Social Media Literacy Module

Independent Learning

The following material is posted on the D2L (our course management system, CMS) for students to complete independently before participating in small, recorded online discussions and (in the case of a hybrid course) the in-person class meeting.

This course has been designed for a hybrid format. The time it takes students to complete the independent learning portion is meant to stand in for the 1.5-hour class meeting each week instructors found in traditional lecture formats. To modify this curriculum for a traditional course (3 hours of lecture per week), we had made recommendations about what videos we found most useful so that instructors could more easily determine what could be assigned as homework and/or shown during class.

Module Introduction

Quizzes are not published, but instructors may request them from Rebecca Oldham (Rebecca.Oldham@mtsu.edu)

1 hour and 13 minutes of video content

There are two submodules.

Take the content quizzes as you are watching the videos.

Complete the participation activity as you are watching the videos. List 5 ways to increase your social media literacy, along with what video they came from. Submit your responses on the Social Media Savvy quiz for a participation grade.

Topics

- Information-seeking behaviors
    - Intellectual humility
    - Cognitive biases
    - Heuristics
    - Rhetorical and persuasive appeals
    - Elaboration likelihood model
- Social media literacy
    - Skepticism
    - Misinformation vs. disinformation
    - Information siloes, echo chambers, filter bubbles, and algorithms
    - Stories
    - Lateral reading
    - Ethics and responsibilities information seeking and sharing

Participation Activity

As you are watching the videos, make a list of at least five ways you can become social media literate and a more savvy consumer of digital information. For each, note which video it came from.

Discussion Preparation

As you are working through the content for this module, **ponder** and **take notes** on the following questions to prepare for discussions:

Note: These are not the full discussion questions. During your small group discussion, please use the full questions located in the "Discussion" section of this module.

1. **Cognitive Biases.** To which cognitive bias do you believe you are most susceptible? How do you plan to go about reducing its influence on you?
2. **Skepticism.** How often are you skeptical of information that you encounter on social media? Are you equally critical of people or ideas you already agree with (e.g., *considering the opposite*)? How often do you fact-check claims on social media or engage in lateral reading?
3. **Social Media Use.** Consider how many young adults today are increasingly influenced by social media over traditional news outlets. How do you think social media has changed the way we view news and information? What are some ways you can modify your own social media and/or news consumption to broaden your mindset or worldview?
4. **Self-Efficacy.** How confident are you that you can effectively sift through information and media to make judgments about credible sources? To what extent do you find this task or goal overwhelming?
5. **Impact & Ethics.**
   "What's shared online has offline consequences." -John Green (2020) Social Media
   What are the potential impacts of misinformation and disinformation, particularly on people? Can you think of a recent example?
   As a member of an information community, what power do you have to reduce harm and increase benefits for people through how you interact with information on social media (either what messages you internalize or information you disseminate)?
   Considering many of you will end up working with vulnerable populations, what are your professional responsibilities regarding how you interact with information?

Required Curriculum & Activity

This module has an activity and two submodules of required content, each with their own quiz.

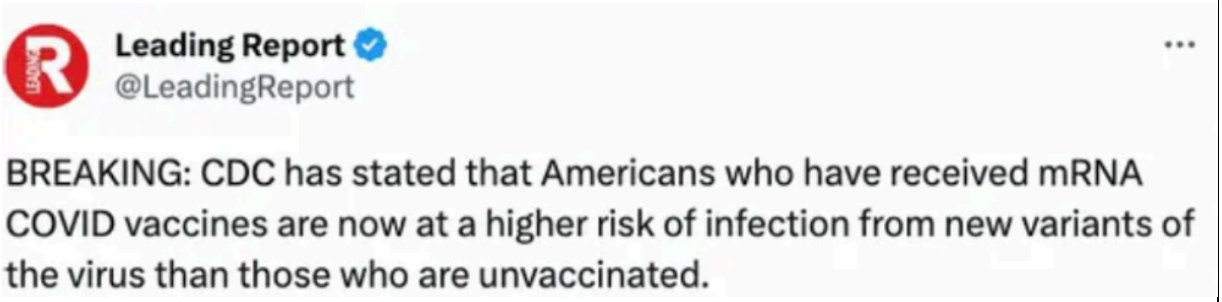
Social Media Savvy Activity

This activity is formatted as a "quiz" in the CMS. Student should work through this activity while reviewing required content. Post it above the required content so they can't miss it.

