

Varieties of Ignorance and False Information

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Outline

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There is really no such thing as false information – if it is false, it is not real or genuine information. It is used here as a category to classify all kinds of ways of misleading people.

- The Varieties of Ignorance and False Information
 - Lies per se
 - Ignorance per se
 - Misinformation
 - Missing information
 - Paltering
 - Malformation and doxing
 - Disinformation: lies, true disinformation, visual disinformation, side-effect disinformation
 - Fax News
- Types of fake news on the Internet (Claire Wardel)
 - Fabricated content
 - Misleading content
 - Manipulated content
 - False context
 - False connection
 - Satire or parody

Lies

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- Why include lies? Who, after all, would not recognize that a lie is a falsehood?
- One of Trump's hallmarks is not only to make the lie or half-truths characteristic of his office (in tweets, speeches and interviews – over 200,000 false or misleading claims), but to convince his followers that his lies are the truth or that truth does not matter. Perhaps the most dominant lie that he continues to promote, and the majority of Republicans believe, is that the election was stolen from him. There is no legitimate grounds for this claim based on verified facts or evidence by all bipartisan authorities who ran the election.
- What is problematic is that 30%+ of Republicans and many independents are convinced that his claims are correct.

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Ignorance Per Se

- Lacking knowledge or awareness, being uninformed about a specific subject or fact.
- Many Americans lack of knowledge of the Constitution, what it really means, and how it forms the nature of our democracy, how government works, the balance of powers, the nature of the first amendment (freedom of the press), etc. This leads to incomplete or biased interpretations about news sources, gun rights, the separation of powers or other civics understanding.
- A lot of the objections to Critical Race Theory (CRT) is based on lacking a full understanding of the flaws in American history, not to mention the distorted interpretations pushed on them by news sources with a political agenda.
- Many are ignorant of their ignorance, what is called the Dunning-Kruger effect where persons overestimate their thinking abilities in believing that their interpretation of data is the only approach. They are unaware of their lack of critical thinking abilities. This is a heavily engulfing cognitive bias to which we will return later.

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Ignorance Per Se (a typical example of Trump's inability to understand the nature of climate change or many scientific topics.):



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Misinformation

- Offering information that is incorrect or inaccurate.
- To argue that vaccinations contain chips to control people's behavior would be misinforming them.
- If I told someone that to use bleach internally or that hydroxychloroquine or ivermectin would prevent or cure the coronavirus, I would be misinforming them (not that I would have invented these ideas myself, but most likely they are derived from dubious sources).

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Missing information:

- The non-inclusion of information that should be known or present in order to understand facts and make decisions.
- Its absence is due to negligence, incompetence or the desire to mislead.
- For example, accusing Hillary Clinton of being responsible for the Benghazi attack omits the fact that after 11 hours of her testimony before the House Select Committee on Benghazi and many other investigations no substantial evidence was unveiled to indicate that she was the source of any wrongdoing. In short, the preordained conclusion of the Committee was to establish that she was responsible for the event in the absence of any evidence to establish their case. One can conclude nothing from no information or no evidence.

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Missing information (this example could also be an example of misinformation or disinformation (the intent is to deceive), or paltering (partial truth)):

- After mass shootings, the NRA and its supporters tout the meme that in Switzerland 1 person in 2 has guns but it has the lowest crime rate in the world.
- They fail to mention that Switzerland has a strong culture of gun responsibility and safety that is anchored in society and passed from generation to generation. For example:
 - Most Swiss men are required to learn how to use a gun
 - When they use guns, it is usually for military or police duties (the Swiss have mandatory military service)
 - Gun sellers have strict guidelines
 - Swiss laws aim to prevent incompetent or violent people from owning a gun
 - Most people are not allowed to carry guns publicly (Brueck, 2018).

