

# The Sift®

## An educator's guide to the week in news literacy

### Delivered every Monday.

The Sift is NLP's free newsletter – delivered weekly during the school year – that explores current examples of misinformation, addresses media and press freedom topics, and discusses social media trends and issues.

This timely content is used as starting points for discussion prompts, activities and other teachable moments in news literacy, both in and out of the classroom.

The Sift is an essential resource for educators and is ideal for anyone interested in news literacy.

If we value education,  
we must value  
news literacy.

### A typical issue includes:

#### The Big Story

An educator's guide to the week in news literacy

Sept. 23, 2019

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Teach news literacy this week

NYT and Kavanaugh | Ukrainian Facebook network | How ads support disinformation

**NYT and Kavanaugh**

On Sept. 14, The New York Times **published an essay** by two of its reporters, Robin Pogrebin and Kate Kelly, that was based on their new book, *The Education of Brett Kavanaugh: An Investigation*. The "Times" opinion section – which is responsible for the Sunday Review section, where the essay appeared – also posted a tweet promoting the piece. Both the tweet and the essay sparked a firestorm of outrage and criticism across the political spectrum and exposed a series of flawed editorial decisions and blunders.

Within minutes after the tweet was posted, @nytopinion **deleted it**, calling it "poorly phrased." (It asked whether exposing male genitalia in someone's face might be considered "harassment.") Soon thereafter, the second tweet also was deleted. Later that evening, @nytopinion **deleted the original tweet as "offensive" and apologized**. On Sept. 17, **people admitted to writing the tweet** and said it was "misworded."

The essay also included a new allegation of sexual misconduct against Kavanaugh when he was in college. Some readers were perplexed that the Times hadn't made this revelation the focus of the essay. Then it came to light that two important facts that are included in the book had been omitted in the essay: that the female student did not recall the incident, according to friends, and that she had declined to be interviewed. The Times later added those details to the essay along with an **Editorial Note**.

#### Viral Rumor Rundown

The truth behind the latest online rumors.

**Viral rumor rundown**

Instead of teaching school kids to master the fundamentals of energy production, the UK's Labour government is burning the money and parking giant bills to cover the cost of the world's most environmentally disastrous by 2050.

**This photo shows trash in London's Hyde Park after events in April.**

**NO:** This photo **does not show trash left behind by "climate strike" activists**. YES: It shows trash left in London's Hyde Park on April 20 after an event supporting the use of marijuana.

**Note:** Using photos of trash in public spaces in a false context is a common disinformation tactic. Frequently used to create the appearance of

#### Five to Teach

Five topics that explore different news literacy issues.

**Five to teach**

**1 Automated digital ad brokers are channeling hundreds of millions of dollars** to websites that publish disinformation, according a new report (PDF) from the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), a U.K.-based nonprofit that describes itself as operating "on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency." The report estimated that programmatic advertising – automated ad auctions and placements on websites – generated at least \$235 million (U.S.) for 20,000 "disinformation domains" such as factify.com, zerohedge.com and the Russian state-run "news" sites RT.com and Sputniknews.com. Programmatic ads are frequently the primary source of revenue for such sites, and are placed by third-party ad exchanges such as Google, Taboola and Revcontent. Brands whose ads are placed by these exchanges are often unaware of the websites that their ads end up supporting.

**Note:** Programmatic ad exchanges currently filter out websites that clients are likely to find offensive and damaging to their brands. The report's findings urge companies running these exchanges to include disinformation websites in these lists, thus cutting off ad revenue.

**Discussion:** Should brands monitor where their ads appear online? Is this possible? What conflicts of interest exist for online ad exchange companies – which make money every time they place an ad – in excluding disinformation websites from their networks?

**Take:**

- Challenge students to screenshot ads that appear on websites that publish content they deem problematic, then share them with the brands that the ads promote. (Note: Make sure students understand that when they visit disinformation websites, their traffic generates a small

#### Reading List

A reader-requested feature with even more resources.

**What else did we find this week? [Here's our list.](#)**

The Sift, from the News Literacy Project  
Sept. 23, 2019  
Reading list

Here are some interesting items that didn't make this issue:

- "Why aren't more journalists talking about human population in proportion to the climate impact that it can have?" **the Christian Journalism Review (CJR)** asked last week. The article cites a [2017 academic paper](#) that recommends four actions to reduce personal influence on climate change: having one fewer child, living without a car, not traveling by airplane and adopting a plant-based diet.
  - Note:** Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders [tweeted criticism](#) after saying during a recent climate town hall that he would address population in his policy about climate change.
- Discussion:** Does the impact of the human population on climate change not receive enough coverage? What's "enough" coverage, and who decides? Should more climate change reporting include personal actions people can take to help mitigate the problem?
  - Take:** Ask students to review recent news coverage about climate change and decide which outlet is doing the best job, then explain their choice.
- When BBC News political editor Laura Kuenssberg [tweeted an article](#) who publicly confronted U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, it touched off an ethics debate. (More journalists with large Twitter followings quote-tweet – retweet with comment –

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### About NLP

News literacy is an essential skill for the 21st century. The News Literacy Project is the nation's leading provider of news literacy education.

For more than a decade, we've helped young people learn to judge the credibility of what they're reading, watching and hearing and make smart decisions about what to trust, share and act on.

Our programs are built in partnership with teachers and librarians, and are strategically designed to help students develop the skills they need to separate fact from fiction.

Questions? Email us at [info@newsnit.org](mailto:info@newsnit.org)

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