Activity Instructions

As you are watching the videos for this module,

1. Describe a cognitive bias with which you struggle with the most. Note from which video you learned about this cognitive bias.
2. Describe two ways you can become more social media literate and a more savvy consumer of digital information. For each, note from which video it came.
3. Describe a recent event when mis/disinformation circulated online had negative impacts on real people or society.
4. Fact-check something you saw on social media using one of the Fact-Checking Websites. Submit a screenshot of or link to the social media post that you fact-checked and a link to the fact-checking site webpage rating how truthful that post is. For example:



X FALSE https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/cdc-risk-assessment-summary-covid-vaccine/

Question #1

Name and describe a cognitive bias or heuristic that you struggle with the most.
In which video did you find this cognitive bias/heuristic?

Question #2

What's one way you can become a more savvy consumer of digital information, particularly on social media?
In which video did you find this suggestion?

Question #3

What's ANOTHER way you can become a more savvy consumer of digital information, particularly on social media?
In which video did you find this suggestion?

Question #4

Describe a recent event when mis/disinformation circulated online had negative impacts on real people or society.

Question #5

At this point, you might start to feel confused about where to go to find reliable information. Or you may feel overwhelmed by whether you need to fact-check the source that fact-checked something else! How are we supposed to know what's true or not?!

Scholarly consensus and articles peer-reviewed research journals are the best sources of information we have, but they are, unfortunately, difficult to read for laypeople and behind paywalls.

The good news is that there are free and accessible fact-checking websites available to you. You learned in this module that, even compared to Ivy League professors, professional fact-checkers are highly skilled at identifying misinformation and disinformation online. In D2L, I've linked you to some highly reputable fact-checking websites, in which professional fact-checkers address some of the most prominent claims in news and social media. Their articles usually provide (a) a rating assessment of to what extent a claim is truthful (it's usually not as simple as just "true" or "false"), (b) an explanation for that rating, and (c) links to high-quality sources so you can check their work.

Not everything is worth your time to fact-check. But information about public health, laws, politics, etc. are worth the effort to make sure the media outlets you are following are not consistently feeding you mis/disinformation. If they are consistently flagged as "false," it may be time to stop following them.

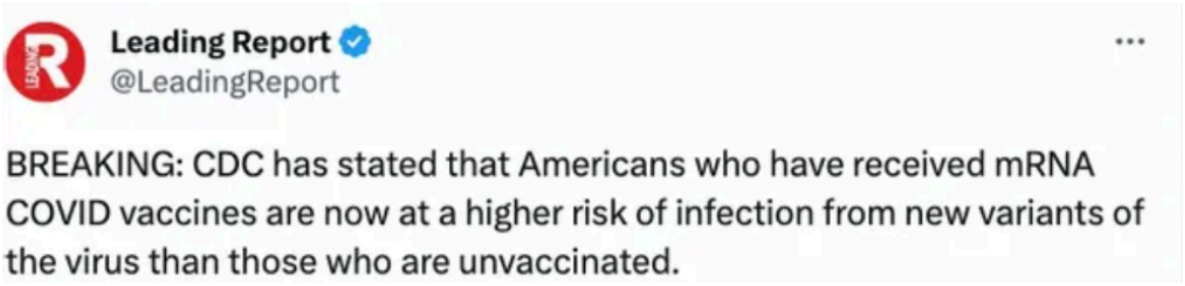
In the following questions, fact-check something you saw on social media using one of the fact-checking websites provided in D2L.

Submit a screenshot of or link to the social media post that you fact-checked and a link to the fact-checking site webpage rating how truthful that post is.

First, submit a screenshot of or link to the social media post that you fact-checked.

For example:

https://twitter.com/LeadingReport/status/1698767595464241283



Question #6

Which Fact-Checking Websites did you use?

