Reactionary Digital Politics: Information Literacy and Ideology in the Age of the Influencer

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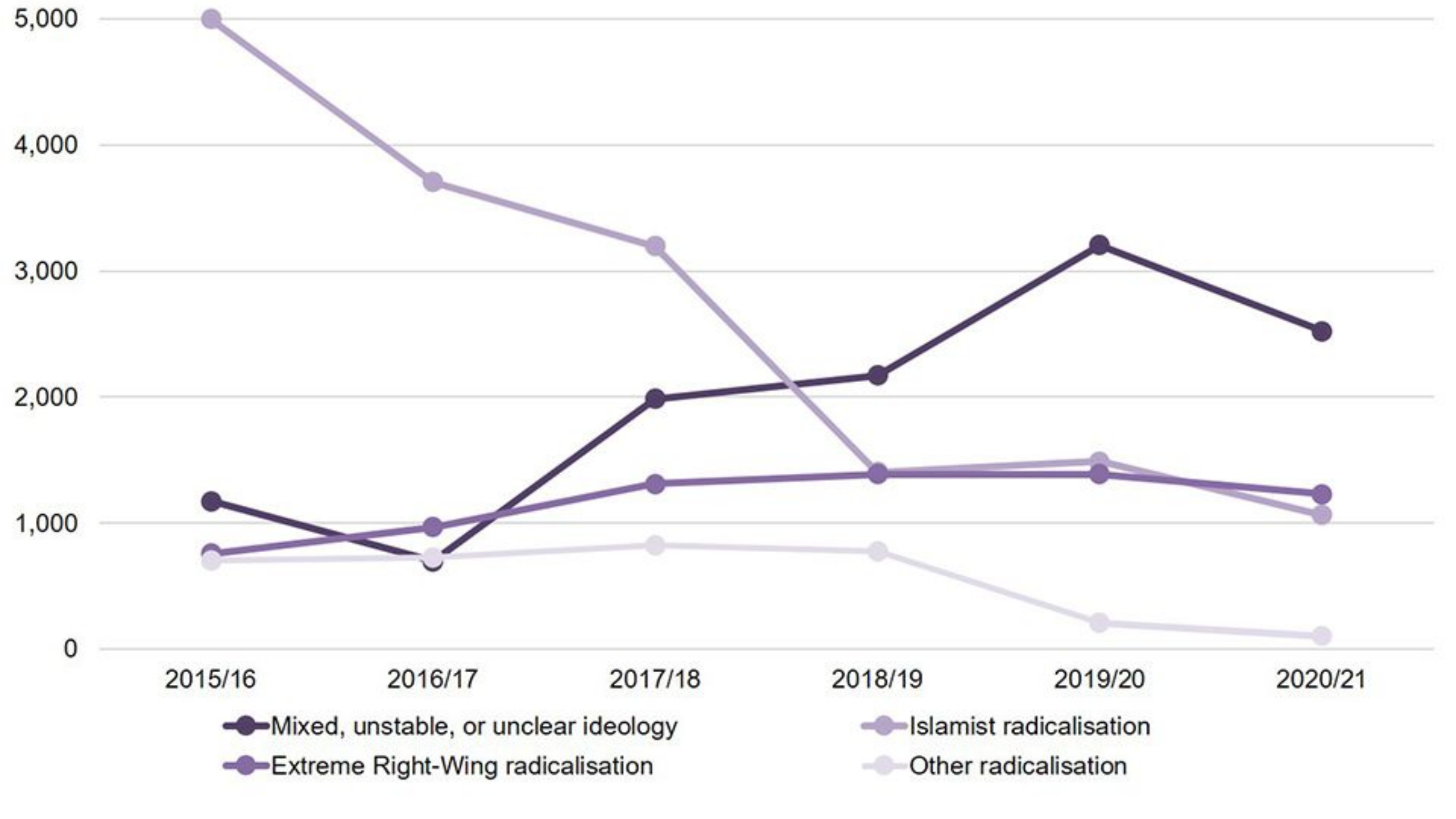
Have a quick chat in small groups and consider…

- **What conspiracy theories or ‘alternative narratives’ from the online world have you come across in schools?**


5,000
4,000
3,000
2,000
1,000
0
2015/16
2016/17
2017/18
2018/19
2019/20
2020/21
Mixed, unstable, or unclear ideology
Islamist radicalisation
Extreme Right-Wing radicalisation
Other radicalisation

The Ideological Entrepreneurs of Reactionary Digital Politics

- Reactionary rhetorics don't make positive propositions; argument involves the proliferation of examples of how things have '**gone too far'** and of the victims of pervasive and cunning liberal egalitarianism

- **'Dangerous', bold and daring heroes** must expose Liberalism as unnatural, decadent and authoritarian: this is the 'new counter-culture'.

