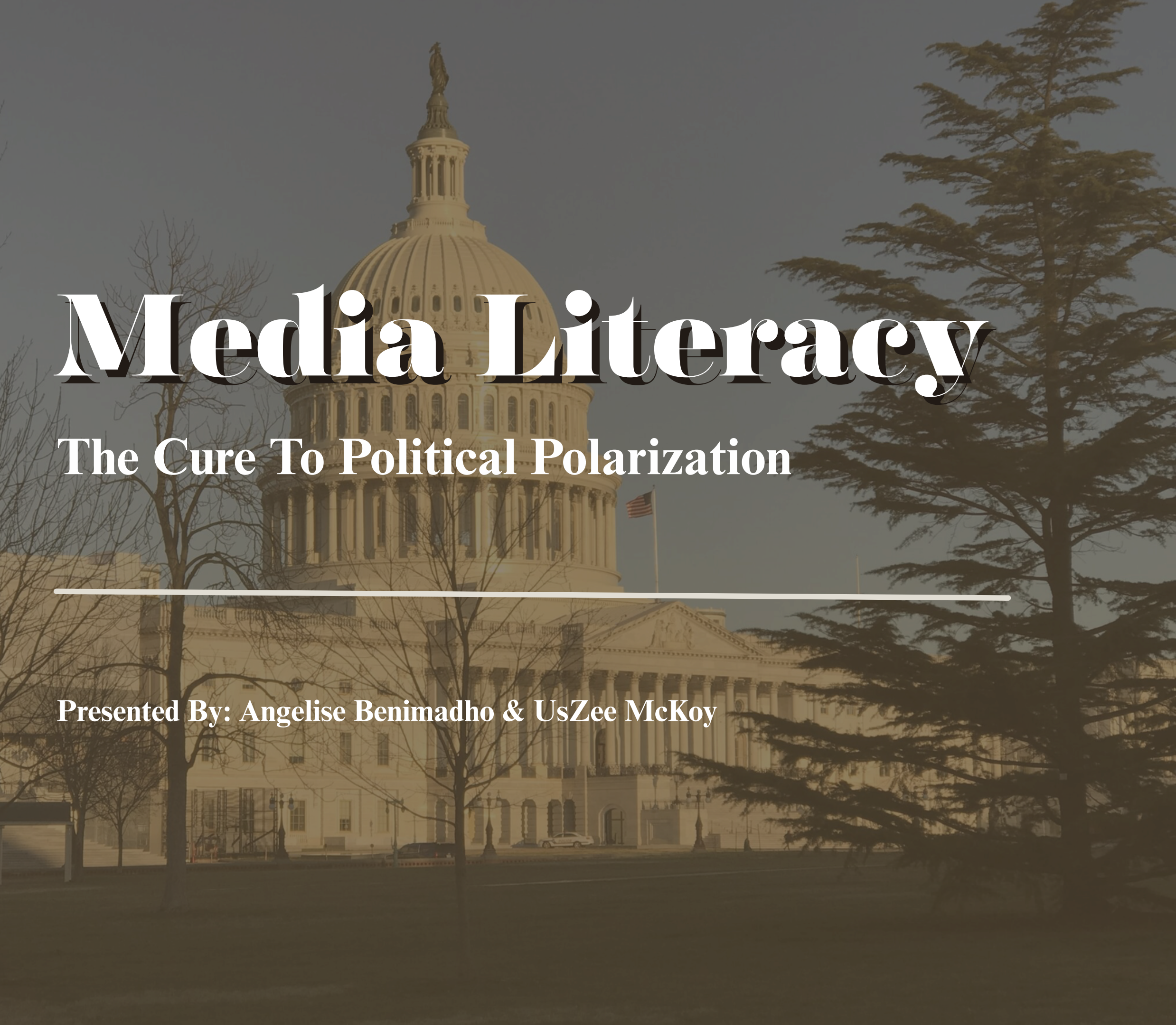




Media Literacy

The Cure To Political Polarization

Presented By: Angelise Benimadho & UsZee McKoy

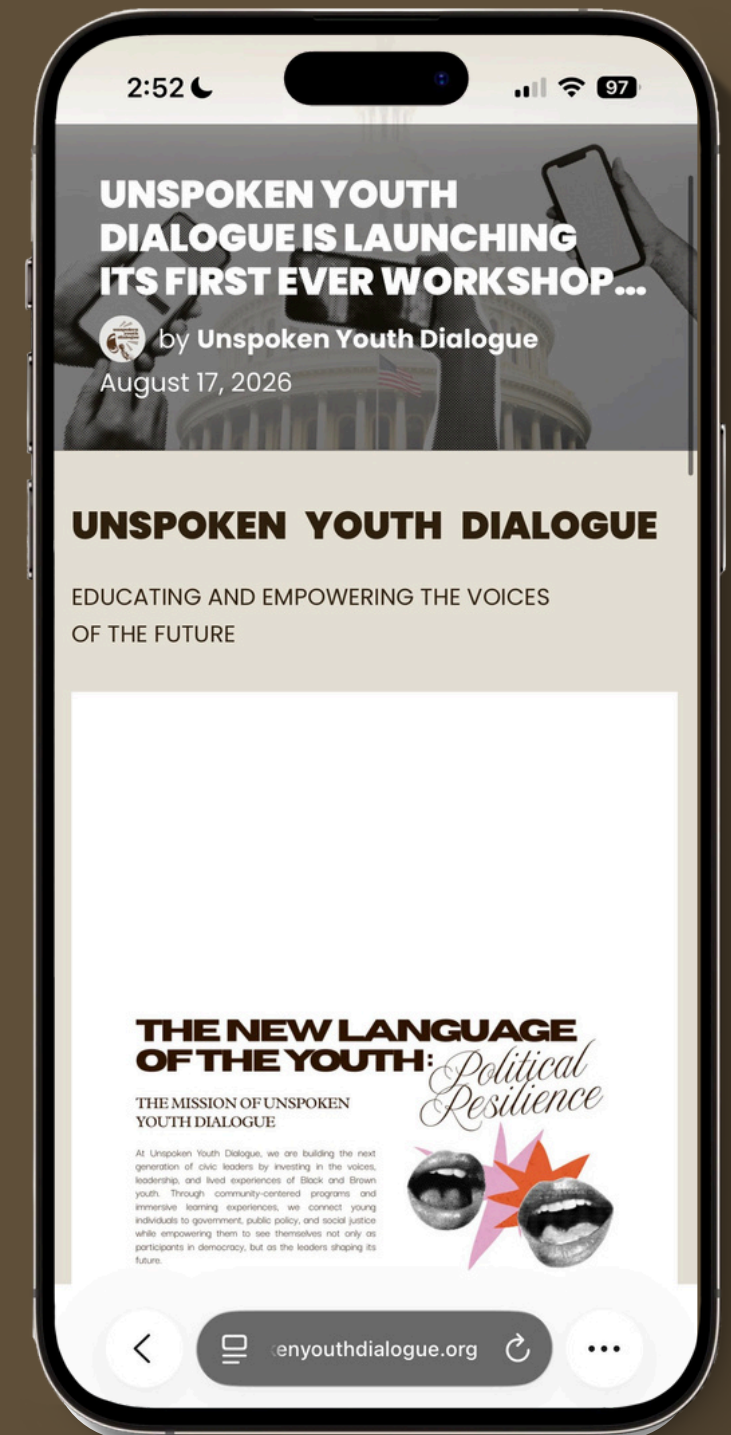


@unspokenyouthdialogue

What is Unspoken Youth Dialogue (UYD)?

Unspoken Youth Dialogue is an organization that empowers Black and Brown youth to become the next generation of civic leaders.

Through community-based programs and hands-on learning experiences, we help young people build leadership skills, engage with government and public policy, and create meaningful change in their communities. We hope to give back to the community through civic educational workshops and annual scholarships.



unspokenyouthdialogue.org

Unspoken Youth Dialogue

Media Literacy