Varieties of Ignorance and False Information

Paltering

- It is an attempt to mislead by telling the truth, but not the whole truth.
- If your mother asks you whether you have finished your homework and you reply that you were working on your problems in your geometry class, you are paltering by telling the truth but not the whole truth. Is the homework to which you are referring the one due tomorrow? Is that all of the homework that was due? The question was about the whole of one's homework and if there was no full answer, one is paltering.
- It is related to missing information (only partial truth is given) or disinformation (there is an intent to deceive), but it seems often used in a political context.
- Donald Trump claimed family separations were Obama policy. It is true that this happened but only in exceptional cases not as a policy. (November 17, 2018 tweet). The problem with many cases of Trump's claims are (and were) that they can be seen as disinformation (intent to deceive), paltering (partial truth), or fake news (one can't always sort out the distinctions in some cases).
- Lou Dobbs congratulated Trump for being nominated for the "Noble" [sic] prize, neglecting to indicate that anyone can be nominated for the prize and that the nominator was right-wing Norwegian who was unhappy with his country's immigration policies (Harvey, 2020).
- It is a common practice of politicians and executives. It is related to malinformation and doxing

Malinformation and Doxing

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- Malinformation is accurate information that is shared to cause harm. Such information includes private or revealing information that is spread to harm a person or reputation.
- One example is to expose one's sexual orientation without their permission to damage their reputation or career.
- Doxing (also doxxing) occurs when one publishes private or identifying information about an individual online or on media without their permission. Many doctors and medical professionals who supported mask and vaccine mandates had their names, addresses, phone numbers, photos, etc. published by those who were opposed to those mandates.
- Essentially, doxing is openly revealing and publicizing records of an individual or group which were previously private or difficult to find, often used for nefarious purposes, such as extortion, shaming, coercion or legal, political, or moral harassment
- According to Clare Wardle, doxing is an example of malinformation, which is genuine information shared publicly to cause harm (https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf), which is one of her definitions in a glossary of information disorders).

Varieties of Ignorance and False Information

Disinformation

- Supplying misinformation with the ***deliberate aim to mislead***.
- Don Fallis correctly observes in "The Varieties of Disinformation" (2014, p. 136) that "Inaccurate information (or *misinformation*) can mislead people whether it results from an honest mistake, negligence, unconscious bias, or (as in the case of disinformation) intentional deception." In other words, the difference between misinformation and disinformation is the *intent to deceive*.
- The suppliers of such untruths can include foreign agents, government agencies, corporations, political parties, political candidates, political factions, or click-bait entrepreneurs

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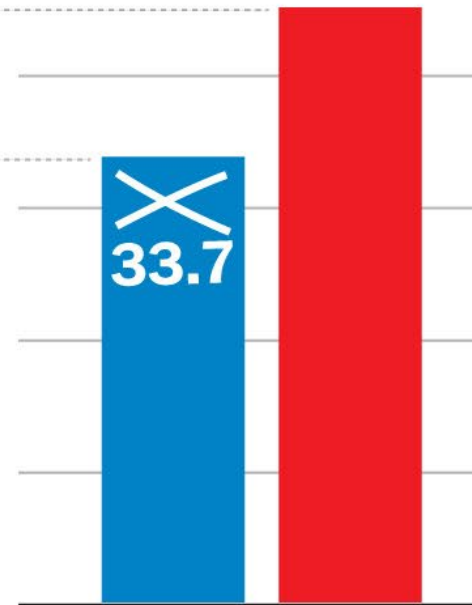
Four types of Disinformation (Fallis)

- Don Fallis's article on disinformation distinguishes four major types of disinformation: lies, visual disinformation, true disinformation, and side effect disinformation (2014, p. 137).
- We have looked at lies. *The Washington Post* created a database of the 30,573 lies or misleading claims of Trump while he was president: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?itid=lk_inline_manual_4
- Visual disinformation. During the elections, Trump also excelled with respect to the misuse of visual graphics, something quite common in political campaigns. For a wonderful illustration, with demonstrations of how charts lie, see John Muyskens (2016), "Most of Trump's charts skew the data. And not always in his favor," in *The Washington Post*.

Visual Disinformation

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We are much less likely to be critical of visual information just as we are much less likely to be critical of information that supports our existing beliefs. John Muyskens (2016), "Most of Trump's charts skew the data. And not always in his favor," in *The Washington Post*:



Visual Disinformation



Deep Fake Videos

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- Because of improvements in computer technology and developments in artificial intelligence, a visual designer can create a “deepfake” video in which a well-known person (e.g., Tom Cruise, Obama, Trump) is made to say things which they did not personally say or whose content they endorse. See a report on Deepfakes from *CBS 60 minutes* (Whitaker, 2021):
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/deepfake-artificial-intelligence-60-minutes-video-2021-10-10/#x> (13 minutes).

