Let's Talk DIGITAL

Activity Guide

Acknowledgements

"Let's Talk Digital" is a non-partisan initiative aiming to engage youth (12-25 years old) in a series of workshops and engagement opportunities on digital citizenship.

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Canadian democracy is in trouble.

Voting rates are declining. Canadians have a low opinion of politicians and do not engage in political activities or discussion. These issues are particularly pressing among Canada's youth who already feel burned out and fearful for their future. In this era of misinformation and polarization, the generation raised on social media is at risk of lacking the knowledge, skills and resources to make important political choices and decisions.

To lesson the impact of misinformation and polarization on youth, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has partnered with the Samara Centre for Democracy to develop a non-partisan initiative aiming to engage youth in a series of activities on digital citizenship called "Let's Talk Digital". The aim of the program is to help youth build their critical thinking skills and capacity to critically assess online reporting and digital media. The program will help educate youth on digital technologies such as bots and algorithms and explain how malicious actors are exploiting online platforms and other Internet technologies for personal and political gains. The program will equip youth with the skills to take action to avoid manipulation online and create a healthy information ecosystem for themselves, their peers and their family.

Welcome to the Let's Talk Digital Activity Guide

The program hopes to empower a connected generation raised on social media to better understand the mechanisms of digital citizenship so they can educate their peers and their families and contribute to a stronger democracy for all.

The Let's Talk Digital Activity Guide provides you with research briefs on each topic and detailed lesson plans needed to run a Let's Talk Digital program at your Club. The Samara Centre research team and expert contractors on digital, media and civic literacy wrote the research briefs. The nine topics we chose to focus on in this program were selected using information gathered from youth participating in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada's National Youth Forum in Montreal as well as piloting at the St. Alban's Boys and Girls Club and the Eastview Boys and Girls Club in Ontario. This means the material covered in this program was informed by BGCC youth to ensure its relevance to youth.

In addition, the lesson plans and activities in this program are designed to facilitate learning in real and personally relevant ways. At the same time, they'll help youth understand and develop the skills needed to be good digital citizens.

At its core, Let's Talk Digital is about helping young people gain the skills and knowledge they need to navigate our increasingly complex digital, social and political systems. The central objective of Let's Talk Digital is to lessen the impact of misinformation, polarization and disengagement, build resilience to online manipulation, and create a healthy information ecosystem.

Essential Competencies for Digital Citizens

To that end, the Activity Guide is designed around nine essential competencies that are needed to achieve critical thinking when it comes to digital citizenship. The nine modules are:

1) Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence
2) Bots and Trolls
3) Disinformation and Misinformation
4) Privacy
5) Attention and Emotions Online
6) The Changing Media and Information Environment
7) Political Targeting
8) Political Polarization
9) Civic Engagement in a Digital World

For each of the nine topics included in the Activity Guide, there are lesson plans with three or four group activities that aim to develop specific skills related to that topic. Different skill sets will be developed in each of the nine sections, but you will notice that several themes pervade the entire guide. These include some of the skills and processes that form the core of Let's Talk Digital, the most important of which is critical thinking.

Critical thinking is the process of analyzing and re-analyzing facts and information to reach an answer or conclusion. To practice critical thinking one needs to practice 5 Cs! Developed by Science Everywhere, a science education organization, the 5 Cs they advocate for us to practice are: Curiosity, Collaboration, Calm, Courage and Creativity.

PRACTISING THE 5CS

PRACTICE CURIOSITY! It's all too easy to shrink away from, avoid or discount the unknown. When we are curious we are more open to new ideas, and more willing to actively seek out new approaches. Thinking speculatively allows us to explore potential outcomes, to more fully consider all the options before us and to make better decisions. Critical thinkers ask "what if?".

PRACTICE COLLABORATION! We all have blind spots in our thinking that are, by definition, invisible to us. The best way to find blind spots is by talking to people who see things differently. Collaboration is one of the core pillars of good science and good thinking, and any good conversation incorporates many perspectives. So, take every opportunity to actively search for perspectives people might not ordinarily take. Collecting a diversity of perspectives is the goal. Critical thinkers collaborate.

PRACTICE CALM! (Take being silly seriously) A good thinker can laugh at flaws in someone else's ideas. A better one can laugh at flaws in their own. Critical thinkers build the capacity to laugh at themselves. It's what we mean by "calm" and it's indispensable to an ability to scientifically and critically refine our ideas. Calm transforms fear into curiosity.

PRACTICE COURAGE! Changing your mind is inherently scary. It requires that we choose to walk into emotional exposure and uncertainty. That also happens to be our definition for courage. This value is the hardest to live by. It takes courage to go against your friends, admit you were wrong, and to listen to people you disagree with. Critical thinkers often and proudly admit, "I don't know!"

PRACTICE CREATIVITY! Creativity is the process of combining old and new ways of understanding the world. It's what happens when we bring different ideas together to understand the world in new ways. Creativity is using your intuition to form new ways of understanding the world and critical thinking is the tool we use to sort good intuitions from bad ones. Without critical thinking, we rely only on emotion to understand the world. Without creativity, we cannot reshape, mold and make the world we want for ourselves.

How to use the Activity Guide

The Activity Guide is designed around nine essential competencies that are needed to achieve critical thinking when it comes to digital citizenship. For each of the nine topics included in the Activity Guide, there are lesson plans with three or four group activities that aim to develop specific skills related to that topic. The activities have been designed to be 1) easy to administer, 2) flexible for age, group size, and time, and lastly, 3) fun and engaging.

1 //
Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence

Algorithms are the basic building blocks of computer software. They are present in nearly every piece of technology that we use in our day-to-day life, from smartphones to coffee machines, and they affect us in many ways. Using algorithms, humans have created more sophisticated technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning that have revolutionized society. Understanding algorithms is critical to understanding the digital sphere, and the way it is changing our social lives.

What is an algorithm?

An algorithm is a list of rules to follow to solve a problem. We use algorithms in our own lives, whether following a recipe for our grandma's secret chocolate chip cookies or sorting our clothes into lights and darks before washing. Algorithms are basically a step-by-step guide for completing a task. As we develop more complex technologies we have also developed algorithms that are far more complex. Algorithms help all forms of technology complete their tasks, from the Internet to the most sophisticated forms of artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence is essentially a group of algorithms that can adapt, grow and evolve on its own. AI can help us program machines to do things more accurately, they also help people travel to places they would not otherwise survive (the moon!). Consider how crucial the Internet is for access to food , emergency care, and social life in very rural and/or northern places in Canada.

Finally, machine learning is a subfield of artificial intelligence. Its goal is to enable computers to learn on their own. The machine's algorithms allow it to identify patterns in observed data, build models that explain the world, and predict things without having pre-programed rules and models. For example, you may program a computer to tell the difference between a cat and a dog. Machine learning allows the computer to notice patterns or changes in patterns. It may notice that cats have smaller noses and dogs come in a variety of sizes. The more data about cats and dogs the computer receives, the more finely-tuned its algorithm becomes and the more accurate it can be in its predictions. Machine learning is already very commonly used. It is the technology behind facial recognition software, text and speech recognition, and credit card fraud detection.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

Algorithms and artificial intelligence impact our lives in a variety of ways. In today's advanced society, not a day passes in which the average person does not interact with this form of technology. Your phone, apps, car and even breakfast rely on the use of algorithms. For most, they are impossible to escape. Because algorithms are everywhere, it is important to understand both the positive and negative ways in which they have come to impact society.

Artificial intelligence offers some tremendous advantages. These are evident, for example, in how useful the algorithms in our phones have become to us on a day-to-day basis. Benefits are also apparent in healthcare, with artificial intelligence being used to analyze data to find early predictors of various health disorders. Artificial intelligence in healthcare may prove revolutionary, helping with the early detection of cancer, diabetes and various other health conditions, in addition to more accurately pinpointing patients' risk factors for such conditions. An MIT-led research team developed a machine-learning algorithm that can analyze 3D scans almost 1,000 times faster than what is possible today. This instant assessment can be highly useful for surgeons during operations. Ultimately, artificial intelligence can help save lives if used correctly.

Another example of artificial intelligence making lives easier is the company, skritswap, a startup that is using artificial intelligence technology to simplify complicated documents full of jargon into easy to understand plain language. This can help simplify complicated legal documents, government policies and terms and conditions. Nearly 50% of North Americans have low literacy skills so this technology can go a long way to make sure people can read important documents at their own comfort level.

However, as algorithms become more elaborate and artificial intelligence becomes more complex, there will be unforeseen consequences. In 2016, ProPublica, an independent and non-profit newsroom, highlighted a controversial case involving the use of software for the calculation of criminal sentences in Florida. Judges and lawyers would use this data to help them predict whether the defendant would commit future crimes. An analysis of the decisions made by the software found that it had some accuracy in predicting future criminals but disproportionately targeted individuals if they were black. On average, the algorithm predicted that black defendants were almost twice as likely as those of other backgrounds to commit crimes. As a result, judges using the software ended up sentencing black people to penalties greater than white people with similar backgrounds for similar crimes.

Another example involves the use of algorithms in law enforcement. Many cash-strapped police departments have begun using predictive programs to help them combat crime in their cities. The algorithms in these systems help to cut costs by showing a police department the neighbourhoods in which they "should" focus their resources and send officers. In many cases, officers are sent to poorer neighbourhoods where a high volume of petty crimes takes place (e.g. selling small amounts of drugs, panhandling). This tendency creates a feedback loop in which police patrol poorer neighbourhoods, disproportionately ticketing and arresting people in those neighborhoods, thus entering this data into the predictive program, leading the program to tell them to go back to that neighbourhood. These systems disproportionately target black, poor neighbourhoods and, as a consequence, the prison system is filled with thousands of people found guilty of victimless crimes. In this example, the algorithms and artificial intelligence involved do not intend to focus on race or ethnicity, but they inevitably cause police to do so.

How Does It Impact Politics?

Imagine: you wake up outraged by the fact that your high school has decided to cancel prom. You decide to write an impassioned post on Facebook and create a petition to reinstate prom. You send your post to three close friends for a once-over, before publishing it to your feed. You have no idea what people's responses will be to your post or who will see it. You also have no idea that once you hit "Share", Facebook owns this content and their algorithms make a judgment about how to use it best. These algorithms make a number of calculations. They start analyzing which of your friends frequently share things on Facebook. They analyze which of your friends like to sign petitions. They also consider who simply scrolls their News Feed and never clicks anything. In addition, they determine which of your friends or followers interact with you the most. After considering all of these things (and others), they determine which of your friends will see your petition. Some of your friends will be presented with it the second they open the app, while others will have to scroll and scroll and scroll before they see it. This reality shows how Facebook has the ability to control the content people see online. So, the question is, how could a few tweaks of their algorithms affect our political landscape?

As a company, Facebook itself wanted to answer this question, and researchers began running experiments on Facebook users in an effort to answer it. During elections in the U.S. from 2010 to 2012, Facebook ran an experiment called "Voter Mega-Phone." The idea was to encourage people to spread the word that they had voted, thereby instilling "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out) in their friends. They did this by creating algorithms in target groups' timelines to encourage them to vote. People would create "I voted" status updates to share. Studies have shown that a fear of judgment by peers is more likely to encourage people to vote then a sense of civic duty. At the same time, Facebook was able to harvest the data of the people sharing these status updates to better determine the characteristics and interests of the people sharing "I voted."

This experiment was highly successful. After comparing voting records, Facebook estimated that it had increased voter turnout by 340,000. That is a gigantic shift, and it is enough to influence important districts across the U.S. This example demonstrates the power of a single algorithm (or a combination of them) to greatly influence politics during an election. By changing adding or changing an algorithm to lead people to sharing an "I voted" status update, they created a pattern that helped lead people to the polls.

Have you noticed the evolution of Facebook, its focus having shifted from cat videos to news stories? If you have, you should realize this was intentional. In 2012, Facebook continued their experiments regarding increasing voter turnout in the U.S. This time, researchers decided to tweak some algorithms so that political news stories appeared at the top of people's news feeds, instead of posts about celebrities and screaming goats. They made the tweaks to see if such a change would affect voter turnout during Barack Obama's first campaign. Their study concluded that voter turnout increased from 64 to 67% among its unwitting participants. Again, the shift is enough to influence a tight political race. Facebook hasn't looked back, becoming a major source for news sharing.

Google's algorithms could have a tremendous impact on politics, as well. Currently, Google seems to have programmed their algorithms to be focused on profit, not politics. However, the company's search results can have a tremendous impact on how people vote. Two researchers, Robert Epstein and Ronald E. Robertson, ran a study in which they had undecided voters in the U.S. and India use special search engines to learn about the elections. The search engines were designed to show political bias toward particular parties. The study concluded that the results shifted voting preferences by 20%. But actually calculating the impact of single sources of political information is extremely difficult and the results could very well change across countries and across time. Since Google's business model relies on keeping their algorithms secret (to maintain their competitive advantage – keep that secret sauce secret) it is hard to know the ways in which algorithms guide us to different decisions.

As it stands, there is no substantial, publicly-known evidence to support the idea that Facebook, Google, Instagram, or any other major Western search engine or social media platform is politically motivated. The point is that these companies have the power to impact politics, and it is important to recognize this.

What Can We Do About It?

Algorithms, machine learning, and artificial intelligence have a tremendous impact on our everyday lives. They help us make coffee, search for restaurants and even decide whom to date. As a society, we recognize how useful they are and we continue to improve upon them, using them to streamline every aspect of humanity. However, our dependence on these tools also makes us susceptible to overlooking their flaws. If we rely too much on them, we allow their biases and flaws to affect our decision-making. Algorithms are not perfect because the people who design them are humans. Even when we try to avoid unfairness, it can creep into the algorithms we create.

If we program algorithms to try to increase voting in rural parts of Manitoba, they will often succeed. What is important is to recognize how algorithms are used to filter content and tailor what it is you see. It is also important that the algorithms and artificial intelligence employed by major online platforms and government remain politically unbiased, in order to help ensure a fair democracy.

There are a number of things you can do to disrupt algorithms from targeting you and filtering your content:

1) PRIVATE BROWSING // Using your browser's private or "incognito" mode is a good way of limiting the number of cookies used to track you. Cookies are small files stored on your computer when you visit a website. They help personalize the website for you. This may seem overly simple, but it can be quite effective.

2) DO A PHONE AUDIT // Look at the apps on your phone. Many of them will collect a lot of information about both your online and offline activities. Go through and remove access to any information that your apps don't absolutely require.

3) USE ANTI-TRACKING SERVICES // www.privacytools.io recommends many different services to help prevent your online behaviour from being tracked. You can also search for alternative search engines to use as well.

① Shazam Showdown

Your Mission // Outsmart the algorithms! Youth will compete against the Shazam app to name a song before Shazam's algorithms can. Humans vs machines in the ultimate showdown!

What you'll need:

A device with the Shazam app downloaded

A source of music with speakers

Internet access (optional)

How long will the activity take?

Each round takes about 20 seconds

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Play songs of your choice, one at a time, then have the youths compete against Shazam to name the song and artist. Play as many rounds as you like.

2) At the end of the game, ask the youths a few discussion questions.

   › What songs would make it harder for Shazam? Why?

   › What songs would make it harder for humans? Why?

   › What other algorithms do they know that can do superhuman things?

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) How do you think Shazam is able to do this?

2) What are the things algorithms are good at that humans are not?

3) What are the things that Shazam can't do?

4) What are the limitations of algorithms?

VARIATIONS

Play the game again using SoundHound instead of Shazam (Soundhound doesn't require clear recordings. It can recognize songs from people in the room singing them).

previous

1 Shazam Showdown

WHAT'S THE POINT?

To spark conversation around what algorithms are and aren't good at. Shazam is able to do things humans can't because it uses algorithms designed to make that kind of problem solving very fast. Superhuman in fact. There are however things algorithms aren't good at. The same is true of social media. Social media uses algorithms to do superhuman things as well. Algorithms can recognize patterns in human behaviour that even humans can't spot, but they can't say what those patterns mean. (Facebook can identify when people with bipolar disorder are heading into a manic phase).

Resources

SHAZAM DOWNLOAD

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/shazam/id897118787?mt=12

Shazam creates a spectrogram for each song in its database—a graph that plots three dimensions of music: frequency vs. amplitude vs. time. The algorithm then picks out just those points that represent the peaks of the graph—notes that contain "higher energy content" than all the other notes around it.

FULL ARTICLE EXPLAINING HOW SHAZAM WORKS:

https://slate.com/technology/2009/10/how-does-the-music-identifying-app-shazam-work-its-magic.html

SOUNDHOUND DOWNLOAD

https://www.soundhound.com/download

② YouTube Sprint

Your Mission // Race down the YouTube rabbit hole of video recommendations to be the first to a "finish line video". The catch is that you can only get there by clicking on YouTube's recommendation videos.

What you'll need:

Access to the Internet

Computers, smartphones or other devices with Internet access

How long will the activity take?

Each round takes about 5-6 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The staff names the "Finish line video" category (i.e. Find a music video by an artist (i.e. Drake, Billie Eilish, Ariana Grande, Taylor Swift, Shawn Mendes); Find an epic fail video; Find a video with a dog).

   NOTE // You can create your own categories or take suggestions from the youth.

2) On their cell phones or on a computer, everyone should close whatever YouTube videos they may already have open, then open a fresh browser. Then go to the YouTube homepage.

3) Everyone selects the upper left video available.

4) Once everyone has their video playing, the race begins. The players are supposed to go through the list of recommendation videos and click on the video that will most likely lead them to the "finish line" video. For example, if the first video that is clicked is a cat video, which of the recommended videos from there will help lead to a Drake music video? Other videos of cats or perhaps videos of children playing with cats? The goal is to get to the "finish line" in the fewest clicks possible.

5) **OTHER RULES:** You are not allowed to go back. You are not allowed to type anything.

previous

② YouTube Sprint

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) How are YouTube's algorithms making their selections?

2) What categories do you think the algorithms use to make decisions?

3) After doing this exercise, do you think differently about how much choice you have over what you watch?

VARIATIONS

Instead of the fewest clicks, you could aim for the fastest time.

If there are not enough devices, people can pair up in teams. Divide the groups to pair up in teams.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

To understand how YouTube (and other forms of digital media) tailors the content you see based on what you've already engaged with. In order to play and win at this game, players must think about how YouTube's algorithms make guesses about what the player would like to see. This helps make algorithms that are normally invisible more obvious.

Resources

KEEPING UP WITH THE ALGORITHMS
https://www.socialmediatoday.com/topic/algorithm-updates/

(3) Categorize!

Your Mission // Participants will learn about algorithms through this fun, quick game of grouping.

What you'll need:

Suitable for large groups of 15 or more.

It requires adequate space to run around, such as a gym or large classroom with obstacles and tripping hazards safely moved out of the way.

How long will the activity take?

Each round takes about 5-6 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The leader instructs the youth to lightly jog around the room in a circle and then they randomly call out "Algorithm ____" and a number.

2) The youth then scramble to get into a group of that. For example, the leaders call "Algorithm 5!" and youth get into groups of 5. If there are 15 youth then they should form 3 groups of 5.

3) The youth that can't get themselves into the groups are out of the game and the game continues until there are very few youth left.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

Discuss the ways in which information can be easily categorized, from the things we search, like, share and follow online. For the rounds in which there are extra players that don't fit into a group and are subsequently 'out,' use this as a teaching moment to note that not all information is relevant or can be categorized by an algorithm. Some information is simply excess.

previous

③ Categorize!

VARIATIONS

If the group is quick to learn the rules of the game and play it well, you can add some difficulty by changing the rules or the "algorithm" so that when you say "Algorithm ___" instead of everyone getting into groups of that number, you only want one group of that number in the middle of the circle. The catch is that they only have one try to get it right.

FOR EXAMPLE, you would have all 15 people jogging around in a circle, then you say "Algorithm 5" and everyone stops and everyone has to decide if they will jump into the middle to form the group of 5 or not but they must decide when you shout the number. So you may get 10 people jumping into the middle or 7, which are the wrong numbers. You can play this game with different numbers until magically the right number of youth jump in. If the youth are clever, they will start to communicate with each other about who jumps in. But even with communication it might be hard to get the magical number as you will not be announcing the number until they have to jump. The point of this variation is to show that for humans communication around complicated tasks can take time and there is confusion, but algorithms have hardwritten rules that are quick to execute so they are very efficient at categorizing no matter the rules we give them.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Algorithms are simply made to categorize information as fast as possible. For example, if someone writes a post on Facebook that says: "I cannot wait to take a vacation after graduation to anywhere hot," an algorithm can track keywords and group them together in order to curate future results that seemingly appeal to that person. This is why ads for summer trips might pop up on your newsfeed more often after you have made posts related to that topic.

Resources

THIS IS EXACTLY HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS WORK TODAY
https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/marketing/this-is-exactly-how-social-media-algorithms-work-today/

2 //
Bots & Trolls

Bots are simple tools for manipulating how we perceive information online. They can be used to make someone appear as if they have more followers and are therefore more influential, or to artificially promote one message, or diminish another message. Bots are used throughout social media, but recently, have notably become tools for political propaganda. Bots disguise themselves as real people in a social media world based on the assumption of authentic interactions between individuals. Recognizing bots is critical to recognizing the kinds of manipulation that we are at risk of on social media.

