



DEBATE NOT ARGUE

III. Social Media and Ownership

The goal of the activity

The goal of the following activity is to help students understand the politics of media ownership and encourage them to think critically about their own social media use. They will have the opportunity to explore real-world examples of media owners and test their assumptions about media monopolies. Finally, students will put this knowledge into practice by testing the algorithm on their own social media accounts.

Suitable participants

The materials are most suitable for high school students from the age of 14 or 15 till the age of 19. However, the activity can be suitable for youth up to the age of 30. They might have some prior knowledge of politics.

The duration of the activity

The recommended duration of the activity is 60-90 minutes. The topics covered in this part of the lesson are likely more unfamiliar to students, so it may be beneficial to spend a bit of extra time on some parts (if necessary).

Tools and materials

Suggested apps to use: Canva or Whiteboard.

The teacher should prepare a means to display students' contributions to the class.

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Introduction

This lesson will begin with a brief discussion to transition from the topic of social media and politics to media ownership. You may start by asking students, "who owns social media?" This discussion can be used to gauge the students' level of prior knowledge on the topic and prepare them for the coming lesson.

Example: Meta

Start with one specific example of the technology company, *Meta*, to illustrate for students how media ownership works. Engage students in a discussion of this example by asking questions such as those listed here.

Questions to ask

- Do you know what Meta is?
- Which brands are part of Meta?
- What do you think is the purpose of Meta?

In response to these questions, sketch the following diagram. Explain to students what Meta is and describe Zuckerberg's vision for the company. You can find more information to answer these questions in the news article linked below.



Find more information on Zuckerberg's vision in this [article](#)



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Next, test students on some facts concerning Meta. Encourage students to give their best estimates, but know that the purpose of the activity is to help students gauge how much reality differs from their assumptions about media ownership.

Have students record their estimates individually first. You may also give them an opportunity to discuss their estimates with a classmate or in a small group to see how their assumptions compare with other students'. Then, reveal the real answers!

Questions to ask

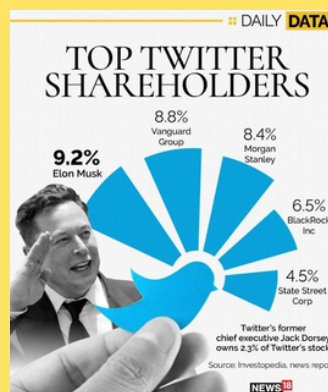
1. How many employees did Meta have in 2022? **86,482**
2. How many users did Meta have in 2022? **3.74 billion**
3. How high was their revenue in 2022? **\$116.609 billion**
4. Who owns Meta? **Mark Zuckerberg**
5. What is the stock market value of Meta? **505.48 billion**
6. How does Meta earn money? **By selling advertisement space**
7. What do you think is Meta's product? **You / app users**

After revealing the true numbers, have students reflect on any facts they found surprising. Ask them how these facts influence their evaluation of social media. Have them share with the class or discuss in small groups.

Example: Twitter

For more practice, you may opt to develop the example, *Twitter*, in a similar fashion and discuss it with the students. Below are some resources you may find useful in expanding this example.

See [this article](#) about changing ownership of Twitter:



Who owns Twitter?

Twitter, is one of the most influential social media platforms, however, its recent rebrand to X.com by new owner Elon Musk marks a new era.



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Game - The Algorithm

This game will help students understand how social media algorithms work by acting as one themselves. Students play by organizing images into different categories based on self-made criteria.

But don't discuss the idea of the algorithm beforehand! Just give students the task and let them work for 10 to 15 minutes. Afterwards tell them "What you have done now is comparable to what an algorithm does."

Game preparations:

- Print out 60 to 80 pictures. The pictures should be clearly categorizable. For example, 5 pictures of different dogs, 7 pictures of cats, 4 pictures of training equipment and so on.
- It would be beneficial to the analogy if you include some "ambiguous" pictures. For example, you could include 8 pictures of food but with 5 of them containing meat and 3 of them showing vegan recipes.
- If the participants should organize them in one category "food" you can discuss how the algorithm operates and that it would potentially block one of the two lifestyles out. It should be likely that you would either be in the "meat bubble" or in the "vegan bubble". You could further discuss with them what would fit the bubble (health, training, ...) and what should not. This should be a good way to discuss "bubbles" and "echo chambers" with them.



Post-game discussion

Invite students to comment on the following statement: "With social media it is possible to reach a broad audience; it is possible to share one's message with the whole world!"

Allow students to share their thoughts, and guide the discussion with the following points.

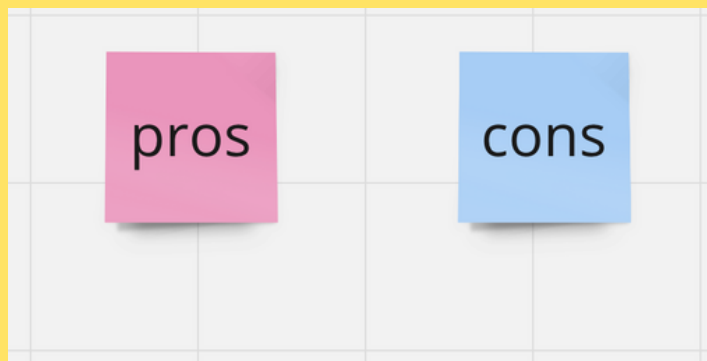
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1. There are 3.7 billion social media users. How many humans are living on our world right now? Not the whole world. Billions are excluded and have no access to social media!
2. If we operate in echo chambers then we are not able to reach the whole world. Our content will be categorized and preferably shown to those who share our opinions and interests. Hence, we can only hardly reach the ones we would like to reach with our messages.

Social media: Advantages and risks

Connect this part to the algorithm game. Use it as a wrap up and a way to develop implications from what the participants have experienced and learned so far.

Start by asking students what the pros and cons of social media are. Using web whiteboard or canva, collect students' responses.



Discuss consequences and implication of the algorithm with them.

- What can we do? How can we deal with it?
- What can you do differently now?

Optional: considering discussing how media owners decide the content users see

- What would happen if specific topics were blocked by whoever owns social media?
 - ex. "What would happen if I ban "cats" from your account?" You would never learn about cats. Maybe you wouldn't even know they exist!



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Social media: Self-experiment

Finally, the question arises "If social media is collecting my data and categorizes my interests to show me fitting content, which preferences are associated with my account and how would I look to the algorithm?"

1. Show them how to find their preferences in Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc. (let students pick one to focus on)
2. Have them identify the three most important preferences
3. Open DALL-e and insert their preferences to develop (3-5) pictures. Those pictures are (maybe) how the algorithm sees them.
 - a. *note: don't give them the link for DALL-e but show your account via the beamer in order to work in accordance with the data protection regulations!*
4. Show and discuss the different pictures!
 - a. Is that you?
 - b. What suits your interests and self-image?
 - c. Which preferences surprised you or didn't fit your self-image?
 - d. What are the consequences (for you and others) if the algorithm gets some preferences wrong

Wrap-up

- Ask each participant for one "take home message" they will remember from today. Ask them to express it in only a single sentence. This strict form could help to clear the multitude of information.
- Ask them further what we could do differently and what they really enjoyed from the workshop.



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- Ask them whether their expectations have been fulfilled and remove them from the wall one by one (see part I!)
- Close the workshop by thanking them for their time, investment and engagement. It is extraordinary to invest oneself in this topic. They are the society of tomorrow; they will shape the world, and they will influence the lives of others. Being sensitized for fake news and willing to counteract hate, lies and violence will contribute to making the world a more loving and connected place.