

Types of Disinformation



Disinformation is created on purpose, but why would people create disinformation? The staff at the library told him that some websites are created by people with the sole purpose of selling something or to support specific beliefs, known as ideologies. They use false profiles to hide their identity and promote their business or their goals.

Because their “business” depends on the number of visitors they attract to their website and the amount of clicks from visitors, these people sometimes use silly stories, really attractive deals, alarming stories, or misleading information to lure people to their website.



Surprisingly, many false stories attract a lot of people. Research shows that our brains react more strongly to negative news, as a result, we tend to share more negative news, making these stories go viral more often. Viewers can have a strong emotional reaction to stories that inspire feelings of anger, anxiety, positivity, and amazement, and these types of stories will also get shared more often.

Misleading stories are carefully crafted around a familiar fact, but twisted to provoke our emotions and exploit our brains' natural biases.

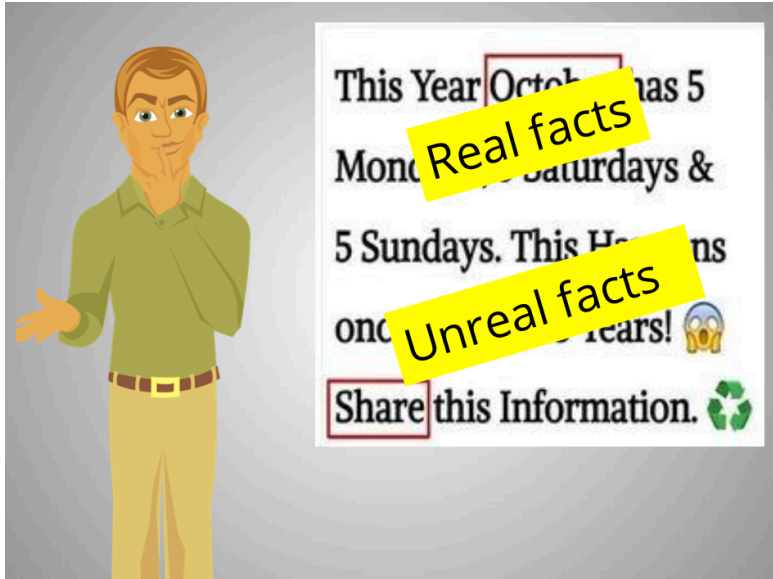


When Tom looks at his social media feed, he navigates the content deciding what to read and what to skip. He also decides what to like and what to share. He is affected by the emotional tone of headlines and photos, even though that's not a good indicator of an article's accuracy. Much more important is who wrote the piece, but Tom rarely takes the time to investigate beyond the image or the headline.

Tom remembers sharing a meme claiming that October 2016 was going to be special because it had 5 Mondays, 5 Saturdays, and 5 Sundays, an event that supposedly only occurs once every 823 years! He was amazed and quickly shared the image.

Soon after he shared the image, one of his friends texted him that it wasn't real.

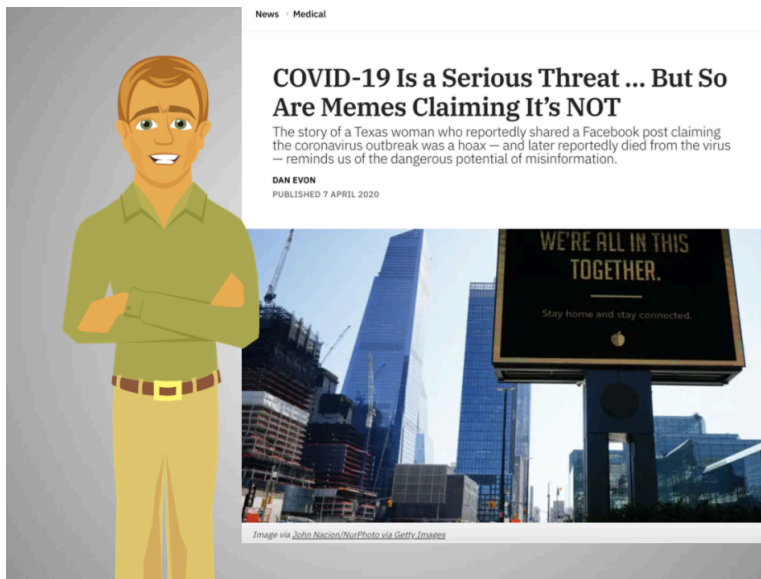
Tom realized that if he had searched the facts at that time, he would have easily found that he wouldn't need to wait 823 years to see this weekday combination. The next time such a combination will occur is in October 2022. That image has been circulating for quite some time tricking people and still being shared as fact.



This is an example of disinformation. In this case, October 2016 did have 5 Mondays, 5 Saturdays, and 5 Sundays, so someone looking at the calendar could have confirmed that, and then shared the amazing fact right away. But the second part is not true. Tom could have done a quick search to find that out, but he didn't because it seemed logical to him and he was caught up by how cool the fact was.

Like in this meme, disinformation often contains some details of a real event or fact, and as you read further, more details may be added or removed to create something that is no longer the real event or fact. Because memes have no author and they use images or short sentences, they are attractive, easy to read, and very effective at being shared.

