



# Are you intelligent, ignorant, or just plain stupid?

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As many of you know from first-hand experience, social media is both a blessing and a curse.

A common complaint about social media – and one that has considerable merit – is that most platforms are saturated with disinformation, misinformation, and conspiracy theory nonsense.

But what we need to realize is that's only going to change if we all start employing the basic principles of critical thinking on a regular basis.

So - have you ever wondered whether you are engaging with social media in a productive manner? If so, read on – this is your lucky day!

If you understand the basic principles of this often-misunderstood concept, then your potential to move the needle in a positive direction is virtually unlimited.

If you don't know how to think critically, however, you are no doubt adding to the challenges currently facing our society both individually and collectively.

Let me see if I can break this down in a way that most readers can easily grasp.

When something is posted on social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.), the way you respond reveals whether or not you truly understand how to think critically. And this obviously has implications for your cerebral prowess.

Case in point. Intelligent people tend to respond to posts by directly addressing the content of the post in an objective and impersonal manner.

If I say Trump lied, they will ask me to provide evidence that what Trump said was not true. If I can't substantiate my statement, they will rightly assume that I am the one who is lying – not Trump.

Being able to back up your assertions with facts and data is a defining characteristic of people who can think critically.

By contrast, ignorant people respond to posts by believing (or dismissing) them based solely on their source. They say inane things like, "Oh, that's from CNN (or Breitbart) so it can't possibly be true." Rejecting a statement out-of-hand simply because of where it originated is not critical thinking.

Smart people typically consider the content of what's being said – not who is saying it. Statistically, even clueless people can be right occasionally.

Moving on, very ignorant people respond to posts by bringing up irrelevant comparisons to other people, situations, or the past. Again, if I say Trump lied, don't start telling me that Biden lied or that all politicians lie. I'm not talking about other people; I'm talking about Trump.

I see this all the time among those who don't understand how to think critically. Let's say I'm pulled over for driving 65 mph in a 45-mph speed zone. When the officer comes to my window, I

tell her she can't give me a ticket because my friend Bob was going 85 mph in a 55-mph speed zone yesterday and he didn't get a ticket.

The officer is probably not going to let me off the hook – nor should she. What someone else did or didn't do has no bearing on the responsibility I have for my behavior.

Finally, people who respond to posts by attacking the character of the person who made the post are just plain stupid. This is arguably the exact opposite of critical thinking and always seems to be the last resort of the desperate and the pathetic.

Once again, if I say Trump lied, and you start calling me names and/or claiming that I'm just an idiot or a stooge or a dupe of the mainstream media, then you have already lost the argument. I could be Satan incarnate and it still wouldn't change the reality of the statement that Trump lied.

Attacking the messenger instead of the message seems to be the preferred strategy of those who have no clue how to think critically.

When used appropriately, social media can be a force to enlighten and educate. When used for less noble reasons, it can be a divisive source of misinformation and turmoil.

Civil discourse is impossible without participants who are willing (and able) to think critically and hold those with whom they engage to the same standard.

So... where do you fall on the critical thinking continuum? Be honest.



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