

Dealing with Disinformation in the Digital Age

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RED WINE & BLUE MEET UP 4/26/26

Introduction

- Carrie Wardzinski
- Non-traditional librarian since 2011 including for Pitt, CMU, and PPG Industries
- Former Red Wine & Blue regional organizer for southwest PA from 2022-2025

**“There is no rest stop on
the misinformation
highway.”**

DAHLIA LITWICK

World Health Organization Declares Infodemic



“The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is the first pandemic in history in which technology and social media are being used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive and connected. At the same time, the technology we rely on to keep connected and informed is enabling and amplifying an infodemic that continues to undermine the global response and jeopardizes measures to control the pandemic.

An infodemic is an overabundance of information, both online and offline. It includes deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals. Mis- and disinformation can be harmful to people’s physical and mental health; increase stigmatization; threaten precious health gains; and lead to poor observance of public health measures, thus reducing their effectiveness and endangering countries’ ability to stop the pandemic.” – excerpt from the *Joint Statement by WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC*

So, why should I learn about misinformation, disinformation and malinformation?

- ❑ Increased awareness and ability to recognize “fake news”
- ❑ Increased ability to discern between fact and opinion
- ❑ Development of increased critical thinking and analysis skills
- ❑ Contributing to the solution rather than the problem



Definitions

Misinformation

- Information that is factually incorrect, but with no malice

Disinformation

- Information that is shared with the intent to deceive or undermine

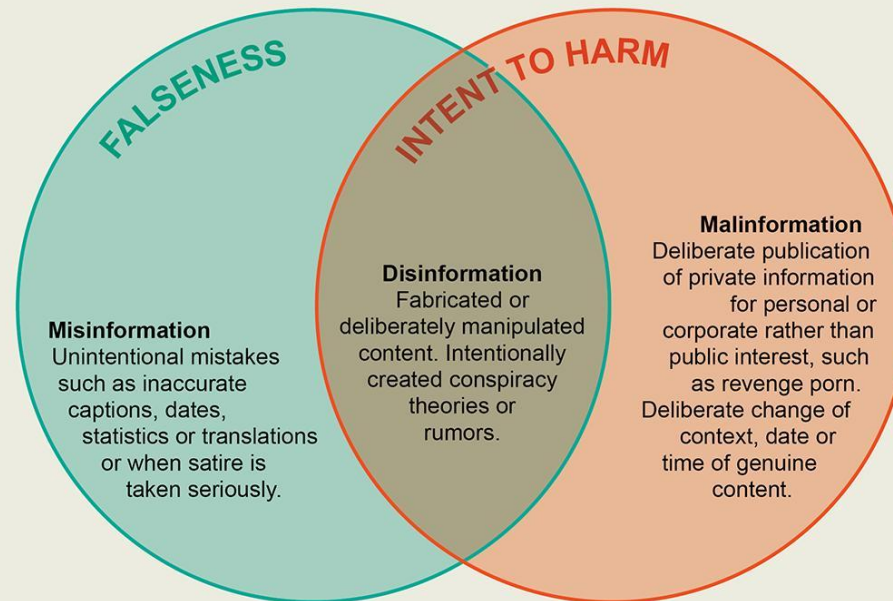
Malinformation

- Information that is incomplete, shared without context, or otherwise manipulated

Information Disorder

THREE CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION DISORDER

To understand and study the complexity of the information ecosystem, we need a common language. The current reliance on simplistic terms such as “fake news” hides important distinctions and denigrates journalism. It also focuses too much on “true” versus “fake,” whereas information disorder comes in many shades of “misleading.”



The ABCs of Information Manipulation

Actor

- Who?

Behavior

- Why?

Content

- What?

