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The MMM* Initiative

*Mindful Media Module

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University of Montana

I. Introduction

We, a team of students within the Global Leadership Initiative, have observed a global problem that we wish to address. We've determined that information collected and distributed by and on news media and social media outlets has manifested in political biases of its users. It is clear that this issue has subsequently led to political polarization. We have also found that this polarization has aggravated pre-existing prejudice by the public, and those social media users, against ethnic minorities globally. The group saw a need for a solution and change to the growing political polarization in our country and globally, exacerbated by social media, that aggravates prejudice against ethnic minorities. We have observed these prejudices levied against ethnic minorities, aggravated via social and news media, in the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States, persecution of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, and prosecution of Uighur Muslims in China. Our solution, addressed below, is to combat this prejudice with a community-led initiative armed with an educational package we design based on our research, testimonies from ethnic minorities, and interactive elements that describe how individuals can work against this global problem. Our hope is to change attitudes towards the information people are consuming that aggravates bias against minorities to combat prejudice in individuals and give individuals the tools to combat prejudice they observe in their own communities. Our research, summarized in the Literature Review below, reasons the connection between our community in Montana and the global issue. As a result, we have decided to tackle this problem with educational information and initiatives. To make a meaningful impact, we must educate communities about how to engage in news media and social media literacy education. We designed this two pronged approach, of a community group and an information package, to meaningfully engage people who are interacting regularly with online conversations. Our capstone project, the Mindful Media Module [MMM] Initiative, is precisely fashioned by ourselves, with the assistance of meticulous research, professionals, and professors, to combat this global problem through this method. If political polarization exacerbates public prejudice against ethnic minorities, then we will create a community group armed with an information package about media literacy to tackle misinformation distributed on social media to address these prejudices. We arrived at this thesis through in-depth research and global observations. Our specific project was developed using the Human Centered Design approach which utilized three phases: Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation.

II. Inspiration

The following is an in-depth analysis and summation of the inspiration we gained from our literature reviews, expert interviews, and community surveys.

Literature Review

There were a number of research journals, articles, and studies that impacted our project ideation and focus.

“Riots and Twitter: connective politics and social media and framing discourses in the digital public sphere, *Information, Communication and Society*” explored the relationship between social media connection and public action, particularly after the widespread influence of social media in the western world. Specifically, it says that connected groups are driven to action based on the kind of activating discourse that occurs within a larger platform. It discusses the political properties of communication and rhetoric and the potential it has to reach great numbers of people. This insight and evidence helps us understand what exacerbates biases in global social media (Pond & Lewis, 2019).

“Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*” discusses the power and meaning of media influence and literacy with the advent of social media, highlighting that the education around this area in the United States is comparatively lacking with other western cultures. It addresses a trend toward multicultural exposure and understanding thanks to social media. It also explores an ever present need to educate students so they might best respond with a goal of contributing to a healthier, non-discriminatory society mainstream media’s role in diminishing inequalities. This gives us insight into how our local community fits into a global problem and provides evidence for our educational-based information package and group structure (Kellner & Share, 2005).

“What predicts adolescents’ critical thinking about real-life news? The roles of social media news consumption and news media literacy” explores media use in young adults around high school age, studying how they consume news on social media and if their consumption corresponded with critical thinking as well as how they interacted with and understood news algorithms and traced and fact checked their sources of information (Ku et al, 2019). This gives us information and evidence on our chosen demographic of younger adults and how they interact with the information distribution we tackle in our global problem solution.

Mieke Alexis VanderBorgh’s study, “Teaching Young Children to be Sophisticated Media Consumers”, makes the case that direct and intensive media literacy instruction can help children become sophisticated media consumers. The primary focus of the study is kindergarten-aged children which implies that we should be teaching media literacy as early as we can. Although this study is specific to television, it explores two ways in which 3-5 year-olds may learn to think critically about media through experience and testimony—which can be easily transferable to social media. The results suggest that talking to older preschoolers about the veracity of television messages may help them become critical television viewers.

The article “Young People Learning from Digital Media Outside of School: The Informal Meets the Formal” by Dra Sara Pereira, Joana Fillol, and Pedro Moura aims to understand how teenagers are learning to use media, what motivates them, and if their media practices contribute to the acquisition of skills and competencies useful to their lives inside and outside school. The research ultimately establishes that media uses, practices, experiences and learning are not explored or discussed nearly enough inside the classroom. Hence, the curriculum doesn’t coincide with what students learn and experience outside of class. The study ultimately recommends that teachers need to play an important role in empowering students to face the problems of the digital information age, but for that, teacher's training should be supported and media literacy needs to be integrated into all subject-learning, which could demand a new school curricula reform. Informal learning strategies—like social relationships—contribute to the development of skills that are useful from a school viewpoint. Therefore, students are largely influenced by their schoolmates, friends, or family when showing interest in learning about a specific topic (like media literacy) (Pereira et al, 2019).

“Media Literacy: A Moving Target” by Hannah Byrd Little suggests that students need to be learning media literacy from an early age, meaning they must learn how to verify this news and how to cite the information. Little argues that it is absolutely imperative that students are taught about information and media bias--especially because many are getting their news secondhand. Little primarily argues that the criteria librarians have traditionally used to evaluate websites can be used for all online sources, regardless of the format. Little then includes many specific resources that aid in teaching students about news media; including lesson plans on The New York Times website that offers lessons on spotting fake news; NIE (Newspapers in Education) wherein a few national newspapers--like the Washington Post--have dedicated sites that help students dissect news; and PBS programming and lesson plans. When it comes to social media literacy, this article shows that online resources are crucial when teaching younger students about information and media bias--hence our decision to focus on online resources in this project (Little, 2018).

