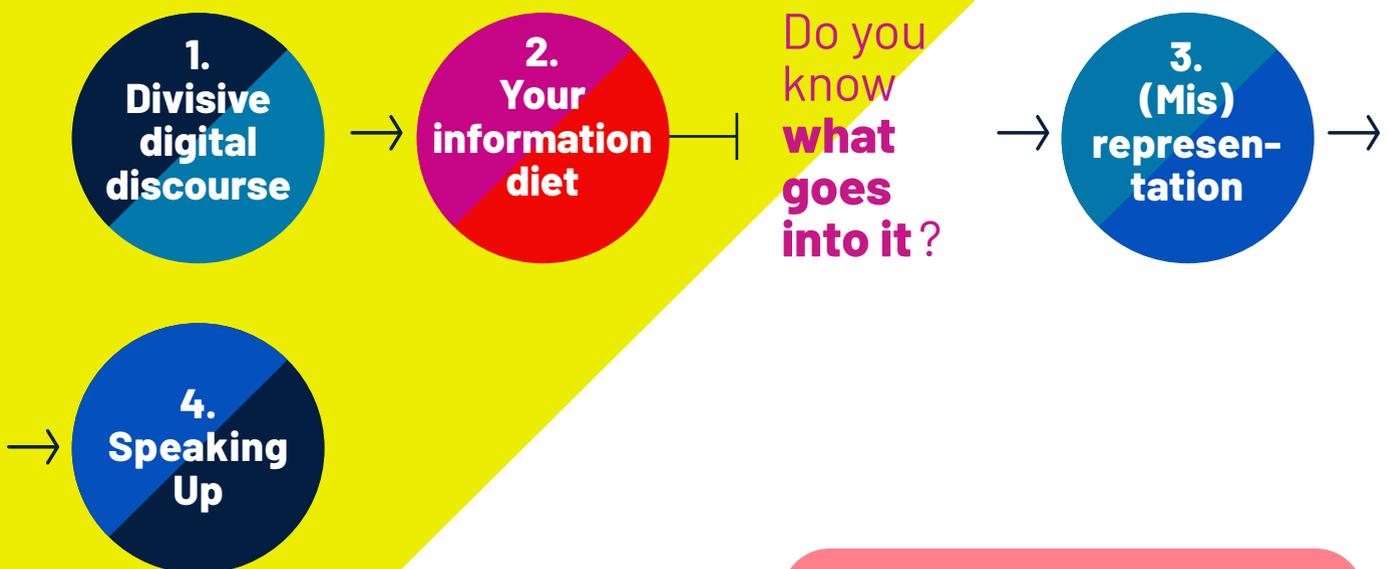


#Citizen Resilience Project

Part 2/4

Our aim is to **empower Canadians** to **recognize** the threats of **false information**, to **fight against it** as informed citizens, and to **engage** in **inclusive, productive discourse**.



About this project

The **Citizen Resilience Project** originated at 6 Degrees Toronto 2019. 6 Degrees is the global forum for inclusion, and a project of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, which convenes leaders from all sectors including arts, civil society, academia, government, activism, and business. Additionally, this project has been developed through research, national polling, and consultations with new Canadian citizens and was made possible by the Government of Canada. We encourage you to ask questions, share your experiences, and join us for 6 Degrees Montréal on March 30, 2020.

Your Information Diet

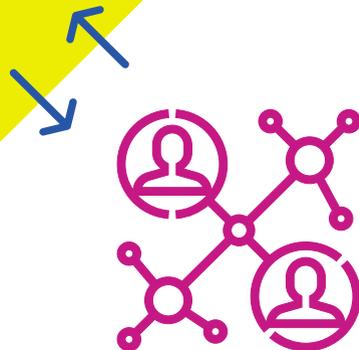
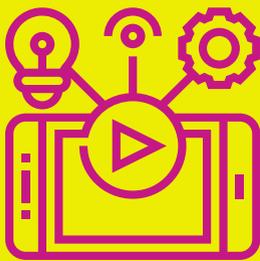
Do you know what goes into it?

Everything we read on social media is influencing our “information diet” – and it’s not all “news.” It’s important to be able to identify the differences between the various forms of information we read online – be it news, news-like content, advertising, or user-generated content. This way, we can consider the influences and biases behind what we read, and ask the right questions before simply believing it. We may not need to be reading more to be informed and engaged citizens, but we need to be reading more critically.

