

MODULE B

Misinformation & Disinformation

This module is second of four parts of the **#IWASFAKE** Basic Learning Course on “Dealing with Disinformation Amidst the Infodemic”. This module contains two (2) lessons:

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, the student will be able to...

- explain the problem with the use of the term “fake news”
- compare and contrast misinformation and disinformation
- illustrate how networked disinformation operates in the country
- investigate the seven most common types of mis-/disinformation

1. What makes misinformation and disinformation better terms to use than “fake news”?
2. What are the seven types of mis-/disinformation?

HEADS UP!

Think of 3 common reasons why someone intends to spread “fake news”. *Example: Someone wants to destroy another person’s reputation.*

LESSON 1 | What makes misinformation and disinformation better terms to use than “fake news”?

There’s a reason why we have been using the term “fake news” inside quotation marks. It’s because in spite of the popular use of the term, experts actually recommend the public NOT to use it. They argue that “if it’s fake, it’s not news” which means the words “fake” and “news” are not supposed to go together. Moreover, people’s understanding and use of the term has become vague and varied through time. “Fake news” has been used to label many different kinds of content from simple lies to rumors to outdated information to **propaganda**.

Some “fake news” are not completely ‘fake’; some are just misleading while some are genuine but used out of context. Also, most content that is deceptive in some way are not made to look like news at all (e.g. memes, tweets, videos, etc). To add to these, the term “fake news” has been **weaponized**; it has become a term used by politicians and other groups to attack and question the credibility of many professional news media around the world.

So, to avoid the confusion that comes with the use of the term “fake news”, we recommend using the terms Misinformation and Disinformation. Collectively, Dr. Claire Wardle, co-founder and leader of First Draft, refers to these as the Information Disorder -- “the many ways our information environment is polluted.”

Disinformation vs Misinformation

You may have heard these terms used interchangeably to talk about the issue of the infodemic. However, it is important to be able to distinguish them to understand how they are created and how they spread differently.

VOCABS

propaganda: selective presentation of information, persuasive framing, and use of emotional appeal to forward a particular agenda (*white propaganda* uses accurate, albeit selectively presented, information, from accurately identified sources, whereas *black propaganda* uses inaccurate or deceptive information, in which the source of the information is obscured or misrepresented)

weaponization: (of “fake news”) use of fake news by politicians to undermine independent media and trust in journalism; (of social media/internet) proliferation of large-scale propaganda and mass manipulation techniques disseminated through the Internet and social media

orchestrated: (adjective) with every detail very carefully planned, sometimes secretly



Tweet your thoughts. In the simplest way you can, as if you are talking to an 8-year-old, explain why using the terms mis-/disinformation is better than “fake news”. Tweet us at @ootbmedialit and use the hashtag #IWASFAKE.

DISINFORMATION

When people intentionally create false or misleading information to make money, have political influence, damage someone’s reputation, or maliciously cause trouble or harm.

MISINFORMATION

When people share disinformation without realizing that it is false or misleading, often because they are trying to help.

So, how does disinformation and misinformation differ? Just one thing: **INTENT TO HARM**. While misinformation and disinformation have more or less the same harmful effects, they are spread **NOT** for the same reasons. People who spread misinformation are those who are just misinformed; they have no intention to deceive or do harm to others. This makes them slightly less guilty compared to those who spread false or misleading information with clear intent to harm (i.e. disinformation).

Moreover, it is important to note that, unlike misinformation, disinformation operates in an **orchestrated manner**; meaning, there are organized, coordinated, and well-funded systems that run it. Political

disinformation, to be exact, is run by professionals. It is a vast network that connects fake account operators to digital influencers all the way to the chief architects in the advertising and PR (public relations) industries. This shows that disinformation is a much more complex and grave problem than misinformation (i.e. making an honest mistake of sharing false information). Putting them both under the umbrella term “fake news” blurs this distinction, and does not help us in crafting the right solutions to our problems.

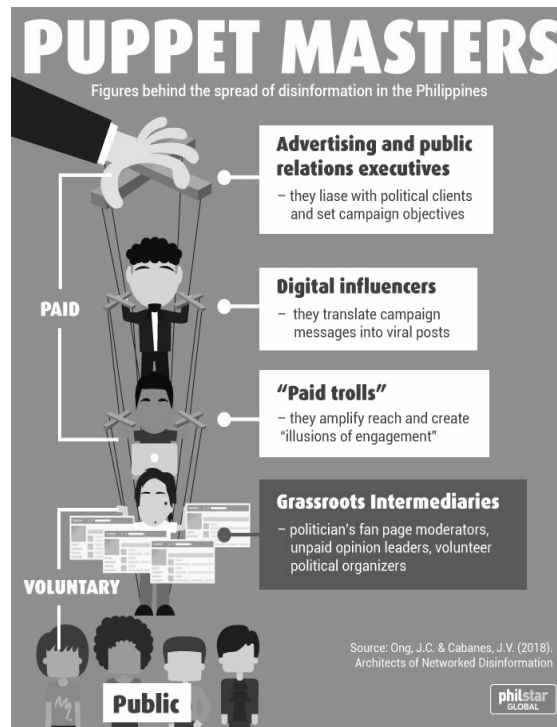


Image source: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/02/12/1787103/ad-pr-execs-are-chief-architects-disinformation-philippines-study>

HEADS UP!

