THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Rise of Infotainment: Improving Media Literacy Education in American High Schools

Collective Essay – Group 5
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Table of Contents

List of Figures

René Magritte - *La trahison des images*[1]

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Abstract

Infotainment transforms lies into perceived reality with alarming efficiency. Hence, this paper addresses the growing influence of misinformation on TikTok among American teenagers and proposes a school-based intervention to foster critical news consumption. Building on Mendelow's Power-Interest stakeholder matrix, Installation- and Activitiy Theory, we propose a five-day Project Week to equip 9th-grade students with cognitive tools to navigate digital content. Rather than regulating platforms directly, the intervention targets schools as scalable environments for behavioural change. By embedding media literacy in interdisciplinary, project-based learning, students develop embodied competencies, reinforced through peer interaction.

[1] *This image by Magritte (1929) illustrates the distinction between representation and reality, challenging the question of the nature of perception and meaning.*

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it." - Aristotle

1. Background

Misinformation is pervasive. The World Economic Forum (WEF) identified false information as the largest short-term threat to the global economy in 2025. On social media platforms, fake news spreads faster than verified information, and the emergence of AI-generated content has made it difficult to distinguish between the two (Aïmeur, 2023; WEF, 2024). This is especially concerning given that 50% of American teenagers rely on social media as their primary news source (Watson, 2022).

Teenagers are influenced by their social circle, but also by media policies and algorithms that define the larger contexts in which they form their identities (Crawford, 2020). This reveals that news engagement is embedded in sociotechnical networks where human and technological infrastructure determine information flow (Lahlou, 2011). Consequently, this flow follows the logic of platform owners such as Meta and ByteDance, and teenagers are not systematically empowered to question this dynamic (Erzikova, 2018).

Manipulation begins at the individual level. Failing to address it early risks deeper societal vulnerabilities in the long term. Fostering cognitive resilience to misinformation builds the foundation of a functioning democracy, as liberal democracies depend on knowledgeable individuals (Steindl et al., 2015). Through group polarization, however, like-minded people find themselves in a vacuum where their opinions are not being challenged (Sunstein, 1999). This steers individuals toward increasingly rigid beliefs, with consequences ranging from xenophobia to capital riots and even public health sabotage. TikTok reinforces this through its highly personalised algorithm: the fundamental objective is to tailor the “For You” page to your existing interests and beliefs.

Misinformation on social media is particularly harmful during political elections, where it can mislead voters and intensify polarisation (Elsner, Atkinson and Zahidi, 2025). The United States (U.S.) presidential elections are a fitting example of this. During the summer of 2024, more than half of news influencers’ posts were about politics, government and the election (Stocking et al., 2024). However, only one-fourth of them were affiliated with an official news organization. Furthermore, the emergence of “deep-fake” videos, synthetic content closely resembling real videos, can convince the American public of political scandals that never occurred (Barari et al., 2021). Such content can influence voter behaviour by amplifying

negative attitudes towards potential candidates and create paranoia (Bastick, 2021). This could explain why two-thirds of Americans believe democracy is under threat, with 80% stating that Republican and Democratic voters do not agree on basic facts such as climate change (DiGiacomo et al., 2023; Noor, 2024). Unlike the obvious absurdity of viral entertainment, misinformation is subtle, persuasive, and dangerous - it's about calculated manipulation.

Given teenagers' constant connectivity to social media, they are primary targets of misinformation (Middaugh, 2019). To address this, the United Nations urges parents and educators to help protect teenagers from the harms of fake news (UN, 2024). Thus, schools have a responsibility to equip young people with media literacy skills, empowering them to critically navigate misinformation and participate in a well-informed democracy (DiGiacomo et al., 2023).

2. Introduction

Teenagers perceive normal news as boring (Hendrickx & Opgenhaffen, 2024). In the U.S., the number of young adults relying on TikTok for news consumption has grown fivefold since 2020 (Leppert & Matsa, 2024). Meanwhile, the country has the second largest TikTok user base worldwide, and in 2024, social media platforms generated nearly $11 billion in ad revenue from American youth alone (Statista, 2024; Brownstein, 2024). The surge in popularity of platforms like TikTok has led to a rise in infotainment: engaging, sensationalized content that decreases attention spans and alienates its users from nuanced, fact-based discourse (Baum et al., 2017; Mokry, 2024). Thus, infotainment has exacerbated the spread of misinformation. For instance, Donald Trump's 2016 victory was deemed heavily influenced by fake news and sensationalised content on social media (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). After his 2025 re-election, Trump himself credited TikTok for his success (Hawkinson, 2025).

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to misinformation, as they do not critically analyse the content they consume online. For example, when evaluating the credibility of health content on social media, 41% of teenagers could not separate true and false health messages (Greškovičová et al., 2022). This was especially alarming during the pandemic, when over 30% of TikTok videos related to COVID-19 contained incorrect information (Southwick et al., 2021). Moreover, teenagers feel little motivation to verify news sources prior to sharing them

with others (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2020). The need to equip teenagers with the competencies to navigate misinformation on social media has never been greater. In the U.S., eight million teens are currently eligible to vote, making it especially critical that they develop these skills to make informed political decisions (Handoko et al., 2023). Therefore, this essay will address the following research question:

How can we change American teenagers' passive behaviour on TikTok to foster critical news consumption?

3. Stakeholder Analysis

According to Mendelow's Matrix (1981), stakeholders can be categorised based on their level of power and interest (Figure 1). In this context, power translates to the authority to enforce decisions while interest reflects the degree to which stakeholders are motivated to foster critical thinking.

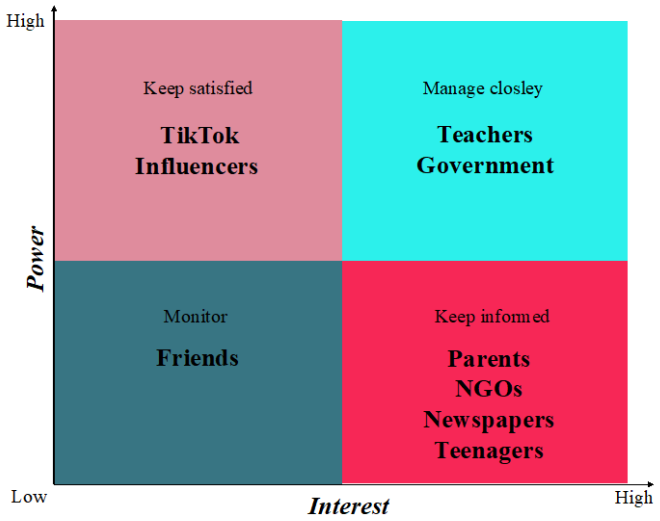

Figure 1: Stakeholder Power-Interest Matrix[2]

Although **teenagers** might be motivated to increase their media literacy skills, they are deemed powerless to achieve this independently. News consumption is shaped less by deliberate choice and more by the actor's environment. Algorithms, peer validation, and institutional norms steer teenagers' news consumption. Thus, this analysis treats teenagers as passive actors, focusing

[2] *The design incorporates TikTok's color scheme as visual pastiche, a concept rooted in postmodernism, referencing familiar aesthetic codes to engage users while reflection on platform culture.*

on other stakeholders to identify the most effective strategy to increase media literacy (see Appendix A).

American **teachers** appear to have high interest in improving teenagers' media literacy skills, and high power to do so. Teachers possess intrinsic motivation to ensure their students are well-equipped to becoming informed citizens (Zou et al., 2024). Moreover, the U.S. school system is quite decentralized compared to other countries, increasing teachers' influence in shaping the curriculum. Each state sets their own learning standards and local school boards reinforce these, but it is ultimately up to the teachers to decide how their lessons are carried out. As students spend over 35 hours under their guidance per week, educators have a great potential in shaping their behavior (George 2023). However, their responsibilities come with increasing pressure. Burnout rates among educators have risen in recent years (Ghasemi, 2025). Although teachers might be motivated to include media literacy in their classroom, expecting them to design the necessary material is unrealistic given their workload (Watt, 2008). Consequently, media literacy has been absent from most grade levels and subject areas, except when integrated by school librarians (Bulger, 2018).

One might also assume that the **U.S. government** has high motivation to increase media literacy proficiency as critical thinking is crucial for a democracy. Moreover, they hold the power to regulate the education system and, to some extent, digital platforms. However, balancing misinformation mitigation with free speech protection is difficult, and media policy remains a low priority amidst global crises.

