



Internet Research and Information Literacy: Effective Strategies and Cautionary Tales

Recognizing Online Propaganda, Bias, and Advertising

INTRODUCTION

This teacher's guide provides information to help you get the most out of the *Recognizing Online Propaganda, Bias, and Advertising* video. The contents of this guide will allow you to prepare your students before using the program, and to present follow-up activities to reinforce the program's key learning points.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Internet has transformed our society and many students turn to the Internet to conduct research for papers and reports. While there are tremendous benefits to using the Internet with the vast amount of information it provides, some of it can be unreliable and deceitful. Even unintentional or seemingly harmless online information can damage an individual's knowledge of what is credible versus incredible information. This video addresses ways to recognize online propaganda, information that is biased, and messages from advertisers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After viewing the program, students will be able to:

- Define information literacy
- Recognize propaganda, bias, and advertising
- Effectively use techniques to determine if a source is reliable
- Understand how information and advertising can be intertwined
- Recognize common propaganda strategies

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

For educational standards for this title, please see: http://ffh.films.com/id/20148/Recognizing_Online_Propaganda_Bias_and_Advertising.htm

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

While their motives aren't always evil, people who bend the truth don't usually do so for the greater good, either. The online world is no exception—in fact, it's a paradise for purveyors of hype, pseudo-journalism, and intellectual snake oil. This video explores ways to identify bias and propaganda on the Internet and sift through the various influences, such as political or corporate interests, that may be behind some Web content. Spotting key aspects of propaganda and bias-driven writing, such as the use of glittering generalities, name-calling, or card-stacking, the program also presents important tips for differentiating between advertising and genuinely useful, scholarly material—a task made increasingly difficult by cleverly disguised sponsorship. Web savvy is further developed through discussions of URL suffixes (.com, .org, etc.) and what they indicate.

MAIN TOPICS

Topic 1: What is information literacy?

In this section, *Recognizing Online Propaganda, Bias, and Advertising* defines information literacy as the ability to consume and create credible, verified information, and the ability to distinguish that information from raw information, opinion, gossip, and propaganda.

Topic 2: Propaganda

This section explains the purpose of propaganda and why it is appealing or persuasive. Examples of common forms of propaganda found on the Internet are provided, with experts giving tips on how to recognize and avoid it.

Topic 3: Bias

In this section, viewers learn the difference between propaganda and information that is biased and how even the most reliable sources can fall into this category. Students learn how to decide for themselves if a source is one-sided and get tips for finding multiple viewpoints.

Topic 4: Advertising

The Internet has blurred the lines between advertising and information. *Recognizing Online Propaganda, Bias, and Advertising* explains the effect advertising has on credible sources and emphasizes the importance of consumer awareness.

FAST FACTS

The Internet has made both credible information and unreliable information readily available in a few quick keystrokes.

Being familiar with propaganda strategies, understanding bias, and recognizing how information and advertising are intertwined are all important information literacy skills.

Propaganda appeals to your emotions.

Bias can occur intentionally or unintentionally.

Online advertising not only influences the layouts of Web pages, but also the content on the page, and the kinds of hits you receive in a Web search.

Even the most careful journalists can have biases that come out in their work, so it is up to the researcher to be thorough.

Advertisers pay for much of the “free” content on the Web, so they have a lot of control over the information that is upfront and easy to find.

VOCABULARY TERMS

Advertising: messages intended to persuade an audience to buy a certain product

Bias: personal beliefs, opinions, or attitudes that prevent impartial consideration of a particular topic

Boolean logic: use of operators such as *and*, *or*, and *not* to combine search terms

Database: a computer program that indexes information, organizes it, and describes it

Directory: an information source listing names, addresses, phone numbers, etc.

Domain name: the domain name is the part of the Internet or e-mail address that describes the location of the host computer (examples: .com, .edu, .gov)

Information literacy: the ability to consume and create credible, verified information and to distinguish credible information from opinion, gossip, and propaganda

Journal: a subject-specific, scholarly periodical

Keywords: any words, phrases, or synonyms that describe a topic

Magazine: a general-readership, popular periodical

Monograph: a book

Natural language: a method of searching that uses everyday language in the form of a question as input

Online resources: sources such as databases and Web sites that are available through a network or the Internet

Periodical: any publication printed on a regular, predictable schedule. A periodical may be published weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.