Introduction: Reframing The Purpose of Media Literacy

Part 1: Where Do We Obtain Our Political Information?

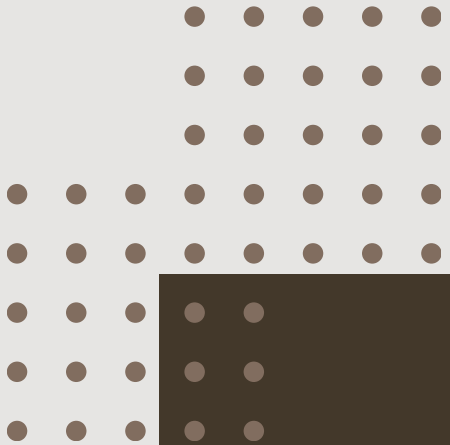
Part 2: Social Media Is Not Simply “The Media”

Part 3: How Is Political Reality Being Constructed?

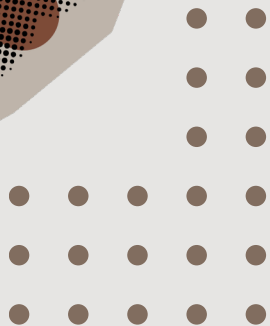
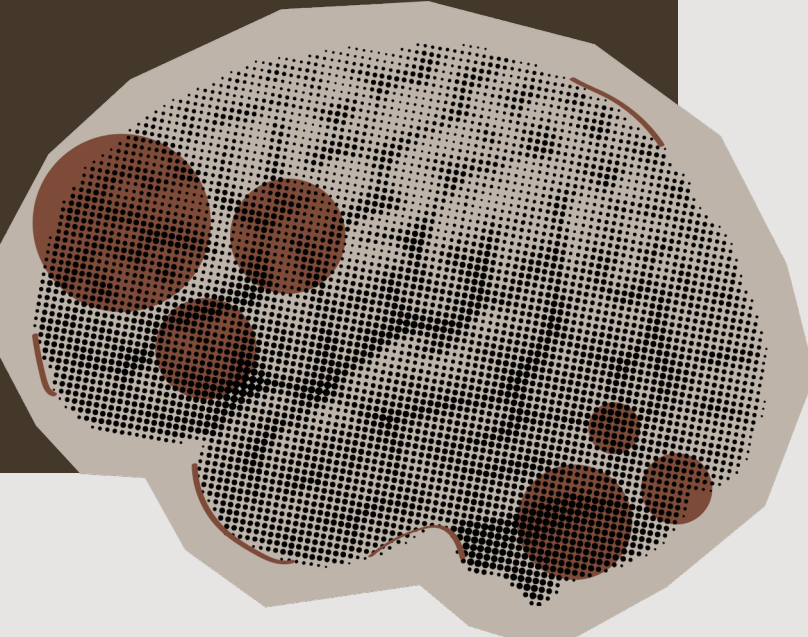
Part 4: Becoming A Consumer, Producer, & Co-Producer

Part 5: Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation

Conclusion: Digital Responsibility



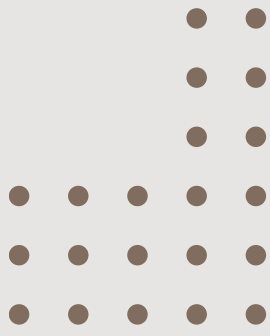
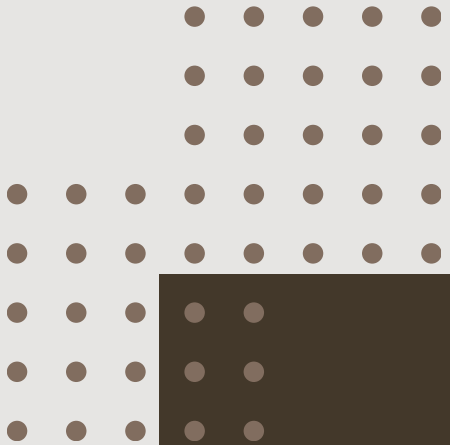
Core Reflection: How can individuals participate meaningfully in democratic life when political information increasingly reaches them through personalized, socially networked, and highly polarized digital environments?



