugs can have. States like Oregon, which on January 1st, legalized the adult use of Psilocybin, often called “Magic Mushrooms,” stand at the forefront of this new frontier of psychiatric help. These non-habit forming drugs, presented in safe clinical environments with trained professionals, have little to no risk for a ‘bad trip’, and can help in a myriad of mental health applications, such as smoking cessation, alcoholism, trauma, depression, and end of life care for terminal patients.

Unfavorable:

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to legalize the use of psychedelics for medical and therapeutic purposes. However, this movement has faced a significant amount of opposition, with many arguing that the risks of these substances far outweigh any potential benefits. Despite advocates claiming the drugs' catch-all effectiveness in curing mental health disorders, many critics argue that studies and trials are performed at too small a scale, and that the long-term effects of these treatments is unknown. Other critics also argue that the trendiness and excitement behind psychedelic research is creating subconscious bias in scientists, and that proven methods of mental health treatment, which are backed by decades of research, should be considered long before offering psychedelics as an option.

Objective:

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to legalize the use of psychedelics for medical and therapeutic purposes. There are various arguments that could be made for and against these powerful drugs' use in a wide manner. For instance, the potential for treating mental health conditions can not be ignored: Advocates argue that these substances have the potential to treat a range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Studies have shown that these substances can alleviate symptoms and help patients better cope with their conditions. However, risk factors exist for this nascent drug research field: individuals with undiagnosed schizophrenia and risk factors for similar disorders can have psychosis symptoms exacerbated or created by ingestion of these treatments. Regulatory holdups, such as arguments over how to dose

these drugs, and the protocols in which to clinically administer these treatments, have been critical in how research in this field has unfolded over the previous decades, and will most likely continue to alter the progress of this movement towards full implementation. However, advocates are optimistic, and hope that legalizing psychedelics could help advance medical research and understanding of how these substances work in the brain, as well as potentially leading to new discoveries and treatments for a range of conditions, mental and physical.