Moreover, **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs), newspapers, and parents seem to share a high interest in promoting media literacy, but low power to influence teenagers. NGOs such as *Common Sense* and *Media Literacy Now* provide a great deal of media literacy resources. However, they rely on teenagers to seek out these sources independently, which rarely occurs (Besharat-Mann, 2024). Meanwhile, traditional **newspapers** face the challenge of maintaining journalistic integrity while adapting to younger audiences' decreasing attention spans (Don, 2025). Furthermore, **parents** might be invested in developing their children's critical thinking skills, but face adolescent resistance (Nathanson, 2001) or lack the necessary media literacy skills to reinforce this (Daneels, 2017).

While **TikTok**'s power to reduce teenagers' consumption of misinformation is high, their interest to do so is low. Its profit-driven model thrives on engagement and confirmation bias, giving them little incentive to support content moderating interventions (Foster & Ellis, 2024). However, the interest in altering the app's interface might be on the rise, as several countries have threatened to ban TikTok in recent years. In 2020, India implemented a full ban, citing national security concerns (Murray, 2023). Meanwhile, the European Union and the United Kingdom have launched investigations into TikTok's data handling and misinformation practices. Under growing pressure, TikTok has taken steps to be more responsible, partnering with fact-checking organizations and removing over 147 million videos in 2024 alone (TikTok, 2024). Additionally, TikTok **influencers** wield disproportionate power to influence teenagers' habits through their perceived relatability and trend-setting capabilities (Lajnef, 2023). However, lack of financial incentives reduces their motivation to promote media literacy.

Lastly, **friends** have relatively low interest in increasing teenagers' media literacy and little power to do so. Friend groups foster conformity rather than critical evaluation despite stating preferences for factual accuracy (Krammer et al., 2023).

4. Our Approach

This paper takes a realist approach, targeting the classroom environment. Since it is deemed unrealistic to expect teachers to implement media literacy education independently, our intervention aims to decrease this barrier to change. We opted against suggesting changes to TikTok's interface for several reasons. Firstly, TikTok's profit maximisation motives make platform-based interventions largely unfeasible. Whilst Gupta et al. (2022) highlights the potential of punitive measures like content regulation, these interventions conflict with TikTok's business model, making them unsustainable. Furthermore, social media platforms that attempt to implement such interventions face aggressive backlash. For example, in Thailand, Facebook encountered legal action over content moderation, leading to costly financial repercussions (BBC, 2020). Secondly, the risk of positioning a platform as an arbiter of truth is significant. How can TikTok determine which videos are "objective" enough to remain? In the end, is not everything on social media subjective? This subjectivity is precisely TikTok's appeal amongst teenagers.

Given this, there is an overwhelming need for digital information awareness amongst teenagers. Research indicates that integrating media literacy into school curricula can foster critical thinking, helping teenagers differentiate between reliable sources and manipulative narratives (Kleemans & Eggink, 2016; Adjin-Tettey, 2022). Yet, such interventions remain largely disconnected from curriculums in schools around the U.S. While 84% of individuals in the U.S. want media literacy interventions, only 21 federal states have enforced legislative action to improve students' media literacy skills (Media Literacy Now, 2025) .

5. Teenage News Consumption: Status Quo

The activity grid in Appendix B explores the different ways in which teenagers are exposed to news, whether it is on TikTok, in school lessons, chatting with friends or watching news with their parents. This paper aims to strengthen teenagers' resilience to misinformation in all these social spheres. However, this section will apply Activity Theory to TikTok specifically.

5.1 Definition of Activity Theory

Activity Theory is a psychological framework that originated in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, primarily associated with scholars such as Sergei Rubinstein and Alexei Leontyev (Leontyev & Cole, 2009; Engeström, 1987). It examines human actions within their social and cultural contexts, emphasising that individuals do not act in isolation but are shaped by the broader structures in which they operate (Lahlou, 2017).

A core premise of Activity Theory is that human behaviour can be broken down into goal-oriented activities, where individuals engage with external influences while pursuing specific objectives. These interactions involve a subject (the individual), an object (the goal), and mediating tools (such as language, technology, or institutional norms) that shape the outcome. The theory integrates internal cognition and external structures, highlighting how cultural and historical factors mediate behaviour and learning.

5.2 Scrolling on TikTok

Figure 2 illustrates the status quo activity system of a teenager scrolling TikTok for infotainment, prior to any media literacy intervention. This highlights an uncritical approach to digital news engagement.

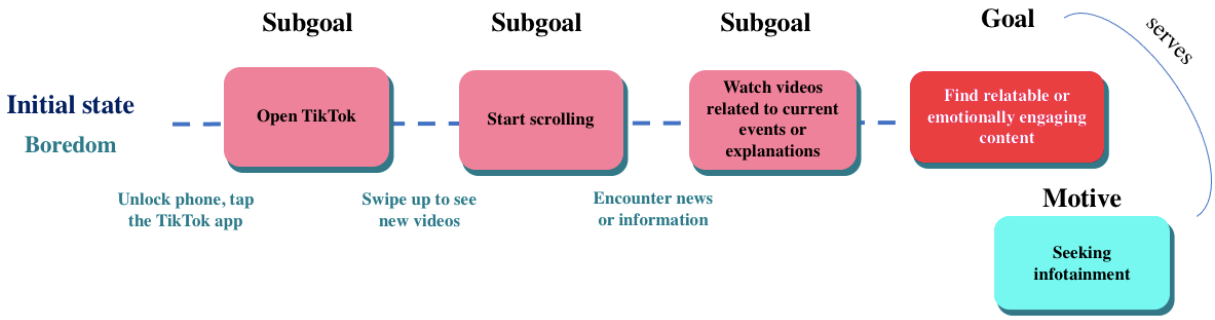

Figure 2: Activity Analysis Pre-intervention

Students encounter news passively through TikTok's algorithm driven "For You" page. Their initial state is often boredom, turning to social media to chase quick hits of dopamine through infotainment (Carvalho, 2020). In this stage, TikTok serves as the dominant mediating tool. However, it fails to limit the spread of misinformation. The outcome is uncritical news consumption, where students trust content based on popularity rather than credibility. This highlights the need for interventions that equip students with cognitive skills to critically assess the information they encounter.

6. Solution Proposal

6.1 Project-based learning

To foster critical news consumption, this paper proposes a media literacy Project Week for American 9th graders[3]. Our goal is to make it easier for teachers to offer media literacy education by providing them with a structured five-day curriculum (see Appendix C). To identify any pain points and gain a better understanding of the U.S. school system, American teachers have been consulted throughout the working process.

The curriculum is designed as an interdisciplinary, project-based learning (PBL) initiative. Unlike traditional passive learning, PBL encourages students to actively investigate real-world problems, requiring them to analyse sources, discern bias, and combine information to form evidence-based conclusions (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). This fosters critical thinking and peer collaboration which is relevant in addressing digital misinformation (Condliffe et al., 2017). Additionally, PBL increases student engagement and motivation, particularly when applied to contemporary issues such as digital media literacy, ensuring that students detect a clear

[3] *Freshmen in High School, typically 14 to 15 years old. We chose this grade to ensure that all students, no matter which middle school they went to, enter High School with the same media literacy skills.*

connection between their studies and their everyday experiences (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). By critically evaluating the media they consume daily, students are more likely to retain information and apply their learning beyond the classroom (Vosoughi et. al, 2018).

For ease of implementation, Project Week does not disrupt the weekly lesson plan. Instead, it integrates media literacy into mathematics, reading and writing. These core modules were chosen as they have a great historical importance within the U.S. educational framework, emphasised by federal initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Ladd, 2017). By offering a smooth way to integrate media literacy education, our hope is that Project Week becomes a fixed part of the 9th grade curriculum.

6.2 Project Week Activities using Installation Theory

The Project Week encompasses all three layers of Lahlou's (2017) Installation Theory:

- Material environment (physical space): The physical and digital infrastructures that afford certain actions. During Project Week, the classroom layout serves as a physical affordance as it guides the students to pay attention to the teacher.
- Embodied competencies (mental space): The skills, knowledge, and cognitive capacities individuals develop. The Project Week curriculum is designed to strengthen teenagers' embodied media literacy competencies through hands-on activities.
- Social regulation (social space): The norms, rules, and cultural expectations that guide behaviour. Working in teams and learning alongside classmates during Project Week will strengthen the social layer as it establishes a norm to be critical online.

