Inside Media Content

A guide to foster critical approach
and creation of quality media content

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Contents

Introduction

This brochure contains an overview and the results of Erasmus+ Training Course *Seeing Through Shadows - Fostering Critical Approach to Media Content* held in Zadar, Croatia, in April 2018. The content includes a short introduction into concepts of media literacy and critical thinking coupled with some insights from the Training Course. The core part is dedicated to creation of quality media content, especially in the context of youth work.

About the project

TC *Seeing Through Shadows - Fostering Critical Approach to Media Content* brought together youth workers from 10 European countries in order to mutually develop competences connected with media literacy and critical thinking. The idea behind the project was to educate youth workers and enable transfer of skills in the field of media literacy. The main objective of this TC was to equip youth workers with knowledge, skills and methods needed for promoting media literacy and critical thinking in their daily work with young people. Specific objectives were to develop critical thinking skills to understand how media messages shape our culture and society and to recognize bias, spin and misinformation. Also, attention was drawn to understanding of the consequences that media have on the formation of stereotypes and prejudices, racism and intolerance, to encourage and empower youth workers to access, analyze and evaluate media messages by using digital tools. During the TC, youth workers learned to create and distribute their own media messages in a skillful manner through experiential learning by using free digital platforms.

About Erasmus+ programme and Youthpass

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion.

Europe needs more cohesive and inclusive societies which allow citizens to play an active role in democratic life. Education, training, youth work and sport are key to promote common European values, foster social integration, enhance intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community, and to prevent violent radicalisation. Erasmus+ is an effective instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants.

The Erasmus+ Programme is designed to support Programme Countries' efforts to efficiently use the potential of Europe's talent and social assets in a lifelong learning perspective, linking support to formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout the education, training and youth fields. The Programme also enhances the opportunities for cooperation and mobility with Partner Countries, notably in the fields of higher education and youth.

Source: Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2018, page 5

Youthpass is a way for participants in the Erasmus+ Programme to describe what they have done and to show what they have learnt. Firmly based on principles of non-formal education and learning, it is a tool and document which puts the Key competences for Lifelong Learning into practice.

More about Youthpass:
https://www.youthpass.eu/

Critical approach to media

Media literacy is a twenty-first century approach to education which provides a framework to "access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society, as well as essential skills to inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy" (Center for Media Literacy, 2011).

Media and stereotypes

Critical approach to media is especially important in order to recognize stereotypes often propagated by the media. Stereotypes are often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about members of a particular group. Stereotypical thinking frequently forms the basis of prejudice and discrimination.

Gender stereotypes can be found in almost every type of media. Women are more often presented in commercials because they are seen as responsible for daily purchase and shopping. On the other side, men advertise cars, investments, cigarettes and beer. Most heroes and protagonists are male, strong and rational. Stereotypes about LGBT population are also present, so gay men are portrayed as effeminate, into fashion, extravagant, social, self-absorbed and with high pitched voices, while lesbians are portrayed as masculine, wear short haircuts and play sports.

Although slowly diminishing, racial stereotypes are still very much present in movies. An essay "Representation: Culture & Perception", published by the Perception Institute, reveals:

"In television and film, characters from non-dominant racial and ethnic groups often fall into formulaic tropes, and their storylines easily follow cliché' narratives. The consistency of these representations reinforces stereotypes and makes them more readily available in our minds. For example, black men and boys are systematically portrayed negatively in both news and entertainment programming. Many media images of black men are linked to criminality or poverty, and positive depictions are often limited to sports and music."

Some stereotypes are considered positive, such as the idea that Asian people are successful at math and corporate business or technologically savvy. Asians are often shown in ads for business-oriented or technical products like smartphones, computers, pharmaceuticals and electronic gear of all kinds. Along with racial stereotypes, ethnic stereotypes are the most common in popular media. For example, Arabs are depicted as

desert dwellers, villains and terrorists. Arab women are shown as oppressed, either veiled or as belly dancers. Most stereotypes go unnoticed and are taken unconsciously, so the first step in questioning them would be to pay attention and notice them when they appear in the media. An active citizen is an individual with a critical approach to media content.

Fake news

Misinformation is a phenomenon old as humanity itself. However, modern means of communication have helped it to grow unprecedentedly and to affect millions of people. A study found that lies and fake news spread faster and penetrate deeper than the truth on social media. True stories took six times as long as to reach 1,500 people on Twitter than fake news. The academics at MIT also found fake news was 70 per cent more likely to be retweeted. The freedom of speech entitles everyone to express their opinion - a right unimaginable to our ancestors - but the problem emerges when people deliberately present opinions as facts.

