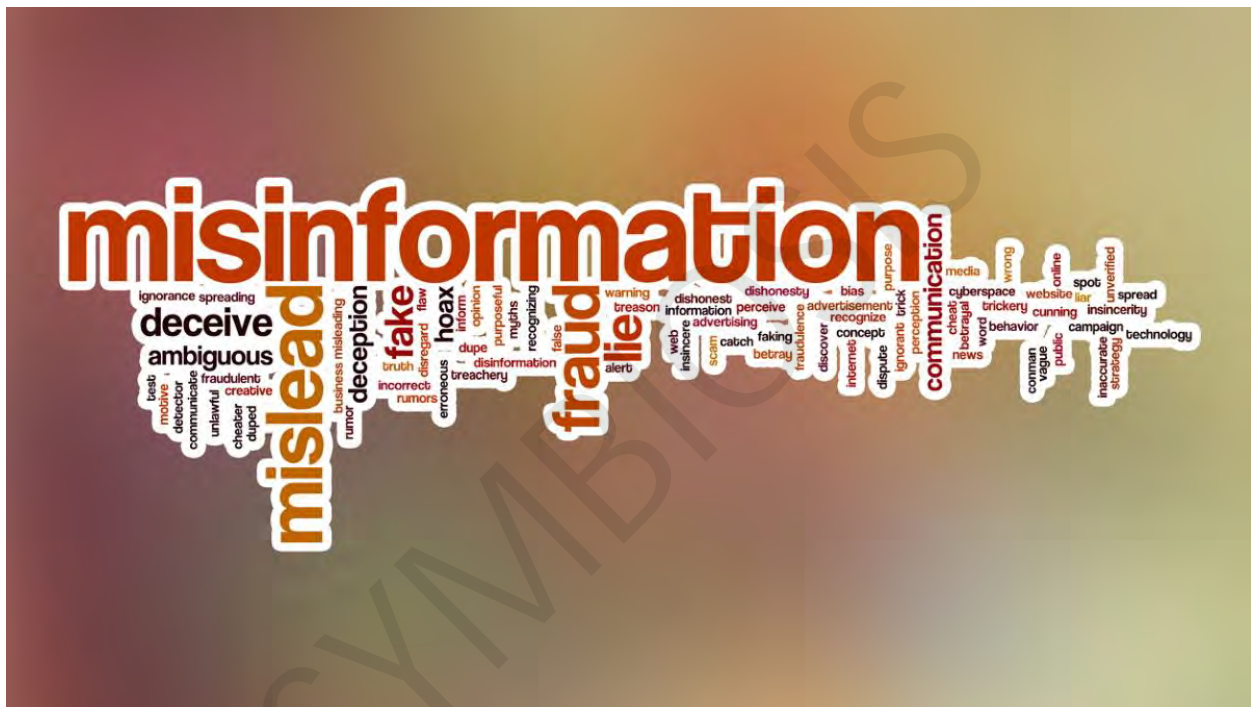




# Information Disorder: Understanding propaganda techniques during a war infodemic

## Module 1: Introduction – Conceptual Framework



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## **Old and New Media**

Duration: 45 min

### **Brief History of the Media**

**Present the following video (or a similar one) by Dan Gillmor, Director of News Co/Lab**

A Brief History of Media - Dan Gillmor <https://youtu.be/VWObRKx38fo>

**Discussion:** How much do you know about the Media?

### **Definitions and Examples**

What is **Traditional Media**?

Any form of mass communication available before the advent of digital media. This includes television, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines. ([Encyclopaedia of Mobile Phone Behavior](#), 2015)

What is **New Media**?

The [New Media Institute](#) defines new media as “a catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound.” Examples are: websites; blogs; email; social media networks; music & television streaming services; virtual and augmented reality

### **Differences between traditional and new media**

*Discuss with participants the definitions and key differences between traditional and new media*

<b>Traditional Media</b>	<b>New Media</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One way</li><li>• Push</li><li>• Non-continuous communication</li><li>• Company oriented</li><li>• Is a monolog.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two way</li><li>• Push and pull</li><li>• Continuous communication</li><li>• The audience oriented</li><li>• Is a dialogue.</li></ul>

Source: Akar (2011: 11)

### **From Consumer to “Prosumer”**

The older forms of media forced the audiences to be passive consumers of the content provided to them, in the sense that there was only so much that they could do.