Think of 3 of the most important qualities of effective mis-/disinformation. *Example: It must be very well edited.*

LESSON 2 | What are the seven types of mis-/disinformation?

Within the two (2) main categories of the Information Disorder (Misinformation and Disinformation), you will commonly find seven (7) specific types of content according to First Draft. This will help you understand the complexity of the online information environment. This will also show you that there is a wide spectrum that exists between what is true and what is false, between “fake” and “not fake”.

The 7 Types of Mis-/Disinformation

1. SATIRE. Satire is a literary technique that employs humor, irony, or exaggeration to expose flaws and criticize individuals, governments, or society itself. Although satirical pieces are meant to be humorous, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism. The problem is when satire is used to strategically spread **rumors** and **conspiracies**. When challenged, it can be simply shrugged off “as a joke”, something not meant to be taken seriously. Furthermore, satire can also be dangerous when from its original source, it gets spread online and turned into screenshots or memes, losing its original context in the process .



A satirical piece by AdoboChronicles, a Philippine satirical news website, makes the claim that the government has ordered Filipinos aged 21-59 to be quarantined. This is an example of a satirical piece of misinformation that has the potential to give the wrong information for those unaware of the satirical purpose of the article.

2. FALSE CONNECTION. Clickbaits are the best examples of the use of ‘false connection’ -- sensational language or imagery used to drive ‘clicks’. This is when you encounter a headline or an image designed to capture your attention, but when you click through it, the link leads you to a content that is of no value to you or content that sells you an item or service. We can’t expect media organizations to stop using clickbait techniques, after all, they need clicks. Our task as readers is to be wary of them as they often trigger our emotion only to drive traffic on their websites.

VOCABS

rumor: a story or statement in general circulation without confirmation or certainty as to facts; gossip or hearsay

conspiracies (or conspiracy theories): an attempt to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small, powerful group. Such explanations reject the accepted narrative surrounding those events

click: act of selecting an option on an electronic interface by pressing a button or touching a screen

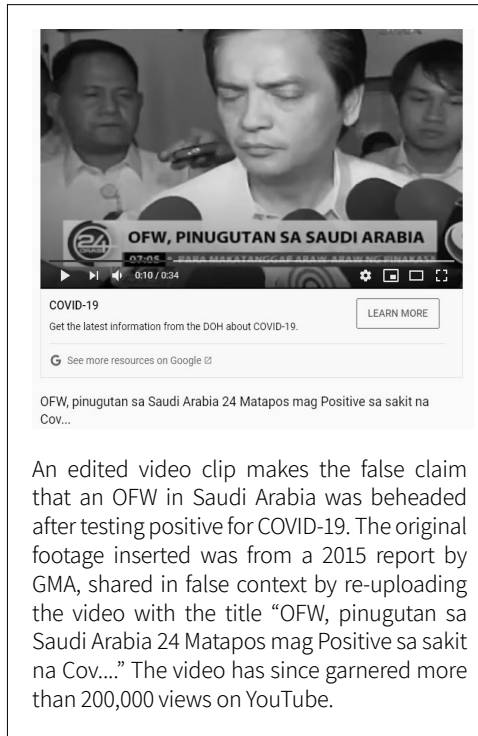
3. MISLEADING CONTENT. What counts as ‘misleading’ can be varied and hard to define, but it usually involves omitting pieces of information to tell a story in a certain way (i.e. cropping photos to change its message, choosing statistics selectively). This is also called ‘framing’. Even the most advanced technology cannot easily detect misleading use of information because it involves contextualization and nuance. Meaning, it requires our brains to analyze the whole story or the bigger picture to judge whether a content intentionally misleads or not.

4. IMPOSTER CONTENT. We always like to employ mental shortcuts to help us understand information. One very powerful shortcut is seeing a brand or person we already know and trust. When we get information coming from trusted brands or people, we are not as doubtful. But the problem is, it is very easy to make fake accounts and pretend to be someone else online. Imposter content is false or misleading content that claims to be from established brands, organizations, or personalities.



