

Learn about media manipulation by doing it in Headliner: Novinews

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	English A2 - B1
Learning objectives	Understand how and why media manipulation can occur by experiencing the gamified life of a news editor.
Subjects	English as a Foreign Language, Literature/Reading, Media education, Psychology, Media education, Social sciences, Political Science
Recommended Age	All
Material needed	Game: Headliner: Novinews (Windows, Linux, MacOs)
Sequence duration	60 minutes, renewable
Individual or group activity	Group activity
Skills developed (after learning goals)	Critical thinking, Problem solving
Game price range	<20 €
Extension / differentiation activities (at the end of the sequence)	Carry the game and its scenario over several class sessions.
Similar games that you can use with the sequence	Suzerain, Emily is Away, Not for Broadcast

Step by step: how to implement the sequence

In this pedagogical sequence, you are going to play the game Headliner: Novinews before your classroom while prompting your students for input on which steps to take into the intrigue.

The game is set in a dystopian future that serves as a buffer between the game and reality. You play as a national mainstream news editor who decides which articles get published. You live your life, walk through the city and talk to people, noticing how the news you publish impact their lives. The game aims at helping players understand how and why media can be manipulated and at questioning their own biases. It isn't pointing any fingers at "evil journalists". It also presents the player with moral dilemmas: what are you ready to do to get what you want. The main political themes that the game discusses are globalization versus nationalism, healthcare, recreational substances, and the police.

Developers strived to present both sides on every issue as fairly and accurately as possible and not to push any political agenda. They used the game medium because it is the only medium in which you can witness the narrative consequences of an action and think: "what have I done?". They wanted players to stop and take time to reflect.

- **Step 1: Presenting the concept of the game (5 minutes)**

Launch the game and leave the main menu screen while you explain to students the concept of the game: you can do so by reading the introductory text above this section.



- **Step 2: Hosting the game session (30 minutes)**

You will first go through a short introductory sequence, where you have to walk towards the left and interact with the environment by clicking it. Follow the game instructions until you end up creating your character. Don't spend too much time on this screen. You can go with the basic information.

After this, you start the game in your boss's office. You must perform your first news curation work afterwards. The game teaches you the mechanics, follow them.

Read every news article with your class and ask students if you should accept it or not. Do not debate just now on the implications. You can take time to notice the impact of your decisions later in the game.

The next sequence is a stroll in the city, where you are going to meet the main characters of the story.

The last part of this short tutorial is to go rightward in the city to reach the main character's apartment.

The game is organized in a day-to-day structure. Each day you work by curating news, then interact with characters in the streets and finish the day in your apartment.

When dialogue choices are presented, ask your students what to choose. Ask them to notice the tags on buildings and the references to the articles you curated inside characters' dialogues.

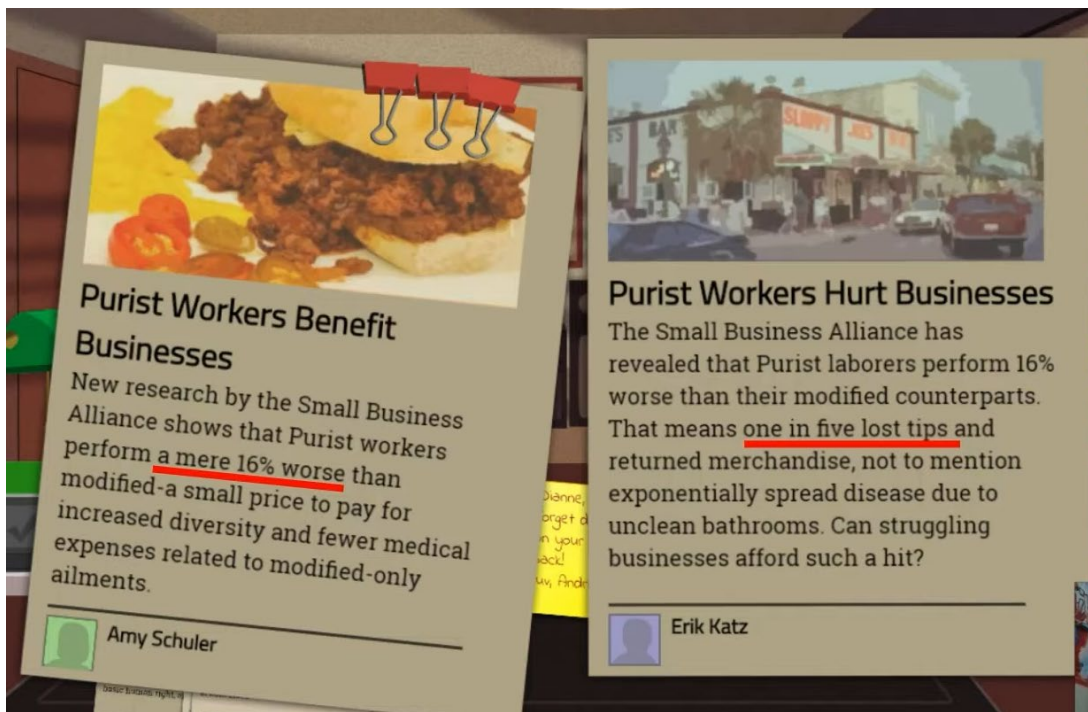
You can ask some students to enact the dialogues instead of reading them yourself.