Snopes.com

Politifact.com

Factcheck.org

Question #7

Submit a link to one of those fact-checking webpages that rates how truthful that post is, and note what their rating was.
For example: **X FALSE** https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/cdc-risk-assessment-summary-covid-vaccine/

Submodule A: Media & Persuasion

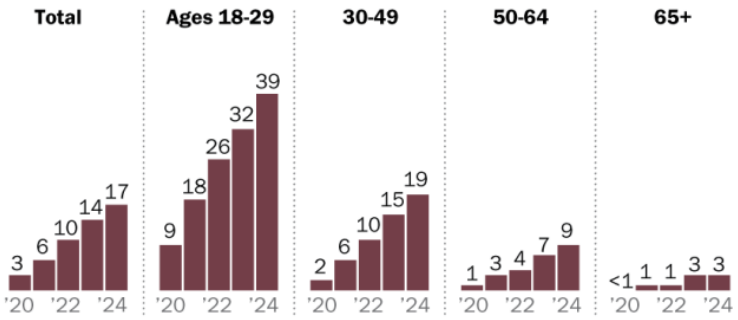
Post at the top of the content, an automatically graded quiz that asks questions about the content that they can complete as they work through it. I give students three attempts on these quizzes. The box below contains pages (written by Rebecca Oldham) and links to online content that can be copied and pasted in your CMS. I embed videos so students can watch without having to leave the CMS. The content below is listed in the order it appears in the module.

Make sure to complete the quiz and the participation activity **WHILE** you are working through the material.

Social Media & News
According to Pew Research (2024), almost 40% of young adults get their news from TikTok. Moreover, the number of TikTok users who get most of their news from that app has more than **doubled** since 2020. Other social media sites (e.g., Twitter/X and Truth Social) have similarly high numbers of users who regularly get their news via these apps.

About 4 in 10 young adults in the U.S. now regularly get news on TikTok

*% of U.S. adults who **regularly** get news from TikTok, by age group*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024.

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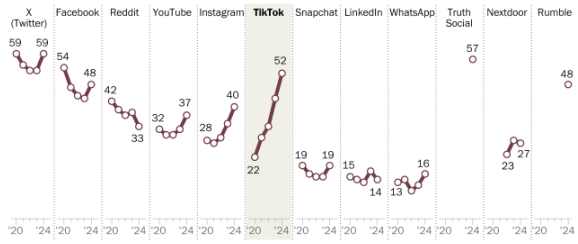
Share of TikTok users who regularly get news on the platform has more than doubled since 2020

*% of each social media site's users who **regularly** get news there*



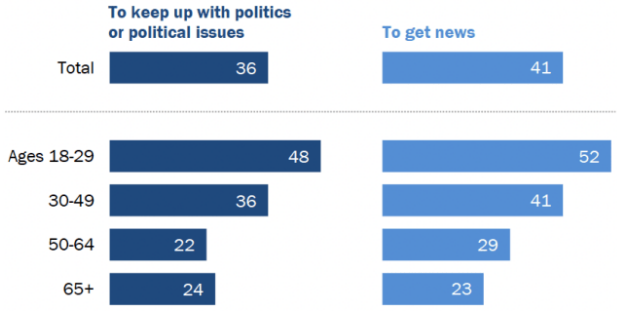
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew (2024) also found that about half of people under 30 use TikTok to keep up with news and politics.

Young adults stand out in using TikTok to keep up with politics and get news

% of U.S. TikTok users who say a reason they use TikTok is ...