The new forms of media allow the audiences to not only consume content, but also produce content. Therefore, we’re becoming Prosumers: producers+consumers. Earlier the audiences could only read or watch news. Today they can produce news through blogs, social media or Citizen Journalism portals.



### The Use of Multimedia

Print media for example, only uses text and still images. Electronic media uses a number of codes, still and moving images etc., but New Media (online medium) trumps both of these with its use of multimedia. Text, images, hyperlinks, videos..a single page online can make use all of it.

### Multiplicity of Delivery Platforms

Unlike old media, new media can be delivered on flexible formats – smartphones, tablets, laptops, PC etc.

### Interactivity

New media allows for greater interactivity among both producers & consumers- audiences can give instant feedback to reporters, news channels through their Facebook page, Twitter, etc; and consumers & consumers- through comment feeds, social media interactions.

### Scope and Reach

Newspaper circulation is bound to a certain physical space, and TV content, unless uploaded on the internet, remains within the viewership of their country's audience. Therefore, older forms of media are limited in their scope and reach.

New media on the other hand, is far wider in it's reach and scope. Once, anything goes on the net, it becomes accessible for almost anyone with a computer and net connection. However, questions of "digital divide" make this argument skeptical. A vast majority of the population still doesn't have access to smart phones or the internet.

This increasing interactivity and greater scope of reach has eventually lead to the formation of a "Global Village" – an interconnected community that is not bound by space or borders. This is just taking forward the concept of "Imagined Communities"- a term that was coined by sociologist Benedict Anderson, who felt that people reading the same news in different parts of the country, far away from each other, felt connected, and part of the same community.

(Source: [VSkills](#))

### **Social Media and News Consumption**

The social media phenomenon began around 2003. Ever since more and more social media platforms appear, and the phenomenon is growing rapidly. The more popular social media websites are centered around **a wall of information that is populated by friends and advertisers.**

### Facts

- **Social media is used to share information:** The information can be truthful, un-truthful, or an opinion of the writer.
- **Social media has power to affect a social change on society:** They allowed thousands of people to have a voice and spread the information that the user feels is relevant and important.
- Information passed by social media **can change the belief of an individual or a group.**
- **Social media serve as providers of news worthy information to the user:** Information appears based on the social media user friends sharing the information; or by who the user chooses to



receive information from. Truthful or un-truthful information appears on the social media user news feed with or without consent of the user.

(Source: [Riddle](#), 2017)

### **Handout: News Consumption Across Social Media in 2021**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2021/09/20/news-consumption-across-social-media-in-2021/>

### **Activity 1: What is Propaganda/Fake News/Information Disorder/Infodemic?**

Ask participants to tell the first word that comes to their mind when they hear:

- Propaganda
- Fake News
- Information Disorder
- Infodemic

Create four 'world clouds' with participants' answers. You can use [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com) to create the 'world clouds' live online.

Reflect on the results aiming to understand what the level of awareness of participants regarding these issues is.



## Propaganda

Duration: 55 min

### What is Propaganda?

Symbols are powerful. Control over symbolic expression generates the power to shape perceptions of oneself, of communities, of possibilities for the future, to even change the world, for better or for worse. But what is propaganda?

### Definitions of Propaganda

**Propaganda** is a form of information that panders to our insecurities and anxieties. – Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, 1962

**Propaganda** is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. – Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 1986

**Propaganda** is intentionally-designed communication that invites us to respond emotionally, immediately, and in a either-or manner. – Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, 1994

**Propaganda** is a form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels. – Richard Alan Nelson, *A Chronology and Glossary of Propaganda in the United States*, 1996

**Propaganda** is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth). Deliberateness and a relatively heavy emphasis on manipulation distinguish propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas. – Bruce Lannes Smith, *Britannica*, 1999

**Propaganda** is indifferent to truth and truthfulness, knowledge and understanding; it is a form of strategic communication that uses any means to accomplish its ends. – Walter Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda*, 2002

### Characteristics (Source: Media Education Lab, 2015)

- ✓ The term 'propaganda' is generally used when someone is aiming to reach a large group of people, not just a few.
- ✓ People who create propaganda have a specific goal and design a communication message that is intended to circulate among a large group of people and create a reaction.
- ✓ Propaganda involves reinforcing existing beliefs, changing perceptions, activating an emotional response or provoking a behavior.
- ✓ The propagandist does not encourage independent judgement by presenting a variety of viewpoints and allowing the audience to determine which perspective is correct. Instead, the



propagandist uses facts and information selectively, transmitting only those ideas that help accomplish the goal.

