

# Combating Misinformation

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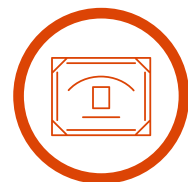
**Oregon State**  
University

# Today's workshop



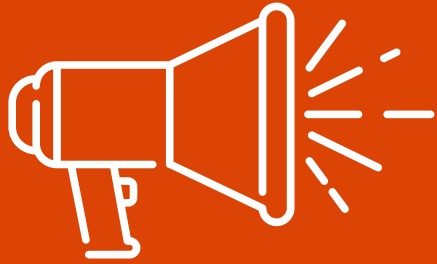
## The threat of misinformation

What makes us susceptible to misinformation. What makes misinformation stick. How polarization, fragmented media and social media play a role in spreading misinformation.



## Fighting misinformation

Based on this information, what are the best practices for fighting misinformation? How they can be applied locally.



# **THE THREAT OF MISINFORMATION**



# What is misinformation?

False or misleading information masquerading as legitimate news

1. Outdated news, thought to be true and disseminated in good faith
2. Technically-true but misleading half-truths



# What is misinformation?

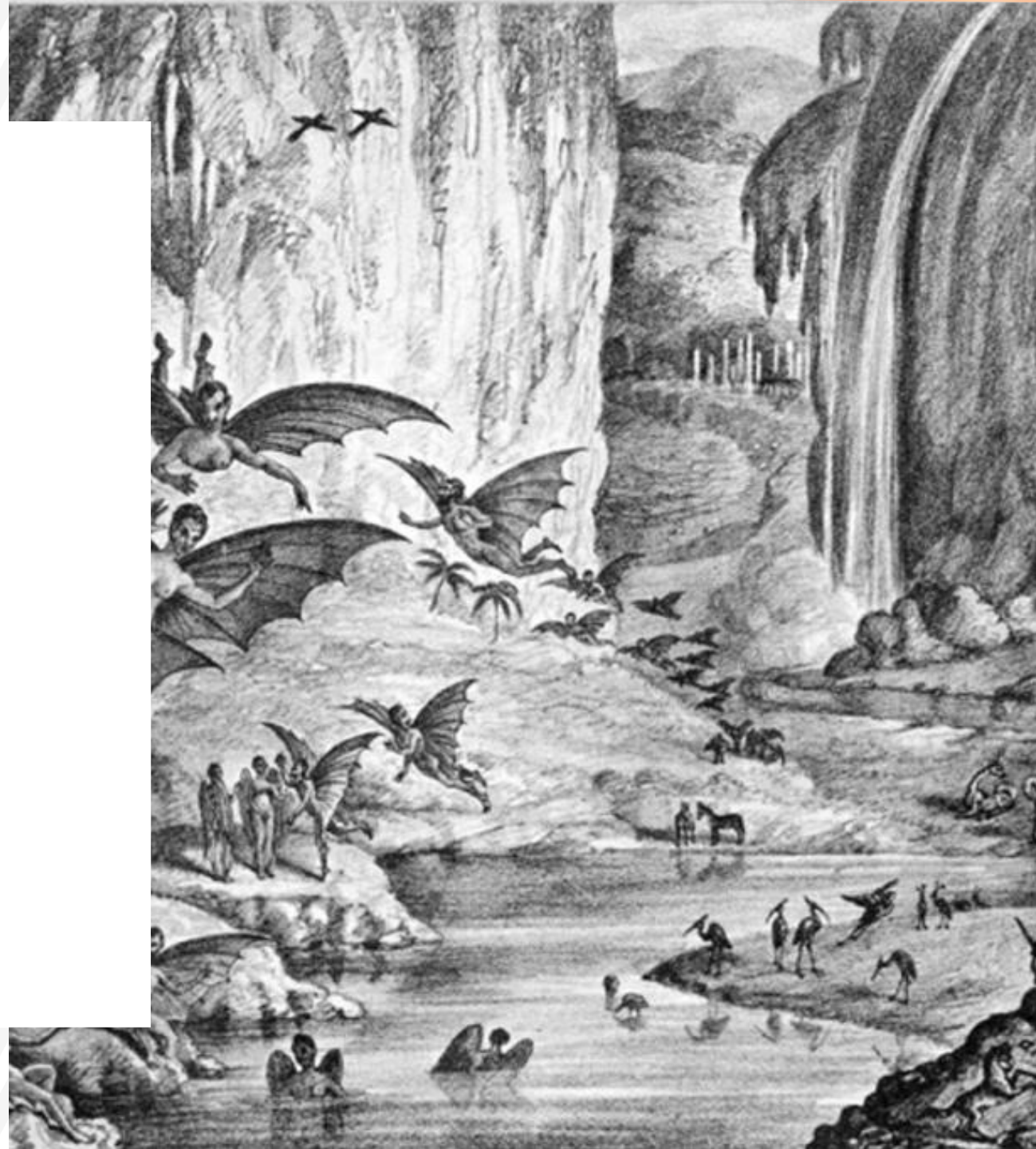
False or misleading information masquerading as legitimate news

