WHAT IS YOUR FEED TELLING YOU?
Propaganda, Misinformation, and Disinformation in Social Media

Background
According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in the summer of 2018, 68% of American adults get their news through social media platforms at least occasionally. At the same time, 57% expect that the news they see on social media will be inaccurate (see http://www.journalism.org/2018/09/10/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2018/ to read a comprehensive analysis of the survey). Given what we know about how disinformation campaigners have used social media to disseminate false and/or misleading messages, learning about how people encounter news stories on social media platforms is important for understanding how such messages spread, and how they might affect people's trust in news media.

Although user communities on platforms like Facebook and Twitter are incredibly diverse, depending on who you are connected to, the opinions and viewpoints that you are likely to encounter in your social media feeds can often be quite narrow. Just how different might your experience of current events be if you were exposed to news content in another social media feed? Could something that you believe is clearly disinformation be credible to someone else?

Activity
Since 2016, *The Wall Street Journal* has been running a project called "Blue Feed, Red Feed" that simulates Facebook News Feeds from left-leaning and right-leaning political viewpoints, organized around specific topics like "guns," "abortion," and "health care." You can try it yourself here: http://graphics.wsj.com/blue-feed-red-feed/.

Part I:
- Split into small groups (3-5) and log onto the "Blue Feed, Red Feed" site.
- Choose a topic, and look at the different feeds together.
  1. Record the sources for each post that appears in the different feeds.
  2. Discuss amongst yourselves the general impression about the topic that you get from looking at the "blue feed," and the impression that you get from the "red feed." Do you see anything that you think might be false or misleading? What is it that makes you trust or distrust the content?
  3. If you have a Facebook account, compare what you see in your own News Feed to the results in "Blue Feed, Red Feed." Do you see any posts from the same sources (or even the same posts themselves)? Is your feed more diverse, less diverse, or about the same as the simulated feeds on "Blue Feed, Red Feed"? How do your individual News Feeds compare to each other? Do you trust what you see in your feed? Why or why not?

Part II:
For the second half of this activity, at least one member of your group will need to have a Twitter account. You'll also need to use the Google Chrome browser, and to download and

install the "FlipFeed" extension for Chrome from the MIT Media Lab, here:
https://flipfeed.media.mit.edu.

- Log into your Twitter account and click on the "Flip my feed" button under your profile picture.
- Focus on the news stories, hashtags, and comments on current events that you see in the new timeline.
    1. How diverse are the viewpoints that are represented in this feed?
    2. Which posts have the most engagement (i.e., comments, likes, and retweets)?
    3. Do you see anything that you think might be false or misleading? What is it that makes you trust or distrust the content?
- Load another timeline with the "Flip my feed" button, and repeat the same steps.

Part III:
After you've finished, discuss your experiences with these two tools in your groups. Was there anything that surprised you? How do you think having a different Facebook News Feed or Twitter timeline might affect the news stories that you see, or how you interpret the news?

For smaller classes: Choose a group member to report back to the class about your experiences. Then, discuss as a class:
- Do you think that it's important to be exposed to different points of view on your social media accounts? Why or why not?
- What sorts of things make you trust or distrust a news story that you encounter on social media?
- If you encounter something that you think could be false or misleading, do you take any additional steps to verify your suspicions? If yes, what do you do? If no, why not?
- Why might someone believe false or misleading information that appears in their social media feeds? And why might someone be skeptical of what they encounter?