Community Guidelines

- *Respect ideas, not people:* Challenge concepts and behavior rather than attacking individuals.
- *Listen actively:* Pay close attention without interrupting or planning your rebuttal while others speak.
- *Balance airtime:* Step up if you are usually quiet, and step back if you tend to dominate the conversation.
- *Avoid inflammatory language:* Refrain from using blame, sarcasm, or personal attacks.





Reframing The Purpose of Media Literacy

Reframing The Purpose of Media Literacy

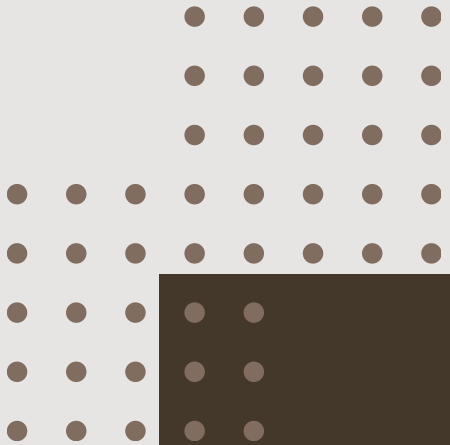
*Media Literacy Is **Not**...*

“The ability to tell whether something online is true or false.”

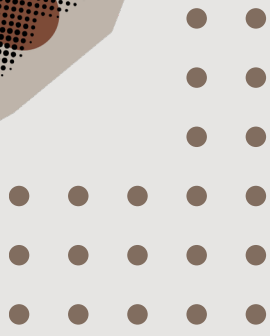
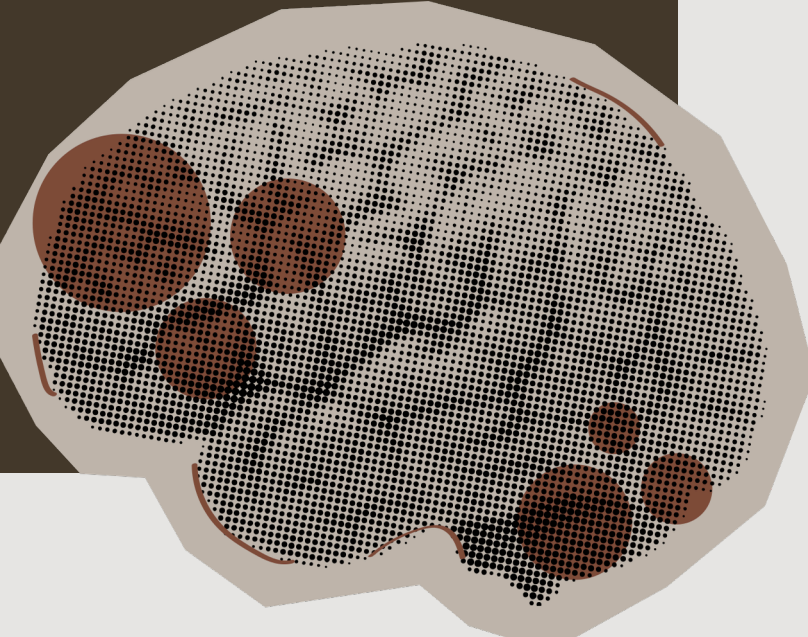
Media Literacy Is...

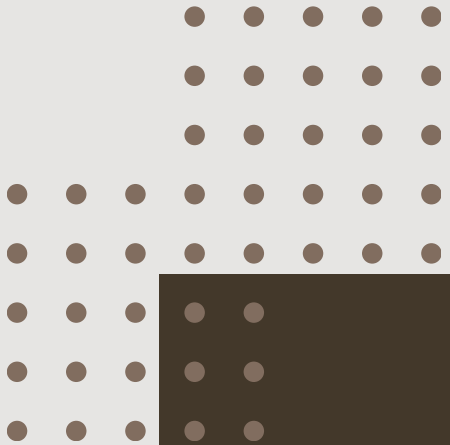
“The capacity to access, analyze, evaluate, interpret, create, and participate through media in ways that support informed democratic agency.”



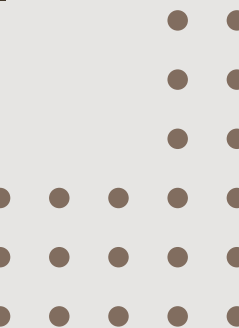


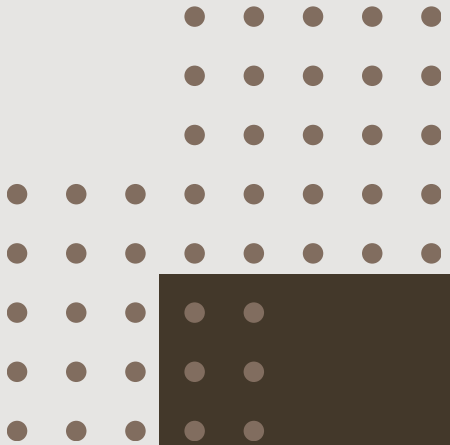
*The concept of a **production-centered reality** where individuals aren't merely consuming media, but they are creating, sharing, commenting on, and using media for political engagement.*





