

Who or what is influencing me?

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General

We like to think we make our own decisions, but they are inevitably influenced by external factors. In this section we look at things that affect people without their full awareness, including the media, peer pressure, and the communities one belongs to.

The aim isn't to judge whether these influences are good or bad. The aim is just to raise your awareness of these influences so you are in a better position to mediate their impact if you so choose.

Media

The media

Defining media

'Media' is the plural form of the word 'medium'. So in its most basic sense, it means 'more than one medium'. But what is a medium? A medium, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is 'a method or way of expressing something'. Media, therefore, are means of communication. Examples include books, TV, radio, and - of course - the internet.

The media landscape

We live in an increasingly information-saturated world where we are constantly bombarded by media. If we go for a walk we see signs and billboards, and if we use a digital device we see advertisements everywhere. All the media we consume feed us information that has been chosen or edited in some way by someone else. The next video discusses the history of mass media:

Playing time: 4:04

[watch](#)

The evolution of mass media in Australia (5 coins)

Like many online resources, the video above focuses on the US. What can you find out about the evolution of mass media in Australia? Post your findings in the '[Mass media history forum](#)' and see if they all add up to the same picture.

Fake news

Disinformation

It's difficult if not impossible to find a truly objective media source. All media outlets have some sort of bias or political leaning, though they differ by degree - some sources actively manipulate the audience, while others seek impartiality. Public claims that misrepresent the truth are sometimes called 'fake news'. This term was popularised in 2016, partly as a result of controversies surrounding the US presidential election. Individuals, political parties, businesses and other organisations spread disinformation for a wide range of different reasons. This is generally a deliberate strategy to shape the way people think and see the world. The following video explores how mass media can be used for this purpose:

Playing time: 4:46

[watch](#)

Raw data

'Data' are pieces of information, in the broadest sense. News reports and advertisements often present data in statistical form. An advertisement for a bar of soap, for example, say it makes you twice as clean as the nearest competitor - but what does that actually mean? This is where raw data come in. 'Raw data' are uninterpreted facts and figures. In this case, soap bar A might kill 2% of germs, compared to soap bar B which only kills 1% of germs. 2% isn't great, but the advertisers have interpreted it so it sounds great - they aren't actually lying when they say it's twice as powerful as the nearest competitor!

Data that are disseminated in a popular form have usually been interpreted already, and it's hard to know if they're a fair representation of the truth without access to the raw data. The same principle applies to qualitative (non-numerical) data. A news article based on a video might be an unfair interpretation of events, but you won't know that unless you see the original footage.

Choosing what to pay attention to

Most of us have access to a vast ocean of media, so how do we decide which sources to pay attention to? These videos give you some pointers on spotting 'fake news':

Playing time: 2:04

[watch](#)

Playing time: 2:53

[watch](#)

Writing fake news (5 coins)

1. Write a 300-word fake news article about a topic that interests you. See how ridiculous you can make it while sounding at least somewhat believable. Try to structure your article around something true, using that as the basis for fiction.
2. Share your article on the '[Fake news forum](#)'.
3. Read someone else's article and indicate whether you think people would believe it if it was posted publically.

Reputable journalism

Reputable news sources tend to adhere to the journalist code of ethics, requiring new information to be corroborated by one or more independent sources prior to publication. On the other hand, news sources that don't verify their information are at greater risk of publishing falsehoods.

Evaluating sources (5 coins)

Think of a news story that interests you and research it on Google - ideally something new or controversial. Find three different news sources and answer the following questions on the '[Evaluating sources forum](#)':

1. Provide the following for each story: URL, date of publication, author name, publication/website name.
2. How do the stories differ?
3. What sources do they cite, if any? (this is corroboration)
4. Which source do you think is the best, and why?

Academic sources

Academic sources tend to be very reliable. They are usually written by experts associated with a university

and they will either be published on an '.edu' domain or in an academic journal. Academic journals use a quality control process called 'peer review' where experts in the field assess verify the quality of a paper before it's published. Academic sources are often regarded as the gold standard in terms of trustworthiness and reliability.

Google Scholar (5 coins)

This activity teaches you how to find academic sources on almost any given topic.