Popular sources: popular sources are books and magazine articles written for the general public

Primary sources: primary sources derive from experiments or original research, literary works, autobiographies, original theories, and other materials

Propaganda: messages that try to change beliefs to reach a predetermined goal by appealing to people's emotions, fear, or gullibility

Results ranking: the order in which search results appear. Each search tool uses its own unique algorithm

Scholarly source: a journal that contains articles written by researchers doing original work in a subject field

Search strategy: a plan for conducting information research

Secondary source: a source compiling or critiquing original works. Examples include literary criticism, biographies, encyclopedia articles, and journal articles critiquing the work of others

Search tools: a generic term that includes all types of Internet search tools, including search engines and directories

Trade publications: periodical articles and books written for and by people working in specific trade occupations

URL: Uniform Resource Locator, the standard address form for any resource on the Web

Adapted in part from the Farmington Library Reference Department Information Literacy Glossary and the York College of Pennsylvania Information Literacy Glossary of Terms.

PRE-PROGRAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What sources do you use to find information online?
2. Have you encountered propaganda before?
3. How do you know if something is an advertisement?
4. Do you trust newspapers to report the news in a balanced, unbiased manner?
5. How often do you check the sources of your information?

POST-PROGRAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways to recognize propaganda?
2. How do bias and propaganda differ?
3. Give an example of propaganda used for good.
4. What are three ways to check if a source is credible?

5. What are some of the best places to look for unbiased information?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Most advertising contains propaganda. Collect magazines and distribute them in class. Have students tally the number of ads and categorize them by the propaganda method used: Bandwagon, Card stacking, Plain Folks, Glittering Generalities, or Other. Afterwards, students can meet in groups to compare and discuss the results. What were the most common strategies? Why? How are stereotypes of gender and race used in the ads? Are there any clear connections between the advertisements and the editorial content of the magazine?

Next, students can create a poster demonstrating each of the propaganda techniques with descriptions and arrows pointing out the examples. Display these in the classroom.

ACTIVITY 2

POSTER PROPAGANDA

During World War II, persuading the American public to support the war became a wartime industry, almost as important as the manufacturing of bullets and planes. The government launched an aggressive propaganda campaign to galvanize public support.

Direct students to the *Powers of Persuasion*, National Archives exhibit.

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_intro.html

Ask students to select a poster and discuss the use of imagery, color, symbolism, and the intended audience for the message. Alternatively, print out some of the posters and the poster analysis worksheet and distribute them in class.

Teacher resources for the exhibit are available here: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/wwii-posters/#documents>

Poster Analysis Worksheet

1. What are the main colors used in the poster?

2. What symbols (if any) are used in the poster?

3. If a symbol is used, is it
 - a. clear (easy to interpret)? _____
 - b. memorable? _____
 - c. dramatic? _____
4. Are the messages in the poster primarily visual, verbal, or both?

5. Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?

6. What does the government hope the audience will do?

7. What government purpose(s) is served by the poster?

8. The most effective posters use symbols that are unusual, simple, and direct. Is this an effective poster?

Designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for United States History

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929–1945)

Standard 3C: Demonstrate understanding of the effects of World War II at home.

Standards in Historical Thinking 3 and 5: Historical Analysis and Interpretation and Historical Issues—Analysis and Decision-making.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government

Standard V. E. 1: Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the relationship between politics and the attainment of individual and public goals.

ACTIVITY 3

BIAS IN THE NEWS

Collect a full week of two daily newspapers. Multiple copies may be useful. These should have parity in terms of coverage area (city, state, or national in scope). Create a list of the top stories that appear on the front pages of the two papers. Compare the space devoted and the headlines for each of these stories. Some stories may move off the front page. Make note of the page number the stories move to. Select three stories that both papers have in common and divide the class in three groups. Who are the key subjects or spokespeople in the stories? Make a comparative list of the adjectives and other descriptive words used to talk about these individuals. Make note of any fact discrepancies between the two papers. Based on the data collected, what observations can be made about the coverage of the story by each paper? How do these observations relate to notions of conservative versus liberal values? Is there evidence of gender or racial bias? Is the story given more prominence in one paper than another? What might this say about the different audiences each paper serves?