**Where do we obtain our
political information?**

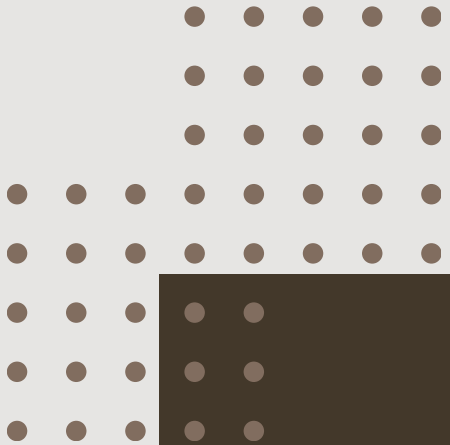




Consumption Pathway

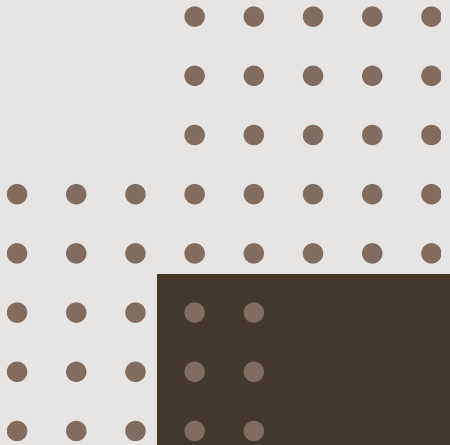
TikTok → creator → comments → Google → news article



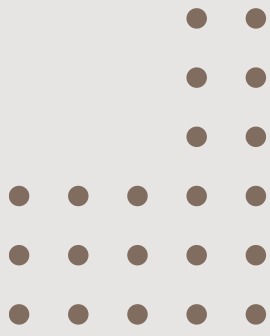
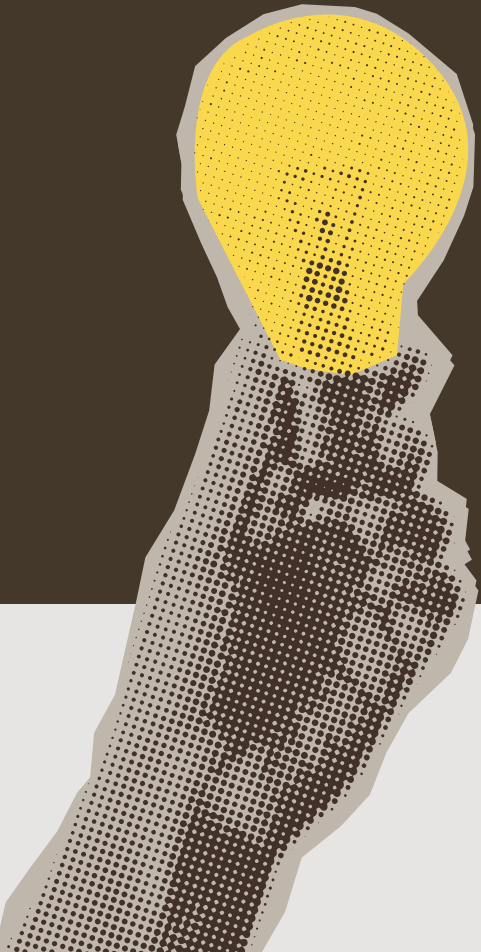


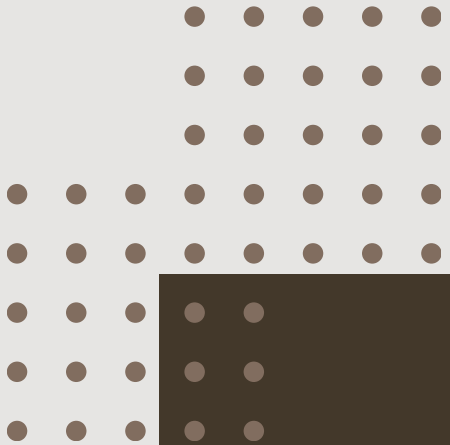
The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)'s 2025 analysis of individuals (aged from 18 to 34) found that 77% named at least one social-media platform or YouTube among their top three sources of political information during the 2024 election cycle. News websites/apps were the largest individual source at 35%, followed by YouTube (29%), TikTok (25%), Instagram (24%), and Facebook (23%).





*At every stage, the information present
acquires political meaning.*





**Social Media Is Not
Simply “The Media”**

Social Media Is Not Simply “The Media”

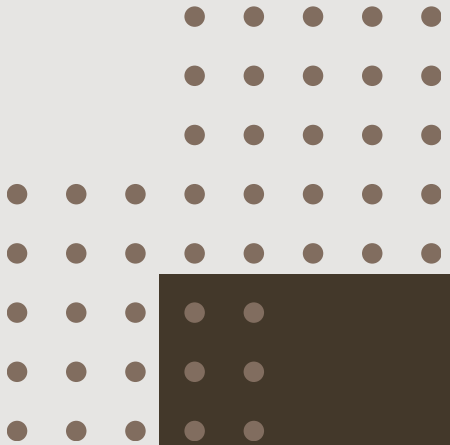
A *conventional* media-literacy framework frequently emphasizes questions such as:

- *Is this source credible?*
- *Is this claim accurate?*
- *What evidence supports the claim?*

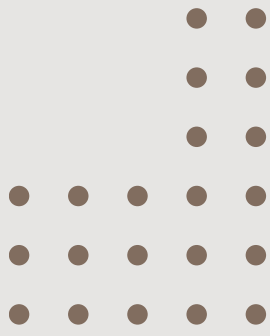
Social Media Is Not Simply “The Media”

*A **critical** media-literacy
framework extends the inquiry:*

- *Who has the authority to define credibility?*
- *Under what institutional conditions was this information produced?*
- *Whose interests are advanced by this representation?*
- *What perspectives are marginalized or absent?*
- *How does the platform determine visibility?*
- *What assumptions does the audience bring to the message?*
- *How are attention and engagement converted into economic or political value?*



How Is Political Reality Being Constructed?



How Is Political Reality Being Constructed?