Varieties of Ignorance and False Information

Four types of Disinformation (Fallis)

- True disinformation, according to Fallis, is the use of accurate information to intentionally mislead. It seems to be related to missing information and paltering. He provides two examples:
 - In a 2009 debate about healthcare, opponents argued that the law mandated death panels. While the proposed law made provisions for optional end-of-life counseling and a cost benefit analysis of medical treatments, it did not literally mandate death panels – which the opponents created to suggest such things as forced euthanasia.
 - There was a commercial on television that pitted Black Flag Roach Killer against another brand, which showed the other brand was not as effective as Black Flag in killing roaches. They failed to mention that the roaches used in the demonstration were bred to be resistant to the type of poison used by the competitor. (Fallis, 2011, 209)
- Fallis's last form of disinformation is called side effect disinformation, which he explains with the example of researchers inserting inaccurate information into Wikipedia to see if and how it might be detected and corrected. In the current context, we would be unlikely to find an example where inaccurate political information was inserted into a campaign speech or press release in order to be found and corrected, given that such information is usually put there to be believed.

Fake News

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Fake News:

- A form of yellow journalism (news stories with catchy headlines but with little or no factual basis) that consists of deliberate disinformation, hoaxes or fraudulent stories, spread in traditional media or online social media.
- It is published with the intent to distort or “mislead in order to damage an agency, entity, or person, and/or gain financially or politically” (*Wikipedia, Fake news, 2020*). Those who produce fake news hope to solicit the motivated self-deception of consumers of such 'information.'
- The phrase is often used by creators of fake news to describe all other narratives about the same subject matter as “fake news,” whereas the reverse is generally true.

Two Dominant Forms of Information Calumny: Fake News

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Fake News:

- The U.S. Intelligence Community has said that it is "confident" that Russia sought to influence the election of Trump during the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Carroll, 2016). The current assessment is that there is irrefutable evidence that Russia interfered in the 2016, 2018, 2020 elections and continues to promote discord through social media.
- One of the more notorious examples was "Pizzagate."
 - Posts to social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook falsely claimed that the Washington D.C. pizza store, Comet, was the center of a child-sex ring run by Hillary Clinton and her campaign chairman, John Podesta. Edgar Welch, 28, of Salisbury, North Carolina, the young man who fired at least three shots from an AR-15 rifle inside the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in December, 2016, explained his attack by saying that he was investigating the veracity of the conspiracy theory this news story had generated. This child-sex ring was to be taking place in the basement of this store, which has no basement.
 - Fortunately, no one was hurt (Simpson, 2017). One might argue that fake news is a species of truthiness or a form of bad faith in that one makes the assumption that the source of the story on the web, usually found on social media, is real.

Fake News and Bots

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- A particularly pernicious form of fake news employs "bots."
- A 'bot' is a software application that automates tasks such as repetitive responding to related tweets on the topic that is being slandered.
- Russian agents have been especially effective in the use of bots to produce disinformation in stories on Twitter, which is one of the most influential forms of social media. They create bogus Twitter accounts by using common key words and hashtags that would typically accompany a pro-Trump, pro-right or anti-democracy tweet.

Fake News

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- Producing fake news stories can be financially rewarding, and not just for Russians.
 - Prior to the 2016 election, NBC News reported the case of a Macedonian teenager who was one of the many Macedonians producing fake news stories, writing under the pseudonym Dimitri. Dimitri wrote and distributed articles criticizing Hillary Clinton and praising Donald Trump which looked real and appeared to be properly documented, but they were fake.
 - His reward for these efforts, based on the penny-per-click advertising scheme, was \$60,000 over six months, garnered from clicks from Trump supporters (Smith & Banic, 201). Such enticements not only increase the flood of fake news stories but also make it much more difficult for people to be discerning, particularly for those predisposed to accept these stories uncritically.
- This is click-bait: every time one clicks on a link of fake information, that person or organization (partisan or nonpartisan) gets paid - pennies add up and reputations get ruined and fake disputes get aggravated.

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While the taxonomy that I have proposed is nice, tidy and comprehensive, its application is not always easy – to decide whether a particular example is an instance of only one category.

There are many forms of misinformation, but in order for it to become disinformation, one must determine what the intent of the author was. If the intent was to deceive, then it is disinformation. However, one cannot always tell that.