- They appear as **charismatic authorities** in a 'personal' relationship with 'followers' (or subscribers)

'White people are constrained by their tolerance to the point that they're neutered. They have no balls. If you're white, and you're not a white supremacist, you're fucking gay.'

'When you go into battle, you have to identify the traitors amongst you plus your enemies. There are people who are deliberately trying to subvert Western nations.'

A growing gender divergence

For the first time, gender is emerging as a sharp dividing line in young people's political ideology. While young men remain more liberal than conservative, young women are becoming significantly more progressive, particularly on issues like immigration and racial justice[12].

This divergence is most pronounced on gender-specific matters. While only 36% of 16-29-year-old men agree that 'feminism has done more good than harm'[13], a concerning minority (20-30%) feel threatened by female equality. Nearly half (45%) believe that efforts to promote women's equality have gone so far that men are now discriminated against[14].

Controversial prominent online figures amplify these concerns, with 47% of Gen Z men agreeing that 'masculinity is under attack'[15]. Even liberal or moderate young men sometimes relate to messages about hard work, discipline, and self-improvement embedded in this type of rhetoric.

As gender roles shift, young men seek motivational figures to navigate modern masculinity. The need for relatable, constructive role models is clear.

44%

of Gen Z men agree that 'when it comes to giving women equal rights, things have gone far enough'

45%

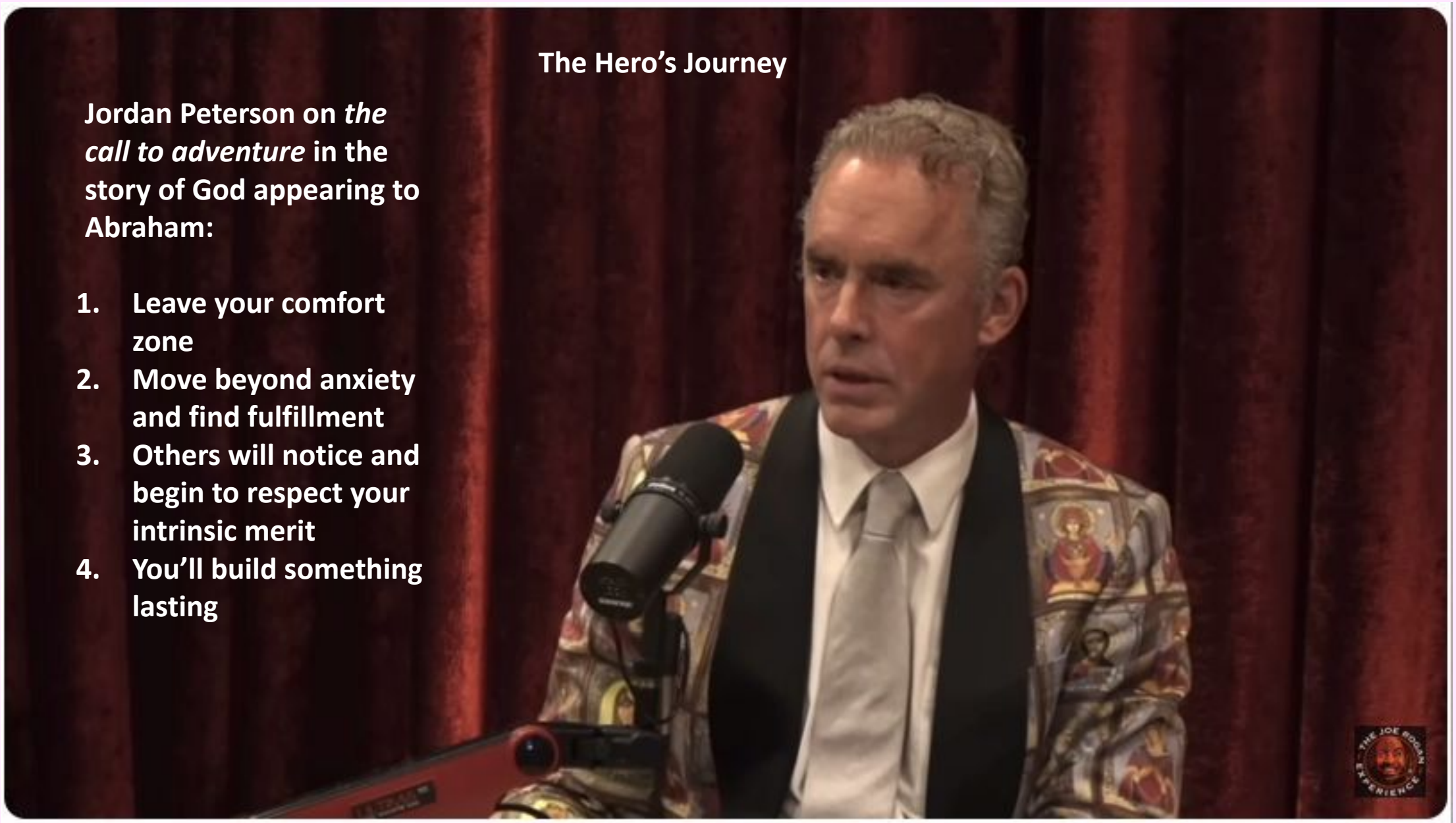
of men believe that 'we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men'

