

## The Importance of Critical Thinking in the Age of Mass Media

Currently, the importance of critical thinking has grown rapidly because technological progress has led to expanded access to various content-making platforms: websites, online news agencies, and podcasts with, often, low-quality information. Fake news is used to achieve political and financial aims, targeting people with low news literacy. However, individuals can stop spreading fallacies by detecting false agendas with the help of a skeptical attitude.

To begin with, fake information introduced by authors who want to earn money can cause damage to the mental health of emotional people, among whom such news is widespread. In the post-truth era, which is developing now, people prefer to believe in the story that appeals to their personal experience rather than the facts (Cooke 212.) For instance, by distributing fabricated stories via the Internet without searching for proof, users help people who produce such stories to gain more views that can be monetized later (Cooke 211.) Moreover, such news may be harmful to people's mental health: misinformation may cause a minor panic among them if it concerns, for example, political issues, such as wars and other military conflicts (Burkhardt 6.) Therefore, to prevent mental breakdowns and anxiety, news consumers should learn how to detect false agendas and stop their distribution.

Mass media can launch political discussions to achieve ideological purposes that can affect individuals' identities. A recently established Computational Propaganda Research project has examined political bots in some states and revealed that they play an important role in the distribution of information in social networks (Burkhardt 18.) These bots not only draw users' attention to specific political issues but also launch discussions and successfully persuade people with low critical thinking ability and mold their identity (Burkhardt 18.) This example stands for the fact that misinformation is introduced not merely as a part of a marketing strategy to earn money but as a part of propaganda policy.

Critical thinking is a tool for achieving independence as it helps to recognize by what means mass media misleads public opinion. Scholars emphasize the need for the introduction of critical thinking as a part of education because media literacy increases individuals' autonomy, which is profitable for the democratic states (Atar 72.) However, there appears an issue. After analyzing the quantitative data, Vraga and Tully revealed the relationship between the ability of critical thinking and the level of participation in political discourse. Researchers concluded that the stronger news literacy individual has, the less is their eagerness to discuss and share the latest political content on social media, as they try to uncover more reliable sources for making their conclusions (Vraga and Tully 10.) So, skeptical content consumers prevent low-quality content from spreading among other social media users. Therefore, everyone needs to improve critical thinking while consuming the content to protect themselves from misinformation.

It can be concluded that because of the free access to social media, there exists low-quality content, including fake news and political bots. People create them with the aim of making money through views and achieving ideological aims by reconstructing users' online identities. People need to acquire critical thinking skills for protecting themselves from the false agenda. This means they need to be skeptical and always strive to figure out what news and users' profiles are real and what is fabricated. They can do it by checking facts and skipping the emotional component of the story.

## Works Cited

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