Title: Is it Really JUST Twitter!?

Course: Basic Communication Course / Introduction to Communication

Learning Objectives:
1. Consider the importance of recognizing unexpected vs. expected audiences in regards to our own messages and messages of the media.
2. Consider how multiple perspectives, explanations, and opinions of the same or similar issues expand our ability to think critically.
3. Evaluate our taken-for-granted assumptions of where we get our information each day by intentionally examining online source credibility.
4. Think about how different media perspectives affect your role as a citizen in a democratic and civically engaged society.
5. Filter through the media to develop coherent and knowledgeable opinions or arguments regarding modern day issues.

Rationale:

This assignment exists to help students experience the use of agenda-setting in social media. Using Twitter, students will be asked to compare and evaluate the credibility of various sources representing differing perspectives. In addition to this, this assignment will show students that the messages they send online often reach audiences far beyond their initial expectations. At the same time, it is important for them to realize just how those messages can be interpreted differently by various groups of people.

Littlejohn and Foss (2010) explained that agenda-setting occurs when the press selectively reports the news to the general public. With limitless stories for the media to cover, the theory suggests that there has to be some sort of natural selectivity in the media (especially when only using 140 characters); despite this, the purposeful selection of news, whether intentional or not, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. According to Shaw and McCombs (1977), "considerable evidence has accumulated that editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news" (p. 15). In other words, agenda-setting establishes the significant images and salient issues in the minds of the public. Littlejohn and Foss explained that the media has this ability because they, "as gatekeepers of information, make choices about what to report and how to report it. Therefore, what the public knows about the state of affairs at any given time is largely a product of media gatekeeping" (p. 282).

Twitter offers a timely, relevant media platform to demonstrate agenda-setting to social media entrenched students. Furthermore, Twitter (Parcha, 2014) has been used to increase community and interaction within the college classroom. As Tyma (2011) so notes, "with the desire for more and more campuses to develop their online or hybrid curricula, expanding our pedagogy to include real-time technology in the classroom not only makes sense but can also be done with little or no additional technological investment" (p. 1). Thus, Twitter represents the perfect platform for teaching agenda-setting and assessing online credibility and bias in the basic course classroom.

Description of the Activity:
As described below, this assignment is divided into three segments . . .

1. **Tweet Selection**
   Students are instructed to pick an issue they are passionate about or find interesting and research it using Twitter. Students must collect at least 10 tweets from 10 different sources that they feel are credible and illustrate different perspectives of the same issue. Students will copy their selected tweets and organize them into a document, as shown in the attached table. *During the assignment, encourage students to collect tweets that represent different information or perspectives regarding the topic.*

2. **Perspective Reflection**
   Student will write a 2 - 4 page double-spaced paper reflecting on the perspectives they encountered. Reflections should focus on answering the following questions:
   - What different perspectives did you encounter?
   - What characteristics of a tweet make it credible?
   - What role does bias play, if any, in the way various sources presented information?
   - How was your opinion influenced or informed by reading other people's tweets?

3. **Class Discussion**
   After the completion of the tweet selection and reflection paper, students will bring their completed assignments to class to serve as a resource for an in-class discussion; *encourage students to use their own examples to provide evidence in the discussion.* This conversation serves as a way for students to consider and discuss the deeper implications and impact of social media on current issues. The class discussion should focus on dialogue considering the following questions:
   - Are there any potential biases present within the sources? Why would they present the information a certain way?
   - In a society dependent on information, how do you decide what to believe? How does this relate to your position as a citizen in a democracy?
   - Out of all the sources, who do you think gave the most credible information? Why do you choose to believe that source?
   - ***Debriefing****: In the future, will what you learned from this activity change the way you approach using social media as a source of information?*

Assignment Assessment
   Upon implementing the assignment in class, we received positive reviews from students regarding their new understanding of how the same issues can be framed from multiple perspectives. In addition, students were genuinely excited about incorporating their social media interests into a classroom assignment. Rather than trying to explain a conceptual skill like evaluating ideas from another person's point of views, the students felt confident in their ability to find direct evidence of ways in which multiple ideas form and shape their own views. Future directions for the assignment should include a detailed rubric outlining specific instructor expectations for student work.

Example: Air Asia Flight QZ8501

Source	Tweet
Aljazeera English @AJEnglish	Bad weather has forced divers trying to identify sunken wreckage from the crashed **AirAsia** jet to abort the mission http://aje.io/qmqg
Wall Street Journal Asia @WSJAsia	BREAKING: **#AirAsia** didn't have permission to fly route on day of crash, Indonesia says http://on.wsj.com/1EXQnJe
The Straight Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP) @stompsingapore	**AirAsia** flight QZ8501: Ice was a likely reason for crash http://bit.ly/1zLx8dG
Mashable @mashable	34 bodies recovered, bad weather blocks divers from **AirAsia** crash site. http://on.mash.to/149vPN5
Astro AWANI @501Awani	Bandung-bound **AirAsia** flight stalled due to technical glitch - **AirAsia** Indonesia CEO http://ow.ly/GLkK9 **#QZ7633**
David Koenig @airlinewriter	**#AirAsia** passengers "spooked" - 60 refuse to reboard after plane returns to gate with electrical problem. http://bit.ly/17aYeUy **#QZ8501**
Sputnik @SputnikInt	Bad weather in **#AirAsia** **#QZ8501** flight crash zone threatens rescuers' lives http://bit.ly/17aTgHD
CBC News @CBCNews	Families of **#AirAsia** victims pray in **#Indonesia** as bad weather prevents divers from reaching wreckage on ocean floor: http://www.cbc.ca/1.2889221
Business Insider @businessinsider	The **AirAsia** plane crashed due to ice chunks in the engine, weather experts believe http://read.bi/14mno1B
The Japan Times @japantimes	**AirAsia** boss credited for deft response to tragedy http://jtim.es/GKGGo

References

Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2010). *Theories of human communication*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Parcha, J. M. (2014). Accommodating Twitter: Communication accommodation theory and classroom interactions. *Communication Teacher, 28,* 229-235. doi:10.1080/174046 22.2014.939671

Shaw, D. L., & McCombs, M. E. (1977). *The emergence of American political issues: The agenda-setting function of the press*. St. Paul, MN: West Group.

Tyma, A. (2011). Connecting what is out there!: Using Twitter in the large lecture, *Communication Teacher, 25,* 175-181. doi: 10.1080/17404622.2011.579911