3. Entirely fabricated **disinformation** spread intentionally to mislead or confuse the public
4. Misconceptions can even be acquired from obviously fictional materials



# Misinformation is not new

The *New York Sun's*  
“Great Moon Hoax” of  
1835



# What is new: speed and magnitude



- Fragmented and polarized news landscape
- Social media effects





## Traditional sources of info

- 79% of Americans trust local news more than national news sources to give them information they can use in daily life.
- Local news organizations are also trusted more to report the news without bias and to get the facts right.





# Decline of local news

- 2,500 newspapers in the United States — ¼ of them — have closed since 2005.
  - Ad revenue fell by over 80% from 2005 to 2020
- “News deserts”



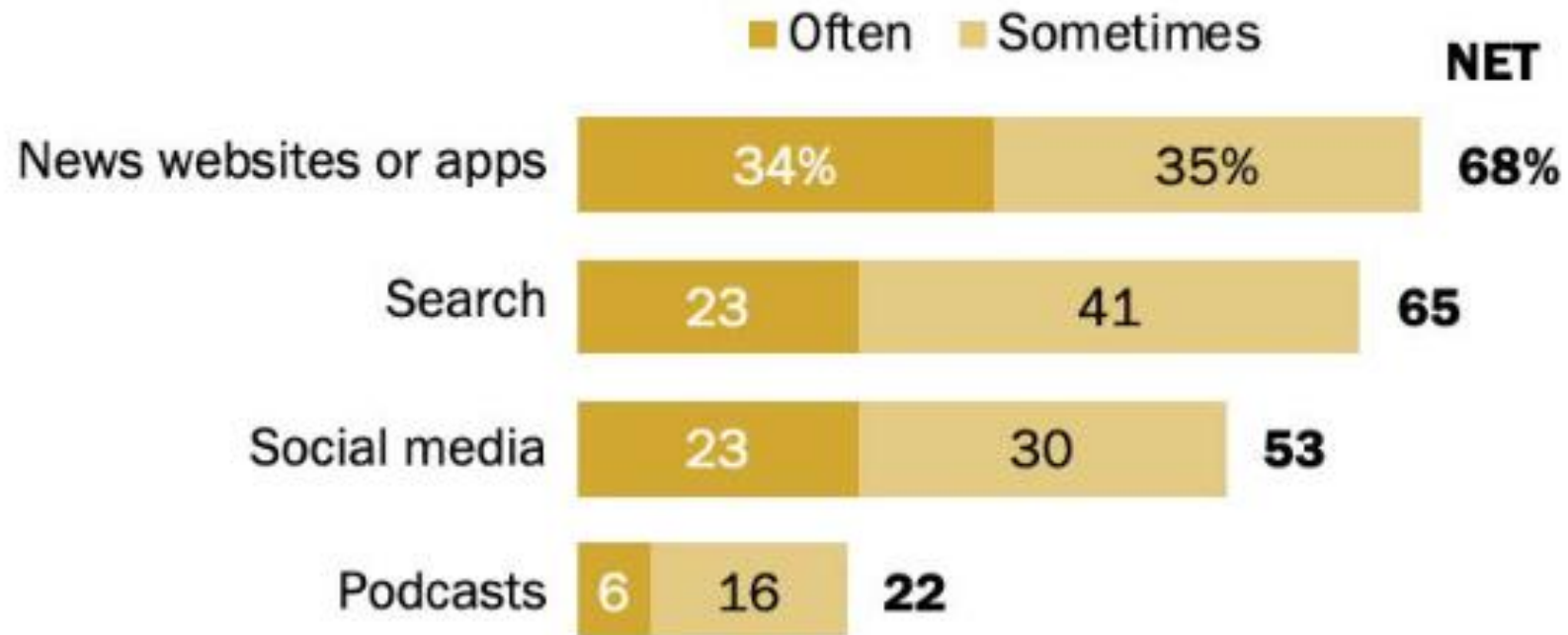
# Decline of local news

- Oregon
  - 2 counties have no local newspaper, 20 have only a weekly newspaper
  - Circulation has decreased more than 40% since 2004 and cuts continue
- **Information vacuum**
  - Making it possible for misinformation to flourish online