Shift the question of:

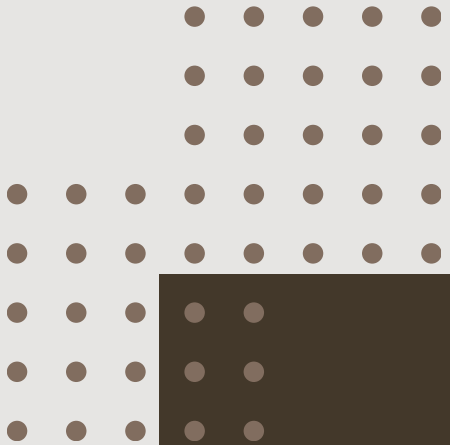
- *“Is this true?” → “How is this message constructing an understanding of what is true?”*
- *“Can I trust this?” → “Can other people trust what I am producing and circulating?”*

January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol

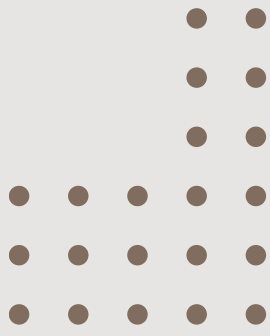
CNN's Article

The White House's Article

- *Who has the authority to define credibility?*
- *Under what institutional conditions was this information produced?*
- *Whose interests are advanced by this representation?*
- *What perspectives are marginalized or absent?*
- *How does the platform determine visibility?*
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Becoming A Consumer, Producer, & Co-Producer



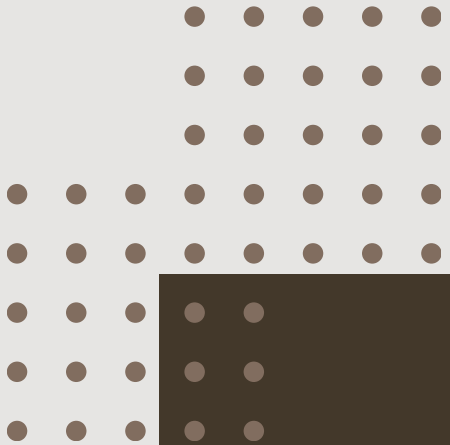
Unspoken Youth Dialogue

Becoming A Consumer, Producer, & Co- Producer

“I don't have to intend to produce political information to participate in producing a political information environment.”

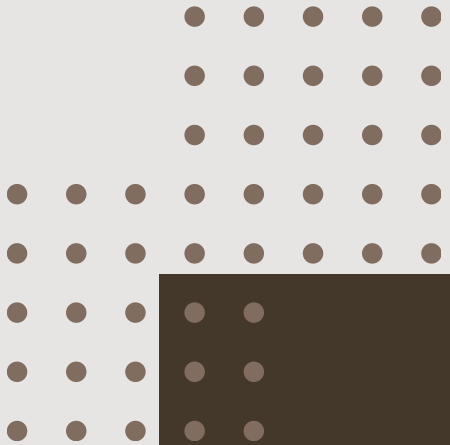
While students might say this or that they don't post political context, they may still...

- *like political content,*
- *comment on political posts,*
- *watch political videos to completion,*
- *follow political creators,*
- *share memes,*
- *send political content privately,*
- *engage with political outrage,*
- *search for political information,*
- *use political hashtags,*
- *interact with controversial posts,*
- *recommend content to friends,*
- *or create non-political content using politically meaningful trends or sounds.*



All of these behaviors generate data, signals, visibility, and circulation. Overall, those things influence the environment in which political communication occurs.

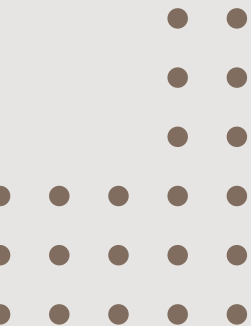


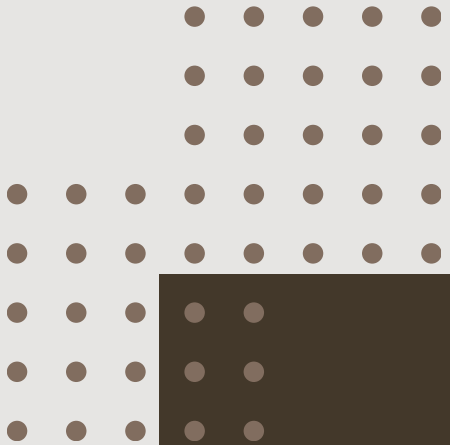


Consumer: I encounter political information.

Producer: I intentionally create political information.

Co-Producer: My everyday interactions help determine what political information becomes visible, amplified, interpreted, and circulated.





Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation



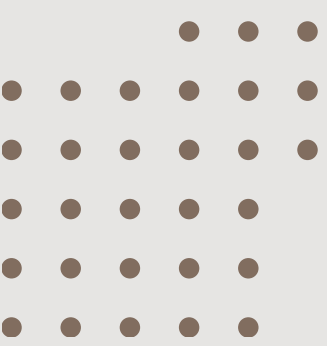
Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation

Confirmation Bias - The tendency to process information in ways that privilege existing beliefs.

Selective Exposure - The tendency to seek or remain within information environments compatible with existing attitudes.

Political Polarization - The increasing divergence of political attitudes, identities, or perceptions across groups.