To address important public issues, from immigration to climate change, we need effective public discourse. A thriving democracy

depends on informed citizens who actively discuss and debate important public issues together. But it can be hard to stay informed. There is a lot of pressure to keep up with the news, follow social media posts from colleagues and friends, and to share your own. Rather than worry about the amount you read, consider focusing on being more critical of what you read.

While the internet and social media have allowed us to access and share information faster and more easily, they have also dramatically increased the sheer volume of information that the average citizen consumes every day. Social media is a vehicle for a variety of forms of information, each with their own biases and influences, and in turn, their own objectivity, credibility, and reliability. According to an ICC-Leger poll, about a third of all Canadians say that they gather almost all or more than half of their news from social media, and that increases to 41 per cent when it comes to new citizens. However, the information we read on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter isn’t always created by credible news sources.



Making sense of it all

Differentiating between the different forms of information often grouped together as “news” allows us to critically assess and consider the credibility and biases underlying what we read. Check out our glossary here to help you define some important terms that come up throughout the ICC’s Citizen Resilience Project.

What kind of content is it?

Here are some important questions to ask yourself when reading online content. This will help to differentiate between journalistic news reporting, opinion articles, political or corporate advertising, and user-generated content.

→ Ask yourself



Is this news or editorial/opinion?

Reliable news outlets clearly differentiate between fact-based news reporting and commentary or analysis (opinion or editorial pieces). The standards for fairness and fact-checking in news reporting are much stronger than for opinion pieces, and the credibility of your online source depends on differentiating between which is which. As the famous quote goes, “everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not to their own facts.”

Some sites that claim to offer news do not follow fundamental journalistic ethics guidelines, such as accuracy, fairness, and transparency. These sites are often pushing a particular viewpoint or agenda, and may only produce opinion pieces, rather than news. Ask yourself, “whose interests does this article or outlet serve?”

Try checking the bias of a source with this [online media bias resource](#). If you don’t see a clearly defined “opinion” or “editorial” label on a piece with a clear agenda, it’s possible you are not reading from a trusted source. The Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University says in their [Digital Resource Center](#) report, “If they are committed to informing news consumers, news outlets are scrupulous about labelling.”



Is this news or sponsored content paid for by a corporation?

Corporate ads and sponsored content can sometimes look like news or editorial content. It’s important to first look for a byline, which indicates who wrote the piece. Does this author financially benefit from writing this piece? Is there a brand logo, “paid for by,” or vague “staff” label instead? Who is being quoted? Are there external sources? Are there counterarguments to the points that promote a particular cause, organization, or individual?

An example of this was a recently removed [Teen Vogue](#) article that framed Facebook as a defender of democracy in a time when the corporation is under heavy public scrutiny. The lack of a byline raised red flags and got reporters and the public talking about the need to properly identify “sponsored content” and distinguish it from news reporting or opinion/editorial pieces. After a confusing series of events, including a “sponsored editorial content” label being added and then removed, it turned out that the article was originally part of a sponsored content agreement, paid for by Facebook.



Is this political news or political advertising? Who is creating or funding this and what is their agenda?

Political advertisements, like all online advertising, can be hyper-targeted to specific groups of people and are not fact-checked on Facebook. We now know that Cambridge Analytica targeted “persuadable” voters with specific anti-Clinton “ads,” identifying undecided voters through personality traits collected through digital profiles. These ads often included false, misleading, and hateful content. These ads continue to be left out of the same fact-checking processes that are required of other content on Facebook. While Twitter banned all political ads ahead of the US 2020 election, [BBC recently uncovered](#) that they continued to allow corporate advertisers to specifically target neo-Nazis, bigots, and other hate groups.



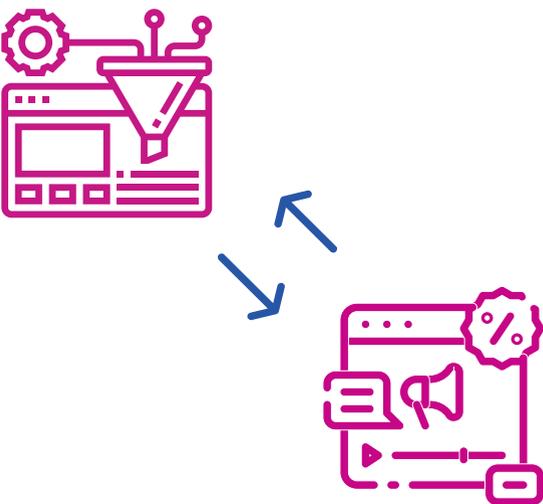
Is this news or user-generated content (ie. Posts by your friends, followers, or bots on social media)?

