

On Being a Critical Media User: A Guide

Professor Jackie Smith, University of Pittsburgh
(Last updated August 2022)

This document reviews relevant social science literature on the mass media and forces shaping both its content and the ways people engage with media platforms and use information. It is meant to provide tools that can help people identify good practices that can limit the spread of misinformation and encourage critical, engaged democratic citizenship.

We live in an “information economy” where profits come increasingly from the delivery of information rather than goods and services. Competition for people’s attention is fierce, as huge profits can accrue to those who succeed. Digital media and online platforms are fueling an increasingly corporate-dominated competition for advertising revenues and user data. We are only beginning to understand the social and political implications of these new technologies, but it is clear that we have much to worry about.

Digital platforms both encourage people to spend more time online—and therefore less time engaging in face-to-face exchanges—and they isolate and segregate users by race, class, age, and ideological perspectives. Not only is digital media use associated with growing rates of depression and anxiety, but it removes the social and cultural filters that have traditionally helped people interpret information and assess its value. In addition, online media use is changing people’s reading habits and concentration abilities in harmful ways.

Critical reflection on this evolving *information ecosystem* is essential for people who want to be wise users of our information tools without losing sight of their own values, goals, and needs. Changes in technology have allowed us virtually unlimited access to information, which is both anxiety producing and distracting but also susceptible to abuse by purveyors of misinformation. The overabundance of information exceeds the human brain’s capacity to make sense of it all. Recent experience shows that this is threatening both to public health and to our democracy.

Democracies require that all people have access to accurate and widely-trusted information about major policy issues. Having key sources of news that are respected and trusted by all members of a political community is essential to helping communities make decisions about how to govern their lives. Today’s new technologies and the long-term trend of commercialization of news have undermined our media system and now threaten our democracy.

The Changing Media Ecosystem

Whereas in the past people relied on local newspapers and national television and radio newscasts, today more U.S. residents get their news online than from print newspapers.¹ The 2000s have brought an expansion of “[news deserts](#)” in the U.S., as nearly two thousand [newspapers have closed](#), leaving an estimated [one in five Americans](#) with limited or no local media coverage.² The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis, and [scores of journalists have been laid off](#) across

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/>

² [How closures of local newspapers increase local government borrowing costs](#) Brookings Institute study, July 16, 2018; See also: [News Measures Research Project \(NMRP\), DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy-Duke University](#).

the country. This has enabled powerful economic players to have even more influence on the news people get.³ In addition, the loss of local news sources is one critical factor fueling the unprecedentedly low levels of trust in news media we see today.⁴

What does it mean when local news sources go away? Declining news coverage of state and local government has led fewer people to be civically engaged, which means they lack opportunities to learn how government operates and how diverse residents view a variety of political issues. This undermines the effective operation of local and other levels of government by fueling political polarization and reducing transparency and accountability. This in turn is associated with, e.g., higher municipal borrowing costs, and increased pollution.⁵ For democracy to work, people need *politically relevant and trustworthy information*.⁶ Yet a minority of Americans report that they trust the mass media.⁷ And the information we're getting through mass commercial media is increasingly removed from our local communities and thus less relevant to decisions that matter most directly for our day-to-day lives.⁸

The increasing availability and diversity of online news, and the growing use of social media, have thus created a paradoxical effect of less-informed and more ideologically polarized media consumers, and a proliferation of false or misleading news.⁹ Despite access to a wider range of views, people now tend to rely on a narrower range of sources that reflect and reinforce their ideological preferences. They are less likely to be exposed to diverse ideas and perspectives, limiting their understandings of complex problems and further inhibiting trust and empathy with those who hold different points of view. In hindsight, policy makers and media leaders are widely questioning practices that have allowed prominent social media figures (and presidents) to use their platforms to spread false claims and manipulate publics.¹⁰

Deepening the problem is the fact that media platforms profit from [amplifying divisive, emotionally triggering content](#) that furthers conflict and polarization and undermines trust in democratic institutions.¹¹ This threatens democracy by making people less able to hear diverse points of view, inhibiting dialogue, critical reflection, and compromise.¹² Social media have fueled the growth of what is known as “fake news” (propaganda) that serves the needs of advertisers and

³ [As Local News Dies, a Pay-for-Play Network Rises in Its Place](#) *New York Times* Oct. 18, 2020.