“Future Responses to Managing Muslim Ethnic Minorities in China: Lessons Learned from Global Approaches to Improving Inter-Ethnic Relations” by Reza Hasmath looks at the political tension and minority unrest of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang, China which is mainly caused by anti-Muslim sentiment. The Uyghur people are Turkic, mostly Sunni-Muslim people. The area they predominantly occupy is shared with Han Chinese people. These two groups have a history of conflict, including what we see today. Since 2009 we can see an increase in crime against Muslim and Uyghur people as the prejudice against this group grows. What really set off the current events is huge religious suppression of the Islamic religion, deeming any religious affiliation in work places illegal and private studies in the Koran illegal. The Uyghur people were stripped away of their religious freedoms. One of the biggest identified issues contributing to the problem is the lack of meaningful interactions between Uyghur and Han Chinese people. When interactions do occur, Uyghur are seen as “different” and “exotic” whereas Han Chinese are seen

as “advanced” and “superior”. In efforts to force the Uyghur people to become “better citizens”, re-education camps were set up and a strict surveillance system was put up. The Chinese government strictly monitors the Uyghur people through DNA, face-scanning, and phone monitoring. Those found to break that rule are sent to re-education centers. The second half of this article addresses policy and action, what has worked and what hasn’t along with suggested plans to help ease this intense humanitarian issue. What the author makes note of is that any past policy plans have failed to address the issue at the root and only addressed the surface area problems. The author also provides short-, medium- and long-term responses to the issues. For the short-term Hasmath suggests refining the surveillance system for only those individuals at risk and small groups that are susceptible to violence and radicalization. Hasmath also suggests a community engagement plan that can bring people together to work on common causes. In the medium-term plan, the author suggests intergroup contact that will help reduce prejudice and increase social trust. This would also include highlighting cross-group friendships to influence positive attitudes towards the “outgroup”, the Uyghur people. The author suggests that first, the portrayal of the Uyghur people in the media needs to be altered to either better fit their culture or just be taken out completely. Hasmath suggests starting with schools since most of the prejudice is ingrained into adults. This would require teacher training and curriculum changes. For the long-term strategy, Hasmath suggests targeting the systemic issues that lead to the lower rate of Uyghur people competing highly on the job market. One suggestion is to keep local jobs in XUAR for the Uyghur, another is to help them learn Mandarin to better compete on the job markets and communicate in their day to day lives. Another solution is setting diversity quotas and other useful tactics. Overall, this article is great at highlighting an issue that relates to our global problem while also providing solutions that we might take into consideration in determining our group’s response (Hasmath, 2020).

We have identified our global problem, but it is important to understand why we consider the situations a problem in the first place. "Trauma and Psychological Distress in Latino Citizen Children following Parental Detention and Deportation" by L. Rojas-Flores, M.L. Clements, J. Hwang Koo, and J. London focuses on the forced separations of Latino parent-child relationships when faced with deportation and detention. Particularly, it focuses on PTSD and mental health of the Latino children. The goal of the article is to inspire reconsideration and revision of the immigration enforcement policies in the United States. Children of immigrants take up 25% of the child population in the U.S. which is why it is important that they are taken care of in an effective way. The effects of PTSD have significant effects on early childhood adversity. With the increasing radicalization of immigration policies in the U.S. it is important to understand the effects to highlight areas that need change, such as childhood trauma. The authors suggest implementing trauma-informed systems in places like schools and intervention programs that target poverty and parent-loss. These systems should be culturally relevant and effective for not only children who already lost a parent due to deportation and detention, but also kids whose parents may face that same fate (Rojas et al, 2017). Overall, this article shows us a U.S. example

of prejudice against ethnic minorities. I think it provides a great example of why we need to care about these problems, why we decided to tie this project to ethnic minorities, and gives meaningful recommendations to improving the situation which we've integrated into our proposal.

In "COVID, BLM, and the polarization of the US politicians on Twitter," Anmol Panda, Divya Siddarth, and Joyojeet Pal took to twitter to research how politicians use social media to communicate, specifically about COVID and BLM. They sought to answer the following questions: "How did the two parties frame their discussion around three key topics: Covid-19, the George Floyd murder, and the Black Lives Matter movement?" and "What does this framing say about the willingness to address or avoid specific issues?" (Panda et. al 2020). They found that democrats tweeted more on a weekly basis and more about COVID, BLM and George Floyd than Republicans did. When focused on COVID-19, Democrats topics were largely centered around "public health" and "health care" and Republicans topics covered more about the economic fall out, "small businesses" and "China". When focused on George Floyd, Democrats connected it to "police brutality", "Breonna Taylor", "Ahmaud Arbery" and reference policy change. Republicans did not focus on brutality, they condemned the death but did not call for policy change. They used words such as "protest", "right", and "violence". When looking at BLM, democrats use similar words to what they used for George Floyd. Republicans had such little data it was deemed irrelevant. Overall, this article provides insight on how two of the parties in the U.S. use Twitter to communicate on issues such as COVID-19 and BLM and how we use social media to communicate pressing issues such as health and human rights. The article shows us how people, particularly politicians, use social media to influence polarization. We can use this information in informing group members on the topic.

Daniel Trilling in "It's a place where they try to destroy you: why concentration camps are still with us" covers the immigration prisons in the U.S., education camps in China, the prison complex in Syria, detention centers in India, encampments in Myanmar, and holding centers in places all around the Pacific. Concentration camps is another word that can be used for all of these things, people are locked inside under surveillance because of their ethnicity, race, or religion. Overall, this article mostly served to put in perspective the "globalness" of the issue at hand as it shows prejudice ethnic minorities across the globe, many of which are exacerbated by their political leaders (Trilling, 2020).

The articles analyzed from *The Harvard Gazette*, *The World Economic Forum*, and *Rhetorica*, all point to news being influenced by biases. Whether it's the bias of the news outlets to give people the exciting short stories they know will sell, or the bias of consumers to stick with what is popular and confirms their existing beliefs, bias is inherent in American news.

The Harvard Gazette examined the way that people make decisions by including their education, experiences, and existing beliefs in the context of understanding a news article. One finding was

that stories and questions heavily influence people. They also determined that no matter your political leaning, your own life narrative is equally likely to influence how you perceive what you read (Pazzanese, 2020). Similarly, *The World Economic Forum* looked at the specific biases most people are affected by, and found that confirmation bias has a strong hold on many Americans.³ Furthermore, availability cascade, groupthink, and concision bias all show that people believe whatever ideas are the most prevalent, widely accepted, and easiest to read. Finally, the *Rhetorica* article analyzed the biases of journalists and news outlets themselves, and found an inherent bias to try to hold their audience's attention (Cline, 2020). This bias manifests in the way news is told by creating a news feed with immediate, short, and emotional stories accompanied by lots of visual aids.