Paltering or missing information is disinformation, given the intent to deceive.

The other side of the coin is from the receiver's viewpoint -- the willingness to be deceived, self-deception and social self-deception, which we will address in the next lectures.

Claire Wardle. Types of Fake News.

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(Wardle, 2017)

<https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/fake-news-complicated/>

Claire Wardle: Types of Fake News

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1. Satire and Parody – no intention to cause harm but has potential to fool. The Onion (<https://www.theonion.com/>) is a site for satire, with articles like “Doctor Informs Patient Weird Lump On Neck Nothing He Can Afford To Worry About.”
2. False Connection – misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual. An example includes click-bait headlines that lead to a site that has nothing to do with the headline. A picture with a sandwich as the headline “When you read these 19 food facts, you’ll never want to eat again” leads to a story about high-calorie foods. (<https://www.ranker.com/list/clickbait/jacob-Shelton>)

(2) False Connection

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**When You Read These 19 Shocking Food Facts,
You'll Never Want To Eat Again**

Claire Wardle: Types of Fake News

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(3) Misleading Content - misleading information to frame an issue or individual. Notice “Among Republicans.”



The image shows a tweet from the official account of Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump). The tweet features a screenshot of a news broadcast graphic. The graphic is titled "PRESIDENT TRUMP'S JOB APPROVAL AMONG REPUBLICANS" and shows a bar chart with "APPROVE" at 88% and "DISAPPROVE" at 9%. The poll is attributed to "NBC NEWS/WALL STREET JOURNAL POLL" conducted from "JULY 15-18" with a "MOE +/- 3/27 PTS". A "DEVELOPING" banner is at the bottom of the graphic. The tweet text says "Thank you very much, working hard!". The tweet has 625,072 likes and was posted on July 26.

realDonaldTrump • [Follow](#)

realDonaldTrump Thank you very much, working hard!

[Load more comments](#)

riot_racer @figboot31977 I know your a Donald trump supporter. Kind of obvious

figboot31977 @riot_racer Here's a thought for ya.... You don't know crap!!! GET a LIFE and STAY the #&# OUT OF MINE!!!

riot_racer @figboot31977 I'm not in yours. If I was then I'd have a bigger understanding of who you are. Like I said if you support

625,072 likes

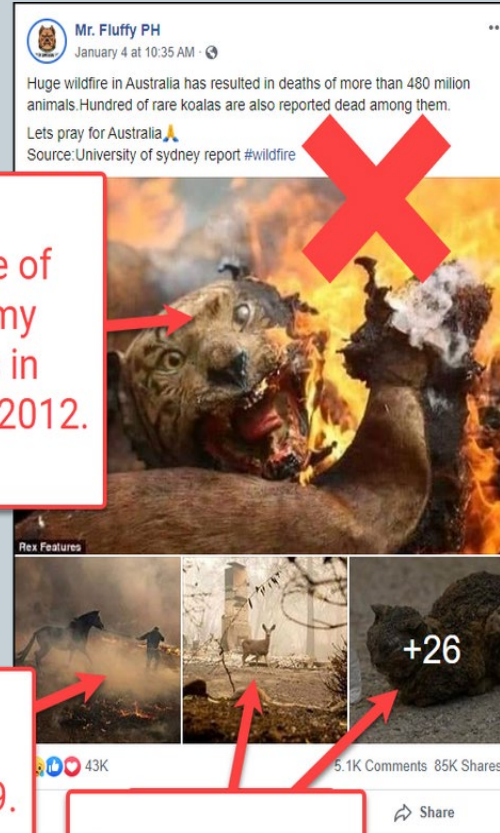
JULY 26

[Log in to like or comment.](#)

(4) False Context

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(4) False Context – when genuine content is shared with false contextual information. This is about wildfires in Australia.



A bonfire of taxidermy animals in Indonesia, 2012.


Simi Valley, California, 2019.

Paradise Valley, California, 2018.