What Are Bots?

The Internet is rife with robots masquerading as humans from all different backgrounds--rich, poor, male, female, educated and even suffering from addiction and illness. We interact with these robots sometimes willingly and other times unwillingly. "Bots" are essentially artificial intelligence modules that impersonate human beings and fill our heads with propaganda. Our social media pages are filled with them. Facebook estimates that there may be as many as 270 million fake accounts on their service. That's more than seven times the population of Canada.

Bots are apparent on Instagram and Twitter as well. While some are easy to identify, others are not. Bots have become rampant in technology. They range from malicious bots that come with a virus attached, to search engine spiders that crawl the Internet looking for new domain names to buy. For this research brief, we will focus on a variety of bots that affect our decision-making in politics.

Technology that can imitate humans is not new. We've been developing it since the 1950s. The goal has always been to build technology that could intuitively interact with us and to simplify our lives. Presently, bots help us order food, shop, save money and find restaurants. People who design bots often program them to act like

humans so that, when interacting with them, it feels like talking to a human and not a robot. Just listen to the gentle voice of Siri as it tells you about the best Mexican restaurant in Red Deer, Alberta.

So how smart are these bots? The simple answer— not very. Despite some forms of artificial technology becoming highly advanced (think Sophia the Robot), the bots we interact with online remain unsophisticated. Think about how frustrating it can be sometimes to ask Siri a question. In addition, if you have ever used a company's chatbot and asked a slightly complicated question, you share our pain.

Bots are notorious for stirring up trouble on social media. People use bots to influence politics in a variety of ways. Bots can help spread misinformation, help legitimize fake news stories with likes and shares and can even target individuals and politicians with negative comments and interactions. People use bots to influence what we read online, bias our perspective on things and seemingly legitimize misinformation, fake news and bigoted perspectives.

There are various types of online bots. Here is a brief overview of them so that you have a general idea of what you are dealing with online.

› **CYBORG/SOCKPUPPET BOTS //** Cyborg bots are bots that are partially human operated. This is to help throw off suspicion that any of their posts are automated. Think of a sock puppet. Essentially, a person has created a disguise in an effort to hide himself. This empowers him to engage anonymously online.

› **AMPLIFIER BOTS //** Amplifiers bots amplify the amount of engagement that online content receives. They remix and repost specific tweets or comments, "liking," "retweeting" or "replying" to enhance credibility and give legitimacy to an idea or individual. They try to make people, content or ideas look more popular than they actually are.

› **DAMPENER BOTS //** Dampeners are bots intended to suppress certain messages, channels or voices. They will engage with certain kinds of content with automated criticisms, create enough noise to drown messages out or manipulate the policies of social media platforms in order to have content removed.

› **TRANSPARENCY BOTS //** Transparency bots automatically monitor data about and behaviour of governments and share this information on social media. One example is a bot designed to make a note any time updates are made to a Wikipedia page from a government location.

› **SERVANT BOTS //** Servant bots help transparency bots by automating simple tasks, helping to maintain data sets and simplifying data analysis. They are often used in research studies on social media to comb through the online behaviour of specific groups, thus identifying patterns of use. They can also update people on traffic, weather conditions and when schools or roads will be closed.

› **COMMERCIAL BOTS //** Commercial bots can be used by companies for a number of business purposes. They can be automated like a chatbot to act as customer service representatives, helping to answer questions about the company and its products and services.

› **CHATBOTS //** Chatbots are designed to chat with people about a variety of topics. They can be used commercially by companies, but they can also be used by organizations to share things like mental health advice and self-care tips.

› **BOTNETS //** A botnet is a coordinated group of Internet-connected devices, each of which is running one or more bots. They work together to achieve any of the above-mentioned goals more quickly and effectively. They can be used to send spam, flood Internet servers, steal data and attack social media pages. Botnets are usually described as having negative or malicious intentions.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

Remember, the goal of a bot is to mimic some form of human behaviour. Bots can be used to simplify our day or complete menial tasks, as well as influence our political thought. Bots are often used to convince us of something, or to justify or make relevant certain content. They attempt to capture our attention and gain our trust in order to impact our online behaviour.

Here is a less nefarious description of a bot. Imagine feeling hungry and opening up your phone to search your apps. You land on Uber Eats and order yourself an extra large Hawaiian pizza. It arrives at your home in under 30 minutes. You did this all without ever talking to a person. This is a great use of a bot. It was created to perform an automated task, such as setting an alarm, telling you the temperature outside or searching the Internet. Siri, Alexa and Google Home are all examples of bots designed to automate everyday tasks and make our lives easier. But the use of bots does not end here.

Here is another description of a bot. For years people have worried about the accuracy of information on Wikipedia. Since anyone can edit Wikipedia there is opportunity for people to try and manipulate the knowledge presented on a given page. But Wikipedia got smart, they created a series of bots which track all edits and when suspicious activity shows up the bot flags it for a human editor to double-check.

One dangerous trend occurring in journalism, for example, is to collect information from social media in order to guess how the public feels about a particular subject. This is then reported as an indicator of public feeling on that issue. The problem is that such an indicator is not necessarily a good representation of true public sentiment. For instance, not all communities are equally active on social media, and the work of bots can make up a substantial number of the comments on a given issue, particularly if that subject is controversial. Bots can be used to bring fringe ideas to the forefront and make them a part of everyday conversation. Media can perpetuate this by reporting on the matter without proper scrutiny.

Bots are sometimes deployed to stir up controversy on ideological debates. A recent example includes the online conversation surrounding the caravan of Central American migrants that were headed to the southern U.S. border. A report by Wired found that between 40-60% of the online conversation on this topic was driven by bots. The use of bots regarding issues such as these intensifies debate, increases polarization and legitimizes otherwise marginal viewpoints to the extent that the media will increase their coverage of said perspectives. Moreover, this phenomenon legitimizes said perspectives in the eyes of the public. Imagine scrolling through Facebook and seeing an article on a topic you are interested in which has 100,000 likes and 50,000 comments. You may assume it is a must-read before wondering how many of these interactions are genuine. The bigger issue is when journalists report on these trending subjects. If bots are able to amplify stories enough to grab the attention of the media, it heightens their power as their content becomes available to a wider audience.

What Are Trolls?

Trolls are people who start fights or upset people online with the intent to provoke emotional responses from others. Trolls are able to use bots to amplify their content online. This was apparent when comedian Leslie Jones was attacked on Twitter, leading her to delete her Twitter account in July, 2016. Trolls who were outraged by her involvement in the film "Ghostbusters" bombarded her Twitter feed with racist, homophobic and sexual threats. Bots were utilized to flood her account to a breaking point. It was harassment, but she was unable to do anything about it.

"Trolling" can refer to relatively innocent pranks, but can also include more sophisticated and serious behaviours. Trolling can include mischievous activities where the intent is not to cause distress or it can seek to ruin the reputation of individuals and organizations. Trolls sometimes release embarrassing or personal information in order to cause harm or distress. "Trolling" is now a term used to describe a wide variety of Internet behaviours.

How Does It Impact Politics?

Social media offers cheap and easy ways to get up to no good. ProPublica, an independent and non-profit newsroom, has conducted investigations that demonstrate how automated advertising tools on

Facebook, Twitter, and Google can be used to target and inflame bigots, and/or target and exclude races and ethnic groups from politics. ProPublica was able to test whether social media sites such as Facebook

would let them buy ads and target people with bigoted language. They were successful. ProPublica also tried this with Google, and Google actually offered targeting suggestions with other bigoted language. These companies claim that such language violates their standards, but the artificial intelligence and bots they use remain blind to it.

Trolls can use bots on social media to stir up disagreement and anger within a given population. Troll farms are coordinated groups of people who systematically engage online. Their goals are essentially the same as those of individual trolls: to elicit emotional responses, to foster disagreement or controversy, or to create a hostile communication environment. Troll farms are sometimes businesses. The most cited example of this involves the Russian government's attempt to interfere with the 2016 U.S. federal elections. In their efforts, they used bots and botnets in a coordinated disinformation campaign. According to the cybersecurity firm FirmEye, tens of thousands of Russian Twitter bots worked together to push various hashtags like #WarAgainstDemocrats and #DownHillary into "Trending" topics.

Even worse, according to The Texas Tribune, a Russian Facebook page organized a protest in Texas and another Russian Facebook page organized the counter protest. In other words, two Russian Facebook pages organized dueling rallies in front of an Islamic Centre in Texas. When the two groups met on the street in front of the Centre, confrontations escalated into verbal attacks. These operatives used fake activist sites to steer American Muslims and right-wing anti-Muslims to the same spot at the same time, leading to clashes.

TROLLS/TROLL FARMS

Generally, researchers and professionals in the intelligence community agree that the goal of the above-referenced Russian campaign was to create distrust and polarization in the American public. The Russian example is the most commonly cited, but it is not the only campaign of its kind. In 2018, there is good evidence that Canada may have been attacked in a similar way.

TROLLS AND BOTNETS

Generally, trolls will use botnets to achieve their goals and employ a roughly three-step process:

1) SOCKPUPPET/CYBORG ACCOUNTS // These are frontline accounts controlled in part by trolls to target or push specific political opinions and ideas.

2) AMPLIFIER BOTS // Amplifier bots then follow these accounts in huge numbers and re-arrange, retweet and repost their messages to help these ideas reach wider audiences. These bots take advantage of the algorithms on social media platforms that are designed to identify and highlight trending topics.

3) APPROVAL BOTS // Approval bots will then reply to these posts to signal that we should trust these accounts. Approval bots are building on the actions of amplifier bots. These three steps are a good example of a coordinated effort by bots.

These practices are widespread. Some estimates predict that about 44% of impressions on Facebook were the result of botnets just prior to the American election. If you spend time to really examine these accounts, it becomes clear that their profiles are automated. But the trolls creating these bots count on the fact that most people don't look closely enough to realize that these are not real accounts.

Some research suggests that bots can target particular human users who might be more likely to engage with and share a given piece of propaganda.

Although social media platforms have promised to crack down on the presence of bots, some studies have found that as many as 80% of the accounts active during the 2016 U.S. election are still active. As a result, there are as many as 6 million bits of disinformation on Twitter alone every month. The net result of this is decreased trust in online discussion.

What Can We Do About It?

From the existing research, it's clear that bots are active in Canada and attempting to sway public conversation and behaviour. That said, it's really not clear that bots have had a huge impact on what Canadians actually believe. This is a relatively new issue and the research has not caught up yet. Even still, there is little harm in adopting strategies to prevent them from potentially influencing your behaviour.

In an effort to combat bots, social media platforms will sometimes modify the ways that they run, but even when such platforms change their behaviour, it's quite likely that trolls will evolve their strategies in turn. The best strategy that an individual using social media can adopt is to know the tell-tale signs of bot behaviour and to practice critical thinking.

Signs of Bots:

NUMBER OF TWEETS: Many bots will post with inhumanly high frequency. Tweeting every five minutes for a full day is not something most humans can manage. The higher the frequency, the more likely it is to be a bot.

GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE: Many bots use algorithms or basic strategies to put together sentences. Because they don't yet understand context in written language, they often make mistakes in spelling and grammar. This is of course true of many humans as well, but it is nonetheless one sign to look for.

LINKING AND HASHTAGGING: Bots are often created just to funnel attention to other stories, media or advertisements. Messier bots will tend to add an unusually high number of links and hashtags to their content. They may also try to piggyback on popular hashtags.

POOR UNDERSTANDING: Again, because bots are still fairly simple algorithms in general, they don't understand context. They can respond with more or less pre-programmed responses, or else they follow very simple rules for incorporating words from their interactions with you. Asking them simple but unexpected questions like "is a shoebox bigger than Mount Everest?" will trip up these simple systems.

CRITICAL THINKING: Practice Curiosity – When you come across content that has made you emotional, ask more questions. Disinformation campaigns generate content aimed at making you emotional.

PRACTICE COLLABORATION: If you see content that is surprising or outrageous, check with many different sources to see if they are all reporting the same thing. Make sure to check sources you don't necessarily agree with.

(1) Catfish

Your Mission // Identify the machines
trying to pose as human writers.

What you'll need:	**How long will the activity take?**
Access to a computer, newspapers, smartphones or another source of news	For a group size of 15 this will take about 20 mins

INSTRUCTIONS

1)   The group competes against a robot to write better news stories.

2)   Each person selects their own news story from a digital source they typically visit. These stories are shared with facilitator. (Each story would be a tab on the facilitator's web browser).

3)   Everyone then reads the first few paragraphs of their selected news story to themselves.

4)   Everyone then writes a short paragraph capturing the gist of the story. No more than 4 sentences. The goal is to be easily readable and accurate.

5)   As they write their stories, facilitators use an AI story generator called Quillbot to produce another version of the selected stories.
   –   Open Quillbot by visiting: https://quillbot.com/app
   –   Copy the first 400 characters of an article
   –   Paste it under "Write a sentence and hit Quill it to rephrase it"
   –   With everyone's eyes closed, the bot's version and the participants' versions are read out to the group.

6)   The goal is to try to guess which version was written by humans and which version was by Quillbot.

7)   For each story, everyone records their guess. (i.e. Version 1 – Bot, Version 2 Human).

8)   At the end, the facilitator reveals which version was which. Every wrong guess is -1 point, and every correct guess is +1 point and everyone tallies their scores.

9)   The winner has the most points.

(1) Catfish

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What are the strategies they're using to recognize human language? (See examples in Resources section)

2) Is it challenging? Why?

3) What are the things that consistently fool people?

4) How could we plan around these?

VARIATIONS

You may choose to select the stories beforehand to save time. If so, assign a few people to each story and have them write versions. In the resources below are a couple of sample stories you might use.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

To learn how to recognize bots. They can write surprisingly human-sounding stories that aren't necessarily based in fact. Because they can do so automatically, they can produce a huge number of stories intended to sway public opinion. For the time being, there are ⌒till a few ways we can tell them apart. Your group will explore how.

Resources

A BOT FOR PARAPHRASING STORIES

https://quillbot.com/app

OPTIONAL STORIES

› Chinese Scientist Claims to Use CRISPR to Make First Genetically Edited Babies
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/26/health/gene-editing-babies-china.html

› Billboard Awards: Cardi B leads with 21 nominations
https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/billboard-awards-cardi-b-leads-with-21-nominations

› 'Tornado of poop': Melrose homes ruined after raw sewage spews from toilets
https://whdh.com/news/tornado-of-poop-melrose-homes-ruined-after-raw-sewage-spews-from-toilets-2/

STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING BOTS

Check the account's bio and history. "Behavior such as tweeting every few minutes in a full day, endorsing polarizing political propaganda (including fake news), obtaining a large follower account in a relatively small time span, and constant retweeting/promoting other high-confidence bot accounts are all traits that lead to high-confidence bot accounts."

(2) From Signal To Noise

Your Mission // To try to remember a sequence of numbers while ignoring the noise.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
A phone or computer with access to the Internet	For a group of 15 this activity takes about 20 minutes

ROLES

› **SIGNAL //** A person (usually the facilitator) who reads a sequence of random numbers.

› **RECEIVER //** A receiver listens to the signal and, after 5 seconds, repeats the numbers.

› **NOISE //** During the five second period, the rest of the group distorts the signal by saying random numbers.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Everyone takes turns being the Receiver.

2) Receivers who remember the sequence incorrectly are eliminated.

3) The Signal begins the first round with sequences of four numbers (the sequence should change with each new Receiver). The next, it increases to five. The next to six and so on until there's only one person left. The last person left wins.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What are some of the other kinds of behaviours you've heard about with bots?

2) Is it easy to ignore the noise? What makes it easier to ignore the noise?

3) Do you think all bots are bad?

4) How might you use bots to do good things?

previous

2 From Signal To Noise

VARIATIONS

Have some people act as "amplifiers" repeating the correct sequence. Does this change things?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

To explore a specific kind of disinformation strategy—the use of social media "dampener bots" designed to drown out targeted perspectives with enough noise to cloud the signal. For instance, a Canadian law professor tweets something critical of the government. A bot created by a person supportive of that government might then produce dozens of tweets being hyper-critical of the professor. This gives someone who happens to see the exchange the impression that many people are very upset with the professor and drowns out the original criticism the professor made.

Resources

A RANDOM NUMBER GENERATOR
https://www.Google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=random+number+generator

3 The Imitation Game

Your Mission // **This is a fun activity** for attention and innovation.

What you'll need:

An empty room or gym space; Suitable for a minimum group of 8 participants

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Have everyone form a circle, standing or sitting, and select a volunteer to be the Filter. That youth leaves the room for roughly 30 seconds while someone from the remaining group volunteers to be the Bot.

2) Once the Bot is selected they start a rhythm pattern by making a simple beat such as clapping your hands.

3) Everyone follows the Bot, but encourage the group not to look directly at the Bot to avoid revealing their identity.

4) When the Filter is called back into the room by the leader, it is their task to find out who the Bot is as soon as possible.

5) The Bot changes the pattern often but discreetly, such as tapping their legs, and everyone catches on and copies the pattern.

6) The Filter has three chances to guess, if they run out of guesses the Bot wins.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Have you ever responded to a comment or followed an account that you later found out was a bot?

2) How many fake followers have been removed from your account from periodical sweeps/clean ups?

3) Do you think bots are getting easier or harder to detect?

③ The Imitation Game

WHAT'S THE POINT?

With so many players online it can be hard to tell where information is coming from and if it's legitimate. In this game, you'll have to find the bot who is influencing change in your feed, subtly but rapidly.

There is infinite information online, and so the point is to better understand how it is processed, distributed and manipulated. Social media bots can automatically generate messages, advocate ideas, act as a follower of users, and act as a fake account to gain followers for itself. It is estimated that 9-15% of Twitter accounts may be social bots.

Resources

#BOTSPOT: TWELVE WAYS TO SPOT A BOT
https://medium.com/dfrlab/botspot-twelve-ways-to-spot-a-bot-aedc7d9c110c

(4) Mission Impossible

Your Mission // Cyborg bots are bots that are operated at least in part by a human. This is done to help throw off suspicion that any of their posts are automated. The more lifelike the dialogue the better. In this game players will attempt to persuade the user to believe they are someone they're not. Pick three volunteers for the first round: the 'Bot,' the 'Real Person,' and the 'User' who will have to guess who is the real person.

What you'll need:

Cue cards and pencils to keep the writing as discreet as possible.

Fitting for a close-knit group. Minimum 6 participants.

Ensure that the leader checks each response before reading it aloud so that they can flag any inappropriate or mean words.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The Real Person, for example, Terrance, will keep all of their characteristics and respond naturally. The Bot will attempt to emulate Terrance when answering to appear convincing as a real person.

   EXAMPLE
   › Question: Do you prefer Coffee or Tea?
   › Terrance's answer: I prefer tea, especially peppermint.
   › Chatbot's answer: Tea because it's less caffeinated.

2) The Real Person and the Bot both get cue cards where they will write answers down to the questions that are asked by the User in front of the entire group. The leader will take the answers, shuffle and read out loud for the User to decide who is the Real Person. You can keep score of how many guesses are correct with a small group.

3) Rotate among the group so that everyone has a turn in each role even if some people go twice. For added fun, randomly pick a Bot every few rounds to include a robotic giveaway in their response such as sharing a link, asking a question back (like, did I answer your question), or unnatural speech.

(4) Mission Impossible

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

› What could you spend all day talking about?

› How many times a day do you look in the mirror?

› If you had to live a week without internet, what would you do to keep yourself busy?

› What's your dream job?

› Describe yourself in 3 words.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) What were some giveaways that you could tell the real person from the bot?

2) How often do you use chatbots for customer service and what has been your experience?

3) Have you ever been fooled by someone in your comments that you responded to that turned out to be a bot?

4) Have you ever received an automated text, call or email claiming to be a company that ended up being fake?

5) With so much of our personal information online, how easy do you think a sophisticated bot would be able to imitate your writing style?

VARIATIONS

Have the group come up with 20 questions that anyone can answer.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The more adaptive artificial intelligence becomes the more difficult it will be to know online human interaction from bots. Social media platforms are deleting concerning amounts of Facebook accounts that engage with everyday pages. This game will bring awareness to pay greater attention to unfamiliar messages and comments that could be bots.

Resources

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE TALKING TO A CHATBOT

https://phrasee.co/how-to-tell-if-you-are-talking-to-a-chatbot/

3 //
Disinformation
& Misinformation

Bad information, spread innocently or with the intention to deceive, is not a new problem. However, in a digital world where it has become cheap and easy to produce and broadcast false information, information of all kinds can be shared widely in an instant. As a result, traditional gatekeepers of truth have lost ground and there are new concerns about the potential impact of misinformation or disinformation. Bad information shared online can influence the attitudes and behaviour of millions. Knowledge of the threat of misinformation can also contribute to a general lack of trust in any information, making it hard to build a shared sense of what's real. But there are tools and approaches available to help us distinguish good information from bad.

What is it?

