

Transcription Louis Martina - Critical online

Yes, we're here today for the smart, critical online portion of the course. I'm Louis Martina. A brief introduction about what we have today, or about me first, and then about what we'll be doing today. For the youth work portion, I'm primarily here as co-founder and chairman of Debate Education Foundation.

It's about projects that encourage young people to think critically through debate education. It focuses on critical thinking for self-development. I'm also a group principal of the SixTen group of companies, the focus of which is sustainable growth through change. So, we help in all aspects that companies are changing through digital transformation and other management consulting functions. Digital transformation was the first step, but now it's also more about competencies, especially among employees, and how to adapt the structure of companies for the future of business. And yes, I'm now also chairman of the CCIC. It's a public-private government committee for Curaçao's national export strategy, for exporting the creative sector. It also focuses on young people, because we really need to prepare the creative sector for internationalization. Jobs of the future and using online for business in the creative sector. And I should also add that, as co-founder of the Montessori Foundation, the focus was also on youth, introducing the Montessori method on the islands. We also established the first Montessori school in Curaçao, and so on. And he was also chairman of the island's oldest water sports association. And that association has a very strong focus on youth development through physical activities, more water sports—we are an island.

What we're going to discuss today is actually divided into three parts: understanding the algorithm in general. Because we're talking about digital platforms, everything has an algorithm behind it; it's coded. Steps for critical thinking: we must commit ourselves to this, and also how we should communicate with young people to encourage critical thinking. But that always starts with the person instructing them.

And finally, the modern youth worker: what that looks like now. And ideally, what skills you need for the future. Because, in my view, the foundation remains the same, but the platforms and all other aspects are changing.

Yes, about understanding algorithms, it actually starts, without you knowing what's happening, with your intuition being played with. How do digital platforms attract young people? And it has a greater impact on young people, but it's about all of us.

A really fun exercise we usually do in groups when we're doing these kinds of workouts is having people take their phones and scroll through their favorite social media app with their eyes closed. Nine times out of ten, you can do it with your eyes closed. Because you're conditioned to do this. And... it gets worse once you're on the platform itself. Think of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Each has its own purpose, but all share the same underlying goal: to keep you on the platform as long as possible. We need to look at this: I've mentioned Brain Rock, Doom Scrolling, and Rage Bait. These are all emotion-manipulating effects created by the

algorithm. There are influencers online who also target all these categories and age groups, and then they also get ads that contribute to this, let's put it that way.

You now see young people saying they don't even have hobbies anymore, but just spend all their time doomscrolling on social media. How do you deal with this? People need to understand what they are... ...and then you can... Then give yourself the most, let's say, the best tools to combat it.

Many people, at some point when you mention these kinds of terms, are aware of this, but they don't have the tools to tackle it, or even if they can see it in their own minds, how to do it. So let's tackle it.

First, we need to demonstrate how to Google, and this is all to counter what I said earlier, or to improve that understanding. If someone can identify it themselves, you can then tackle it step by step. The foundation here is how to prompt. AI is all the rage right now. But it starts with the basics of how to Google. If you don't formulate your questions correctly, you won't get good answers. And that's on those social media platforms. I use Google because it's more well-known now, but TikTok, for example, is the new Google for a generation. Instagram was the Google for the previous generation, but it's that you want answers to questions, and if you can't articulate those answers well and only use keywords, which is actually what the platforms want.

If you formulate your question correctly, you'll get good, better answers. And it's gotten worse with AI. Because if you ask something incorrectly, you'll get a completely different answer. And then you'll use that, let's say, as a fact. But that's not the case. So, initially, it's about using guidance and a visitor function. Maybe you have the tools, but you lack the knowledge to use them. And that's the first thing you need to address. Once you understand the basics of asking a good question and a good prompt, you then move on to the second option: better channels. So, how are you going to diversify your "for you page"? All these platforms have a "for you page." That's your homepage. That's what the algorithm wants to sell to you. Once you ask good questions, it's adjusted accordingly. But a second option is who you follow. If you want to get good information, you also need to follow the right sources. Usually, it's a change, perhaps not necessarily a decrease in platform usage. Because if your platform is TikTok, for example, or Instagram, you have to tailor your for-you page to ensure you get good, verified information from good sources. And once you start following those good sources, that for-you page is growing very quickly. Because it also has an AI—let's say, a machine learning component—in the background, it will also adapt very quickly to better information sources.

Another step is critical thinking. It starts with who, what, and why. Who says what, and why do they say it? Let's say, in the first step, you have to look at who's saying something. You get the information online. It's also platform agnostic, so it doesn't matter much there, but who's saying it, what's the source? Not just who's speaking, but what's their agenda. So I just said, there are a lot of influencers. Okay, but what's influencing them, and why? Where do they come from? What are their agendas? Secondly, you have what's being said, but also why it's being said. So you have to interpret not only what's being said, but why it's being said. If you look at a news

source, for example, you know who's saying it. What they're saying is very easy to hear... ...but then you also have to slow it down to understand it...

And then the "why" is two-sided. Why are you seeing it now? And that's the first question. The algorithm sent you something. The algorithm made it appear. Why? Why is the digital content on my timeline, on my For You page now? And then why the platform says that, that needs to be interpreted. So why the platform says that and why are you seeing it at that particular moment? And the last of the "who, what, and why" is the emotions—what emotions are they trying to appeal to? What is emotionally affected by the "who, what, and why."

