

Media Literacy Advances Dialogue and Discussion for Democratic Self-Governance

Section: Society and gender

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[Global Media and Information Literacy Week \(24-31 October\)](#)

Disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda have become large-scale social problems, shaping the way citizens view facts, define truth, and make decisions.

Dialogue and discussion programs that address the role of digital and mass media in daily life help people acquire critical thinking skills about the persuasive genres that now are contributing to rising levels of polarization in society.

Through practicing the art of respectful dialogue and discussion in an online forum, people develop knowledge about media, increase their use of active listening practices, and build intellectual humility that helps them contribute to civic discourse in ways that promote lifelong learning.

With support from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, we designed, implemented and assessed [Courageous Rhode Island](#), a whole-of-society approach to reduce the fear and hate that leads to violence. Adults participated in a series of online dialogue and discussion programs about controversial issues related to media, technology, and society.

Participants had a lot to say about social media influencers, conflict entrepreneurs, and the way extremist violence is depicted in news and entertainment. They reflected on their exposure to politically polarizing news and entertainment and [we documented these conversations using an online portal](#) developed by researchers at MIT that enables us to amplify underheard voices.

We also offered a program to secondary teachers and college faculty to help them design learning activities to advance media literacy, promote active learning, and reduce conflict. Young people were also invited to share their insights on media literacy – and they did, by creating poetry, short video documentaries, graphic designs, and even original music.

Learning to critically analyze news, information, digital media, and popular culture can benefit all members of society because it can diminish the appeal and efficacy of us-vs-them persuasive paradigms that rely on activating strong emotions and oversimplifying ideas and information.

[Image by [Andrew Neel](#) on [Unsplash](#)]