⁴ [Media Confidence Ratings at Record Lows](#) (Gallup poll July 2022). This report shows a steady decline in trust in media over the 2000s.

⁵ Alan Greenblatt, “[When no News isn’t Good News: What the Decline of Local Newspapers Means for Government](#)” *Governing: The Future of States & Localities*, April 24, 2019.

⁶ That’s why groups like the [Fund for Local Journalism](#) are working to engage public pressure and advocacy to support local news media production and laws that protect it.

⁷ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/267047/americans-trust-mass-media-edges-down.aspx>

⁸ There have been some efforts to counter this trend, but this requires concerted and organized community efforts, as well as financial support from the public. See, e.g., [How Chicago is reimagining the future of local journalism as papers decline](#), *The Guardian* June 23, 2021.

⁹ <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>

¹⁰ R. Richardson, *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*

¹¹ For instance, A study by *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting* found that [White Republicans Are Less Supportive of Black Lives Matter After Consuming Right-Wing Media; Truth & Nothing But the Truth: Impact of Social Media & Communication on Democratic Participation](#) *IPS News* Feb. 1, 2018

¹² See “[Digital democracy will face its greatest test in 2020](#),” by Siva Vaidhyanathan *The Guardian* 25 Nov. 2019; [Netflix’s ‘The Social Dilemma’ Tells Only Half the Story](#) Johnathan Cook, *Consortium News* <https://consortiumnews.com/> Jan. 14, 2021.

politicians seeking to advance their political ambitions by fueling fear, mistrust, and social conflict. These media platforms and market-driven content are largely unregulated, and they have exacerbated racial and gender biases in mainstream media sources, furthering this social and political polarization.¹³ The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the extreme dangers this system poses for human well-being, and [global health leaders coined the term “infodemic”](#) to refer to the widespread and deadly manipulation of information on media platforms.

To make matters worse, corporations have used their wealth to make this information ecosystem even more confusing and misleading, seeking to deceive readers/viewers in a number of ways. For instance, analysts writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review* found a network of 450 websites linked to five corporations that “mimic the appearance and output of traditional news organizations” in order to “manipulate public opinion by exploiting faith in local media.”¹⁴ Also, investigative journalists uncovered an effort by Monsanto to discredit journalists and activists and bully scientists and critics who were uncovering evidence that its weedkiller, Roundup, posed serious health risks, including cancer.¹⁵ And powerful groups can use their resources to shape content, sometimes even relying on public funds as in police departments’ use of “copaganda” to ward off criticism by racial justice advocates.¹⁶

Commodifying News

Things didn’t have to be this way. A few key policy decisions led to the growing commercialization and corporate concentration of the mass media. In **1987**, President Ronald Reagan ordered the Federal Communications Commission to stop enforcing the **Fairness Doctrine**, which required radio and TV stations to broadcast to both present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a way that was honest, equitable, and balanced.¹⁷ Under the Fairness Doctrine, news divisions were required to operate separately from entertainment divisions of networks, and the purpose of these divisions was not profit-making but to provide the public with information they need to be informed citizens of our democracy.

Then, in **1996**, the [Telecommunications Act](#) limited restrictions on corporate ownership of local media outlets, and since then media sources in the U.S. have become increasingly competitive, for-profit entities. Since that legislation was passed, there has been a tremendous concentration of corporate ownership of the mass media, and now just 5 or 6 companies control as much as 90% of the media market.¹⁸ Such concentration reduces the diversity of news and increases the ability of commercial interests to shape media content. Since corporations are organizations designed to generate profits, media content is determined largely by calculations of commercial benefits, costs of production, and the related preferences of advertisers—not by how well it informs audiences about issues of importance to the larger society. This has led to content that is often [sensationalist](#)

¹³ See, e.g., [“Study Uncovers Sexism in Mainstream News Media”](#) and [a recent controversy over the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s](#) treatment of its Black reporters.

¹⁴ <https://www.projectcensored.org/6-shadow-network-of-conservative-outlets-emerges-to-exploit-faith-in-local-news/>

¹⁵ <https://www.projectcensored.org/2-monsanto-intelligence-center-targeted-journalists-and-activists/>

¹⁶ [Police Departments Spend Vast Sums of Money Creating ‘Copaganda’](#) *Economic Hardship Reporting Project* July 20, 2022.