- ✓ Perceptions of its impact will vary depending upon people’s individual identities, life experiences, and values.
- ✓ Propaganda can’t be successful without the active participation of audiences.

**Activity 2: Where Can Propaganda Be Found?**

*Working individually or with a partner, participants read about the 6 locations where propaganda can be found. Then they brainstorm at least one contemporary example for each of the six locations and describe it briefly in the space below.*

(Source: Media Education Lab, 2015)

<p><b>Advertising:</b> There is a difference between advertising and propaganda. Advertising supports sales and marketing goals. Advertisers want to generate increased consumption of their commercial products and services by using a variety of forms of mass media and digital media to persuade readers, viewers, users or listeners. The public is generally aware of advertising and recognizes its purpose. Many forms of mass media that can be accessed for free—including broadcast television, radio, and search engines—depend on selling advertising space to businesses that want to sell products and services to audiences. But advertising can be propaganda when it activates strong emotions, attacks opponents, or simplifies information to shape people’s attitudes and behaviors.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>
<p><b>Education:</b> From kindergarten to college, some forms of education are explicitly designed to lead people to accept a particular world view. Education can be a form of indoctrination when certain doctrines, ideas, information, values and beliefs are not permitted to be questioned. Propaganda enters the classroom in many ways. Many businesses and technology companies provide curriculum materials to educators. These are explicitly designed to promote a particular point of view. For example, Monsanto and other biotechnology firms provide videos, lesson plans, and other materials for science teachers. In Illinois, a state law mandates that schools promote a positive image for coal mining.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>



<p><b>Entertainment:</b> Some stories are just entertainment, but many stories are also a form of propaganda. Stories offer ideas and information about good and evil, right and wrong, thus embedding values and ideology into narrative form. In many American movies and video games, violence is depicted as justified and morally courageous, which is a value message that is generally not questioned in society. Another way that propaganda is embedded in entertainment is through native advertising or sponsored content, where a company’s world view is presented as a form of entertainment.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>
<p><b>Journalism and Public Relations:</b> Public relations is the term used for communication professionals who seek to shape perceptions and influence public opinion on behalf of a business client. In the U.S., there are four public relations professionals for every working journalist. PR people feed journalists information based on the agenda and goals of their clients. They may aim to get information and positive opinions about a business into the news by carefully crafting events, video news releases, blogging, newsletters, policy documents, and social media posts. In general, people are not aware of how public relations efforts have shaped the content of newspaper articles, blog posts, or other online information.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>
<p><b>Government and Politics:</b> Throughout the 20th century, the United States has generated war propaganda by defining battles as conflicts between good and evil. Politicians use propaganda to get elected. They talk to reporters about topics and issues that get printed or broadcast as news. Propaganda can also used to help improve public health or address social issues. You may be familiar with public service announcements (PSAs) that aim to alter your behavior. By reshaping perceptions of social norms, public service campaigns can have a beneficial impact on changing attitudes and behaviors.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>
<p><b>Activism and Advocacy:</b> People who are trying to improve society or create social change use propaganda to influence public opinion. Activists try to promote social, political, economic, or environmental change through using communication activities and public events that attract attention and influence people's knowledge, attitudes, and opinions.</p>	<p>YOUR EXAMPLE:</p>