Source: Channel 4 and Craft Research (2025). 'Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust.' January.
Available at:
https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/_flysystem/s3/2025-01/Gen%20Z%20Trends%20Truth%20and%20Trust_0.pdf

The Hero's Journey

Jordan Peterson on *the call to adventure* in the story of God appearing to Abraham:

1. Leave your comfort zone
2. Move beyond anxiety and find fulfillment
3. Others will notice and begin to respect your intrinsic merit
4. You'll build something lasting



Joe Rogan Experience #2180 - Jordan Peterson

The Truth About Chads

1.4M views • 5 years ago

The Truth About Bill Gates

826K views • 3 years ago

The Truth About the KAREN Movie

480K views • 2 years ago

The Truth About the Titanic

596K views • 9 months ago

The Truth About Ukraine

827K views • 2 years ago

The Truth About Afghanistan

654K views • 2 years ago

The Truth About France

568K views • 9 months ago

The Truth About Trump Getting Corona

675K views • 3 years ago

The Truth About Simone Biles

651K views • 2 years ago

The Truth About Extinction Rebellion

929K views • 4 years ago

The Truth About Brexit (2018)

454K views • 5 years ago

The Truth About the Christmas Parade Killer

452K views • 2 years ago

The Truth About the FBI Raid On Trump

520K views • 1 year ago

The Truth About 'Vaccine Passports'

908K views • 3 years ago

The Truth About Andrew Tate

632K views • 1 year ago

The Trap for Teachers

- Criticising ideological entrepreneurs *proves that they are right*
- Your criticism becomes ‘proof’ that the Matrix exists, and that *you* are one of its agents
- How to respond? It starts with understanding new forms of media and information literacy…

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER.

VOL. LXI. NO. 19,640. NEW YORK, TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 1912. TWENTY-FOUR PAGES. ONE CENT

TITANIC SINKS FOUR HOURS AFTER HITTING ICEBERG; 866 RESCUED BY CARPATHIA, PROBABLY 1250 PERISH; ISMAY SAFE, MRS. ASTOR MAYBE, NOTED NAMES MISSING

Col. Astor and Bride, Isidor Straus and Wife, and Maj. Butt Aboard.

"RULE OF SEA" FOLLOWED

Women and Children Put Over in Lifeboats and Are Supposed to be Safe on Carpathia.

PICKED UP AFTER 8 HOURS

Vincent Astor Calls at White Star Office for News of His Father and Leaves Weeping.

FRANKLIN HOPEFUL ALL DAY

Manager of the Line Insisted Titanic Was Unsinkable Even After She Had Gone Down.

HEAD OF THE LINE ABOARD

Biggest Liner Plunges to the Bottom at 2:20 A.M.

RESCUERS THERE TOO LATE

Except to Pick Up the Few Hundreds Who Took to the Lifeboats.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

Calvander Carpathia Rushing to New York with Her Survivors.

SEA SEARCH FOR OTHERS

The California Stands By on Chance of Picking Up Other Boats or Rafts.

