**Why Critical Thinking?**

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Did you use social media already this morning? Were you thinking critically? Did you notice any fake news?

Look at this post! “A lion escaped from a zoo in KUMAMOTO.” Three years ago, after the Kumamoto earthquake, this post was shared many times - as many as 27,000 times in just one hour! Can you imagine people’s reactions? But this post was actually fake. Fake news can easily fool us into believing things that are not true. Many people were deceived by the information, and I was too. My critical thinking skills failed.

 To learn more about critical thinking in relation to social media, I gave a survey to the 188 4th year students at my school. I asked, “What are you concerned about when looking at social media?” 53% of the students answered, “I don’t trust the information”, or “I only pay attention to personal information”. However, 38% of the students answered, “I don’t pay attention to anything at all when I look at social media”. Wait! This is very dangerous.

We must identify fake news to avoid being deceived. This is why we need “Critical Thinking”. It is an important life skill.

According to the Cambridge dictionary, critical thinking is “the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you”.

Although critical thinking is an essential skill, in my survey 72% of students didn’t know what Critical thinking was. In fact, only 25% of students had heard of it before. And only 3% of students could explain critical thinking. We use social media every day, but most students don’t know about critical thinking. This is a critical state!!!!

Imagine a world without critical thinking. We would believe all sorts of “fake” news and make many bad decisions. However, if we use critical thinking correctly, we can make better decisions because we can think more clearly and accurately. I will give you three tips on how to improve your critical thinking when it comes to viewing social media.

First, make sure that the item is from a legitimate news source.  News from an unknown source or news outlet should be a red flag. In my example, the story came from an individual in Kanagawa.  He was NOT part of a news team.

Second, check the content of the article. Are there many errors?  This might show it was not edited professionally and might be fake.  Also make sure the caption matches the information. Sometimes titles are very misleading.

Like in the previous example.  It says it is about Kumamoto, but the photo is NOT of Japan.  This is very clear if we take the time to look at it carefully. The traffic signal, the crossing, and the car number plate are not Japanese. If I looked at the picture critically, I would not have been deceived.

Last, verify the story with fact checking sites or other news outlets.  Most real news stories will be reported on by more than one news outlet. No other news outlets reported about a lion in Kumamoto.  Also check with fact checking sites. In this case, the creator of this story was caught and punished.

Social media is very useful, but we need to use it carefully. We need to train our critical thinking skills to make sure we are not fooled. Please apply your critical thinking skills and stem the tide of fake news. Happy surfing.