## Fake News

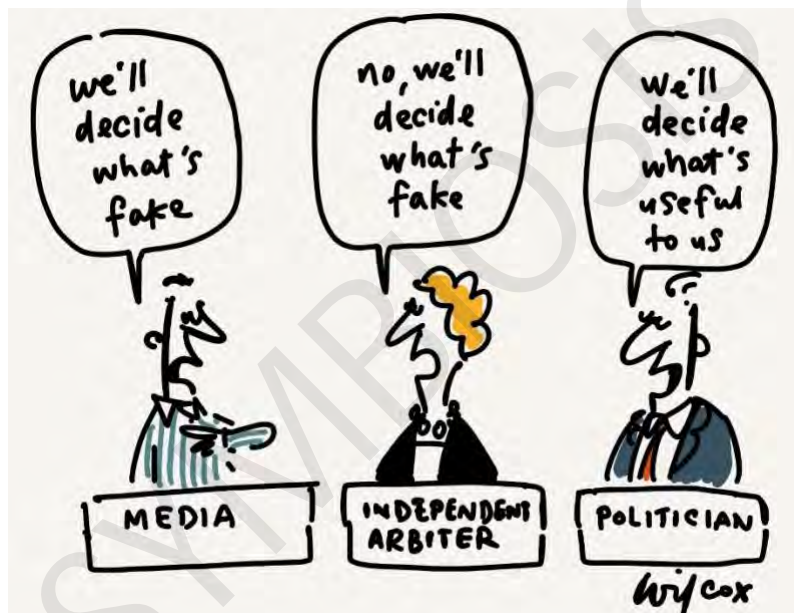
Duration: 45 min

### What is Fake News?

Fake news has been a serious issue lately in politics, media, national security, etc. It affects people's view of the world and events and affects society importantly.

You can elaborate further. Proposed source: *A Citizen's guide to Fake News*

<https://www.cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news>



Cartoons by Cathy Wilcox, drawn for UNESCO for World Press Freedom Day 2017.

### Definitions of Fake News

**Fake News** refers “The fictions and fabrications that comprise fake news are but a subset of the larger bad news phenomenon, which also encompasses many forms of shoddy, un-researched, error-filled, and deliberately misleading reporting that do a disservice to everyone” (David Mikkelsen, 2016)

**Fake News** means “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017)

**Fake news** “is the promotion and propagation of news articles via social media. These articles are promoted in such a way that they appear to be spread by other users, as opposed to being paid-for advertising. The news stories distributed are designed to influence or manipulate users' opinions on a certain topic towards certain objectives” (L. Gu, V. Kropotov, & F. Yarochkin, 2017)





**Fake News** “is fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but...lack(s) the news media’s editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information” (Lazer et al., 2018)

### Facts & Figures

- Two thirds of EU citizens report coming across fake news at least once a week. (European Commission, 2018b)
- Over 80% of EU citizens say they see fake news both as an issue for their country and for democracy in general. (European Commission, 2018b)
- Half of EU citizens aged 15-30 say they need critical thinking and information skills to help them combat fake news and extremism in society. (European Commission, 2018a)

### Clickbait

Clickbait refers to a headline or the leading words of a social media post (the teaser message) written to attract attention and encourage visitors to click a target link to a longer story on a web page (Potthast et al. 2016). Clickbait offers odd, amazing, or suspenseful phrases that induce curiosity, and entice people to want to know more (<https://www.cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news/what-is-fake-news>).

### Activity 3: Get Bad News <https://www.getbadnews.com/#intro>

Participants try their hand at “spreading” fake news in this ten-minute online game from Cambridge social psychology professor Sander van der Linden. The goal of the game is to teach people how disinformation is made and spread.



## **Information Disorder**

Duration: 60 min

### **Introduction – Conceptual framework**

The terms ‘propaganda’, ‘misinformation’ and ‘fake news’ often overlap in meaning. They are used to refer to **a range of ways in which sharing information causes harm, intentionally or unintentionally – usually in relation to the promotion of a particular moral or political cause or point of view**. (Council of Europe, n.d.)

Rumours, conspiracy theories and fabricated content have already been around us for a while and they are well historically traced and documented. However, we are witnessing something new with the contemporary social technology means:

- information pollution at a global scale;
- a complex web of motivations for creating, disseminating and consuming these ‘polluted’ messages;
- a myriad of content types and techniques for amplifying content;
- innumerable platforms hosting and reproducing this content; and
- breakneck speeds of communication between trusted peers (C. Wardle & H. Derakhshan, 2017).