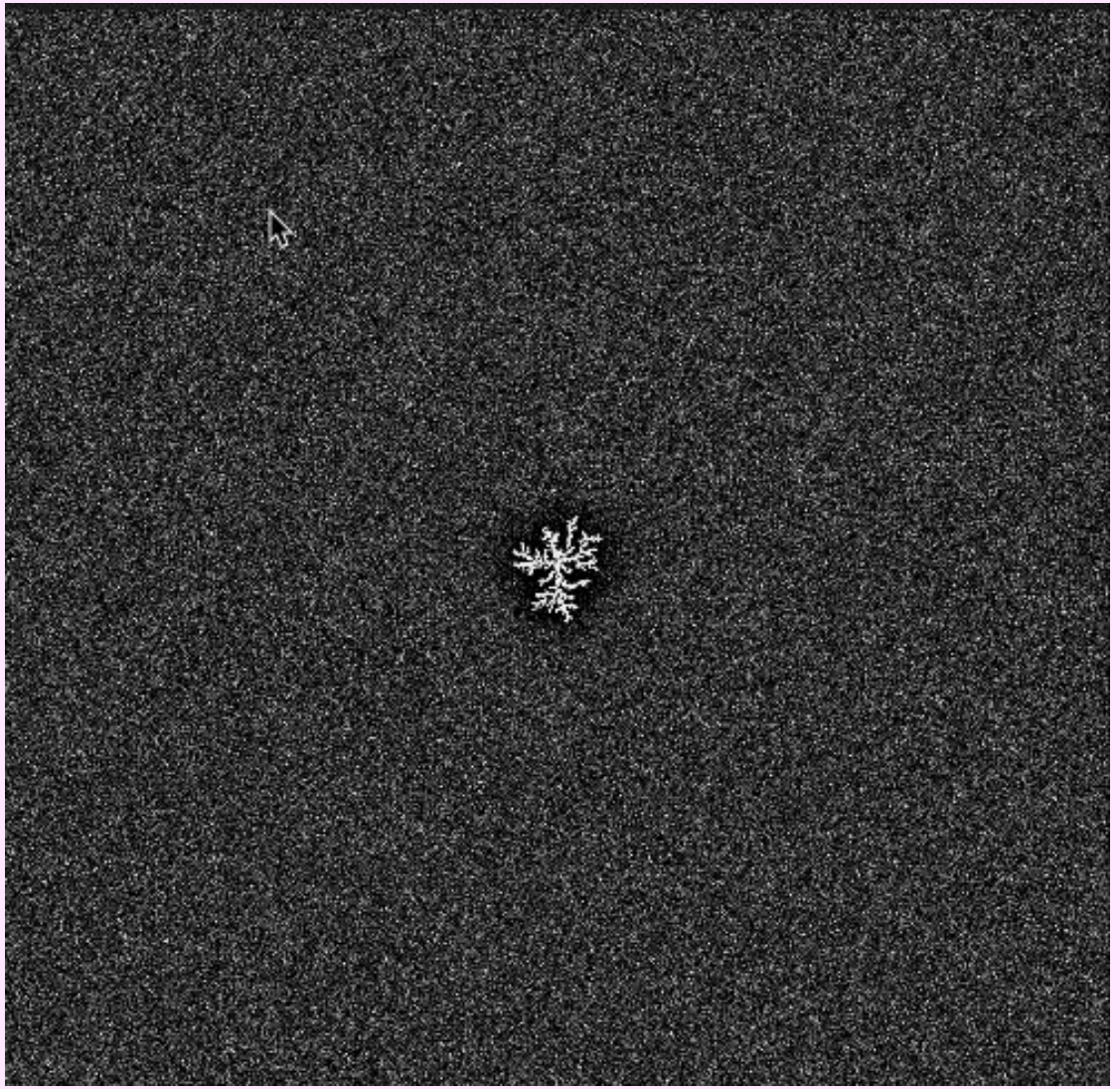
OLYMPIC SENDS THE NEWS

The Lost Titanic Being Towed Out of Belfast Harbor.

CAPT. E. J. SMITH, Commander of the Titanic.