# Rise of online news

- 86% of U.S. adults get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet “often” or “sometimes”



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.



# Fragmentation of news sources

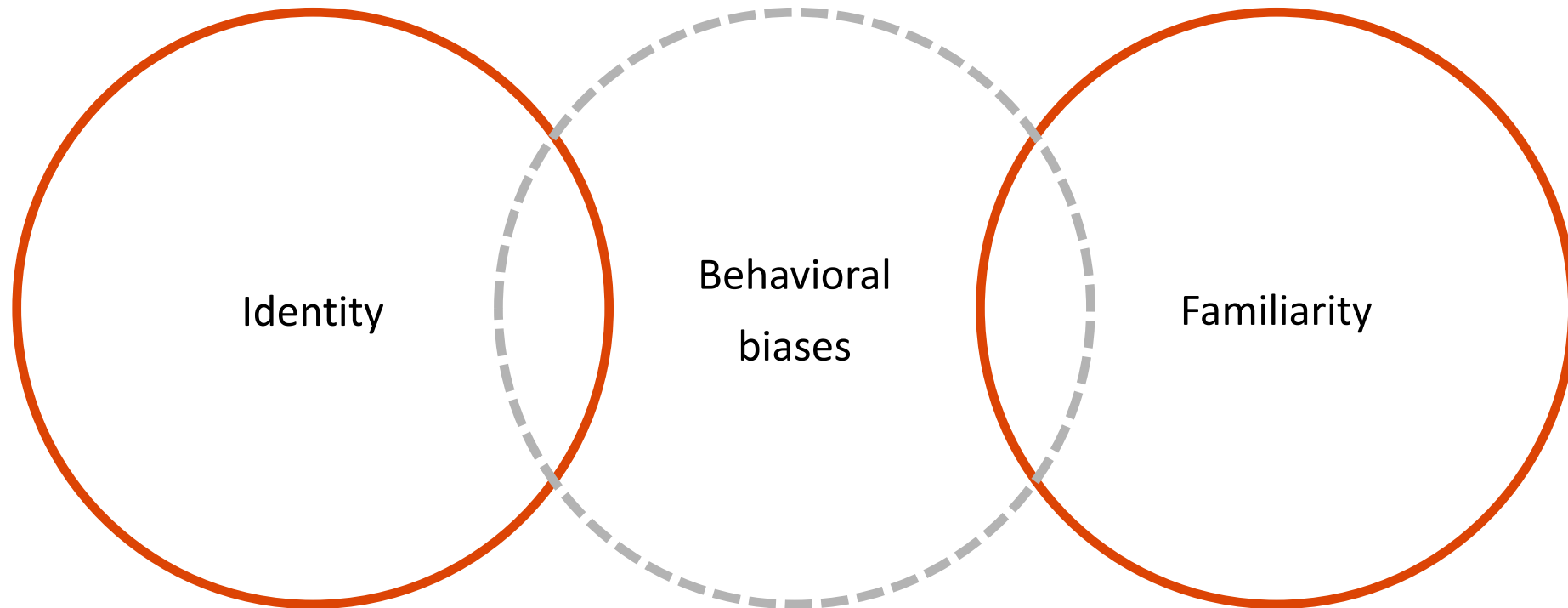
- Different people see and hear different content
- Selective exposure
  - People with different political identities place their loyalty and their trust in very different sources.



# Fragmentation of news sources

- Creates homogeneous, polarized clusters or echo chambers
- Challenging to parse through this information
  - Large share of Americans say made-up news creates confusion and is a big problem for society.

# Why are we susceptible to misinformation?





# Behavioral biases

- **Confirmation bias:** An automatic tendency to notice data that fit with our beliefs.
- **Motivated reasoning:** Tendency to scrutinize ideas more carefully if we don't like them than if we do.