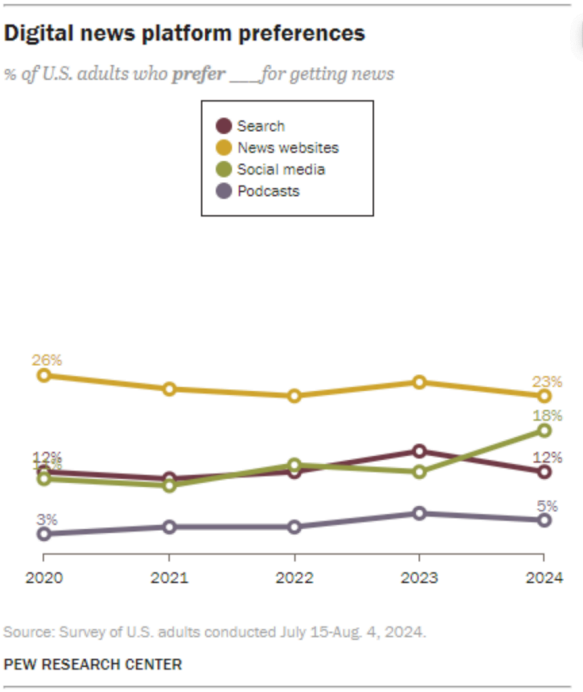


Note: "Major reason" and "Minor reason" responses are combined. Refer to the topline for the full list of seven reasons users were asked about. Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted March 18-24, 2024.

PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

While social media can be a useful tool for sharing media and information, using it as a primary (or only) source of news creates problems. In the U.S., we are reaching an inflection point wherein the percentage of adults who get news from social media is about to surpass those who go to news websites.



However, for adults aged 18-29, that shift has already happened—only 19% of adults in this age group prefer to get their news from news websites compared to a whopping **43% who prefer to get their news from social media.**
In this class, we will learn about how social media works, how exclusively getting news from social media can create problems, and what you can do about it!

Video Links (*Favorite)
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAdkzxB4WFo
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReFqFPJHLhA
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzevRHUEnVI
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3klMM9BkW5o
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2dEuMFR8kw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmR58_dqLxY

Resisting Bias, Rhetoric, and Fallacies
So far, you have learned about cognitive biases and rhetorical appeals that political and media actors leverage to persuade the public (and you!) to develop certain worldviews or opinions. The goal of learning about biases and rhetorical manipulation is to be able to better identify and resist when it is being used against us and when these biases naturally arise within ourselves. **Confirmation bias** (our tendency to notice and internalize ideas/evidence that support our existing worldview and ignore ideas/information that challenge it) is powerful and persistent, particularly in economics and politics.

In this class, I hope you will learn how to think more critically about economics, politics, and social issues so that you are more savvy in navigating society than you were before (and maybe than the general public)! Education is power—in this case, the power to resist fallacies and misinformation/disinformation!

Media Recommendations
One way to resist misinformation and disinformation is to just be better informed! You will be better able to spot them and tell yourself and others, "but that's just not true."

Garbage in, garbage out! If you are on social media or listen to podcasts, I recommend to UNfollow accounts that appeal to your worse nature, misinformation, or polarizing language. Instead, start following accounts that provide accurate and educational information. I'll try to make recommendations throughout the course for social media accounts, podcasts, books, shows, and films for you to check out. [Insert links to parts of CMS with your recommended sources of public scholarship for laypeople.]

Smarter as you scroll. [Insert descriptions and links to social media accounts relevant to your topic that students can follow instead. I recommend including Instagram and TikTok accounts that you can verify are responsible scientists or science reporters.]

Enlightened listening. [Insert descriptions and links podcasts relevant to your topic that students can follow instead. I recommend including Instagram and TikTok accounts that you can verify are responsible scientists or science reporters.]

Another excellent podcast episode about how our biases impact our ability to interpret data fairly is from NPR's Hidden Brain, *Where the Truth Lies*. From the episode website:

> ***When we think about misinformation, we often focus on blatant errors or deliberate attempts to deceive us. But in recent years, social scientists have found that misinformation comes in many flavors — many of which are far more subtle than obvious falsehoods. These forms of misinformation prey on our mental blindspots, and take advantage of our passions and loyalties. This week, economist Alex Edmans explores the many insidious forms of misinformation, and how we can all get better at separating fact from fiction.***

This episode gives several examples of how our bias can make it difficult for us to fairly interpret research and data. It gives examples of spurious correlations and why we should be cautious of them.