The activity can also be assigned outside of class, using online news sources, or focusing on one single story in the news.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

TRUE/FALSE QUIZ

(if the statement is false, explain why)

1. Journal articles are often written by experts in a specific field.
2. Magazine articles often have extensive bibliographies.
3. The *or* operator expands your search and you will find more hits/results.
4. You have to get permission to publish on the Web.
5. The most important criterion when evaluating an Internet resource for a research paper is the author.
6. Glittering Generalities refers to a technique that assumes you'll think that if someone you admire agrees with something, you should, too!
7. The Bandwagon technique encourages you to join a movement that already has momentum.
8. Propaganda is unintentionally biased.
9. Quoting public figures out of context is a form of selection bias.
10. The URL .gov can't tell you whether or not you are getting official information.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Journal articles are often written by experts in a specific field.

True.

2. Magazine articles often have extensive bibliographies.

False. *Magazines very seldom contain bibliographies.*

3. The *or* operator expands your search and you will find more hits/results.

False. *Your search will be limited. The *and* operator expands your search.*

4. You have to get permission to publish on the Web.

False. *Anyone can publish on the Web.*

5. The most important criterion when evaluating an Internet resource for a research paper is the author.

True.

6. Glittering Generalities refers to a technique that assumes you'll think that if someone you admire agrees with something, you should, too!

False. *Glittering Generalities uses words with vague, positive connotations.*

7. The Bandwagon technique encourages you to join a movement that already has momentum.

True.

8. Propaganda is unintentionally biased.

False. *It is deliberately biased.*

9. Quoting public figures out of context is a form of selection bias.

True.

10. The URL *.gov* can't tell you whether or not you are getting official information.

False. *.gov is reserved only for official government agency Web sites.*

ADDITIONAL INFOBASE LEARNING RESOURCES

Propaganda

Though they often work in the shadows, their efforts have affected the destinies of entire nations, in peacetime and war. This program focuses on dictators and spin doctors who shaped the perceptions of the masses in 20th-century Europe. Archival news film and footage and historical photos spotlight the propaganda of the Russian Revolution, World War II, the Gulf War, and the NATO attacks against Serbia, as well as the PR blitzes so much a part of today's political scene. Clips from propaganda classics *Battleship Potemkin*, *The Triumph of the Will*, and *The Eternal Jew* are also included. A BBCW Production. (29 minutes) © 2000

Item#: 12061

DVD ISBN 978-1-4213-1806-6

Sexual and Racial Stereotypes in the Media

Sexual and racial stereotypes are constantly being redefined and reinforced on TV and in movies, in magazines and on the Web, in video games—practically everywhere. They frame perceptions, reinforce prejudices, and promote a fear of the “other.” This two-part series scrutinizes the media in order to both expose and understand common sources of bias and the intentions behind them. Expert commentary is provided by Carolyn Kitch, director of the Mass Media and Communication program at Temple University; Oscar Gandy, professor emeritus at the Annenberg School for Communication; and NPR's Bob Garfield, cohost of *On the Media*. A Films for the Humanities & Sciences Production. 2-part series, 38 & 42 minutes. © 2008

Item#: 37004

DVD (chaptered) ISBN 978-1-4213-8677-5

Hi-Tech Hate

Extremists are increasingly using the free flow of information allowed by the Internet to spread messages of hate around the globe. This program begins in a computer class in a Toronto high school, where students find racist propaganda on a neo-Nazi Web site. The purveyors of this information, and those who oppose them online, are interviewed. We learn from experts why individuals are drawn to extremist ideologies, and how they use technology to further their aims. We follow this network from Canada to Russia and Germany, and finally home to the U.S., where extremists not only maintain Nazi Web sites, but also exploit freedom of speech to openly air their propaganda on cable television. (45 minutes) © 1995

Item#: 6203

DVD ISBN 978-1-4213-2479-1

ADDITIONAL INTERNET RESOURCES

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/infolit/index.cfm>

A gateway to resources on information literacy. Includes a set of tools, Web pages, and other resources that will help you to use the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.

The News Literacy Project

<http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/about/>

The project's primary aim is to teach students the critical thinking skills they need to be smart and frequent consumers and creators of credible information across all media and platforms. Students are learning how to distinguish verified information from raw messages, spin, gossip, and opinion and are being encouraged to seek news and information that will make them well-informed citizens and voters.

National Forum on Information Literacy

<http://infolit.org/>

A national network of 93+ organizations and agencies supportive of information literacy as a key 21st century skill, viewed as a critical pathway in advancing our nation's educational and workforce development agendas.