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FCC_fairness_doctrine

¹⁸ See [Harvard Future of Media Project](#)

[and that focuses on celebrities](#), while ignoring important news citizens need to hold politicians and corporations accountable to public needs and values. In addition, the media [emphasis is on economic indicators and frameworks](#), with considerable attention to stock market figures at the expense of analyses and news that help show the links between our economy and people’s health and well-being.¹⁹

Another problem resulting from this concentration of media ownership is the absence of diverse viewpoints media content. Corporations tend to be led primarily by white men, and thus the views of racial minorities, women, and gender diverse people are often neglected in media content.²⁰ In addition, the **U.S. media tends to present a U.S.-centered view of the world**, often failing to offer critical assessments of the policies of U.S. officials or to convey to the U.S. public the perceptions that people from other countries might have of U.S. policies and their impacts.²¹ [Project Censored’s](#) annual reports of the top under-reported news stories routinely include major U.S. foreign policy issues that have substantial impacts on the lives and well-being of people around the world. In 2017-18 & in 2018-19, five of the top ten stories were related to U.S. foreign policy.²² More recently, analysts have sounded alarms about **selective coverage of foreign protests**, which undermine Americans’ ability to fully understand both the impacts of U.S. policies and the conditions people are facing in other parts of the world.²³

Over recent years, commercial media outlets have been cutting operating costs by **reducing their professional reporting staffs**, especially foreign correspondents, which is especially worrisome as global forces increasingly impact our everyday lives. This leads to less in-depth and expert reporting, and it encourages media outlets to broadcast or publish content provided by outside sources, including corporations and other well-resourced groups with vested interests in conveying particular messages.²⁴

Reductions in staff have also meant less diversity in newsrooms. A 2018 study of the educational backgrounds of journalists from leading U.S. news sources, the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* showed that the staffs of these newspapers “shares much more in the way of educational and cultural background with [the elites] they cover than with the general public” (FAIR 2018). Moreover, the larger problem of **institutionalized racism** is reproduced in our information system through the perpetuation of racial stereotypes and privileging of normative assumptions of those in power, along with other “whitestream” values and perspectives, omitting and devaluing alternative viewpoints. Despite noteworthy changes to improve diversity in media organizations

¹⁹ See, e.g., “[Dear NPR: Stock market is not the economy.](#)” John Buell, *Commondreams*, June 29, 2021.

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/28/media-diversity-neo-nazis-reporting; Women’s voices marginalized in COVID media coverage> *The Guardian* Sept. 24, 2020

²¹ [Robert Koehler \(Jan. 4, 2018, Commondreams\)](#) discusses the “toxic nationalism” resulting from news reports on nuclear weapons and border regulations, and [Jeff Cohen \(June 21, 2021, Commondreams\)](#) finds a consistent “America first” theme in various “liberal” U.S. news sources—including NPR and MSNBC.

²² <https://www.projectcensored.org/top-25-censored-stories-of-all-time/> (Archive 2018-19; 2017-18)

²³ See, [Whitewashing Neoliberal Repression in Chile and Ecuador](#) (FAIR, Oct. 23, 2019); [“The Revolution isn’t being Televised”](#) (FAIR, Oct. 26, 2019)

²⁴ *The Guardian* reported on [local news outlets using video segments provided by Amazon](#) to report on that company’s labor practices during the Coronavirus pandemic. See also the point above about police department “copaganda”

racist attitudes continue to be perpetuated in many mainstream outlets, with Fox news being a particular—but by no means the only—problem in this regard.²⁵

Media companies' concern for attracting corporate advertising has led them to avoid reporting on controversial issues or issues that would harm the interests of advertisers, thereby reinforcing the political interests of powerful groups. They thus present limited perspectives on important topics that favor the status quo and dismiss or neutralize dissent. For instance, a recent study by Public Citizen documents the under-reporting of climate change in the corporate media.²⁶ Sociological research has documented how corporate media practices have obfuscated public understandings of the science of climate change.²⁷ Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) points out how the corporate media has failed to identify massive inequality as a threat to economic prosperity, noting that "[Record Inequality and Corporate Profits Are What Media Call a 'Strong Economy.'](#)"²⁸ Critically important too is how companies profiting from military expenditures are able to influence reporting on the complex issues surrounding global conflicts and U.S. military interventions.²⁹ The following websites track the companies that own the major media outlets www.cjr.org/resources/index.php and <http://fair.org/interlocking-directorates>.

