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Integrating Cross-Cultural Analysis of Misinformation into Multicultural Education and Digital Literacy Curricula

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A photograph of a classroom scene, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the foreground, a young girl with long dark hair is looking towards the camera. Behind her, several other children are visible, some looking at a tablet or paper. A teacher with long dark hair is partially visible on the right side of the frame, looking down at the children. The background shows a classroom setting with a whiteboard and shelves.

01

The Cultural Gap in Digital Literacy

Why universal digital literacy curricula fall short in multicultural classrooms

Information Disorder and the Missing Cultural Lens

Digital communication has intensified **information disorder** including misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation amplified by platform dynamics that reward speed, emotion, and identity signaling.

Educational responses have expanded with media literacy modules and fact-checking routines. Yet a **major gap remains**:

Most curricula assume the same cognitive routines and classroom norms are equally effective for all learners. In multicultural classrooms, students bring culturally shaped expectations about authority, disagreement, and social risk.

Key Insight: These expectations influence whether verification strategies are used, whether corrections are voiced, and whether misleading content is shared for relational reasons.



The Core Argument: Culture as a Core Component

Culturally responsive digital literacy should be treated **not as an optional supplement**, but as a **core component** of multicultural education and global citizenship education (GCE).



Multicultural Education

Emphasizes **knowledge construction** and **equity pedagogy** asking whose knowledge becomes authoritative and how teaching must adapt to diverse cultural repertoires.



Global Citizenship Education

Stresses **perspective-taking**, intercultural communication, and the capacity to examine global issues critically while recognizing worldviews are historically situated.



Digital Literacy

Contributes **source evaluation**, algorithmic awareness, manipulation detection, and ethical online participation as operational dimensions.

Central Claim: Once misinformation is understood as a cultural and social phenomenon, it becomes a powerful site for building both critical thinking and intercultural competence.



02

Why Culture Matters

Cross-cultural frameworks that explain how communities recognize credibility, manage disagreement, and find narratives compelling

Individualism vs. Collectivism: The Social Meaning of Sharing

Individualist Contexts

Public reasoning norms privilege **autonomy**, open debate, and the legitimacy of dissent. Epistemic authority is treated as something to be scrutinized and negotiated.

Example: In a study, U.S. participants were reported to cross-verify claims and value creator transparency more often than participants in some higher-power-distance contexts.

Collectivist Contexts

Relational obligations and **in-group harmony** alter the meaning of sharing. Forwarding a warning in a family chat may be understood as care or loyalty, even when accuracy is uncertain.

Example: Research on WhatsApp-linked mob violence in India found that child-kidnapping and kidney-theft rumours circulated in trusted private networks, where forwarding could be framed as community protection.

Empirical Evidence: US-India research (Gupta et al., 2023) shows collectivist value endorsement is associated with higher fake-news believability across multiple scenarios. Drivers of belief do not travel neatly across societies. Ideological predictors vary by context.

Educational Implication: Teaching correction only as assertive debunking may work in some discourse cultures but backfire where direct contradiction risks social rupture.



Core Insight: Verification competes with other social goods. Misinformation education should address not only truth evaluation, but also the **relational motives** that drive circulation such as care, loyalty, and social responsibility.

Power Distance: Authority, Trust, and Institutional History

Power distance can shape whether students treat official sources as default anchors of credibility or as institutions to be approached with caution. Trust must be treated historically rather than abstractly.

Country / Context	Reported Credibility Anchor	Reported Verification Pattern	Relevant Cultural Dimension(s)
United States	Creator transparency and multiple sources	More frequent cross-verification	Lower power distance; higher individualism
China	Institutional / platform cues	Less independent verification in study sample	Higher power distance; long-term orientation
India	Institutional + relational trust cues	Triangulation through several sources	Higher power distance; collectivist orientations
Japan	Official-source precision	Reliance on official sources in study sample	High uncertainty avoidance; institutional trust

Source: UGC-news trust study using Hofstede framework; patterns are study-specific, not fixed national traits.

