

A Few Resources

When we go online, we come across a lot of different types of information. What should we look for to spot false and misleading information? Here is a list of the main types of misinformation and disinformation that we might encounter in the digital media ecosystem and selected groups and organizations that offer news and media literacy resources.

Types of Misinformation and Disinformation

Clickbait: attention-grabbing, exaggerated or sensationalized headlines or photos designed to distract, increase page views and drive ad revenue by enticing the reader to click the link, which typically leads to content that does not match what the reader anticipated based on the text or visuals.

Conspiracy theory: an explanation for an event or circumstance that rejects the widely-accepted official version and instead credits the action to a sinister and/or powerful group. Conspiracy theories usually contain a kernel of truth and cite proof supported by correlational and not causal evidence that often is based on incorrect assumptions. Conspiracies tend to be politically or economically

motivated, in-group driven by confirmation bias, usually in response to fear or uncertainty, and attempt to simplify a complex situation.

Deepfake/cheapfake: digitally manipulated video in which an existing image of a person or sound of their voice is replaced with someone else's likeness and/or voice using sophisticated computer-generated techniques. The intent is to deceive by making it appear that a person may have been somewhere they had not actually been or said something that they had not actually said. Initially used to create fake celebrity porn videos, revenge porn and hoaxes, deepfakes are employed to produce fraudulent narratives usually for political purposes. Cheapfakes are more common and popular because they use less expensive and more accessible technology or no software at all to alter the image or voice. For example, cheapfakes can be created by editing an image with Photoshop to change a person's appearance or slowing down the speed of a video to make it sound like a person is slurring their words.

Doctored content: editing original text, photos, or other content to create a false context that supports a fake story or disinformation campaign. Differs from deepfakes and cheapfakes because the intent may not be to pass for real information.

Doxxing (or doxing): online threat to privacy by publicly disclosing personal or identifying information that was meant to be private — such as home address, email, phone number, workplace, sexuality — typically with malicious intent to embarrass, bully, harass or get revenge and cause emotional distress or physical harm to an individual, group, business or organization. Information may be known to the perpetrator or obtained by searching publicly available databases and social media sites or hacking into an account.

Error: a mistake made by a journalist or news organization that is not intended to harm and will be publicly corrected and, if appropriate, issued an apology. Although journalists correct these reporting mistakes, disinformation creators often widely share the uncorrected version or use it as part of their messaging.

Fabricated content: content that is entirely false created to make people think it is real and is usually intended for harmful purposes. Fabricated content is sometimes used to disseminate a specific message for a short period of time, such as a political campaign, and often uses bots for malicious intent.

False context/attribution: real image, headline, quote, caption or other content that is falsely attributed to an event or person to change its meaning.

Gaslighting: a form of psychological manipulation used to make people question their own reality, perceptions, judgment or memory by persistently lying, withholding, denying, contradicting or misdirecting information in an attempt to destabilize a person or group and delegitimize their beliefs. Gaslighting involves a power dynamic in which the victims are fearful of challenging the false narrative.

Hoax: a fake news story, meme, phishing email, clickbait or other Internet item that intentionally pretends to be real to trick someone into believing something is true when it is actually false. People are taken in because hoaxes often play on their confirmation bias about a belief. Hoaxes can be humorous and have a benign impact such as an April Fool's Day prank or a malicious intent such as luring a person to click on a virus-infected link, stealing private information from their device, or worse, swatting a person usually for revenge. Swatting is enabled by doxxing and involves falsely reporting a dangerous situation to provoke a law enforcement or emergency team response against the victim, intentionally putting that person in harms' way.

Imposter content: content created to impersonate genuine websites, social media profiles, brand logos or other media form with the intent to deceive people into believing it is authentic.

Knowledge hole: the purposeful exclusion or simplification of a topic or event to make truth better fit a specific narrative. This includes the erasure or revision of historical events or representing events with too narrow or too broad a focus. Sometimes knowledge holes rely on misinformation that ignores changes in laws or policy, new scientific findings or current events.

Propaganda: news, advertising, entertainment or other information designed to purposefully manipulate what people think and do by using deception to override facts and appeal to emotions. Propaganda is primarily intended to influence political views and actions, such as voting, in negative or positive ways to build mass support and gain power. Techniques include reducing complex issues to catchy slogans and attention-getting images that can easily be remembered, appealing to emotions that play on fears, weaknesses or desires, exaggerating promises and outcomes of success without evidence to support them, and framing messages to exacerbate divisions between people, groups and ideologies.

Pseudoscience: statements, beliefs, theories or practices that claim to be based on factual evidence and grounded in the scientific method but are neither supported by facts nor science and pose potential harm to individuals and society. People who believe or promote pseudoscience might misinterpret the facts, misunderstand

the scientific process, rely on outdated or disproven claims, favor confirmation bias over facts, or do so for political or economic reasons. Popular examples are climate change deniers, anti-vaccine advocates, and miracle cure enthusiasts.

Satire/parody: the use of humor, exaggeration or irony to expose, critique or ridicule the ignorance, flaws or shortcomings of a person, organization, policy, or society itself. Articles, memes, skits, songs, and other formats that use satire or parody are usually intended as constructive social commentary about contemporary politics and newsworthy issues. Although the intent is not to deceive, people who do not understand the comedic nature can mistakenly believe that the information is true. Satire is also used to bypass fact-checking, spread rumors or conspiracies, and dismiss misleading claims or disinformation by politicians.

