

Lavin & *The Great Hack* Paper Prompt

Course: ENC1939: Unfollow—Culture and Identity on the internet
Instructor: Nico Cassanetti

Formatting Requirements: Double spaced, Garamond or TNR font, MLA formatted and minimum 4 full pages (not including the complete and correct Works Cited page that should be included with your paper).

Total Points Possible: 100

Rough Draft Due Date: TBA

Final Draft Due Date: TBA

Overview:

Throughout the semester, we have covered everything from Big Data, algorithms pushing antagonistic content, complicated disinformation campaigns and how the lines of free speech get blurry online. We talked about how the internet has only amplified the rate at which social norms change, about different online communities and social media platforms, and the various fringe and extremist groups wielding the power of internet anonymity to grow their base and spread racist ideologies and incite violence.

In *The Great Hack*, “QAnon, Blood Libel and the Satanic Panic”, Lesson 9 and Lesson 10, we took a closer look at how our online activity has been scraped, sold and manipulated for use in large-scale misinformation/disinformation campaigns that threaten the very fabric of our society.

For your third and final paper, you must **create and support an argument around what you believe is the biggest threat to our society when it comes to issues of misinformation/disinformation. These issues include: targeted marketing** (why is targeted advertising okay to do for selling products but not political candidates or policies?), **distrust in mainstream news media** (how do we resolve the issue of “truth?”), **glorifying social media influencers** (free speech should not equal free reach), **not teaching internet literacy in schools** (critical thinking, fact-checking, and other research techniques and the rise of “online schools” with no accreditation pushing disinformation like Prager University), **and more!**

General Guidelines:

If you feel like this prompt is pretty broad/open-ended, you’re right. I wanted to give everyone the chance to approach this paper through a lens that most interests you. However, you **MUST** be sure to acknowledge both sides of the argument and really think about the weight of each side in terms of what you argue should or should not be done/changed.

In addition to the formatting criteria listed at the beginning of this prompt, you **MUST**:

1. **Cite *The Great Hack* and Talia Lavin at least ONCE in your paper.**
2. **Cite AT LEAST TWO of the readings/films from earlier this semester (Harari, Daniels, Konnikova, *The Social Dilemma*, *Feels Good Man*)**

3. **Research and Cite AT LEAST ONE credible and relevant source pertaining to a current event or issue that aligns with the topic/argument you choose.**

As usual, **you can use and build on any of the ideas from our online discussions or those laid out in the lessons** Other outside CREDIBLE sources (such as any of those found in lessons/lectures) are permitted but not required. You should also revisit the rhetorical strategies and various handouts, rubrics and worksheets from previous weeks to help you write and revise your essay.

QUESTIONS/LINES OF INQUIRY TO CONSIDER:

You are welcome to consider any of the questions below to help you begin brainstorming ideas for your paper. You are also welcome to use email or stop by a Zoom Q&A to talk out some of your ideas ☺

- Who are the producers of misinformation and disinformation? And where is it coming from? What role does money play in the creation and dissemination of misinformation and disinformation?
- What circumstances would make a fake news story more believable? How does cultural background affect whether an audience believes fake news? What personal experiences could affect whether an audience believes fake news?
- What can companies like Facebook and Snapchat do to stop users from spreading fake news? What can ordinary people do? What do you think would work, especially with younger users?
- We've learned through the QAnon lesson that banning users and specific keywords/content may help the spread of mis/disinformation, but ultimately it won't FIX the problem. Should lawmakers and policy makers within the government demand accountability from these social media companies by creating regulations on what users are allowed to share on their platforms?
- Should all schools provide media literacy education in some form? Should media literacy be a required course in school? Why, or why not?