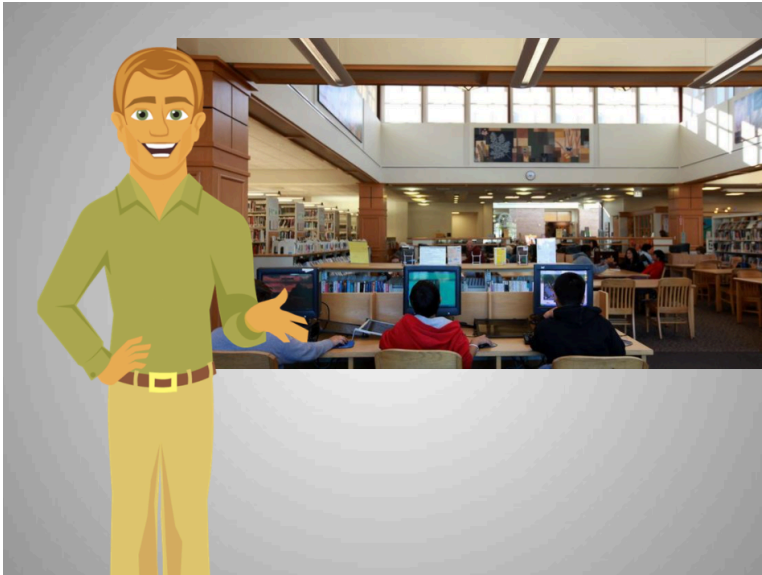
Tom shouldn't feel bad for not checking the facts. Many people, even computer savvy people, share false information sometimes. It can be hard to identify disinformation because it is crafted to trick people.



Tom was embarrassed when his friend told him that the October story he shared was a lie, but at least it was a harmless lie. He knows he needs to be more careful because not all disinformation is harmless.

Tom remembers a meme that asked people to stay home to help reduce the spread of a novel Coronavirus. The message was right, but the alarmist claims it made were wrong.

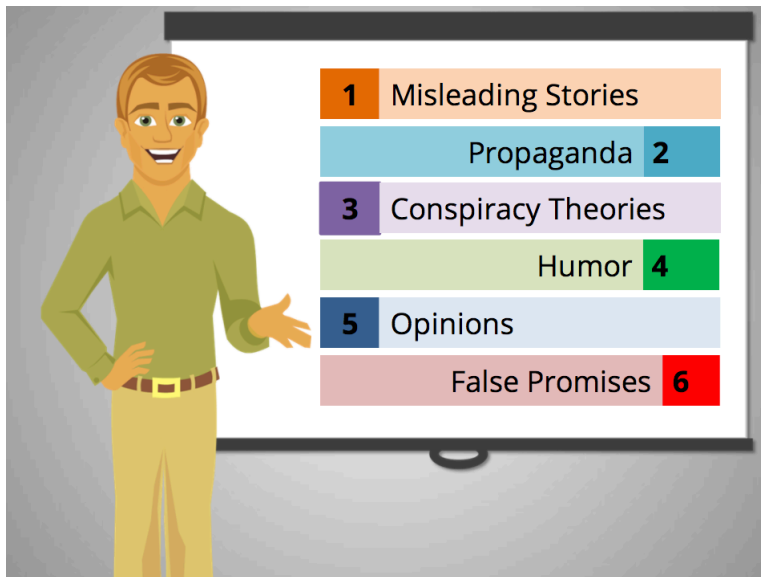
Another meme asked people to cover their eyes because “if they couldn’t see the virus, the virus could not see them.” The message was meant to be humorous and it is obviously wrong.



Mememes are not the only harmful sources of information, some websites that contain health information are intended for patients, but some sites serve other purposes. Health information may be intended to raise public awareness about a condition; but some sites may be sponsored by ads and therefore provide partial information.

When Tom was at the library, he was told about the course Online Health Information in Chicago Digital Learn. You can also review this course to learn how to access reliable sources for health information, and how to avoid potentially harmful information.

Tom knows that he needs to seek information from trusted sources, especially for information about diseases and other medical conditions.



There are many forms of disinformation. These are some popular ways in which disinformation is created. Try pairing the type of disinformation with its definition.

1. **Misleading Stories:** Bogus stories or posts are designed to mislead people and are typically false stories based on the real national news.
2. **Propaganda:** Partial information in which the goal is to promote a specific cause or to discredit political opponents.
3. **Conspiracy Theories:** Stories that suggest that a secret plot among powerful people or organizations is covering up the truth of what really happened.
4. **Humor:** Stories that mimic real news coverage but are made with the purpose of entertaining. Anyone paying close attention will see those stories make cartoonish characterizations and silly statements.
5. **Opinions:** Commentaries or experts interpreting complex news and expressing their own opinions. Throughout the piece, it is hard to know where the news stops and the opinion begins.
6. **False Promises:** Stories based on science that usually present far-fetched medical claims, like offering a cure for cancer through some sort of natural treatment or sites which promote bogus products and get-rich-quick schemes.

Select the term and match it to its definition

Stories that mimic real news coverage but are made with the purpose of entertaining.

Humor

Partial information in which the goal is to promote a specific cause or to discredit political opponents.

Propaganda

Stories that suggest that a secret plot among powerful people is covering up the truth of what really happened.

Conspiracy

Submit

Try pairing the type of disinformation with its definition.

That's right! There are many reasons to create false information.