This information is significant to our project because we better understand the types of biases people form and what they are most likely to be influenced by. For example, understanding what impact education has on the perspective someone retains about a given news story, we know that increasing their media education makes them more likely to pick reliable sources and check their facts. Similarly, knowing that news outlets more often than not put their own spin on their stories helps us understand that we need to put source reliability in the curriculum of what we teach people. Finally, information concerning the form of news people are most impacted by: stories, ensures that we will incorporate this medium into our project. We will do this through the online sharing of stories by international students and group sharing of experiences with media, biases, and prejudices.

In a Swedish study on digital journalism, researchers examined how often people are exposed to news “incidentally,” without explicitly seeking it out. The study sample was a group of Swedish youth between the ages of 16-18. The article analyzes how the customizing feature on social media platforms creates an environment that is “somewhere between the extremes of selective exposure and incidental exposure”. It compared the evolution of getting news between older “legacy” sources such as newspapers or broadcast news which tend to be more linear, with the more sporadic present day information cycle of social media news consumption. The conclusion was that nowadays people don't follow the news so much as the news follows them (Bergstrom & Belfrage, 2018).

As we are focusing our project on college students as a starting point for initiating change, this information is useful in confirming that social media is the best platform. Additionally, we learned that people being incidentally exposed to news is part of media literacy, as you must be aware of all the ways you are consuming news in order to fight biases.

“Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization” by Christopher Bail took data sets from Republicans and Democrats. The Democrats were paid to follow bots that would retweet conservative's political views. They ended up becoming slightly more liberal in views after this study. While vice versa, Republicans who were paid to follow

liberal retweeting bots became substantially more conservative. They stated this data is not absolute but it could have significant meanings for political polarization in the future. A good quote from the study was that it, “indicates that attempts to introduce people to a broad range of opposing political views on a social media site such as Twitter might not only be ineffective but counterproductive.” They also made sure to specify that the effects are more negative when the initiatives are taken by liberals toward conservatives. A good note to take away from this for us is that if we were going to try to decrease political polarization we will need to be careful because there is a high potential of creating the opposite effect of what we want. Aka, making things more polarized by trying to expose people to other viewpoints if not done carefully (Bail et al, 2018).

In a research journal titled “Does Social Media Use Really Make People Politically Polarized? Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Media Use on Political Polarization in South Korea”, a group of researchers took data from South Korea to see if social media was contributing to their political polarization. They found that those who actively use social media networks were more likely to be engaged in political processes. And those who had been moderate or slightly liberal have begun moving further liberal. In effect, creating more polarization. It’s important to note that a number of times the article mentioned the fact there is not a lot of empirical evidence that social media is creating the political polarization that we’re seeing. Their particular study found that indirectly, because of the increased political engagement and interest, social media could be a catalyst for more polarization. But their study found that only certain types of social media use such as political discussions and news were related to greater political participation (Lee, et al., 2018).

An article by Professor Hodson of Royal Roads outlining how navigating the digital sphere is not a targeted lesson provided to youth. This article identifies the importance of primary and secondary education as the mechanism for introducing things like coding skills and internet familiarity. Hodson notes that coding skills do not fulfill the needs of the average citizen in what she calls the “digital democracy”. She expands on her research regarding the communication around climate change, social media platform choice, and what specific factors affect how people engage with information (children are the most prevalent part of this article). Finally, she identifies social media as a non-neutral element of digital information, and that kids should be informed of how social media disposes itself to them (Hodson, 2018).

Gregg Hoffman’s exploration of Media Literacy delves into what happens when the subject is newly introduced to students. One notable element of this study is that Media Literacy is recognized as a somewhat neglected course of study. Hoffman says that this subject is often foregone since few studies are done to expound upon it and thus it has little showing in the scientific community. The study he performed was also education-focused, singling out 300 middle school and high school students that filled out a survey, took a small media course, and

took another survey and participated in interviews. Particularly, he found that even “astute” students that understood the fundamentals of media still could not identify elements that journalists and the news rely on when designing stories. He also felt that students began to see journalists as humans affected by their biases and biases of the industry, even if it was short-term knowledge. The study was by no means exhaustive, but Hoffman felt that there was evidence that media literacy education is effective (Hoffman, 1999).

Several scientists have also remarked on the progression of media literacy as a science, despite its relative obscurity. This article probably goes the deepest into the scientific element of media literacy, and compares/contrasts traditional media literacy and a New Media Literacy (NML) that is starting to become more prevalent. They note that media literacy education nowadays has certain qualities: Students are taught that media literacy usually is updated as new media are created, causing discord in society. Media education is also somewhat protectionist, since public information is often a democratic tool to make societal progress. NML is a phenomenon in that it asks people to not simply consume media as it is, but also to critique it and utilize it as a part of culture. This is a more formal recognition of how people are willing to accept media information as fact, and how NML is meant to change the education behind media literacy (Lin et al, 2013).

A common theme among these studies and articles is that media is not always treated as a human creation. People take information for granted and most do not know how to make value judgments on the information they take in. This is the issue that media literacy addresses: teaching consumers how to compare and contrast experiences they read about with experiences they know. As Gregg Hoffman stated, there are few outlets for this kind of education outside of journalism. Creating these outlets through community groups or organizations will provide a new perspective to people with divided views.