One practical recommendation Edmans suggests to sharpen critical thinking and **resist confirmation** bias is to ***consider the opposite*** (around minute 47:00). Essentially, he says you should levy the same critical mindset that you use to argue against information that you DON'T like to challenge the information that you DO like. For example, search for information that challenges your preferred opinion. Try to come up with arguments and alternative explanations that challenge your perspectives.

Submodule B: Social Media Literacy

Post at the top of the content, an automatically graded quiz that asks questions about the content that they can complete as they work through it. I give students three attempts on these quizzes. The box below contains pages (written by Rebecca Oldham) and links to online content that can be copied and pasted in your CMS. I embed videos so students can watch without having to leave the CMS. The content below is listed in the order it appears in the module.

Make sure to complete the quiz and the participation activity **WHILE** you are working through the material.

Videos (*Favorite)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz6GULbowAk
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHNprb2hgzU

SIFT Method Infographic and Links
https://libapps.s3.amazonaws.com/accounts/207197/images/SIFT_infographic_cc.png
https://hapgood.us/2019/06/19/sift-the-four-moves/

Fact-Checking Websites
https://www.snopes.com
https://www.factcheck.org/
https://www.politifact.com/

Videos (Favorite)
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5YKW6fhlss
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Be-A-sCIMpg

Test Your AI-Detection Skills:
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/24/technology/ai-deepfake-facebook-midjourney-quiz.html?unlocked_article_code=1.hE4.GP4q.qagyL5yTuEKE&smid=url-share
New York Times interactive quiz. *Might* be behind paywall. Subscribers can share 10 free articles per month.

2024 Onyx Impact: The Black Online Disinformation Landscape Report:
https://www.onyximpact.org/uploads/1/4/7/3/147321580/onyx_impact_landscape_analysis.pdf

Tools for Protecting Your Privacy
In this module, you learned a lot about social media and algorithms. Every time you engage with content on social media, you give that company information about you. What they do with your data after they have it is an open debate we are currently having in our society. Our laws and regulations are having a hard time keeping up with the fast-paced world of technology.
What is at Stake?
Some information you may not care if they have (e.g., that you liked a certain movie or music artist). You may even enjoy getting customized ads based on your online activities. However, there is some information that you may not want Google or social media companies to have

about you. Information about your health, political ideologies/affiliations/activities, birthday, sensitive identity information (SSN), immigration status, sexual orientation/gender identity, etc. This kind of information could be stolen, leaked, or subpoenaed and find itself in the hands of people who can do you harm or deny you access to important resources.
Consider, for example, DNA testing companies (e.g., 23 & Me). HIPAA (the law protecting the privacy of your health records) does not protect these data. What if you have a genetic marker that increases your risk for heart disease or cancer? "The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act does prevent employers and health insurance companies from using the results of a genetic test to discriminate against you, but not other entities or types of insurance companies." What if that information was stolen, leaked, or otherwise made available at some point in the future to life insurance companies? What if, based on that genetic risk, they decide to deny you life insurance or increase your insurance premiums or deductible because it makes you "high risk" to insure?
There are many kinds of online information that you may expect to be completely private and legally protected, but that actually are subject to subpoena (when the government, usually a court, requires your witness testimony or for you to hand over documentation/evidence, and there is a penalty if you don't comply). For example, your past Google searchesor the private messages that you've sent to friends or family could be subpoenaed in legal proceedings. Even data from apps with extremely personal health information, such as period tracking apps, can be subpoenaed. If you have location services turned on on your phone, where you have gone can be accessed via geofencing warrants. Geofencing data has been used to obtain search warrants on people for protesting and was used as evidence in the conviction of some of the people who stormed the Capitol on January 6th. The point is, even if you never do anything illegal, extremely private information could be made public during legal proceedings (whether someone is prosecuting you or other people) in ways that you may have not thought possible.
Moreover, there have been multiple major data leaks from major institutions in the past several years that have compromised sensitive information from millions of users. These have included Equifax (credit score monitoring, which includes social security numbers, birthdays, and identity information), Marriott hotels (credit cards and passport information), and U.S. Voter Data (identity information, religion, ethnicity). This kind of information can be used to steal your identity and decimate your credit score, making it difficult for you to get loans to purchase cars or houses in the future.
Other data breaches have included Yahoo! email and Facebook. When email or social media data is breached, personal information about your political ideas or activities or gender identity/sexual orientation—that was only **supposed** be available to "friends"—may now be made seen by potential employers (who may not hire you because of it) or may be seen by family and friends that you would rather not share that information with for personal privacy reasons.