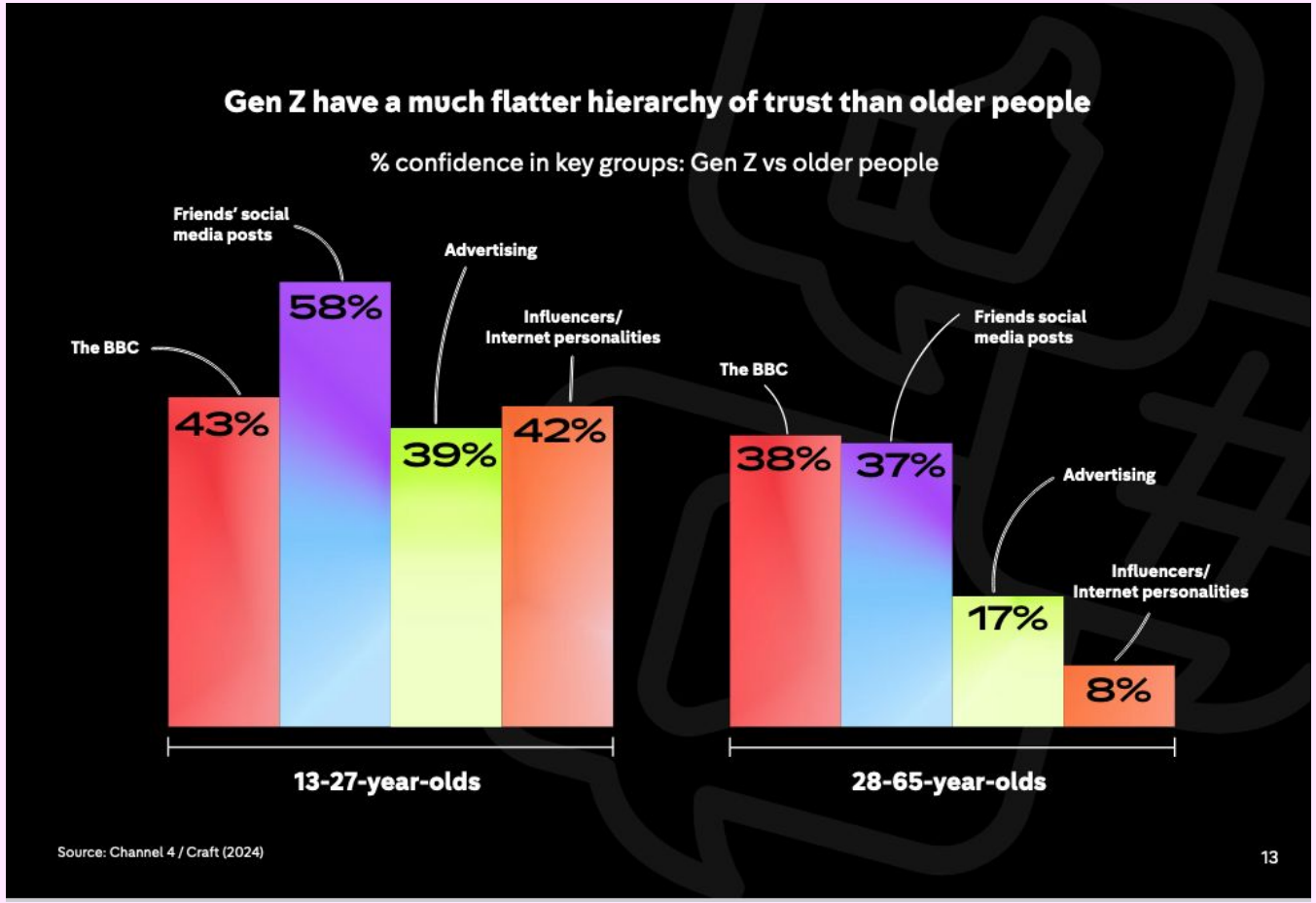
PARTIAL LIST OF THE SAVED.

Includes Bruce Ismay, Mrs. Widener, Mrs. H. B. Harris, and an Incomplete name, suggesting Mrs. Astor's.