This is a news card from ABS-CBN’s social media pages that was edited. It is an example of imposter content where the credibility of a news organization like ABS-CBN was used to spread misinformation.

5. FALSE CONTEXT. When genuine information is shared out of its original context such as when old news stories are re-shared in present time, it can be very dangerous. Sharing information in its proper context is very important because the context (i.e. the time, place, situation) within which an event or news story existed helps explain the event. Sometimes, it is only a plain case of misinformation where a person mistakenly re-shares an old story. Other times, the purpose is more deliberate: to mislead the people by sharing information in a different context.



An edited video clip makes the false claim that an OFW in Saudi Arabia was beheaded after testing positive for COVID-19. The original footage inserted was from a 2015 report by GMA, shared in false context by re-uploading the video with the title “OFW, pinugutan sa Saudi Arabia 24 Matapos mag Positive sa sakit na Cov...” The video has since garnered more than 200,000 views on YouTube.

6. MANIPULATED CONTENT. Manipulated content is genuine content that is altered or edited to change the message. It is not completely made-up or fabricated. Many people fall for this kind of manipulation because most of us only glance on images or captions while scrolling down our phones. As long as it fits a story and is good enough to ‘look real’, people may share it.



An edited screenshot of an advisory with the logo of the Civil Service Commission indicated that those who were scheduled to take the civil service exam (CSE) on March 15, 2020 are deemed “automatically passed” due to the COVID-19 crisis. The Civil Service made no such announcement.

7. FABRICATED CONTENT.

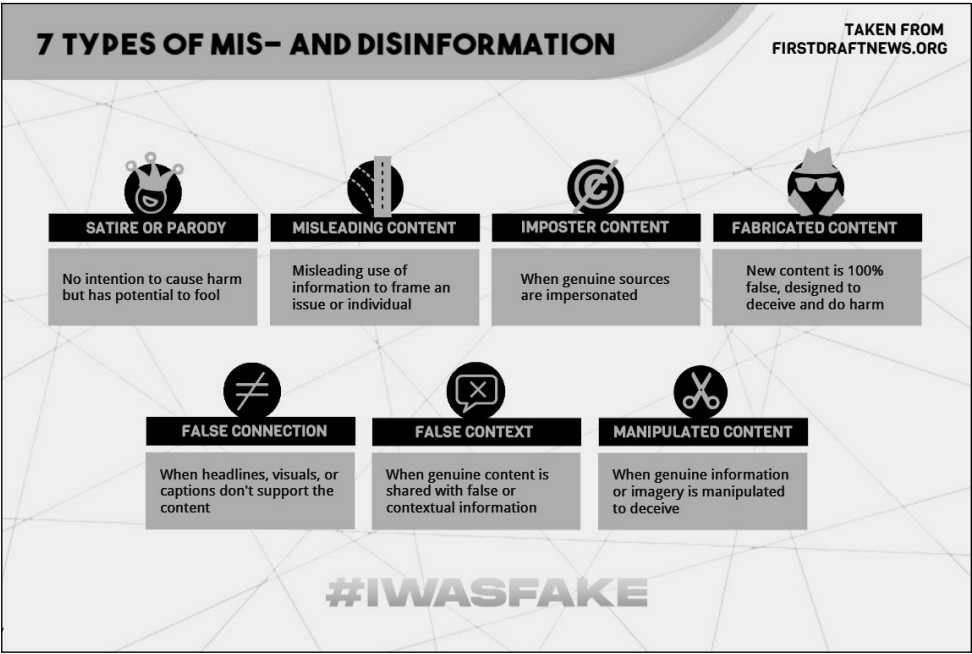
Fabricated content is anything that is 100% false. This is the only type of content that we can really consider as purely 'fake'. Staged videos, made-up quotes, and fake websites fall under this category. 'Deepfakes' or 'synthetic media' are fabricated media produced using Artificial Intelligence (AI), which usually combine different elements of video and audio to create 'new' content that never actually happened.

Various edited quote cards or graphics showing famous personalities and fictional characters praising President Duterte have been circulating online. These quotes are completely made up with no source or other news report verifying these personalities' statements.

VOCABS

spectrum: selective presentation of information, persuasive framing, and use of emotional appeal to f

Tweet your thoughts. Is there a way to prevent satirical content from being harmful? How?
 Tweet us at @ootbmedialit and use the hashtag #IWASFAKE.



Since these seven (7) types exist in a **spectrum**, more than one type can apply to a specific piece of content. For example, a clickbait article that employs false connection may also be considered fabricated content if it is 100% false. Moreover, if it is created and uploaded by a fake account of an established brand, then you can also call it an imposter content.



THIS IS THE END OF MODULE B. Are you ready to test your knowledge and practice your skills? Get from us or your teacher the Module B quiz and worksheets.