Social Media

Social media has been changing the information landscape dramatically, and new reports surface each day about the damaging effects this has had on our democracy and on people's access to truthful information.³⁰ Social media is linked to greater social polarization and the rise of hate crimes in multiple countries.³¹ The polarization of U.S. (and other) societies through the manipulation of information by social media outlets and governments³² results from a failure of the U.S. as well as other governments to effectively regulate these platforms. We're now seeing pervasive harms to the body politic, and evidence grows of how social media has fueled white supremacy, hate crimes, and other forms of violence.³³ In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that [Trump's anti-press statements risk inciting violence](#) against journalists

²⁵ [How Fox News is making a network out of race baiting](#), *CNN Business* (July 23, 2021); [Has Tucker Carlson created the most racist show in the history of cable news?](#), *NPR* (May 12, 2022); [Fox News' Racial Crime Coverage Is Hurting People](#) <https://www.mediamatters.org/>; [Fox News Is Racist. Period.](#) Freepress.net. See also: [How the Media System Fuels Anti-Black Racism | Free Press](#) March 8, 2021

²⁶ <https://www.citizen.org/sites/default/files/public-citizen-carbon-omission-media-report-january-2018.pdf>

²⁷ https://stephenschneider.stanford.edu/Publications/PDF_Papers/McCrightDunlap2003.pdf

²⁸ Source: FAIR, November 19, 2019. Many economists and policy makers are expressing growing concerns over the levels of inequality, which they see as a major threat to economic and political stability.

²⁹ See, e.g., [Corporate Media Are Erasing US's Long-Term Culpability for Afghanistan War.](#) William Rivers Pitt, *Truthout* Aug. 17, 2021; ["When Military Contractors Fund Their Own Pro-War Think Tanks,"](#) Sarah Lazare *In These Times*, August 30, 2021.

³⁰ For a detailed list of resources on this topic, see the following website: [Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age.](#)

³¹ ["How the West fell for Manufactured Rage" Excerpt: This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto.](#) Suketu Mehta, New York University. *The Guardian*, August 27, 2019; [I warned in 2018 YouTube was fueling far-right extremism. Here's what the platform should be doing.](#) Becca Lewis, *The Guardian* Dec. 11, 2020.

³² [Facebook and Twitter are being used to manipulate public opinion – Oxford report;](#) see also Committee to Protect Journalist [report on government manipulation of social media.](#)

³³ See, e.g. Williams, Matthew L et al. ["Hate in the Machine: Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Social Media Posts as Predictors of Offline Racially and Religiously Aggravated Crime."](#) *British journal of criminology* 60.1 (2020): 93–117. Johnson, N F et al. ["Hidden Resilience and Adaptive Dynamics of the Global Online Hate Ecology."](#) *Nature (London)* (2019): 261–265; Müller, Karsten, and Carlo Schwarz. ["Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime."](#) *Journal of the European Economic Association* 19.4 (2021): 2131–2167.

and other members of the press. Indeed, recent years have seen growing violence against members of the press, which presents a larger threat to principles of democracy and human rights ([Committee to Protect Journalists](#)).

In addition to the harmful effects on society, new media platforms can harm individual health. Growing numbers of psychologists and social analysts are identifying worrisome trends of worsening physical and mental health in younger generations that they link to growing digital and social media use.³⁴ *The Guardian* surveyed its readers in 2019 and found that they spent an average of 2.5 hours per day on their phones.³⁵ That may sound small, but it adds up to over one month per year. Social media and digital technology use contributes to distraction, loss of concentration, forgetfulness, social isolation, and sleep deprivation, according to a number of studies. It can also contribute to physical ailments related to repetitive stress and sedentary lifestyles. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, such findings were leading more people to take steps to adopt more healthy habits regarding media use.³⁶

What are the alternatives?

