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News Literacy Resources: An Online Hub of Informational Materials for Learning and Teaching News Literacy

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NEWS LITERACY RESOURCES: AN ONLINE HUB OF INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS FOR LEARNING
AND TEACHING NEWS LITERACY

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
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by

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Abstract

This thesis contains and organizes a variety of online educational resources including articles, books, games, organizations, podcasts, tools and videos related to promoting news literacy. The purpose of the website is to make this information more accessible and the topic of news literacy feel less daunting. The written component of this thesis describes the design process of the website — conceptualization, layout, wireframing — as well as the research process. A link to the final website is included.

Key Words: Web Design, News Literacy, Resource Page

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INTRODUCTION

The concern for misinformation in the media has existed for hundreds of years, since news could be put to print and disseminated. In response to Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, which sparked an information revolution, Mark Twain wrote "Gutenberg's achievement created a new and wonderful earth, but at the same time also a new hell...It found truth astir on earth and gave it wings but untruth also was abroad, and it was supplied with a double pair of wings." This suggested Twain believed misinformation had a much farther reach than true news, a phenomenon we can witness today.

A 2018 study by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that while true news tended to reach about 1,000 users, false news could reach 1,000 to 100,000 people. Often it's suggested this is due to the novelty of false news — "new" information that elicits an emotional response from the reader is a stronger motivator to hit "share." While the repercussions of some of these hoaxes may not be particularly consequential, there is a growing concern for the sheer amount of false or misleading information online disguised as news, especially when it comes to politics. This is no more clearly demonstrated than by the rise of the term "fake news."

The term was popularized and cemented in the modern lexicon in 2016. Previously describing the sensationalist reports of the 19th century phenomenon "Yellow Journalism," fake

news is now used to describe false or deceiving stories often intended to damage another's reputation. Though the term has become highly politicized and divisive, it prompted conversation about misinformation in the media and online. The idea of being media literate, capable of applying critical thinking to media to analyze and evaluate messages, becomes increasingly relevant as more people are getting their news from social media where anyone can post and there is little moderation.

One statistic I found interesting was that 26% of Americans are very confident in their ability to recognize fake news, according to a survey by Amy Watson. However, a 2021 study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found Americans are generally overconfident in their news judgment. What's for certain is that concern about misinformation is at an all-time high, with 48% of Americans even saying the government should step in and restrict false information, according to a 2021 Pew Research study.

Even if the government were to do so and even as social media companies begin implementing fact checking features, there is simply too much content online to moderate. That is why it's important to start teaching media literacy skills early on. Media Literacy Now, a nonprofit advocating for such education in public schools, found in a 2022 national survey that only 38% of respondents learned how to analyze media messaging in high school.

My first experience learning about news literacy in a classroom setting was when I took News Literacy: Trusting the News in a Hyper-Polarized Era during my 2022 spring semester. Learning about past cases where lack of verification caused serious harm was impactful, especially as a journalism major. I think courses similar to this are essential to navigating today's

media landscape. However, since these classes are not common, that responsibility for research ends up solely on the individual, which can be overwhelming. Knowing this, I wanted to create a resource that would serve as a centralized hub for information and tools related to understanding and practicing news literacy. This led to the development of News Literacy Resources (newsliteracyresources.com).

TARGET AUDIENCE / PURPOSE

For my website, I decided my target audience would be ‘Gen Z individuals who are aware of issues concerning misinformation online but don’t know where to start learning how to combat it’ after considering my own experience and research showing Gen Z, while more skeptical than previous generations, are just as susceptible to false news. I also thought this demographic would be more receptive to a resource like this and more likely to share it with others. This could also be expanded to include educators who may indirectly find this website looking for instructional materials. I found this group to be the primary target of many websites I visited while researching.

The purpose of the site would then be to serve as a comprehensive news literacy resource that is easy to navigate, conveys the importance of the topic and functions as a hub for a variety of content — web articles, journals, books, games, podcasts and videos, as well as related organizations.

With this in mind, I had two primary goals for News Literacy Resources:

1. Be an introduction to the concept of news literacy that informs readers of best practices and points them in the direction of relevant information regarding issues surrounding misinformation they may be concerned about.
2. Serve as a library of resources for educators.