Fake news (word of the year 2017) is a type of yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate misinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional print and broadcast news media or online social media. The goal of such content is to trick the consumer into accepting false information and/or into supporting certain ideas and opinions which can be explicitly or implicitly encoded in the media content. Fake news often appeal to emotion instead of facts, logic and reason, avoiding the issue of truth as irrelevant in the postmodern post-truth world. So, what can be done to neutralize the effect of fake news? Education and developing of critical thinking skills seems to be crucial. We need to foster the love for truth in youth (and adults): "I believe X because it's true, being based on evidence, not because I want it to be true". Also, tools such as fact-checking websites can be very useful in discerning between facts, opinions, hoaxes and misinformation.

Here is a list of the most reliable fact-checking sites:

- snopes.com is the oldest and largest fact-checking site on the Internet, debunking not just fake news but also urban legends and other types of misinformation
- factcheck.org covers political stories but also science, social topics and general interest topics
- politifact.com focuses on politics related news
- wikipedia.org covers most topics in an honest, accurate and unbiased manner (be sure to check the references in the end of every article)

How to spot fake news?

- Take a closer look on the source and author of the news story. Is it a credible/reliable source or author? Satirical sites are popular online and sometimes it is not always clear whether a story is just a joke or parody.

- Check other sources. Are other reputable news/media reporting on the story? Are there any sources in the news story?

- Examine the headline. Check the entire article, many fake news stories use

sensationalist or shocking headlines to grab attention.

● Check the facts. Fake news stories often contain incorrect dates or altered timelines.

● Check your biases. Are your own views or beliefs affecting your judgement of a news report? Do you maybe want this news story to be true in order to confirm your views?

Content Creation

Target audience/reader

Understanding to whom you are writing is a halfway to having a higher impact by sharing your story. Before writing an article you have to ask yourself "Who is going to read it?". To whom am I writing it? Brainstorm and think of possible readers, their demographics, psychographics and persona. Discovering your audience and narrowing down identity of your readers will give you a better insight, as well, into how you're going to write the article. For example, if you're writing about the radicalisation of youth in Europe, your article will be written with a completely different tone for high school students than for policymakers. Defining your target audience will help you focus on creating great content that connects and resonates with readers.

Demographics

Demographics provide information on age, sex, sexual orientation, income, educational level, occupation, marital status, home ownership, nationality, place of residence, political and religious affiliation, number of children, etc. In this step try to generate a general target audience. For example, 20-24 years old, male from Zadar, Croatia, Catholic, student, no kids. You don't have to go in details here as much as you'll have to in the next steps.

Psychographics

Psychographics are kind of like demographics. While demographics explain who is the reader, psychographics explain why they read. Psychographics information might be about personality, attitudes, values, interests, hobbies, lifestyles, behaviour, habits etc.

For example: a Croatian student likes to relax in free time, to read newspapers. He doesn't like to use the phone to read. He gets angry when he sees unfairness. Although he appreciates kindness, rejects to accept refugees.

In this step, you are narrowing down the identity of your readers. Try to imagine and write down as many details as you can. It will help you to understand how to approach writing your content and where to publish it to reach your target audience.

Personas

You can effectively reach your target audience, connect with your readers and have a higher impact on them only if you understand both their demographics and psychographics. When you combine both sets of information, you can form your reader's persona.

Personas are detailed picture of the reader. When you create personas, use both demographic and psychographic information, combine them. Go into extreme detail. Find a photo and include it in the profile. The more details you find out you will be able to better write your article and have higher impact on the reader. A reader will feel that the content is written exactly for him, it will resonate with him.

For example:

Ante Svraka

• 23 years old
• Lives in the old town of Zadar
• A student in agriculture goes to church every Sunday
• He is not married and doesn't have kids, but has a girlfriend
• In free time he likes to relax and read newspapers. He doesn't use a mobile phone to read the news.
• He is passionate about agriculture and permaculture design
• He gets angry when he sees unfairness, but when it comes to refugees it's a different matter, he rejects to accept them in his own town.

A great audience persona covers these details: who, what, when, where and why.

Evaluate

Evaluate your decision. It is important to step back and ask yourself a couple of questions to understand will your content make difference and how big your audience is. The best would be to evaluate yourself after each step to stay focused and on track.

Are there enough people who fit my criteria?
Will my target audience really benefit from my message?
Do I understand what drives my target reader to accept my message?
Can I reach them with my message? Are they easily accessible?