1. Think of a topic you would like to know more about and perform a standard Google search.
2. Run the same search on [Google Scholar](#) , which only searches peer-reviewed journals and other reputable publications.
3. Compare the first few results from each search and post your findings on the '[Academic sources forum](#)'. Keep in mind that academic sources can be hard to understand because they are usually written for an expert audience.

Opinion

Virtually everyone has a voice online, and that can cause a lot of confusion. A quick Google search will reveal multiple different perspectives on any given issue, and it can be hard to tell who to trust. The fact is that most of what's published online is just opinion, and it may not be particularly reliable. This is especially relevant for social media (including YouTube), where people regularly publish information without appropriate expertise or reputable sources.

Online research (5 coins)

Choose a big or controversial news story and find a source from each of the following categories:

- News website
- YouTube
- Forum post (Reddit or some other website)
- Academic article (if relevant)

Post about how the sources you found differ on the '[Comparing sources forum](#)'. Which one is more entertaining? Which one is more informative? Which one is easier to understand?

Freedom of the press

Democracy and the media

Freedom of the press is an extension of the right to free speech, in that it upholds the right to publish and share media without state interference. This freedom is fundamental to a democratic society as it allows all sides of a political debate to be heard, and it can hold those in power to account. The next two videos explain why we should care about freedom of the press:

Playing time: 1:13

[watch](#)

Playing time: 1:08

[watch](#)

Holding people to account

Mass media can be a very powerful tool for holding people to account. Many politicians have been brought down by the press, including US president Richard Nixon who resigned in 1974 after the Washington Post

published his role in an illegal burglary and wiretapping operation. More recently, Australian Minister for Sport Bridget McKenzie resigned after it was discovered she had preferentially allocated sports grants to marginal seats approaching an election. Not all abuses of power are political. In 2020, famous film producer Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to prison for sexual assault following the media's widespread coverage of his crimes.

Political fact checking

Watch the next video for an insight into how new technology could shape the future of fake news:

Playing time: 4:03

[watch](#)

Politicians often lie or misrepresent the truth, so it's important to verify what they say. The problem is that it takes time to fact check, so they can't usually be corrected on the spot. By that point, it's too late - the misinformation has already been circulated, and some people won't receive the correction.

Fact check (5 coins)

Various 'fact checking' websites investigate the claims made by politicians. Choose three politicians and research how truthful they are. Assign each politician a grade from 0 (liar) to 5 (perfectly truthful). Post your findings on the '[Fact check forum](#)', along with the reasoning behind the grade you assigned each politician.

Manipulation of the press

Some political figures attack the press directly because it reports on them critically. Other political figures manipulate the media in order to quash criticism, bolster their public image, and win elections. This kind of manipulation can be seen in the lead-up to any election where the owners and readers of any given news source tend to favour one party over the others. This sort of bias works partly through the publication's choice of what to cover and what to overlook or ignore. Publications may choose not to report on the failings of their favoured political party, for example.

State interference

Given the media's role in holding those in power to account, many governments around the world attempt to restrict its operation. The internet is heavily censored in China, for example, and criticism of the government is illegal. While we have more freedom of the press in Australia, the Australian Federal Police were recently criticised for raiding the homes and offices of journalists. Some argue that this is an undemocratic attack on freedom of the press, while others argue that the government is simply upholding the law. Watch the video below for a brief outline of the issue:

Playing time: 3:58

[watch](#)

Whistleblowers

The raids discussed above were conducted following the publication of news stories about a possible government surveillance program, and the alleged misconduct of Australians soldiers in Afghanistan. These stories were written with the help of anonymous sources known as 'whistleblowers'. These sources remain anonymous because it's illegal to reveal secret government information, and they don't want to get in trouble.

The public interest (5 coins)

Answer the questions below on the '[Public interest forum](#)', after watching the video above:

1. Do you think the police raids discussed above were justified? Why or why not?
2. Should whistleblowers be protected by law if they reveal something that's in the public interest, or do the government and other large organisations have the right to keep certain things hidden even if they could be a public wrong? Why?