Interviews with Experts

Professor Lee Banville teaches a class at UM about social media and media literacy. In an interview, he informed our group that media literacy is not something many university students are well-versed in and that it’s a worthy topic, as long as we specify what we mean by media literacy. It’s a broad issue, and one that is aggravated by the diverse use and implementation of news on social media platforms. Improperly consumed and disseminated information allows for prejudice between users. Banville said that users should understand the goals of media platforms and the way information is provided to users in order to attain something like media literacy. Banville added that part of media literacy is understanding the way audiences react and how oneself interacts with content and the consequences of those interactions. In short, he believes that critical democracy doesn’t come from the social media platforms themselves but by the people who use it and their intentions. These insights will help us create our information package that will educate our community groups by teaching them how, they as individuals, and how audiences they interact with are receiving information online and responding to it. This will help

us address prejudice within our community groups and how we will begin to help them develop and distribute media literacy.

The following is a summation of interviews with three marketing and social media professionals: Professor Mario Schulzke, digital marketing expert and former Chief Marketing Officer at UM; Professor Justin Angle, a UM marketing professor who specializes in consumption behavior (i.e. stereotypes and implicit bias in marketing); and Abigail Belcher, a public relations professional with specific expertise in marketing in politics. All three argued that social media serves as a contributing factor to political polarization wherein polarization is a direct outcome from the social media business model. Facebook and Twitter have been identified by all three interviewees as primary social media platforms that present or deal with user (and algorithmic) bias. Bots are already being used to censor content, they wouldn't recommend using them to engage with or moderate discussion. A younger audience would be better and would influence the following generations. Reddit and TikTok have been identified as potential platforms that would be effective for a social media campaign seeing as they're less saturated by advertisement and their users are younger. Marketing works on all ages, it just depends on the user profile we're trying to reach. Social media literacy education is not up to par. However, simply integrating it into the classroom as a lesson might not be that effective. True education lies at home with their parents. The best way to teach students about social media literacy is to give them a basic ethical framework for understanding everything it involves--including how algorithms work and how advertising is done. It would also be useful to frame it in a way that solves their problem. If we were to run a campaign, only put effort into those "leaning in", not those who have already made their mind up. Algorithms definitely contribute to curated feeds and are often coded with pre-existing prejudice/bias due to it originating from humans. They're essentially the operationalization of existing biases. It would be next to impossible to use an algorithm seeing as social media platforms themselves have little control over it. The best thing to do in this instance would be to get rid of algorithms--which would be unlikely to happen. TikTok might be unique in this instance, however, because their algorithm is based on the users' information, not that of their friends. Changing people's opinions can best be done through peer influence. In terms of quality marketing strategies, door knocking and email marketing are the most impactful. The social media platforms (like Facebook and Google) that are the most used for marketing, a.k.a. the most money is spent there, are over-saturated--you will reach the most people on those platforms, however, the quality of that marketing will be less. Their advice seems to be to take the smallest viable audience you want to influence and then do things that don't scale, rather than to try and go after the masses. These interviews gave us some necessary insight into how we should construct our social media toolkits and provided us with a key element that is crucial to any social media literacy education: the business of social media.

Kate Szczudlo is a high school teacher of 12 years based in Burbank, Illinois. She teaches mainly sophomores and seniors in the subjects English/Language Arts, Oral Communication, Public Speaking, and Drama. She says that Tik Tok seems like a great focus, though children also use

Snapchat and Youtube a lot. Children want an outlet to express their views and thoughts, children are more engaged in social issues now that she has noticed before. Personally, she made a teacher instagram account and works on implementing more diverse voices in the classroom, through literature and lessons. Most of all though, she wants all children of all backgrounds to feel they are welcomed. They did a lesson where they analyzed Trump's tweets and found that they did not properly analyze his use of logos. My favorite quote is, “ we don’t want to alienate them [students] by suggesting their political affiliation is wrong. Those students need to feel safe in my classroom, too.” She suggests the use of Flipgrid as well. And says a teaching method that works well for her is setting up for failure first and then talking about it. Szczudlo’s discourse is useful to us as we begin to navigate the implementation of our project. She gives great insight on how to go about teaching. Even though we will not be teaching in a school setting, this information is relevant to how to communicate with and engage a group. We will also be supplying tools for people to teach in a classroom setting, so we will use the methods spoken about here to craft a starter package for that scenario.

Joseph Illichman is a high school teacher of 8 years based in Burbank, Illinois. He teaches freshmen through seniors in the subjects Honors Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II Essentials, Statistics, Advanced Math Concepts, and AP Statistics. He ponders the idea of targeting the students and teachers or targeting parents. He says middle school children have views mostly influenced by parents and by graduation of highschool they are forming more diverse views. He mentions that older teachers may need help finding tools and implementing tools based around social media literacy as they may be disconnected. As a math/stats teacher he still implements social media and politics into the classroom by analyzing political stats and exploring political stances such as taxes. This gets students opening up and asking questions based in politics and social media in a math setting. He says that students want to feel connected and like what they are learning will personally benefit them. When trying to reach children he says we should make it feel personal, like we are talking directly to them individually. He asks us, how do we create something that speaks to the youth in a way that they relate to, get a personal attachment to, and see the potential issues while still holding their interest? He also teaches by setting them up to fail at first. At the end he questions the target audience and asks us if it would be better to target the parents in media literacy and not students to target more of the current issue instead of the future of the issue. Illichamn was an advocate for an older audience, which we ended up deciding to pursue by targeting college-aged students. He also raised us thought-provoking questions about how to teach media literacy in a way that people find personal and can get attached to. Questions like these pushed the group along in creating the MMM initiative and is a big reason why we chose to pursue a two-pronged approach with multiple ways to get involved.

Diane Latessa is currently working with high school seniors, but in the past has done Work-Based Learning, English, Science, and consumer Education. She teaches students with learning and social/emotional disabilities. She has been teaching for 25 years in Illinois and now Georgia.

She agreed that Tik Tok could be a useful platform for us, she also suggested Instagram. She thought that middle school to high school would be a good range to target, but she also said that younger was better. She thought younger middle school children would be more impressionable because of a lack of knowledge and experience. Diane mentions that in her experience, group-based learning and interactive or hands-on learning were the best techniques to use. Though she sees the usefulness of a campaign or reaching children through social media, she thought the best way to go about our project was to target classrooms and curriculum. One thing she said that stuck out to me was that she suggested that we start a club for high schoolers so they could be their schools “myth-busters” in that they would learn how to scope out fake news, misinformation, and bias and teach their peers or middle-schools. Though we steered far away from middle school to high school aged students, we still used Latessa’s knowledge to realize the importance of somehow including children in that age range. Her interview tells us how to approach teaching middle school and high school students information on media literacy. We used and will continue to use her knowledge to create an implementation plan, specifically the how to teach others part of the module.