What is misinformation and disinformation and what is the difference? Misinformation is false information that is spread. This is done regardless of whether there is an intent to mislead or not. Disinformation is more problematic, as it involves the deliberate spreading of false information. A blending of the two is also possible, where malicious actors can take misinformation that they see spreading and perpetuate it or twist it for political or personal gains. Essentially, disinformation can be seen as either someone fanning the flames of a fire of misinformation that is already spreading with the intent to cause more damage or starting a new fire altogether.

According to Michele Rosenthal from the New Scientist, there are three especially important problems for researchers, policy makers and the public to consider when it comes to misinformation in television, radio and online content. First, people who encounter misinformation tend to believe it. Second, media systems often do not block or censor many types of misinformation before it appears in content available to large audiences. Third, countering misinformation once it has reached the public is extremely difficult and expensive. Misinformation was a major theme in the most recent Canadian and U.S. federal elections, and it continues to be a worry moving into the upcoming Canadian federal election. It is important to understand how misinformation can impact us and our politics, and it is equally vital to know the steps that we can take to fight it.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

There is no doubt that misinformation has affected your life in a variety of ways. You may have unintentionally shared a story full of falsehoods, you may have retweeted something misleading or you may even be learning about how to spot it through classes at your school. Disinformation and misinformation are everywhere, and our technology-driven world is spreading it at lightning speed.

It has become common knowledge that the Internet is full of lies. Despite this, society still has a trigger finger when it comes to sharing and perpetuating misinformation or "fake news." Despite warnings about fake news and misinformation online, society still has a knack for sharing them.

To understand this, it is important to consider the creator of the story. Most of the time, "fake news" creators are not loyal to any one ideology, nor are they limited by geography. They monitor the pulse of society and seize on whatever the conversation is, usually to make money. Misinformation is part of the online economy, allowing bad actors to profit from users' clicks and shares. And despite the ostensibly great efforts from tech companies like Facebook to stop it, it persists.

There are a number of reasons behind why we share misinformation. First, seeing is believing. In 2018, a video of a plane doing a 360-degree turn went viral. It was viewed over 14 million times on Facebook. In this case, someone had combined a real news story of a plane making an emergency landing in China and combined it with a fake video of a plane doing a 360 degree turn on YouTube. In this instance, they combined a real news story, some real news footage, and a fake video to create something believable enough to trick people. When created effectively, misinformation featuring manipulated photos and videos is among the most likely to go viral. Moreover, when friends and family share videos online, they become more credible to us and we are more likely to share. The design of Facebook actually perpetuates the sharing of fake news because it fosters community-building online. People and companies with a lot of followers and likes generally develop some trust with their audience. And if a trusted person or company shares something, we

instantly become more likely to do the same.

The Internet presents many challenges to users in confronting deception. Sometimes it is more obvious than others. It can be much more difficult for us to defend against political deception and disinformation. When we receive an email from a "Nigerian Prince" offering to pay millions of dollars or see a website that offers to make one's lips "puffier than Kylie Jenner's", we are likely to be highly skeptical. However, many people have yet to apply that same kind of thinking and scrutiny to political disinformation. This is especially true when disinformation conforms to someone's pre-existing views. Years of social psychology research show that humans tend to pay greater attention to information that confirms their existing beliefs. We also tend to spend time with people who have similar experiences, are exposed to similar ideas, and hold similar views to us. To decide what to trust and what to question we also rely on cues like how often we have seen a given idea or how recently we personally experienced something similar to an idea that we are confronted with.

Activists and politicians, including Prime Ministers and Presidents, are not immune to peddling conspiracy theories and false promises. In fact, many such figures often gain a wide following by doing so.

The problem we have with misinformation concerns trust. When a private company presents us with an offer, we have been taught to be skeptical. However, when the offer comes in the form of a promise from a trusted politician, elected official or established political party, you are more likely to believe it. If you were to send the Nigerian Prince your personal information and he stole your identity, you would instantly learn never to do that again. But if you were to find a website or Twitter feed that promises to promote some form of social justice, "Make Canada Great Again", or something that aligns with your political beliefs, your skepticism may be lower.

For example, the vote that you cast on election day or your support for the "wrong" candidate feels much less significant than losing your money in a scam. The impacts of buying into political or news-related misinformation are not as immediately felt

because you could blame your error on the rest of society, the media or someone else, rather than on yourself. This also makes people feel less responsible for having behaviours that limit them from spreading misinformation.

Consequently, many voters don't feel the pressure to be super informed about politics. In many cases, voters remain unaware of basic information or rely on second-hand knowledge that is passed on to them from other people. Many people have not learned the skills necessary to evaluate the things they read and watch online. Often times, people end up believing dubious claims that reinforce their views on an issue without

seeing evidence that may cast doubt on those beliefs.

If one voter is misinformed when going to the polls, it is a problem. Now imagine that a huge chunk of the Canadian population has been duped into believing falsehoods—the consequences could be monumental. It is important to understand that politicians and parties are well aware of voter ignorance and bias and have an incentive to use it to their advantage. Politicians end up promising this, that and the moon if their words will win your vote. A politician unwilling to do so is at a disadvantage, either spending all of their time fighting against misinformation or struggling to find an audience.

How Does It Impact Politics?

How disinformation is impacting politics is an ongoing discussion in academia, media and society. As mentioned, misinformation and disinformation have existed in our society since the beginning of human communication, but technology has shone a light on the problem. Moreover, political operatives and foreign adversaries have recognized the Internet's potential for spreading disinformation, and they are using it to their advantage. The 2016 U.S. presidential election was a wake-up call for all major democracies in terms of how foreign influence can impact domestic politics.

The Russian government created "troll farms" to spread disinformation and sow public discord in the U.S. during its 2016 presidential election season. Canada is not immune to this problem. Karina Gould, the Minister for Democratic Institutions, warns that disinformation campaigns similar to those involved in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and elections across western Europe could target Canada in 2019. Moreover, the Canadian Communications Security Establishment recently published its 2019 Update on Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process. The report highlighted that the attempts of foreign entities to influence our election will mirror what has been observed in other advanced democracies around the world. Additionally, experts believe that most Canadians will encounter some form of foreign cyber interference related to the 2019 federal election. The goal of these trolls will be to sway the ideas and decisions of voters by polarizing

social and political issues, promoting the popularity of one party over another and trying to shape the public statements and policy choices of a candidate.

Having a hard time picturing how disinformation can be used to impact politics? Here are a few examples.

Lobbyists and special interest groups are able to use disinformation to impact our civic life. In 2015, an anti-abortion group known as the Centre for Medical Progress posted videos allegedly showing an aborted fetus at a Planned Parenthood clinic. The videos purported to prove that Planned Parenthood was selling the fetuses to researchers. These videos sparked a huge backlash and a wave of protests across the U.S., leading to a Republican push to defund the organization. It was later proved that the videos were doctored, thus presenting a narrative that was in many ways inaccurate. The Centre for Medical Progress admitted that the videos contained misinformation but it was too late; the damage was done. The videos were used by anti-abortionists to raise funds and fight against Planned Parenthood. Since the videos' release, Planned Parenthood has lost a significant amount of funding, which has led to the closing of many of their offices.

Another example of disinformation in politics was the "birther" campaign against Barack Obama, perpetuated by Donald Trump. In 2011, Donald Trump pushed an unfounded theory that Barack Obama

was born in Kenya, not Hawaii, and was therefore ineligible to be U.S. president. The accusations gained traction among many right-wing conspiracy theorists, culminating in repeated calls for Obama to reveal his birth certificate. Trump even claimed that he had seen Obama's birth certificate, which would prove that he was indeed not American. Many claim that Trump's use of the birther claim helped launch him into the political sphere and gave him a platform to run for president. Trump's peddling of disinformation about the Obamas gained him a huge following on Twitter and a legitimacy in influencing public discourse. The term "birther" gained so much steam that it is now in the dictionary and is even an obscure political affiliation.

A closer to home example of a disinformation campaign is the Canadian robocall scandal of 2011. During the 2011 federal election in Canada, many residents in Guelph, Ontario complained about automated calls giving false information about voting locations. They were being told that their polling stations had been moved to different locations. Believing these phone calls were real, voters went to the new locations to find that they were empty fields or other locations and not their voting station. An investigation found that the campaign was created by a party staffer with the intent to influence a tight MP race in Guelph and swing the outcome in favour of his party. In the end, the party staffer was convicted.

What Can We Do About It?

As previously stated, misinformation & disinformation have existed since human beings have been able to communicate. Misinformation can occur unintentionally, whereas disinformation is intentional. However, technology is becoming a powerful tool to harness in an effort to misinform the public. So what can we do about it? Both the Canadian government and the public can take action in trying to combat it.

The Canadian government has launched a task force to fight misinformation ahead of the 2019 federal election. The task force has created a media literacy campaign to fight foreign influence and misinformation in our election. A government agency has been created to monitor and notify other agencies and the public about disinformation attempts. The task force is led by five nonpartisan political officials and is housed within the Department of Global Affairs. The government is also putting pressure on social media platforms to combat misinformation and disinformation before the election. The government has created laws to encourage tech companies to be more transparent about their anti-disinformation and advertising policies. Finally, the

government announced that $7 million would be given to projects aimed at increasing public awareness of misinformation online.

Despite the government's efforts, it is still very likely that you will encounter misinformation or disinformation in your day-to-day life. So what can you do as an individual to combat it? There are a number of things.

1) **READ MORE THAN JUST THE HEADLINE.** How often are you scrolling through your social media feeds, then read a headline and assume you understand the story? Sometimes you may even like and share the story without reading it. It is important to dive a little deeper and actually read the article to make sure you understand it.

2) **CONSIDER WHY THIS CONTENT MADE IT TO YOUR FEED AT THIS MOMENT.** What algorithms might be at play? How do they work? Might there be bots or trolls affecting whether this content was served to you?

3) **READ LATERALLY,** look for other places you can find information on the topic.

4) **CHECK THE WEB ADDRESS** for strange-sounding or looking web addresses that end in extensions like ".infonet" and ".co" "instead of ".com", ".ca", or ".org". While the web address of fake news websites will often look very close to the news site they are trying to mimic, a close eye to the details will allow you to catch it. For example, instead of "www.abcnews.com", a fake news website is "www.abcnews.com.co"

5) **ARE THERE TYPOS OR SLOPPY WRITING?** Fake news websites are more prone to spelling and grammatical errors as they often do not have copy editors like most credible new sources.

6) **ARE OTHER NEWS SITES REPORTING ON THE SAME STORY?** If it is a major story there should be more than one news site reporting on it so read multiple stories on the same subject to verify that the information is indeed the same across multiple outlets.

7) **CHECK THE PUBLICATION DATE.** Sometimes news stories from several years ago get recycled and people share it as if it is recent news, this is also a form of misinformation. For example, a politician may have been accused of a committing a crime a decade ago but was ultimately found to be innocent. If the old story is recirculated now without the context that the politician was found to be innocent, it may damage their reputation.

8) **BE A CRITICAL THINKER.** Don't just accept something as fact. Question it, talk about it with friends and ask experts. Media has a tendency to blend opinion and news at times, and it is best to always question what you are reading or watching.

9) **TALK TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** Find someone with a differing political perspective than yours and ask them what they think about a topic that fascinated you or about a story you read. See what their perspective is, trade notes and have a more rounded view on the topic.

10) **BE CURIOUS. MEDIA CAN BE BIASED.** The next time you are interested in a breaking news story, try this little experiment. Read an article about the same topic on CBC, CNN, MSNBC, BBC and FOX. You will see a huge difference in the style of reporting and pick up on the different biases in the media. Sometimes these things are obvious just by reading the titles of the articles. This demonstrates the importance of looking at various sources when educating yourself about current events.

11) **BE CALM.** There are so many examples of people perpetuating misinformation by having a trigger finger online. If a story makes immediately gives you a strong emotional reaction, then there is a risk that it is misinformation. So take a breath or step away from the story and read it at a later time when you feel you can approach it calmly.

(1) 2 Truths
& a Lie Remix

Your Mission // Sort fact from fiction with a new twist on this classic game. While the point of the traditional 2 truths and a lie game is to tell truths and lies that do not necessarily have anything to do with each other, in our version, the truths and lies are woven into the same story. This is more reflective of how disinformation stories are built, based on the weaving of truths and lies, making it hard to just say the whole story is made up.

How long will the activity take?

Each round takes about 4 minutes to play.
For a group of 15 people this activity lasts about 20 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Everyone is given 3 minutes to think of a story they would
be comfortable telling about themselves.

2) Pair off randomly or with the people next to you. (If there is an extra person,
or too few people, the facilitator can jump in or out of the game.)

3) Pairs tell each other short autobiographical stories which include 2 truths and
1 lie. The form of the story should be: ONCE I... → THEN... → NOW I...

   EXAMPLES:

   › **01 //** Once I had braces (truth). Then I got nerve damage in my cheek (lie). Now
   I can't feel anything on an area of my face (truth).

   › **02 //** Once I had two cats (truth). Then one of them ran away from home (lie).
   Now, I don't like cats (truth).

   › **03 //** Once I was riding my bike to school when I saw a skunk run by (truth). Then
   I chased the skunk down the street on my bike and it sprayed me (truth). Now, I
   don't chase skunks down the street (lie).

4) Each partner tries to identify the other's lie.

5) Those who guess the lie incorrectly are eliminated from the game.

6) If both players guess the lie incorrectly then they have to try again until one of them
guesses correctly and can be paired up with another winner.

previous

(1) 2 Truths & a Lie Remix

7) The winners of each pair continue to face-off against each other until there is only one pair left. The game is over when there is only one liar left!

NOTE // Facilitators are encouraged to make up a story of their own as an example.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) How did you know if something was a truth or a lie?

2) Was it hard to tell the truths and lies apart when it is all part of one story?

3) What strategies were you using to get away with your lie?

4) Do you remember a story that you heard on the news or one that someone had told you before that was similarly hard to figure out what was true and what was false?

5) What does this all mean for the media and our ability to understand the truth, particularly when it comes to politics?

6) Most many media organizations are not in the business of spreading disinformation, but of those that do, which strategies can we use to identify bad stories?

VARIATIONS

If you have more time, or the game finishes quite fast, try a round where people get to ask follow up questions about the stories. How does this change the game?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

One of the most common strategies used by disinformation organizations is to embed disinformation within many accurately reported stories in order to disguise disinformation. Playing this game brings your group's attention to this in a fun way. It's a jumping off point to talk about how to address that.

Resources

N / A

(2) Fake News Face Off

Your Mission // We are on the hunt for 'fake news' in media. Everyone and their granny has an online opinion, making it difficult to tell the difference from what's hearsay to what's shared with journalistic integrity.

What you'll need:

Computers or smartphones.

See **VARIATIONS** below if there is no Internet access.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Set your group into teams of 2-5 that will compete to find as many articles and posts about a controversial topic online.

2) Each team gets 1 point for posts/news from civilian broadcasters (aka the average person) and 2 points for fake news from independent sources (example: dailynews. com).

3) Provide the group with 20-30 minutes to search, checking on their progress and offering tips.

4) Give another 20 minutes to go through each group's findings, select the winning team, and leave room for discussion.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What are some of the patterns of misinformation?

2) How do you address your peers sharing fake news?

3) Can you share a time when you were a victim of innocently sharing news you thought was real but turned out to be false, and what would you do differently?

(2) Fake News Face Off

VARIATIONS

Make sure news sources are age appropriate. Pre-select and print three news stories from three different sources, such as Twitter and Facebook. Point out giveaways in the posts/articles that make the story false.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Get the youth to identify the difference between speculation, opinion and fact.

Resources

WIKIPEDIA - BASIC FACT CHECKING RESOURCE
https://www.wikipedia.org/

(3) Decepticon

Your Mission // Share something in your own words about a person, place or thing that is newsworthy BUT swap in one fake piece of information and have the group guess what it is.

What you'll need:

Computers, newspapers, or smartphones to source current articles from.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Break out individually for 10-15 minutes to have each person read an article from a credible news source about a current event, no older than 7 days old.

2) Each participant goes over the article and creatively re-tells the story by including two truths and a lie by raising their hand each time they present a 'fact'. Have them write it down, no longer than a paragraph is needed.

3) The listeners have to guess which part of the story is untrue.

EXAMPLE:

"According to the 2019 report Canada's Changing Climate Report (CCCR) which was commissioned by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canada's annual average temperature over land has warmed by [1.7 C] since [1968 (False, correct answer: 1948)] . The rate of warming is even higher in Canada's North, in the Prairies and northern [British Columbia]."

In this example, the temperature, date, or location are all easy to falsify. Participants should choose articles where facts can be manipulated to make the game challenging.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Have you read a news source that didn't make sense?

2) Has anyone ever written something false about you, from a simple misspelling of your name to saying you were from a different country or part of town?

3) What are giveaways that something isn't true in an article?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Getting the facts right may not always seem like a big deal but other times getting the facts wrong can cause huge issues. It is particularly important to have the right facts when governments use those facts as the basis for making policies that affect peoples' lives. For example, facts about climate change and how to find solutions to stop it need to be as accurate as possible for our policies to be effective in stopping climate change. Unfortunately, there is a lot of disinformation that needs to be combed through with critical thinking.

previous

2   Decepticon

VARIATIONS

For younger participants provide a couple of pre-selected examples that are simple to guess.

EXAMPLE #1

On May 1, 2016, a wildfire began southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. On May 3, it swept through the community, forcing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history, with upwards of 88,000 people forced from their homes.[12] Firefighters were assisted by personnel from the Canadian Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and other Canadian provincial agencies, to fight the wildfire. Aid for evacuees was provided by various governments and via donations through the Canadian Red Cross and other local and national charitable organizations.

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Fort_McMurray_wildfire

EXAMPLE #2

The Toronto Raptors of the National Basketball Association (NBA) are a professional basketball team based in Toronto, Ontario. After the Vancouver Grizzlies moved to Memphis in 2001, the Raptors became the only Canadian team in the NBA. Since its founding in 1995, the team has won six division titles, made the playoffs 11 times and won the NBA championship once. Star players have included Damon Stoudamire, Vince Carter, Chris Bosh, Kyle Lowry, DeMar DeRozan and Kawhi Leonard. In 2017–18, the Raptors finished atop the Eastern Conference regular season standings and set a franchise record with 59 wins. They won another division title in 2018–19 and advanced to the NBA Finals, where they defeated the Golden State Warriors in six games for their first NBA championship in franchise history.

SOURCE: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-raptors

EXAMPLE #3

Members of the community of Quinte West near Belleville showed off their Canadian pride and in the process set a new world record. A total of 3,942 dressed in red t-shirts gathered at Centennial Park to form the largest human maple leaf as part of Canada Day long weekend celebrations. An official with the Guinness World Record organization was on hand to verify the new record.

SOURCE: https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/06/29/almost-4000-gather-near-belleville-to-form-largest-human-maple-leaf/

Resources

Globe and Mail, Huffington Post Canada, Maclean's, CBC, NOW Magazine, VICE Canada, National Observer, Salut Bonjour, The Coast, The Guardian, etc.

4 //
Privacy

We keep some of our most important and personal information on our phones and the online applications we use. But we don't always know who is going to end up seeing that information, or how it is going to be used. Since our politics and economy is increasingly being driven by our data—that personal information we share, knowingly or unknowingly—people are beginning to pay more attention to whether our privacy is being respected by the sites, apps, and platforms we rely on. There are techniques and tools available to us to guard our own privacy better online.

What is Privacy?

Privacy is the ability to choose who you share personal information with. It is the freedom from unwanted intrusion. The Canadian government considers it a violation of your privacy if businesses collect, use or disclose your personal information without your explicit consent. As technology develops, protecting our privacy becomes more complex as the use of the Internet and social media allow for digital trails and the sharing of your personal information without your knowledge or consent.

Now more than ever, Canadians have more opportunities to connect and communicate with one another. Websites, emails, discussion groups and social media sites are wonderful ways to stay in touch with friends, families, and chat with people around the world. However, even with the toughest privacy settings in place your online activities are never entirely private. This is because every time you visit a website or click on a link, you are leaving a digital trail. This digital trail leaves breadcrumbs that shed light on who you are, what you are interested in, what you do, and what you like and what you dislike. Companies, organizations and even political parties are then able to gain access to this information and use it in ways that you may or may not like.

So what personal information may you be sharing? The Canadian government defines personal information as data about an "identifiable individual. It is information that on its own or combined with other pieces of data, can identify you as an individual." This includes information about: contact information, race, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, marital status, medical, education or employment history, financial information, DNA, identifying numbers such as your social insurance number, or driver's license, views or opinions about you as an employee.

In the new age of big data, the discussion on privacy has generated a lot of attention. These trails that we create online and the identity we forge on social media is deemed as valuable by organizations. Many Canadians may not actively be considering or aware of who is actually interested in the pages we like on Facebook, or the celebrities we follow on Instagram. Moreover, many Canadians are unaware of how their information is being used in advertising and politics. Political campaigns have become more and more involved in acquiring mass amounts of data on voters in an effort to win votes. It is important to know how this new economy of big data impacts your privacy.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

The protection of our privacy is becoming more difficult with technological advancements. There are many ways in which it can affect our lives, whether personal or political. The use of social media and the privacy concerns that stem from it are important to highlight.