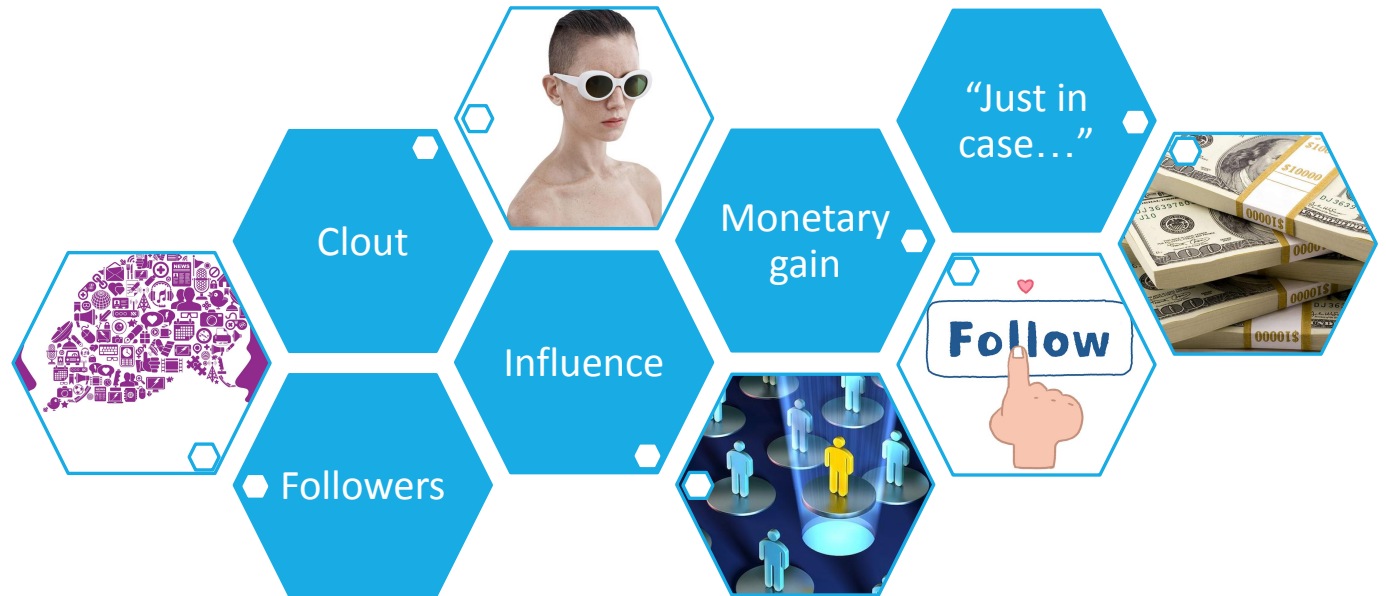
In other words, who are the perpetrators...

- Foreign powers and politicians
- Scammers
- Conspiracy theorists
- People claiming to be experts or insiders
- Friends, family, and celebrities
- Jokers



...why are they perpetrating it...

- Clout
- Followers
- Influence and manipulation
- Money
- "Just in case..."



Misinformation Example #1: Daylight Saving Time Reminders

Daylight Saving Time reminders



Misinformation Example #2: Dewey Defeats Truman headline



Disinformation Example #1: The Shed at Dulwich

The Shed At Dulwich Add Business Hours
★★★★★ 96 Reviews | #1 of 18,092 Restaurants in London | ££ - £££ | British, Vegetarian Friendly, Vegan Options
📍 London, England | 📞 +44 7961 568431 | 🌐 Website



A restaurant that doesn't exist became the highest ranked restaurant in London in late 2017 by using one of the most trusted review sites on the internet.

How did the creator achieve this?

Disinformation Example #2: Covid-19 Vaccines



Malinformation Example #1: Macron's emails

“One striking example of mal-information occurred when Emmanuel Macron's emails were leaked just before the run-off vote on 7 May [2017]. The emails were regarded as genuine. However, by releasing private information into the public sphere minutes before the standard electoral ban on any coverage immediately ahead of polling, the leak was designed to cause maximum harm to the Macron campaign.” – from *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation*. UNESCO. 2018

Malinformation Example #2: Revenge porn

Revenge porn is regarded as a type of malinformation. Sharing intimate images or videos of someone without their consent, often to humiliate or harm them, is a classic example of malinformation. The content itself may be real but the intent and the content are malicious.

What else is considered false information?

conspiracy theories

propaganda

clickbait

deepfakes

statistics out of context

omissions

satire

“If you make it trend,
you make it true.”

**BRET SCHAFER, ALLIANCE FOR SECURING DEMOCRACY MEDIA AND DIGITAL
DISINFORMATION FELLOW**

How do we combat this?

Government

Corporate

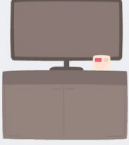
Individual

Individual Actions


Be aware of and combat your own biases.

- Consider current factors that may be influencing you.
Strive for a growth mindset.
Identify what makes you uncomfortable.
- Seek multiple perspectives.
- Look for disconfirming evidence.
- Practice intellectual humility.


Signs of Cognitive Bias




Only tuning in to news and stories that confirm your opinions.




Attributing other people's success to luck.



Constantly blaming others if things don't go your way.



Assuming you are always correct.



Assuming that everyone else share the same opinions or beliefs.

BetterUp

Individual Actions

Know your source.

Who is sharing the information?

- Do you trust that person?
- Does that person share trustworthy, reputable information?

What is the original source of the information?

- Is it a reputable, unbiased source?
- Can you triangulate the information?

Individual Actions

Triangulate!

Individual Actions

Practice good information consumption online and in-person.

- Go on an info diet if necessary.
- Do not share or click on misleading or incorrect information.
- Measure twice, share once!

Individual Actions

Own your mistakes.

- Admit when you have shared something that is not accurate.
- Remove it from public view and let anyone who may have shared it know that it is not correct or accurate.