- **Step 3: Debrief and analysis (25 minutes)**

Ask your students if they can point out some manipulation techniques that occurred during the game.

Here is a set of examples and in-game images that illustrate them.

- **Statistical manipulation:**



In-game screenshot: two ways to tell the same story

Using data to prove a point which is not really proven by the used data: compare 2 articles that cite the same study or number but draw different conclusions from it. One article says this number is low, the other says it is high. One uses a percentage, the other a fraction.

Use this to advise your students to analyse numbers in papers: for instance, by considering the sample size of a study or poll, or whether the source is relevant or not.





- **Relevancy:**



In-game screenshot: an example of relevancy issue

This point is not exactly a manipulation but is part of the problem. It is when a non-expert writes and analyses facts and data on a subject which they do not master.

- Profiling:

 <p>Man Shot on Capitol Square</p> <p>Young man was killed late last night on Capitol Square, marking worrying trend in gun violence. Numerous witnesses reported the assailant as "<u>foreign-looking.</u>"</p> <hr/>  <p>Rudolf Wunnenberg Clearheaded Editor</p>	 <p>Young Woman Found Dead in Park</p> <p>Last night, the Police found the body of Sofia K. hidden in the bushes of a nearby park. NoviPD issued no statement, but likely suspect is her boyfriend Hermann P., who is <u>not a Novistan native.</u></p> <hr/>  <p>Rudolf Wunnenberg Clearheaded Editor</p>
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In-game screenshot: an example of negative profiling

Repetition of articles about crimes committed, describing assailant as foreign-looking, or not a native. Publishing only articles about crimes committed by foreigners can shape the public opinion by making people think there is an overrepresented number of crimes committed by foreigners.

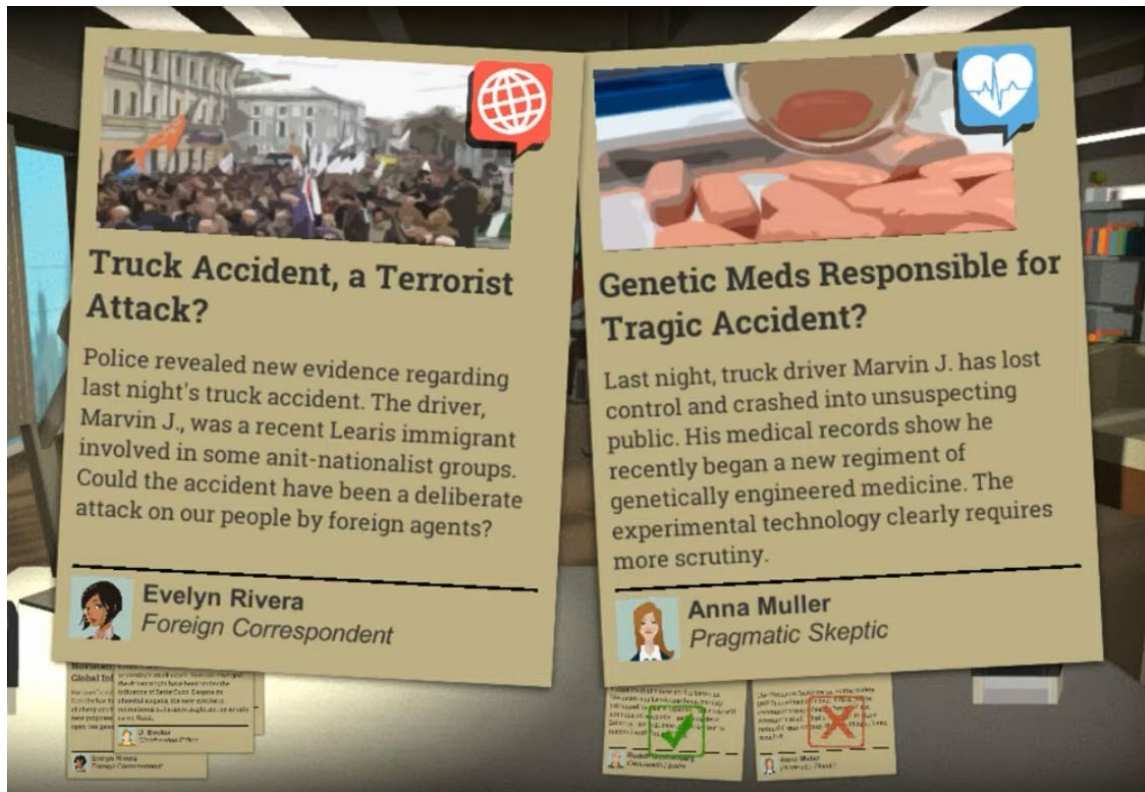
- Repetition and lies of omission:

Your boss pushes you to publish articles that keep presenting the same point of view. Being exposed to the same idea over and over, you start to believe it a little subconsciously even if you think you don't. It is called the mere-exposure effect or cognitive ease.