Pedagogical Implication: "Trust the experts" cannot function as a universally sufficient teaching strategy. Students need tools for examining **why** some institutions are trusted, **why** others are doubted, and how historical memory shapes those reactions.

Uncertainty Avoidance and Cultural Tightness-Looseness

Uncertainty Avoidance

Individual discomfort with uncertainty correlates with conspiracy beliefs, but **country-level uncertainty avoidance does not consistently predict** endorsement.

Crises create demand for narratives offering **causal closure**.

Greece & Portugal both score high on uncertainty avoidance (100 and 99), yet show different patterns due to media trust.

Tightness vs. Looseness

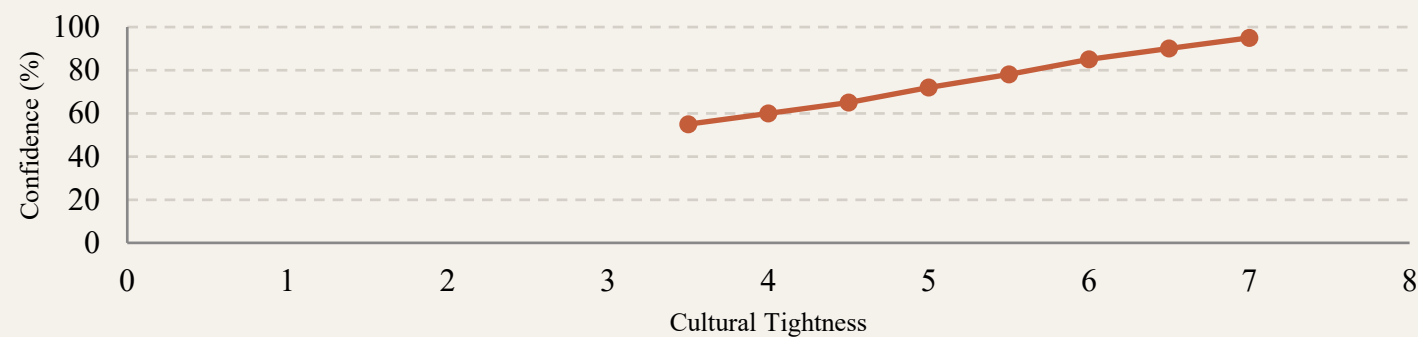
Tight cultures enforce stronger norms; **loose cultures** allow greater permissiveness.

Across 28 countries, higher cultural tightness was positively associated with COVID-19 vaccine confidence (Wang et al., 2025).

Organized anti-vaccination resistance was prominent in 19th-century Britain and the United States.

Educational Takeaway: The same corrective content may succeed or fail depending on normative logic. In tighter contexts, emphasize collective responsibility. In looser contexts, preserve autonomy.

Vaccine Confidence vs. Cultural Tightness (28 Countries)



Source: Wang et al. (2025), JMIR Public Health; visualization is illustrative, not plotted from the source dataset.

Schwartz's Basic Values and Narrative Appeal

Schwartz's theory focuses on **value tradeoffs that cut across societies** such as security vs. self-direction, conformity vs. openness, universalism vs. power.

Value Pair	Appeals To	Often Used In
Security vs. Self-Direction	Safety, stability, predictability	Crisis warnings, health scares
Conformity vs. Openness	Tradition, social order, obedience	Cultural preservation narratives
Universalism vs. Power	Justice, equality, protecting nature	Anti-corruption, reform movements
Benevolence vs. Achievement	Care, loyalty, family welfare	Family-targeted health messages
Tradition vs. Hedonism	Respect for customs, modesty	Religious or ethnic identity claims

Why This Matters for Curriculum

This model is useful because it can be **operationalized without reducing students to national categories.**

Learners can ask: **What values does this message appeal to?**

Value priorities are associated with receptivity to conspiracy beliefs, interacting with political context (Adam-Troian et al., 2021).