The global community has long warned about the inequalities in the operation of the commercial mass media, and in the 1970s some leaders called for a [New World Information and Communication Order](#) (NWICO). These conversations generated important critiques about the global economy's role in shaping information systems in countries around the world, and in 1980 UNESCO issued the [McBride Report](#), outlining key recommendations for, e.g., protecting the right to communication and creating structures to ensure coherence between communications policies and global development and equity goals. Although NWICO and related efforts to better support norms of equity, democracy, and human rights have so far failed at the global level, journalists and activists, especially in the global South, continue to actively promote them.³⁷

Alternative media activists and organizers Laura Flanders and Isaiah J. Poole offered their insights on "[Shaping a media for people and planet](#)." In most democracies, governments provide some support for public media, since free and equitable access to information and culture is critical to the operation of democratic societies. However, there can be problems with government funding, especially in a context where money can influence politics and prevent equity in shaping government agendas and priorities. Here's an interview by the *Columbia Journalism Review* about the pros and cons about [government funding for journalism](#). Responding to the crisis in American news media, *Current Affairs* presented this argument about [the urgent need for worker-owned media](#) (Oct. 2019). As reporter Nathan Robinson observes: "The biggest threat to journalism today is not 'technology.' Journalists can innovate ways to use technology to produce excellent new work, and even to get people to pay for it. *The big problem is ownership*: The journalists don't

³⁴ The 2020 documentary, *United States of Distraction: Fighting the Fake News Invasion*, draws from interviews with scholars and student analysts to provide an in-depth look at how policies governing media operations and social media platforms have impacted both people's news habits and our democracy (<https://youtu.be/Wa4uVohP-Tw>).

³⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/aug/26/guardian-readers-spend-25-hours-phone-screen-time>

³⁶ See, e.g., [How we can reclaim our screen time](#); [Consciously Digital](#) website; [Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age](#). It bears noting that the need to rely on digital communications to limit the spread of COVID-19 seems to have dampened public conversations about this.

³⁷For instance, in 1991 African journalists adopted the [Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press](#).

own the companies.” For-profit journalism is still an option, and in addition to local newspapers owned by entities committed to the values of democracy and free press, a range of nonprofit media entities rely on advertising and other traditional funding models in addition to reader contributions, with the catch that they reject funding that comes with any corporate or government attempts to influence content.

We’re also seeing a proliferation of media watchdog groups and pro-democracy media advocates, including national groups like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Freepress, and Project Censored. In Pittsburgh, the local independent news outlet *Public Source* has been working to help promote media literacy among its readers.³⁸

How can I determine which web sources to use? The internet provides an immense amount of information, and it is often difficult to determine whether a particular source is trustworthy. Here are some tips for identifying potential sources of bias in internet sites:

- Read the “About” link which should appear in a prominent spot on the home page of the site. This information may also be posted as part of the organization’s “History,” so check for any links that might tell you more about the organization. If this information is missing or hidden, be wary, since this may be a sign that the owners of the site don’t want their identity known. Look to see if the site seems to have links to a government or business entity or industry, as these tend to both have strong financial or political interests in shaping public opinion and they also have highly disproportionate resources with which to do so.
- Check out allied groups and links: Look at any groups to which the website provides links. Visit these sites and see how they are funded and what their organizational missions are. Is there a discernible bias or interest expressed in these organizations?
- Be wary of any groups linked to an industry that may have a financial interest in promoting a particular viewpoint. For instance, groups questioning global warming are often funded by oil and gas companies and are therefore not interested in providing unbiased information about this topic. Similarly, “clean coal” sites are typically funded by the coal industry and are not as interested in environmental goals as in securing a continued market for this fossil fuel.
- All sites have a perspective, or bias, so distinguishing what the bias is can help you assess whether and how you should use the information from the site. *Even “straight news” is selective in what it chooses to report, who it treats as reliable sources, and how it conveys the issue/s.* Think about the purposes or aims of the information provided on the site. Does it seem that the information aids in the pursuit of private interests such as profit-making, or broader public interests, such as clean air and water, greater social equity, or government transparency and accountability?
- All media is produced by people who are shaped by the institutions, structures, and histories of the larger society. Thus, even sources that aim for inclusion and diversity have blind spots and omissions that affect the views of the world their reporting presents. An informed, critical media user will seek out sources that intentionally center the voices of groups that have been marginalized by prevailing power structures that privilege White, Western men over other groups. Below I provide some links to a selection of such sources.

³⁸ See, for instance, *Public Source’s* [Detecting Fake News course](#). The course promises to help participants learn how to detect fake news with a free 3-Day email course.