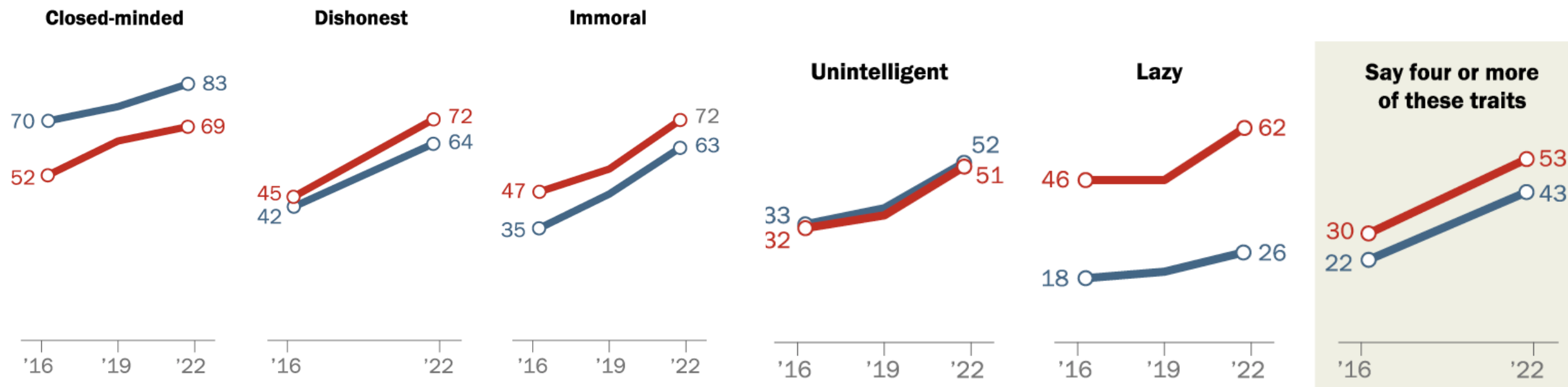


# Rise of polarization

**Growing shares of both Republicans and Democrats say members of the other party are more immoral, dishonest, closed-minded than other Americans**

*% who say members of the **other** party are a lot/somewhat more \_\_\_\_\_ compared to other Americans*

- Republicans say Democrats are more ...
- Democrats say Republicans are more ...



Note: Partisans do not include those who lean to each party.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 27-July 4, 2022.





# Examples

## Study on mask mandates

- 9 months into the pandemic, Americans had no clear sense of which level of government was responsible for COVID policies in their local communities.
- The more opposed to the policies people were, the more likely they were to blame whichever level of government was controlled by the opposite political party.



# Examples

## Experiments about government services

- When individuals believe a program or service is low quality, they are likely to assume it is provided by government.
- When encountering a program or service that is perceived to be of higher quality, they are more likely to assume it is provided privately.