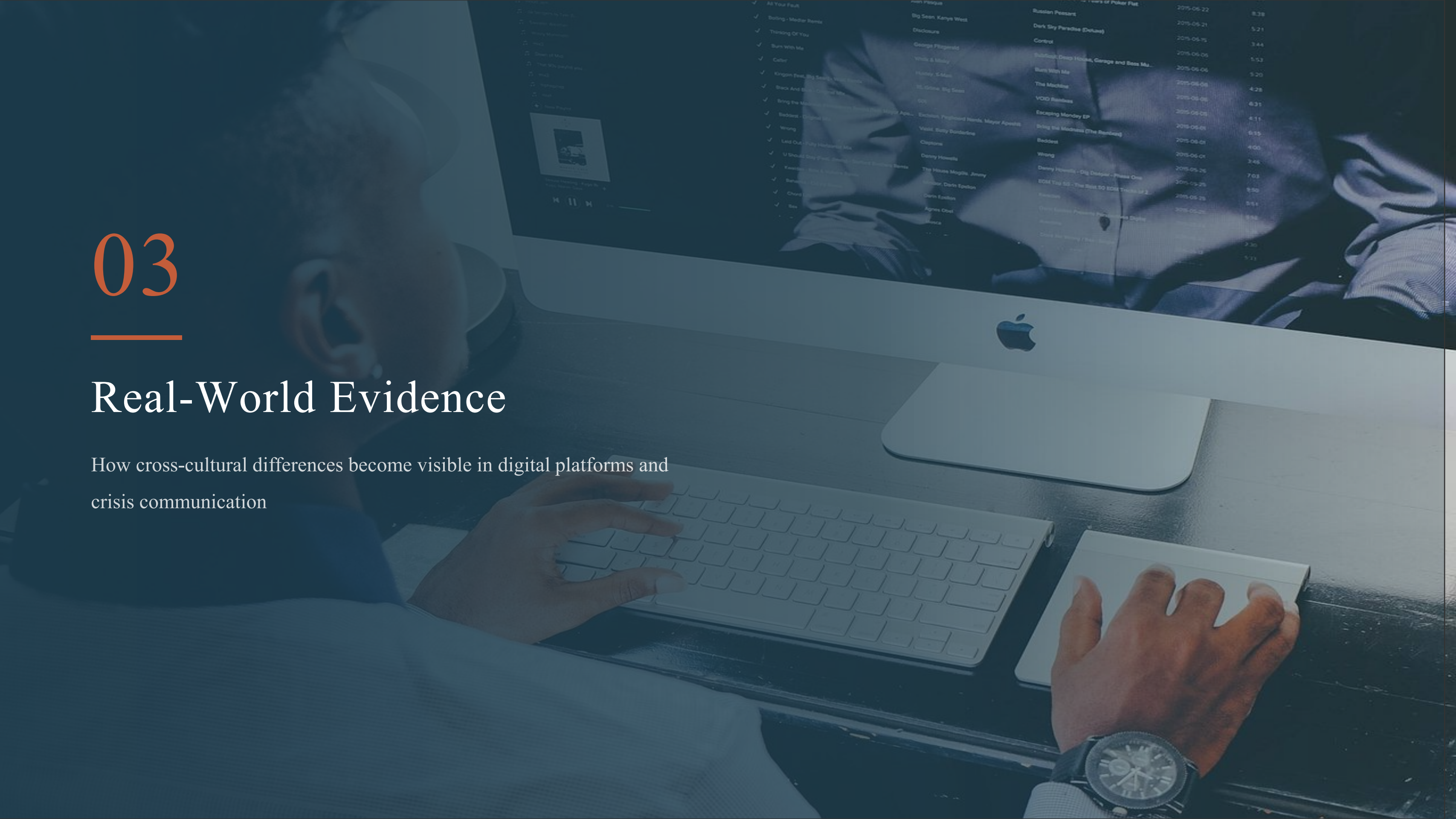
Analyzing value appeals should be central to digital literacy instruction.

