



# 6 FACT SHEET WHAT ARE INFORMATION MEDIA?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

### DISCIPLINES AND LEVELS CONCERNED

#### English (Secondary – Cycle 2)

##### Reading and assessing various texts

- Making a critical judgment: taking a critical distance from the text by relying on cultural and media references that confirm the credibility or acceptability of a source or information.

#### ERC (Secondary – Cycle 1)

##### Theme: Autonomy

- Conditions that favour autonomy (e.g. critical judgment, common sense, moral responsibility, ability to choose, authenticity, etc.)
- Name some references that support and enrich ethical thinking about autonomy.

##### Form of dialogue

- Conversation, discussion, debate.

### SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Producing an infographic: Canva;
- Discussing and debating through a podcast: Anchor;
- Analyzing social media discourse: YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.;
- Developing a creative situational exercise: Clips, Sketches.

### TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Develop and engage information literacy;
- Exploit the potential of digital technology for learning;
- Develop critical thinking regarding digital information;
- Produce content with digital technology;
- Innovate and show creativity with digital technology;
- Communicate by using digital technology.

### EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the learners will be able to identify and recognize the role and place of information media in society.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Produce an infographic that sheds light on the most important rules of journalism;
- Debate the place and role of social media in our society;
- Analyze the discourse of certain controversial media and think about their implications for the public;
- Create a situational exercise exposing behaviour that is contrary to the code of journalistic ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

The information media have special mechanisms that distinguish them from other players, like Facebook, YouTube, bloggers and influencers. The information disseminated by the information media has a direct impact on laws, human rights, politicians, the environment, etc. Unlike other platforms and players, they can be held liable if they circulate fake news.

At a time when the media landscape may seem saturated, it's especially important to understand how the information media work and know the strict rules they must observe.

## SIMPLE DEFINITION: ROLE OF THE INFORMATION MEDIA

Information media can take several forms: newspaper, magazine, television network, radio station and website.

The information media have a common (and very simple!) goal: inform people by publishing journalists' work. The news and facts they publish must be verified and accessible for their entire audience, without exception.

Several serious media have adopted strict rules that ensure their credibility and maintain their journalistic independence. This is one of the things that distinguishes them from other media.

NOTE: If it respects these criteria, your favourite podcast or the YouTube network you follow regularly could be part of the information media. It's up to you to judge after reading this fact sheet!

### Media that aren't information media

Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other social media platforms aren't information media, but they may disseminate their content. Serious media sometimes use these platforms to reach different audiences.

Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, rejected the idea that its platform was an information medium.

There are several news aggregation platforms: Google News, Apple News and Facebook, through its news feed. These platforms aren't information media either. They sort information and offer their subscribers a selection of articles.

## THE RULES TO FOLLOW

Codes of ethics exist in Canada, sets of strict ethical rules and values specific to journalism.

Here are some of these rules:

### Accuracy and rigour

Journalists make a commitment to be rigorous and work in the public interest. They must check the facts they report. They also undertake to follow up the stories they have covered and update them, if necessary.

### Independence

Journalistic independence is crucial. It gives journalists a right to scrutinize institutions and authorities instead of serving them. They may not work to defend the interests of an individual or a company and they have no right to advertise.

### Absence of conflicts of interest

Journalists lose their credibility if they have a personal or financial connection with the subjects they cover. They may not receive gifts in the course of their duties and they must avoid any personal comments on public issues.

### Privacy vs. public interest

Individuals have the right to privacy and journalists must respect this right. However, sometimes the public's right to know is in conflict with the right to privacy. It's then up to the journalist and his or her media employer to decide whether it's in the public interest to publish private information. The right to information will take precedence.

## Transparency

In the course of their work, journalists may not conceal their identity or their profession, unless they're sure they can't obtain information otherwise.

## Responsibility

If they make a mistake, journalists undertake to correct it quickly and publicly.

## Examples

- On Prince Edward Island, the trial of a well-known criminal finally ends. He is found guilty and sentenced to 45 years in prison. A few weeks later, a new development completely changes the story. The information media has the duty to report these changes.
- A journalist is sent to Disney World to cover the opening of a new amusement park. The company pays for his trip. The media must specify this detail to its readers.
- For 10 years, a journalist has donated part of his salary to an Alberta organization that gives toys to disadvantaged children. A scandal breaks out: the organization's president has embezzled funds. The journalist must abstain from covering the story. Journalists are advised not to be associated with charities in any way.

## THE DIFFERENT PLAYERS IN THE INFORMATION MEDIA – PRINT MEDIA

Quality information has a whole team behind it! In fact, journalism has several branches, several functions and several different jobs. A traditional newsroom contains several information professionals, who all have an important role in producing the news. Let's take a "guided tour" of the offices of a major daily newspaper, whether printed or online.

### Editor-in-Chief

The editor-in-chief is the journalists' big boss, the person who makes the decisions. He or she has to find and approve topics for original reporting and ensure the quality of the information published, while keeping an eye on the editorial line.

## Section Editors

In general, each section of a media outlet (news, international news, arts, food, recreation, etc.) is run by a section editor. This editor assigns, finds and approves original stories that will be covered by the section's journalists.

The editor-in-chief and the section editors meet regularly to discuss content. After this meeting, the section editors distribute the assignments to the journalists.

## Journalists

When they are given assignments, it's the journalists' turn to take over. They conduct interviews, cross-check their sources, do research, attend press conferences or go into the field, all depending on what they cover. After gathering and checking all the relevant information, they write their articles. The editor in chief or the section editor then reads the final article and may ask for adjustments.