WikiLeaks

One of the most well-known whistleblowers is an Australian named Julian Assange who gained access to classified US military documents from US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning. Assange published the documents on his own website, called 'WikiLeaks'. Since then, he has published a wide range of other confidential documents including the private emails of politicians. In some cases, these documents reveal ethically questionable behaviours that were intended to remain secret.

Playing time: 2:43

[watch](#)

Assange sought refuge in Europe before spending nearly seven years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. He was finally arrested in 2019, for extradition to stand trial in the US.

Criminal or hero? (5 coins)

1. Research Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Do you think he is a criminal or a hero?
2. Vote in the '[Criminal or hero? choice](#)'.
3. Post your reasoning on the '[WikiLeaks forum](#)'.

Resources and Activities

forum: Mass media history forum

What can you find out about the evolution of mass media in Australia? Post your findings here.

Link: [Mass media history forum](#)

forum: Fake news forum

1. Write a fake news article about a topic that interests you. Try to structure your article around something true, using that as the basis for fiction. 2. Share your article below. 3. Read someone else's article and indicate whether you think people would believe it if it was posted publically.

Link: [Fake news forum](#)

forum: Evaluating sources forum

1. Provide the following for each story: URL, date of publication, author name, publication/website name. 2. How do the stories differ? 3. What sources do they cite, if any? (this is corroboration) 4. Which source do you think is the best, and why?

Link: [Evaluating sources forum](#)

forum: Academic sources forum

1. Think of a topic you would like to know more about and perform a standard Google search. 2. Run the same search on Google Scholar, which only searches peer-reviewed journals and other reputable publications. 3. Compare the first few results from each search and post your findings below.

Link: [Academic sources forum](#)

forum: Comparing sources forum

Post about how the sources you found differ. Which one is more entertaining? Which one is more informative? Which one is easier to understand?

Link: [Comparing sources forum](#)

forum: Fact check forum

Choose three politicians and research how truthful they are. Assign each politician a grade from 0 (liar) to 5 (perfectly truthful). Post your findings here, along with the reasoning behind the grade you assigned each politician.

Link: [Fact check forum](#)

forum: Public interest forum

Answer the two questions about whistleblowing after watching the video on press freedom.

Link: [Public interest forum](#)

forum: WikiLeaks forum

Do you think Julian Assange is a criminal or a hero? Post your reasoning here.

Link: [WikiLeaks forum](#)

choice: Criminal or hero? choice

Do you think Julian Assange is a criminal or a hero?

Social media

Social media

The impact of social media

Social media allow for a combination of mass media and private messaging. Popular platforms include Facebook, YouTube, SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The next video is a critique of social media:

Playing time: 4:18

[watch](#)

Evaluating social media (5 coins)

The video above suggests that social media have a negative impact on people overall. Are social media a force for good or bad? Indicate your response by voting in the '[Evaluating social media choice](#)'.

Answer the following questions on the '[Evaluating social media forum](#)':

1. Do you agree with the video above? Why or why not? Do social media make people happier or unhappier? Do they connect people or isolate them?
2. The video above argues that social media only shows the best 1% of someone's life, and people compare their normal lives to that false image. What sorts of things do you post on social media? Do you only post the high points, or not? Is it a fair representation of your life overall? How do you decide what to post and what not to post?
3. What techniques does the video use to influence your emotions and opinions?

Life without social media

What was life like before social media? In the next video, someone gives up social media for 30 days.

Playing time: 8:42

[watch](#)

Giving up social media (5 coins)

Try going without social media for a while and see how you feel. Post about your experiences on the '[Giving up social media forum](#)'.

Addiction

Some people will find it harder to give up social media than expected. The next video discusses how the psychology of addiction applies to social media:

Playing time: 2:57

[watch](#)

Letter to myself (5 coins)

How do you feel about your own use of digital media - phones, video streaming, social apps, gaming? Some people feel that they game too much, while others find that their sleeping patterns are affected by time spent on social media in the evening. Write a letter to yourself giving advice on how to have a healthy and productive relationship with digital media. When you've written your letter, go ahead and share it on the '[Letter to myself forum](#)'. If you don't want to share the whole letter, just share one or two key points.