Classroom Application: Students examine real misinformation messages and identify the values being activated. They then discuss how those same appeals might function differently across communities building both critical analysis and intercultural perspective-taking.

03

Real-World Evidence

How cross-cultural differences become visible in digital platforms and crisis communication



Cross-National Evidence: 16 Countries, 6 Continents

Cross-national survey analysis shows perceptions of fake-news exposure vary across EU countries and are associated with cultural dimensions (Arrese, 2024).

Experimental work across **16 countries on six continents** (Arechar et al., 2023) reveals misinformation susceptibility and intervention effects are globally distributed but **uneven**.

This reinforces the need for **culturally adaptable educational tools** rather than one-size-fits-all interventions.

Key Finding: What people believe they see online is shaped by **cultural-political interpretation**. The same content evokes different concern levels in different societies.



Key Studies & Findings

Arechar et al. (2023): Accuracy prompts reduced misinformation-sharing intentions in a 16-country experiment, with effects varying by national context.

Basol et al. (2021): Prebunking interventions showed cross-cultural promise but required localization.

Arrese (2024): Cultural dimensions are associated with fake-news exposure concern across EU countries.

Hornsey et al. (2023): Individual, intergroup, and nation-level influences on conspiracy beliefs operate through distinct mechanisms.

Platform Dynamics: WhatsApp, Family Networks, and Social Intimacy



In contexts where information moves through **trusted private networks** such as family groups, neighborhood chats, religious communities misinformation spreads precisely because it is **socially intimate**.

Research in India (LSE WhatsApp Vigilantes) and Zimbabwe (Bowles et al., 2020) shows how platform affordances interact with social trust and local care norms.

The same video can be **recaptioned with different contexts** to serve different ideological purposes.

The visual content stays identical while the meaning shifts.

Case: WhatsApp Lynchings in India

LSE research documented WhatsApp-linked child-kidnapping/kidney-theft rumours associated with more than 40 deaths and hundreds of injuries across more than 11 Indian states, mainly during 2017-2019. Messages spread through trusted networks because:

- Forwarding was understood as **civic duty** and care for community safety
- WhatsApp's intimate nature **delegated credibility to relational ties**
- Visual "proof" created affective shock that **disrupted critical evaluation**
- Local media/social chatter sometimes reinforced rumours when users tried to verify

The point: culturally appropriate correction looks different when public rebuttal is socially costly.

Crisis Communication Patterns: COVID-19, GMOs, and Natural Disasters

COVID-19 Conspiracies

Uncertainty, institutional trust, and identity conflict intersect. Narratives supply **agency**, identify scapegoats, and reframe uncertainty as hidden intention.

Themes shifted across pandemic phases, reflecting interaction of uncertainty, institutional credibility, and platform dynamics (Erokhin et al., 2022).

GMO Debates

Epistemic claims intertwine with economic, moral, and political concerns. Misinformation persists through **identity reinforcement** rather than simple ignorance.

Scientific claims merge with identity-based concerns about corporations, governance, and food systems (Erokhin & Komendantova, 2023).

Earthquakes & Blackouts

High-impact disasters catalyze **techno-causal explanations** (HAARP claims). Crises generate stories that personalize blame and reduce complexity.

A 2025 study of Spanish-language YouTube discourse after the Iberian blackout found emotionally charged comment cultures shaped by local politics (Erokhin, 2025a).

Recurring Pattern: Crises generate stories that personalize blame, moralize causality, and reduce complexity. Misinformation functions not only as falsehood but as an **interpretive shortcut** during disruption.

Pedagogically Important: Students need to learn to separate prevalence from impact. Misinformation can be quantitatively limited yet still disproportionately salient when it carries higher emotional intensity than routine commentary (Erokhin, 2025b).

A culturally responsive curriculum should help students recognize how uncertainty, threat, and social disruption create demand for explanatory narratives that simplify complexity and assign blame.

04

Reframing Digital Literacy

Integrating critical digital literacy, multicultural education, and intercultural competence development



Three Traditions, One Integrated Framework

A culturally responsive approach brings together **three educational traditions** often discussed separately into one coherent framework.