What a social media friend or follower says a news story says, isn't necessarily true. Nor are their opinions facts. A lot of mis- and disinformation spreads through user-generated content on social media networks. When you see something designed to make you click, make sure the story in an article matches the tweet or quotes included in a tweet or post. Avoid sharing or retweeting content that you don't know is true, and flag hateful or harmful content to social media sites so they remove it.

User-generated content is often the driver of disinformation campaigns. Coordinated groups or bots can create and prioritize hateful or misleading messaging in groups, private chats, or feeds. Bots, hate groups, or malicious actors can strategically amplify emotionally charged, false or hateful content by leveraging algorithms and targeting specific groups of people. It is important to look into their credibility by looking at past tweets/posts to look for patterns, to see what groups they are a part of, or the rate at which they tweet (is it even humanly possible?).

Why do I see it? How content is curated online

The processes behind social media networks and news feeds prioritize and target the content that each person sees online. These systems often feed us content that reinforces our existing beliefs, encourages heightened emotional reactions, polarizes opinions, or leads us to share false information.



→ **How it works**

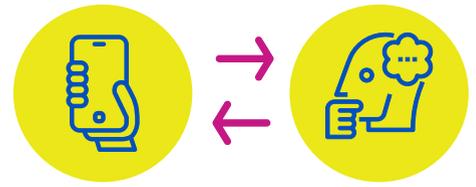


Social media algorithms are designed to prioritize emotionally-charged content since it generates more likes, comments, and views, in turn keeping people on their web sites longer. This often means that the most provocative opinions or content appears at the top of our newsfeeds. A 2018 [MIT study](#) found that false stories were 70% more likely to be retweeted than true stories, largely due to the novelty and emotional reactions that false or exaggerated online information appeals to. Since these algorithms are built with human behaviour in mind, they tend to reward misleading headlines, posts, and tweets, and result in a greater likelihood for these to be shared.



Digital profiles allow you to be personally targeted with tailored content. Your likes, dislikes, comments, clicks, and purchases are collected online to create your digital profile. This profile is then used to hyper-target political or corporate advertising that is likely to appeal to you. This process often reinforces existing beliefs or biases, rather than showing you another perspective to consider. For instance, it is more worthwhile for a political party or corporation to spend their money to promote "ads" that are hyper-targeted to segments of the population who are more likely to believe or be convinced by the information.

A Guide to Healthy Information Diet



→ Information Types

→ Ask Yourself

→ Tools & Tips



1. User-generated content

The actual tweets, Facebook posts, and instant messages on social media platforms

What biases might exist? Is there a pattern in the content of their posts? Do they post so frequently that that it could be a bot? **Does the information in the post match the article? Is the content they post stereotyping or promoting hate?**

- ➔ If you usually only read content on social media feeds, or articles sent by family or friends, subscribe to a reputable newsletter to gather and balance your information diet.
- ➔ Flag hateful or harmful content shared on social media platforms.
- ➔ Take a minute to assess the credibility and reliability of the content before retweeting or sharing a post.



2. News-media

News **reporting**
Opinion/editorial
Content **posing as "news"**

Is this source recognizable and reputable? What is the outlet's mission and who are its funders? Is this news reporting or opinion? **Is this news reporting or sponsored content? Does it have a byline? Who is being quoted?**

- Consider the source's Bias, expertise, funding, political affiliation**
- ➔ Check out The Trust Project's indicators of reliable news.
 - ➔ Check the media bias: mediabiasfactcheck.com
 - ➔ Fact-check using: www.FactsCan.ca www.CanadaFactCheck.ca



3. Advertisements

Corporate sponsored content posing as "news"
Political ads that can be hyper-targeted based on digital profiles.

Who is benefitting or profiting from this narrative? Who created this and who funded it? What is their agenda? Is this political news or a political ad? Is this news or sponsored content? **Does it have a byline? Who is being quoted?** What information do advertisers have about me?

- Find out more** about how you are tracked through the Digital Advertising Alliance of Canada
- Use the Who Targets Me plug-in to better understand how political advertisers use Facebook ads ahead of elections.