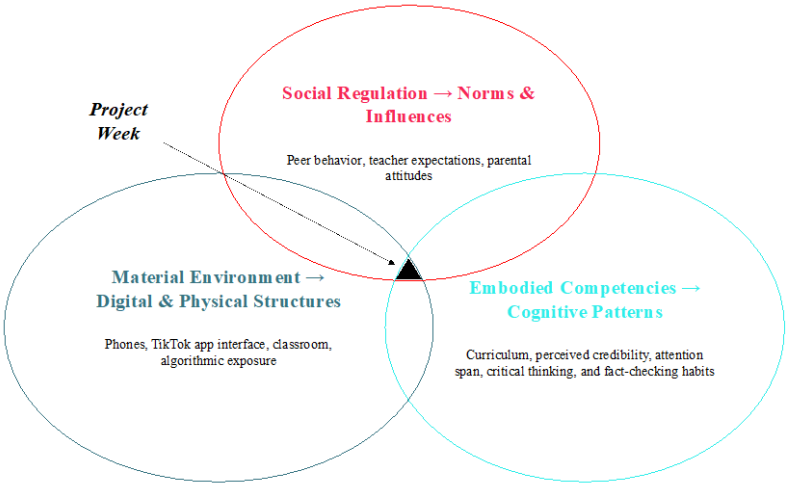

Figure 3: Installation Theory

To make sure Project Week is a well-structured learning process, inspiration is drawn from the Empowerment Spiral that suggests breaking complex topics into four steps: awareness, analysis, reflection and action (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). This section will showcase how the Empowerment Spiral and Installation Theory is used to develop the activities in the Project Week outline (see Appendix C).

Logging Misinformation

The first day of Project Week is all about creating *awareness* of online misinformation. This can be done by showing the students a provocative documentary like "The Social Dilemma", followed by group discussion and the introduction of the week's homework (see Appendix C.1). Throughout the week, students will be expected to keep a journal to track every time they come across news-related content on TikTok (see Appendix C.4*)*. The idea is to give students an "ah-ha" moment as they become aware of their news consumption habits (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). This will unlock "a spiral of critical inquiry and exploration that are the foundation of media literacy pedagogy" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 198). The intervention integrates all three layers of Installation Theory. The journal itself might afford certain actions - it becomes a physical reminder to be aware of misinformation online. Journaling might also improve the students' critical thinking skills and make it a norm to consciously evaluate information. Even if some students fail to fill out their journal, being given the task might imbed a subconscious awareness to look out for misinformation on TikTok.

Competition

The second day of Project Week starts with a competition, further amplifying the students' awareness of their own news consumption (see Appendix C.1). Each student draws a topic from a bowl and is given 15 minutes to find as much information on the subject as possible. They are permitted to use their phone or tablet, but no AI tools. The activity is illustrated below (see Figure 4).

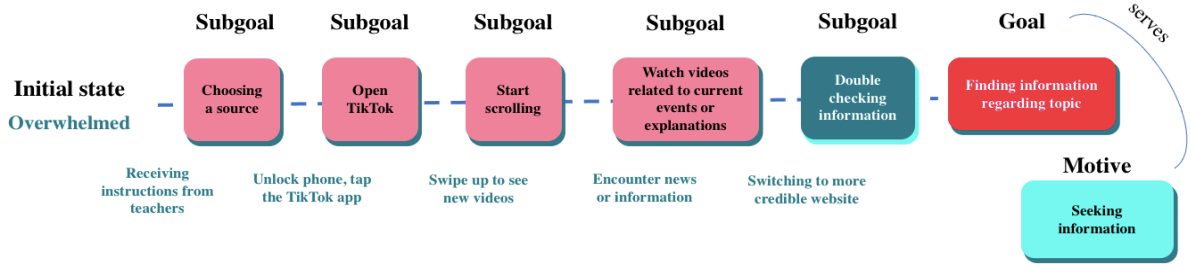

Figure 4: Activity Analysis During the Intervention

Students are initially overwhelmed by the competition's time pressure. When choosing a source, some might turn to TikTok out of habit. However, at the half-way point of the activity, teachers interrupt the students, telling them that TikTok is not a reliable source of information. This introduces a moment of tension between habitual digital behaviour and academic expectations, causing the students to pause and reflect, before shifting their attention towards more credible sources. By intervening at the exact moment students engaged with social media, the classroom becomes a space for recalibration. Although the goal of the activity remains the same, the teacher's intervention alters the tools and strategies students use to pursue their goal. Some might continue using TikTok, while others become more sceptical, re-evaluating their choice of sources considering the classroom standards.

Comparative Exercise

After the competition, the Project Week curriculum suggests an *analytical* exercise to explore why TikTok is not considered a reliable source (see Appendix C.1). According to Thoman & Jolls (2005), it only takes "two or three experiences with close analysis to give us the insight to "see" through other media messages as we encounter them" (p. 202). The *Centre of Media Literacy* highlight "Five Key Questions" for this purpose:

- Who created this message?
- What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently from me?
- What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
- Why is this message being sent?

The students will be asked to compare a TikTok video posted by a legitimate news organisation and an individual platform-user. Next, the students reflect on the questions above, maybe in pairs, before debriefing as a class. Comparing sources to check credibility, also called lateral reading, significantly improves students' ability to evaluate online information (Breakstone et, al., 2021). They can also be encouraged to go beyond TikTok and cross-check informational videos with reliable news sites.

The following day, the students will do a similar analysis for the mathematics module (see Appendix C.1). The students can be given printouts of real-world news stories that employ statistical manipulation, such as misleading crime statistics in politically charged narratives or selective polling data that exaggerates trends. This can be complemented by a legitimate news source addressing the same issue without statistical manipulation. The exercise follows a so-called inoculation approach, helping individuals to resist misinformation by exposing them to false information along with corrections (Haywood & Sembiante, 2023). Studies show a positive correlation between such interventions and increased awareness of media influence, with strong effects on knowledge acquisition (Eyal & Te'eni-Harari, 2013).

Group Discussion

Day four addresses the *reflection* stage of the learning process. Creating an atmosphere where teachers and students are partners in learning is crucial for media literacy (Gill & Stewart, 2024). Therefore, the reflection element is structured as a group discussion, rather than a top-down lecture. To get a wider perspective on misinformation, journalists and NGO-representatives are invited to class (see Section 6.3). Having outside sources come in and discuss the consequences of TikTok news consumption might make a bigger impact on the teenagers' behaviour than their teachers would. Moreover, it is a good foundation for group discussion. The students can be divided into groups of two to four people, responsible for making a poster on one of the following topics:

- How does misinformation on social media impact democracy/body image/consumption/health?
- What can we do to protect ourselves from being manipulated online?
- If TikTok is not reliable: Where should we look for trustworthy information?

In addition to fostering critical reflection among peers, this exercise creates powerful affordances. The posters can be hung in the classroom to remind the students to stay critical in their consumption of news long after the Project Week has ended.

Friday Workshop

The last day of Project Week addresses the fourth step of the Empowerment Spiral: *action* (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). Understanding how media is constructed is crucial to enable the students to navigate the digital sphere. One of the best ways to increase their understanding of

good media is to create it themselves. To conclude Project Week, the students can be asked to choose a current event and present it in TikTok video format. When choosing a topic, the students can be encouraged to transform one of the concerning TikTok videos they noted in their misinformation journal during the week into an unbiased and fact-based video. This interactive approach ensures that students are not mere passive recipients of theoretical knowledge but active engagers in questioning and deconstructing the information they encounter online. To conclude Project Week, the class can watch these self-made videos, reflecting on what they have learnt about misinformation. Through participation in debates, collaborative research, and presentations, a culture of critical inquiry and source verification is constructed (Lahlou et al., 2022).

6.3 Stakeholder involvement

Parents Night

In reference to the stakeholder analysis, parents possess high interest but low power to promote critical thinking. Thus, to kick off Project Week, we introduce a *Parents Night* event, acknowledging them as influential actors in their children's social development and empowering them to enhance their children's critical thinking. The night begins with a presentation given by teachers, where parents are debriefed on the Project Week activities. The presentation can start with a brief outline of Project Week's rationale, highlighting teenagers' prolific use of TikTok and the importance of building competencies so they handle misinformation on this platform critically (Ruak, 2023). Parents are then guided through the Project Week activities for each day, where we emphasize that Project Week will not disrupt the children's regular school schedule – which is essential in securing parental approval (Haywood & Sembiante, 2023).

Following this, parents will receive a take-home leaflet (see Appendix C.2.1), which features strategies from NGOs (e.g., Media Literacy Now) to help tackle digital misinformation at home. This leaflet functions as a physical affordance which guides parents' actions, introducing them to a simple four-question heuristic they can communicate to their children. Through regular application of these questions at home, parents can teach their children to internalize informed scepticism and critical thinking, vital tools needed to succeed in the digital world (NAMLE, n.d.):

- Who is the Author?
- What is the evidence?
- When was this published?
- Where else is this reported?