Critical Digital Literacy

Source evaluation, algorithmic awareness, manipulation detection, and ethical online participation.

Operational dimension: **how** to verify claims and navigate information environments.

Multicultural Education

Knowledge construction, power analysis, and equity pedagogy.

Asks **whose knowledge** becomes authoritative and how curricula reproduce or challenge inequality (Banks, 1993).

Intercultural Competence

Openness, respect, empathy, flexibility, and self-reflection.

Skills alone are insufficient without these **attitudes and dispositions** (Deardorff, 2006).

The Four Interpretive Questions

1. What **values** does the message appeal to? (security, loyalty, fairness, tradition)
2. What **trust relationships** are invoked? (science, government, media, elders)
3. What **communication norms** shape how the message is spread or corrected?
4. What **evidence** is offered, and what counts as credible here?

Cultural analysis becomes a **core cognitive scaffold**. Students learn to test truth claims and recognize how persuasion works differently across communities.

Case-Based Curriculum Design

Case-based learning exposes the **situated nature of credibility**. Cases invite comparative reasoning across contexts, languages, and communities.

Case 1: COVID-19 Conspiracies

Students trace how narratives supply agency, identify scapegoats, and reframe uncertainty as hidden intention. Compare tight vs. loose culture responses to health authority guidance.

Case 2: Earthquake Conspiracies

Examine how historical experiences of secrecy condition plausibility judgments. Why do techno-military explanations (HAARP) emerge after disasters in some communities?

Case 3: GMO Debates

A slower-moving contested-science case. Students see how misinformation persists through identity reinforcement. Epistemic claims merge with economic and moral concerns.

Methods: Lateral Reading + Cultural Sensitivity

Students learn **lateral reading** and civic online reasoning leaving a source, cross-checking claims, investigating the organization behind a message (Wineburg & McGrew, 2019).

The **culturally responsive extension**: students also learn how to apply these techniques in socially appropriate ways:

- How to **question without humiliating**
- How to **correct without escalating conflict**
- How to recognize that **hesitation to challenge** may reflect norms of respect, not lack of critical capacity

Intercultural competence is not an optional social skill. It becomes **part of the method itself**.

05

From Theory to Practice

Teacher preparation, assessment strategies, and the research agenda ahead

Teacher Preparation and Assessment

Three Areas of Teacher Support

1. Curating Diverse Cases

Teachers need help building case corpora across platforms, languages, and trust ecologies, not just English-language Twitter examples.

2. Guiding Comparative Discussion

Strategies for facilitating discussion without overgeneralizing from nationality or ethnicity avoiding "people from culture X do Y" stereotypes.

3. Ethical Challenges

Addressing representation, data bias, context collapse, and student vulnerability when working with real-world digital content.

Research Agenda

Future research should ask: **Which cultural adaptations improve learning outcomes?** Which risk stereotyping? How do interventions perform across diverse classrooms?

Evidence is needed not only for *whether* methods work, but for **whom, under what conditions, and through what cultural mechanisms** (Basol et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

Teacher training in critical AI literacy is increasingly important because AI tools can produce or flag content imperfectly, creating false positives/negatives and trust challenges.

Performance-Based Assessment

Assessment must capture whether students can **reason about credibility across cultural contexts**, not just label headlines true or false.

A culturally responsive extension of civic online reasoning (Wineburg et al., 2019):

- Analyze the same misinformation theme in **two different cultural contexts**
- Identify the **value appeals** and **trust cues** in each
- Propose **context-sensitive correction strategies**

This assesses **interpretive flexibility, intercultural reasoning, and ethical judgment.**

CONCLUSION

From Checklists to Contextual Rigor

Students should be trained to ask not only *whether something is true*, but also *why this feels true here, to these people, at this moment*.

That second question does not weaken critical judgment. It **strengthens it** by connecting evidence to context, verification to empathy, and digital literacy to democratic life.

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