Sponsored content: a type of native advertising made to look like a legitimate video, news article, opinion piece or other editorial content to help advertisers reach their audience. Sponsored content is deceptive because it is designed to fit the format and user experience where it appears and is not clearly labeled to let consumers know it is a paid advertisement.

Selected News and Media Literacy Resources

Center for Media Literacy

<https://www.medialit.org>

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) is a pioneer in the field of media literacy providing leadership, professional development, and evidence-based educational resources and tools to teach media literacy skills and strategies. Its media literacy framework of key questions and core concepts is used by educators around the world to help prepare students for living and learning in a global media culture.

Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook

<https://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/>

The Center for News Literacy is a university program that teaches students how to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news. Its Digital Resource Center serves as a clearinghouse for news literacy curricula and resources for educators, students, and the public.

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Common Sense Media is a leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for families, conducts original research about media and children, and offers digital citizenship and media and news literacy resources and lessons for K-12.

Crash Course

<https://www.youtube.com/c/crashcourse>

Crash Course is an educational YouTube channel that offers courses on a range of topics. They partnered with MediaWise, Poynter Institute, and Stanford History Education Group to develop “Navigating Digital Information,” a 10-part series of hands-on skills to help evaluate the information we read online.

Duke University Reporters’ Lab

<https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/>

Duke Reporters’ Lab tracks the latest fact-checking news and maintains a database of fact-checking websites around the world that features an interactive map to locate sites in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Information Futures Lab

<https://sites.brown.edu/informationfutures/>

Information Futures Lab at Brown University brings together a multidisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners to collaborate on problem-solving the obstacles that prevent effective communication. Their goal is to design and implement solutions that help communities build trust, mitigate misinformation, and protect the future of our information ecosystem.

Media Education Lab

<https://mediaeducationlab.com/>

The Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island networks educators to advance research and scholarship in media and digital literacy and provides multimedia curriculum resources and professional development programs,

including webinars, online learning communities, a Summer Institute, and a Graduate Certificate Program in Digital Literacy.

National Association for Media Literacy Education

<https://namle.net/>

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) is the largest nonprofit membership organization dedicated to advancing media literacy education in the United States. As the leading media literacy voice in the U.S., NAMLE hosts the annual National Media Literacy Week and provides leadership, advocacy, networking and resources with the goal “to make media literacy highly valued and widely practiced as an essential life skill.”

News Literacy Project

<https://newslit.org/>

The News Literacy Project is a nonpartisan education nonprofit that provides programs and resources for teachers, students and the public to help them become engaged and informed news-literate citizens. Its Checkology virtual platform is a free resource with lessons to learn to identify credible information, seek out reliable sources, and apply critical thinking skills to separate fact-based content from falsehoods.

NewseumED/Freedom Forum

<https://newseumed.org/>

NewseumED is the education arm of the Freedom Forum, a nonpartisan public policy center whose mission is to foster First Amendment freedoms for all. NewseumED offers free resources to increase public understanding of the importance of the First Amendment and a free press and cultivate media literacy skills essential to civic life through student classes, educator trainings, and other learning tools. In addition, Freedom Forum provides access to Today’s Front Pages of newspapers around the country and conducts an annual survey of Americans’ views and knowledge about the First Amendment.

NiemanLab

<https://www.niemanlab.org/>

The Nieman Journalism Lab focuses on the future of quality journalism as the Internet and digital technology transform the news business. The Lab encourages a collaborative exchange of ideas and invites journalists to join the conversation to help figure out the changing role of journalism. It is an initiative of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard whose mission is to promote and elevate the standards of journalism.

Poynter Institute

<https://www.poynter.org>

The Poynter Institute is “the world’s leading instructor, innovator, convener and resource for anyone who aspires to engage and inform citizens.” Its *MediaWise* program empowers people of all ages to become critical consumers of online content. The *Teen Fact-Checking Network* is a virtual newsroom of teens who use social media storytelling to show step-by-step how to debunk viral misinformation and disinformation. *On Campus* trains campus correspondents to facilitate fact-checking sessions online and in college classrooms across the country. The teen virtual newsroom is a verified signatory of Poynter’s *International Fact-Checking Network’s Code of Principles*, which promotes a global exchange of fact-checking best practices to advance accountability in journalism.

Project Look Sharp

<https://projectlooksharp.org>

Project Look Sharp is a nonprofit outreach program at Ithaca College that offers media literacy curriculum resources and professional development to help K-16 educators enhance students’ critical thinking and civic engagement.

RAND Corporation

<https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay.html>

RAND Corporation’s multi-faceted Truth Decay initiative examines “the diminishing role of facts and analysis in public life” and ways to counter it. Its researchers identified media literacy education as a powerful tool to engage young people in civic life and counteract disinformation by changing how they consume, create, and share information.

Stanford History Education Group

<https://cor.stanford.edu/>

The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) is an award-winning research and development team that creates free evidence-based lessons and assessments to develop critical thinking and analysis of historical events and online information. Its Civic Online Reasoning (COR) curriculum is at the cutting-edge of developing the essential skills students need to navigate the digital landscape and evaluate online content.