Professor Pinrada Metharom, a Thai marketing professional along with being a professor of marketing responses to the following inquiries to further understand more about our target age group and methods. When asked about personal experience and research, whether she’d found social media to be a factor of political polarization and if it depends on the country in question, the answer was as follows, “Yes. Both sides can use social media to promote their own side and create hate for the other side. Yes, it depends on each country. Depends on the transparency of government. In my country, the military uses IO (fake accounts) on Twitter to promote government and create hate on the other side.” Professor Metharom further cemented our thought on influencer being a good avenue to follow for reach when she said that by using influencers we would be most effective in changing people’s opinions. As she put it, “Teenagers and young people like to search for reviews from bloggers and YouTubers before they buy the products.” To the question “From the marketing work you’ve done for companies, what social media platforms have the most political biases?” Metharom answered that it was Twitter in the case of Thailand. Metharom found that Facebook was the best platform for marketing success because, “it can be used to advertise, promote, get feedback from customers. It can create games and special events. Many people get involved with this platform. It can reach the right target markets.” To my follow up question of what the most effective age group from middle school to college to market towards on social media, Metharom answered high school and college and that Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, and Instagram are the best platforms. As well as once again saying using influencers and viral marketing techniques to reach those age groups.

Dr. Haber specializes in Latin American politics, but also on political polarization and its effects. In the course of his work, Haber has noted the detrimental effect of social media on political discourse. To him, social media has affected the concentration of issues in American media, as

news articles are being given up in favor of soundbites and easy to read statements on people's Facebook feeds. Dr. Haber does believe that media personalities and leaders can affect the use of social media in a positive direction if they change their behavior. However, he finds it difficult to imagine that reality, as social media sites are designed inherently to distract. Overall, Dr. Haber thinks social media is corrosive to public discourse, though it is not entirely to blame. Society has a lot of other factors that pressure the kind of polarization seen in America today. Social media is an amplifier of modern issues. And while it is not productively designed, it only contributes to the issue as much as people care about said issue. In the way of media literacy, Dr. Haber is a proponent, and wishes this variety of education was more available either to public interest or when integrated into a classroom. The benefits not only include improving your relationship with media (what Dr. Haber calls information nutrition), but also allow people with newfound critical thinking skills to translate those skills to other people. This is the kind of discourse that can help reduce the polarization of issues, and address the more personal problems that fuel racial movements.

Perhaps the most notable term that Dr. Haber used was "information nutrition." Social media creates a poor media diet for its users and creates a hostile media environment in countries it is prevalent in. Social media can negatively impact the conversation for any political issue, and this effect includes racial prejudice. While a culture shift can help change the use of social media, it's difficult for companies like Facebook and Twitter to run against their business models. In addition, the nature of social media may never single out its own weaknesses through the engagement of its users. The best way to do this would be a movement, or a kind of community organization that can educate the public on the usefulness of media literacy.

Surveys

College Student Survey on Social Media and Media Literacy

Our survey of 61 UM students across majors and age ranges conducted this semester reinforces the idea that news consumers especially appreciate short stories that confirm their existing biases. In fact, 64% of respondents claimed that articles and posts were their main source of news, and the most popular news platform was Twitter. This indicates that for our purposes, using a platform that caters to storytelling would be beneficial to reaching our target audience.

The UM student survey also found that the common biases are fairly accurate, as 63.9% of students tended to avoid views they disagreed with. Additionally, almost half of all polled students said they would unfollow an account for posting a political view they disagreed with. In terms of what topics caught students' attention the most, political and social unrest was the top answer, getting 85.2% of votes. This information is relevant to our project due to the current causes of political and social unrest around the world. These are generally ethnic and racial divides associated with inequality.

Our findings, that college students are most interested in these issues, makes them the perfect group to initiate change from within. According to the survey, 83.6% of students would like or comment on a post raising awareness about prejudices against ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, 37.7% would donate, and a surprising 16.4% would volunteer with an organization raising awareness about such a topic. In contrast, the Pew Research Center estimates that about 9.2% of Americans of all ages volunteer for political organizations, just over half the amount of college students. As such, we have chosen the college age group to start our organization for change and develop an information package for teaching media literacy.

High School Student Survey on Social Media and Media Literacy

This survey gathering information about social media literacy among high schoolers was conducted when it was still undecided what age group we would focus on for our project. Despite choosing college students as our focal point, the information gathered from the high schoolers is still relevant seeing as many of them are only a few years away from college themselves.

Data was collected from a total of 157 students across the northwest. Most of the respondents were 16 to 17 years old and averaged about 5 social media accounts per student. Over 70% of students said they rely on social media and websites to stay updated on current events and news. In a question asking their top three learning formats, data shows that 70% of students prefer hands-on learning, 44.6% would like to watch a demonstration video on how to do something, and 41.4% would prefer watching an informational video. This data shows that people prefer interactive activities and are more willing to pay attention to videos than intensive reading or research. These ways of learning in the actual learning environment—class time, videos, even homework—have worked for a majority of students despite the complications that come with online classes.

The main part of this project is media literacy and so we asked these students if they knew what media literacy was. Almost 83% answered no. Of those that answered yes, we asked them to then define it and only about half answered somewhat correctly. Some said they learned from school, others said they learned it from family or from the internet. Overall, this shows that this is clearly a topic people are lacking knowledge in, which makes it all the more important we address it. Over half of students also answered, when asked, that they would be interested in taking a class on media literacy and/or the algorithms and coding behind curated feeds. This proves that it's not disinterest on the students' part that is the issue; the problem is media literacy is not in teachers' curriculums, let alone is its very own class.