As Canadians, we are well aware of the information we share willingly online. This may be an impassioned Facebook post, or a super cute picture on Instagram. However, we are not all aware of who owns our content, and what they can do with it once we share it. Every photo, message, video, snap or story we share on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram or any other sharing service is technically owned by the service on which it's posted. Although this doesn't mean that they can share or use your content in literally any way they like, it does mean that they can analyze that content to create new data about you, that they can share however they like. This data about data, or "metadata", can contain a lot more personal information than we might think. This metadata is highly sought after for companies and political parties as it allows them to make more targeted ads directed at you online.

Here is a real-life example. As reported in Forbes, the company Target was able to guess that a teenage girl in the United States was pregnant before her own father knew. Her father went to his local Target furious that his daughter had been sent coupons for baby clothes, and demanded to know why they were encouraging her to get pregnant in high school. In reality, she was already pregnant, and Target had gathered as much. Combining artificial intelligence, statistics, and mountains of consumer data, they knew that the things she was searching for and buying online indicated she was pregnant. Social media tracks our behaviour with a lot of detail for the same reason. Every activity we engage in leaves behind digital breadcrumbs that social media websites collect in order make predictions about our behaviour which they can sell to advertisers.

Next time you search for a particular clothing item on Google, look to see if you are being shown ads for similar products on your social media sites.

Social media sites and websites deal with data brokers. Data brokers are companies that collect personal information from individuals and then sell that data to outside organizations. Data brokers make deals with outside organizations that they can use mass amounts of collected data to create specific ads that target certain demographics of people. In the past, social media companies have sold mass amounts of data to data brokers who have then used it to help political campaigns, politicians, or companies. This means that you are knowingly or unknowingly allowing third party companies access to your information to create political advertisements that can influence our democracy. The issue is, many Canadians unknowingly agree to give up some of their privacy without fully knowing how it may be used to shape the national discourse around politics. Moreover, your giving up of online privacy allows companies to target you with specific ads tailored to your interests.

There are some potential benefits of giving up some of your online privacy. Predictive advertising offers some potential health benefits for users. Artificial intelligence has been proven to have the ability to identify users who are struggling with bipolar disorder, depression or mental health issues. If used correctly, predictive advertising can help people in need find services that could save their lives. From a business or political perspective, giving up some of your privacy means that content and information that you are interested in will be catered and sent to you directly. As AI gets better, and you share more content online, organizations can send you more and more relevant content to simplify or streamline your life.

How Does It Impact Politics?

Political parties collect a massive amount of information about voters. They start with our names, addresses, phone numbers, and extend to our social media handles, political leanings, jobs, education, history of participation, and observational data about us like religion, ethnicity or sexuality. They collect this information in a variety of ways. They may collect it from their own canvassing, Elections Canada, or from third-party companies like data brokerages. They are able to do this with or without your consent. They are able to invade your privacy, depending on existing privacy laws and standards.

Political parties collect this data to create campaigns and advertisements that would persuade us to support them, vote for them, donate to them, or even volunteer for them. The data they collect on us gives them the tools they need in order to figure out exactly what they should or shouldn't say to us.

This is where the conversation on privacy becomes very important. Political parties are able to do all of the above with basically no oversight. There have been some developments in protecting Canadians' privacy. A digital charter was created to help protect our online rights. Additionally, the Trudeau government invested over $500 million in cyber security. Finally, in 2018, Parliament passed the Elections Modernization Act, which did create some new privacy rules on how political parties use our data. However, all of these developments have been heavily criticized as not going far enough.

Most of these policies target businesses exclusively, and leave out rules and regulations for political parties around Canadians' privacy. The Elections Modernization Act now requires political parties to have their own privacy policy and to make it available on their website. However, the responsibility then falls on the voter to go to a party's website to view the information they are collecting about you—which is asking a lot from the average Canadian. There is currently no obligation for Canadian political parties to limit themselves on data collection. Furthermore, if you have a complaint or issue with a political party regarding privacy there is no mechanism in place to force the party to respond or address it. If you wanted

to lodge a complaint against a company, you could do so to the Privacy Commissioner. Critics have argued that political parties are unwilling to legislate on this matter, as the collection and use of our personal information is highly valuable for their own self-interest.

Another important factor in how our online privacy impact politics is a discussion on the companies that have emerged to harvest information on us. Data brokerages, which buy and sell our information, also attempt to influence our political decisions. Limitations on our privacy rights allows for the emergence of data brokerages into the political sphere. They now have a tremendous amount of power to influence politics.

An excellent example of this occurred in 2016 when the company Cambridge Analytica gained worldwide attention for their involvement in the U.S. presidential election. They are a British consulting firm that "mines" or collects data on people, and then uses it to make strategic political communication to impact election results. Cambridge Analytica was notoriously involved in a scandal with Facebook. They gained improper access to around 87 million users' personal information, which they used to assist political parties during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Cambridge Analytica found a loophole in Facebook's privacy policies on data gathering and used it to collect a huge amount of data on unknowing users. Essentially, if your friend took a quiz administered by this company, it gave Cambridge Analytica access to your personal information. To many, this felt like a huge violation of privacy. Cambridge Analytica was able to use this data to create political advertisements for their clients and influence the 2016 presidential election. This scandal created a huge uproar and cause for a re-evaluation on protecting our online privacy.

Firms like Cambridge Analytica can use our data in a variety of ways. It can be used by political parties to reach out to new demographics and increase voter turnout. It can also be used to conduct voter suppression in key battlegrounds and tip the results in favour of one candidate over another. Many Canadians probably never considered how giving up some of their privacy online could be used to shape the minds of thousands of others.

What Can We Do About It?

The Internet has never been more convenient, to connect with friends, shop for products and educate yourself about anything imaginable. However, many people are becoming painfully aware of the need to consider the risks the Internet poses to our privacy. Organizations that collect and use your information have a responsibility to protect it, but there are certain things you can do to protect yourself from the misuse of your information. It is important for you to have your privacy respected in the way that you want. Ultimately, if this is something you are passionate about, you can take action. Below we outline a few things that can help you avoid the risks of sharing your information, while keeping the benefits.

Threat Modeling

Threat modeling means understanding what information you want to protect and who you want to protect it from and then planning accordingly. You might be alright with your friends seeing your search history but not your mom. So, using private browsing on a device your mom borrows occasionally is a good idea. To practice threat modeling, there are five questions you can try to answer:

1) What are you trying to protect?

2) Who are you trying to protect it from?

3) How likely is it to be taken?

4) How bad are the consequences if you fail?

5) How much trouble are you willing to go through to keep that information private?

Once you've identified the kinds of information you'd like to protect (i.e. Your impulsive spending habit, your health, your psychological profile, where you live) there are many tools to help you protect your information.

PRIVATE BROWSING

› Using Incognito mode or private browsing mode is a good way of limiting the number of cookies used to track you. This may seem like a simple step but it can be quite effective.

DO A PHONE AUDIT

› Audit the apps on your phone. Many of them will collect a lot of information about your online and offline activities. Go through and remove access to any information that your apps don't absolutely require and decide which apps you can live without.

USE ANTI-TRACKING SERVICES

› Privacyio.com recommends many different services to help prevent your online behaviour from being tracked. For instance, Duckduckgo.com is a search engine that does not track your search history.

① Cellphone Chicken

Your Mission // To convince your members that you're all going to play a game called "Cell phone chicken". (In reality you won't actually play this game as it's a huge invasion of privacy). The point of this exercise is to recognize how uncomfortable it can be to give up your privacy to people you don't know, but do not let your group know this until the end.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Phones, or computers with Internet access.	Roughly 5 minutes to introduce the activity and then 10 minutes for discussion.

INSTRUCTIONS

1)   Get everyone sitting in a circle, with you standing in the middle (around a table or just on the floor is fine).

2)   Instruct everyone to unlock their phones. To do this go to your setting and change your auto lock settings.

  ›   **FOR iPHONES**, go to "Display & Brightness" and change Auto-Lock to "Never".

  ›   **FOR ANDROID** users, go to settings, then "Screen" or "Display". Then go to "Timeout" or "Screen Timeout". Then select a longer time.

3)   Wait until everyone has done so, then verbally confirm with everyone that they have. (For those who don't have phones, have them log in to a social media account of theirs on a computer, or participate in it as a mental exercise).

4)   Now, instruct everyone to make sure that their phone will stay unlocked for at least 10 minutes by going into their phone's settings. Again, confirm everyone has done it by asking everyone.

5)   Ask everyone to place their phones in the center of the circle.

6)   Tell them the name of this game is "cell phone chicken".

7)   Ask everyone, by show of hands, how many people think we shouldn't be worried about our privacy on our phones? Note whether it's the majority or minority of people.

8)   Tell them that, the point of this game is to invade your privacy.

(1)   Cellphone Chicken

9) You will give a countdown from 5 and when you get to 1, they'll each take someone else's phone and go through it. People can go through photos, messages, Internet search histories, contact lists, Facebook accounts, Snapchat accounts. Whatever they like on your device.

10) Then tell them, when one person freaks out too much and asks for their phone back, the game ends.

11) Start to count slowly down from 5 but stop at 2.

12) At this point, some youths will start to panic and question the exercise, there are two ways that the game can go:

A // **The youth put their phones into the middle willingly** and no one objects or freaks out by the time you get to 2. At this point, you stop the game and tell the players: "Alright so this is when the game stops. We do not actually want you to look at each other's phones. What we wanted was for you to go through the mental exercise of deciding to give away your private information. Now let's talk about what thoughts were in your head when you were going through this exercise?" Then please engage in a conversation about privacy, what they put online, what they allow apps to read and see, why are they uncomfortable or comfortable with corporations reading their private information?

› Ask how people are feeling about playing the game.
› Ask how many people would be nervous about playing the game right now.
› Ask how many people would be nervous about playing with their parents.
› Ask how many people would be nervous about playing the game with teachers.
› Ask how many people would be nervous about playing the game with strangers.
› Ask how many people know that most of the information on their phone is already available to strangers.

B // **The youth do NOT put the phone in the middle** and start to question the exercise even before you start to count down. At this point, you engage them in a conversation about privacy, what they put online, what they allow apps to read and see, why are they uncomfortable when another human does it vs a robot? Here are some examples of questions/interactions that might take place:

EXAMPLE #1

› **Youth:** "I don't want people to look at the stuff on my phone."
› **Facilitator:** "Why not?"
› **Youth:** "There is private stuff on there!"
› **Facilitator:** "Then why are you so comfortable giving away the same private information online?"

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(1) Cellphone Chicken

EXAMPLE #2

› **Youth:**   "What are the rules about what people can do when they are on my phone? What are the boundaries and limits?"

› **Facilitator**: "There are none, they can do anything they want when they are on it, look at your photos, read your messages, looking at your banking info."

› **Youth**:   "That's not cool, I don't want them to do that."

› **Facilitator**: "But why is this any different to you allowing apps to read and look at all of your photos and messages on social media?"

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What is privacy?

2) What do they put online?

3) What do they allow apps to read and see?

4) Why are they uncomfortable when another human sees and reads what's on their phone vs a robot or algorithm?

5) What are some ways they can protect themselves from giving away their private information?

6) What are data brokers?

7) What is advertisement targeting and how do they use my data to target me with ads?

VARIATIONS

If the youth do not have cell phones please use the computer room and they can log on to their Facebook, Instagram or email instead), if some of the youth do not have cell phones they can just do the exercise in their head. When using computers to log on, the point is still not to actually let other youth click on anything. We just want them to go through the process of logging on and thinking about the prospects of others seeing their private information.

previous

(1) Cellphone Chicken

WHAT'S THE POINT?

This activity gets youth to think about what is on their phones, what information they may want others to know and what information they may not, the access they are giving away to big corporations like Facebook and Google when they allow access and what the dangers may be of not being fully aware of what privacy policies say. We want to make the youth feel a bit uncomfortable about having others look at their phones and ponder why they may not feel this discomfort when a robot or algorithm is involved as opposed to a human.

Remember the point of the game is not to frighten the players. We all give up our privacy under certain circumstances and for good reasons. Your doctor for instance knows a lot about you, and you really want them to. Giving up privacy under controlled and consenting circumstances can be a good thing. We rely on it as a society. But for the selective sharing of private information to be good, we have to have consent.

So, the point is not to frighten. It's to drive home how much of our information we give up to various groups without even realizing we're doing it. Most people think that when their Snapchat stories or photos disappear, they are gone for good. What they don't know is that Snapchat can keep your photos and data for up to a month after they've been "deleted" from your phone. Most people don't know that Facebook and Google track you even outside of their services across the websites you visit. Most people don't know how huge amounts of personal information are collected, bought and sold about you. And you should. And from there, you can make consenting decisions.

Resources

N / A

(2) Security Breach

Your Mission // Prevent a security breach by working together to protect gaps that make information vulnerable.

What you'll need:

Before you start you will need an equal number of chairs to the number of participants.

Review safety rules (no diving, no head-first lunges, one person to a chair).
This game can be easily played in a classroom, with tripping hazards cleared.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Have every player bring a chair and arrange them randomly throughout the room with space in between each and have everyone start seated.

2) The leader chooses a volunteer to be the Security Breach and stand away from their chair so that one chair is left open. The goal of the security breach is to get past security and sit in the empty chair.

3) All seated players must work together to stop the person in the middle from sitting in the open chair. Someone next to the empty seat tries to beat the Security Breach to it by shuffling over, creating a new empty seat.

4) The game continues until the person in the middle makes it safely to the open seat. The facilitator then picks someone new to stand.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

The importance of protecting your privacy by closing the gaps on threats like sharing your password, not signing out of your account, using the same password for every login, etc. Bring the conversation home with examples of how everyday people including youth can be victim to hacking.

② Security Breach

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

› Have you ever had your account hacked, and if so what did you do?

› If you had to create a new account, how do you feel about all the old data you lost access to?

› Do you know the ways that you can make it easier, or harder for hackers to break into your account?

› Have you shared your passwords with friends, parents or significant others currently or in the past?

› Have you had access to someone's account and did some snooping they didn't know about?

VARIATIONS

For a challenge add two volunteers to be the security breaches or play in slow motion.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

There is no foolproof security system but companies have the responsibility to keep collected confidential/ sensitive information safe. This is a fun group activity that requires everyone to work as a team to avoid a security breach.

Resources

PRIVACY TIPS FOR TEENS

https://staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/managing-your-privacy/privacy-tips-teens/

(3) Octopus Cookies

Your Mission // The Internet is filled with tracking cookies, try not to get tagged. This is an adapted version of the "Octopus Tag Game" that some may have played in gym class.

What you'll need:

A large open space for a group to run

Something to mark off safe zones

ROLES

› **The Data Broker** (facilitator) turns people into cookies.

› **Cookies** stand in place trying to collect data by tagging them.

› **Data** try to avoid being "collected".

INSTRUCTIONS

This game is played in a large open space with safe zones at each end and room to run.

1) Everyone begins as "Data" on one side of the room known as a safe zone.

2) When the Data Broker yells "Data Dump", all the pieces of "Data" try to get from one side of the room to the other without being caught by the Data Broker.

3) If any of the Data are tagged by the Data Broker, they become Cookies. The Cookies stand in place where they were tagged and trying to tag additional data using just their hands and not moving their feet.

4) The game continues until there are no pieces of Data left.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

Define and discuss how data brokerages work and how social media sites track your behaviour across the net.

Data brokers definition: (aka information brokers, data providers, and data suppliers) are companies that collect data themselves or buy it from other companies (like a credit card company), crawl the Internet for useful information about users—legally or otherwise—and aggregate that information with data from other sources.

(3) Octopus Cookies

WHAT'S THE POINT?

There is no foolproof security system but companies have the responsibility to keep collected confidential/sensitive information safe. This is a fun group activity that requires everyone to work as a team to avoid a security breach.

VARIATIONS

A version that brings in "clear browsing history": the facilitator (data broker) sees that lots of students have been tagged and wants to refresh the game without it ending, so he or she shouts "Clear Browsing History!" and all of the data are now free and the game restarts.

What you'll need:

Open space or a gym

Even teams

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Do you ever use a privacy browser when online?

2) Have you gotten ads from websites you visited on other sites that you were surprised to see?

3) Are you concerned with how much of your information and preferences are being tracked online?

4) Do you ever clear your cookies cache?

Resources

WHAT IS A DATA BROKER AND HOW DOES IT WORK?
https://clearcode.cc/blog/what-is-data-broker/

IT'S TIME TO SWITCH TO A PRIVACY BROWSER
https://www.wired.com/story/privacy-browsers-duckduckgo-ghostery-brave/

4 The Entire History of You

Your Mission // To understand just how much data social media platforms can collect about you to buy and sell to others.

What you'll need:

Access to the Internet and/ or communal computers.

How long will the activity take?

This will vary quite a bit depending on which service you're downloading from. Some apps take seconds, others can take up to 48 hours.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Google and Twitter all allow people to download the information that has been collected on them.

› INSTAGRAM

– Navigate to **Instagram.com** and select your profile.

– Click the gear next to your name and select **"Privacy and Security."**

– Scroll down to **"Data Download"** and click **"Request Download."**

– Then enter the email to which you'd like to receive the download link and verify the request by entering your Instagram password.

– Instagram collects:
  · My profile information
  · Everything I've searched on Instagram
  · Everyone I follow
  · Every post I've ever liked
  · Direct messages I've sent to other users
  · Every video I've ever posted
  · Every photo I've ever posted
  · Every story I've ever shared (Stories are Instagram's Snapchat-like feature)

› SNAPCHAT

– Log into your account on **accounts.Snapchat.com**

– Click **'My Data'**.

– Click **'Submit Request'** at the bottom of the page.

– If you have verified an email address with Snapchat, they'll send you an email with a link once your data is ready to download.

– Follow the link in your email to download your data.

– Click the link to download your data.

NOTE: You cannot download your data using the Snapchat app.

› FACEBOOK

– Go to **Facebook.com/settings**

– Tap **"Download a copy of your Facebook data."**

– Tap **"Download Archive."**

– It might take a few minutes, but Facebook will alert you when your archive is ready.

– When it is, click **"Download Archive"** again, and a zip file will download to your computer.

– Browse through that archive by opening each file inside the folder.

previous

4   The Entire History of You

› **GOOGLE**
   – Go to **https://takeout.Google.com/settings/takeout**
   – Google collects:
     · Your personal profile: name, gender and birth date, personal cell phone numbers
     · Your Google searches
     · A complete map of where you've been at what date and time since you started using Google on your phone
     · What apps you use
     · Your advertising profile
     · Your entire online and search activity across all your devices
     · Your entire YouTube history
     · Things you do
     · Things you create
     · Things that make you "you"

2) Youth will download information about themselves from any or all of these services to find out which ones have the most information about them.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Was there anything collected about you that surprised you?

2) Where there any things in there you wouldn't want bought or sold?

3) Will this affect how much information you'll continue to share? Should it?

VARIATIONS

Given that not all youth have phones, this is an activity that could be done more independently by staggering access to computers.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Most people volunteer their information to these services with so much ease that they don't notice. The reach and scope of the data becomes apparent when you go back through it.

Resources

GOOGLE https://techstartups.com/2018/03/30/find-everything-google-knows-download-one-big-file/

FACEBOOK https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/23/how-to-download-a-copy-of-facebook-data-about-you.html

INSTAGRAM https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/27/how-to-download-everything-instagram-knows-about-me.html

SNAPCHAT https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/a/download-my-data

WHATSAPP https://www.gadgetsnow.com/how-to/how-to-check-everything-that-whatsapp-knows-about-you/articleshow/64048658.cms

5 //
Attention & Emotions Online

In an era of almost limitless information, we can only pay attention to so much. That makes our attention valuable, and social media platforms and online content creators are competing fiercely for it. Social media companies use a variety of techniques to ensure that we keep paying attention, through manipulation and by invoking strong emotions in us. By recognizing the techniques used to grab our attention, and changing how we use platforms, we can avoid the pitfalls of dedicating too much of our attention to the digital world.

What is it?

Understanding attention and emotion is critical to understanding the online world, and the behaviour of people and groups online. A key concept in this theme is the so-called "attention economy". The attention economy is a way of thinking about the economics of the Internet age. This theory suggests that:

› **Attention is a scarce resource.** In other words, there is only so much that we are able to pay attention to. There is also nothing that can replace attention. So there are hard limits on the amount of attention that is available.

› **On the Internet, attention can also be measured**, in a way—by looking at things like clicks on links, downloads of material, 'likes' on social media, views, followers, and social media sharing.

› **Because it can be measured, attention can be monetized**—it can be assigned a value in money.

› **Because our attention is scarce, measurable, and valuable,** Internet companies and platforms, marketing firms, products, and political messengers are all competing with each other to gain our attention.

› **The attention economy is different from the traditional economy.** Prior to the Internet, information was scarce and valuable. Now there are enormous amounts of information—more than we can consume. So the real value lies in attention, rather than information itself.