Um. That's actually the first step towards something we always use in our training courses at the Debate Education Foundation.

That's the sexy method, that's the basis. You have to state, explain, and illustrate. State means you have to be able to state your argument. And you can do this in reverse with the information you receive. Okay, which argument do you state? Which argument did they state? In the explain phase, you also get why what you say is true.

So explain it. You can take logical steps for that, just through logic. Or you can also do it evidence-based. Okay, because X, Y, Z are true, this is also true.

So, two ways to explain. Illustrate is using examples. If you have this as an argument and can dissect it, you can understand it better, or better support your opinion, because you then know where it comes from and why it was said. And then you also have substantiation for everything there.

The modern youth worker. In short, I've moved from instructions to guidance. Because historically, everyone wants to give instructions; it's not about going on the platform, or doing this on the platform, or that on the platform, but doing it from your own experience. And your own knowledge of it.

But... The first step to doing it effectively is understanding. You have to be able to know why someone is on this platform, why they've been there for so long, or what they're looking for. Guidance focuses on three key points. It's about slowing down instead of accelerating, so you have to change yourself. Being able to slow down to understand, so to understand it properly, it can't happen quickly, and you shouldn't react too quickly either. Understanding is about judging, so you have to understand the person using it or their intentions. And you have to normalize doubt, so you have doubts or they have doubts, but you have to bring that together, and that comes back to the first point: You have to slow down. Don't react immediately; it's constantly changing. The platforms are constantly changing. The algorithms are constantly changing. So you also have to show understanding. Not just for the person, but also why they're using this medium. What's also highlighted by everything mentioned above is that fake news is rampant, especially now with AI-generated content. They're so incredibly realistic that you no longer know if something you're seeing is real. Because they used to say you had to see it to believe it. Now

you see things that simply aren't true at all. And it could also be that you're manipulating people, so images of real people are digitally manipulated with different text or soundbites. So this fake news and the polarization that follows it demands very quick reactions. Because if you react quickly, you don't have enough time to internalize it, and as a result, it also slows down. Ask those critical questions, then you can understand why this is being done, for example.

An effective approach for a youth worker, I must say, is not to immediately shame, ridicule, or convince them of your opinion, but to look at the bigger picture. Ask those questions, go through that section, or, conversely, through what's being said or seen, and again, it's about what's important. It's the slowing down, it's the probing questions. Ask more questions about what you see, hear, or read, and be able to identify emotions.

If you do that, you already know what triggers them. For example, if you see that everything that triggers you, or everything that becomes a problem, tries to trigger the same emotion. Then you know you're susceptible to those kinds of triggers. And you allow for complexities. It's no longer straightforward online.

Because everything is controlled by, let's say, intelligence, these platforms can continue to stimulate and attract you in various ways, because at some point they can form a better picture of what triggers you, of what holds your attention, than you yourself realize. And that's usually the case now.

Uhm... Yes, the penultimate slide before we get to the Q&A is a tip for youth workers. Focus on understanding instead of judgment. We just talked about that, but this is really essential. You have to be able to understand what the new normal is for your group. And it doesn't just change over time, it also changes with location.

So, for example, we have a lot of WhatsApp use in the Caribbean and in parts of Europe. A lot of people are on WhatsApp. But in Western America, for example, nobody uses it; everyone is on iMessage, for example.

So... We're doing it at the same time but people are using different platforms and you need to be able to understand why.

Why is this? Can I use the same ideas as, for example, chatting via WhatsApp with iMessage? Are the same tools available there? It is also categorized as social media. Many people only look at the use of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc. But chat apps are now also becoming more comprehensive. If you look more at Eastern Europe, you have WeChat, etc., which is an all-encompassing platform. That is also where X, for example, the previous Twitter, is moving to.

You can now also get financial services through the chat function. So that's something too. A second normalization of questioning. There needs to be a back-and-forth. People need to be able to talk to each other and discuss things.

And you have to ask yourself questions, but also ask them out loud to the young people. Go through the process of asking questions. They also need to know the process you're internalizing. Encourage critical thinking, so that section method, encourage active searching. This is the method of searching we just discussed. Go on, why are you looking for something? What would you ask now? Could you ask it more effectively? Just like you would ask in person. Voice is increasingly being used instead of text. So then they have to be able to formulate more quickly. It seems like a small change, but it will have a huge impact. Because with voice, you have to be able to formulate and respond much faster than with text. We're used to using a keyboard, and that slows everything down. This actually speeds up the process. Physically and online is also something that differs; the way emotions, gestures, and body language are expressed through online media. That when we're here is different than when you're physically facing someone. Help somebody understand what and why... instead of telling them why. So that part is for youth workers.

Actually, the biggest point is that these basic truths remain the same across platforms. It doesn't matter what happens tomorrow... or why they do it. But if you can relate to this, if you ask yourself the right questions. If you slow down and internalize it before you actually react, it doesn't matter which platform you use or what's on that platform; these are the basic things that remain the same.

I think that was most of it.

I'd like to close this by saying that digital resilience requires guidance, not shielding. Because the first reaction is usually: okay, don't use this platform anymore. We're past that. Everyone will use these platforms. If you don't, you'll be surrounded by three or four other people who do.

So you need to be able to protect yourself from the digital world. Just like everyone else. Or if you lock your door when you go to sleep, or close your windows at night. Now you need to be able to do the same for yourself in the digital world. Thank you.