

Is It Advertising: How To Identify Hidden Ads On Social Media?

Five Key Concepts and Key Questions for Media and Information Literacy

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IS IT AN AD: HOW TO IDENTIFY HIDDEN ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media has become a permanent part of our daily lives, with an ever-increasing amount of advertising in its content. Some of the ads we encounter are hidden - hard to distinguish from non-commercial content. Unscrupulous content creators may even pass off a hidden ad as fact and genuine news. The first part of this informative material summarizes information about several types of hidden ads, as well as tips on how to recognize them. The second part offers insight into the operation of social media algorithms.



ADVERTISING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

It is possible to distinguish three types of advertising that we most often encounter in social media:

- **sponsored posts:** paid social media posts;
- **influencer marketing:** content for which the content creator receives money or products in exchange for brand or product promotion;
- **product placement:** the product is included in the content, but is not the main focus of the content.

HIDING ADS

The most common ways to hide ads are:

concealed sponsorship: In Latvia, the law regulates the activity of influencers, and influencers are obliged to indicate if the content was created as part of paid cooperation, but there are content creators who do not do this; it should also be taken into account that the user may simply not notice this indication because they are paying attention to the content of the photo or video, not to the accompanying text, in which these indications are most often stated;

using misleading hashtags: when hashtags are added to the advertising content, which may mislead the consumer or influence their decision about the necessity of the product in his everyday life;

disguising ads as real news: this tactic is often very easy to detect, as it is obviously modified by image or audio-visual enhancement programs (for example, an ad inserted into the credits of a real news broadcast), but the content creators are also developing their techniques and it is becoming increasingly difficult to recognize them.

HOW TO DISTINGUISH HIDDEN ADS FROM NON-COMMERCIAL CONTENT?

The first step in recognizing hidden advertising is to critically evaluate the content of a social media post – does it overemphasize the positive attributes of a brand or product? Look carefully at the placement of information in the post, as most social media platforms provide a clear indication of "sponsored" in the case of sponsored content. You should also pay attention to the hashtags added by the content creator (look for #ad, #sponsoredcontent, #paidpartnership, etc.). Also, research the product or brand featured in the content, making sure it has used influencer marketing and sponsored posts before.

Evaluate social media content and don't be afraid to be skeptical of posts that seem too good to be true! By being aware of the presence of hidden ads in social media content and using these tips, you will be able to evaluate the content more critically and make more informed decisions about your purchases when social media content influences you to buy a product or use a service.

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS USE YOUR DATA FOR TARGETED ADVERTISING?

Social media algorithms are designed to ensure that users spend as much time as possible on these platforms engaging in content creation, commenting and liking.

Algorithms use not only the socio-demographic information provided by users themselves, which is necessary to create a profile, but also learn from the behavior of users on the platform, studying their interests in depth.

This allows social media to target users with ads that are truly of interest to them.



HOW DO SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS WORK?

Step 1

Data collection

Social media platforms collect data about you (both your own information about your age, gender, place of residence, interests, and information about your location (if you have allowed the platform access to this data) and online behavior). The platforms collect information about the posts you interact with, the pages you follow and the ads you click on.

Step 2

Profile creation

Using the collected data, the platform creates a profile about you. It includes information about your likes, dislikes, and online behavior. When you use the platform, the profile is supplemented and updated.

Step 3

Use of algorithms

Social media algorithms use this profile to show you ads that are more relevant to your interests. Algorithms analyze your behavior, including the posts you like, comments and pages you visit, to determine what ads to show you. For example, if you search the platform for parenting tips, you'll soon notice that ads for children's products appear next to the sponsored content you see in your content feed.

Step 4

Retargeting

If you click on an ad or add a product to your cart (some social media platforms offer integrated e-commerce tools), the platform may use retargeting to show you similar ads in the future. It encourages you to purchase, or to take action.

Step 5

Transparency and control

Social media platforms must provide information about what and how they use your data for targeted advertising. Platforms also allow users to partially control the ads presented to them, for example, by providing the option to hide an ad or report ads that are not suitable for you.

While targeted advertising can be beneficial for both the advertiser and the social media platform, its user, it is important to be aware of how data is being used and to control the ads that are served. By understanding how social media algorithms work, you can evaluate your online behavior, protect your privacy, and make more informed decisions about online purchases.