When it comes to political bias, people acknowledge that it exists but about half believe it doesn't affect them. Over 90% of people also believe that political biases on social media contribute to political polarization that generates prejudice toward ethnic minorities. 77.7% of

students notice prejudice toward ethnic minorities on social media and 67.9% of those people take note of who is creating those posts. While 56.7% of students ignore it some of the time, they also take the time to call the person out (21%) or report them to the site (47.8%) or even post counter messages to support the people being attacked (29.9%). A large chunk of students also do their research, fact checking if what's being said is even true (53.5%) and look into ethnic groups to learn them and their situations (38.2%).

Overall this survey shows that media literacy is severely lacking among young people, and it's an issue that not only needs to be addressed but that people are willing to address and learn about. Despite not knowing what media literacy is, people are still noticing the prejudice and negativity directed at ethnic minorities, especially the role politics plays in it. Creating a space and website for them to explore to better understand what it is they see across their social media accounts will arm them with the knowledge to better avoid and prevent the spread of misinformation.

Inspiration Summary

Globally, social media literacy education is extremely lacking. Although social media is not the direct cause of prejudice and bias, it unquestionably exacerbates them. The primary purpose of social media, other than as a communication platform, is to make money. It's a business that uses its algorithms and advertising technology to curate information for individual users. Although everyone could benefit from social media education, teaching younger adults will be far more impactful.

III. Ideation: Proposed Project

The MMM experience is focused on educating and mobilizing high school and college aged people through media literacy education in a dynamic, two-pronged approach: an informational package and an interactive community experience. Our project is centered around public engagement through advocates, or what we call "superspreaders" to spread our message and provide our team with useful feedback. These influencers are primarily college-aged adults, and that is also the demographic we focus on for our engagement. Our purpose in focusing on this age range is due to a number of factors: 1) they are highly active on social media, 2) this is the age in which people tend to start developing their worldview which impacts the way they use and consume media, and 3) they have a much broader range of impact--meaning they can influence those younger than them through the trickling down of information *and* they can have educational conversations with those who are older than them in a way that's constructive and intellectual. The two-pronged approach originated from our need to provide information in a way that's easily consumable and a platform to educate viewers. We realized through our research that access to decent social media literacy education (both in traditional education and

nontraditional education) is virtually non-existent; hence the need for a comprehensive, easily digestible informational package. Our interviews with experts show us that the best way to get students engaged in learning is through interactive tasks and team work. Therefore, we decided to supplement these educational tools with an interactive experience that consists of a community group and the engagement of influencers to spread the principles of our initiative. Our project contributes to solving the spread of misinformation, political polarization, and prejudice against ethnic minorities on social media precisely because it attacks the primary problems at the core of these issues: a lack of knowledge and understanding about 1) the way in which social media is operated and 2) the information that's being expressed to individual users on a daily basis.

IV. Implementation

The MMM Website

Our website contains the lion's share of information, lessons, and practical advice on media literacy and dealing with racial prejudice online. Each page is designed to follow a set of categories, first focusing on the viewer, then on the industry of social media, and then an opportunity for the viewer to act. There are also secondary resources on the website to help people get started on their reflective media journey.

Website Pages

1. Your Media Diet:

- a. The Subjectivity of Media - To introduce the viewer, it is important to ground them in real-world examples of harm and how media affects reality. This introductory page provides information on the condition of the Uigher's in China, and provides an easy transition to the next page.
- b. Are You Biased? - Doubt is a healthy part of reading news and online information. We do not want readers to doubt themselves, necessarily, but we do want them to think procedurally about what they read. This page gives examples of certain kinds of bias that are common, and indicates to the viewer how capable they are of not opening their mind. They are also given a set of questions to ask themselves when responding to surprising or controversial news.
- c. Empathy Skills - This page outlines strategies to help viewers become more empathetic to devastating stories and other parts of the news. Our research shows that people are quick to make assumptions when reading a story, and this page encourages a tone of care and openness
- d. Mediaholics Anonymous - Some viewers may not recognize that they have a media addiction, as it is an element of media that most people ignore. Media addiction can accelerate the problems we are identifying, so this page provides tools to help people recognize their condition and get help.

2. Reading Better:

- a. The Business of Social Media - Now that the viewer is aware of their own possible biases, the next page can deconstruct the business model that draws people into more radical ideas.
 - b. Echo Chambers 101 - A whole segment is dedicated to this topic as it is the primary way that social media prevents individuals from challenging their perspectives.
 - c. Media Biases & Algorithmic Biases - The media is made by people, who are both interested in success and recognition. The industry of social media has its own biases that are listed here.
3. Share your voice; Case studies of racial prejudice and its relationship to social media are few and far in between. In order to relate our content to real life, we have collected anecdotal stories that provide a grounded perspective of what racism online looks like. There is an entry segment in this website for viewers to provide their own stories.
4. Resources:
- a. Fact-Checking - A set of websites to help clarify or confirm information you see online, as well as other resources.
 - b. Applying Your Knowledge - A call to action. Getting active on media is a good way to help become an informed reader. This page holds advice on how to best accomplish that goal.
 - c. Sources - An online bibliography of information and links provided on the website
 - d. Let's Chat: The MMM Seminar - A recording of our most important programming of the semester.

The goal of the website is to change behavior without being too confrontational. Viewers are less likely to change their mindset on media unless it is considered suitable from their perspective. To that end, much of the website language is centered on the reader, encouraging them to check what they read.

The MMM Experience

The second prong of our two-pronged approach is an interactive experience that consists of two parts: the targeted application of our package through the use of influencers or “superspreaders” and a community group.

Our team identified a number of different community leaders, or what we like to call “superspreaders,” who share the same passion for social media literacy and utilized their respective networks to put our MMM package to the test. Our partners are students and club members, teachers, and marketing professionals who took the tools and resources we’ve outlined in our package to teach and mobilize their own communities. We ensured the participation of superspreaders through the use of incentives; these incentives included gift cards and the

opportunity to boost their public perception amongst community members. Our superspreaders are based across the globe, residing in countries such as New Zealand, Thailand, France, Japan, Finland, Germany, Canada, India, Austria, Mexico, South Korea, Scotland, Ireland, and Norway. Many of our superspreaders are based in the U.S. in states such as Montana, Washington D.C., Idaho, Colorado, Missouri, Texas, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida, and Iowa.