Resources and Activities

forum: Evaluating social media forum

Answer the two 'evaluating social media' questions here.

Link: [Evaluating social media forum](#)

forum: Giving up social media forum

Try going without social media for a while and see how you feel. Post about your experiences below.

Link: [Giving up social media forum](#)

forum: Letter to myself forum

Share your 'letter to myself' below. If you don't want to share the whole letter, just share one or two key points.

Link: [Letter to myself forum](#)

choice: Evaluating social media choice

The video suggests that social media have a negative impact on people overall. Are social media a force for good or bad?

Peer pressure

Peer pressure is the feeling that you need to do what those around you are doing. If your friends want to go to a music festival, for example, you might feel pressure to go with them even if you don't want to. The next video discusses the concept a bit more, including its occasional benefits:

Playing time: 2:00

[watch](#)

Peer pressure isn't just something teenagers experience. Most people will experience some form of peer pressure throughout their whole life, so it's important to make sure we belong to the right peer group.

The invisible rope of peer pressure

This next video is a kind of social experiment that shows the power of peer pressure:

Playing time: 1:42

[watch](#)

Watch the next video for another famous demonstration of peer pressure, sometimes called 'social conformity' in psychology:

Playing time: 3:39

[watch](#)

Social conformity (5 coins)

How would you have behaved in each of the above scenarios? Answer honestly - would you have ducked under the invisible rope or would you have walked straight through it? Would you sit and stand like everyone else, or would you remain seated? Make your selection on the '[Social conformity choice](#)' and then post why you think you would behave that way on the '[Social conformity forum](#)'.

The psychology of peer pressure

So why do people duck when there's no rope? The next video explains the science behind peer pressure.

Playing time: 4:31

[watch](#)

Peer pressure experiences (5 coins)

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt peer pressure? If so, what was that like? Do you tend to give in to peer pressure, or do you resist it? Why? Share your experiences in the '[Peer pressure forum](#)'.

Dealing with peer pressure

In the next video, Russell Brand talks about ways to deal with peer pressure. Note that there's a bit of swearing in the video, so if you find that offensive, just jump straight to the activity below.

[watch](#)

Your mentors (5 coins)

Brand recommends replacing peers who pressure you with mentors who you admire. Do you have any mentors or figures who you look up to? If so, who are they and why do you look up to them? If not, who might you choose and why? Share your thoughts on the '[My mentors forum](#)'.

Resources and Activities

forum: Peer pressure forum

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt peer pressure? If so, what was that like? Do you tend to give in to peer pressure, or do you resist it? Why? Share your experiences here.

Link: [Peer pressure forum](#)

forum: My mentors forum

Do you have any mentors or figures who you look up to? If so, who are they and why do you look up to them? If not, who might you choose and why? Share your thoughts below.

Link: [My mentors forum](#)

forum: Social conformity forum

Would you have ducked under the invisible rope or would you have walked straight through it? Would you sit and stand like everyone else, or would you remain seated? Post how you think you would behave and why below.

Link: [Social conformity forum](#)

choice: Social conformity choice

Would you have ducked under the invisible rope or would you have walked straight through it? Would you sit and stand like everyone else, or would you remain seated?

Your communities

Communities

What is community?

A community is a group of people who share one or more of the following:

- location
- government
- history
- culture
- interests
- religion
- values
- beliefs
- shared identity
- economic interests
- political interests

Your communities (5 coins)

Given the definition above, try to come up all the communities you belong to. Post a list, along with the total number of communities you belong to, on the '[Community membership forum](#)'.

Local communities

Shared geography

Local communities are defined by a shared geographical area. The next video asks if we choose a local community because its beliefs and values match our own, or if our local community defines our beliefs and values for us.

Playing time: 2:50

[watch](#)

Your local community (5 coins)

Think about your local community. What's distinct about it? What sort of place is it? What sorts of people live there? How do they behave, and why might that be? Share your observations on the '[My local community forum](#)'.

Living somewhere else (5 coins)

What would your life be like if you were born somewhere else? If you live in a city, for example, what sort of life might you lead if you were born in an isolated rural town? Write a 'day in the life' story about what it would be like to have been born somewhere else, and then upload it to the '[Living somewhere else submission](#)'.