What different online actors do to gain our attention is what makes the attention economy important for understanding the digital sphere. There is fierce competition for our limited attention. In order to keep us reading their content, or sharing their content so that it finds the attention of more people, or simply remaining on their sites and apps, online platforms will use a variety of techniques. For example, social media platforms work to hold our attention through:

› REWARDS // Social media platforms are designed to give users little rewards for participating. One of the most obvious rewards is a "like". Likes or retweets have been found to have a clear psychological impact on the people receiving them—they produce pleasure. Social media games are also designed to reward the player in unpredictable ways—a

technique long known in psychology to cause someone to increase that behaviour (in other words, to play the game more). Those are called "compulsion loops".

› NUDGES // Platforms are designed to make things the companies want you to do easy, and things they don't want you to do hard. Amazon's one-click purchasing is an example of making an action easy so that we are more likely to do it. Platforms try to dissuade us from doing things that would reduce the attention we're paying to them by making those things complicated or sending strong psychological messages. For example, in the past when users try to de-activate Facebook they would be presented with a message with images of their friends, suggesting those people would miss them. These are sometimes referred to as "persuasive technologies".

› MONITORING // Social media apps on smartphones recognize when we are using them less, and respond with notifications, sounds, feelings (like a vibration), or little dots designed to encourage us to log back in.

In other words, social media companies and other Internet actors try to attract and hold our attention with more than just interesting information. The examples above are just some of a range of tools and techniques designed to keep us engaged where otherwise we might direct our attention somewhere else.

Emotion is another key factor in why we pay attention online. We have strong tendencies to pay attention to particular kinds of content, and to ignore or overlook other kinds of content. Those tendencies have a lot to do with how the content makes us feel. Research has found that content which produces emotion is more likely to "go viral"—to be widely shared across the Internet. This is true for content that produces both positive and negative feelings, but it's most true for information that invokes strong emotions like awe, anger, or anxiety. News articles focused on highly emotional or divisive topics attract the most comments, for example. Content that produces a strong emotional response related to feeling in control is also more likely to go viral.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

The fierce competition for our attention affects how we live our lives in a variety of ways. The techniques that social media platforms use create strong online habits that are difficult to break—so much so that there are real concerns about social media addiction.

Research has identified some of the impacts that the competition for our attention can have on us. They include:

› **An inability to "turn off" or "unplug"**—to cease checking social media, even for a short period. For example: A study asked 1000 college students in ten countries to stay logged out of social media for 24 hours. In every country, a majority of students admitted that they had failed to last the entire 24 hours. Around the world, students describe their reactions in similar ways, with words like "depressed", "jittery", and "restless".

› **Constant distraction,** even when we're not actively online. For example: A study found that simply having your smartphone with you reduces your ability to

think about other things you're doing, even when you are not specifically paying attention to the phone.

› **More limited in-person interactions,** in which making a close human connection is more challenging. For example: An experimental study found that the presence of a mobile phone changes the nature of a conversation between two strangers. When a phone was in the room, people felt less empathy and understanding from the people they were talking to, especially when they were talking about personally meaningful subject matter.

› **Emotional contagion**—the strong emotions that capture our attention also affect how we feel overall, and what we pass on. For example: A very controversial study conducted by Facebook on nearly 700,000 users found that when users see more positive content they post more positive content, and when they see more negative content they post more negative content.

› **Worse sleep.** For example: A series of studies have documented evidence that using a computer or smartphone in bed reduces how much and how well you sleep, and increases your sleepiness during the day.

› **Higher engagement and awareness of the news**—along with negative impacts, the sophisticated

competition for our attention also ensures that we receive more information. For example: An experiment which asked nearly 3,000 Facebook users to deactivate their accounts for a month found that while people were happier having deactivated their accounts, they were also less informed about the news.

How Does It Impact Politics?

The online attention economy, and the powerful emotional effects of online media, can have a range of effects on how citizens experience politics. As described above, one positive effect is in promoting awareness of the news and current events. By holding our attention, and feeding more information to us than we might otherwise seek out on our own, the online environment may result in a public that is more engaged and knowledgeable.

On the other hand, competition for attention can have several kinds of negative effects on how politics are experienced. For example, social media platforms will try to hold our attention by putting content in front of us that we are likely to want to spend time with. With respect to political media, that means serving us more of what we like—creating a "filter bubble" where we get more and more news and views that align with our

beliefs, and less and less different perspectives. The result is that in competing for our attention, online platforms may be reinforcing the political bubbles we live in.

The importance of emotion in what holds our attention, gets shared, and goes "viral" can also have a big impact on politics. Stories and opinions that convey strong emotions get shared more widely than those which are more measured, or moderate, or based more in facts than in feelings. Because emotion is contagious online, that viral emotional content can change how we are all feeling about a given topic, and can inflame our own emotions. So, the attention economy can contribute to a more emotional political environment, which can mean more anger, anxiety, and polarization (or negative emotions toward the 'other side').

What We Can Do About It?

Increasingly, researchers and activists—including former tech insiders—are providing tips and tools to allow us to shield ourselves from some of the more negative aspects of the attention economy. Some recommendations for how we can continue using social media while avoiding or minimizing its aggressive and addictive qualities include:

› **Change notification settings on your phone:** Apps use notifications to keep us returning to them, but it is possible to turn off many or most notifications. The Centre for Humane Technology recommends only permitting notifications of when a real person is trying to contact you (like when someone sends you

a message).

› **Change the way your phone looks:** You may have the option of changing your phone settings, so it only displays in black-and-white. Apps use bright colours to attract our attention, so changing our phones to a black-and-white display can reduce their effectiveness in doing so. Another strategy is to change what apps are displayed on your home screen, limiting it only to essential tools.

› **Remove social media apps from your phone:** A stronger move is to simply remove apps like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook from your phone so that you only access them from a computer. This

can cut down on the constant distraction that comes with carrying a smartphone, and always having immediate access to that information.

› **An app for that:** There are now many apps that exist specifically to help cut down on distraction, break social media addictions, and help us focus on other things. They range from apps that simply tell us how long or how often we have had social media platforms open, to ones that put limits on how often or when we can open certain apps. People use these apps to limit their social media use to particular times of day, so they can focus on other things at other times, for example.

The goal of these tools and practices is to create a counterbalance to the strong efforts by online platforms to capture and hold our attention, and to allow us to pay more attention to our offline lives—without necessarily shutting down our ability to benefit individually and as a society from the abundance of information now available to us.

(1) Simon Says Remix

Your Mission // Learn to think for yourself instead of following the crowd of popular but dangerous viral challenges.

What you'll need:

Paper for writing a script/outline

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Ask the group to be good sports and play an easy round of Simon Says.

2) Then begin to add action that are from fun viral video challenges such as
   › Simon says "water bottle flip" – pretend to be flipping a water bottle in the air
   › Simon says "the ice bucket challenge" – pretend to flip a bucket of ice on your head

3) Then escalate towards dangerous challenges that cannot be actually acted out, such as:
   › Simon says "Tide Pod Challenge" – pretend to eat a tide pod and feeling unwell
   › Simon says "Mannequin Challenge" – pretend to freeze in a silly position
   › Simon says "Cinnamon Challenge" – pretend to eat a spoonful of cinnamon

4) After a few rounds of this game, have the youth sit down and talk in small groups of 2-3 about the pros and cons of viral video challenges. Have them brainstorm and share the pros and cons that their group came up with. A pro can be that viral video challenges are fun and unite people while a con can be that they are dangerous and can end up hurting people.

5) Then (if time permits) have the groups do some online research to create a campaign about viral challenge awareness picking one challenge to focus on. Encourage each group to draft a script or outline that covers:

   › A description of the viral challenge
   › Where/how it originated
   › What are the side effects/repercussions
   › Create a slogan for how to decline to participate

previous

(1) Simon Says Remix

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) What viral challenges have you taken part in?

2) Have you filmed a prank for or been pranked on social media and the prank did not turn out as intended?

3) Are teens any more susceptible to taking part in viral challenges than adults?

4) How can viral content like dangerous pranks be edited and misconstrued to be fun?

VARIATIONS

Pre-select dangerous challenges, dares or pranks that are relevant to your youth.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

There are countless dangerous/problematic challenges, dares, and pranks that gain viral status and, hence, a lot of pressure to join the bandwagon. Simon Says is a simple game to demonstrate the need to pay attention to online calls-to-action that do not 'sit right' and reinforce critical thinking/self-esteem.

Resources

YOUTUBE HAS BANNED DANGEROUS PRANKS AND CHALLENGES
https://time.com/5504295/youtube-bans-challenges/

(2) Clickbait

Your Mission // Compete for the title of "News Room Champion"!
Everyone has 3 minutes to write the most eye catching and appealing news headlines you can.

What you'll need:

Either access to the Internet or a bank of recent news stories that your youth would be interested in.

A whiteboard and whiteboard marker.

Paper/pens.

How long will the activity take?

Each round of the game takes about 2 minutes to read plus 3 minutes to find a story and write a headline. For a group of 15 it will take about 20-25 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1)   Hand out pencils and paper to everyone.

2)   Explain that in this game, they'll be news room editors. So, their job is to keep people interested in their news stories.

3)   Explain that each of them will have 3 minutes to think of or find an event that they want to write a news story headline about. They will then write a one-sentence headline for it.

   NOTE: Group members may go through their normal sources for news to find a story that you think is newsworthy (try reddit, CBC, Fox news, 6ixbuzz, YouTube, Facebook or any other site you get news). It can even be a story from their memory. The key is that the story **MUST BE A REAL STORY.**

4)   Explain that the group will then compete 3 at a time for the best headlines.

5)   Instruct them to begin finding and writing their stories.

6)   On a whiteboard (or large piece of paper readable to the room) write everyone's name.

7)   After 3 minutes stop the group writing to read their headlines.

8)   Bringing 3 people to the front at a time, read the headlines.

(2) Clickbait

9) Then ask people to vote on their favourite story.
      (Note they cannot vote for their own).

10) Play as many rounds as you like.

11) The person with the most votes by the end wins the game.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What are the characteristics of the most popular stories?

2) How do the most popular headlines make you feel?

3) What are strategies you used to get your headlines selected?

4) Do you see any of these strategies used in media?

VARIATIONS

Write stories about themselves instead of news stories.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

To explore the reality that news organizations find themselves in. They have to balance writing accurate and enticing headlines in order to survive. You'll unpack and explore the techniques and strategies news room editors use and the pressures they face.

Resources

N / A

③ TMI - Too Much Information

Your Mission // Try to share information without being overwhelmed.

What you'll need:

Suitable for groups of minimum 6 participants.

3 dodge balls or similar in lightness or stuffed animals.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The group will stand in a circle formation and say their first name one by one. The second round will have the first person say their name, plus one piece of information about themselves called out by the facilitator such as favourite food or last book you read. The next person will say the first person's category and then their own.

   EXAMPLE
   › Category: favourite food
   › 1st person: Potato Salad
   › 2nd Person: Potato Salad, Spaghetti
   › 3rd Person: Spaghetti, Butter Chicken, and so on

2) Finally, do a quick round in the opposite direction with another category, for a total of (3) times so that everyone has become familiar with each other's information.

3) Choose someone to volunteer to start and say their own answer to the category and then say someone else's answer to the category that is not beside them (if possible) until everyone's answer has been said. Answer in the category that has been called. Do a rapid round of everyone going in the same order of answered. Introduce a ball or stuffed animal and do a one round. Introduce a second ball or soft toy. The game stops when the ball/toy drops. Introduce up to 6 objects depending on how large the group is.

4) Remind everyone to project their voice and to pass, not throw but pass the ball/toy.

(3) TMI - Too Much Information

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Do you ever get information fatigue?

2) Have you ever found yourself confusing details of a story by piecing together small bits of information?

3) Do you feel anxious when you are not up-to-date on a trending topic that everyone seems to know about?

4) How often do you put off an important task such as homework or getting enough rest because you have spent longer than intended online?

VARIATIONS

For a more relaxed game, you can sit on the floor and roll one ball within the group.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

This game encourages youth to be mindful of how much information they are consuming and how too much can be overwhelming/confusing to process and decipher. Many of us scroll through our timeline a mile a minute, being exposed to bits and pieces of information that seem to be created at an even more rapid speed.

Resources

EXCESSIVE INTERNET USE - MEDIA SMARTS
http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/excessive-internet-use

(4) Tipping Point

Your Mission // Have a candid conversation about the ups and downs of social media by mapping out a graph that represents the point where online engagement shifts to a burden. This activity will point out the moment when we're no longer having fun and social media feels like an obligation.

What you'll need:

Sheet paper, chalk or dry erase board or Smartphones (optional).

INSTRUCTIONS

1) iPhone instructions:
   › Open up the Settings app.
   › Scroll down to the "Screen Time" section that's grouped with Notifications, Sounds, and Do Not Disturb.
   › Tap on "Screen Time" to see your usage statistics.

2) Have participants in the group volunteer to share their Screen Time hours. Further sharing of what apps were most used are also welcome. Android users will need to reference a similar app for the equivalent to Screen Time or a similar one.

3) Ask the youth what platforms or apps they use most often and then write 4 to 6 horizontally at the bottom. Write numbers 1 to 10 vertically.

4) For each platform ask participants to share where their tipping point is between having fun to being unhappy. Average the numbers and correlate the point on the board. Repeat for all of the platforms/apps.

EXAMPLE

› Natasha believes she no longer enjoys Facebook after 1.5 hours.

› Stacy no longer enjoys Facebook after 4 hours.

› Kenneth no longer enjoys Facebook after 30 minutes.

› On average the group is not happy on Facebook after 2 hours.

Points scored
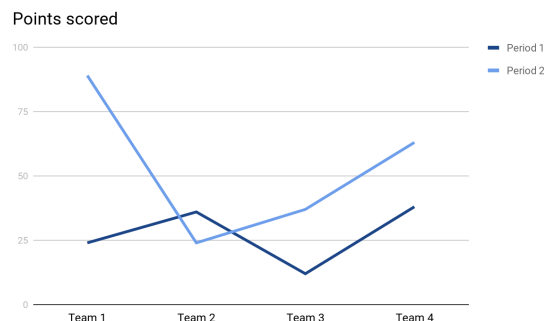
④ Tipping Point

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) What are the signs that you know you are not enjoying using a platform?

2) What are your social media habits—generally, when is the first and last time you use social media each day?

3) How important are likes, comments, shares, saves to you?

4) Do you have a business account for your personal page, if yes, why?

5) What do you think about the number of likes being removed from Instagram?

VARIATIONS

Take out Screen Time exercise if participants do not have phones.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Time flies when you're online but rarely do we consider how our mood and productivity changes. This activity will help put a number to the tipping point to help foster better online wellness.

Resources

THE MOBILE APPS WE USE THE MOST MAY BE MAKING US UNHAPPY
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/do-the-mobile-apps-we-use-the-most-make-us-unhappy/

(5) Screen Time Tetris

Your Mission // Form the perfect team to win!

What you'll need:	**How long will the activity take?**
Phones or computers to access social media accounts.	For a group size of 15 this activity will take about 25 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Players begin by reviewing their usage times for various social media services (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) on their phones.

   › IPHONES: Head to your Settings, then click on Battery. A list of apps will appear below with their respective percentages of battery usage for the last 24 hours or seven days. In the upper right hand corner, you'll find a clock icon. Click on that, and the time you spend using the apps will be added beneath their names.

   › ANDROID: Log on to Facebook on your phone. Click on "Settings and Privacy" Click on More > Settings and Privacy, then scroll down to Your Time on Facebook.

   › INSTAGRAM: Go to Your Account > More > Settings > Your Activity, and you'll see the equivalent.

2) They then team up with other players trying to find a combination of screen times adding up to 1 hour **exactly**. The team that gets the closest to 1 hour wins.

   ### EXAMPLE #1
   › If I was on Instagram for 34 mins today, I could look for:
      – Someone who was on Snapchat/Facebook/etc. for 26 mins.
      – One person on YouTube for 12 mins and another person on Reddit for 14 mins.

   ### EXAMPLE #2
   › Two people already have 48 minutes collectively. I can review my use times and see that I've spent 24 minutes on Instagram, and 14 mins on Facebook. I would team up with my Facebook time to put us at 62 mins.

⑤ Screen Time Tetris

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

The average usage times are 58 mins (Facebook), 49.5 mins (Snapchat), 53 mins (Instagram), 40 mins (YouTube).

1) How close are people to the average?

2) Are people comfortable with how long they spend on it?

VARIATIONS

Try to add up to 2hrs, or 3hrs.

People can only select one account to use.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Many of us are aware that we are addicted to our smartphones. This game may help us recognize the degree to which these devices are able to capture our attention without us even realizing it. It will hopefully foster a conversation around just how much of our time we'd like to be on our phones vs. how much time we actually spend on it.

Resources

N / A

6 //
The Changing Media & Information Environment

Traditionally, mainstream media employing professional journalists (like television, newspapers, and radio) was the source of most information and opinion—on everything from restaurant reviews to political views. The rise of digital media has reduced the power and centrality of mainstream media, and allowed new voices to emerge. This is both positive and negative; the new media landscape is more open and accessible, but there is also less quality control in the information that is shared. These changes in how we access information require changes in media practices, and also for us to become more careful consumers of information.

What is it?

Online reviews have changed how people shop and go to restaurants. Some influencers take money to provide favourable reviews. But can you trust them? What about news outlets? If they take money from advertisements, can you trust them?

In the past, most people got their news solely from traditional media like TV, radio, and newspapers. Today, many other types of media exist alongside them and have gained in popularity, but traditional media are still the source Canadians turn to most often for quality news.

With traditional media, stories are assigned to and reported on by professional journalists who have direct access to primary sources: politicians, public office holders, and celebrities, for example. These journalists have completed specialized studies and must adhere to certain journalistic standards, including a code of ethics and a commitment to share fair and accurate news. Media outlets are also subject to these journalistic standards.

Traditional sources of news are facing a very different media landscape today. Incomes from advertising—the lifeblood of traditional media—have plunged, and paid subscriptions, especially for smaller local newspapers, have fallen. This has led to drastic cutbacks in the number of journalists. Some newspapers have closed shop altogether.

As traditional media compete for advertising, some have turned to running "sponsored content" or "advertorials," where money is exchanged for producing content favourable to the sponsors. As newspaper staff numbers shrink, remaining papers have increased their use of wire services, purchasing stories from other papers to fill gaps in their news coverage. There are fewer "boots on the ground"—journalists free to go in the field to gather local stories or verify facts—and less money for newspapers to experiment with online models. There are also concerns that newspapers are decreasing their reporting of hard news and are instead providing more Op-Eds. Hard news refers to stories which focus on the reporting of events, with

the goal of informing the public. They are based on fact, with some analysis. Op-ed is short for "opposite the editorial page" and are intended to persuade the reader on an argument. Op-eds communicate the opinion on the columnists who write them. The concern is that Op-eds are becoming blurred with hard news, and fact and opinion become blurred together.

An additional strain on traditional media is that there is an increasing concentration of ownership in the mainstream media market. The concern is that the political bias of the owner impacts the reporting of the news. If local papers and radio stations are bought by larger companies, we may lose the unique voices we have reporting on local stories and focus on other matters.

Another defining characteristic of the changing information environment is the rise of new media. New media is the use of digital technology (computers or the Internet) to share information. They are interactive, using two-way communication. Stories can be easily shared, linked to, viral, and accessed. The public is no longer solely relying on traditional media for its news. For example, information can come from online-only publications, personal blogs, social media, messaging apps, or YouTube.

The rise of cell phones and smartphones has made it easy for anybody to take pictures and videos and share them instantly. In some cases, these "citizen journalists" are people who are in a certain place at a certain time, like those who happen to observe a house fire, a terrorist attack, or an altercation with police. Citizen journalists are people who are not related to a news agency but share information. They record what they see and share it with the world on a one-off basis. Although this type of journalism is not held to the same journalist standards as other forms of news, the information shared is not necessarily false or biased.

Others are involved for the longer term. They may share the stories of their communities on an ongoing basis, or regularly attend events to share their perspectives. Over time, these ongoing citizen journalists can build up a following. As they build a following, their content becomes available to a larger audience and their impact on news sharing grows.

Such citizen journalism bypasses the filtering imposed by the traditional media. As with other new media, it allows a direct relationship between the producer and consumer but does not adhere to the journalistic standards of traditional media. Without these safeguards, there is more room for mistakes, bias and misinformation.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

Simply put, it's hard to say. Researchers disagree on whether trust in traditional media is rising or falling. An IPSOS 2019 survey found that 72% of Canadians trust traditional news media to give unbiased political coverage (up 7 points since 2018 and up by 3 points since it was first measured in 2008).

The Edelman Trust Barometer measures global rates of trust in key institutions in society such as media, government, NGOs, and business. In 2019, it found that 57% of Canadians trust the media (up 8% from 2018). On the other hand, a 2019 survey from CanTrust found that rates of trust in media had dropped to 40% (from 54%, when it first began measuring in 2016).

According to a study by the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, there is a general distrust in the use of social media for the sharing of digital news. The 2018 report analyzed a survey conducted in 37 countries and found that only 23% of people trusted the news that was presented to them on social media. This is an all-time low for the study, which has been conducted since 2012. Additionally, 63% of respondents in Europe believe the government should do more to fight fake news in Europe.