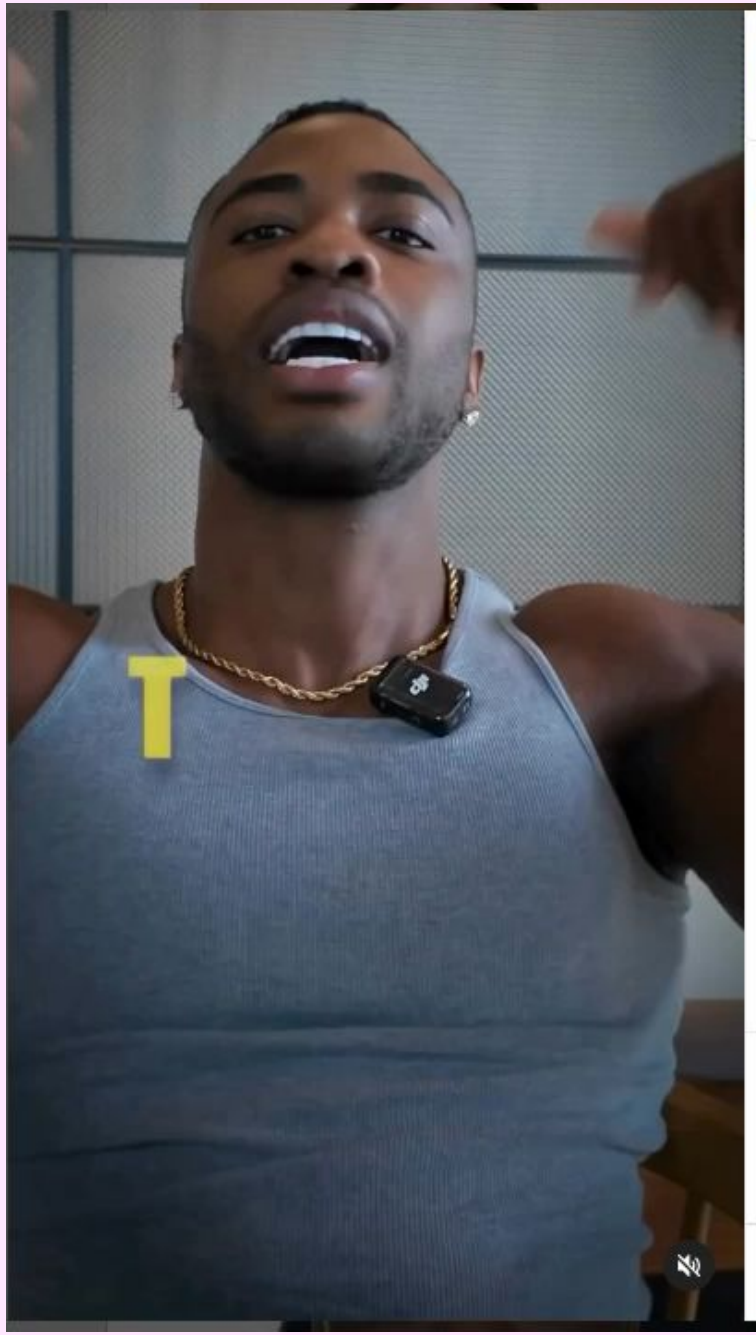
Context collapse: news, socializing, self-help-tips, establishment media and influencers all vie for attention in the same space.

Influencers orient their followers *emotionally* and *ideologically*



Context collapse makes ideas and ideologies appear incoherent to to the uninitiated.

One person’s extremist misinformation, another person’s liberating truth?



fitxfearless · Follow
Original audio

fitxfearless Stop Expecting Women To Accept Your Bare Minimum 💯

You think women should like you "just the way you are."

Wake up.

Humans are superficial - that's not an opinion, it's reality.

Here's the truth most guys don't want to hear:

- Your "potential" means nothing if you don't act on it
- Being a "good guy" isn't enough
- No one owes you attraction
- Women want a man who puts in the work

You can have great internal qualities AND be physically attractive.

You can have strong values AND dress well.