Furthermore, when parents participate in media literacy tasks similar to those of their children, they gain the knowledge and confidence to reinforce these skills at home. By leveraging the authority of parents as key stakeholders, Parents Night strengthens home-based media literacy and ensures that critical media engagement becomes a habitual, normative skill beyond the classroom (Lahlou, 2017).

Teacher Training

Teachers must be adequately trained before Project Week begins (Scull & Kupersmidt, 2013). The proposed training program (see Appendix D) will consist of an interactive workshop, focusing on two core pillars: educating teachers on how to detect potential misinformation on TikTok and how to subsequently integrate these skills into the Project Week curriculum. Given the timetable constraints and overwhelming workload of teachers, we must be pragmatic - teacher training is an optional component for those who have the time. Further, it is crucial that training remains flexible. Therefore, preparation of training materials can be outsourced to media literacy NGO's (e.g., National Literacy Trust), and training modules can be delivered virtually to ensure this is easier for teachers to integrate into their schedules.

This training can start with a "Detecting Falsehoods" module, where teachers will learn how to identify signs of misleading TikTok content, such as AI-generated deep-fakes (*OECD*, n.d.). Teachers will complete a real-world misinformation case study, where they will collaborate to assess the accuracy of a viral TikTok video, using source cross-referencing (i.e., comparing details of video to reputable news sources) and intuitive question-based heuristics (e.g., What evidence is provided in the video?) to create a physical source evaluation report. This evaluation report serves as a material artefact that reinforces a step-by-step approach to TikTok source verification, reducing the cognitive load when integrating similar exercises into the classroom during Project Week (Lahlou, 2017).

The training session transition to a Curriculum Integration module. This stage is critical as most teachers acknowledge the importance of digital media literacy education but often struggle with practical strategies on how to embed this into the existing curriculum (Zhang et al., 2023). To bridge this gap, the module will cover reading, writing, and math-oriented teaching strategies presented in the Project Week outline (see Appendix C.1). For example, in preparation for day two, teachers will learn how to guide students through lateral reading exercises and identification of word choice differences, to deliver the "Bias Scavenger Hunt" activity (comparing two articles covering the same event). The training program is oriented towards building embodied media literacy competencies amongst teachers. Through participating in the same digital verification and critical thinking skills that their students will later apply during Project Week, teachers can introduce these concepts with confidence and fluency (Lahlou, 2017)

Guest speakers

Guest speakers include volunteering journalists and media literacy experts from NGOs. Our stakeholder analysis revealed that journalists and NGOs have high interest but low power in fostering critical thinking. By leveraging them in a school setting, we increase their influence through facilitating face-to-face interaction with the students. Furthermore, both journalists and NGOs have motivations to attend these events. Media literacy organizations like Lie Detectors recognize the importance of educating teenagers on responsible media consumption and thus are willing to offer their time (Voices Festival, n.d.). Journalist volunteers have been documented making school visits to transfer knowledge and attract new readers (Checkology, n.d.).

Building on programs like *Newsroom to Classroom*, media literacy organisation representatives (e.g., Media Literacy Now) will engage the students in live demonstrations of fact-checking techniques and case reports of real-world misinformation strategies (News Literacy Project, n.d.). Journalists will explain the media literacy standards of quality journalism and detail their personal approach to writing articles. Furthermore, this speaker-student engagement is critical to establishing norms of responsible media consumption – students are more likely to internalize critical thinking skills learnt during Project Week when they see them practised by professionals (Lahlou, 2017).

6.4 Lasting Change

In summary, the interplay between the layers outlined in Installation Theory - material structures (e.g., classrooms and digital tools), embodied competencies (e.g., fact-checking skills), and social regulation (e.g., teacher expectations and peer norms) - create a foundation for normative behavioural change. By internalising critical engagement with infotainment, students are more likely to carry them beyond the classroom and apply them to their everyday digital routines (Lahlou, 2017).

Students' behavioural shift after the Project Week intervention can be illustrated in Figure 5. While boredom remained a driving force behind their TikTok usage, their motive has evolved - they now sought infotainment with a degree of scepticism.

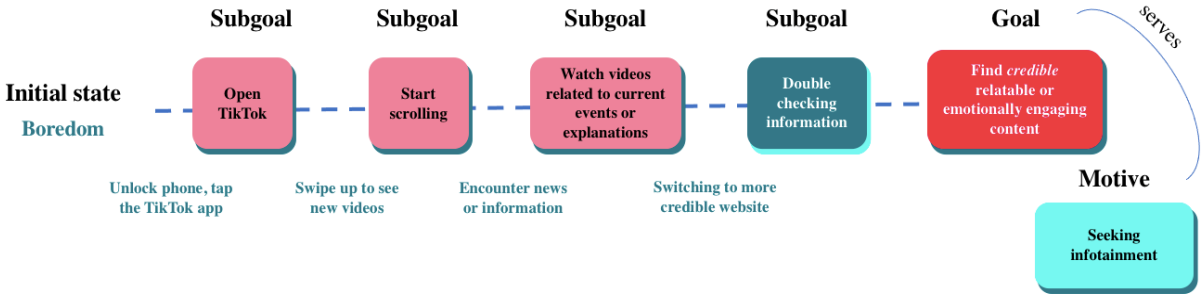

Figure 5: Activity Analysis Post-intervention

Their engagement with TikTok still follows the familiar cycle of opening the app, scrolling, and encountering news, but now they actively question source credibility. When they encounter news on TikTok, they are more likely to cross-check sources, verify claims, and recognise emotional or misleading tactics. Additionally, some students who previously relied solely on TikTok now supplement their news consumption with fact-checked websites and traditional news outlets. Again, their core motive of seeking engaging content remains unchanged, but now they have a more effective and responsible way to fulfil it. The intervention does not attempt to stop students from consuming news on TikTok. It rather empowers them to engage with it more critically, ensuring they can still enjoy the platform while being less susceptible to misinformation. Throughout Project Week, students' goal has shifted from mere consumption to critical engagement, and the outcome reflects a more analytical approach to digital media. While students continue using TikTok for infotainment, they have developed the ability to discern credible information, making them less vulnerable to misinformation.

7. Discussion and Limitations

As extremism and economic instability dominate today's political agenda, governments must facilitate digital literacy. In Germany, for example, TikTok has become a key platform for promoting the far-right party among the youth (Pitel, 2025). The platform dominates influence at precisely the stage when opinion-forming behaviour is most active and political awareness deepens. This contributed to *Alternative für Deutschland's* growing popularity among first-time voters despite the country's historical reckoning with fascism.

Liberal democracies need institutions (Hay, 2006). Without them, governance becomes susceptible to concentration of power and corruption. Trump's recent executive order to dismantle the *Department of Education* highlights his approach to reducing education bureaucracy (Lowell & Leingang, 2025). Such executive orders risk patrimonialism, where rule-based governance erodes in favor of personal power and partisan loyalty (Hanson, 2022). As the federal educational system becomes increasingly fragmented, it can no longer effectively support teachers, making teacher empowerment and professional autonomy critical. As responsibility shifts to the states, disparities in equitable education continue to grow. Media literacy becomes a counterbalance. Unlike top-down regulatory measures, which often face resistance from tech companies or raise ethical concerns around censorship, the Project Week intervention empowers students to evaluate information independently. It's the habits that build resilience to misinformation. Therefore, the focus lies on the individual and strengthens bottom-up capacity. Yet, once media literacy becomes a shared classroom experience, it can spill over into peer interactions. This enables the low-power, low-interest stakeholder group "friends" to initiate change within their social systems, strengthening their position on the matrix (Figure 1).

The Project Week is versatile as it can be applied to platforms beyond TikTok - underlying mechanisms of manipulation are comparable across social media (Ruiz, 2023). Despite cultural differences, algorithm-driven content is universal. For this reason, other platforms such as Facebook or Instagram were not included in the analysis. Crucially, the Project Week intervention does not attempt to eliminate social media use but aims to address media literacy needs that exist across different national contexts.

However, there are limitations to our intervention. First, defining misinformation can be subjective. Second, scalability may be limited in under-resourced schools that lack sufficient

staff or access to digital tools. Instructional inequities exist between private and public institutions and across state curricula. Moreover, the intervention assumes classroom stability, which may not hold in contexts affected by institutional distrust. Thirdly, a potential negative spillover effect is that the digital literacy training may increase scepticism toward truthful news (Moore & Hancock, 2022). According to Truth-Default Theory, the assumption of truth actually aids people in recognizing accurate information (Zimmerman, 2022). Hence, heightened scepticism from misinformation awareness may disrupt this beneficial bias, potentially fostering generalized news distrust.