RESEARCH

Before getting started, I spent time researching existing resources that might be similar to what I had in mind. I found that information about media literacy was typically either published in individual articles or consolidated within a specific subsection of a more general website. I couldn't find a website solely devoted to the topic.

From there I began compiling resources, starting with the ones I had learned about from my class, which included several web articles, tools and games. I then used backward reference searching from key articles to expand my list. I knew I wanted to include YouTube videos and podcasts as both are popular sources of information for Gen Z, more so than text-based resources, as they're more engaging and convenient. I also wanted to include national and international media literacy organizations that are providing educational resources and promoting media literacy education in classrooms.

I then looked into recent studies and statistics about misinformation and the need for media literacy education to try to illustrate the scope of the problem. I learned after talking with some of my peers that they wanted to know how to teach friends and family about

misinformation. So even though my target audience would have a baseline understanding of news literacy, including introductory information was also important.

BUILDING WEBSITE

After considering the hosting plans, custom domain cost, design flexibility and my experience with several website builders, I decided to use WordPress to host my site.

Fortunately, “News Literacy Resources” was available as a URL, a name that I decided was descriptive and to the point.

I then had to choose a website theme, of which WordPress has many. I knew beforehand that I wanted my final site design to resemble a newspaper website, like The New York Times or The Washington Post, so I was looking for a theme that would support that. In the end, I chose “Zoologist” by Automattic. Described as a “streamlined theme for modern bloggers,” the clear and legible sans-serif font, minimalist layout, black and white color scheme and generous white space immediately stood out to me.

Resource page

The next step was to consider how to organize my content. I had a wide variety of resources that I wanted to ensure were easily accessible depending on what the user was looking for, so I decided to sort them by type: Articles, Books, Games, Organizations, Podcasts, Tools, Videos. I centered the different categories in the navigation bar across the top of the page, similar to how news sections are indexed on a website. Clicking on a category would then lead to a new page where all of the resources of that type are listed in order from most recently

published to oldest. This page is organized in a three-column grid layout that features the title, author, vessel, and date published of each resource as well as an image, quote and “read more” call to action/hyperlink. I used the design tool Figma to lay out my ideas.