A video to illustrate/explain cognitive ease:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cebFWOlx848>

- Scapegoating:



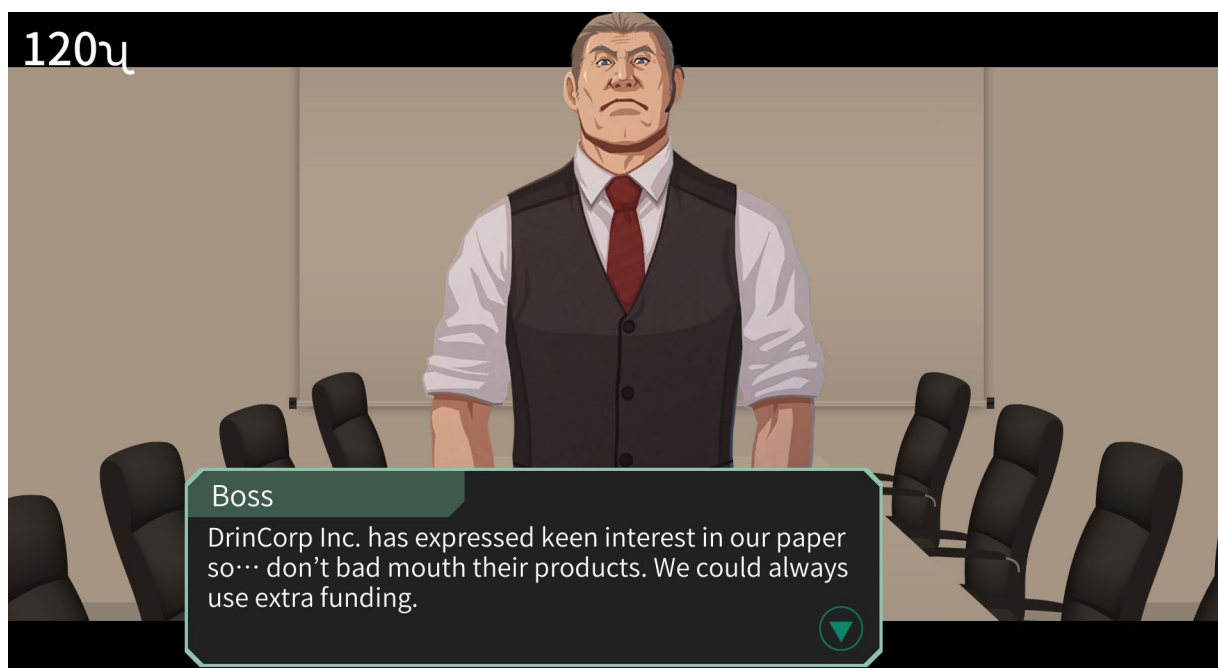
In-game screenshot: an example of scapegoating

When something tragic happens, we can feel a need to put the blame on something. There is nothing scarier than the unknown, so we are prone to jump to conclusions even without full information. In the game you are pressured to choose someone as a culprit. It is possible to publish nothing in the game, it is a secret possibility!

- Packaging, bundling or hidden agendas:

You try to push a story but embed it in a hidden message. For example, a story about coronavirus titled “Chinese coronavirus” putting the blame on China for the pandemic.

- Government or financial pressure:



In-game screenshot: example of financial influence

It refers to politicians calling your articles fake news or financial problems to push you to get extra funding. Adds on online articles do not pay the bills anymore so the need to resort to clickbait is increasing.

You can illustrate and elaborate on this point on clickbait using this video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE3j_RHkqJc

Resources

Getting the game

https://store.steampowered.com/app/918820/Headliner_NoviNews/

References

All screenshots used in this lesson were taken from Headliner: Novinews, Unbound creation (2018).

[Veritasium]. (2016, July 21). 'The illusion of truth' [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cebFWOlx848>

Flynn, D. (2019, September 17). You Can't Have it Both Ways – Headliner: NoviNews Review. gamingtrend.com Retrieved from <https://gamingtrend.com/feature/reviews/you-cant-have-it-both-ways-headliner-novinews-review/>.

[GDC]. (2020, June 4). 'Stop & Think: Teaching Players About Media Manipulation in Headliner' [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf_bezxknxU

[CGP Grey]. (2015, March 10). 'This Video Will Make You Angry' [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE3j_RHkqJc