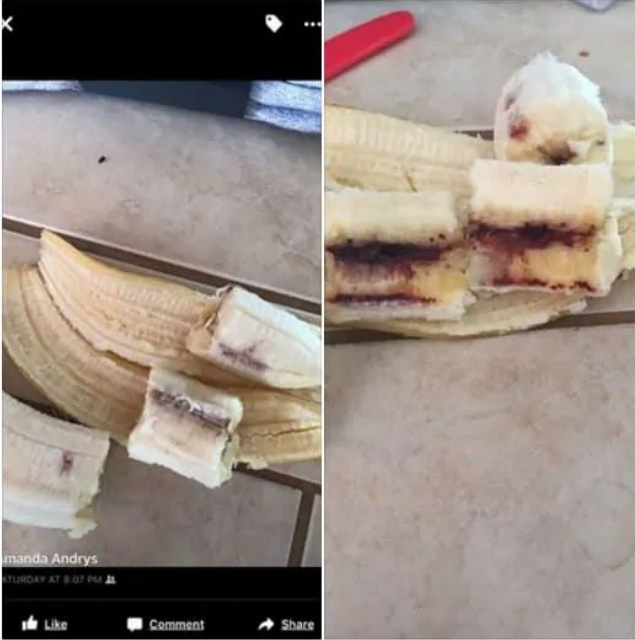
(5) Imposter Content


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(5) Imposter Content – when genuine sources are impersonated

 **Anna Aquavia** added 2 new photos.
November 9 at 9:54am · 🌐

This happened to my friends sister who lives in Nebraska but please share this and be aware. Someone is injecting blood into banannas. The hospital tested the bananna and it is indeed blood. After researching on the Internet apperently someone is injecting HIV positive blood into bananas and oranges.



 **Amanda Andry**
SATURDAY AT 9:07 PM 🌐

Like Comment Share

Share

5,710 shares

(6) Manipulated Content

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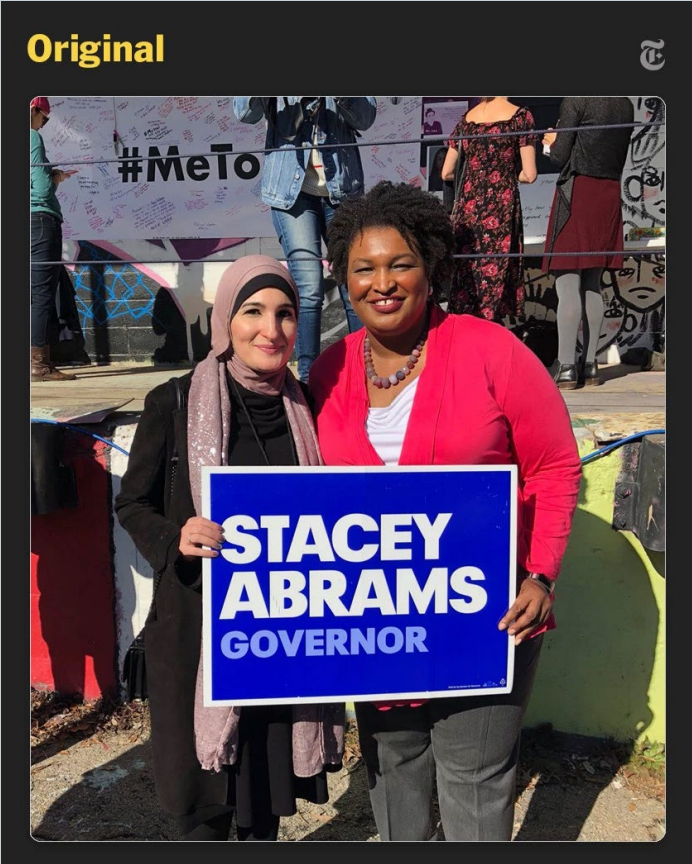
When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive:



“The dangers of a one sided story”

(6) Manipulated Content

When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive:



(7) Fabricated Content

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New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and harm










A tweet claimed that “An Indian restaurant in New Cross uses human meat as meat.”