Lastly, the success of Project Week hinges on the strength of its social regulation layer. If norms are not consistently reinforced beyond the five-day program, students may struggle to internalize these values. Similarly, the development of embodied competencies requires repeated practice and real-world application. Without opportunities to apply their skills beyond structured activities, the depth of learning can remain superficial. As a result, the intervention's long-term impact on student behaviour can be limited. Hence, future interventions might include dedicated sections for the target group in news applications or gamified news content to strengthen additional layers.

Ultimately, resistance begins when opinions first take shape. Despite the limitations, we hope this framework sparks further dialogue, offers inspiration, and serves as a blueprint for addressing contemporary democratic vulnerabilities in youth media consumption. Project Week is not a quick fix, but a foundation that reflects Maslow's highest human need: self-actualisation(Maslow, 1943). With contemporary media oversupply, students can autonomously regulate their own media demand. Our goal is to equip students with the tools to approach the world with curiosity and critical insight: **Rerum cognoscere causas** - to know the causes of things.

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Appendices

A. Stakeholder Analysis: Goals and motives concerning media literacy

Stakeholder	Goals	Motives	Enablers of change	Barriers to change
Teenagers	Recognize and avoid echo chambers to not become a victim to them. Engage with new and diverse perspectives. Recognize the need of self-expression.	Avoiding misinformation that could harm reputation or decisions. Maintain peer acceptance.	Digital natives with adaptable habits. Responsive to peer influence. Open to engaging formats for learning. Natural curiosity when engaged properly.	Algorithm-reinforced confirmation bias. Low incentive to seek diverse viewpoints. Limited experience evaluating information quality. Time investment required for critical thinking.
Teachers	Foster critical thinking and improve media literacy among students: promote credible news sources. Ensure students develop skills to assess and challenge misinformation.	Provide valuable education. Make a difference. Be perceived as a knowledgeable teacher.	**Schools** have a significant impact on teenager's media literacy. Neutral positioning in information landscape. Access to diverse resources. Established trust as information authorities. Policy-making authority. Budget allocation power. Curriculum approval rights. Community and parent relationships.	Reluctance to increase teachers' workloads. Curriculum not allowing teachers to spend enough time teaching appropriate news consumption. Teenagers might not take their education seriously.
Librarians	Curate quality information resources. Teach information evaluation skills.	Uphold information equity. Preserve intellectual freedom. Combat information poverty.		Perception as outdated institutions. Limited authority in curriculum decisions. Limited TikTok presence/influence.
Local School Board	Support teacher development.	Respond to community concerns. Meet educational standards.		Competing educational priorities. Political pressures from diverse stakeholders. Budget limitations. Lack of consensus on appropriate approach.

State's department of education	Set broad learning standards.	Ensure workforce readiness. Standardize educational quality. Address emerging social concerns. Respond to federal guidelines.	Regulatory authority. Funding leverage. Professional development infrastructure. Assessment framework implementation.	Bureaucratic implementation delays. Competing educational mandates. Political influence on content standards. Resource allocation limitations.
Federal level	Establish baseline in media literacy standards. Fund research and program development.	Address national security concerns. Prevent social division. Respond to constituent concerns.	Legislative and regulatory authority. Research funding capabilities. Convening power across stakeholders.	Tech industry lobbying. Federalism limitations on education policy.
TikTok	Optimize for maximum screen time. Increase advertising inventory. Expand demographic reach. Minimize regulatory friction.	Quarterly revenue growth demands. Market valuation tied to engagement metrics. User growth statistics drive investor confidence. Competitive pressure from rival platforms.	User behavior data at unprecedented scale. Advanced algorithmic testing capabilities. Ability to introduce new features widely. Strong influence on creator economy.	Algorithm optimized for engagement fundamentally opposes viewpoint diversity. Core business model depends on attention capture, not information quality. Change risks market share loss to competitors maintaining addictive features. TikTok's algorithm prioritizes entertainment and viral trends over credibility, making it harder to redirect students to factual news sources.
TikTok's legal team	Minimum viable compliance with regulations. Defend current business practices. Create perception of responsible governance.	Avoid misinformation lawsuits. Prevent revenue-impacting regulations. Maintain operational freedom. Avoid costly litigation. Protect executive liability.	Regulatory expertise. Access to government officials. Ability to implement technical safeguards.	Genuine transparency threatens the competitive advantage. Meaningful content moderation increases costs. Corporate structure designed to minimize liability, not maximize responsibility.

Parents	Encourage credible news consumption.	Ensure well-informed children.	A teenager's social circle has a significant impact on their values (especially friends during these formative years). Their eager to fit in might motivate them to change their news consumption behaviors.	Parents may not be media-literate themselves. Teenagers are known for rebelling against their parents, they may reject parental guidance.
Friends	Define group identity through shared content. Maintain social connection through platform engagement. Signal values through content sharing. Develop cultural capital through trend awareness.	Peer acceptance. Status within social group. Fear of missing out. Social coordination efficiency. Shared experience creation.		Group polarization effect strengthens extreme viewpoints. Social penalties for challenging group consensus.
U.S. Government	Ensure public access to credible information while maintaining free speech and protecting democratic integrity.	Prevent foreign influence and misinformation from undermining trust in institutions. Maintain national security and public safety.	Government has the power to ban regulation on TikTok. Federal government can influence the education system.	TikTok might resist government intervention. Balancing free speech with misinformation control is complex. Misinformation can spread faster than regulations can keep up. Heavy reliance on self-regulation by platforms.
Traditional, Reliable News Outlets (e.g. NYT, BBC)	Maintain credibility while adapting to digital-first consumption habits.	Preserve journalistic standards. Professional reputation protection. Institutional survival concerns. Declining revenue model defence.	Reliable news outlets have an existing reputation of providing trustworthy news, and TikTok offers an increased reach to the lower aged segments. Established credibility and trust infrastructure. Brand recognition across generations.	Produce content that resonates with teenagers without compromising journalistic integrity. Difficult to monetize content on TikTok. Competing with short-form, low-effort viral content is challenging. Teenagers may perceive traditional news as outdated or biased. Difficulty competing with TikTok's entertainment-driven nature for teenagers' attention.

			Institutional knowledge and processes.	
Influencers	Maximize their “reach” and user engagement. Build personal brand through TikTok.	Financial gain through sponsorships. Social status and recognition. Creative expression and autonomy. Audience connection and validation.	Influencers have a big impact on teenagers’ values and behavior. Direct communication with youth audiences. Perceived authenticity and relatability. Format expertise for engaging content. Rapid response to trending topics.	Probably need financial incentive to change their content. Probably need financial incentive to change their content. Content quality sacrificed for engagement metrics. Limited expertise in complex topics they discuss.

B. Activity Grid: Consumption of news in a day from a teenagers' point of view

Task	Teen's Goals	Teen's Motives	How News is Consumed	Installation: Affordance	Installation: Social	Installation: Embodiment	Pain Points
Scrolling on TikTok	Check personal algorithm ("For You" page). Share videos with friends.	Entertainment, unwinding, procrastination. Feel a sense of community. Be updated on the latest social media trends. Self-expression.	Incidental exposure: News appear on the "For You" page through viral videos, influencers, or trending sounds.	Algorithm-driven content, short-form videos, interactive engagement (likes, shares, duets).	News spread via influencers, trends, and peer validation, shaping beliefs based on popularity.	Engaging, emotionally charged, short attention span, prone to reacting quickly.	High risk of misinformation, echo chambers, oversimplification of complex issues.
Attending a class at school	Learning and paying attention. Interacting with friends and teacher.	Get an education, get good grades. Maintain social relationships.	Direct exposure: News may be discussed by teachers or classmates, linked to curriculum.	Textbooks, lesson plans, teacher-led discussions, digital resources (e.g., slides, articles).	Academic norms encourage critical thinking and media literacy, but engagement depends on the teacher's methods.	More analytical but less emotionally engaging compared to social media.	Curriculum on media literacy can be outdated, less interactive, and disconnected from teenagers' real-time news habits.
Chatting with friends	Share thoughts. Show awareness of social / cultural happenings.	Bonding, social validation, fitting into the group. Appear knowledgeable.	Social transmission: Friends share news via direct messaging on social media, group chats, and in-person discussions.	Messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat), social media, memes.	News is spread through word-of-mouth, humour, and social proof.	Relatable, informal discussions, but subject to group bias and selective exposure.	Risk of misinformation, lack of depth, reinforcement of personal biases.

