

“I Know More than the Sietists”: *Selecting Media Education Approaches for the Moment*

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Many of us are quick to tap the retweet button on Twitter if a post confirms our beliefs and evokes our emotions, but what are the consequences? When we see tweets like the one in Figure 1, showing a man with a sign that says “I Know More than the Sietists,” it is easy to form immediate reactions.¹ As individuals who have been cautious throughout the pandemic, we quickly judge the protester as unintelligent, and we empathize with Andrew Baback Boozary MD, a verified user and medical professional who seemingly posted the tweet in exasperation. All of these feelings run through our heads as we join more than 50,000 people in retweeting or liking the tweet exposing this disgraceful protest. What we’ve missed, though, is that we are spreading misinformation. The so-called protester had in fact created a satirical sign.

In this article, we name five categories to differentiate among types of media education with the aim of supporting teacher decision-making about the benefits and drawbacks of each. We are not arguing for any single approach, but instead believe understanding all of them together can help teachers support students when they see a tweet like the one with the COVID-19 protester.

1. Think about Sources

A *think about sources* approach examines the credibility of a source of information. This approach to media education is the most common and there are an array of strategies for rationally determining credibility. For instance, the Civic Online Reasoning (COR) curriculum focuses

on sources, evidence, and corroboration with an underlying question: Is the information credible?²



Figure 1. COVID-19 Protester Tweet.

Teachers could help students practice this approach by showing them the protester tweet and asking the three COR questions: *Who's behind the information? What's the evidence? What do other sources say?* Students might identify that a medical doctor with a verified account posted the tweet, and the doctor tagged the image with the location as "University Health Network," but they might have trouble finding corroborating information for a specific tweet. This rational approach overlaps with our next approach.

2. Respond to Posts

A *respond to posts* approach helps students make quick decisions in our fast moving online environment. The SIFT model developed by Michael Caulfield asks students to: *Stop; Investigate* the source; *Find* better coverage; and *Trace* claims, quotes, and media to the original context.³ If citizens cannot quickly determine credibility of the source, evidence, or corroborate it, then they should avoid interacting with the post (e.g., liking or retweeting) in ways that will amplify the content. An underlying question is: Do I have enough information to interact with the post?

Drawing on the SIFT method to respond to posts, we can quickly recognize that while the poster is a doctor who appears to be at a hospital, there is much we do not know. Is the "protester" actually at the hospital in which the doctor works? What kind of doctor is the original poster? When did he take the picture? Who *really* is the protester? Why doesn't Dr. Boozary provide more context in his tweet? This approach would help students raise enough questions to avoid liking or retweeting the post.

3. Reflect on Feelings

A *reflect on feelings* approach asks students to reflect on how they feel when viewing media. Assumptions, beliefs, emotions, worldviews, and unconscious processes shape how people think and feel about media they encounter. This approach is a "psychosocial" one⁴ because it addresses both how our minds (psycho-) and society (-social) influence our media experiences. An underlying question is: how do my feelings affect my interpretation and actions?

This approach can help students see that how we respond to the COVID-19 protester tweet is affected by how we feel about the topic. Students should consider how their bodies and minds react

when they see the image. Do they feel smarter or better than the protester? Does that make them want to like or retweet the post? Does the image confirm their biases? Such motivating reasoning can discourage students from, for example, being duped by the obviously satirical sign. Such attention to emotions may encourage students to consider that most vaccine holdouts are not "conspiracy theorists and anti-science die-hards who think that Covid is a hoax," but many are vaccine hesitant due to discriminatory or infrequent healthcare experiences, fear of needles, confusion, or pregnancy.⁵ This knowledge can encourage more complex thinking, avoid confirmation bias, and seek productive solutions.

4. Observe the Media

An *observe the media* approach encourages students to shift their focus away from the content of the post and toward elements in the background. A lot of how we experience online information is determined by the type of media or

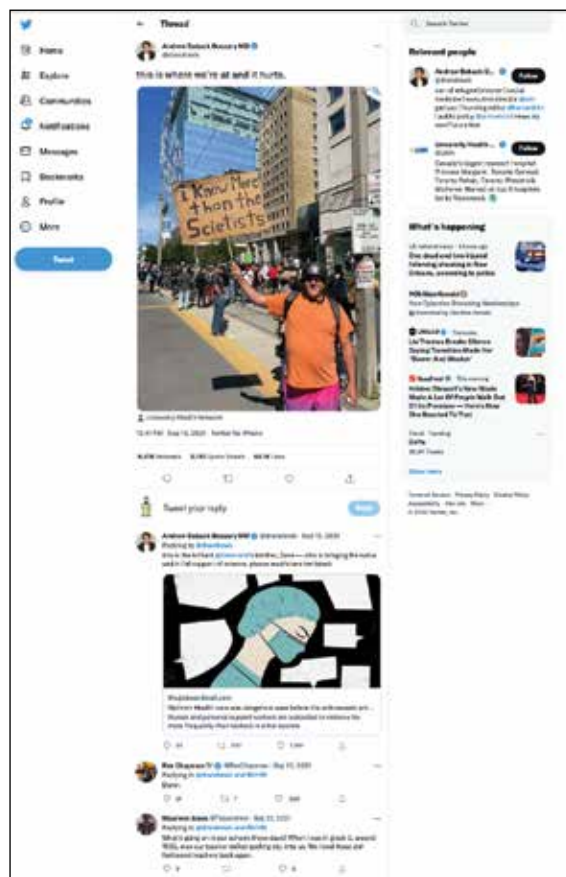


Figure 2. Larger Twitter interface. (Find this activity at <https://www.civicsoftechnology.org/tweetactivity>).

by the design or business decisions that are easy to ignore. An underlying question is: How does the media type change my thinking?

