Misinformation and Disinformation – How It Works & What To Do

In today's political environment information is used to influence, incite, confuse, and manipulate us. For example, Mr. Trump's success relies on it, and by *it* we mean **Misinformation** and **Disinformation.**

Most of the Misinformation and Disinformation crafted by professional political operatives and others, is delivered primarily online and on television. Similarly, radio and print media are negatively impacted as well. This guide will define Misinformation and Disinformation, identify common ways that Misinformation and Disinformation are spread on social media and other media outlets, and finally share methods to sort out the truth, and identify objective information sources.

To begin, we need to know exactly what Misinformation and Disinformation is:

> ***Misinformation** **is inaccurate** or **misleading** information that is **not** spread with the **intent to deceive**.*
>
> ***Disinformation** is **false information** that is **deliberately** spread **to deceive** people and **obscure the truth**. (The Human Rights Research Center)*

Understanding the differences in these types of false information is helpful to knowing what kind of information is safe to share and creating your own network of trusted sources.

What are the harms of Misinformation and Disinformation?

The impacts of Misinformation and Disinformation campaigns throughout history and across the globe are varied–ranging from silly misunderstandings to targeted violence against marginalized individuals and communities.

Misinformation and Disinformation has promoted Sinophobia, xenophobia, trans-phobia, antisemitism, public approval of limitations on body autonomy, military coups, and disguises corruption and exploitation. The mass spread and acceptance of misinformation, especially violent and targeted campaigns, helps facilitate normalization of dangerous rhetoric and incites interpersonal and systemic violence. The current campaign by the Trump regime on "illegal aliens" is one current example.

What are the different types of Misinformation and Disinformation?

Here are some of the more familiar types of Misinformation and Disinformation:

- **Fabricated Content:** content that is false.

    - EXAMPLE: Current immigration policies that characterize immigrants crossing the southern border as drug dealers, rapist, murderers.
- **Manipulated Content:** real content that has been edited or distorted in some way.
    - EXAMPLE: The recent crisis in Los Angeles in response to ICE actions – Call in the marines?
        - There was some conflict in Los Angles, but the scope was very limited, only affected one neighborhood and was made worse by sending the military in.
- **Propaganda:** information of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.
    - EXAMPLE: The Charlottesville protest where there were "good Nazis" on one side.
- **Misleading Content:** content that presents misleading information.
    - EXAMPLE: The DOGE project with claims of billions in savings from fraud, but not one arrest, or accounting of the money saved/recovered.

What role does social media play?

https://www.privacy.com/blog/what-are-data-brokers

Social media, meaning the various accounts we may have on Facebook, Twitter (X), Blue Sky, Instagram, TikTok, all the way down to local "estate sales" type apps; collect massive amounts of data from us. This data is indexed, packaged and sold by data brokers to advertisers, political consultancy firms, think tanks, and anyone else who can afford to pay for it.

These organizations then can organize data by various influence-able demographics, as well as potentially link a profile of these preferences and trends to you and your accounts to directly influence you. In short, the media world taps into our likes and dislikes, the emotional triggers, etc. as we comment, like, follow, share, while we used social media.

All of these groups that can buy your personal and demographic information can then use social media to craft a message designed to influence you, your demographic or whole segments of society.

Common tactics to spread Misinformation are:

- Emotion: using **headlines** and making claims with language meant to trigger the audience's emotions, whether they be positive or negative.

- Polarization: purposefully **play on political divisions** and divide the audience based on their political affiliation.

- Discredit: opposed to directly addressing a claim, this strategy focuses on discrediting the individual or organization that is sharing the information.

What are some common tactics of Disinformation?

- Create Deep-fakes[1] and Synthetic Media: photos, videos and audio clips that have been digitally manipulated or completely fabricated.
    - [1]Deep-fakes are images, videos, or audio that have been edited or generated using artificial intelligence, AI-based tools or editing software. They may depict real or fictional people and are considered a form of synthetic media, that is media that is usually created by artificial intelligence systems by combining various media elements into a new media artifact.

- Exploit Information Gaps: exploiting information gaps, when there is insufficient credible information to satisfy a search inquiry, by generating their own content and encouraging others on the internet to look it up.
    - Example: Iraq had WMD and now the same narrative again on Iran.