Selected/ Recommended independent (*Nonprofit, public, or reader/viewer-supported*) media sources

[Compilation of recommended independent media sites](#)-by region & topic ([LocalFutures.org](#))

BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/>—British Broadcasting Service—publicly funded news program with an excellent reputation around the world for its high quality and trustworthy reporting.

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world>—an independent British daily newspaper with an extensive reporting staff, including a U.S.-based team.

Independent Media Institute <https://independentmediainstitute.org>—A nonprofit organization that educates the public through a diverse array of independent media projects and programs. We work with journalists and media outlets to shine a spotlight on stories that are vital to the public interest, including democracy, education, environment, peace and conflict, and global issues.

Inter Press News Service- <http://ipsnews.net/> A nonprofit organization established to provide reporting on global events that takes greater account of the perspectives of people outside the U.S. and Europe. This is a widely respected service widely read by United Nations diplomats and civil society groups working in the UN. This source provides more in-depth analysis of current issues. This [history of IPS News](#) gives a critical analysis of mainstream world news.

Al Jazeera: <http://america.aljazeera.com/> -Former BBC journalists are among those behind this effort to challenge Western framings of international news.

Pambazuka News Service- <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/> Provides perspectives from people of Africa and the global South, with a concern for issues of freedom and justice.

Common Dreams- <http://www.commondreams.org/> A site that provides a daily news clipping service from news sources around the world, providing perspectives on U.S. foreign policy and domestic civil society/ democracy issues. Links to social movement organizations and campaigns are provided on this site.

Democracy Now! www.democracynow.org – is a non-profit, publicly funded news program hosted by Amy Goodman, a leading activist for an independent media and democracy in the U.S. Goodman covers a selection of the day’s top stories, with in-depth reporting on issues relevant to democracy and to U.S. foreign policy—particularly the war in Iraq and U.S. policy in Latin America.

Economic Hardship Reporting Project <https://economichardship.org>

Global Policy Forum <http://www.globalpolicy.org> – a nonprofit organization based in New York providing in-depth analysis of the United Nations and issues surrounding its work. Global Policy Forum is a well-respected source of information on foreign policy and UN-related issues, and its president has been a leader of the NGO committee that consults with the UN Security Council. This is a highly privileged and specialized body with exceptional access to UN diplomats.

Oneworld.net –A nonprofit organization that draws from a variety of sources to provide U.S. citizens with a perspective on the world not available in mainstream commercial media. They draw from reporting by NGOs, non-governmental organizations, among others, and take steps to ensure the quality and reliability of reporting on their site.

Consortium News <http://consortiumnews.com/>

Other Words: <http://otherwords.org/>

ProPublica: <https://www.propublica.org/> ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism that digs deep into important issues, shining a light on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust. Its focus is largely on the United States.

Media Centering Voices of Excluded Groups

This is just a small sample of sources that can help critical media users become sensitized to those communities and perspectives that are excluded from prevailing media sources.

COLORLINES <https://www.colorlines.com/> is a daily news site where race matters, featuring award-winning in-depth reporting, news analysis, opinion and curation. COLORLINES is published by [Race Forward](#), a national organization that advances racial justice through research, media and practice.

Facing South <https://www.facingsouth.org/> is the online magazine and [weekly email update](#) of the Institute for Southern Studies, featuring investigative reporting and in-depth analysis of trends across the South. Facing South has earned a national reputation for exposing abuses of power, holding powerful interests accountable, and elevating the voices of everyday people working for change in the South. (Founded in 2000)

The Appeal <https://theappeal.org/> The Appeal produces original journalism on how policy, politics, and the legal system impact America's most vulnerable people. We hold officials accountable and expose the human impact of our most routine policy and practices through original reporting, explainers, newsletters, podcasts, and in partnership with NowThis, a daily, live talk show. The Appeal is an editorially independent project of The Justice Collaborative, which is a fiscally sponsored project of Tides Advocacy.

5 independent Indigenous media sources to check out online: The CBC offers recommendations of Indigenous sources.

The Discourse engages in community-led journalism by underserved communities in Western Canada and was Founded in 2014. Founders of The Discourse put forward the following [10 principles aimed at promoting more inclusive, representative, equitable and democratic media.](#)

Local Pittsburgh Media

PublicSource: <https://www.publicsource.org/>

Next Pittsburgh: <https://www.nextpittsburgh.com/>

New Pittsburgh Courier: <https://newpittsburghcourier.com/> Serving Pittsburgh's Black community.