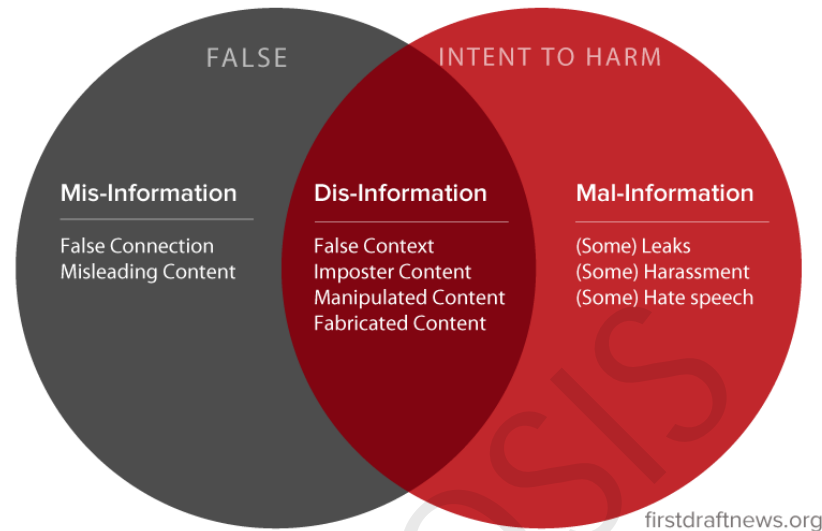
*“In the 1970s and 80s the average white supremacist was isolated, shaking his fist at the sky in his front room. The net changed that” - Mark Potok, a former editor at the SPLC*

### **Information Disorder by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017)**

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) introduce a new conceptual framework for examining information disorder, identifying the three different types:



## INFORMATION DISORDER



Source: Claire Wardle, First Draft (2017)

### ***Mis-Information***

- false connection and misleading content, “the inadvertent sharing of false information” (C. Wardle, First Draft, 2017);
- information that is false, but is not created with the intention of causing harm;
- information whose inaccuracy is unintentional, including information reported in error, which can be spread when journalists misinterpret or fail to independently verify a source’s claims with an incentive to publish information quickly either due to the unfolding crisis or competition (C. Jack, 2017, p. 2);
- individuals, who may, unwittingly, publish a number of rumours on social media and by being caught up in the moment they are, trying to be helpful, and fail to adequately inspect the information they are sharing;
- a broader concept of “fake news” that encompasses intentional deception, low-quality information and hyper-partisan news, is seen as a serious threat to democracies (F. Filloux, 2017).

### ***Dis-Information***

- false context, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content (C. Wardle, First Draft, 2017);
- fabricated information blended with facts and practices, including some forms of automated accounts used for astroturfing, networks of fake followers, fabricated or manipulated videos, targeted advertising, organized trolling, visual memes, and much more. It can also involve a whole array of digital behaviour that is more about circulation of disinformation than about production of disinformation, spanning from posting, commenting, sharing, tweeting and re-tweeting, etc.;
- information that is deliberately false or misleading (C. Jack, 2017) and which is deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country;



- false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit. The risk of harm includes threats to democratic political processes and values, which can specifically target a variety of sectors, such as health, science, education, finance and more. It is driven by the production and promotion of disinformation for economic gains or for political or ideological goals, but can be exacerbated by how different audiences and communities receive, engage, and amplify disinformation (European Commission, 2018);
- forms of speech that fall outside already illegal forms of speech, notably defamation, hate speech, incitement to violence, etc. but can nonetheless be harmful. It is a problem of actors — state or non-state political actors, for-profit actors, citizens individually or in groups — as well as infrastructures of circulation and amplification through news media, platforms, and underlying networks, protocols and algorithms (European Commission, 2018).

### **Mal-Information**

- leaks, harassment and hate speech;
- information, based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country and being used strategically to cause harm.

### **Activity 4: Self-Evaluation Quiz on Information Disorder**

1. Give participants the following questions or others that would be built on this part of the module.
2. Ask them to answer according to what they have been taught in this part of the module.
3. Reflect on their answers.