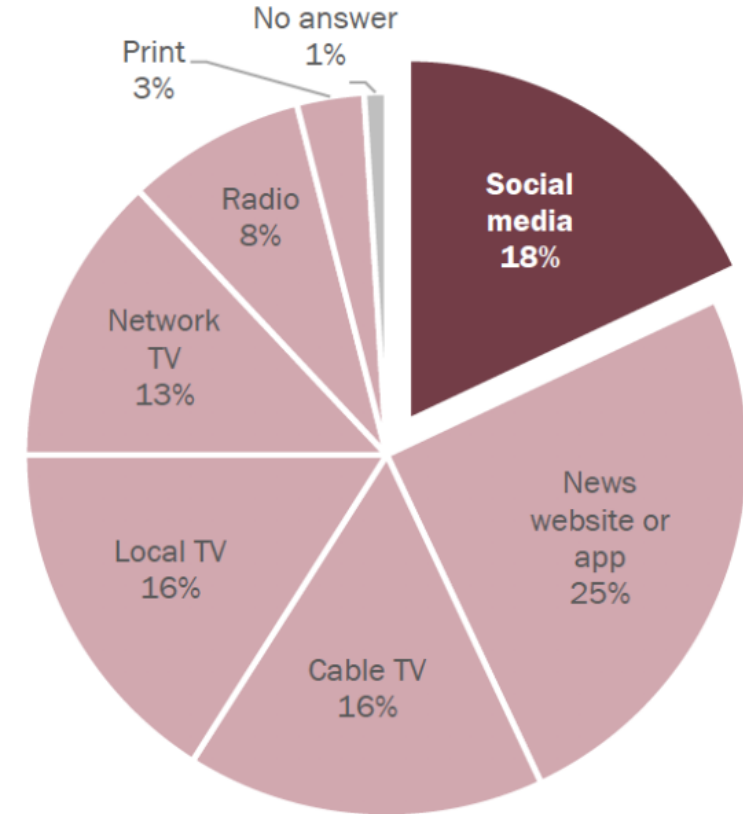


# Social media

- Democratized publishing of information
- Gatekeepers are not traditional publishers and editors

## About one-in-five U.S. adults say they get their political news primarily through social media

*% of U.S. adults who say the most common way they get political and election news is ...*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 29-Nov. 11, 2019. "Americans Who Mainly Get Their News on Social Media Are Less Engaged, Less Knowledgeable"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**



# Social media and identity

- We tend to share information because it **connects us with others**, not necessarily because it is true.
  - “Interesting if true” or “just asking questions”
  - Share to mark identity
- We trust people when we feel like they’re on our side
  - Cognitive trust vs. affective trust



# Social media and identity

- Echo chamber leads to selective exposure, selective attention, selective retention of information
- Misinformation believed more when presented in a context that reinforces rather than challenges people's own political views
- Replies between like-minded individuals strengthen group identity
  - Can strengthen tentative beliefs



# Misinformation is sticky

- Repetition leads to “illusory truth” effect
  - We tend to believe falsehoods when they’re repeated often enough
  - People more inclined to pass along a rumor after they’d heard it two or three times.
- Corrective information
  - Doesn’t get same attention
  - People still tilted toward believing original claim



# Social media and familiarity

- Posts that drive engagement are favored over everything else.
  - More time spent on platform leads to more revenue
  - Algorithms favor outrage, anger, lies, conspiracies because those drive engagement.



# Social media and familiarity

- Misinformation is shared much more often and travels more quickly
  - False news stories are 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories
  - The lifecycle of political misinformation on social media is longer than that of facts and tends to reemerge multiple times
  - Over time, “feels true,” people more likely to share



# City says misinformation rampant surrounding playground equipment for autistic children

Elliot Lake will continue to serve those children

[Brent Sleightholm](#)

Apr 1, 2022 3:12 PM



This week Elliot Lake City Council voted to move some playground equipment out of Westview Park.

The specially-designed equipment had been designed and installed in the park on the shores of Elliot Lake, to benefit autistic children.

The city was forced to [take the step](#) after vandals who abused the equipment wound up causing sleepless nights for people living across the water from the park.

Since last Monday's virtual council meeting, City of Elliot CAO Daniel Gagnon said there has been misinformation circulating about the fate of the park and specialized equipment for youngsters with autism.

He stated that remedies will be taken to make sure autistic children will continue to have their recreational needs met.

# City of Dixon to Host a Town Hall Meeting in Regards to Recovery and Sober Homes to Clear Up Misinformation

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By Tim Lee

🕒 Aug 1, 2022 | 6:29 PM

According to Dixon City Manager Dan Langloss there is a great deal of misinformation in the community in regards to Recovery and Sober Homes. At the Dixon City Council meeting Monday night, he also said the city has also heard legitimate concerns from the public.

Advertis

# Officials: Misinformation being spread

*City website statement says spread could be intentional*

## Staff Reports

Published 11:19 a.m. PT May 5, 2015 | Updated 11:19 a.m. PT May 5, 2015



City officials last week released a statement clarifying a discussion regarding animal zoning at a recent City Council meeting.

Despite a lengthy discussion on animal zoning at the April 21 council meeting, officials said misinformation continues to be spread throughout the community. Officials say they believe this action may be intentional.

# CORTEZ FIGHTING MISINFORMATION WAR OVER OVER REFUSE DEPARTMENT TROUBLES

2/22/2022







# Prince Edward Island

- Pop 156,947
- Story got 6 million interactions on Facebook

**Drivers will now lose licence if they illegally pass a school bus**



Fines already highest in Canada, and will be higher with more demerit points

[Nicole Williams](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 29, 2018 4:12 PM AT | Last Updated: November 30, 2018



As of Dec. 8, Island drivers will lose their licence if they illegally pass a school bus. (Brian Higgins/CBC)



## **Group discussion 1**

What examples of misinformation have come up in your communities?