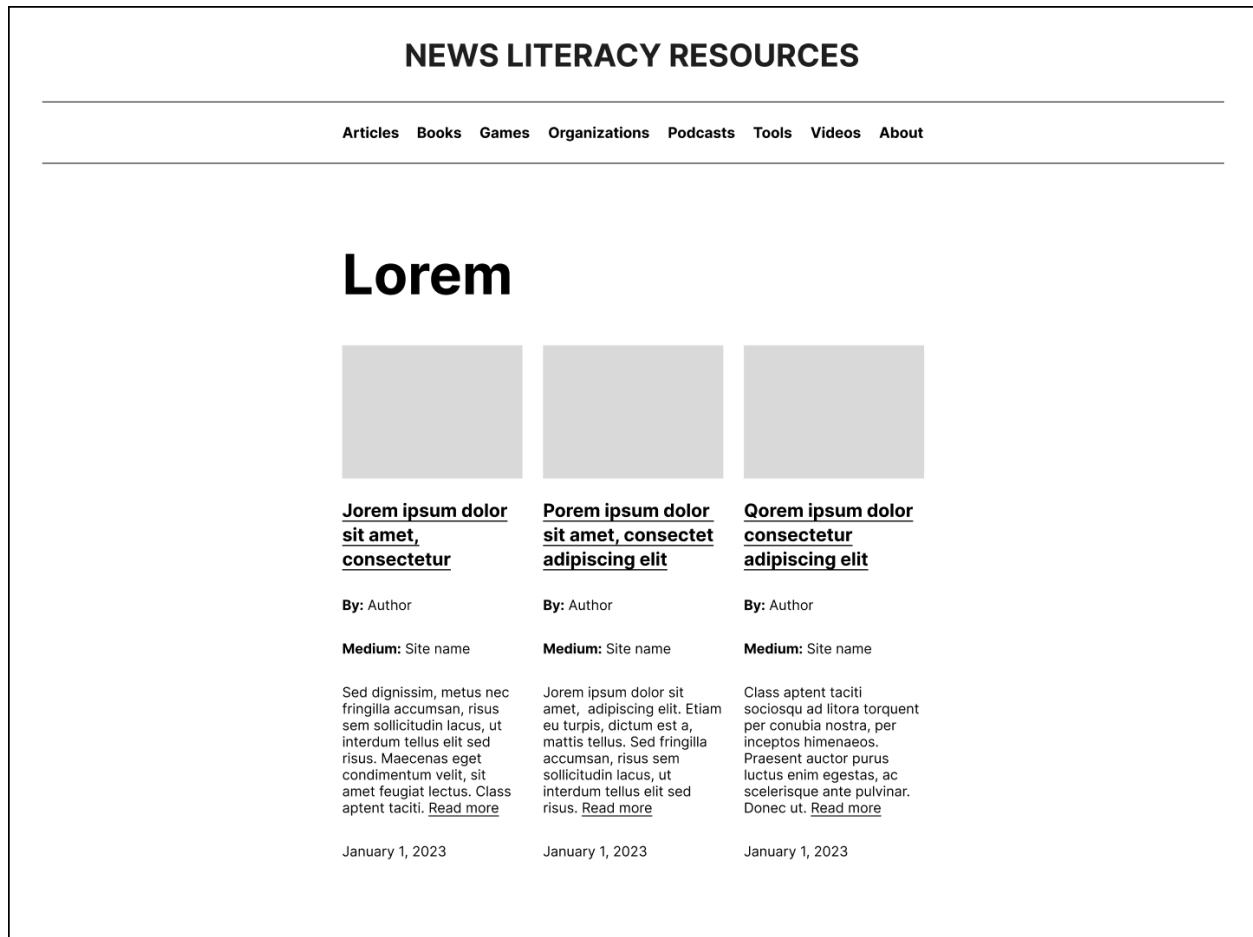


Fig. 1: Wireframe of resource page designed in Figma

Homepage

I spent a fair amount of time deciding how I wanted to utilize my homepage. News websites typically feature breaking news or top stories here. As mentioned before, I wanted to

include some introductory information on news literacy for those first learning about the topic. I figured it would be best placed here.

In order to break up the information and help guide readers through the content, I pulled key statistics that best illustrated the problem to create “headlines” then further elaborated on those points in smaller body text below, similar to an article preview. I then added black and white news-related imagery from Unsplash as “feature images” to enhance each section. All sources for the information were hyperlinked throughout the text, as is standard on news websites.

Near the end of the homepage is a call to action for the reader. Here, I created several “articles” covering strategies and concepts related to critical reading, including lateral reading, the IM/VAIN method and types of biases. I chose these topics because they covered the most common guidelines I found for evaluating news sources. On each of these pages, I also added related articles on the sidebar that go more in depth on the topic if the reader wants to learn more. A wireframe of this page layout is included on the next page. At the very end of the homepage is a “Contact Us” button inviting recommendations for new resources to be added as well as questions or concerns.

