E-Learning Design Project Part 1: Project Proposal
Cindy Richard
EDTC 6325

Introduction

We are all immersed daily in a digital world of media and social media, scrolling for news and memes that catch our interest. When we feel strongly about a post, we comment and share. How often do we pause to check that the content we're passing along is authentic and factual? How often do we pause to wonder if we've been fooled by a digitally altered image or a misleading headline? If we're *not* pausing and thinking, we *should*. Carelessly spreading misinformation is not only foolish, but harmful to individuals, businesses, and civics in a bitterly polarized political climate.

Media literacy comprises a skill set vital to every individual who wishes to be a free, critical thinker and wishes to avoid being manipulated by others. Unfortunately, one only has to spend a little time on social media to observe that media literacy is a skill set many people lack. There is a clear performance gap between the level of critical thinking displayed by many social media users and the level of critical thinking that is needed to protect individuals in their decision-making and to protect our society from deceitful, uncivil discourse and the consequences thereof.

This e-learning course is not a fully comprehensive course on media literacy, but it will help the learner to gain or refine critical skills in evaluating text, images, and video content across media types. Learners will develop a mindset and discerning eye for false or misleading media content, enabling them to make better informed personal decisions and to fight the good fight against misinformation in our society.

This course is fully online and self-paced, geared towards a high school audience for use in an English or other humanities class, and contains assignments and assessments that an instructor can add to their gradebook. The course can also easily be extended to adult learners interested in strengthening their own media literacy skills.

Instructional Goal

Learners will critically evaluate text, images, and video content across media types to assess for validity and impartiality.

Sub-Goal 1: Learners will explain how and why misinformation spreads and will critically evaluate online content.

Learners will:

- Objective 1.1: Define and distinguish between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation with 80% accuracy on a quiz.
- Objective 1.2: Identify the psychological or emotional tactics used in samples of misleading posts or headlines, with 80% accuracy on a quiz.
- Objective 1.3: Analyze a social media post and determine how it might manipulate emotions or reinforce confirmation bias, following a rubric to craft a short essay response.
- Objective 1.4: Discuss how algorithms and echo chambers contribute to the spread of misinformation, and reflect on patterns observed in the learner's own social media accounts.

Sub-Goal 2: Learners will evaluate the authenticity of images and videos using observational techniques and digital verification tools.

Learners will:

- Objective 2.1: Identify common visual indicators of AI-generated or digitally altered images, evaluating sample images with 80% accuracy on a quiz.
- Objective 2.2: Use a reverse image search tool (such as Google or TinEye) to verify the origin of online images, classifying sample images with 80% accuracy on a quiz.
- Objective 2.3: Identify types of video manipulation and red flags signaling that a video has been manipulated, evaluating sample video clips with 80% accuracy on a quiz.
- Objective 2.4: Argue whether a sample video clip is misleading, manipulated, or authentic, following a rubric to craft a persuasive short essay response.
- Objective 2.5: After watching a short tutorial on InVID and WeVerify video verification tools, discuss how journalists and reporters would use these tools and reflect on possible personal uses if a learner chooses to install the Chrome extension.

Sub-Goal 3: Learners will assess the credibility of news sources and distinguish between factual reporting and biased or misleading content.

Learners will:

- Objective 3.1: Use a media bias tool to locate the bias ratings for several news organizations, matching the organizations to their ratings accurately on a quiz.
- Objective 3.2: Classify sample news content as reporting, opinion, or sponsored content with 80% accuracy.
- Objective 3.3: Discuss how two different news outlets cover the same story, making observations about differences in tone, framing, or omitted details.
- Objective 3.4: Evaluate two news articles using a source evaluation checklist (e.g. author credentials, publication bias, evidence,) recording findings in short answers on a digital worksheet.

Sub-Goal 4: Learners will demonstrate fact-checking strategies across media types.

Learners will:

- Objective 4.1: Identify logical fallacies and manipulation tactics in false claims, matching sample claims to their strategies accurately on a quiz.
- Objective 4.2: Use a fact-checking site (e.g. Snopes or FactCheck.org) to verify sample memes and quotes, selecting answers on a multiple choice quiz that best describe the findings.
- Objective 4.3: Apply a 3-step fact checking strategy to 2-3 viral claims, recording findings in short answers on a digital worksheet.
- Objective 4.4: Discuss a personal checklist the learner could habitually use to verify information before sharing.

Intended Audience

The module will be geared towards a high school English, Social Studies, or other humanities class. However, media literacy skills are relevant for everyone in the digital age, and the intended audience could be extended to interested adult learners.

A high school class may consist of 12-30 individuals of diverse abilities, races, religions, cultures, genders, political affiliations, and socioeconomic statuses. Lesson materials will reflect sensitivity to this diversity. For example, selected samples of misleading headlines and deepfake images should not be one-sided in a way that encourages bias towards one political party over another. The class may also contain English language learners and students with IEPs and 504s who receive accommodations due to learning disabilities or health impairments. The instructional module will be fully online and

self-paced, so students' usual accommodations such as text readers, speech-to-text, extended time, preferential seating, one-on-one aides, etc. should be feasible. Content will be presented in a variety of formats (e.g., video, closed captions, audio, graphics, chunked text) to support students' various learning styles.

Assumed similarities are that the students are all comfortable navigating a predictable LMS on school devices, and all have the prior experience of a basic introduction to media literacy from elementary or middle school library classes. However, the course stands alone without prerequisites and so is equally beneficial for students with little prior exposure to media literacy, as well as interested adult learners.

Learning Context

As the module is completely online and self-paced, teachers could assign it in parts for homework or independent work during class, perhaps as teachers are conferencing with individuals or small groups on a different topic. Students will need access to their school devices, such as Chromebooks, and earbuds for the multimedia components. Students or adult learners could also use personal devices if given the link. Learners should work independently at their own pace unless following IEP or 504 provisions for extra support. Comprehension quizzes are embedded in the course and will be scored automatically. Writing assignments and discussion questions will be recorded by the course as learners type and submit responses, but will need to be evaluated by an instructor for scoring. Rubrics are provided for scoring guidance.

Summary

In summary, this course will help learners improve their media literacy by developing critical skills to evaluate media content for validity and impartiality. These skills will help learners to avoid sharing misinformation and to be better informed decision makers in their personal lives. While designed for a high school English or humanities class to complete on school devices with the integration of graded assignments, the course could also be undertaken by curious adult learners who wish to independently build their media literacy skills.

References

OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT (Mar 14 version) [Large language model].
    https://chat.openai.com/chat

(I used a ChatGPT conversation as a brainstorming aid when considering ways to divide the umbrella topic of media literacy into manageable modules and lessons.)