What is clear in the research is that the likelihood of you trusting media (and other institutions) is affected by many different things: your education level, household income, age, or whether you consume a lot of media and regularly engage in public policy and business news. It has been found that perceptions of the media vary according to political affiliation and gender,

too. So it's difficult to understand all the factors that influence trust in the media, as the way people view the world is related to a number of interrelated factors.

Looking a bit more closely at some of the data, certain groups of Canadians are more likely to trust the media than others, and the gap between these two groups is growing. For example, in the case of the Edelman Trust Barometer, researchers found that 74% of "informed Canadians" (25 to 64, college-educated, in the top-quarter for income, and often tuning in to the news) trust the key institutions of media, business, government, and NGOs. On the other hand, only 54% of the rest of the population feels the same. This "trust gap" is the highest it's ever been in Canada, and the second highest in the 27 countries surveyed. Canadians

are also more likely to trust traditional media over other types of sources. Social media, on the other hand, is the least-trusted source of news. This is a global trend.

In summary, Canadians are not tuning out—they are still seeking to stay informed and traditional media sources are still the go-to reference for Canadians to get reliable news. In fact, according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer, more Canadians report consuming news every day (42%, up 11 points from 2018) and the number of people disengaged from the news has also dropped (from 54% in 2018 to 33% in 2019). But the same group no longer wants to pay for its news, and would like to access it at any time, leading people to increasingly consult digital sources.

How Does It Impact Politics?

Today's information environment is much more open and diverse. Citizen journalists cover stories that might never have been discovered. Anybody armed with a smartphone can report the news!

However, the more saturated information environment means that we're also getting more clickbait, recycled stories, and fake news. It's more difficult for Canadians to discern ads from opinion pieces, or even from hard news stories.

Citizens should have a say in how they are governed. But citizens can only take part in democracy if they have credible information about what the government is doing, and the feasibility of the options provided by those competing for their votes. A significant number of Canadians are worried of the possible effects of disinformation being used to thwart democracy. Since new media are not regulated by journalistic standards, and traditional media are struggling, Canadians find that they have fewer and fewer trusted sources of information to turn to. If Canadians no longer feel that they have access to fair and accurate news, their capacity as citizens to participate in democracy is undermined.

Traditional media, especially newspapers, are struggling. When the market or business logic of news outlets becomes their sole preoccupation, the

normative component of sharing the news—that people should be given accurate information to stay informed and take part in decision-making—takes a hit. Small local news outlets close, resulting in certain regions becoming "news deserts." These communities lack the information they need to make educated political decisions. Larger papers are now dominating the market, but they are increasingly owned by fewer and fewer companies, with less room for original news coverage. Most are unable to cover very local news.

New media are both a blessing and a curse. They allow for more interactive content, and they're accessible—as we mentioned, anyone can take part. But they occupy a digital space with very little oversight. Traditional media are required to fact-check, use multiple sources, be fair, and they are edited by professionals. New media do not play by the same—or by any—rules. Can new media be trusted? Do they show the whole story? And who are they accountable to, especially when the content is anonymous?

Although anybody with a blog or social media account can contribute to the information environment, it does not mean that everyone will be heard. New media spaces are still dominated by large companies. What the public gets to debate online is largely dominated by what appears on Facebook and Google. Companies

are also able to pay in order to have their news seen by larger masses of people. On Facebook, if you have the money, you can pay for social media companies to target users in order to grow your audience and have more eyes on your stories.

Like citizen journalist, governments and political parties have also taken advantage of new media platforms to speak directly to citizens, without having to go through traditional media. While this is allowing a direct connection between politicians and citizens, this content can be shared without the fact-checking performed by news organizations. For example, some governments and political parties have created TV shows, newsletters, or websites that look like real news but provide biased information that furthers their political agenda.

What We Can Do About It?

There are a number of actions that citizens can take to combat the harmful effects of changes to the media landscape:

1) Support reputable, accredited, peer-reviewed news media by paying for subscriptions, especially for local media. It takes significant resources for news outlets to prioritize rigorous journalistic standards.

2) The "trust gap" in media is related to many different factors, but having media cover different social groups—and not solely publish stories that the "informed Canadians" are interested in—could result in the rest of Canadians not feeling left behind.

3) Encourage media to be pro-active in explaining how they do their job and the lengths they go to be accurate and fair. If media sources make greater efforts to be more transparent, there will be fewer reasons for Canadians to doubt them.

4) Some media sources have successfully made their funding models more transparent, or sought alternatives to the ad-funded model. For example, some media are turning to crowd-sourced funding.

5) News that is fact-checked more openly is more trustworthy.

6) Demand honesty, integrity and transparency from our public leaders. When they attack the media, unfounded, they undermine much more than the media outlets—they undermine citizens' ability to get information and hold them to account.

7) When you hear that a reputable news source is being unfairly criticized, stand up for them. A recent US study found that when journalists ignore attacks on their profession, people tend to believe they're conceding to the fact that their coverage is slanted. We're social creatures, and respond to what others say and do. Your voice could lead someone to verify the facts surrounding criticism.

8) Train yourself in civic literacy. Those who are more skilled at spotting fake news online are also more likely to trust the news.

(1) Weird Flex

Your Mission // Convince others that you're telling the truth (even when you're not).

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Access to the Internet.	For a group of 15 this activity will take approximately 10 mins (with additional 3 per additional round).

ROLES

› **FACILITATO**   a BGCC staff member
› **REPORTER**   one volunteer
› **PUBLIC**   the rest of the group

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The Facilitator provides the Reporter with a weird stock image to review for 5 seconds.

2) The Reporter and the Facilitator play rock, paper, scissors. If the Reporter wins, they have to report the truth about the image they saw to the Public. If the Reporter loses, they have to lie and invent a photo to describe to the Public. In either case, they must try to convince the Public that they are telling the truth.

3) Three members of the Public (selected by the Facilitator) can then ask the reporter one follow-up question to catch the reporter if they're lying.

4) The Public records their guess on a piece of paper.

5) Every correct guess earns a point. After everyone's had a turn as the Reporter, the person with the most correct guesses wins.

① Weird Flex

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What are the cues you're using to tell if people are telling the truth? Are they working?

2) News sources can't always be right. Note the sources that issue corrections when they realize they've gotten it wrong.

3) How do you tell when real media sources get their stories wrong on purpose or by accident?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The point of this game is to recognize it can be hard to distinguish mis/dis/information. There are cases where disinformation is the goal. However, misreporting can easily be unintentional (as is the case in this game). That is often how misinformation spreads. This game brings attention to the fact that different motives can produce the same kinds of dis/misinformation spread.

Resources

WEIRD STOCK PHOTO COLLECTION
https://www.Google.com/search?q=weird+stock+photos&client
=firefox-b-d&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj4u-
XLvfTiAhVIXK0KHaL6APwQ_AUIECgB&biw=1280&bih=645

(2) Rear View Mirror

Your Mission // To describe and report the news as accurately as possible.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Access to the Internet.	With a group size of 15 this will take about 10-25 minutes.
Weird stock photos.	
Pencils and paper.	

ROLES

› **FACILITATOR:** Assigns roles and distributes photos.
› **WITNESSES:** Describe a weird stock photo to a reporter.
› **REPORTERS:** Reporters try to draw the image being described to them.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Reporters and witnesses pair off, and sit back to back.

2) A facilitator provides the witness a weird stock photo (i.e. someone dressed in a onesie of a Pokémon in a silly pose).

3) The reporter has 3 minutes to draw what the witness is describing in the most accurate manner possible

4) **CONCLUSION:** The Reporters try to describe what they drew to the group. Then the original image is shown to the group. We get to see the ridiculous difference between the two and hilarity ensues.

② Rear View Mirror

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) How the drawings don't need to be perfect. Not everyone's an artist.

2) The difficulty of explaining simple things to someone. Someone is wearing a Pikachu onesie in a silly pose may seem straightforward but how big is the person? What does that silly pose look like?

3) How our bias stops us from seeing where or what our blind spots are.

4) The amount of focus and concentration it takes to describe something accurately.

VARIATIONS

Add two or three more rounds to see how bad the drawings get. Decrease the number of minutes the reporter has to draw from 3 minutes to 1 minute.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

With cell phones, citizens are now reporters by default. They frame stories as best they can, but it's easy to misinterpret these stories and distort reality. This game helps to recognize how one's interpretation of things is not the same as others. Despite the witness's best efforts to describe something they are looking at right in front of them, someone who is not looking at the same thing can understand it very differently.

Resources

N / A

③ Tall Tales

Your Mission // Write a story… with some help. Fold over stories are stories written one line at a time, by people who never have the full story.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Pieces of paper	With a group of about 15 people, this activity takes about 10 minutes.
Pencils	

INSTRUCTIONS

Give each youth a sheet of blank paper. Write the following words on the board in a vertical line: WHO, WHAT, HOW, WHERE, WHEN, WHY. Explain that everyone will be writing a sentence story. Write an example on the board, explain, asking for suggestions.

1) Tell them to write someone's name at the top of their paper, i.e., their own, a friend's, the facilitator's, a famous person that everyone knows; fold the paper over once so no one can see it, then pass the paper to the person on their right.

2) Write on the received paper what the subject did (suggest funny or outrageous actions), fold it over and pass it on to the right.

3) Continue to write one line, how they did it (adverbs), fold and pass; where-pass; when-pass; and last of all, why (because…) and pass it one more time.

4) Have the youth unfold their stories, and read them silently. Help anyone who cannot read what the others wrote, or doesn't understand.

5) Ask one youth at a time to read "their" story aloud, or turn the stories in for the facilitator to read. Funny!

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) How reliable is social media for getting information about breaking news?

2) Have you ever heard/passed on information on social media about breaking news that turned out not to be true?

(3) Tall Tales

VARIATIONS

When you get to the why, you can add "Then" to bring new characters into the story.

Try a version where you try to write reasonable stories. Does it work?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The most common source of news for youth is social media. This means that people only hear bits and pieces of stories from people on their feeds at a time. In particular for breaking stories, no one will have the full picture to be able to communicate the story effectively. This leaves room for all kinds of miscommunications and misunderstandings. This activity is designed to highlight the importance of context in information sharing. When there is no context, the story can be hilariously misinterpreted.

Resources

N / A

(4) ZINE

Your Mission // Create a collaborative Zine
that reflects the vast interests of your group.

What you'll need:

Surface(s) that you can use art supplies on.

Art supplies: paint, pastels, non-permanent markers, and/or crayons.

Diverse magazines (sourced from local thrift store).

Scissors

Glue or tape, Pens or pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Ask each person to pick a topic to focus on and provide 30-45 minutes for them to create one to two zine pages.

2) By the end of the session everyone combines their pages for one complete club Zine. Suggested topics include:

› Community   › Human Rights

› Environment   › Wellness

› Youth Activism   › Digital World

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) How you piece together different perspectives and styles into one Zine.

2) Have the groups provide input into the layout/order of the zine.

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(4) ZINE

VARIATIONS

If resources allow it, collect the individual pages, photocopy and compile into one Zine for your club.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

There are countless ways we learn and engage with information. This is a youthful activity that gives participants an opportunity to explore alternative ways to talk about topics outside of social media and school assignments.

Much like a newspaper or magazine, information is pieced together by topic. From a creative standpoint, the group will have plenty of creative outlets to share information from their own perspective. Zines are self-published materials with limited print runs. Besides creating collages of magazine clippings, Zines can include original artwork, games, poems, articles, short stories, and/or journal entries—the more curated and creative the better.

Resources

HOW TO MAKE A ZINE FOR THE INTERNET AGE - FADER
https://www.thefader.com/2015/10/27/how-to-make-a-zine-born-n-bread

EXAMPLE: BORN N BREAD
https://www.instagram.com/bornnbread/?hl=en

7 //
Political Targeting

Recent decades have seen a dramatic advancement in information and communication technologies that allow political parties and campaigns to refine data and target voters in unprecedented ways. Political parties now have the ability to collect personal information on voters, analyze them to understand what each person cares about then create strategies and messages that target them directly. These abilities allow political parties to use their data-driven voter research to microtarget individual voters who they are most likely to influence. It is important to understand the effects of microtargeting on how politics is done, and on how we as citizens are in communication with parties and candidates.

What is it?

Political targeting, also known as microtargeting, is a type of personalized communication that involves collecting personal information about people and then using that information to show people targeted political advertisements. Politicians use microtargeting as a means of efficiency, believing that targeting makes their ads more effective. These ads are created in an effort to address issues that are important to individuals. These ads are adapted in their format, layout, and language in an effort to meet an individual's interest to a maximum effect. Research demonstrates that those exposed to political targeting and advertising are more likely to act upon it. The use of political targeting and microtargeting can be both a blessing and a curse to democracies like Canada. On one hand, it can enhance political participation and voter turnout by encouraging people to go to the polls, and it can help share knowledge on political topics. However, it also presents risks. A party could advertise itself as a one-issue party for voters, when they have a whole platform of other issues, which can mislead

voters. And the data collection used for political targeting presents privacy concerns.

In the 2018 Ontario election, the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP all had different strategies for the use of microtargeting. CBC News and the non-profit American news site ProPublica partnered during the provincial election to monitor the messages used by political parties and interest groups. Political parties and interest groups used social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to micro-target ads at potential voters. They based their advertisements on users' interests, age, and location. In the lead-up to the election, the Conservative party was running 23 ads, the Liberals had nine, and the NDP had none. The Conservative party focused their advertisements on middle-aged men and people over 65. The Liberals focused on a wider spectrum. The Conservatives used targeted ads in certain communities, focusing on very specific issues. For example, in a Scarbourough-Agincourt by-election, they ran ads claiming that the

Liberal's support for safe injection sites would bring more drugs to that community. The Conservative party knew that this was a wedge issue and, in this instance, created a campaign to focus on that issue in particular.

Moreover, special interest groups also use microtargeting to speak to specific demographics. An example would be the "Working Ontario Women" group, which ran attack ads against Doug Ford claiming he would cut nursing jobs. Also, "Ontario Proud" created targeted campaigns for people who liked the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on Facebook, claiming billions of dollars had been lost in Ontario because of Liberal Government scandals. The use of microtargeting by political parties allows them to speak to very specific demographics of voters and appeal to them by either highlighting a small section of their platform, or by attacking another party's record.

Currently, online political advertising is receiving a heavy amount of scrutiny. This is a result of the ongoing debate surrounding its influence on the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the hugely controversial Brexit vote in the U.K. Online political microtargeting involves the creation of finely-tuned messages on specific topics based on individuals' demographic characteristics and consumer and lifestyle habits. Online political microtargeting can take two forms.

1) Political direct marketing in which political actors target personalized messages to individual voters based on a huge amount of acquired voter data.

2) Behavioural advertising which involves analyzing people's online behaviour and using the collected information to display individually targeted ads.

Online political microtargeting is used to identify likely voters for a specific party and then targeted them with messages. Microtargeting also allows political parties to advertise policy stances to citizens that match their interests, i.e. Universal Healthcare, Environment, Gun Control, Women's rights etc.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

The impact of political targeting is difficult to measure. Microtargeting has an individual impact on people's lives and a collective impact on our society. From an individual perspective, the ads you view on social media may be filtered and organized in an attempt to shape your policy views or persuade your vote in an election. On a societal scale, political targeting can be used to impact society enough to determine the outcome of an election—whether at the municipal, provincial or federal level.

In theory, political microtargeting can be used to increase political participation, knowledge transfer, and strengthen democracy. It can create online debate and dialogue about political parties and political issues that matter to you. It can create a more engaged and informed population. Online media and social media can mobilize people during an election. Online mobilization was apparent during Obama's 2012 election, Trump's 2016 election and even during the 2018 Ontario election. Organizations or political parties can use political targeting to encourage voting on Election Day, attend a meet and greet with politicians, discuss politics with family members, or go to a political fundraiser in their community.

Political targeting online is more personalized for the recipient. This means that a political party is able to target you with an ad that speaks to your specific interests. It can be argued that this is better for both you and the political party sending the ad. You are able to quickly absorb information about a topic relevant in your life, and the political party is better able to reach a potential voter. Political targeting online is more efficient in comparison to traditional advertising like television, in which ads are created to speak to a broad audience, therefore increasing the risk of the ad having no relevance or impact on your potential vote.

Moreover, political online microtargeting can have a greater impact on a wider audience than traditional media. Online political targeting allows for access to a greater or different audience than traditional media. Not everyone watches or consumes news through cable T.V. It would be difficult to find a millennial or Gen X who still listens to radio on a regular basis. Therefore,

online political targeting allows political parties to cast a wider net and affect a greater audience. Therefore, it could increase voter turnout for demographics who traditionally don't vote.

An example: Shruti is an 18-year-old first time voter. A provincial election is approaching. She is a first generation Canadian and her parents rarely talk about politics at home. Her civics teacher commonly falls asleep in class, and seems as uninspired to teach as Shruti is to do her homework on Friday nights. Shruti rarely watches T.V. and mostly engages with her friends on Instagram. Shruti plans on attending the University of British Columbia in the fall and her and her parents are concerned about paying tuition. She has been reading about student debt online. One night, Shruti sees an ad from a political party promising to address student debt and lower tuition. She looks for more information about the party and decides to perhaps vote for them. The advertising worked, and Shruti has become a more engaged citizen.

Political targeting presents a significant amount of possible threats for Canadian citizens. Primarily, your privacy can be invaded, manipulated or ignored. A major privacy threat involves the potential breach of personal data. Data breaches occur when hackers or other individuals access databases with personal data and release that information to the public. Data breaches have become a common topic in the news. A recent example occurred in 2017 when a marketing company contracted by the U.S. Republican Party had a data breach. The personal data collected on almost 200 million U.S. citizens was breached. Personal information was exposed, as well as suspected religious affiliations, ethnicities and political stances on topics like abortion and gun control. This information can then be used by other companies, individuals, and political parties to target citizens. In 2000 the federal government introduced the Personal Information

Protection and Electronic Documents Act, which requires Canadian companies to follow mandatory rules with respect to how personal data is collected, stored, and used.

Beyond privacy threats, there is also the potential for the political manipulation of voters. Political parties could target particular voters with advertising or information that maximizes or minimizes voter engagement. A party could target xenophobic voters with misleading information about immigrants. Therefore, parties can increase political polarization between groups of people through the use of misinformation in their political targeting. Donald Trump's campaign in 2016 targeted African-American voters with ads about Hillary Clinton's earlier remarks calling African American males 'super predators.' The idea was to suppress the black vote. Microtargeting typically targets voters on one issue of importance to them. This presents parties as one issue parties, obscuring the priorities of that party.

Finally, political microtargeting could be used by parties to ignore certain voter groups or focus on very specific groups. If a campaign does not expect certain groups of people to be supportive of their party, they will not inform those groups about the election. This in turn leads to lower voter turnouts among certain demographics and a weakened and less representative democracy. For example, voter turnout for youth (18-25 year olds) has historically been low so it is not surprising to see politicians focus less attention on youth and advertise to them less. This sort of political targeting isolated many Ontarians during the 2018 provincial election, resulting in many people probably having very little contact with these campaigns.

The main threats for Canadians from online political targeting is an invasion of privacy, the possible manipulation of their data and the exclusion of them by political parties.

How Does It Impact Politics?

The advancement of technology and the emergence of social media have created big opportunities for political parties interested in using political microtargeting. Political microtargeting is cheaper than traditional advertising, more efficient in reaching an audience and also more effective in impacting voters. Political communication is becoming more reliant on incorporating social media to target voters, donors, volunteers and track engagement. Using social media has allowed for the emergence of smaller or more fringe parties to reach a wider audience and engage with more people.

In comparison with running television ads, using social media allows political parties to reach specific voter groups more effectively. Television ads reach a large audience at once, but the messaging has to be general. A political party could use political microtargeting to reach out to voters they know to be supportive to their party. They could also use political microtargeting to reach out to individuals in key swing ridings across the province or country. A party could also use political targeting on social media to reach out to a demographic of voters who have been ignored through traditional advertising or have not been formally engaged in politics. Theoretically, a political party could target first-time voters, or 18-year-olds in Canada to try and educate them about their party and their campaign.

There are many possible negative consequences for how political targeting impacts politics. Political targeting can be expensive to do properly and safely, it gives opportunities and increased power to political intermediaries and does not engage the public in meaningful debate.

To have a huge reach in an online microtargeting political campaign, you have to be able to buy large data sets from companies. These data sets can be very costly, and what ends up happening is only larger parties with large amounts of money can afford them. This means that the larger, more effective political targeting campaigns are more accessible by the parties already in power, or the parties with a lot of cash. This is a disadvantage for smaller parties.

Microtargeting can also make intermediaries, or the companies that own your personal information, more powerful. Essentially, companies that own an incredible amount of data, whether it be Facebook, or Cambridge Analytica now become important actors in connecting political parties to Canadian citizens. As a result, a new industry has emerged filled with pollsters, digital strategists, social media experts and big data consultancies. These companies are hired to design and test political messages and make sure those messages end up on the right people's computer screens. The entry of these intermediary companies allows for a new gatekeeper to the public, with a tremendous amount of power to influence our democracy. The largest intermediaries, such as Facebook and Twitter, have billions of users giving them huge power to set prices, and influence the political parties with which they work. They can choose who they work with and who they don't, allowing room for bias.