The Allegheny Front: Environmental News for Pennsylvania: <https://www.alleghenyfront.org/>

Other Resources on the Media

Here are a few recommended (nonprofit) media watchdog groups that provide critical analysis of U.S. commercial media as they work to reform our media system:

- Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) produces a helpful guide to media literacy: http://www.acmecoalition.org/files/ACME_questioningmedia.pdf
- Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: www.fair.org
Reviews mainstream media coverage of important issues and highlights biases in reporting.
- Project Censored: www.projectcensored.org
Summarizes each year's top stories which were not reported or were under-reported in the mainstream media, but which appeared in non-commercial media.
- Center for Media and Democracy www.prwatch.org
Analyzes bias in contemporary news stories, provides detailed analyses of influences on media content.
- Columbia Journalism Review www.cjr.org
A project of Columbia University's School of Journalism, this site provides critical analyses of contemporary debates and dilemmas in journalism and news media.
- Media Education Foundation: <http://www.mediaed.org>
 - **How to be a Critical Media Viewer:*
<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/CriticalViewing.pdf>
- [**Media 2070**](#) is a 100-page essay examining the history of anti-Black harm in the U.S. media system. From the critical role that trafficking of enslaved Africans played in making our nation's earliest newspapers financially viable, to decades of targeting of Black press and journalists, the history of harm runs deep, and it impacts us today. Deregulation has resulted in very few Black owners of traditional media— while racist algorithms amplify the voices of white supremacists across online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
- [**On the Media**](#), (with Brooke Gladstone) WNYC's weekly investigation into how the media shapes our worldview (NPR)
- Pew Research Center Project on Journalism and the Media <http://www.journalism.org/>
This site provides updated information on media use, news coverage, and other important topics relevant to media and politics.
- [**Media Matters for America**](#) is a non-profit research and information center that systematically monitor a cross section of print, broadcast, cable, radio, and Internet media outlets for conservative misinformation - news or commentary that is not accurate, reliable, or credible and that forwards the conservative agenda
- [**Ethical Journalism Network**](#) is a coalition of groups of journalists, editors, press owners and media support groups from across the globe. We are a registered UK charity and supervised by a Board and an international network of advisors.
- [**Team Human**](#) is a podcast striving to amplify human connection. Each week we are engaging in real-time, no-holds-barred discussions with people who are hacking the machine to make it more compatible with human life, and helping redefine what it means to stay human in a digital age.

Select Bibliography*

Analyses of and research on the news media

*This is not meant as a comprehensive search of recent titles on this topic, but rather a starting point to thinking about the media and its role in democratic societies.

Social Media

Move Fast and Break Things: How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy. Taplin, Jonathan. (Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2017).

iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us (Twenge, Jean. 2017. Atria books).

The Attention Merchants, Wu, Tim. 2016 (Random House: New York).

Anti-Social Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy by Siva Vaidhyathan. 2018, Oxford University Press.

Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age. By Sherry Turkle, 2015. New York: Penguin Press.

[United States of Distraction: Fighting the Fake News Invasion.](https://youtu.be/Wa4uVohP-Tw) (<https://youtu.be/Wa4uVohP-Tw>). The Real News Network and Project Censored (October 2020).

*More resources at: [Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age](#)

General Media

Borri, Francesca. 2013. "Women's Work: The Twisted Reality of an Italian Freelance Writer in Syria." *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Clayman, Stephen E. and Ann Reisner. 1998. "Editorial Conferences and Assessments of Newsworthiness." *American Sociological Review* 63:178-199.

Gamson, William and Antonio Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power." *American Journal of Sociology* 95:1-37.

Herman, Edward. 1995. *Triumph of the Market: Essays on Economics, Politics, and the Media.* Boston: South End Press.

Herman, Edward and Noam Chomsky. 1988. *Manufacturing Consent.* New York: Pantheon.

Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*". Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kielbowicz, Richard B. and Clifford Scherer. 1986. "The Role of the Press in the Dynamics of Social Movements." Pp. 71-96 in *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, vol. 9, edited by L. Kriesberg. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

McChesney, Robert W. 1999. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times.* Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Project Censored (Annual) www.projectcensored.org *Censored 2018* (and every year since 1976). This annual collection reports on the year's top under-reported stories and offers a number of scholarly analyses of the media and politics.