- How were they spread?
- Was there an information vacuum?
- Did group identity or repetition make fighting the misinformation more difficult?
- What are your concerns for the future?



## Recap of discussion

- What common types of misinformation came up in your group?
- What common sources of misinformation came up in your group?
- What made misinformation the most difficult to fight?
- What are your concerns for the future?



# **FIGHTING MISINFORMATION**



# Three methods to fight misinformation



**Active  
communication**



**Prebunking**



**Debunking**



# Identity and trust

- Information from sources that are perceived to be credible typically creates stronger beliefs and is more persuasive
  - Credibility can matter more than expertise for correction of misinformation
- Americans have higher levels of trust in local elected leaders than state or federal



# Identity and trust

- Tailor the message to the audience and use a messenger trusted by the target group
- Discredit disinformation sources that have vested interests



# Stickiness of misinformation

- Fact-checking can reduce people's beliefs in false information
- But the misinformation often continues to influence people's thinking
  - "Continued influence effect"



# Stickiness of misinformation

- Repeating misinformation – backfire effect?
  - Headline: ‘Bob Talbert is not linked with Mafia’
- Important to use the most effective debunking approaches



# Be active communicators

- Fill the information vacuum about local issues
- Present reliable, factually correct information before false information is spread
  - The first information heard tends to be what sticks
  - Should be issued quickly, repeatedly, and across multiple different platforms.
  - Build a strong track record as a reliable source of information




# Be active communicators

- Email, text, website

**Eugene**

RESIDENTS      BUSINESSES      EXPERIENCE EUGENE      GOVERNMENT      I WANT TO...


## CITY NEWS



**Eugene City Council votes to ban fireworks**


At its meeting on Monday, September 26, the Eugene City Council voted 6-2 to ban the sale and use of personal fireworks within Eugene city limits.

[Read on...](#)



**City of Eugene Awarded \$1.2 Million Grant to Support Suzanne Arlie Park Development**


Today, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo announced that the Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) is awarding a \$1.2 million grant to the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space for phase one of the Suzanne Arlie Park development.



**Sheldon Pool & Fitness Center to open Sept. 26**

After more than a year of construction, Sheldon Pool & Fitness Center is ready to reopen.

[Read on...](#)

 Select Language



# Amplify the message

- Every community has influential members who are trusted by the public
- Have a consistent and reliable voice
- Admit to mistakes when they are made





# Prebunking

- Try to inoculate people from believing misinformation

EN ▾

# BAD NEWS

From fake news to chaos! How bad are  
you? Get as many followers as you  
can.

START

FOLLOWERS

8

CREDIBILITY



No worries! To gain notoriety, we can start by borrowing someone else's credibility. What do you want to do?



NÄSA

Expløre the universe and discover øur hømme plänet with @NÄSA.

Meteorite alert: large space object set to hit US West Coast. #BeSafe

Tweet this!

Not this one

**DOT BUYS A BIKE**





# Prebunking

- Encourage people to:
  - Think critically about all the information they read on social media
  - Consider the source of the information and the experts associated with those sources
  - Evaluate all claims by checking them against other sources
- Simple, consistent reminders to follow these steps



# When to debunk?

- If the misinformation is largely unknown, keep monitoring, withhold debunking, but be prepared
  - Avoid raising familiarity
- If myth is out there, but you can still set the agenda or frame the topic, provide accurate information.
- If myth has spread, debunk often and properly
  - Fact-checking and debunking doesn't necessarily backfire

# How to debunk

**FACT**

**WARN ABOUT  
THE MYTH**

**EXPLAIN  
FALLACY**

**FACT**



## **Fact: State the truth first**

- Make it sticky
- Elevate trusted, local voices
- If possible, do not rely on simple retraction, i.e. “This claim is not true”
- Truth should not be more complicated than the original misinformation





## **Myth: Point to misinformation**

- Repeat the misinformation, only once directly prior to the correction.
  - Avoid any potential backfire effects
- Corrections are most successful if people are suspicious of the source or intent of the misinformation



# Explain fallacy

- Why info was thought to be correct in the first place
- Why it is now clear it's wrong
- Why the alternative is correct
- If possible, also point out the logical fallacy underlying the misinformation
  - e.g. cherry-picking data