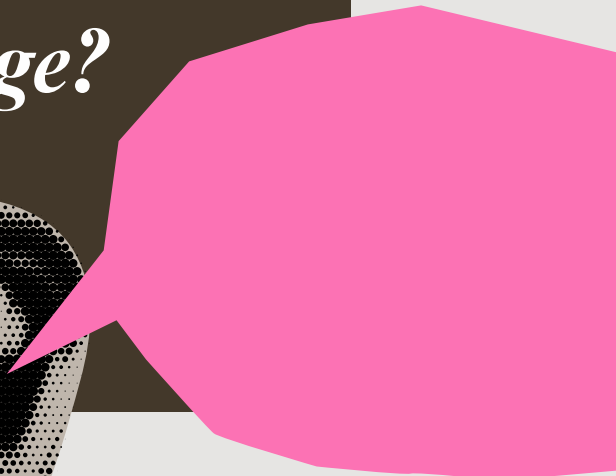
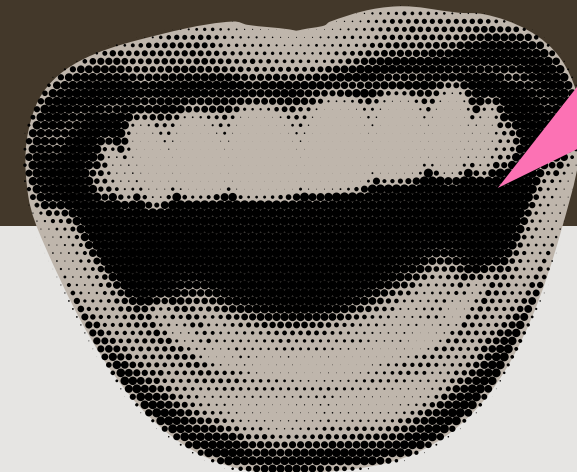
Epistemic Fragmentation - The development of substantially different understandings of social reality across communities operating within different information environments.



Discussion Question



If two individuals encounter fundamentally different information environments, what happens to the possibility of shared political knowledge?



Unspoken Youth Dialogue

Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation



Engagement

Recommendation

Exposure

Interpretation

*The Cycle of
Visibility &
Selective Exposure*



Unspoken Youth Dialogue

Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation

Why This Matters for Political Polarization

We participate in producing the information environments that subsequently shape our political perceptions.

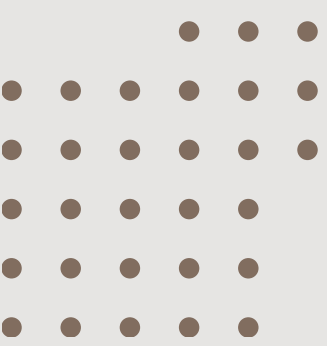
This doesn't mean that individuals are solely responsible for polarization nor the algorithms radicalizes its users, but that polarization can emerge through multiple factors:

- *Individual psychology*
- *political identity*
- *social networks*
- *media framing*
- *platform affordances*
- *algorithmic recommendation*
- *economic incentives*
- *political actors*
- *existing social divisions*

*The platform is therefore **neither completely neutral nor completely deterministic.***

The user has now become a co-producer of the information environment that subsequently influences them.





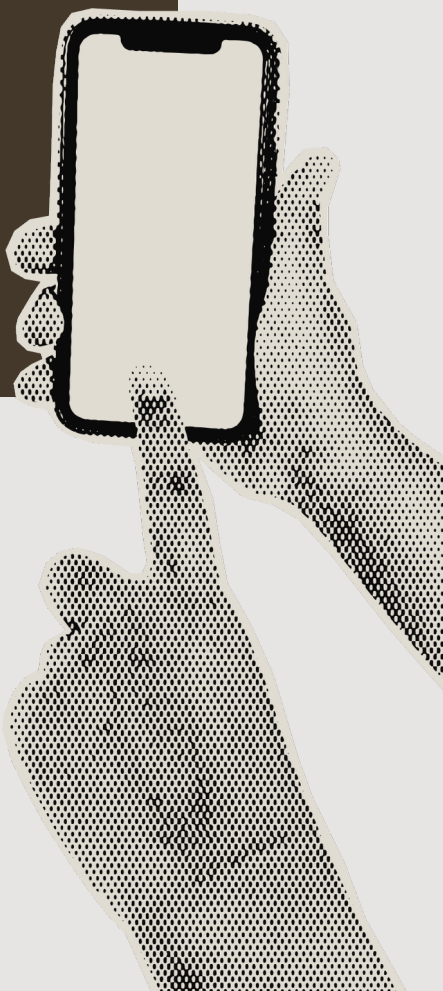
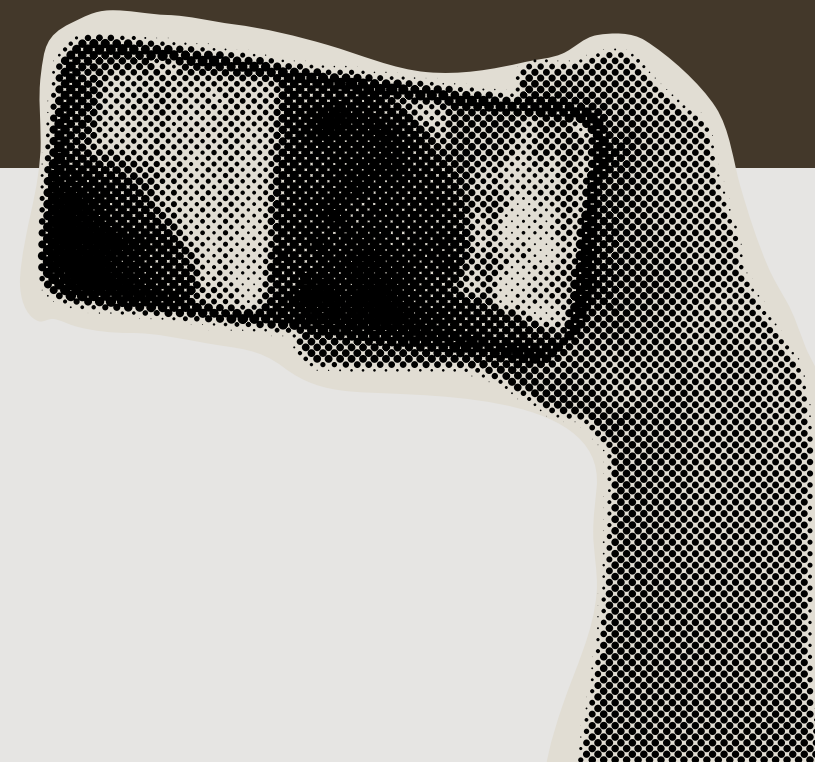
Paradox Of Oppositional Engagement

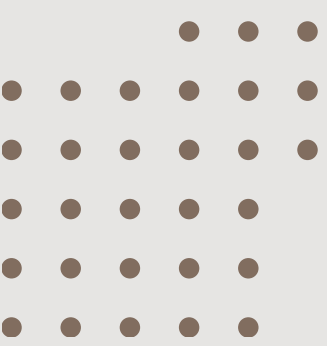
Their intention may be:

"I'm arguing against this."

