

Learning activity

Targeted news online

Learning outcomes

Must:

All students will understand that websites can choose what kinds of news and information we see online based on what we watch and read.

Should:

Most students should know how to recognise online targeting.

Could:

Some students can suggest reasons why websites target information at their users, and explain why it's important to read information from different sources.

Resource checklist

- ✓ Targeted news online slides
- ✓ Hook the reader game

Useful knowledge for supporting teacher/adult

- When we go online, we enter a world where computers and companies are tracking what we are watching and reading.
- Websites, including search engines and news providers, 'follow' their audience - which means they note how long users spend on their sites, which videos/pages people are looking at and what page/video/article they click on next.
- Companies can target that person with information they like and will therefore keep them on their website for longer.
- When we search online, we don't see everything on the internet and the information we do see isn't 'random'. We are shown things (including news stories) that websites have worked out we are interested in - we are in a filter bubble.
- Sometimes this means people only gain one viewpoint, read stories on similar topics or get similar information about a topic.

Outline

These activities are intended as a framework you can adapt to suit individual students' needs. They can be used as standalone activities or as part of a sequence of work on news literacy. These activities would work particularly well for tutor group time or in a PSHE lesson.

- **5-10 min starter activity** - Activity 1
- **20 min extend activity** - Activity 1 and 2
- **30 min enhance activity** - Activities 1, 2 and 3

Activity 1

Use **Targeted news online** slides

Slides 2-4: Share character profiles of Jake, Aneesha and Tyler. *If they were searching online/on social media, what sorts of news stories would pop up? Would they all see the same content? Why/why not?* Explain that when we search online, websites track what we are looking at and then show us things based on that to keep us on their website for longer.

Slides 5-11: Show news headlines (mostly fictional for the purpose of this activity) - can students work out which news stories would be shown to which character? You may prefer to print these for students to physically match them.

Develop this for more challenge:

Slides 12-13: *What other stories might Jake, Aneesha or Tyler be shown that are related to their interests?* Eg a Stormzy fan might be shown stories about other rappers/music; a TikTok fan might also be shown news stories about YouTube or other social media accounts. Students try creating a profile for themselves, including their interests and what they look at online, and suggest what news stories they would be shown.

Activity 2

Use **Targeted news online** slides and **Hook the reader** worksheet

Extend the learning:

Slide 14: In pairs, play **Hook the reader** game. Discuss how this shows how what we look at online and on social media is chosen based on what we have watched before. Is there a problem with only ever reading/seeing things from the same places and about the same things? Draw attention to this meaning we might not hear different points of view/opinions or hear about other important issues.

Slide 15: What happens when people get different information about the same news story or topic? How would this change their thoughts and feelings? Would this affect friendships? Emphasise the importance of listening to others and different viewpoints and researching before making a decision.

Activity 3

Enhance this learning further:

Slide 16: Ask students to think of two or three strategies to protect them against online targeting (eg by regularly looking at information from more than one source/making sure a 'safe search' or content filter is on/trying different searches or being more specific about what you enter). Connect this to other aspects of internet safety students may benefit from revisiting (eg being careful about sharing personal information online).

Plenary

Slide 17: *What have you learnt? How do companies target us online? Why do companies do this? What do people need to be aware of when searching online and reading news stories? Why is it important to read information from lots of different places/ sources?*