Main message

Before creating content you should determine what is the main message you want to share. What do you want to transfer or show to the readers? Let's think about the aforementioned topic: the radicalisation of youth in Europe. We already discovered our target audience and we understand who are our readers. The main message we would like to deliver is "Refugees are accepted and welcome in Zadar". The kindness of local people helps refugees to feel at home.

Aim

The aim is a purpose or the desired outcome. It refers to the end results. It is as well the determined course set to achieve a target. It tends to be broad, general, not measurable. It is something you hope to achieve by doing. They are usually long-term, even though it can be a short-term too. For example, our aim is to create a positive social environment for accepting refugees in Zadar.

Goal

Goal is a desired result a person wants to achieve. It is usually broad and does not lay out the steps to achieve it but it should be measurable. Goals keep you focused on your aim and on track working to achieve it. Goals can be short term or long term.

In our example, we would like to achieve several goals.
- To inform a minimum 2000 newspaper readers about how local community organise welcoming events for refugees.
- To develop empathy of minimum 50 students towards refugees.
- To increase visibility in public space of positive examples of refugee acceptance by local people.

Goals do not answer how, when, where, with whom or why we want to achieve them. They only contain the intention and desired result we want to achieve.

Creating quality content - Articles

Writing articles

Article is a piece of writing usually intended for publication in a newspaper, magazine or journal. It's written for a wide audience, so it is essential to attract and retain the readers' attention. Article may include amusing stories, reported speech and descriptions. It can be formal or informal, objective or subjective, depending on the target audience. The style of writing should be interesting, containing opinions and thoughts, as well as facts.

An article should consist of:

1. an eye-catching **title** which attracts the readers' attention and suggests the theme of the article. (Think about why you read a magazine or newspaper article recently - what made you read it?) Articles can also have subheadings before each paragraph. A title has to be informative, accurate and concise. In other words, the main topic of the article should be stated in the title.

2. an **introduction** which clearly defines the topic to be covered and keeps the reader's attention. To get the reader to read further it can be good to get him questioning, to seek for an answer. Introduce the main content by asking a question which will drive him to continue reading to find the answer.

3. the **main body** of two to five paragraphs in which the topic is further developed in detail. You should deliver the main message here.

4. the **conclusion** - summarizing the topic or a final opinion, recommendation or comment. In order to involve the reader more it is advised to invite him on discussion or to comment. Regarding your aim of the content call him to action, to get him involved more. The age of social media changed the way we interact with the content. Nowadays it is desired to have both way interaction, reader should be able to involve and interact.

Before you begin writing think about:

1. where is the article going to appear - on a webpage, social media, newspaper or magazine?

2. who are the intended readers - a specific group such as students or teenagers, or adults in general? The article could be formal, semi-formal or informal, depending on your intended audience. Use vocabulary and descriptive language appropriate for the topic and audience.

3. what is the aim of the article - to advise, suggest, inform, compare and contrast, describe, etc.?

A few more advices:

1. determine the information you are going to use and organize your ideas carefully into paragraphs. Each paragraph should have a clear topic sentence.

2. don't use over-personal or over-emotional language or simplistic vocabulary.

3. don't talk about yourself. You are writing for the general public, not a close circle of friends. Your opinions are only interesting to other people if you can make them amusing, justify them or explain them.

Headline

It takes more than good content or great design. The most important part of writing an article is the headline. Headline have to draw attention. It can be provocative, sensational, informative, get you to question, descriptive, suggestive, etc. But most importantly it have to be connected to the content. It will significantly impact and increase the readers' attention and willingness to open the content.

It takes more than good content or great design. The most important part of writing an article is the headline. Headline has to draw attention. It can be provocative, sensational, informative, mysterious, descriptive, suggestive, etc. But most importantly it has to be connected with the content.

If you understood your target audience and you know your readers, it will determine your headline style. When writing the headline, have in mind that most search engines have restrictions on the character length of headlines, and will not display your article in search results if the headline is more than 65 characters. To avoid it, write headlines that contain less than 65 characters. Your headline should contain keywords for search engines too. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation. Headlines who are having keywords are better indexed on a search engine, therefore readers are more likely to discover your content. Discover best tips for writing great headline you'll ever need.

Subtitle

Regarding the style of the article or where it is published, content can have a subtitle but it's not obligatory. What we found work best is to have a subtitle that is a bit descriptive and invites the reader to action or questions readers' mind.

Creating quality content - Visual

Visual content is as important as textual content. They have to complement and support each other in delivering the main message.

Graphic Design

What is graphic design? It is the art of combining text and pictures. It is a process of visual communication through typography, photography and illustration. Best way to understand it is by looking at it.

When you do graphic design for your article you should think about 5 things.