Watching the news on TV	Watch news.	Being able to discuss news with others. Fear of missing out (FOMO). Partake in family habit. Entertainment. Curiosity.	Passive consumption: Family may have the TV on in the background, teenagers may tune in briefly.	Traditional broadcast format, official news anchors, in-depth analysis	Authority-driven; seen as outdated by teenagers but still a trusted source for older generations	Less engaging, passive, and requires effort to focus compared to digital media.	Feels outdated, less interactive, less convenient than scrolling social media.
Having dinner with family	Still hunger while sharing thoughts.	Hunger. Bonding.	Second-hand exposure - Parents or older family members discuss news, sometimes from traditional media.	Face-to-face conversations, personal anecdotes, family-shared sources (TV, NYT newspapers, social media)	Generational knowledge-sharing, family norms shape trust in different news sources	Emotional discussions, family values influencing news interpretation.	Generational bias, conflicting perspectives, reliance on parents' sources which may be outdated.

C. Project Week Brief for Teachers

C.1 Outline

Project Week Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Learning through Media Literacy & Critical Thinking

Theme: "Decoding the Digital Age: Truth, Bias, and Misinformation"

This Project Week curriculum provides a flexible, interdisciplinary framework to embed media literacy and critical thinking into core subjects—Math, Reading, and Writing—for 9th grade students. Designed with project-based learning (PBL) at its core, the week invites students to critically engage with contemporary issues such as misinformation, media bias, and algorithmic influence at a crucial stage in their cognitive and social development, when they begin to form their own worldviews.

Although the curriculum is structured as a one-week program, it is designed with flexibility in mind. Teachers may choose to stretch the content across two weeks to allow for deeper engagement or selectively implement individual lessons over five consecutive class periods. It can be adapted to fit within an existing school schedule, making it suitable for both short-term implementation and long-term curricular integration.

Ultimately, this guide is intended to support educators in fostering critical media consumption habits, whether they follow the full curriculum or draw on specific components to suit their classroom needs. To this purpose, the curriculum includes a background guide for teachers *(see Appendix C.2)* to differentiate and support student learning.

Day 1: Introduction & Problem Framing

Essential Question:
"How does media shape our perception of truth?"

Learning objectives:

- Understand how misinformation spreads on social media, focusing on the role of engagement-driven algorithms, selective exposure, and fact-checking interventions.
- Be aware of the week's journaling assignment

Activity:

- **Project Kick-off** – Discuss real-world examples of media bias, echo chambers, and misinformation (e.g., viral TikTok news vs. traditional reporting) during assembly, watching a shocking documentary recommended by *Common Sense* and introducing the Media Literacy Journal (see *Appendix C.3.2*) (agenda example available in *Appendix C.3*)
- **Media Literacy at Home -** Parents are invited to Parents Night, where they receive a leaflet (*see Appendix C.3*) to help tackle digital misinformation at home

Stakeholder Involvement:
- Teachers provided with differentiated background materials.

Day 2: Reading – Comparative Exercise

Essential Question:
"How can we spot misinformation online?"

Learning objectives:
- Learn how to reframe biased reporting into neutral, fact-based writing.
- Develop persuasive communication skills through debates.

Activity:
- **Competition (15 min)**
  - Students will be given 15 minutes to find as much information as possible on one of the questions below. They are allowed to use any source available (including phones and tablets) except for AI. Half-way through the activity, teachers interrupt the students to remind them that TikTok is not a reliable source. This prompts students to use other sources. The questions are open-ended to give teachers flexibility, and allow students to brows the internet freely.
  - Example of topics and questions:

Climate Change	Is climate change real? What causes climate change?
Vaccine Safety	What are the main arguments for getting vaccinated? What are the main arguments against it?
Deep fakes	What are "deep fakes"? How are they used?
Mental Health	How can you deal with anxiety? How to improve body image?
Conspiracy Theories	Was the moon landing made up? Is the U.S government keeping aliens in area 51.

- **Comparative exercise: Bias scavenger hunt (30 min)**
  - Students compare two TikTok videos on the same topic from different sources (e.g., New York Times vs Dylan Page).
  - Identify differences in word choice, framing, and perspective.
  - Use the Media Bias Chart by AllSides or Ad Fontes Media to categorise sources.
  - Use these questions to help guide students to reflect in their journal entry

Step	Question
1. Who	Who created this message?
2. What	What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How	How might different people understand this message differently from me?
4. What	What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why	Why is this message being sent?

- **(*Optional additional activity*) Debate: Misinformation's Impact on Democracy**
  - Students take on different roles (news outlets, politicians, social media companies).
  - Engage in a critical discussion on misinformation's impact on democracy, culminating in a debate where they assume roles such as journalists, politicians, and social media executives to examine its ethical implications.
- **(*Optional additional activity*) Conspiracy Theories vs. Scientific Theories**
  - Analyse real-world examples of conspiracy theories and how they spread, contrasting them with scientific consensus.

Stakeholder Involvement:
- Debate judged by teachers & journalists.
- Winning arguments published in the school newsletter.

Day 3: Math – Data Literacy & Statistics

Essential Question:
"How can statistics be used to manipulate the truth?"

Learning objectives:
- Use mathematical skills to analyse and detect bias in news reporting through statistics and data interpretation.
- Analyse how data is used to mislead audiences.
- Discuss statistical bias, misleading graphs, and fake polls.

Activity:
- **Comparative exercise: Statistical Bias & Misinformation**
  - Compare two headlines using statistics from different sources (e.g., crime rates in different political news outlets).
- **Possible Project for the day**

Steps	Questions
1. Identify Data Usage	Find an article using statistics. How are numbers presented?
2. Spot Bias	Are statistics used to mislead? How?
3. Create a Graph	Represent this data in a new way to emphasize a different perspective.

Stakeholder Involvement:
- Math teacher guides students in graphing media bias using real-world data.
- Students share their findings via infographics.

Day 4: Writing – Reflection

Essential Question:
"How do we identify and evaluate reliable sources?"

Learning objectives:
- Teach students to critically analyse articles and identify biases in news sources.
- Identify bias, logical fallacies, and credibility in media sources.
- Understand how echo chambers reinforce misinformation.

Activity:
- **Guest Speaker** – Journalist, fact-checker, or NGOs such as Media Literacy Now discussing the role of media literacy.
- **Poster Making** – Students are divided in groups of two-four people, responsible for making a poster on one of the following topics:

    1. How does misinformation on social media impact democracy/body image/consumption/health?
    2. What can we do to protect ourselves from being manipulated online?
    3. If TikTok is not reliable: Where should we look for trustworthy information?
        - Tip: Teachers could encourage students to follow newspapers on social media to get unbiased news in their feed.

***(Optional additional activity*) Fact-Checking Challenge:**
- Students' fact-check viral social media news clips using Snopes, PolitiFact, and AllSides.

Stakeholder Involvement:
- Journalists or NGO-representatives lead a media credibility workshop.

Day 5: Workshop – Crafting Unbiased Reports

Essential Question:
"How do we become responsible digital citizens?"

Learning objectives:
- Create a video in TikTok format, presenting news in a fact-based manner.
- Reflect on lessons learned and how to apply media literacy daily.

Activity:
- **TikTok Project**
    - Students choose a topic from their journal and make it into an unbiased TikTok video which they can later share with their parents and discuss how the Project Week has shaped their perspective on the information they find on social media, particularly TikTok.
- **Reflection on the week**

Step	Question

1. Key Takeaways	What surprised you the most? How has your understanding of media bias changed?
2. Your Media Habits	How will you apply media literacy in daily life?
3. Challenges & Solutions	What was the hardest part of this project?
4. Final Thoughts	Why does media literacy matter?

- ***(Optional additional activity*) Community Engagement:**
  - Student-led news literacy workshop where they showcase the posters and videos created during the week, passing on learnings to students of younger grade.
  - Best projects are shared via the school's website, local newspapers, or social media.

Stakeholder Involvement:

- Local newspapers highlight top projects.

C.2 Example: Project Kick-Off Agenda

The first day of *Project Week* sets the stage for a deep dive into media literacy by introducing students to the real-world implications of misinformation. Through a combination of assemblies, classroom inquiry, and stakeholder engagement, Day 1 builds awareness of how media shapes perception and empowers students to begin their own investigations into biased and misleading content. By integrating both in-school and at-home components—including an evening Parents Night—the kick-off day establishes the foundations for a week of critical thinking, collaboration, and civic reflection.

Importantly, this guide is flexible and intended as a template that teachers can adapt to fit their specific classroom schedules, student needs, or school resources. Whether used in full or in part, the goal is to create an engaging, thoughtful start that empowers students to critically explore the media landscape.