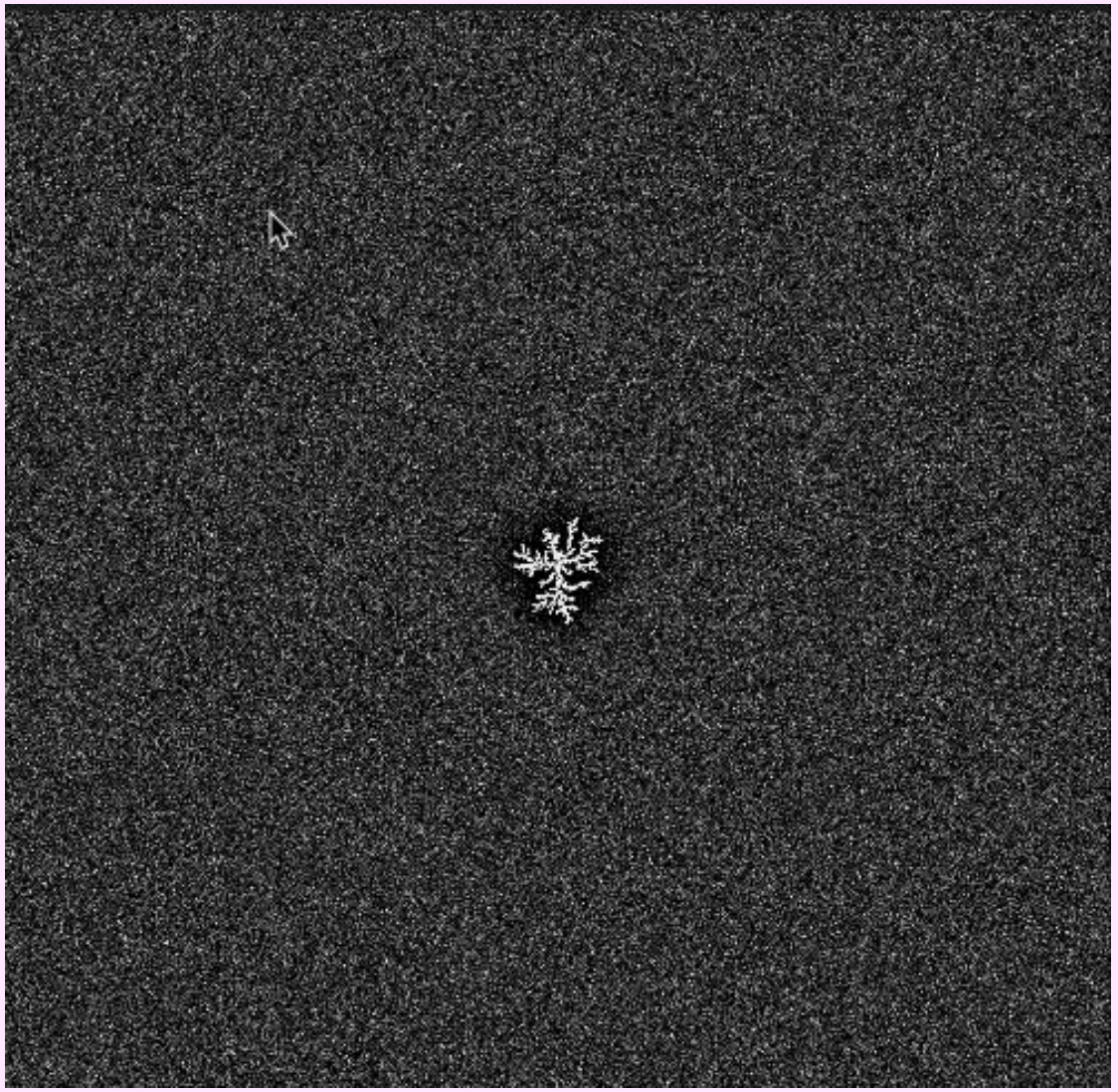
You can be authentic AND level up your looks.

That's why I created a free guide called "5 Attraction Triggers" that shows you exactly how to become a more handsome, attractive man - fast.

2,235 likes
2 days ago

Add a comment... Post

- Hyperinformation, not disinformation
- Influencers orient followers to contextual ’clusters’
  - Eg, workout tips
- Literacy is about linking cluster to cluster
  - Workout tips and dating advice, dating advice and anti-feminist politics
  - Includes some sound literacy skills: do your own research, check for bias
- But remember: ‘parasocial relationships’ are emotionally real