1. Objectives of the communication

2. Hierarchy (What needs to be said first and then next and then after that?)
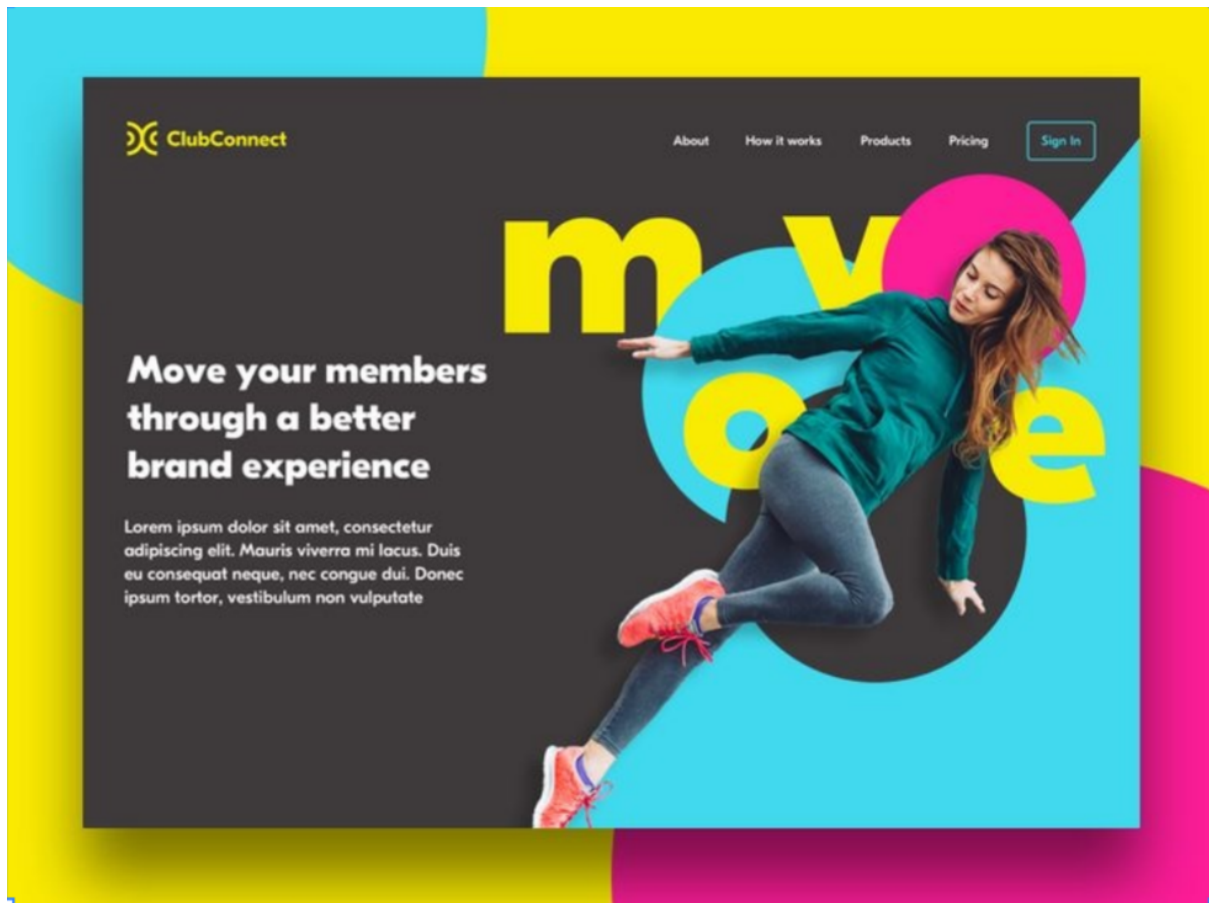
3. How do you want the user's eye to move around the page?

4. Who are you speaking to?

5. What is the tone of voice?

Photography

When we want to include photography in the article, we have to think about copyrights. Copyright is a legal right created by the law of a country that grants the creator of an original work exclusive rights for its use and distribution. In this brochure, you can find a list of useful tools which can be great resources for free photography, graphics and illustrations.

Photography will help the reader to visualise the content and to connect more with the message. Articles with one or two photographies are more appealing and more effective in delivering the main message.