FIVE CORE CONCEPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS OF MEDIA LITERACY

Media and information literacy is a set of knowledge and skills that allow a person to find and analyze information, understand the functions and goals of information providers, as well as evaluate content critically, promoting an individual's ability to distinguish objective information from biased and/or false information and compare information available from different sources . It helps to form an opinion based on facts and reliable information. Media and information literacy also includes the ability to practically use the media and find reliable information, and nowadays it is also directly related to digital literacy, because the skills to search (and find) reliable information using digital technologies are urgently needed. This informative material is devoted to five basic concepts and key questions of media and information literacy, which will help to evaluate information critically.

1. MEDIA TEXTS

Media texts can be considered any media content - it doesn't have to be written words! Media text is not only an article in a newspaper or a news portal, but also television shows, movies, advertisements, social media content and even music. Regardless of the media type and channel, at least four questions should be asked when analyzing media texts.

- 1. Who created this text?**
- 2. What messages or values are being conveyed?**
- 3. Who is the intended audience?**
- 4. What methods are used to convey the message?**



2. AUTHORSHIP AND POINT OF VIEW

Authorship and the author's perspective affect the content, so when you read the text, ask yourself at least three questions. Reflect on the author's connection to the topic, the reasons for being interested in the particular issue and possible prejudices or biases.

1. Who created this message and what is their background?
2. What values or biases might influence the creator's perspective?
3. Whose point of view is represented in this text?

3. REPRESENTATION

Representation in media texts refers to the representation of different groups in society. When analyzing these representations, it is important to understand not only how, but also why these groups are represented in a particular way.

1. How are different groups represented in this text?
2. What stereotypes or assumptions are made about these groups?
3. Are these statements accurate and fair?

4. AUDIENCE

When consuming media texts, one must also think about their target audience. Readers or viewers for whom the author intended the given text may perceive it completely differently than a person who is not the target audience of the text.

1. Who is the target audience for this text?
2. How might different audiences interpret this text differently?
3. What assumptions are made about the audience?

5. MEDIA INFLUENCE

The media influence both individuals and society as a whole. By reading, watching or listening to media texts, and understanding the process and reasons behind their creation and distribution, it is also possible to analyze media effects.

1. What are the potential influences of this media?
2. How can different audiences be affected by this message differently?
3. What is the responsibility of media creators for the impact of their content?

By understanding the concepts of media text, authorship, representation, audience and media Influence, and by asking critical questions about the content of the media we consume, we can become more informed and responsible media consumers. Media and information literacy helps to navigate the range of media and make informed decisions.

FIVE STEPS FOR EVALUATING INFORMATION SOURCES

Not all sources of information, including those imitating news portals, are reliable and trustworthy. We've put together five steps to help you assess the credibility and accuracy of information sources.

Step 1

Authority

Make sure the source is qualified to speak on the subject. Make sure that the authors who create the materials have done enough research on the topic.

Step 2

Accuracy

Check the accuracy of the information provided – is it accurate and true?

Step 3

Transparency

Check how transparent the source of information is – does it reveal its methods? Do journalists and other content creators act professionally and with integrity when creating content?

Step 4

Objectivity

Make sure the source is not biased or one sided.

Step 5

Relevance

Make sure that the source is current and provides the latest information on the given topic.



WHY DO WE READ COMMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA? THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENT.

Social media comments can be both informative and entertaining, but there are other reasons why we regularly find ourselves reading and engaging in daily discussions. By understanding the psychological factors behind the willingness to engage in commenting, we can think more critically. Here are five of the most common reasons we read comments on social media.

1. Social comparison

We read comments to compare ourselves to others and feel better or to see how others react to a situation.

2. Validation

We look for validation of our opinion in the comments to make sure that our opinion is in line with the opinion of the majority.

3. Connection

Reading comments can help us feel connected to a community or like-minded people, even if we don't know them personally.

4. Information

Comments are often informative – they offer additional information on a topic or let you look at it from a new perspective.

5. Entertainment

We read comments for fun, find humor in them, or are entertained by the drama.



Be careful! Not all social media comments are human-made! Comments can be artificially generated by bots designed for manipulation and disinformation. By being aware of the existence of bots, we can critically evaluate comments, distinguishing truth from fiction, and reduce the opportunities for those who command the software to manipulate public opinion.

While reading comments on social media can be informative and entertaining, it's important to be aware of the psychological factors behind the desire to read them and engage in discussions. Understanding them also helps you avoid misinformation or manipulation.

