

NEWS LITERACY PROJECT

Is it possible for you to avoid the #manufactureofconsent?

Probably not. Today's technologies are too advanced, governments too experienced, media too monopolized, journalism too underfunded, and human beings too biased for any of us to get an utterly objective story. But that does not mean that we are completely lost in the dark. There are tons of ways that, if we work at it, we can become better informed about the world around us. Here are a few of the lessons I have learned along the way.

FORM.

The shorter the piece, the more likely you are getting #fictionalnews, pieces that have been distilled so much that the complexity of the truth is no longer in view (think of it as a photograph that is too pixelated, you can make out the general outline but not the specifics).

What does this mean? Twitter is going to give you some of the least complex views. That might be a good source for headlines, but not a place to gain deep understanding.

TIME.

How long did it take to put the story together? The longer the journalist worked on it, the higher the possibility that the journalist did serious research. What does this mean practically? That news channels on the television are the worst place for reliable reporting. Again, a good place for headlines, but do not expect serious research from any 24-7 news channel (CNN, Fox, CBS, throw them all out).

Good journalism takes time, and if you want to really understand the world you need to read books and watch documentaries and listen to podcasts. Of course, this means you won't be able to hear what just happened last night, but try to pair deep readings (books and podcasts) with headline readings (what happened last night) and you will actually have a framework with which to better discern the story that just broke.

SITES.

If you are not paying for the service, then someone is. Be aware. But even if it is advertisement driven, some news sites have better journalism than others. Are newspapers partisan? Absolutely. They have been ever since they were invented. I encourage you to stop dismissing newspapers just because you can recognize which party they tend to support. Instead, practice reading papers from across party lines. Reading two different attitudes on a same story is often the best way to form your own opinion on an issue. That way you get multiple perspectives!

Here are some news sites that I find helpful.

The Atlantic (moderate)
Politico (conservative)

New York Times (This and the WallStreet Journal are socially liberal and have been particularly anti-Trump in this administration. But they are not necessarily that liberal in terms of economy, military-industrial complex, foreign policy).

Washington Post

Wall Street Journal

NATIONALISM.

News sites tends to be a bit nationalistic. All over. So if you want to know how people outside of the United States are thinking about politics, society, or the economy, then read journalists from outside the US! I often read the pieces from The Guardian, Reuters, and BBC (all from England) and from Al Jazeera (Qatar).

Read another language? Want to learn one? Even better. Try reading the news in another language to build up your chops while you simultaneously cut back on local #manufactureofconsent.

ALTERNATIVE FORMS.

Even though it seems like journalism is falling apart with the rise of ad-dominated online newspapers, it might be more accurate (and alleviating) to imagine the journalism is just ripe for reinvention. And there are plenty of signs that this process of reinvention is already underway: there tons of podcasts, vlogs, blogs, and documentaries that are ushering in new news. If you have a podcast or vlog you really like, then email it to me so I can share it with the class.