JOIN THE REAL WORLD

ESCAPE THE MATRIX

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Email address

example@gmail.com

First Name

First Name

Last Name

Last Name

SELECT PLAN

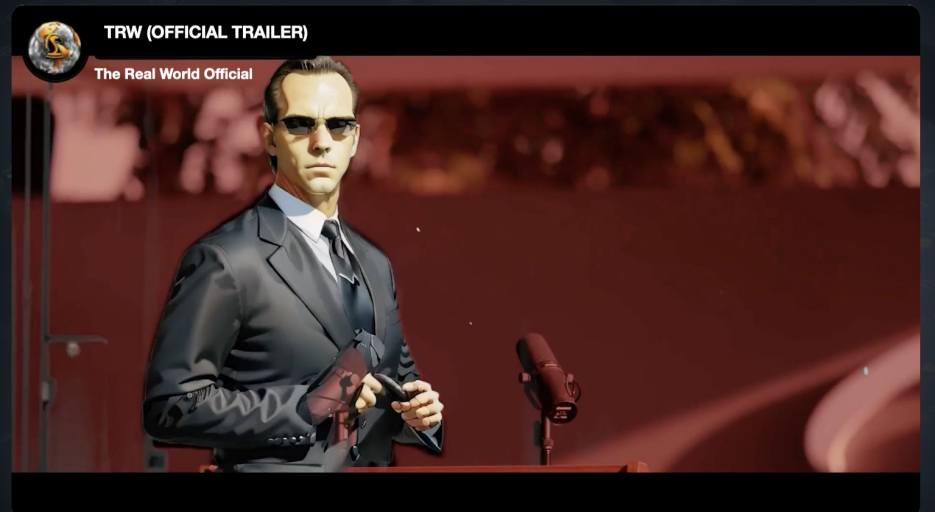
$49.99 / monthly

Cadet

reactionarypandemicpolitics.wordpress.com

MONEY MAKING IS **A SKILL**

We will teach you how to **master it**



~~Hustlers University~~ → THE REAL WORLD

INTRODUCING

A MASSIVE **UPGRADE**

The modern education system is designed to make you poor.

Imagine you could get access to multi-millionaire mentors who will give you a step-by-step path to reach your goals as fast as possible...

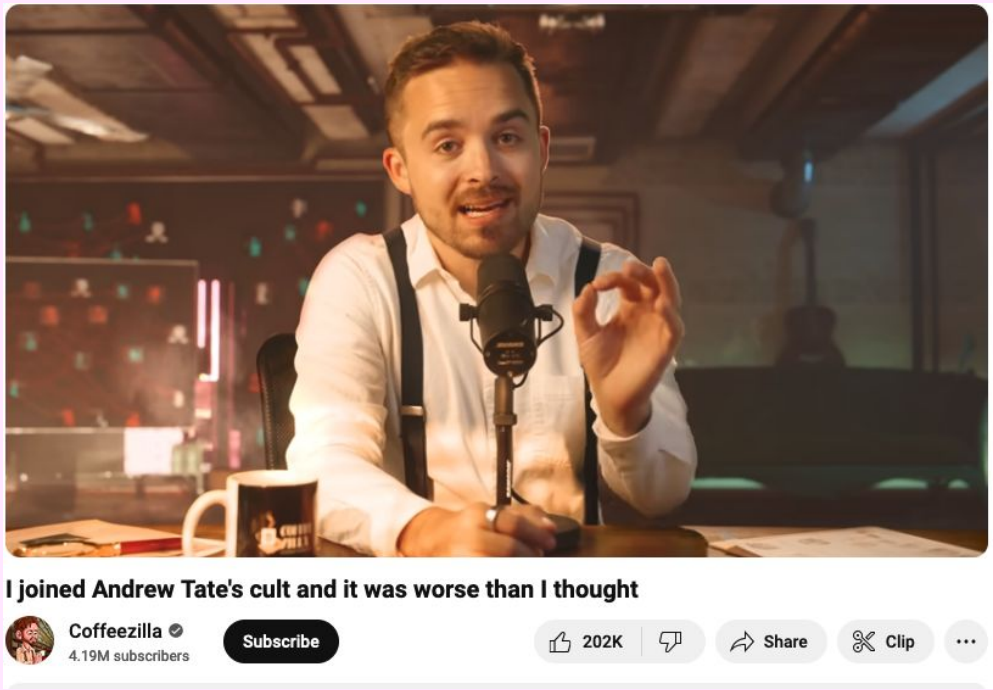
That's **exactly** what you can find **inside THE REAL WORLD.**

Practice ‘methodological empathy’:

- Do not debunk or debate
- Understand the emotional appeal
- Acknowledge the kernel of truth
- Pivot from the kernel

Long term…

- Teach the techniques
  - How do these influencers make money?
  - Who’s the mark?
- Rethink media literacy for a world of context collapse and do-your-own research
- How can we channel critical questioning toward critical thinking?



Discussion and reflection

Consider the following Questions at your table (15mins)

1. **Linking to School Experiences:**
   - How does what you have heard connect to conspiracy theories and reactionary digital politics students have mentioned or discussed in your school?
2. **Understanding Students' Perspectives:**
   - In what ways has this session challenged, changed, or reinforced your understanding of how students engage with conspiracy theories or reactionary ideas from the online world?
3. **Impact on Teaching Practice:**
   - How can we help students develop critical thinking skills to assess conspiracy theories and reactionary ideas and ideologies?
   - How can schools and teachers proactively address conspiracy theories and 'alternative narratives' without reinforcing them?

References

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Please share your feedback!

https://forms.office.com/e/Z8TQPVhTrW

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