Questions - match the term with its definition:

1. Information based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country and being used strategically to cause harm

Choose one:

- Mis-information
- Dis-information
- Mal-information **(Correct Answer)**

2. Information whose inaccuracy is unintentional.

Choose one:

- Mis-information **(Correct Answer)**



- Dis-information
  - Mal-information
3. Information that is deliberately false or misleading, and which is intentionally created to harm. Choose one:
- Mis-information
  - Dis-information (Correct Answer)
  - Mal-information

### ***Information Disorder during armed conflicts***

The deployment of disinformation as a military tactic is hardly a modern innovation. Writing in the fifth century BC, Sun Tzu maintained that “all warfare is based on deception”. Classical military history is replete with storied battlefield artifices, conjuring the legendary tales of the Trojan Horse, Alexander the Great's surprise crossing of the Hydaspes River, and Hannibal's ambush at Lake Trasimene. In the modern period, subterfuge and deceit remain critical components of military strategy, facilitated by increasingly sophisticated communications technologies. (Source: [IRRC](#))

Misinformation is also commonly used by warring nations as part of propaganda campaigns. Propaganda allows one country to weaken their opponent's resolve, which reduces the effectiveness of the fighting force and erodes domestic support. Meanwhile, propaganda can also bolster the morale of a country's own military and civilian population. (Source: [Forbes](#))

*Present optical examples, such as*



[Soviet Russian cartoon from the Cold War Era. 1960's](#)



[Captain America](#)

You can present the following video by the Best Film Archives

'Meet King Joe | 1949 | Cold War Era American Propaganda Cartoon' <https://youtu.be/j-6YQQ779YM>



**Discussion:** Discuss with participants on the video

Although common in wars, the amount of misinformation in this conflict is significantly more than usual. Moreover, much of the misinformation appears to be coming from third parties that are independent of both militaries or governments. Individuals around the world are using social media to spread large amounts of misinformation. Some of the misinformation is spread intentionally, to help bolster either Russia or Ukraine.

Whether intentional or unintentional, misinformation will play a large role in this war. The primary channel for spreading this misinformation is through social media posts. The algorithms for displaying posts in an individual's feed are based off that person's interests and viewpoints garnered from metadata including previously viewed posts. Therefore, if someone is viewing posts supporting one side, their news feed will populate more posts supporting that side. Given the abundance of posts about the conflict, a person's feed can quickly get filled with a combination of real news and misinformation about the war, often in support of one side. With the misinformation mixed into the actual news, viewers are more likely to accept the misinformation as fact, reinforcing and solidifying their existing viewpoint. (Source: [Forbes](#))

**TikTok algorithm directs users to fake news about Ukraine war, study says, The Guardian**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/21/tiktok-algorithm-directs-users-to-fake-news-about-ukraine-war-study-says>



## **Infodemic**

Duration: 45 min

### **What is an Infodemic?**

The term '**Infodemic**' (*Information + Epidemic*) was first used in 2003 by David Rothkopf in connection with SARS. It has seen renewed usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The term can appear in other occasions too, such as conflict situations and wars.

**In conflict situations and wars, the role of the media is critical in providing the public with accurate and timely information.** Trustworthy news and images can contribute to the protection of civilians and conflict prevention, bring to the attention of the international community the horrors and reality of conflict and expose violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. (Source: [Council of Europe](#)).

### **Definitions of Infodemic**

**Infodemic** is a situation where "a few facts, mixed with fear, speculation and rumor, amplified and relayed swiftly worldwide by modern information technologies" ([David Rothkopf](#), 2003)

According to the [Cambridge Dictionary](#), an **Infodemic** is "a situation in which a lot of false information is being spread in a way that is harmful".