10 TIPS FOR ONLINE SAFETY AND SECURITY

Each day, we share more and more personal information online. This applies not only to the content we consciously create and publish on social media, but also to private messages on various platforms, including e-mail, data storage in cloud services (such as Google Drive) and other activities. Protect your data and privacy online. In this informative material, you will find 10 tips to help you keep your data safe.

1. Choose unique and complex passwords for all your accounts and avoid using the same password for multiple services and platforms.

2. Turn on two-factor authentication. Two-factor authentication is an additional security feature provided by many social media platforms, online banks, email services and other websites. The principle of its operation is based on the requirement for the user to provide two different authentication methods to prove identity and access the system (for example, to access their profile, they must not only enter a password, but also confirm their identity on a mobile device that receives information that an attempted login is underway). Use two-factor authentication whenever possible.

3. Update your operating system, apps and antivirus software regularly. This will protect against new security risks.

4. Use a virtual private network (VPN) to encrypt your internet connection and hide your IP address.

5. Do not open email attachments or click on links in emails received from unknown or suspicious email addresses. This will help protect you not only from computer viruses, but also from phishing attempts. Phishing is a type of cyber attack where an attacker impersonates a real company or organization in order to obtain confidential information such as usernames, passwords, credit card numbers or other data. Phishing attacks are usually carried out using deceptive emails, text messages, phone calls or other forms of communication that appear to come from a trusted source, such as a well-known bank.

6. Use secure websites. Before entering any information on a page, look for a small lock icon and "https" before the link in your browser toolbar to make sure you're using a secure site.

7. Limit personal information. Be careful about the personal information you share online and limit the amount of information you share on social networks.

8. Keep an eye on your privacy settings. Review and adjust the privacy settings on the platforms and services in your online profiles to control who can see and access your information. If you use your social media or email profile to sign in to an app or website (for example, a ticketing website, an image processing app, etc.), check what data the service requires access to. Don't use apps that require the ability to post content to your accounts and access your communications, images, contacts, location etc.

9. Backup your data. Backup your important data and files regularly

10. Educate yourself. Stay on top of the latest online privacy and security threats and learn about best practices to stay safe online.



9 TIPS FOR DIGITAL WELLNESS

It's easy to get carried away and spend too much time online, which can have a negative impact on your overall well-being. Here are nine tips to help you maintain a healthy relationship with technology and promote digital well-being.

1.

SET (AND FOLLOW) BOUNDARIES

Create a schedule for using your digital device and stick to it. Set specific times for work and rest and avoid checking your phone during meals or before bed.

2.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Take breaks and be present in the moment. Engage in activities that help you disconnect from technology and focus on the present, such as meditation or spending time in nature.

3.

PRIORITIZE FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

Make time for personal communication with friends and family. Focus on making meaningful connections and maintaining social support networks.

4.

SAMAZINIET LIEKAS INFORMĀCIJAS RADĪTO TROKSNĪ

Unsubscribe from unnecessary emails. Clean out your email and unsubscribe from emails you don't care about.

5.

CREATE A DIGITAL-FREE ZONE

Create an area in your home where digital devices are not allowed, such as a bedroom or dining area.

6.

TURN OFF NOTIFICATIONS

Disable notifications for non-urgent apps and emails. This will help reduce distraction and increase productivity.

7.

PRACTICE "DIGITAL HYGIENE"

Keep your devices and personal information safe by regularly updating your software, using strong passwords, and avoiding public, unsecured, Wi-Fi networks.

8.

SEEK HELP IF YOU FEEL LIKE TECHNOLOGY IS HAVING A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON YOUR WELLBEING

If you feel that technology is having a negative impact on your mental health, seek professional help or talk to a trusted friend or family member.

9.

TAKE BREAKS

While scrolling endlessly through social media platforms can be calming for some, give your brain (and eyes) a break. Find time for yourself to recharge and do things that bring you joy and fulfillment.

Build a healthy relationship with the digital environment – use technology, but don't let it take over your everyday life!

INCLUSIVE MEDIA CONTENT – WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Inclusive content in media refers to the fair and accurate representation and portrayal of diverse people and communities. The diversity of our world is reflected in the media, as it is the content of the media that often shapes how we see ourselves and others, and has a significant impact on our attitudes and beliefs. Gender, race, religious affiliation, ethnicity, sexuality - these are just some of the features that have been stereotyped, left out, or misrepresented in media content at different times and in different parts of the world. In this informative material, you will find information about why inclusive content and representation is so important and what positive impact it has on each of us and society as a whole.