What Can You Do?

There are several precautions you can take to protect yourself.

1. **Think twice before adding more information about you or your loved ones online.** This includes the details in your online accounts (social and otherwise), the photos and information you share in your social media posts, and which questions you answer online. People don't need to know everything about you, where you are/were at a given moment, or information that could be used to steal your identity or put you at risk. For example, I don't share photos for trips, until I'm back home. I carefully guard

information about where my son goes to school and who his teacher is. Before you add new information online, ask yourself if that kind of information could be used to steal your (or others') identities, hack into other accounts, harm you, or discriminate against you (or others) in the future if it were ever leaked.

2. **Remove unnecessary information from accounts.** Chances are you probably already have too much information about yourself online. You know the security questions you have to answer to reset your passwords? Could someone use your information on social media to guess the answers to those kinds of questions? Go through your social media accounts and remove details about your birthday, anniversaries, or other information that could be used to hack into your accounts. When choosing your security questions, select questions about the information that you are reasonably sure would not be easy to ascertain based on the information you've already put online.
3. **Use a password manager.** Many people have very risky password practices. They have passwords that are too simple. They use names, numbers, or information that is easy to guess. They use the same password for most of their online accounts so that if one is compromised, the others are too. One simple workaround is to use a password manager. Password managers suggest random, complex passwords for your accounts and store them for you in a secure location. Apple products have their own built-in password manager. So does Google. If you have a Dropbox account, that can manage your passwords. Your passwords will be harder to guess and, if you notice suspicious activity on an account, then you don't have to change your password for all the other accounts that also have that password.
4. **Use secure apps.**
    1. **Messaging.** As stated above, information from private applications can be subpoenaed in legal proceedings. In particular, if you are having sensitive conversations about topics you would rather not have made publically available, use messenger apps like Signal. On their website, they explain, "Signal messages and calls **cannot be accessed by us or other third parties** because they are **always end-to-end encrypted, private, and secure**" (emphasis added).
    2. **Health information.** Consider what kind of health information you are putting into apps that could be made publically available later. Consider if there are other apps out there that offer high-level encryption or if you might be better off just using offline methods of tracking health information.
    3. **Web browsing and searches.** If you are doing any sensitive searching online, don't use Google Chrome, which tracks user data. Use Firefox (which is very user-friendly) or Opera (which is even more secure). As an added layer of protection, you can do your web browsing in an "incognito tab." This makes your browsing "private" in that the web browser that you are using (e.g., Google Chrome) won't log or sync that website in your browser history, **however** "any website you visit **will** know you visited, as will its advertisers...[and so will] your internet provider...[like] AT&T or Verizon Wireless" (emphasis added).
5. **Change privacy and security settings.**
    1. **Online accounts.** Social media and internet companies like Facebook and Google have built-in privacy and security check-in services. These will walk

you through all of the privacy and security settings to make sure that you are aware of and exert control over what information you are sharing online.

2. **Mobile devices.** There are several settings on your mobile devices that you may want to consider turning off so that you are not sharing information unintentionally. You should also manage the information that the smart speakers in your home may be gathering about you. I recommend taking a few minutes to use the guides that in the Supplemental Material for this module to change some privacy settings in your accounts and mobile devices.

6. **Reject website cookies.** Have you noticed anytime you visit a website now, it asks you about what cookies to accept? These cookies are a record of you visiting that site. Take half of a second to open that box and reject any cookies that it will allow. This will reduce the amount of information about what websites you've visited online.

Collective Learning

Small Group Discussion

Small groups have weekly recorded online meetings throughout the semester. Students submit the recording to a cloud folder so the instructor can listen and assign a participation grade (for quantity and quality of contributions). The following information is posted on the CMS to guide those student discussions.