Facebook content

NGO-s and youth workers increasingly use the benefits of Facebook to reach out to youth and the general public. Details such as exact formats of profile photo size, cover photo and cover video can make a difference and contribute to a successful communication strategy for creating Facebook content. After developing the strategy, create a roadmap which is defined by a target audience. The content consists of links, images, videos and text. A video should include text description, together with links and images. By defining the tone of the content, you should think about a specific emotion you want to evoke since the emotional response guides the audience towards the next step - action. The choice of colours should fit the tone of the message; which should be clearly understood. We come back once again to target audience. Understanding and knowing your audience is the most important thing on social media, especially Facebook. Before sharing the content on Facebook, take your time to explore and find out who is your audience, their habits, motivations, interests, demographic and psychographic information. Facebook has great tools which you can use to discover your audience and readers profile.

Press or Media Release

A press or media release is a written communication that reports specific but brief information about an event, circumstance or other happening. It is a written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something ostensibly newsworthy. It is sent to targeted members of the media.

3 Tips for Writing a Great Press Release

Key components each press release should have are

-   Well written headline of the e-mail you are sending. It will attract journalists' attention and motivate them to open the message.
-   Boilerplates: brief information about your organisation
-   Contact information, important if a journalist needs more details or finds the story interesting to cover deeper
-   Answers Key Questions: What (is happening)? Who (is involved)? Where (is it happening)? When? Why?
-   Embargo: When it can be released!

Attach documents to the e-mail. The more you prepare, a journalist has less work to do. That's why we recommend you to attach photography, graphics or illustrations you would like they use in the press or media release. Send open format of text and one in PDF showing how you would like the text to be published. By sending both you will minimise the chance that journalist will publish something wrong and your whole message will be most likely published correctly. A journalist will decide which one they will use.

Do not send your press or media release to everyone. Create a media list with contacts of journalists and publishers and keep regular contact with them. Send your release to most relevant media.

One of the great tools we found useful to monitor media releases by keywords is Mediatoolkit - media monitoring tool which enables you to follow required mentions/queries in real-time. It monitors all digital media including social media.

List of Useful Tools

Strikingly

www.strikingly.com
Strikingly is the best website builder for anyone to build a gorgeous, mobile-friendly website easily. Quick, simple and stylish.

Medium

www.medium.com
Medium is a place to read, write, and interact with the stories that matter most to you.

Daytripper

www.daytripper.mobi/
Easily document, tell and promote your story. Great app which allows you to capture, tell, promote and share your own story.

Freepik

www.freepik.com
Graphic resources for everyone! Freepik offers users, high quality graphic designs: exclusive illustrations and graphic resources carefully selected by design team in order to provide users with great content that can be used in both personal and commercial projects.

Unsplash

www.unsplash.com
Beautiful, free images gifted by the world's most generous community of photographers.

Pixabay

www.pixabay.com
Pixabay is a vibrant community of creatives, sharing copyright free images and videos. All contents are released under Creative Commons CC0, which makes them safe to use without asking for permission or giving credit to the artist - even for commercial purposes.

Canva

www.canva.com

Canva is a free graphic-design tool website. It uses a drag-and-drop format and provides access to over a million photographs, graphics, and fonts. It is used by non-designers as well as professionals. Easily create beautiful designs + documents. Use *Canva's* drag-and-drop feature and professional layouts to design consistently stunning graphics It has a content of different elements, formats, shapes, typography and images for usage. Inside Canva there are ready-to-use templates. Through simple example of creating one banner all options were explained to them considering all buttons which are more or less self-explanatory as well as meaning of some of given choices Canva gives, e.g. downloading the file as JPG, PNG, or PDF.

Mediatoolkit

www.mediatoolkit.com

Media monitoring tool which enables you to follow required mentions/queries in real-time. It monitors all digital media including social media.

MediaTRUST

www.mediatrust.ro/

MediaTRUST is providing services which consist in searching for information in the media and analyzing its influence on companies and brands' image. They perform/allow a 360-degree research on the brand, based on the media targeted by the public relations activity (the Web, radio and television), the own media (social channels), and purchased media (monitoring of ads).

Hootsuite

www.hootsuite.com

Social media management tool that allows users to schedule and post updates to any page or profile for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, WordPress, and other platforms from one place. As well you can search and analyze media content mentioned on social media.

PARTNERS

Bulgaria
Champions Factory
www.championsfactory.bg

Croatia
Udruga Prizma
www.udrugaprizma.hr

Czech Republic
Brno For You, Z.S.
www.brnoforyou.cz

Estonia
Eesti People To People
www.ptpest.ee

Greece
Youthfully Yours Gr
www.youthfullyyours.gr

Italy
Mine Vaganti Ngo
www.minevaganti.org

Latvia
Humana People to People
www.hpplatvia.com

Netherlands
Stichting The Youth Company
www.theyouthcompany.nl

Portugal
Teatro Metaphora
www.teatrometaphora.org

Romania
Actions for Change
www.facebook.com/actionsforchange/

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