But their participation may simultaneously contribute to:

"This content generates significant engagement."





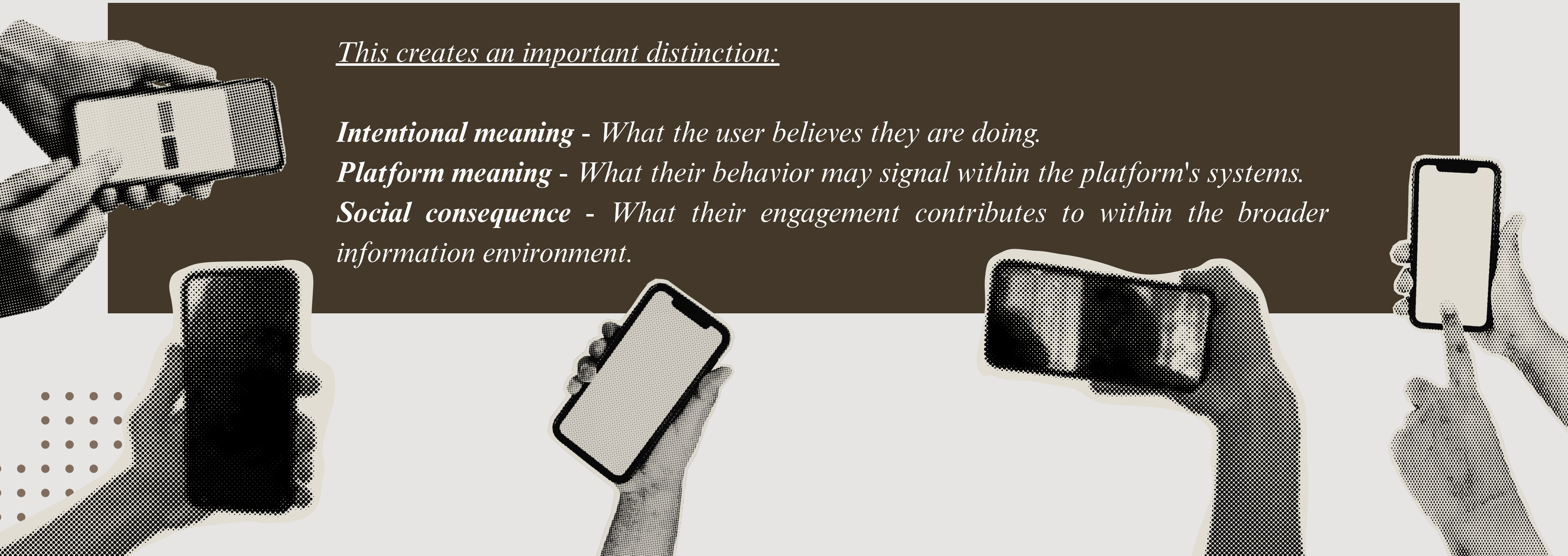
Paradox Of Oppositional Engagement

This creates an important distinction:

Intentional meaning - What the user believes they are doing.

Platform meaning - What their behavior may signal within the platform's systems.

Social consequence - What their engagement contributes to within the broader information environment.



Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation

From Engagement to Affective Polarization

Affective Polarization is increasing emotional hostility toward political out-groups.

Example:

"I disagree with this policy."

can gradually become:

"People who support this policy are ignorant."

and potentially:

"People who support this policy are a threat."

*The political disagreement has now become increasingly connected to **group identity and affect**. Social media can provide continual opportunities to perform, reinforce, and observe these identities.*

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Selective Exposure & Epistemic Fragmentation

From Engagement to Affective Polarization

Users don't *only* encounter the original political message. They encounter:

- *likes;*
- *shares;*
- *comments;*
- *follower counts;*
- *quote posts;*
- *reaction videos;*
- *supportive or hostile replies.*

These signals can communicate:

"People like me believe this."

or

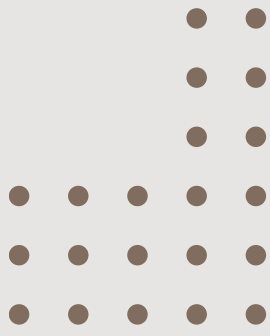
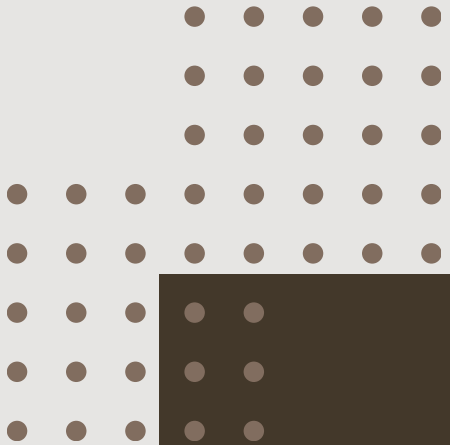
"Everyone is angry about this."

or

"People on the other side think this way."