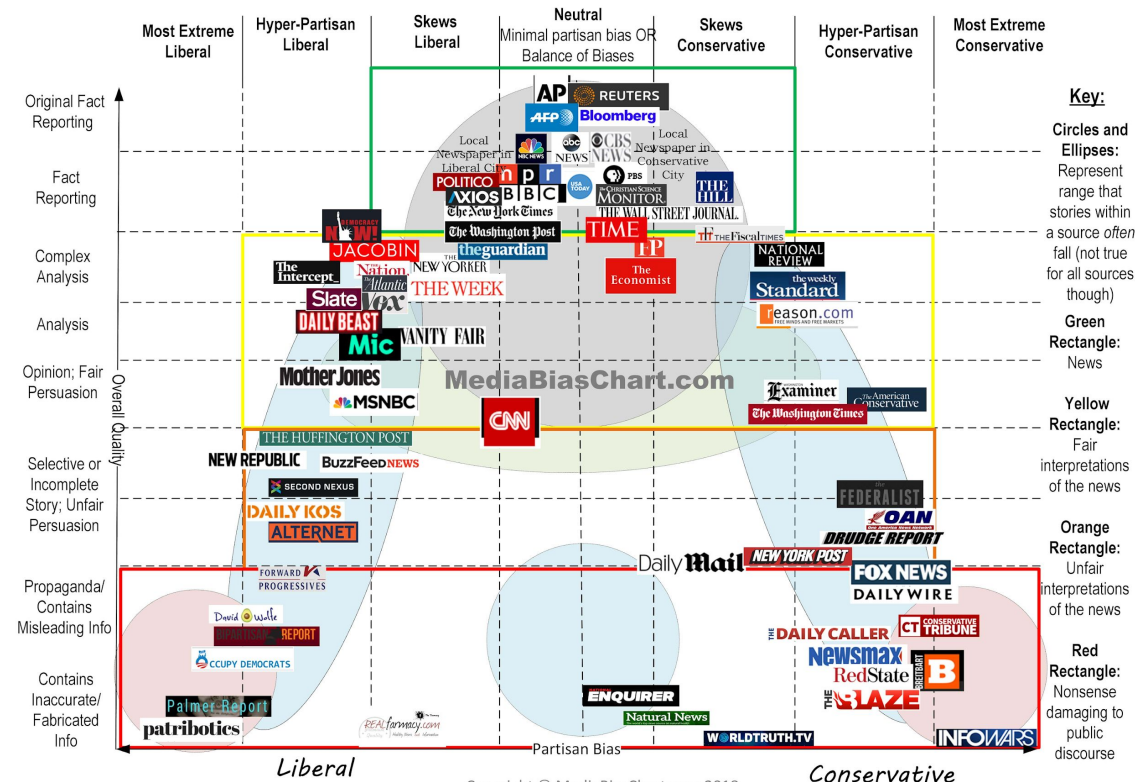


Individual Actions

Recognize and use valid and authoritative sources for information.

- Primary sources
- Certain secondary sources like encyclopedias, dictionaries, compendia, or databases
- Peer-reviewed research
- Standards
- Certain websites and social media, particularly if it comes from research or fact-based institutions **with caveats**
- Look for established compilations or annotated bibliographies of information on subject matter
 - Consider looking for a LibGuide on the subject

News Resource Biases



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 mediabiaschart@gmail.com

DO YOU KNOW YOUR

C

Currency

Is the research up to date?

Have there been any new advancements since publication?

How frequently does research change in your field?

R

Relevance

Is the information fact or opinion?

Who is the intended audience?

Does the information add something to your topic?

A

Authority

What are the credentials of the author?

Is the author qualified to write on the topic?

How is this information published? Did it have to go through editing/peer review?

A

Accuracy

Is the information supported by evidence?

Can you verify any of the claims using outside information or personal knowledge?

Are there typographical errors?

P

Purpose

Who funded the study?

Why was this research conducted? To inform? To persuade? To sell? To entertain?

Is the point of view impartial?



Fact-Checking Websites

www.FactCheck.org

www.snopes.com

www.politifact.com

www.fotoforensics.com (enables people to submit an image to determine if has been manipulated)

How countries around the world are combatting disinformation...

[World Map of Disinformation](#)



“Nothing can now be believed
which is seen in a newspaper.
Truth itself becomes suspicious by
being put into that polluted
vehicle.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON TO JOHN NORVELL, JUNE 1807 LETTER

**Questions? Comments?
Concerns? Criticisms?
Want to chat?**

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PHONE: 770-490-1559

False Information Assessments

[Spot the Troll](#)

[Factitious](#)

[Real or Fake? PundiFact](#)

[Can You Spot the Fake News Stories?](#)

[Can You Spot Fake News?](#)

[Can You Spot the Fake News Story?](#)