How to Engage in Tough Discussions

Three tips for having more productive conversations when there is disagreement:

Kwame Christian is the director of the American Negotiation Institute. He offers a simple, three-step technique to engage in tough discussions while keeping the conversation cool:

1. **Acknowledge and validate the emotion.** Recognize how everybody is feeling about the situation, even if it's difficult.

2. **Get curious with compassion.** Ask lots of questions and genuinely listen to the answers.

3. **Engage in joint problem-solving.** Once both parties have acknowledged how they're feeling and identified why there's an issue, come up with solutions together — so that there is buy-in from both sides.

If you want to listen to the full interview, you may do so below.

[embedded interview from https://www.npr.org/2020/08/28/907043503/make-all-your-arguments-win-win-stop-fighting-and-start-brainstorming**]**

Social Media Module Small Group Discussion

Requirements

- Before starting this discussion, group members should review the D2L page: How to Engage in Tough Discussions.
- Minimum time = 40 minutes
- Make sure someone is recording your discussion.
- Each individual will be graded according to the quantity and quality of their contributions to the discussion.
    - All students should have their video cameras on so]Dr. O can see who is contributing during the conversation.
    - Students are encouraged to go beyond just agreeing with each other. If you agree, elaborate. Add a unique idea to the conversation.
    - Don't be afraid to disagree or share a contrasting experience. That's where learning happens.
    - If you are taking this class completely online, consider watching this video: Safe Spaces are Not Enough to Change the World. Consider what you can do to cultivate difficult conversations in a brave space.
- If you are taking a hybrid format of this course, have a student take notes about what of your conversation you want to make sure to mention during the larger classroom discussion.

Discussion Questions

Just for this first discussion, have each person state their name so that your peers and Dr. O know who you are.

Remember, we're going for **organic conversation** here. The group, **as a whole**, should **thoroughly address each question set**. I recommend having a student read all the questions under each numbered set at once and letting their peers respond to the question set as a whole.

Each student may have more or less to say on any given question, and that's okay. Each student is responsible for making sure they are staying engaged, speaking frequently, and contributing thoughtfully throughout the session.

1. **Cognitive Biases.** To which cognitive bias/heuristic do you believe you are most susceptible? How do you plan to go about reducing its influence on you?

2. **Skepticism.** How often are you skeptical of information that you encounter on social media? Are you equally critical of people or ideas you already agree with (e.g., ***considering the opposite***)? How often do you engage in fact-checking or lateral reading on social media?

3. **Social Media Use.** Consider how many young adults today are increasingly influenced by social media over traditional news outlets. How do you think social media has changed the way we view news and information? What are some ways you can modify

your own social media and/or news consumption to broaden your mindset or worldview?

4. **Self-Efficacy.** How confident are you that you can effectively sift through information and media to make judgments about credible sources? To what extent do you find this task or goal overwhelming?

5. **Impact & Ethics.**

"What's shared online has offline consequences."

-John Green (2020) Social Media

What are the potential impacts of misinformation and disinformation on people? What's a recent event when mis/disinformation circulated online that impacted real people and created problems?

As a member of an information community, what power do you have to reduce harm and increase benefits for people through how you interact with information on social media (either what messages you internalize or information you disseminate)?

Considering many of you will end up working with vulnerable populations, what are your professional responsibilities regarding how you interact with information on social media?

Submission

Before the deadline, the group member who has access to the recording of your discussion should upload the video file on behalf of the group to your group's OneDrive folder. You can find a link to this OneDrive folder under the Welcome! module.

Librarian In-Class Guest Lecture (Hybrid Course Only)

See Appendix B for 2024 version of librarian guest lecture on social media, including a guided activity to prepare students for the Meme of the Week assignment (Appendix C).

We recommend bringing printed copies of slide 15 ("Meme Analysis Exercise – SIFT") so students have a hard copy to guide their work.

Ideally, this lecture occurs after they have completed (1) independent learning and (2) small-group online discussions.