- Manipulate Unsuspecting Actors: targeting of prominent individuals and organizations to help amplify disinformation narratives.
    - Example: In the recent conflict with Iran, the IAEA, through Rafael Grossi, the current Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concluded Iran was on the verge of a bomb. However, this entire narrative has been challenged as false. https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/how-the-us-israel-used-rafael-grossi-to-hijack-the-iaea-and-start-a-war-on-iran/ar-AA1HfC6M

- Spread Targeted Content: producing tailored influence content likely to resonate with a specific audience based on their worldview and interests, making them more likely to spread disinformation narratives

- Astroturfing and Flooding the Information Environment: posting an overwhelming amount of content with the same or similar messaging from several inauthentic accounts.

- Controlling the Sources: the current administration has threatened media outlets that don't spread information that has the angle that it approves of with loss of access to the White House Press room. So anything coming directly from those news sources should be cross checked.

What can you do?

You can be more careful about what you read, and share. Check your sources before you re-post. Look things up for corroboration. Evaluate before you let your emotions take over your logic. Remember the

people crafting these messages rely on emotion and deception to convince people how to think on issues.

To avoid this critical trap, *use the magic word "because" when viewing new information*; this conclusion is probable BECAUSE, the facts stated logically supports the conclusion.

> *For example, I believe in gravity, **because**, each and every time I throw a ball into the air, its falls to the ground. This is a simple example, but once you start to breakdown conclusions this way, it will sharpen your instincts to spot misinformation or disinformation, instead of falling for it.*

Seek out credible sources! Credible sources are sources that have information you know you can trust. Credible sources should have a clear list of citations that help readers track where they are getting their information and evaluate the trustworthiness of any claims made in the work.

Credible sources, especially sources sharing news, should have little to no political bias. This is important because sources without political bias often focus on including information regardless of how well it might reflect on a given political group.

With increased censorship around national and international human rights violations, social media has been and can continue to be a vital tool for disseminating information and amplifying the voices of grassroots communities. But we need to be critical of information circulating because of the powerful potential that social media has. By verifying information before we share it, we can be more accurate and effective advocates for people in our communities and beyond.

It's clear that not every source you may come across is trustworthy, but that doesn't mean you have to be afraid or resistant to what you're seeing. Using extra caution when engaging with information being spread on social media and by the news can look like:

- Engage with curiosity, not fear or anger: while it can be hard to identify Misinformation and Disinformation, it's best to take the information you see, especially information trending on the internet with a grain of salt until you have time to thoughtfully investigate

- Understanding the tactics used to spread misinformation: seeking out guides like this one, often developed by libraries or universities, can help keep you up to date on tactics to be on the lookout for.

- Measure the potential risk of sharing the information and pause before re-sharing things like important health or national legislative news and make sure to take time to verify your sources to help mitigate panic and fear.

- Triple-checking your sources: making sure to check whether the sources referenced on social media are credible is an important step to identifying mis- or disinformation.

- Consulting with the people you know in real life: talking to trusted people, such as a trusted community groups, who have also encountered a trending topic might help you feel less alone and verify the accuracy of the information

- Cross checking your resources: check multiple news sites and opinion pieces to see if they all have the same "facts". Read the fine print instead of trusting inflammatory headlines.

- Find trusted advocates: many people are experts on one topic, but not all. Figure out what your trusted sources are for each type of information. Just because someone is a legal expert, doesn't mean they are a healthcare expert.

Short List of Information Sources:
CIA Fact Book – online source of country specific economic, political, and military analysis
The Cradle – established & in-depth online Middle East news and analysis
Reuters – online international news aggregator
Al Jazeera – international news and analysis
Dante King – Author, speaker & online content on Domestic & International issues
News 18 – partnership between India's leading television network & CNN International
Ground.news – news aggregator that categorizes sources according to their bias
refseek.com – academic sources
link.springer.com – links to more than 10 million scientific documents
bioline.org.br – scientific journals published in developing countries
repec.org – 4 million publications on economics and related sciences
science.gov – American states search engine for over 2,200 + scientific sites