*The comments section can therefore become a **secondary layer of political communication**. Individuals aren't simply interpreting the original message.*

*They are interpreting the **collective reaction to the message**. That reaction can reinforce perceptions of political differences.*



Digital Responsibility

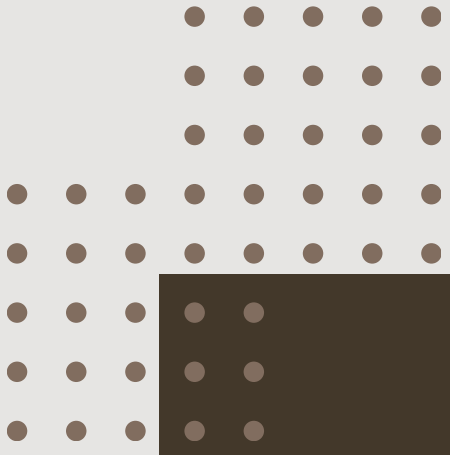
Digital Responsibility

“Curing” Political Polarization

- *Separate the person from the position they stand from.*
- *Apply the same skepticism on your side that you apply to others.*
- *Be hard on ideas and gentle on people.*

"The differences are real. Some differences are extremely important. And people on the other side are still human beings whose motives and perspectives deserve to be understood."



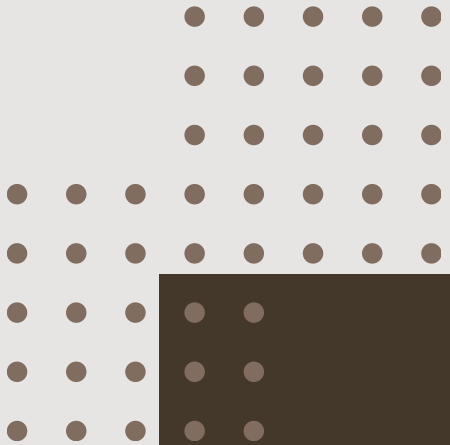


*We cannot critically consume media without recognizing
that we are also participating in its production.*

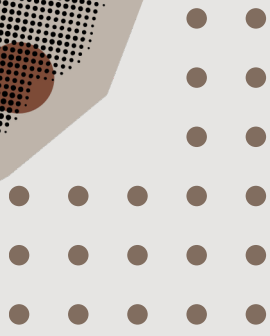
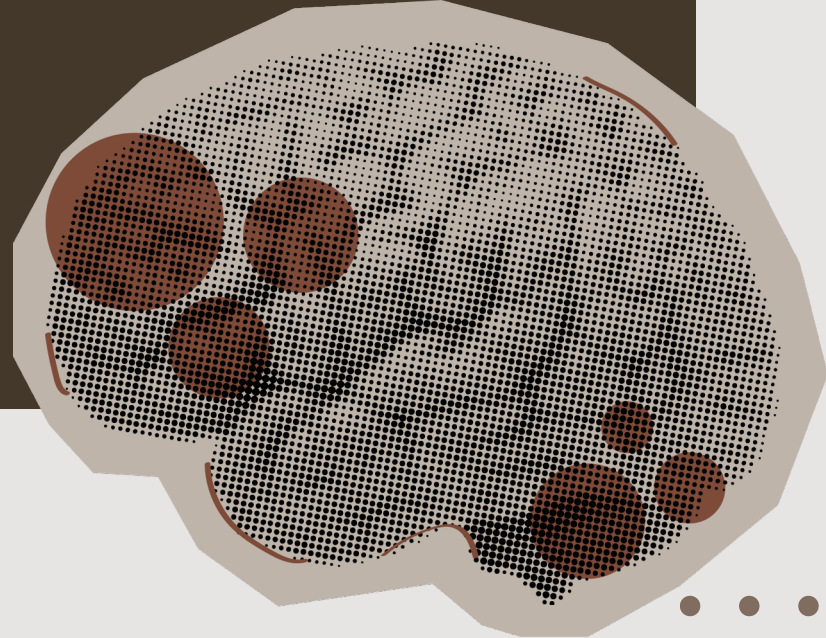


*And we cannot responsibly produce media without
developing the critical capacities required to evaluate the
media we consume.*

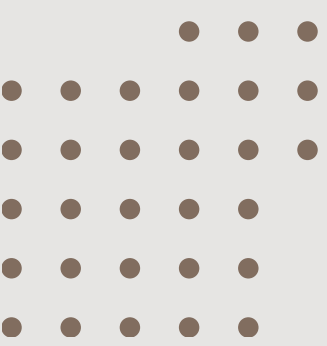




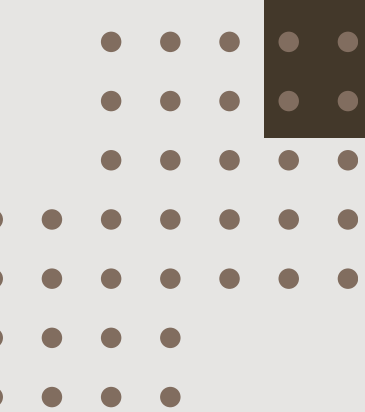
**What responsibility do I
have for the information
environment I help create?**



Discussion Questions



- *If political reality is mediated, filtered, personalized, and algorithmically organized, what does it mean to be politically “informed”?*
- *Is the central problem of contemporary political communication that citizens have access to too little information, or that they have access to too much information without a shared framework for determining what is credible?*
- *Can democracy function without a shared political reality? If not, what constitutes the minimum level of shared reality necessary for democratic governance?*
- *When citizens inhabit different epistemic environments, should the goal of democratic media literacy be consensus, exposure to difference, or the development of better methods for evaluating competing claims?*
- *If individuals are simultaneously consumers, interpreters, and producers of political information, where does individual agency end and media-systemic influence begin?*
- *Is political polarization an outcome of individual choice, or are individual choices themselves being shaped by the media environments in which those choices occur?*





Thank you !

We thank you for making this workshop possible!