Human connection

Ubuntu

Communities in developing countries can be quite different to what we're used to. When there's no electricity,

there is no internet. When there aren't enough bedrooms, there's no privacy. When you own very little, sharing with your local community is more important. In the next video, Desmond Tutu discusses the importance of community and human connection:

Playing time: 3:26

[watch](#)

'I am because we are' (5 coins)

In the video above, Desmond Tutu discusses the African philosophy of 'ubuntu', which means 'I am because we are'. How does ubuntu apply to your life? How are you shaped by other people? Who are the 'we' in your lives? Create a mind map or other visual representation of the way ubuntu applies to your life and share it on the '[Ubuntu forum](#)'.

Changing communities (5 coins)

Explore with a grandparent or another older person how they feel communities have changed during their lifetime, and what communal and social life was like for them when they were your age. How much do their stories differ from your own experience? Write their story as a short biographical anecdote and add it as a new page on the '[Changing communities Wiki](#)'.

Identity and community

Perceptions of identity

Community can be defined by physical location as discussed above, but it can also be defined by other identifiers including religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Minority identities can form different subcultures within the dominant culture, resulting in a different experience for those who belong to them. In the next video, someone discusses what it's like to be Aboriginal.

Playing time: 9:02

[watch](#)

Identities (5 coins)

The speaker in the video above discusses how people identified her as Aboriginal even though she didn't really think of herself as representing the Indigenous community. For other people, 'Aboriginal' became a key identity they used to categorise her. In some cases, there may be a disconnect between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. How do people tend to identify you at first? Would they connect you with any particular community or group of people? Does that affect how they treat you? Do they think of you differently if they really get to know you? Post your thoughts and experiences on the '[My identities forum](#)'.

The dark side of community

Manipulation

Community can sometimes affect people negatively, particularly if they involve an uneven power dynamic, stemming from age, income, status or something else. Some communities have a manipulative leader or group who abuse their power in some way. The next video discusses the psychology of manipulation:

Playing time: 5:16

[watch](#)

Leaving a community

If you do find yourself in a manipulative or otherwise harmful community, you might decide to leave. This can

be very difficult. In some cases, other members of the community will cut you off. If you want to leave, therefore, you need to be prepared to lose friends and maybe even family. In the next video, someone discusses what it was like to leave her religious community to follow a more secular lifestyle.

Playing time: 1:54

[watch](#)

In the next video, some people share what it was like to leave the Amish community:

Playing time: 4:27

[watch](#)

Saying goodbye (5 coins)

How would you feel if had to give up your friends and family in order to live the life you want? Would you ever think of leaving your community? If so, what other communities might you seek out? It's not uncommon for people to move to a new area and pursue a new lifestyle, surrounded by new people. Others find great value in their community and want to remain there for a long time. What about you? Share your thoughts on the '[Leaving a community forum](#)'.

Resources and Activities

forum: Community membership forum

Try to come up all the communities you belong to. Post a list below, along with the total number of communities you belong to.

Link: [Community membership forum](#)

wiki: Changing communities Wiki

Explore with a grandparent or another older person how they feel communities have changed during their lifetime, and what communal and social life was like for them when they were your age. How much do their stories differ from your own experience? Write their story as a short biographical anecdote and add it as a new page below.

Link: [Changing communities Wiki](#)

forum: My local community forum

Think about your local community. What's distinct about it? What sort of place is it? What sorts of people live there? How do they behave, and why might that be? Share your observations here.

Link: [My local community forum](#)

forum: Ubuntu forum

Create a mind map or other visual representation of the way ubuntu applies to your life and share it below.

Link: [Ubuntu forum](#)

forum: My identities forum

How do people tend to identify you at first? Would they connect you with any particular community or group of people? Does that affect how they treat you? Do they think of you differently if they really get to know you? Post your thoughts and experiences below.

Link: [My identities forum](#)

forum: Leaving a community forum

Share your thoughts on the 'Saying goodbye' prompt below.

Link: [Leaving a community forum](#)

assign: Living somewhere else submission

Link: [Living somewhere else submission](#)