1. Morning Assembly (30 min)

- **Welcome & Week Overview**
  - Introduce *Project Week* and the theme: *"Decoding the Digital Age: Truth, Bias, and Misinformation."*
  - Explain objectives, the schedule, interdisciplinary approach (Math, Reading, Writing), and final showcase.
  - Connect misinformation to real-world risks (e.g., health, elections, AI deepfakes).
- **Q&A with Students**

2. Media Literacy Documentary and Discussion (2,5 hours)

- Watch a documentary on media literacy as suggested by *Common Sense*.
- Guided class reflection:
  - What did the documentary tell us about misinformation online?
  - How is misinformation spread online?
  - What are the impacts?

3. Homework Assignment: Misinformation Journal (20 min)

- Students begin a **Media Literacy Journal**:
    - Throughout the week, they track examples of misinformation or biased content they encounter (especially on TikTok).
    - They reflect on what made the content questionable and how it might be verified or challenged.
    - This serves both as a learning tool and as a prompt for subconscious awareness of digital media manipulation.

5. Parents Night (Evening Session)

- **Overview Presentation by Teachers**
    - Explain Project Week's rationale and daily activities.
    - Emphasise that this week is embedded in regular curriculum — no disruption to schedule.
    - Highlight teenage vulnerability to misinformation and how Project Week addresses this.
- **Take-Home Leaflet Distribution** ***(see Appendix C.3.1)***
    - Parents receive a short media literacy guide:
        - Includes a **4-question heuristic** they can use with their children:
            1. Who is the author?
            2. What is the evidence?
            3. When was this published?
            4. Where else is this reported?
- **Call to Action**
    - Parents are encouraged to use this heuristic in everyday conversations at home.
    - Invite parents to attend the Friday Showcase to see student work.
    - Reinforce the value of home-school collaboration in building digital resilience.

C.2.1 Parents' Media Literacy Leaflet example

The 4-Question Heuristic for Media Conversations

Use this anytime your child shares something they saw online:

- ? **WHO** is the author?
- ? **WHAT** is the evidence?
- ? **WHEN** was it published?
- ? **WHERE** else is it reported?

***(Tip:** You don't need to know the answers—just asking the questions helps your child think critically)*

What's Project Week About

Your child is taking part in a week-long media literacy initiative to explore how misinformation spreads online, especially through platforms like TikTok.

Together, we aim to build lifelong critical thinking skills that help students separate fact from fiction in today's digital world.

Why It Matters

1. 41% of teenagers could not separate true and false health messages
2. Misinformation spreads faster than verified facts.
3. Teenagers often trust content based on popularity, not credibility.
4. Parents play a key role in reinforcing critical thinking at home.

School Name
Media Literacy Project Week 2025

Spotting Misinformation Together: A Parent's Guide

Tips for Talking About Media at Home

- **Ask your teen what they've seen on TikTok today**
- **Share a news story and compare it across sources together**
- **Encourage open dialogue—avoid judgment**
- **Try listening to a teen-friendly news podcast together** *(suggested list available from teachers)*

What's Coming Up This Week

Monday
- **Focus:** Identifying misinformation
- **At-home tip:** Ask about what they learned from the documentary they watch

Tuesday
- **Focus:** Reading & debate
- **At-home tip:** Ask about how unreliable it is to use TikTok as a source

Wednesday
- **Focus:** Understanding data bias
- **At-home tip:** Talk about misleading stats you've seen in the news

Thursday
- **Focus:** Writing & Reflection
- **At-home tip:** Ask your child what their poster is about

Friday
- **Focus:** Student showcase
- **At-home tip:** Ask your child about the projects that they have made and how that has changed their perception of infotainment online

> ***"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."***
>
> ***— Aristotle***

Want to Learn More?

- Visit ***https://medialiteracynow.org/resource-library***
- Fact-checking tools: ***Snopes.com, PolitiFact.com, AllSides.com***
- Podcasts: ***News Not Noise, The Ten News, Start Here*** *(suggested list available from teachers)*

C.3 Assessment

C.3.1 Alternative Group Project

If the teachers are not interested in using the posters and videos (as suggested in appendix C.1) as the week's assessment, an alternative group project is proposed below.

The students can be divided into groups of two-four people at the start of the week, creating a presentation on a media literacy topic. Providing a pre-selected set of topics helps maximise instructional time and ensures that all students engage with relevant and thought-provoking subjects. While some students may prefer to choose their own topics, others may struggle with selection, so this structure allows for flexibility while offering necessary guidance. To further support differentiated learning, each topic is categorised into easy, intermediate, and advanced levels, ensuring accessibility for students with varying levels of academic readiness.

1. Digital Media & Social Media Trends

- **Easy:** How do social media shape the way young people consume news?
- **Intermediate:** What role do social media influencers play in spreading news and misinformation?
- **Advanced:** How do social media algorithms contribute to echo chambers and filter bubbles?

2. Political News & Bias

- **Easy:** How do different news sources report on the same political event?
- **Intermediate:** How has misinformation impacted past elections (e.g., 2016 U.S. Presidential Election)?
- **Advanced:** What is the role of artificial intelligence in political disinformation campaigns?

3. Science & Health Misinformation

- **Easy:** How does misinformation spread about vaccines and health trends (e.g., COVID-19 myths)?
- **Intermediate:** What strategies do social media companies use to combat health misinformation?
- **Advanced:** How do confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance make people resistant to scientific facts?

4. Conspiracy Theories vs. Legitimate Theories

- **Easy:** What are some common conspiracy theories that have spread online (e.g., flat earth, chemtrails)?
- **Intermediate:** How do you differentiate between a conspiracy theory and a legitimate scientific theory?
- **Advanced:** What psychological and social factors contribute to belief in conspiracy theories?

5. Data & Statistics in Media

- **Easy:** How do graphs and statistics influence public perception of news?

- **Intermediate:** How can data be manipulated to mislead audiences (e.g., selective graphs, misleading polls)?
- **Advanced:** How do polling biases affect political narratives and decision-making?

6. AI & Deepfakes in Misinformation

- **Easy:** What are deepfake videos, and how do they impact trust in media?
- **Intermediate:** How do AI-generated articles and bots influence public opinion?
- **Advanced:** What ethical challenges arise from AI-generated misinformation?

Background for teachers

To help teachers guide students, this background provides concise topic summaries, key concepts, and a recommended article for each subject area. These resources allow educators to adapt instruction based on the collective academic levels of different student groups, facilitating deeper engagement and targeted support. Recognising that media landscapes change rapidly; teachers are also encouraged to incorporate current events into discussions and may refer to suggested reliable sources for updated materials.

1. Digital Media & Social Media Trends

- Key Concepts: Algorithm-driven content, short-form video impact, role of influencers in news sharing.
- Resources: Reports on under-25s's media habits, examples of viral misinformation.
- Recommended article: BBC News to create AI department to offer more personalised content
    - **Summary:** This article discusses the BBC's initiative to establish a new department focused on integrating AI technology to tailor content to individual audience preferences, particularly targeting under-25s who predominantly consume news via smartphones and social media platforms like TikTok.

2. Political News & Bias

- Key Concepts: Left vs. right media bias, editorial decision-making, fact-checking methods.
- Resources: Media Bias Chart, real-world examples of the same event reported across different outlets.
- Recommended article: Americans worry Trump too closely aligned with Russia, Reuters/Ipsos poll finds
    - **Summary:** A Reuters/Ipsos poll found that over half of Americans, including 27% of Republicans, believe Trump is too closely aligned with Russia. The poll also showed little support for his expansionist proposals, with most Americans prioritizing issues like inflation

3. Science & Health Misinformation

- Key Concepts: Scientific literacy, trust in institutions, spread of fake medical claims.
- Resources: WHO guidelines on misinformation, historical examples of public health disinformation.
- Recommended article: False Measles Vaccine Conspiracy Theories Won't Stop: Here's Everything You Need to Know

- **Summary:** This article addresses a measles outbreak in west Texas exacerbated by anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, discussing the historical roots of vaccine misinformation and its impact on public health.

4. Conspiracy Theories vs. Legitimate Theories

- Key Concepts: Psychological appeal of conspiracies, contrast with scientific method.
- Resources: Fact-checking organizations, academic studies on belief in conspiracies.
- Recommended article: Inside the legend of the 'Black Knight' satellite orbiting Earth that some believe is a 13,000-year-old alien spaceship
  - **Summary:** The "Black Knight" satellite conspiracy theory suggests the existence of a 13,000-year-old alien spacecraft orbiting Earth, a claim debunked by experts.