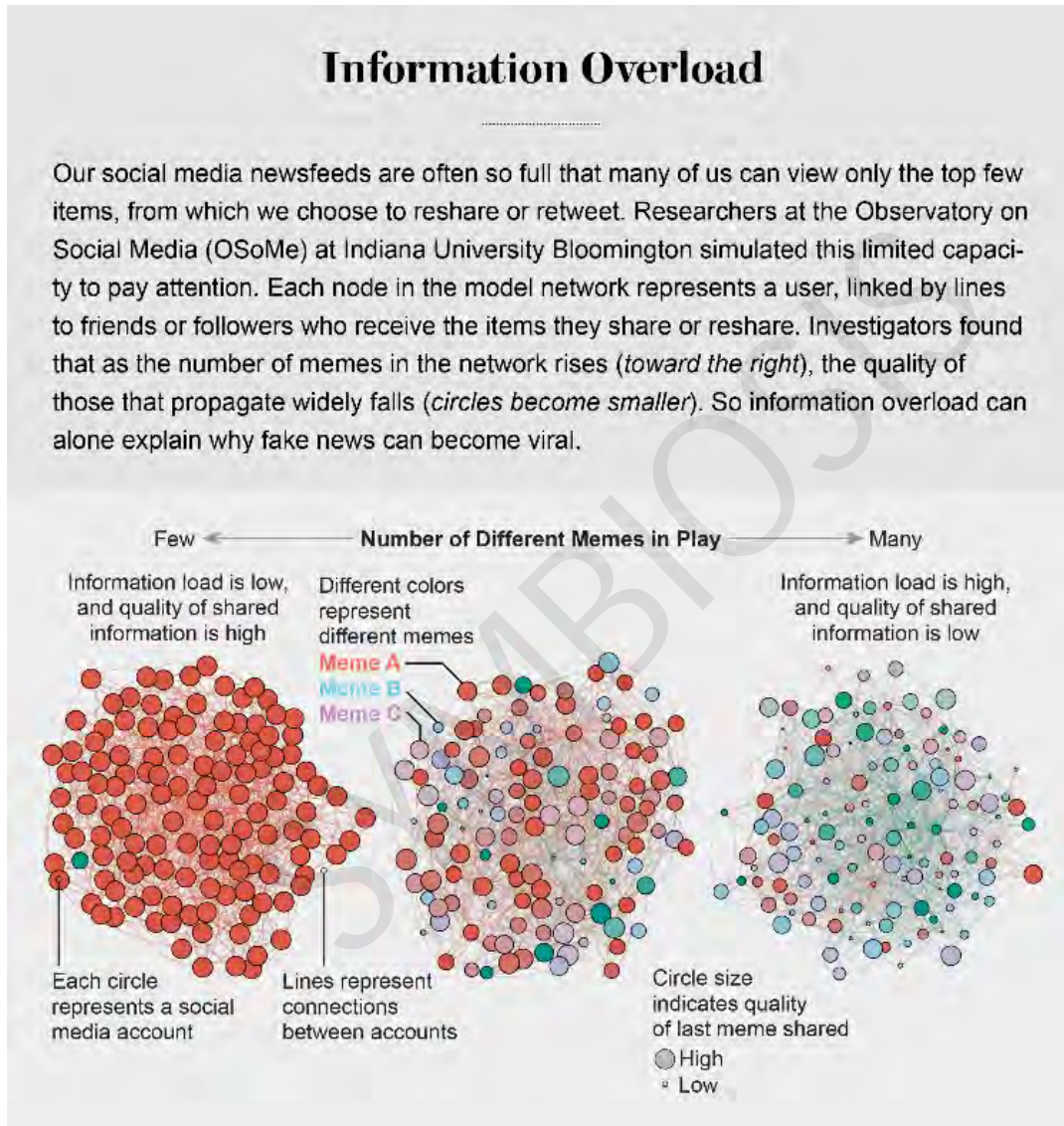
According to [Wikipedia](#), an **Infodemic** is "a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something, such as a disease".

According to [WHO](#), "An **infodemic** is too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It causes confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response. An infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health and the health of people around them. With growing digitization – an expansion of social media and internet use – information can spread more rapidly. This can help to more quickly fill information voids but can also amplify harmful messages."





Related term: Information Overload



Credit: "Limited individual attention and online virality of low-quality information," By Xiaoyan Qiu et al., in *Nature Human Behaviour*, Vol. 1, June 2017

### Infodemic/Information Overload and spreading of misinformation

(All information derive from Menczer & Hills, 2020 unless otherwise stated)

It has been observed that social media users **confuse popularity with quality**, ending up copying the behavior they observe.



Experiments on Twitter by Bjarke Mønsted and his colleagues at the Technical University of Denmark and the University of Southern California indicate that information is transmitted via “complex contagion”: when we are repeatedly exposed to an idea, typically from many sources, we are more likely to adopt and reshare it.

