"I Wanna See your NewsFeed:" A NewsQuiz Building Exercise

Introduction: This exercise has a two-fold purpose:

1. For me as the instructor to gain an insight into the news sources used and followed by students like channels on Snapchat and Twitter.
2. For the students to understand the difference between aggregated news and sponsored content that they follow on social media channels, and the news provided by traditional known news sources.

The idea is for students to develop their own comfort level with combining traditional news sources with new channels, and to discern differences between the two (including aspects of bias).

Rationale: This is an innovative teaching idea because students tend to complain about the news quizzes given to them every week and express that they follow the same "news sources" on social media. The usual question is, "Where do you find these stories, and how is it that we don't?"

The rationale behind it is to open a discussion on the different kind of news channels, including those on social media, to compare and evaluate news judgement, selection and bias.

Implementation: I gave this assignment towards the end of the semester, and this was the first time I used it. After about 12 weeks of traditional 10-point news quizzes, I explained the assignment and proposed this "news source trade." I'm curious on where and how the students find their news, and I'd like for them to use more traditional sources. They point out traditional sources are "boring" and not available on their favorite social media channels.

Structure of the Activity: I asked that the students turn in the 10 top news stories for the past week (from the last class to this one). They also had to provide me with the sources (either in the form of screenshots or links, or tweets). I put these together and brought in the news quiz I would ordinarily hand out (complete with my sources). We compared the compiled material in class through guided discussion.

Student Reaction: What I found is students valued the different perspectives provided by classmates' choices, as well as my own on what they considered newsworthy, and on the different channels everybody uses. Students were more receptive to the differences and debating how effective their methods were at news gathering and awareness.

The discussion also veered into trust and how the different channels tailor their stories to suit their audiences in terms of length, multimedia and in terms of leads.

Impact: This was a simple yet revealing exercise for both me and the class. Students are often concerned about the gap between media instructor and their own experience of media, and this helps bridge their gap in a very real way. It also somewhere brings about more empathy for the instructor as an ally in the learning process.