We also organized an online outreach event to scale up our project and further support our superspreaders. When marketing for this online event, we reached out through a range of different avenues, including campaigning on the University of Montana campus by using social media posts, email lists, and community boards to spread the word about our initiative and the upcoming community discussion. In doing that, the majority of those attending were students--our target demographic. This community discussion had the opportunity to host two guest speakers. To start off, we had Kimberly Martin, the principal of the most diverse high school in the Washington DC area and a BIPOC herself. She lead us through discussions on personal experiences of discrimination and hateful rhetoric over social media. Following her, Lee Banville, a renowned journalist and professor at the University of Montana, explained the technical social mechanisms at work in the algorithms of social media software and the importance of media literacy. The community discussion allowed our superspreaders and all of those attending the opportunity to get involved in the conversation on being mindful with their social media consumption. Our goal for the seminar was to motivate and guide new and old community leaders and influencers to educate their communities on thinking critically about online information, considering who is behind it and why it was posted. Our overarching objective for our community discussion was to inspire our attendees to take action in addressing prejudice against ethnic minorities by using our website as an interactive tool. We were also able to partner with teachers who utilized our website in this way: as an interactive tool in their classrooms. This allowed us to reach our younger high school audience. The teachers who partnered with us used our website to guide activities and discussions centered around mindful media, the perception of ethnic minorities online, and the political polarization. The students also participated in our pre and post surveys which helped us analyze the educational outcomes of our website.

By selecting superspreaders who were active on social media and aware of the issues we were working to address, we were able to grow our reach. After the community discussion, the website experienced a jump of 75 new site visits. The seminar itself was attended by 35 people and, after we uploaded it to YouTube, gained an additional 37 views. Our superspreaders were and still are hard at work sharing and promoting our website.

Longevity

In order to continue making a difference, long after we've graduated, the MMM initiative was built around community involvement. This project is much bigger than the eight of us. Having teachers use this tool in their classroom for our research has had the double benefit of educating those students on the issue. As our initiative grows we will be able to reach more people and use the interconnectivity of the media to our advantage. We have met with an

incoming GLI capstone team with the potential of them using the MMM initiative as a key part of their project, with the intention of continuing to develop and support it. Our website will also be used in COMX 204, International and Development Communication, a gen-ed course taught through the Communication Department at the University of Montana that promises to continue to reach students year after year.

Member Contribution:

- Noelle Annonen - Annonen's academic focus of journalism and real-world experience in content design and creation gives her a unique perspective on the role of both news and social media in every-day life. Her main contributions were assisting with the design of the package content and helping conduct the necessary research and interviews to bolster the success of the initiative. She crafted the "Share Your Voice" section of the website and organized guest speaker Lee Banville's presence at our community discussion.
- Brianna Bal - With a background in Wildlife Biology and other group-centered activities, Bal has worked extensively in teams and in collaboration with people of differing backgrounds. Her main contributions were making sure everyone's voices were heard and bringing in diverse perspectives to the MMM initiative. She also managed the "Empathy and Listening Skills" page of the website and organized the purchasing of gifts for our guest speakers.
- Jaime Breisch - Majoring in Parks, Tourism, and Recreation Management, Breisch has a background in making sure information is easy for users to understand and access. She contributed to website content and incorporated user feedback into the final product. Breisch also helped with advertising and gathering information for the project's seminar as well as coordinating with the guest speakers to make sure they had access to the zoom link and answering their questions regarding the planning of the seminar.
- Rachel Brosten - Majoring in Anthropology, Brosten's main contributions were focusing on social and group based relations as well as bringing knowledge of human psyche as it relates to technological influences.
- Erika Byrne - Due to her background in public relations, including marketing and social media work, Byrne's primary contribution was the development of the website and the marketing for the MMM seminar. Her advertising efforts included creating the marketing materials and reaching out to 20 plus advisors on campus to distribute the materials.
- Amanda Cunningham - Majoring in Political Science, Cunningham's major website contribution was helping users identify the types of biases of content contributors and consumers. Additionally, she created surveys to measure the effect of the website and introduced the website during the seminar.
- McKenna Jones - A background in business, finance, and economics means McKenna contributed to aspects such as financing, organization structure, and website formation. She also used her broad international connection to help promote the module globally.

- Christian Pfeifer - Pfeifer's contribution worked with the political sensitivity and overall tone of MMM's material. The goals of media literacy must avoid being caught in the same caustic public discourse it's trying to solve, and he helped frame this dynamic.

V. Evaluation

This project affected positive change through education and awareness, so our evaluation is in terms of its outcomes and impacts. We evaluated the success of the project in three main areas: participation, pervasiveness, and effect on existing biases and prejudices. In measuring the outcome of our online and in-person components in these areas, we will understand our project's global public benefit.

Website Outcomes:

The most effective way to track MMM participation and reach was through the built-in analytics of our website, provided by Squarespace. Since its activation in January, the website has garnered an impressive amount of activity. As of April 4th, the website's received 398 unique visitors, 723 total site visits (which means we had over 300 re-visits), and 2,334 pages views. These numbers go up every day.

The website has substantial global reach with users located in the US, Finland, Canada, India, Norway, China, Thailand, France, Ireland, Latvia, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. We wanted to note that the presence of users in mainland China is particularly significant considering the current persecution of Uigher Muslims by their government and the state controlled media. Because of that, we know that our project has the potential to make a significant impact in areas of the world that seem untouchable. The website's impact in the US is also impressive with active users in 25 of the 50 states.

These analytics show that our educational effort has spread far and wide globally.

Website Pre-assessment:

When having students learn about The MMM Initiative through our website, we asked teachers to utilize our pre- and post-surveys as a means of tracking changes in attitudes. Students were asked to take a brief survey before viewing the website, explore and learn about The MMM Initiative for about an hour, and take a similar survey with many of the same questions afterwards.

