

The Concurrently Companion



Episode 54: Digital dementia and discerning sources

Topic introduction

Every now and then we take a single news article, usually from a website, and we print it out and make notes on the physical paper. We apply our SOAR method—S-O-A-R, survey, observe, analyze, respond—going step by step to evaluate it. Today’s article, entitled “A New Type of Dementia Plagues America,” comes from a website called ZeroHedge. It gives us dual opportunity to address a pertinent topic and to practice what it looks like to evaluate not just a news article, but a news source.

Key terms and ideas: *survey, observe, analyze, respond, Tyler Durden, dementia, news source, pre-frontal cortex (PFC), executive function, IQ, gray matter, white matter, hermeneutic of suspicion, hermeneutic of goodwill, Luddite*

Questions

What are your initial impressions of the article and source for today’s SOAR exercise?

What are good news literacy practices? How do we evaluate a news source?

What do you notice about the stated news source?

What do you notice about the stated author? Who is the real author/source? What do you notice about that source?

What do you notice about the title of the article? What words are used? What do they mean? What is digital dementia?

What are the connotations you have with the words used in the title?

What is the article’s main concern? How do you know?

What do you notice about ads?

What words jump out at you in the main text? How well does the article define words like “excessive”? What adjectives are used? What adverbs? How does that color or influence the way you receive the information in the article? What emotive words are used?

Evaluate the focus of the article. How well does it keep “the main thing the main thing”?

What is distinctive about the age of 25, developmentally speaking, according to the article? (Note: this is a topic worthy of deeper research.)

What conclusions are drawn by the article?

How many external links do you count in the article?

How many of them are substantive? How many of them are “new” data sources (rather than circling back to/multiplying from one central scholarly source)?

What has become attractive regarding a certain display of machismo in modern culture? What is concerning in this trend? What concerning personalities are the faces of this trend? What other popular media texts help us understand this trend?

What are some ways we can guard against either fully absorbing or fully dismissing sources according to their bias (presumed or otherwise)? To put it more concisely: How do we practice a healthy hermeneutic (or interpretive principle) as we read broadly?

What is this author trying to get me to think, feel, or do?

Scriptural anchors/provision

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit. . . . The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. — from 1 Corinthians 2:12-16

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