Finally, the use of political targeting can affect the public by shaping a false image of a political party or campaign. If a citizen is receiving political ads about promises of job creation from a political party, they may not be aware of the larger party platform. If individuals are targeted specifically based on their interests or identity, they may only be shown the values and platforms that they support with that party. Political targeting does not allow for an extensive overview of a party or politician, and attempts to turn the public into one or two issue voters. It can also be used to slander a politician and gives rise to a new 'attack ad.' Political targeting allowed for the NDP in Alberta to label Jason Kenny as anti-LGBT, it was used to label Hillary Clinton as racist, and it was used during the Barack Obama birther scandal. Political targeting can be used to transform the debate away from policy to a focus on the individual and their character traits. Some of which may be true, or misrepresented.

What can we do to overcome some of these problems?

CREATING LAWS

Public policy seems to always be two steps behind technological advancements. It is hard to keep up! However, political targeting has been present in our democracy and others for long enough that our government has taken action and must continue to find ways to protect us.

The first responsibility the government has is to create laws to protect our privacy. Data protection laws puts responsibility on companies to protect the information they have on us. The Canadian government has taken steps to ensure our privacy leading up to the 2019 federal election. The Trudeau government has enacted a $508 million dollar national cyber security strategy. Within this strategy, businesses that own information on Canadian citizens must follow a set of regulations in protecting and disclosing information if ever there is a data breach.

However, critics of this strategy, such as the Canadian Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, argue that it does not go far enough. There are not enough resources for enforcement and companies don't have a clear timeline to follow. Moreover, critics point out that this strategy does nothing to put pressure on political parties to take Canadians' privacy seriously. There are no limits on how political parties can collect and distribute political information on Canadian citizens. If a political party suffers a data breach, there are no guidelines or laws forcing them to disclose that information to the public. Privacy experts believe that we need to create stricter guidelines for business, and especially political parties in terms of handling data on Canadian citizens.

EDUCATING OURSELVES

In combination with requiring more transparency from political parties on how they are microtargeting Canadian citizens, the public needs to take action in ensuring their own privacy safety. This starts with a general understanding on how political parties use microtargeting to influence your vote. Be critical and educate yourself on the issues you care about.

Moreover, take a holistic approach to understanding who you vote for. Don't turn into a one issue voter without knowing exactly what a party or a candidate proposes for other policy points. Political targeting does not allow you to understand the real identify of a party, or the complexity of certain political issues.

(1) Who Said It?!

Your Mission // See how well you know your community by guessing who-said-what! *Works really well with groups who know each other somewhat.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Paper	Each round is about 10 minutes. For a group of 15 people it will take about 20 minutes.
Pencils	
A score keeper	

INSTRUCTIONS

1) The facilitator hands out small strips of paper to write on.

2) They then provide a category description like:
   › *"THINGS... you wouldn't do for a million dollars*", or "*THINGS...you wish grew on trees*", or "*THINGS... your parents forgot to tell you*"

3) Everyone then writes funny answers to these categories.
   › **EXAMPLE:** things you wish grew on trees.
   › **ANSWERS:** chocolate bars, cars, self-respect.

4) Everyone puts their strips in a hat, or basket or other small container.

5) Sitting in a circle, people will pull out a fact from the container and read it out loud. They will then make guesses about who wrote what. If they're right, they get a point. If they're wrong it goes to the person next in the circle (clockwise).

6) There are no right answers... There are no wrong answers. Just a lot of laughs. You won't believe the THINGS... you'll hear.

7) The youngest person goes first. And the game ends whenever you decide. Play as many rounds as you like.

> continued

1   Who Said It?!

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1)   Is political targeting always bad? Is it always good?

2)   What assumptions do you make about other players? Why?

3)   Are your assumptions ever incorrect? Are they ever correct?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

This game requires players to understand the psychology of other players in order to make predictions about their behaviour. Political campaigns targeting voters do the same thing. This game is a fun way to reflect on that reality.

Resources

FOR MORE CATEGORIES:

https://www.thegameofthings.com/

(2) Online Scavenger Hunt

Your Mission // To find examples of municipal, provincial, and federal political targeting.

What you'll need:

Computers or phones for searches. They can use their social media feeds and search there as well.

How long will the activity take?

Each round is about 10 minutes. For a group of 15 people it will take about 20 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Form teams of 2 to 5 participants and provide them with the scavenger hunt list.

2) The first team to find them all wins.

3) Go around the teams to offer support and suggestions on anything they make be stuck on.
   › Find an online campaign that targets young voters
   › Find a news clip with a scandal in the title in relation to a candidate
   › Find an ad that uses the word Canada and/or community
   › Find a television show or web series with political satire
   › Find a sponsored political ad
   › Find a photo op with a politician and a celebrity posing together
   › Find a fundraiser invitation letter for a political campaign
   › Find a political meme
   › Find political merchandise, such as a hat, book or t-shirt
   › Find a campaign topic on jobs
   › Find a campaign that uses fear as a tactic

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previous

(2) Who Said It?!

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) Describe the most recent political
ads have you come across?

2) What kind of political ads attract youth?
Besides online targeting, what do you think
about door–to-door campaigning?

3) Do you think about how much it
costs to run for an election?

4) Have you ever seen a commercial political ad on
YouTube, Facebook, Xbox/Playstation, or Twitter?

VARIATIONS

Have a discussion about
what political targeting
is and how to be aware if
it is happening to you.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Youth independently search and filter through political messaging, from neutral to attack
ads. Political targeting is benefiting tremendously from online advertising and endless
data. When the majority of the world has a Facebook account with endless information
about their personal lives, it's important now more than ever to pay attention to what
political targeting shows up on our feed.

Resources

FACEBOOK INTRODUCING MEASURES TO PREVENT ELECTION DISRUPTION
https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/facebook-canadian-election-interference-1.5059626

(3) Political Werewolves

Your Mission // To save the townspeople from being eaten by werewolves... (unless you're a werewolf). This is very similar to the game "Mafia" if you have played that before.

What you'll need:

Space to sit in a large circle.

ROLES

› **MODERATOR**   Assign roles and narrate the game.
› **WEREWOLVES**   Try to kill all the townspeople without your identity being discovered.
› **TOWNSPEOPLE**   Try to save the townspeople by killing only the werewolves.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Everyone sits in a circle. The game is played in alternating rounds of night and day. Everyone puts their heads down.

2) In the first round of Night, the moderator secretly selects two people as werewolves by tapping them on the head. Otherwise the rounds proceed as follows:

   › **NIGHT:** Everyone puts their heads down and closes their eyes. The moderator tells the werewolves to lift their heads and silently select someone to kill. The moderator then tells everyone that they can lift their heads and tells the room who has been killed.

   › **DAY:** Everyone (including werewolves) has 1 minute to discuss and nominate suspected werewolves for elimination. After a minute, the moderator holds a vote and whoever the majority vote for is killed.

3) Once killed, players may not vote. Each round, the moderator announces who is killed until either all the townspeople or all the werewolves are killed.

(3)   Political Werewolves

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1)   How do you know who you should trust?

2)   Are their kinds of behaviours that give players away?

3)   What would happen if we didn't trust anyone?

4)   How do the werewolves decide who to eliminate?

5)   How did the townspeople decide who to eliminate?

6)   Which strategy would work best for eliminating werewolves?

VARIATIONS

If there is a tie in the townspeople vote, then no one is killed.

The narrator does not reveal whether a townsperson or werewolf was killed.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

It's one thing to read a politically biased article. It's another thing to not know who wrote it. Targeted political advertisements can try to sway your decisions in ways that you may not realize. Like the Werewolves, sometimes ads may have a hidden agenda for influencing our decisions without our knowledge. Knowing this means we should look for more diverse sources of information for stories we encounter.

Resources

N / A

8 //
Political Polarization

Throughout the democratic world, there is a perception of increasing polarization. In other words, it appears as though divisions in society are growing, and that in politics there is harsher and more intractable conflict between parties. The perception and reality of polarization is critically important to how citizens experience elections, and politics in general. Reducing polarization requires citizens to look critically at how political leaders use divisive language for personal political advantage.

What is it?

The Parliament of Canada is partisan in nature. We have five major parties with competing visions for our country. We may see overlap and collaboration between the parties, but each one seeks to differentiate itself from the others. Each does this by allowing officials within their parties to come together and shape policies and platforms. During elections, each party controls their own narrative and encourages voters to choose their own leaders.

For both candidates and elected MPs, their party shapes their identity. One's party provides training, resources, key messages and roles. The party supports you in representing your constituencies and supporting your riding. The party is very important for your success in Ottawa and your political survival and continued success in politics.

When thinking about political polarization, many people turn to the U.S. as a case study. It is easy to see; there are two major political sides with competing views of the issues in the U.S. However, the Samara Centre for Democracy recently published "The Real House Lives" report which highlights an increase

in political polarization in Canada. For this report, Samara interviewed MPs who stressed that there has been a change in political cooperation in Ottawa. In the past, parties were more willing to work collectively and to find compromises.

The Samara report highlights that in the past decade, parties have become increasingly polarized. Parties are less likely to search for compromise and work together, and they are more likely to police their own ideological borders and postulate their own views. One can witness the decline in collegiality upon watching a debate in the House of Commons. Jeering and booing often echo throughout the room, and there has been a decline in decorum. Several MPs noted that partisanship has reached silly and dangerous levels in Canada. Political scientists have found that over the past two decades, Canadian political parties have become more ideologically polarized, with growing gaps between the policies and approaches of different parties. The polarization we are seeing within our political institutions is not isolated and is spreading to the public.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

Social media and the Internet have been identified as possible drivers of polarization. We all have witnessed this. If you ever read the comment section on an article about Andrew Scheer, Justin Trudeau or Elizabeth May, you can see hate-filled vitriol and extreme polarization. The debate online is aggressive, dramatic and downright shocking at times. Moreover, the Internet and social media offer us opportunities to learn about and reinforce our political ideologies. Academics and the media sometimes refer to these as "filter bubbles" or "confirmation bias." Although it may be true that we follow like-minded people on social media, it has yet to be proven that this, in fact, increases political polarization.

A study by researchers at Duke University highlighted that showing highly partisan individuals different perspectives on political topics did very little to decrease polarization. In fact, in some cases, this reinforced these individuals' beliefs even more. These findings suggest that polarization may be occurring because of disagreement with a political party or politician, rather than because of the existence of filter bubbles.

Research on political polarization in the U.S. has also looked at this phenomenon through the lens of different age groups, thus attempting to determine which is the most polarized. Studies have found that as people age, they become more politically entrenched and polarized. Therefore, the most polarized age demographic (75+) was actually the group that used the Internet the least. This shows that further research needs to be done on how and if the Internet has a role in polarizing people.

What does seem plausible is that the narratives surrounding politics are changing. With the advancement of technology and the use of social media to broadcast political opinions, media is adapting. The debate on social media is transforming the discussion occurring among major media programs and outlets. Turn on any major news network, from the CBC to FOX, and you will see segments filled with pundits debating the latest headlines. Media outlets also create stories based on social media reactions to breaking news. These types of stories are used to reflect Canadians' sentiments towards different topics. However, are comments pulled from social media really reflective of how Canadians, or particular groups of Canadians, feel about a news story? It is dangerous to make huge assumptions like that based on such limited data.

Public opinion research demonstrates changing attitudes among everyday Canadians towards political parties. Many Canadians are noticing the stronger ideological differences between parties. "The Real House Lives" report suggests that Canadian voters for a given party have become increasingly like-minded and ideologically in-sync, with a growing divide between voters for parties on the "left" and those for parties on the "right". There is also evidence to suggest an increase in negative attitudes towards political parties other than those which a particular voter has supported. Data demonstrates a sharp decline in how Conservative party voters feel about Liberals politicians, and how Liberal voters and NDP voters feel about Conservatives politicians.

With the 2019 federal election fast approaching, we can begin to see polarization occurring online and everywhere else around us. A new survey conducted by Abacus Data provides interesting insights into where Canadians stand on the most polarizing policy and public opinion issues. The survey found that 26% of the population are deeply entrenched in their existing political views, while 74% are more open-minded. The polarized group (26%) is split between individuals who support parties on the so-called left (Liberals, NDP, Bloc, Green) and those who support parties on the right. As it stands, Andrew Scheer is viewed more favorably by those in the polarized group than Justin Trudeau.

The political sentiment and polarization stemming from Ottawa seem to be impacting Canadians' views of each other. This also seems to be changing the way Canadians are viewing the future. Nearly half (45%) of respondents to the Abacus Data poll stated that they were "fearful and frustrated" about their own future prospects. This fear and frustration regarding the future is much higher among the most polarized Canadians, at 63%. Such a finding shows that, among Canadians, hyperpartisanship creates a more toxic view of other Canadians as well as of our future as a nation.

How Does It Impact Politics?

Political polarization is impacting the way we debate political and social matters online and in person. The polarizing tone in politics can be observed within our own Parliament and online. As noted in the "Real House Lives" study, debate within our Parliament has become more hostile, partisan and polarizing. Parliamentary polarization is shaping the ways in which our politicians interact with our institutions. The polarization of parties has a direct impact on the ability to pass policy that could benefit many Canadians. Moreover, the rhetoric which our politicians are using creates an "us" versus "them" environment that fosters a sense of fear and competition between Canadians.

We can observe this partisan debate and communication style online. Go to the social media page of a major political leader in Canada or the U.S. and study the language each uses. Politicians are meticulous in the way they craft their Tweets, Facebook posts, and Instagram Stories. Many use emotional and strong language to drive home their point. It resonates, but it is also polarizing.

There is ongoing research that focuses on the types of political messaging on Twitter and Facebook which receive the most interaction. Researchers analyzed Tweets from presidential, Senate and Congressional candidates during the 2016 U.S. election. Their findings were that Tweets with more emotive and moralizing words had a higher chance of being retweeted. Users responded more to words that evoked some sort of moral outrage. Findings indicated that emotive Tweets worked for increasing engagement among both Democrat and Republican voters but were somewhat stronger in the case of Republican candidates. Republicans were also more likely to respond to candidates who used emotional words involving patriotism or religion.

So what does this mean? This research suggests that if politicians and political candidates want to maximize their impact using social media, they need to use more emotive and passionate vocabulary. This form of communication style encourages politicians to share content that speaks directly to their base. Politicians are not encouraged to reach across the aisle but to reinforce their own positions. This can lead to further isolation and polarization from voters who have differing political views. Politicians have become more focused on moral issues like abortion, LGBT rights and religion, which are wedge issues for many voters. These communication styles could also help to explain why encouraging people to follow politicians with different political perspectives may actually make polarization more intense. By Tweeting moral and emotive language, politicians may get a positive reaction from their base but a strongly negative reaction from those on the opposing side.

The media reacts to these impassioned Tweets by turning them into news stories. These news stories then continue to stoke political divides. Many agree that Donald Trump is great at driving a narrative, but we have seen similar behaviour from Trudeau, Hillary Clinton and Andrew Sheer, among many others. When the media reports on these impassioned Tweets, their actions transform the news cycle into a more polarizing and emotionally-laden environment.

As politics become more polarized in Canada, what sort of implications will this shift have on our youth? Research shows that young people typically go in two directions; they either double down on their existing political beliefs, or they shy away from politics altogether. As political polarization heightens, we should be concerned about how this impacts future generations of voters.

What Can We Do About It?

As we observe our society becoming more polarized, we need to start thinking about ways in which we can bridge the divide. Research demonstrates that as countries become more politically fractioned and polarized, these divisions lead to a harmful, self-reinforcing, pattern. What can we do about it? There are no clear answers. Simply withdrawing from politics does not seem to be the answer.

Canadian citizens should be aware of the politics of division. They should look for the political and psychological workings of polarization and democratic erosion. Canadians can refuse to participate in divisive politics that pit "us" versus "them" or "winners" against "losers." Moreover, political leaders have a responsibility to be mindful of their actions and words and of how these can fuel divides.

Additionally, social media companies have a role in helping to foster collaboration. They can crack down on extremism, disinformation and polarization by better regulating political targeting campaigns.

As individuals, we can try to cultivate a diverse network that extends past our immediate social circles. We don't need to increase the volume of information we receive from the people whom we already know well. Research shows that when we are not exposed to the "other side" of an issue, we have less of a chance to expand our own political diversity. If we have some exposure to other content, it may inspire political moderation.

There is no simple answer to solving the increasing polarization of politics in Canada. However, surely the answer starts with both citizens and politicians taking responsibility for their actions and being aware of the polarization that is happening around them.

(1) Wikipedia Control Room

Your Mission // To use collective information gathering to convey a more accurate picture of a controversy.

What you'll need:	**How long will the activity take?**
A dry erase board/ chalk board	For a group size of 15 this activity may take 20-30 mins. (Though you may choose to end it later or earlier based on engagement).
Dry erase markers/ chalk	
Access to the Internet	

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Everyone is given a whiteboard dry erase marker (ideally as few people have the same colour as possible).

2) The facilitator writes a controversial statement on the board. (i.e. "There is no evidence that GMOs are bad for human health" or "Russia attempted to hack the U.S. election", "There is no evidence of aliens", "There's no evidence of political bias in Facebook's algorithms.").

   NOTE: At this point, it may be valuable to remind yourself, and your group that although many of you may personally disagree with these statements, **the purpose of this activity is to make the statement more accurate over time** by information gathering. It is **not** to have an initial statement that is necessarily 100% accurate.

3) Anyone in the group can propose changes to the sentence in whatever ways they want. **FOR EXAMPLE:**

   The initial statement: *"There is no evidence that GMOs are bad for human health."* might be modified to: *"There is no evidence that GMOs are **worse for** human health **than non-modified foods**".*
   The person writing this might cite a study that supports this.

   Another person might modify it to say:
   *"There is no evidence that GMOs are **worse for** human **health than non-modified foods**, **although they do carry significant environmental risks**"*
   after providing studies highlighting the risks of a lack of genetic diversity in crops.

4) Group members are encouraged to provide the rationale for their changes and to

1   Wikipedia Control Room

find evidence to support it.

5)   In order to stay, any change they propose must be passed by a 2/3 vote of the group.

6)   This activity should last about 6-7 mins per question.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1)   What are the benefits of collecting ideas from many different sources?

2)   Why do people disagree on what sources are trustworthy?

3)   How do we move away from focusing on what we know towards focusing on how we know it?

VARIATIONS

If you notice people getting stuck or too frustrated, it's good to have a couple of questions on hand to switch to.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

One of the central features of misinformation is that people have a hard time building a shared sense of understanding. Instead, we tend to focus on what we disagree on. This activity helps understand the difficulty of reporting a news story when there are so many perspectives and interpretations of the same event. It also helps people move through controversial ideas in a way that focuses on consensus. We all have blind spots in our thinking that are invisible to us. Talking to people who see things differently is a great way to find them. Collaborate!

Resources

N / A

(2) Walk the Line

Your Mission // Come up with the most hilarious arguments to change minds (including your own!). Practice flexible thinking!

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Masking tape.	Depending on the number of questions and your group's engagement, the game will last between 10-20 mins.

INSTRUCTIONS

A FACILITATOR WILL ACT AS MODERATOR.

1) Put tape down the middle of the floor, dividing the room, and leave a square "talk box" in the middle.

2) Ask a two-sided question (i.e. is a hotdog a sandwich? Should we pee in the shower? Should we put pineapple on pizza? What's better: cake or pie?)

3) Give your audience 10 seconds to pick a side.

4) Have each side explain to the other why the other side should switch.

5) Make sure that only one person is speaking at a time (the person in the talk box).

6) Anyone and everyone is allowed to speak (including the facilitator), but they have to line up for the talk box to do so.

7) If you hear a surprising idea, you should switch sides. If you hear another surprising idea, you should switch sides again.

8) Play as many rounds as you like.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

Encourage people to say their piece. If you're the only one on your side, there might be a blind spot only you can see. Change your mind if you hear a surprising idea. It doesn't have to be forever, you can always switch back.

(2) Walk the Line

1) Remember the goal here is to practice changing our minds.
2) When is it hard to change your mind?
3) When is it easy?
4) Are there ideas that surprised you?
5) Were you able to come up with ideas from a side that you were against at first?

VARIATIONS

OTHER QUESTIONS: Would you rather...

1) Read the book or see the movie?
2) Binge watch a show or one episode a week?
3) Ice cream flavoured poop, or poop flavoured ice cream?
4) Zombie apocalypse or robot revolution?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

We all have blind spots in our thinking that are, by definition, invisible to us. Polarization is the failure to talk to people who can best help us see our blind spots—people who see things really differently. A healthy democracy relies on people from different perspectives coming together to sort out confusing ideas through discourse. This activity practices the values that help us do that. Curiosity, collaboration, courage and calm (not taking yourself too seriously) help us practice the flexible thinking necessary for productive disagreement.

Resources

N / A

③ Rap Battle

Your Mission // Battle rap in a friendly competition about fun topics.

What you'll need:

BEATS

Two hip hop instrumental beats, one slow and one regular tempo

Speakers to play the instrumental, whether from a phone or Bluetooth speaker

YouTube sample instrumental: (URL in Resources section, page 106)

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Choose two teams to battle rap on fun topics such as pizza versus burgers or lions versus tigers.