On our Pre-MMM website survey, we asked a total of eight questions in order to gage participants' awareness of bias online and how it impacts ethnic minorities. Those questions were:

1. Do you follow people who have different opinions from you?
2. How confident are you in your ability to identify misinformation on social media? (1-5 Scale)
3. Do you know how to fact check information you see on social media?
4. Do you think critically about the information you see on social media? Why?
5. Do you question advertisements targeted towards you based on your internet history?
6. How often do you question the bias of the media you consume?
7. What are the main sources of influence on your attitude towards ethnic minorities?
8. Do you think social media content about ethnic minorities is generally supportive, discriminatory, or neutral?

The first three questions aimed to assess how aware people are of different narratives and how accurate these narratives are. Out of 40 participants, 65% said they follow different opinions and 49% said they feel at least somewhat confident in their ability to detect misinformation online. However, only 30% were certain they knew how to fact check information, revealing that the participants were not generally aware of the tools to help them identify misinformation.

The next three questions attempted to gauge how much people think about media biases and how they affect users. A majority of participants said they do not think critically about the information they see on social media. Similarly, over half of participants said they did not or were unsure if they questioned the ads they see online. When examining how often participants question the bias of media they consume, 93% said “Every once in a while” or more.

The last two questions aimed to identify what impact media has on participants’ views about ethnic minorities, and what they think the media says about these groups. Not surprisingly, the most prevalent source of influence was social media, with 68% of participants identifying it as a factor. Further, almost half also recognized other forms of media as factors in their attitude towards minorities. Family was the second strongest influencer, with 65% also selecting this category. Finally, 90% of participants either did not believe social media takes a stance on ethnic minorities or did not pay attention themselves. However, those who did think social media takes a stance were twice as likely to say social media was discriminatory than supportive.

Website Post-assessment results:

The Post-MMM Survey recorded the change in responses from high school and college students. These responses displayed improved bias awareness, with the percent of participants believing in their ability to identify misinformation rising to 65%, about a 21% increase from the pre-survey. Similarly, the number of participants who felt confident in their ability to fact check information on social media doubled to 63%. When asked what part of the website was most helpful, useful, or interesting, a majority of participants responded with something about identifying different biases. This further reaffirmed our website’s ability to provide people with the tools and confidence to recognize biases on the internet.

Significantly, 82% of participants said they would think critically about social media after viewing the website, up from 44% in the pre-survey. This means that we have raised an awareness in our audience, enabling them to contemplate and ask questions about what they see on social media.

When re-examining social media's general stance on ethnic prejudice, the recognition that discrimination is prevalent increased to almost three times the original total, with 34% of those recognizing bias and identifying it as negative. This increased awareness of the negative light ethnic minorities are portrayed in online indicates a greater recognition of everyday prejudice.

Additionally, recognizing the ability of The MMM Initiative website to make an impact on more individuals, 59% of participants said they would consider sharing the website with others. Moreover, two-thirds of participants correctly identified tools to identify misinformation after viewing the website, and 86.7% showed a greater desire to consider how biases affect themselves. One participant wrote concerning why they will think more critically about what they see online, saying that, "I want to find out what the truth is, or else I will be unsatisfied."

These surveys helped measure an increase in media literacy and bias identification skills that will reverberate around the communities of each participant. By increasing the awareness of the biases and prejudices online, we have equipped those we reach with the critical thinking skills and tools to decrease misinformation online.

VI. Conclusion

We observed a global problem - media illiteracy stimulating political bias and generating prejudice against minorities. The recent hate crimes against Asians in the United States, Great Britain, Australia and beyond, and the hate crimes continuing to be committed against immigrants across Europe and the world, are more installments of exacerbated prejudice fueled by misinformation on social media spreading like wildfire. Our project from conceptualization to impact is built to directly combat the heart of these issues. Our inspiration phase compiled intensive research, expert quotes, and surveys of University of Montana students that reveal sources of misinformation: self-indulgent media diets and a lack of media literacy education, confirming our own anecdotal observations. Our ideation phase constructed a website, designed as a free, accessible, and interactive tool for social media users who have the essential characteristic of wanting to change themselves and the world for the better, accompanied by a community discussion, lead by experts, of prejudice observed and the construct of social media that caters to our chosen global problem. We implemented our tools, and with the help of our superspreaders, have been able to distribute access to our website, and our taped community discussion, to communities around the world. Our pre and post surveys of MMM Initiative viewers and participants have shown real results in those who have interacted with our content.

The MMM Initiative team applied our knowledge from a diverse set of backgrounds and studies to compile, create, and apply the Mindful Media Module to the world. Having

successfully done so, we are confident our project will continue on without us. Classrooms across the country have studied, discussed, and applied the tools provided on our website. The University of Montana has incorporated our project into its Communication department curriculum. Participants of our community discussion and our superspreaders continue to distribute our information and website. The third prong of our project has materialized in a community of superspreaders, students, and citizens of the world, now armed with the knowledge, empathy skills, and savoir-faire essential to the practice of media literacy. They are generating awareness of the issue of media illiteracy and the prejudice it aggravates, and are moving as bodies of change on our behalf. Based on the data analytics of our project, we know we have reached hundreds of people with the MMM initiative and we expect our capstone project to continue to reach several hundred-thousand people. We are proud of our work and expect to see the fruits of our labor for years to come as we progress with our careers.

We have not accomplished this incredible feat alone. Our professor, Phyllis Ngai, was an essential factor in our success. Without her guidance, constant support, and faith in our team, we would not have formed as cohesive a goal or made as powerful an impact. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank Professor Ngai. We owe her our success.

Although the MMM initiative performs exactly as intended with as great a success as we could have hoped for, the circulation of misinformation and prejudice on social media continues around the globe. The Mindful Media Module team, from Missoula Montana to New Zealand, from Japan to Mexico and everywhere in between, asks for you to join our initiative in pursuing media literacy, empathy, and advocacy to make the world a safer, more inclusive place for all.

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