5. Data & Statistics in Media

- Key Concepts: Sampling bias, correlation vs. causation, misleading data visualization.
- Resources: Infographics on misleading statistics, interactive data literacy tools.
  - Recommended article: If China's statistics can't be scrutinised, doubts about the economy will only grow
  - **Summary:** China's economic statistics, particularly GDP figures, have faced scrutiny due to suspicions of inflation to meet regional targets. Restrictions on data transparency and manipulated statistics erode trust, highlighting the need for open analysis for sustainable development.

6. AI & Deepfakes in Misinformation

- Key Concepts: AI-generated content, deepfake detection, implications for media trust.
- Resources: Case studies on deepfakes, technical explainer on AI misinformation tools.
- Recommended article: Newsom signs election 'deepfake' ban, Musk claps back resharing AI-altered video of Kamala Harris
  - **Summary:** Elon Musk shared a digitally altered video on X (formerly Twitter) that used AI voice-cloning tools to mimic Vice President Harris. The video portrayed her making statements she never actually made, raising concerns about the spread of AI-generated misinformation and the challenges it poses to media platforms and public perception

C.3.2 Evaluation rubric

The assessment process for Project Week is designed to evaluate both individual and group performance through structured rubrics while also recognising outstanding contributions. The Rubric can be used to evaluate the posters and/or videos created during Project Week. However, an alternative assessment method is proposed in Appendix C.2.

The Rubric-Based Evaluation provides a detailed five-point scale across key categories such as Inquiry & Research Depth, Collaboration & Teamwork, Creativity & Communication, Critical Analysis, and Real-World Impact, ensuring a well-rounded assessment of student work. The PBL Works' Gold Standard Rubric further reinforces these criteria, emphasising critical thinking, teamwork, and the ability to engage an authentic audience.

Beyond formal evaluation, students can earn awards for exceptional work in specific areas, including Best Data Visualization, Most Persuasive Debate, and Most Impactful Written Article, celebrating creativity and analytical depth.

- **Rubric-Based Evaluation:**

Category	1 - Minimal Effort	2 - Needs Improvement	3 - Satisfactory	4 - Good	5 - Excellent
Inquiry & Research Depth	Little to no effort in research	Few sources, lacks depth	Some credible sources used	Multiple credible sources	Deep analysis using varied sources
Collaboration & Teamwork	No teamwork, disruptive	Minimal participation	Contributes but inconsistently	Works effectively	Highly engaged, strong leadership
Creativity & Communication	Unclear or incomplete	Lacks engagement	Some effort in presentation	Engaging, clear findings	Exceptionally creative, insightful
Critical Analysis	Fails to identify bias	Identifies some bias, lacks depth	Basic bias analysis	Thoughtful, clear bias evaluation	Deep, nuanced analysis
Real-World Impact	No connection to real world	Some attempt to connect ideas	Understands relevance	Demonstrates real-world impact	Inspires action, broad outreach

- **PBL Works' Gold Standard Rubric:**

Category	Criteria
Inquiry & Research Depth	Uses multiple, credible sources to analyse media bias.
Collaboration & Teamwork	Works effectively in groups, demonstrates active participation.
Creativity & Communication	Presents findings in an engaging and clear format.
Critical Analysis	Identifies bias, misinformation, and logical fallacies.
Real-World Impact	Project is shared with an authentic audience beyond the classroom.

- **Awards:**
  - Best data visualization
  - Most persuasive debate
  - Most impactful written article

C.4 Example: Journal Entry

The following page is an example of a Day 1 journal entry designed to help students become more aware of how and when they encounter misinformation in their digital environments—particularly on platforms like TikTok. This template supports the "Awareness" stage of The Empowerment Spiral and aligns with Installation Theory by encouraging reflection on daily media habits.

This is a suggested format that can be adapted according to teaching style, student age group, or project theme. Teachers are encouraged to modify the layout and questions to suit different subjects (e.g., math, reading, writing) or focus areas during the week. Additional journal entry examples can be developed for Days 2–5 (e.g., comparative analysis, fact-checking, rewriting biased articles, or final reflections). The key is to keep the format simple, relatable, and action-oriented—so students are guided, not overwhelmed.

Media Literacy Week Journal

Quick Context

Date:

Platform: ☐ TikTok ☐ Instagram ☐ YouTube ☐ Snapchat ☐ Other: _____

When did you come across it?

☐ Before school ☐ After school ☐ During class

☐ While scrolling aimlessly

☐ While chatting with friends

☐ Other: _____

What Did You See?

Brief description of the post/video/article:

You can draw what you saw too!

What Drew You In?

Why did it catch your attention?

☐ Shocking or emotional

☐ Lots of likes/views

☐ Shared by a friend

☐ Sounded believable

☐ It made me angry or confused

☐ Other: _____

Was It Credible?

Did it seem accurate? Why or why not?
Was there a source? Did the speaker/writer seem trustworthy?

Did You Try Fact-Checking?

What did you find?
Use Snopes, PolitiFact, Google, or a news site such as the New York Times to double-check.

Fact-checked ☐

Final Reflection

How did this post make you feel?
Would you have believed it a week ago?

Friendly reminder: You don't have to know everything — just pause, question, reflect!

D. Teacher training

This section serves as a practical guide for educators, school leaders, or partner organisations responsible for facilitating the teacher training component of Media Literacy Project Week. It outlines key learning goals, suggested session formats, and hands-on activities to prepare teachers for confidently delivering the curriculum.

Importantly, this training structure is intended to be flexible. We recommend here that it can be a one-day intensive training but it should be adapted based on the available time, school resources, and teachers' existing schedules and workload. Whether delivered in a single workshop, split across shorter sessions, or integrated into regular staff development hours, the aim is to offer pragmatic, supportive training that equips teachers with the skills and tools to guide students through media literacy in a way that fits their local context.

Purpose

To equip teachers with the skills, tools, and confidence to deliver the Project Week curriculum, particularly focusing on misinformation detection on TikTok and integration of critical thinking into core subjects (Reading, Writing, Math).

Format

- **Delivery**: 1-day interactive workshop (3–4 hours), can be split into two sessions.
- **Facilitators**: Internal school leaders, guest media literacy experts, or NGOs (e.g. Media Literacy Now).
- **Mode**: In-person or virtual (depending on school logistics).

Training Structure

1. Introduction & Rationale (20 min)

- Why media literacy matters now: misinformation, teen vulnerability, TikTok's influence.
- Overview of Project Week and its interdisciplinary goals.
- Quick intro to Installation Theory and The Empowerment Spiral as pedagogical backbones.

2. Module 1: Detecting Misinformation on TikTok (60 min)

Goal: Help teachers recognize hallmarks of false or misleading content.

Activities include:

- Case Study: Analyze a viral TikTok video and assess credibility.
- Toolkit Walkthrough:
    - Spotting deepfakes and AI-generated content
    - Common misinformation signals (clickbait titles, emotional language, source opacity)
    - Using fact-checking tools (Snopes, PolitiFact, Media Bias Chart)

Teachers complete a **Source Evaluation Report**, which becomes a physical classroom tool for Day 3.

3. Module 2: Curriculum Integration & Teaching Strategies (90 min)

Goal: Show how to deliver Project Week activities within existing subjects.

Breakdown by subject:

- **Writing (Day 2)**:
    - Support students in rewriting biased articles using multiple sources.
    - Frame debates on platform responsibility and misinformation.
    - Encourage balanced argumentation and respectful discourse.
- **Math (Day 3)**:
    - Teach how statistics can mislead (e.g., misleading graphs, sampling bias).
    - Use real media headlines for hands-on exercises.
    - Help students visualize their findings.
- **Reading (Day 4)**:
    - Lead lateral reading exercises.
    - Guide the "Bias Scavenger Hunt."
    - Help students compare tone, framing, and bias.

Collaborative Task: Teachers develop example prompts and classroom scaffolding tools for their subject area.

4. Resource Walkthrough & Planning (30 min)

- Review of student worksheets, journal entry templates, rubric, and curated media sources.
- How to assess student work using the PBL evaluation rubric.
- Discuss differentiation for mixed-ability groups and classroom time constraints.

Training Materials Provided

- Teacher Guidebook (overview of Project Week with daily breakdowns)
- Printable versions of:
    - Source Evaluation Report
    - Media Bias Chart
    - Journal Templates

    - Lesson planning cheat sheet
- Slide deck for presenting key media literacy concepts
- Optional: Recording of the training for future reference

Outcome

By the end of the training, teachers will be able to:

- Confidently detect misinformation on TikTok and similar platforms.
- Deliver media literacy content across core subjects with minimal prep.
- Empower students to apply critical thinking skills to their everyday media use.