Students can develop their skills by comparing different types of media. Social media posts often consist of brief text, short videos or gifs, or pictures without context. Students could write or tell stories about the protester tweet as a way of exposing how much important context is missing. Students could also examine the design decisions they can see (e.g., infinite scroll, notifications, advertisements) and those they can't see (e.g., proprietary algorithms, business model).⁶ Examining the larger Twitter interface in Figure 2 allows students to consider how social media operates and why. Students might notice that Dr. Boozary's next post corrected his misinformation, but received far fewer retweets and likes. Students might ask, why did he not delete the incorrect post? By observing the media, we should become more attuned to how social media affects how we think

about the topic.

5. Identify Power

An *identify power* approach examines the media's role in reproducing and shaping culture. This view encourages us to see who is represented, how they are represented, and how media normalize or marginalize certain identities and ways of being. The Critical Media Project⁷ takes such a critical approach to media, examining the media representations of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age, and disability, particularly concerning how dominant groups are stereotyped. An underlying question is: Who benefits from, and is harmed by, media representations?

Using an *identify power* approach with our protester tweet, we might wonder why social media platforms seem to generate so much attention toward a vocal minority of COVID protests and so little for those who are immunocompromised. While this approach doesn't help us determine tweet

Table 1. Comparing the Five Approaches

Approach	Key Question	Resource	Emphasis
Think about Sources	Is the information credible?	<i>Civic Online Reasoning</i> https://cor.stanford.edu	An analytical approach emphasizing fact checking sources to thoroughly examine sources.
Respond to Posts	Do I have enough information to interact with the post?	<i>SIFT Moves</i> https://hapgood.us/2019/06/19/sift-the-four-moves	An analytical approach similar to <i>Think about Sources</i> , but with more emphasis on quick decision-making in online environments.
Reflect on Feelings	How do my feelings affect my interpretation and actions?	<i>PsychoSocial Approach</i> www.civicsoftechnology.org/psychosocialapproach	An emotional approach identifying how unconscious processes affect engagement with information (or not).
Observe the Media	How does the type of media and design change my thinking?	<i>Figure/Ground Analysis</i> https://www.civicsoftechnology.org/figureground	A counterintuitive approach examining how the type of media affects understanding.
Identify Power	Who benefits from, and is harmed by, media representations?	<i>Critical Media Project</i> https://criticalmediaproject.org/	A critical approach interrogating the power media has in shaping our lives, values, and experiences.

credibility, it does generate important questions of coverage.

Conclusion

A multifaceted media education approach can help students increase their knowledge, improve their reactions, attend to their feelings, recognize media influences, and critique representations. We recommend that teachers and students become familiar with each of the five approaches—perhaps leaning on a preferred “go-to” approach, but modifying or adding other approaches to emphasize different facets of media. For example, educators might center the COR approach, but add psychosocial questions to their lessons. No single media approach will be sufficient for today’s complex media environment, but together, maybe these approaches can help us avoid a retweet we will regret. ■

Notes

1. Andrew Baback Boozary, MD, “This is where we’re at and it hurts” (September, 13, 2021, 11:41 AM), <https://twitter.com/drandrewb/status/1437471529277837316?s=20&t=51uWtJ3B9IQwMGoNzrsWkw>. We found this tweet via the “Viral Rumor Rundown” from the News Literacy Project, <https://rumors.newslit.org>.
2. Stanford History Education Group, “Civic Online Reasoning,” <https://cor.stanford.edu>.
3. Mike Caulfield, “SIFT (The Four Moves),” *Hapgood* (June 19, 2019), <https://hapgood.us/2019/06/19/sift-the-four-moves>.
4. H. James Garrett, “Why Does Fake News Work? On the Psychosocial Dynamics of Learning, Belief, and Citizenship,” in *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator’s Guide to Navigating the Media with Students*, ed. Wayne Journell (New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 2019), 15–29, and Ellen Middaugh, “Teens, Social Media, and Fake News,” in *Unpacking Fake News*, 42–59; see also Cathryn van Kessel, “Psychosocial Approaches to Media Education,” www.civicsoftechnology.org/psychosocialapproach.
5. Zeynep Tufekci, “The Unvaccinated May Not Be Who You Think,” *The New York Times* (October 15, 2021).
6. Michelle Ciccone, “Figure/Ground Analysis” www.civicsoftechnology.org/figureground.
7. Critical Media Project, “Media Literacy and Politics of Identity – Resources for Educators” (2017–2022), <https://criticalmediaproject.org>.



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