Reflects reality

When media and advertising portrays diverse people, the reality of our diverse world is more accurately reflected. It overturns stereotypes and drives the formation of an inclusive society.

Empathy

Exposure to different kinds of people and perspectives (even if only in the media) can increase our empathy and understanding of others who may be different from us.

Self-esteem

Having people who are like us portrayed in a positive light in the media can build our self-esteem and promote our sense of belonging.

Promotes equality

Representing diverse groups and individual members of society by including their stories and voices in media content and advertising are important steps in promoting equality and social justice.

Why is inclusive content and representation important?

Inclusive media content can help break down stereotypes and reduce misconceptions about different groups of people. It is essential to ensure balanced and fair representation of social groups in the media, as it can influence social norms. Representation in the media helps reduce prejudice and promotes understanding and empathy which decreases discrimination. Studies show that positive representation of a group in society can have a beneficial effect on people's self-esteem, especially for representatives of groups underrepresented in the media. By objectively reflecting the diverse world we live in, we can help build a more inclusive and equal society for all.

COGNITIVE BIASES - WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO THEY AFFECT OUR EVERYDAY LIFE?

We all encounter cognitive biases on a daily basis – unconscious thought patterns that can affect our decision-making and judgment. Recognizing these biases can help you overcome them and make more informed decisions. In this informative material, you can familiarize yourself with 12 common cognitive biases that you will definitely notice in your everyday life.

1. Confirmation bias

The tendency to seek information that confirms our pre-existing beliefs and to ignore evidence that contradicts them.

2. Anchoring bias

The tendency to rely too much on the first information we receive when making decisions, even if it is not particularly important.

3. Availability bias

The tendency to overestimate the importance of easily accessible information, or information first received, while underestimating the importance of more complex information.

4. Hindsight bias

This is the tendency to believe after an event that we knew it would happen all along.

5. Halo effect

The tendency to judge someone or something based on one positive trait or quality and assume that everything else is also positive.

6. Negativity bias

The tendency to give negative information more weight than positive information, even if the negative information is less important.

7. Framing effect

The tendency to be influenced by the way information is presented rather than the information itself.

8. Sunk cost fallacy

The tendency to continue to invest resources (time, money, work, etc.) just because we have already invested in it, even if it is no longer useful.

9. Gambler's Fallacy

The belief that a random event is more likely to happen because it hasn't happened in a while or because it's bound to happen.

10. Overconfidence

The tendency to overestimate one's abilities, knowledge, and expertise and to underestimate the potential for error.

11. Self-serving bias

The tendency to attribute our success to our own abilities, to attribute all failures to external factors beyond our control.

12. Groupthink

This is the tendency to conform to the beliefs and opinions of a group, even if they are not in our best interest or based on faulty information.

By recognizing these cognitive biases and learning to observe them in our daily lives, we can become more aware of our thinking patterns and make better decisions in our personal and professional lives.

12 COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES TO AVOID

Fallacies of reasoning (also called logical fallacies) can lead to flawed arguments and adverse decisions. By learning to recognize these mistakes, we can think more critically, avoid them ourselves, and notice when someone tries to use them in an argument against us.

1. *Ad hominem (or attacking the person)*

An attack on a person's character, personality, image, not their argument.

2. *Appeal to authority*

This is an argument that something is true because an authority or expert says so without providing evidence.

3. *False dilemma*

Offering only two options (either 'A' or 'B') when in reality there may be more options.

4. *Slippery slop*

The argument that one action will inevitably lead to a series of negative consequences, with no evidence to support this claim.

5. *Strawman*

Distorting the opponent's argument to make the attack easier.

6. *Hasty generalization*

A sweeping claim without supporting evidence (may have limited evidence or a single example). Prejudice.

7. *Circular reasoning*

An argument in which a conclusion is used as proof but does not follow from the proof (eg: John's latest book is great because John is an excellent writer).

8. *Appeal to emotions*

This is the use of emotional language to persuade someone without providing evidence.

9. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*

The assumption that one event caused another. The claim that coincidence is causation.

10. *Bandwagon effect*

The argument that something is true or good because everyone else thinks so.

11. *Fallacy of distraction*

An argument that distracts from the question at hand. This may be valid, but prevents the original problem from being solved.

12. *Fallacy of questionable premise*

The assumption that a statement is automatically false if it is erroneous or weakly substantiated.

By recognizing these common logical fallacies, we can improve our critical thinking skills and make more informed decisions.