

Refresher: Applying News Assessment Skills

- Objective of this class: Train you to become more active and informed news consumers
- Learned about many aspects of news:
 - Who makes it, how it's made
 - How news operates within communities
 - Types of news (crime, education, business, etc.)
 - How journalistic investigations work
 - Peculiarities of international coverage
 - Characteristics of these types of news
 - Basic tools for analyzing these kinds of stories
- Now – up to you to apply all that you've learned to navigate through today's news environment

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?

Navigating the News

What News Literacy Requires

- Requires being an active consumer – not just passively accepting information as true
- Requires being open-minded, not assuming your existing beliefs and assumptions are always right
- Requires understanding how and by whom news is made, at least on a basic level
- Requires knowing that some material is intentionally made to misinform or mislead, or to inflame conflicts
- Requires adapting to different types of news stories from different places, cultures, contexts
- Requires being aware of stereotypes
- Is this too much to ask of people?

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
- 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

Early concept: Ongoing public discourse

- Founders saw media as vital to democracy
- Citizens' continuing discussion of social and political topics that are important to them
- Best ideas work their way into larger discussion, evolve into consensus
- Discourse both fuels democracy & responds to it
- Makes ordinary people feel involved

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