This social bias is further amplified by what psychologists call the “mere exposure” effect: when people are repeatedly exposed to the same stimuli, such as certain faces, they grow to like those stimuli more than those they have encountered less often.

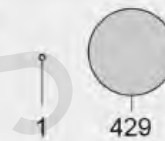
SYMBIOSIS



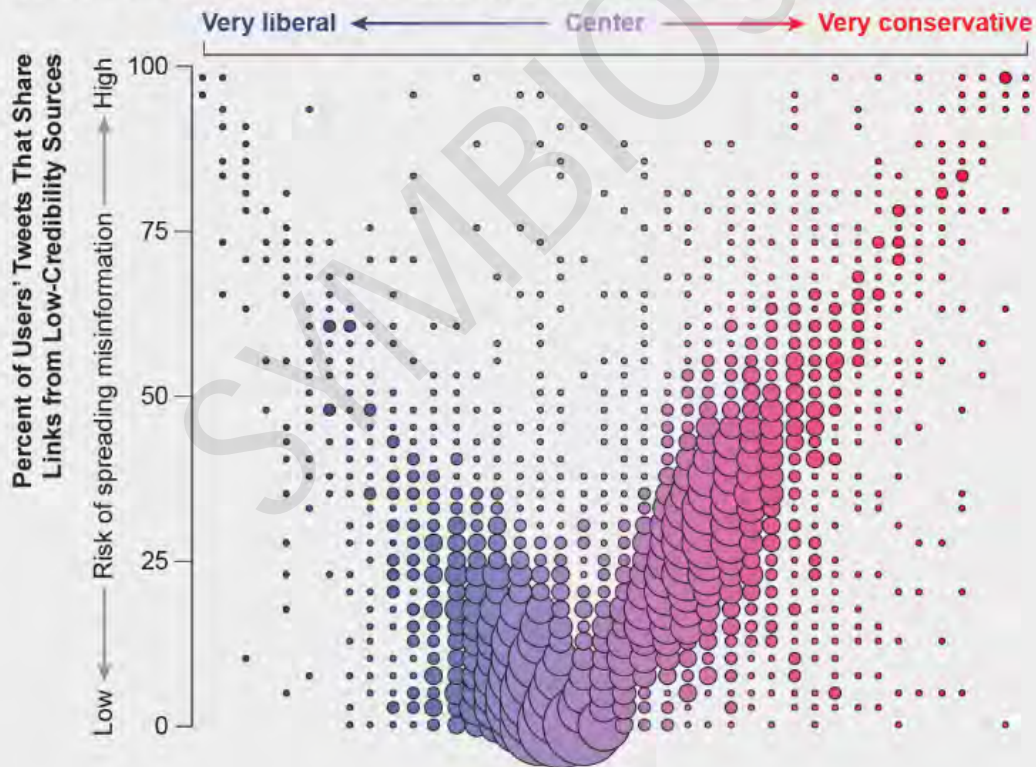
## Vulnerability to Fake News

A study of Twitter users that rated their political leanings found that both liberals ● and conservatives ● end up sharing information from sites that repeatedly post news of low credibility (as identified by independent fact-checkers). Conservative users are somewhat more susceptible to sharing fake news, however.

More than 15,000 Twitter users are plotted on this matrix. The size of each dot represents the number of accounts that share that political bias/misinformation coordinate, ranging from one to 429.



Political Bias of Twitter Users (inferred by set of news sources shared by user)



Credit: Jen Christiansen; Source: Dimitar Nikolov and Filippo Menczer (data)

You can present the following video by BBC

'The fake war photographer' <https://youtu.be/fzw6Sukae5I>



**Discussion:** Discuss with participants on the video

**Activity 5: What is Propaganda/Fake News/Information Disorder/Infodemic?**

Repeat the activity. Ask again participants to tell the first word that comes to their mind when they hear:

- Propaganda
- Fake News
- Information Disorder
- Infodemic

Create four 'world clouds' with participants' answers. You can use [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com) to create the 'world clouds' live online.

Compare the before and after 'world clouds'. Reflect on the results to understand how effective the module was.

SYMBIOSIS



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