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/39966215/restaurant-hit-by-human-meat-fake-news-claims>

Claire Wardle. Uses of Fake News Types

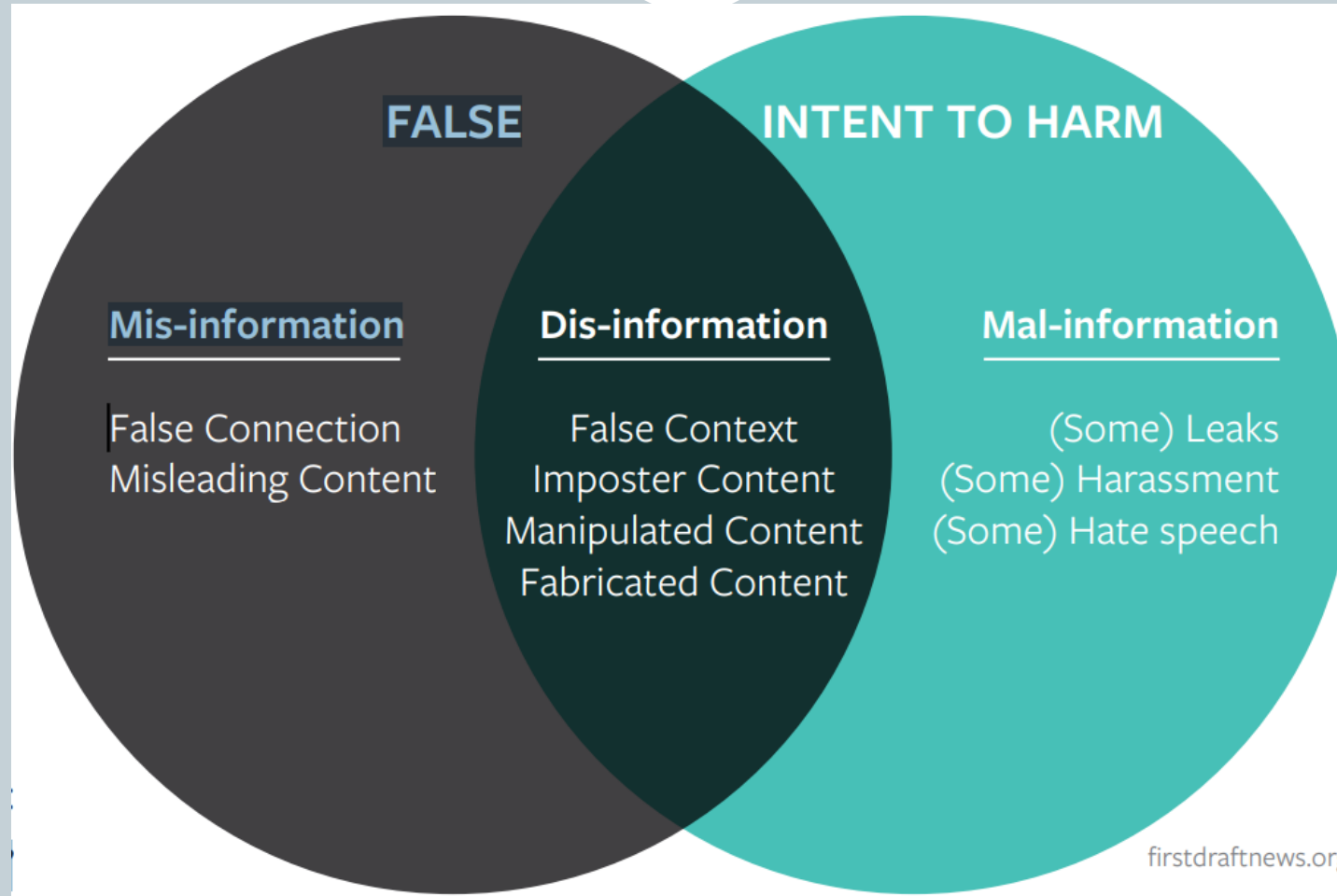
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FIRSTDRAFT		MISINFORMATION MATRIX					
	 SATIRE OR PARODY	 FALSE CONNECTION	 MISLEADING CONTENT	 FALSE CONTEXT	 IMPOSTER CONTENT	 MANIPULATED CONTENT	 FABRICATED CONTENT
POOR JOURNALISM		✓	✓	✓			
TO PARODY	✓				✓		✓
TO PROVOKE OR TO 'PUNK'					✓	✓	✓
PASSION				✓			
PARTISANSHIP			✓	✓			
PROFIT		✓			✓		✓
POLITICAL INFLUENCE			✓	✓		✓	✓
PROPAGANDA			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<https://firstdraftnews.org>

The relationship of the types of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation

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Why do people accept, repeat or promote false information?

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- Why do people accept misinformation or disinformation? We can start by looking at psychological factors in the next lecture.