Curating Your Media Diet, or, How not to Feed Your Kids Twinkies at every meal!

Most of us rely heavily on social media as a source of news and information about the world. However, since social media allows to choose who we listen to (and conversely who we don't), we run the risk of creating an informational echo chamber in which our own biases and preconceived ideas about the world are reinforced by the news sources we consume. In the best case scenario, this leads to an incomplete understanding of the world, and in the worst to the reinforcement of prejudice, bias and even more dangerously, radicalization.

The good news is, we live in a time where technology, plus our own self awareness and critical thinking, can easily lead us to become highly informed consumers of information.

This assignment asks you to analyze your current media consumption, determine its biases, gaps and weaknesses and then make a plan to create a more balanced, higher quality personal media environment - to create the best possible mix of information so that we can navigate the world in which we live

The first step is to complete the personal media environment template. We will check this off, but we will not collect it.

Key terms for this assignment:

Slant/Bias - This indicates lens through which the source filters information. Bias/slant is not necessarily a bad thing, unless the consumer is unaware of it. For our purposes, bias/slant will be described using the following terms:

> **Left** - This indicates a source the filters information through a liberal bias. These sources tend to be more sympathetic to Democrats in the American political system. Examples of positions typical (but not universally true) of left slanted sources include:
> * Pro gun control
> * Pro abortion
> * In favor of a larger social safety net (social security, unemployment insurance, medicare etc.)
> * Other examples from class:

> **Right** - This indicates a source that filters information trough a conservative bias. These sources tend to be more sympathetic to Republicans in the American political system
> Examples of positions typical (but not universally true) of right slanted sources include:
> * Anti-gun control
> * Anti Abortion
> * In favor of smaller less invasive government and a smaller social safety net
> * Other examples from class:

> **Establishment foreign policy-** This has to do with foreign policy and it reflects a view that is consistent with the professional foreign policy establishment. It is neither left or right, although there are left and right leaning establishment figures. Positions typical of and establishment slant include:
> * The belief in the importance of America's system of global alliances (NATO etc)
> * The belief that America ought to play a leadership role in world affairs
> * The belief that international institutions (the World Bank, the World Trade organization, the UN etc.) are generally forces for stability and good in the world

> **Anti-Establishment foreign policy -** Generally rejects the positions held by establishment figures.

Degree of slant/bias
- **leans** - a little
- **skews** - generally
- h**ard** - a lot
- **extreme** - So far as to promote hatred and possible violence against the opposition

Type of source

News - The goal of this source is to provide information that is as objective as possible, although no source is completely objective. News sources often have editorial sections that are designed to persuade. Learning to distinguish the parts of a newspaper or TV network that aim to provide news or to provide editorials is a very import information literacy skill.

Opinion - The goal of this source is to persuade. It does not claim to be an objective sources of information.

How do you determine a source's bias? There are a variety of tools available to assess bias, some of which are described in this article that appeared in the Columbia Journalism Review. With many sources, we have an idea of bias based on reputation, with others a bit of research is required. One way of thinking about a source's bias is to determine your own bias and then measure the degree to which the source generally agrees or disagrees with your positions. The best news outlets aim for objectivity but may lean one way or the other. When in doubt, look for a standards and practices page!

Here are some common news and opinion sources and my assessment of their general bias:

Wire services

Reuters - Very little slant
Associated Press - Very little slant

US daily newspapers

New York Times - Editorial stance leans left
Washington Post - Editorial stance leans left
The Los Angeles Times - Editorial stance leans left
National Public Radio - Centrist
The Hill - Centrist
Dallas Morning news - Editorial stance leans right
Wall Street Journal - Editorial stance leans right (links to the 7 day free guest access page)
The Chicago Tribune - Leans right

US opinion periodicals

The Atlantic - Left oriented
The New Yorker - Left oriented
The Bulwark - Right oriented but anti-Trump
The National Review - Right oriented

Foreign newspapers and periodicals

The Economist - Centrist, published in the UK
The Moscow times - English language newspaper published in Moscow by a Dutch owned company. Tends to be critical of the current Russian government.
Die Zeit - Left leaning published in Germany
BBC - State funded multimedia company in the UK. Editorial stance leans left.
Haaretz - Israel's longest published newspaper. Editorial stance leans left (remember this will have a different context in foreign countries
Rappler - Philippine news site and aggregator. Generally critical of Duterte