2) Play a hip-hop instrumental for individuals in each team and give them 15 to 20 minutes to write a battle rap that represents team's position.

3) Once finished, pair battle rappers to compete in a showdown where the goal is to 'dis' the opposition (not actual participants/players).

Encourage everyone to rap to the best of their abilities. The audience will show through a round of applause who wins the battle.

During the writing period,t choose an instrumental to play at low to medium volume in the background as well as the performance, if requested. Battle rappers can also get creative and beat-box their own rhythm for performance if working in pairs.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What do political attack ads and battle rap have in common?

2) Have you seen any attack ads that have 'gone too far' to make their opponent look bad?

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(3) Rap Battle

3) What were some of the words or phrases in the speeches that stood out to you that made your rap 'dis' worthy?

4) If politicians don't use attack ads do you think it will positively or negatively affect their chances of winning?

VARIATIONS

Participants can work in pairs, writing and/or performing as a team. Battle rappers can choose to perform a capella, without a beat. Political speeches tend to use high level language.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

It might seem like a stretch but political attack ads tend to make jabs at their opposition that go beyond policy and decision-making. From the background music, to the colour schemes, to the graphics, and beyond—attack ads are meant to evoke an emotional response from voters.

Resources

YOUTUBE SAMPLE INSTRUMENTAL
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KPcFmn-oys

ATTACK ADS GET THE JOB DONE — BUT AT WHAT PRICE?
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/political-attack-ads-1.4036288

(4) Make Your Own Survey

Your Mission // Using a polarizing topic such as immigration, create a biased survey that will sway respondents to agree or disagree with the topic.

What you'll need:

REVIEW IN ADVANCE THE RESOURCE LINK AND LIST OF BIASED SURVEY EXAMPLES ABOVE.

Paper and writing utensils or a computer with word processing software.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Have participants get into teams of 2-5 and create 10 biased questions per team.

2) Have each team survey individuals and tally their score on a separate paper then allow each team to present the results of their survey as a brief report using statistics such as, "90% of respondents said climate change is not their number one priority."

3) Review each type of biased question and allow participants to take a try at giving an example as you go through the list for clarity.

Types of Biased Questions	Example
1 // THE LEADING QUESTION ascribes a judgment and suggests there is a right answer.	*Should pollution be allowed in Canada?:* *a. Yes* *b. Unsure* *c. No*
2 // THE LOADED QUESTION makes an assumption about your respondent that forces them to make an answer they may not agree with.	*What animals should be banned from entering Canada?* *a. Snakes* *d. Ferrets* *b. Pit Bulls* *e. Other* *c. Parrots*

previous

④ Make Your Own Survey

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3 // THE DOUBLE-BARRELED QUESTION

asks two questions in one.

How safe or unsafe do you feel around Pit Bulls?

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4 // THE ABSOLUTE QUESTION

has a clear yes or no answer that is better worded as a variable answer.

Do you always sing the national anthem?
- *Yes*
- *No*

---

5 // THE UNCLEAR QUESTION

using language or acronyms that are not commonly known.

Are you registered for CAIP?
- *Yes*
- *No*
- *Unsure*

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) What is the most bizarre study finding that you have heard quoted?

2) Which questions are most likely to go unnoticed as biased?

3) Have you ever taken a real-life survey that you felt was biased?

4) Is there ever a reason to make a survey biased, such as political?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

There are countless studies that news and other people quote but rarely do we know what questions were asked. This activity engages critical thinking to get youth to observe the detail in surveys they take and reports/findings they read.

Resources

10 EXAMPLES OF BIASED SURVEY QUESTIONS
https://surveytown.com/10-examples-of-biased-survey-questions/

(5) War & Peace

Your Mission // To gain the most resources for your country over time.

What you'll need:

A whiteboard with all the leaders' names on it.

Small pieces of paper with a "W" on one side or a "P" on the other.

How long will the activity take?

Each round takes about 2 minutes. This game can be as long or short as you like, but it will generally last about 20 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) In this game, each player is the leader of a country. (i.e. 11 players means 11 countries). The game is played in 10 rounds.

2) In every round, players pair off and simulate a conflict between their countries. Players can choose either to make peace or go to war.

› **IF COUNTRY A AND B BOTH CHOOSE WAR,**
then they maintain their borders (0 points each).

› **IF COUNTRY A GOES TO WAR, BUT B TRIES TO MAKE PEACE,**
(+2 points for A, -2 points for B).

› **IF BOTH COUNTRIES CHOOSE PEACE** both get (+1 points).

3) They have 30 seconds to discuss strategy.

4) Counting down from 5, all the players then make their decisions simultaneously (players can choose not to fulfill promises). Everyone's scores are updated on a dry-erase board each round.

5) The leader or leaders with the most points at the end of the game wins.

5 War & Peace

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

1) What are the patterns of play you notice?
2) Do you play another round with players who chose war?
3) How do you decide if you should trust the other leaders or not?
4) Is it easy to build trust with others?
5) How do you build trust with others?

VARIATIONS

› Don't tell players how many rounds will be played before hand.
› Tell players how many rounds will be played before hand.
› Track the War vs. Peace decisions of each player on the board.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Polarization can make trust and cooperation difficult for democracies. The point of this game is to understand some of the reasons that polarization can occur. The degree to which we are willing to cooperate with others in good faith depends on the degree to which we trust that they share the same goals, values and beliefs as us. When we don't believe that this is the case, cooperation is difficult, even if it would be mutually beneficial. This game helps us explore the relationship of trust to polarization and our willingness to cooperate across time.

Resources

N / A

9 //
Civic Engagement in a Digital World

Technological developments are radically changing how we engage in our communities and in politics. Social media has become one of the most important social and political spaces, and a tool used by a diverse range of individuals, organizations, and interests to advance change. This shift is especially profound in the lives of young people, who have grown up in the digital sphere. The digital landscape is a source of community and a powerful civic resource, at the same time that it supports extremism and makes mass surveillance possible. Citizens need to develop a new toolbox of civic skills to advance change in the digital era.

What is it?

In an age of increasing democratic anxiety, some Canadians are doing their part for democracy by becoming politically involved and more engaged in their communities. Civic engagement is commonly understood as getting involved in some capacity in your community to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and country. This can be through activities like volunteering, signing a petition, protesting, voting, or donating to a cause. Civic engagement is often divided into two categories: formal political engagement and activism. Examples of formal political engagement are being a member of a political party, attending political meetings, donating money to a candidate or party, volunteering for a campaign and giving a political speech in public. Formal political activities are important because they get citizens closer to political decision makers and decision-making. Examples of activism are signing a petition, boycotting products for ethnical, environmental or political reasons, and protesting or demonstrating. These activities are a way for citizens to immediately express their political support or opposition in between elections, without direct contact with their Members of Parliament.

How Does It Impact Our Lives?

SHARING AND INTERPRETING DATA

The Internet and digital technologies can help generate data and foster communication. Technology allows this to happen extremely quickly, often in real time. This data generation helps to inform citizens and policymakers, allowing for rapid responses. Information shared online can also improve accountability, as citizens can often view updates from their elected representatives and view the progress of their

proposed agenda. Citizens can hold their elected representative accountable and provide them instant validation or criticism depending on the outcome. Digital technologies also allow for politicians or organizations to disseminate information or data in accessible ways.

STRENGTHENING CITIZENS' VOICES

Digital technology has also provided new opportunities for citizens to get their voices heard in the public sphere. It gives them direct access to politicians in order to provide feedback. It also presents a platform for like-minded individuals to connect and organize. It allows users to share their perspectives and contribute to online dialogue. Citizens can connect on a horizontal level with other citizens. They can contribute to municipal, provincial, federal, and even global discussions. It also allows citizens to connect at a vertical level and communicate directly with politicians and institutions. Additionally, it presents a platform for citizens' voices to be heard by academics and policymakers, allowing the everyday person to potentially have a direct impact on the politics around them.

FACILITATING SOCIAL COHESION AND SUPPORT

Digital technologies can foster peer-to-peer support, mobilize various communities, and even create new communities. Communities built online can be big or small and are not limited by any physical boundaries. Communities with strong networks can use digital technologies to grow and better organize. For example, digital spaces can be harnessed to run effective petitions and fundraising campaigns. If executed effectively, these petitions and campaigns can influence community-building, political mobilization, and policy change.

Additionally, in the digital world, geography becomes less of a factor. This means that more people from remote communities are now able to access content and information to which they never had access before. In this way, digital media allows citizens to better connect and share valuable perspectives, shrinking the world. We are able to understand and respond to the needs of others more easily.

The Internet also provides opportunities for people to find communities of users whom they are unable to find in the physical world. Online communities are often based more on shared interests and values than on just geographic location. The Internet also provides a certain level of anonymity that you can't find elsewhere. This means that you are able to connect with people around the globe and seek support from people whom you may not be able to find in your school or town. Furthermore, as the Internet expands, the world becomes more exposed to communities that may be underrepresented in their society. An example would be LGBTQ+ folk. Some researchers believe that this increased exposure can lead to higher levels of acceptance for marginalized groups of people.

SUPPORTING DIRECT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Digital tools such as social media can support citizens' participation in the political process, thereby shaping public policy and changing political discourse. Online campaigns have greatly impacted the political process all across the world, from pipeline protests in Canada, to Brexit in the U.K., to the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The Internet and the use of digital tools have played a tremendous role in the way politicians talk to their constituents. Look at how Justin Trudeau uses Facebook and Instagram to connect with Canadians, or at how Donald Trump uses Twitter to connect with his base. Social media creates a stronger connection between political groups and citizens and can inspire greater participation. Grassroots organizing has also benefited greatly from the Internet. One example would be Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential run, in which he set records for small donor donations to his campaign. A lot of these donations were driven by online outreach.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR MOBILIZING ENGAGEMENT

The community-based nature of digital technologies and social media has been harnessed to impact political mobilization. Facebook has experimented with trying to increase voter turnout. They do this by running experiments and encouraging users to both vote and then post about voting. They rely on peer pressure and "FOMO" to inspire people to go to

the polls. Facebook reported that their experiments were successful when they implemented them in 2012 and witnessed an increase in voter turnout among participants. Politicians and companies have picked up on this trend and have begun using social media to create their own digital tools and advertisements to target people and influence their vote.

Digital technologies have also lowered the barriers that some people face in being civically engaged and politically active. For example, people can now become involved in political causes by donating to an online

campaign or signing a petition. These platforms have invited people into the public sphere and allowed for a different type of engagement—one that is less time consuming and less demanding.

Digital media can also help to organize marginalized communities. It can connect people who are looking for a politician or party that shares their values. It also creates the opportunity for people to organize around the issues unique to their own identity. For example, there are many organizations that are now focused on electing LGBTQ+, women, and black candidates.

How Does It Impact Politics?

LESS INCLUSIVITY IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

The use of technology in promoting democratic engagement is promising. However, there are serious challenges. One potential problem is how the use of digital technologies in politics may prioritize some voices over others. Broadly speaking, different demographics use the Internet in different ways. Consequently, some voices may be prioritized over others. This prioritization could be perpetuated by levels of inequality or accessibility. Moreover, highly organized online groups can co-opt social media platforms to like, or share various people and organizations. Groups and individuals across the political spectrum have proven effective in these efforts.

RADICALIZATION OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND POLITICAL OPINION

Lately, many academics and media figures have focused on the concepts of "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers", discussing how these phenomena have accelerated the spread of misinformation online. The way in which some digital platforms' algorithms are designed is to curate online content in a particular order. This filtering contributes to isolating Internet users from alternative perspectives or reinforcing existing ideas or prejudices. The argument is that this can lead to an increase in polarization and a decrease in social harmony. Additionally, these factors could

lead to misinformed decision-making, increased radicalization, and in some cases violent extremism. More research is needed in order to determine how much of an influence "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" have on reinforcing violent extremism and misinformation.

INAPPROPRIATE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Globally, there is a lack of laws that meaningfully enforce transparency on the part of social media companies. Additionally, there is a lack of public understanding about how digital technologies are created and used. There are also worries about the potential uses or misuses of technology by different stakeholders. Particular areas of concern include targeted ad campaigns that influence political preferences, the exploitation of personal data, and the use of social media platforms for spreading misinformation.

LOW LEVELS OF TRUST IN DIGITAL POLITICAL PROCESSES

The general public harbours cynicism regarding participation in online political processes. There is general distrust of and concern about security, especially with aspects like online voting. Additionally, there exists a sentiment that online participation will not influence policy outcomes.

According to a study by the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, there is a general distrust of the use of social media for sharing digital news. The 2018 report analyzed a survey conducted in 37 countries and found that only 23% of people trusted the news that was presented to them on social media. This finding represents an all-time low for the study, which has been conducted yearly since 2012. Additionally, 63% of respondents in Europe believe the government should do more to fight fake news in Europe.

What Can We Do About It?

BUILDING DIGITAL SKILLS

As the world becomes more digitized, some new challenges arise for democracy. As more people begin to form online communities for news sharing and communicating, democratic societies would do well to address the issues that come with this. One important step is for people to build digital skills. In North America and much of the western world there are no rules in place when it comes to who can and can't use the Internet. In fact, children and grandparents are connected, using the Internet for everything from education and research to "Facebook stalking". It is essential that we have a public that is digitally literate in order to help combat threats such as misinformation and hate speech.

Taking into consideration the increased use of the Internet for participation in democratic citizenship, it is important that we invest in tailored educational programs. The proper education will give citizens the skills they require to interact and participate online with confidence. Educational programs surrounding digital literacy will give young people the skills to counter things like fake news and misinformation. It could also reshape the way we have political discourse online, creating healthier dialogue. Additionally, if we invest in digital skills for our children we need to also increase parents' and teachers' knowledge in order to better support the process.

BUILDING SKILLS FOR CITIZENSHIP

Building effective digital skills is very important, but we also need to focus on building stronger citizenship skills as well. Developing strong critical thinking skills are important for good citizenship and democratic participation. Critical thinking skills are paramount in fighting against the spread of misinformation or extremism online. Moreover, creating empathy is also viewed as necessary in creating positive social interactions online and fostering a sense of community.

Do you know what an algorithm is? Could you easily explain this to an audience of people with prior knowledge of the subject? Perhaps after reading this report. The point is that we need to prioritize education about topics like algorithms and how they affect everything from personal information feeds to the advertisements we see online. If we are able to fill these knowledge gaps, we would be better equipped to build skills for citizenship online. Moreover, we can harness the advancement of technology for educational purposes. Virtual reality is opening new frontiers for education and providing a new medium for learning; online courses and digital technologies can provide instant feedback and results, allowing for more streamlined learning.

DEVELOPING SKILLS TO COUNTER VIOLENT AND EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES

There is a considerable amount of violent and extremist ideology buried deep within the Internet. It is accessible to a large population. There are countless examples of people who have found extremist communities online and become radicalized. Either their views are enhanced or reinforced, and can sometimes be linked to intolerance, violence, and even terrorism.

The design of social media can sometimes exacerbate the problem of online extremism. The design of sites like Facebook and YouTube (as well as more obscure platforms like Gab and Voat) rewards loyalty to a group and provides users the opportunity for connection and a shared sense of community. Part of the issue is that

algorithms on these sites promote engagement with content, often regardless of that content's nature, thus creating a feedback loop which can guide audiences to toxic ideas.

There is a call for governments and social media companies to take action in fighting against hateful rhetoric and mobilization online. Currently, there is a smattering of laws around the world that help govern sites like Facebook and YouTube. Each country has the autonomy to create their own laws to help fight extremism. However, policy formation is normally two steps behind technology. In order to combat this, we can look to global examples for regulating the Internet. In 2018, the U.S. department of Justice launched a new initiative for reporting hate crimes online. The European Union has created regulations requiring

service providers to be available 24/7 to facilitate or follow up on requested removal orders of online content. These strategies are designed to help fight against the spread of online extremism and misinformation. Canada can draw upon these examples to create their own guidelines and regulations to fight extremism.

We can also help facilitate international cooperation in fighting online extremism. Working together with international bodies like the G20 could prove promising. Many of the top tech companies have their headquarters in countries outside of our own. Ultimately, what we need to promote is dialogue between countries, tech companies, civil society and academics to create policy around online misinformation and extremism.

(1) Message Board

Your Mission // Write as many arguments as you can for each side.

What you'll need:	How long will the activity take?
Paper and pencils.	This game will take about 10 minutes per round. Play as many rounds as you like.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Ask a two-sided question. (i.e. what's better: cats or dogs? Robot revolution or zombie apocalypse? Being too hot or too cold? Should we make robots smarter than us? Should we legalize all drugs? Should everyone meditate?)

2) Divide people into two groups based on the side they picked.

3) Give each side a sheet of paper with a line down the center of it.

4) Each side has 2 minutes to write as many arguments as they can for that side. (One argument per line).

5) Each side announces how many arguments they came up with to the room. Then each side will have 4 minutes to come up with more arguments than the other side.

6) Each side's goal is to write the most arguments for the other.

   EXAMPLE

   In the 2 minute round;
   – the Dog side writes 12 arguments
   – the Cat side writes 14 arguments.

7) In the 4 minute round, the Dog side needs to write 15 arguments to win and the Cat side needs to write 13 dog arguments to win.

previous

① Message Board

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS…

Remind them that the goal is not just to come up with arguments.
The goal is to practice seeing things from another perspective.

1) Did it get easier to come up with ideas after the second round? The third?

2) Was it easier to come up with ideas when you cared more, or less about the question?

3) Did playing change how you feel about any of the questions?

VARIATIONS

› You can ask more serious or more silly questions

› If your group seems into it, ask more political questions

› If they are getting too tense, ask sillier questions.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Thanks to social media message boards, it has never been easier to understand perspectives that you don't have. Although it's not always easy, we can begin to think more deeply about the world and its problems. One of the challenges we face is how to overcome polarization in order to make decisions together. Although it hasn't been used this way, social media can help us to make bridges instead of dig trenches to make real progress.

Resources

N / A

(2) Human Bingo

Your Mission // For Human Bingo the mission is to collect as many initials in the boxes until you get 5 in a row.

What you'll need:

Print enough copies of the bingo sheet so that everyone in the group has one each.
Best suited for a large group of high school students, with a minimum of 8 participants.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Give each participant a bingo sheet.

2) Limit each participant to initialing no more than two squares per person.

3) The person who filled 5 boxes in a row wins.

For a challenge, get each person initialing to describe in a word or two their civic engagement experience.

EXAMPLE   If someone "Has participated in a protest" write down the name or topic such as **Climate Change** or **Black Lives Matter**.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) How was the process of collecting initials?

2) Were there any squares that you did not consider as civic engagement and why?

3) What is one civic action you would like to do at least once?

4) Who is someone you look up to for their civic engagement (can be alive or deceased)?

VARIATIONS

If the group is small, go through the questions in the bingo squares one by one. Ask for a show of hands for each square and provide examples if there is no one who raises their hand.

② Human Bingo

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Youth will have a better understanding of what it means to be civically engaged. Some examples are simple, everyday activities while others require more commitment and research.

Resources

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering

BINGO HANDOUT

continued

(2)

Human Bingo

Find somebody who has...

(BINGO = 5 IN A ROW)

Participated in a **protest**	Written to a **government official** (email or letter)	**Fundraised** for a cause	Signed a **petition**	**Cleaned up trash** in a community
Taken a **survey** on political views	Actively **reduced waste** for climate change	**Volunteered** for a non-profit	Shared a **political news story** on social media	Gone to a **political rally**
Attended a workshop / seminar / event on **youth engagement**	Been **featured in local media** such as newspaper, radio or television	**FREE SPACE**	Ran for **school council position**	Visited a **political website**
Followed a **national media source** on social media	Wore a **button/pin** for a cause	Applied for a **scholarship** funded by the Government	Watched a **documentary** on local issues like human rights	Borrowed a **book** from the library
Voted for a school council candidate	**Donated** to a charity (any amount)	Has read out **morning announcements** at school	Has attended a **Canada Day event**	Taken **public transit**

(3) Dear Politician

Your Mission // Write a letter to a politician
(your MP, MPP, Mayor, or City Councillor).

What you'll need:

Computer stations for typing . Alternatively a pen and paper is sufficient enough.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Describe the different types or local and provincial politicians and their responsibilities.

2) Support individuals or teams of 2 in crafting a letter and encourage peer review. Allow 20-25 minutes for 2-3 paragraphs.

3) Have participants email or print their letter. Voluntary.

ALONG THE WAY DISCUSS...

1) How do you write an effective letter that touches on important issues?

2) Do know anyone who has written a letter to a politician?

3) What kind of response are your expecting?

4) If you get a response will you send a follow up letter?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Have youth learn about tangible ways they can have a say in politics. Even if they're not of voting age anyone can write a letter that will likely be answered.

VARIATIONS

For smaller, younger groups write a letter together by polling on issues the group is interested in and mail or email on behalf of the group.

Resources

WRITING TO YOUR MP OR MPP
https://www.legalline.ca/legal-answers/writing-to-your-mp-or-mpp/