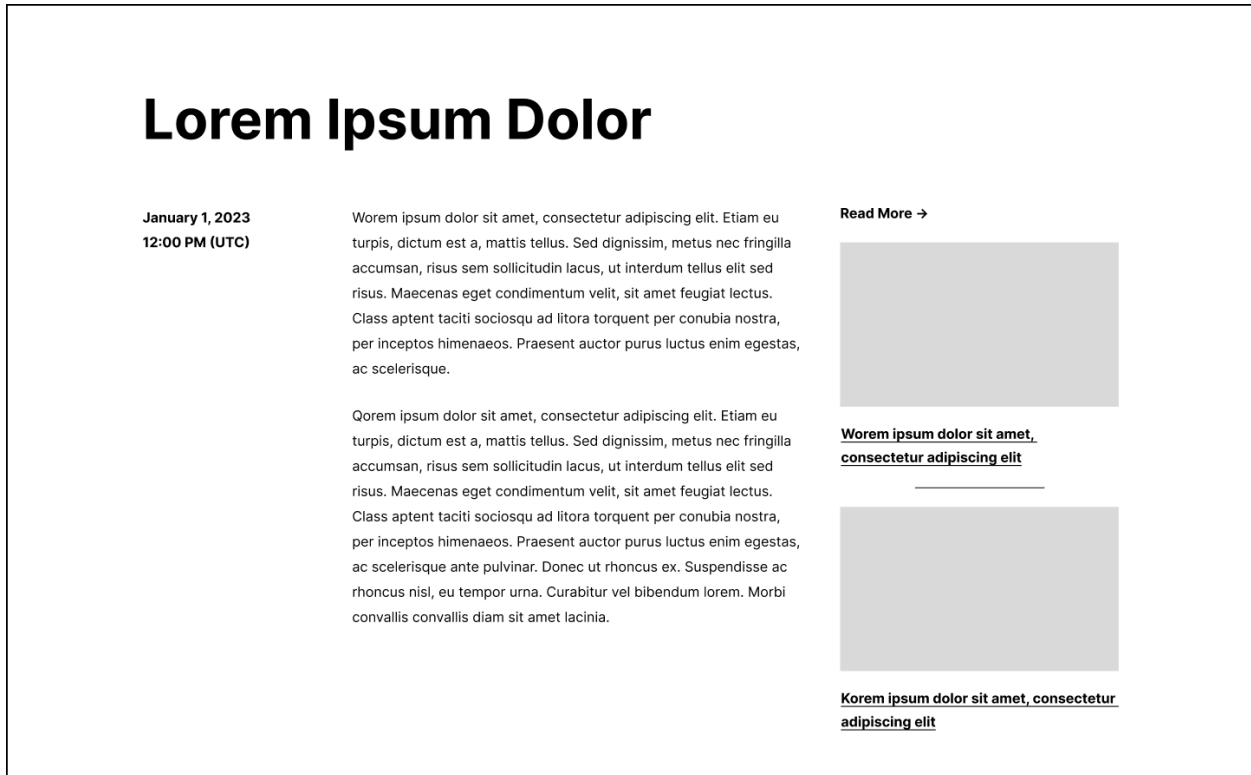


Fig. 2: Wireframe of page layout designed in Figma

MOVING FORWARD

When I first started this project, my only goal was to create an informational website dedicated to news literacy. Figuring out how to narrow my focus was a challenge I didn't expect. However, due the sheer volume of available information, the nuance of news stories and the ever-growing problem of misinformation, news literacy is a complex topic, made no less challenging by a rapidly changing media landscape and emerging technologies. Truthfully, what I've covered is only the tip of the iceberg. However, my hope is that by focusing on the fundamentals, this website won't be completely outdated by next week.

Still, moving forward I would like to figure out a way to discuss recent issues and challenges concerning media literacy, such as deep fakes/manipulated media, AI-generated content, algorithms and more. At one point while making this website, I wanted to research and write about how to identify AI-generated images, as I was seeing more being shared on social media. However, within just a few weeks, the technology used to create the images had already adapted so much that the tests people were using to differentiate between real and fake photos were no longer enough. And of course, with this new technology comes conversations about its ethicality, which I was also interested in exploring. Incorporating some of these topics into News Literacy Resources may look like adding new categories to the navigation menu, reconfiguring the homepage or creating a new website altogether.

As far as maintaining the current website, eventually I will need to update statistics on the homepage as new studies are conducted. I will also need to regularly monitor and fix broken links as well as continue to introduce new resources. The goal for now is to keep the content relevant and focused on news literacy tools and principles so as to not overload the website with information and overwhelm visitors.

CONCLUSION

Developing News Literacy Resources allowed me to hone the web design skills I've learned throughout my college experience as well as delve deeper into a subject I've long been interested in and that I think is important. Though I couldn't cover every aspect of news literacy that I would've wanted to, I'm very happy with the resource that I ended up with and look

forward to continuing to improve it. As mentioned earlier, news literacy is a dynamic subject matter that involves continuous learning and adaptation to new technologies, platforms and media. Needless to say, there are endless possibilities for the future scope and coverage of the website.

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