## **Fact: State the truth again**

- Restate the fact again, so the fact is the last thing people process
- Effects will wear off over time, so be prepared to debunk repeatedly



# Debunk the idea, not the person

- Need people to be willing to believe you
- Remember the role of identity
- Important to avoid stigmatizing groups for holding inaccurate beliefs
  - Likely to polarize more



# Debunking on social media

- “Most people want to receive accurate information”
- “See something, say something”
- Dealing with trolls?
  - Governments should respond once, firmly, with the facts
  - Seeing someone else on social media being corrected can lead to more accurate attitudes

# Bizarre leak discovered in the ocean floor could cause magnitude 9 earthquake



Bizarre leak discovered in the ocean flo...

0:43



Waterspout Begins to Form Over Lake Mich...

1:17



News bulletin 2023/04/23 23:06



Watch: last checks as runners check in f...

1:00



News bulletin 2023/04/23 22:09



Erik ten Hag vows Manchester United will...

0:46





## Example

### FACT

Scientists are not alarmed at discovering a seep of water from the sea floor, which does not trigger earthquakes, but may regulate friction in the fault zone.

### WARN ABOUT THE MYTH

A myth that is circulating claims the seep could cause an earthquake.

### EXPLAIN FALLACY

Though scientists only recently discovered Pythia's Oasis, it is one of many seeps that have existed for a very long time.

### FACT

This discovery does not change the current risk of a large earthquake in Oregon.



# City of Glendale Rumor Page

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[Home Page](#)

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[GWP Heat Wave Messaging](#)

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[Safe Browsing](#)

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## About

The City of Glendale's **Rumor Page** is dedicated to eliminating misconceptions, and bringing residents the facts about varying issues and concerns within our community.

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### [GWP Heat Wave Messaging](#)

**X** [During the last heatwave, GWP used its customer notification process ...](#)

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### [Rent Price in Glendale](#)

**X** [Rent.com Labels Glendale as Having the Highest Rent in Southern California](#)

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### [Americana at Brand Economic Impact](#)

**?** The City of Glendale received numerous inquiries

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# Correcting Misinformation

During public comment at board meetings and in other venues, we continue to hear misinformation about various aspects of the County's policies and operations. Below is a list of corrections to some of this misinformation, with the most recently added corrections provided at the top.

## **14. Myth: The County refuses to release video from the Board of Supervisors' January 2022 workshop.**

The Board's workshop was not included in our contract with Nevada County Digital Media Center (NCDMC) as it is not normally live streamed. However, due to Covid protocols in place at the time, the County requested the additional service of live streaming the workshop which was available to the public and the media for viewing during the event. Unlike regular and special Board of Supervisors' meetings during which action is taken, the annual workshop is informational only; for this reason, written minutes (rather than a recorded video) are the official record of the event. These minutes can be found [here](#). We recently learned that a saved recording of the livestream is accessible, and have uploaded it to that [same link](#). *[Added 5/19/2022]*

## **13. Myth: Nevada County is tracking children through contact tracing.**

Fact: Contact tracing does not involve tracking anyone. "Tracing" involves a voluntary interview with the COVID-positive individual to determine who they may have been in contact with during their infectious period so that close contacts can be notified and provided guidance and resources. We have no ability or desire to track anybody.

### Additional Information:

- o Contact Tracing: This is a long-standing practice to limit the spread of communicable disease. This involves contacting people who have tested positive (or their parents/guardians in the case of children) and connecting them with information and resources to help them manage their illness. This process also includes voluntarily interviewing them to determine if they have been in close contact with others during their infectious period who need to be notified of their possible exposure, and following up with those close contacts as needed.



## Group discussion 2

- What tactics have you used to fight misinformation, and were they effective?
- What resources did you use?
  - Website, social media, newsletter, meeting, etc.
- What other resources could you use, and what are the constraints?
  - Staff time, budget, etc.



## **Recap of discussion**

- Did your group have examples of techniques that worked?
- Did you get ideas for new ways to fight misinformation?



# Key takeaways

- Fill the information vacuum at local levels
  - Prebunk if possible
- People share and believe misinformation due to group identity.
  - Be aware of this when debunking
- Information is sticky
  - Debunk using a “truth sandwich”
  - Debunk repeatedly

# THANK YOU

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University

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