## Photographers

If a news item must be illustrated, the photographer takes charge! A press photographer often receives several assignments a day. The photographer accompanies the journalists in the field and ensures their work reflects the news.

## Copy Editor

The written article and the photos then pass into the hands of a copy editor. This editor ensures that all the texts are laid out or posted online. The copy editor chooses the best photo, finds the typos and cuts the article to ensure it fits the page.

The copy editor is also responsible for writing news briefs. These mini-articles are often found between the big news stories. On newspapers, the copy editor often chooses the headlines.

## Proofreaders

Once the page is completed and all the articles are edited, the proofreader corrects all the spelling and grammatical errors. The proofreader may also propose clearer and more effective formulations.

## Desk Editor

The desk editor oversees the copy editors. When the layout is finished and final proofreading is completed, the desk editor reviews all the sections and gives final approval. As needed, the desk editor asks for last-minute changes and additions. Once the publication is revised, the desk editor sends it to the printer.

This hierarchy only applies for the biggest media, with newsrooms of dozens of journalists, and even hundreds (in the United States). Most radio and TV stations, weekly newspapers, magazines and online media don't have section editors or copy editors under the desk editor.

## HOW DO THE INFORMATION MEDIA MAKE MONEY?

Traditionally, since the 19th century, information media obtain their revenue from two sources: subscriptions and advertising. Even today, on the Web, on paper, in audio or on video, the information media reserve space for traditional advertising. But they may also publish advertorials (see *Fact Sheet 5*).

However, most media have lost a considerable amount of advertising revenue, due to the arrival of major platforms like Google and Facebook. That's why we've increasingly heard about donations and crowdfunding campaigns in the past few years. It's also why there's been discussion of the need for government subsidies to help the press fulfill its mission.

Attention: In Canada, media that receive money from the government must not answer to the government. They retain their journalistic independence.

# EXERCISES

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## EXERCISE 1

**On the Internet, find a code of journalistic ethics. To what federation, association or organization does it belong? What rule seems most important? Explain your choice.**

**Suggestion:** It could be interesting to create an infographic that relates the rules the students consider most important. For example, each student may choose a “top 3” of journalistic essentials and present them in an infographic produced on Canva or on any other visual creation platform.

## EXERCISE 2

**Why do you think Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms aren't considered information media?**

**Suggestion:** Here's an opportunity to produce a podcast with the students. In teams of two, the students will debate the place of social media in our society. One team member will have to play the role of a citizen who consumes all the news on social media and trusts everything he or she sees. The other team member will act as a journalist, bringing up arguments why social media platforms shouldn't be considered information media. Each person will express their point of view, making sure to listen to the other person and responding to their arguments in turn. Advance preparation is necessary. Then the roles can be reversed. The entire recording, editing and podcasting process can be performed with Anchor, a tool that makes it easier to produce podcasts.

## EXERCISE 3

**Situational exercise:** VitalNews, a controversial new media outlet followed by 5 million people on YouTube, claims to publish neutral news. It describes itself as information media. You learn that its team doesn't follow any ethical rules. You also know that one of their videos on a “corrupt” Manitoba scientist reports false and exaggerated facts. They have never published apologies or corrections. What do you think are the risks associated with such a practice?

**Suggestion:** After discussing risks associated with such a practice, it may be interesting to look for other controversial media and analyze their discourse. What similarities do they have in common? What strategies do they use to have so many followers? Why do some people abandon media that are considered credible and turn to this type of dubious information channel?

# EXERCISES

## EXERCISE 4

**Read the following three situations featuring a journalist. Which of these behaviours is contrary to the code of journalistic ethics?**

1. The journalist meets a close associate of the Minister of Education in secret. This person witnessed an injustice in the department and wants to blow the whistle. The journalist promises to keep his identity quiet.
2. You notice that a Parliamentary journalist's Instagram profile follows only one Canadian political party and regularly "likes" its posts.
3. The journalist uses a fake identity and a hidden camera to investigate a doctor who sells expired medications to his patients.

**Suggestion:** Ask the students to develop their own situational exercise and stage it creatively. For example, they can produce a short video on Clips, a slide show with Google Slides or a sketch note with Sketches to illustrate behaviour contrary to the code of journalistic ethics. The creations then can be presented to the entire class to highlight the faulty behaviours. The class can then discuss changes to respect the code of journalistic ethics.

## ANSWER KEY

1.

- [Ethics Guidelines of the Canadian Association of Journalists](http://www.ethics.gc.ca/en/condemned/condemned.asp)  
[www.bit.ly/2AkYrZy](http://www.bit.ly/2AkYrZy)
- [Professional Federation of Quebec Journalists: Quebec Journalists Code of Ethics](http://www.federationjournaliste.org/quebec/quebec-journalists-code-of-ethics)  
[www.bit.ly/32fUktA](http://www.bit.ly/32fUktA)
- [Quebec Press Council Guide of Journalistic Ethics](http://www.cpcj.org/quebec/quebec-journalists-code-of-ethics)  
[www.bit.ly/3j7jJvy](http://www.bit.ly/3j7jJvy)

2.

### Possible answers:

- These platforms may disseminate information, but they don't produce it. They relate information media content.
- They aren't governed by a code of ethics like the one journalists must follow.

3.

### Possible answers:

- If VitalNews doesn't follow any journalistic rules, it's impossible to determine whether its information is credible and neutral. It's difficult to trust this media outlet, which can publish whatever it wants without any consequences!
- The false information published by VitalNews will probably never be corrected. This risks damaging the Manitoba scientist's reputation.

4.

**B:** The journalist should follow all political parties... or none! In the social media era, "liking" a partisan post expresses a political opinion. This could put the journalist in a conflict of interest.