

CORECON

The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



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Researching fake news: understanding the challenges

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We'll cover:



- **Conceptual delimitations and short history**
- **The spread of fake news:** mechanisms and platforms facilitating the dissemination.
- **Psychological aspects of fake news:** exploring the cognitive biases and emotional manipulations involved.
- **Impact of fake news on public health:** case studies from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Fake news in conflict zones:** case studies from the Ukraine-Russia conflict.
- **Challenges in fake news research:** identifying the obstacles to understanding and mitigating fake news.
- **Critical media literacy:** tools and techniques for identifying fake news - short presentation of "Four Moves and a Habit" + practical debunking exercises (fake news about the Ukraine-Russia conflict).

Conceptual delimitations - challenges


Reasons:

- Fuzzy relationship between fake news and other types of misleading information
- It can refer to both deliberate deception and unintentional mistakes,
- The interchangeability of the terms "fake news," "misinformation," and "disinformation." (Domenico et al., 2021).

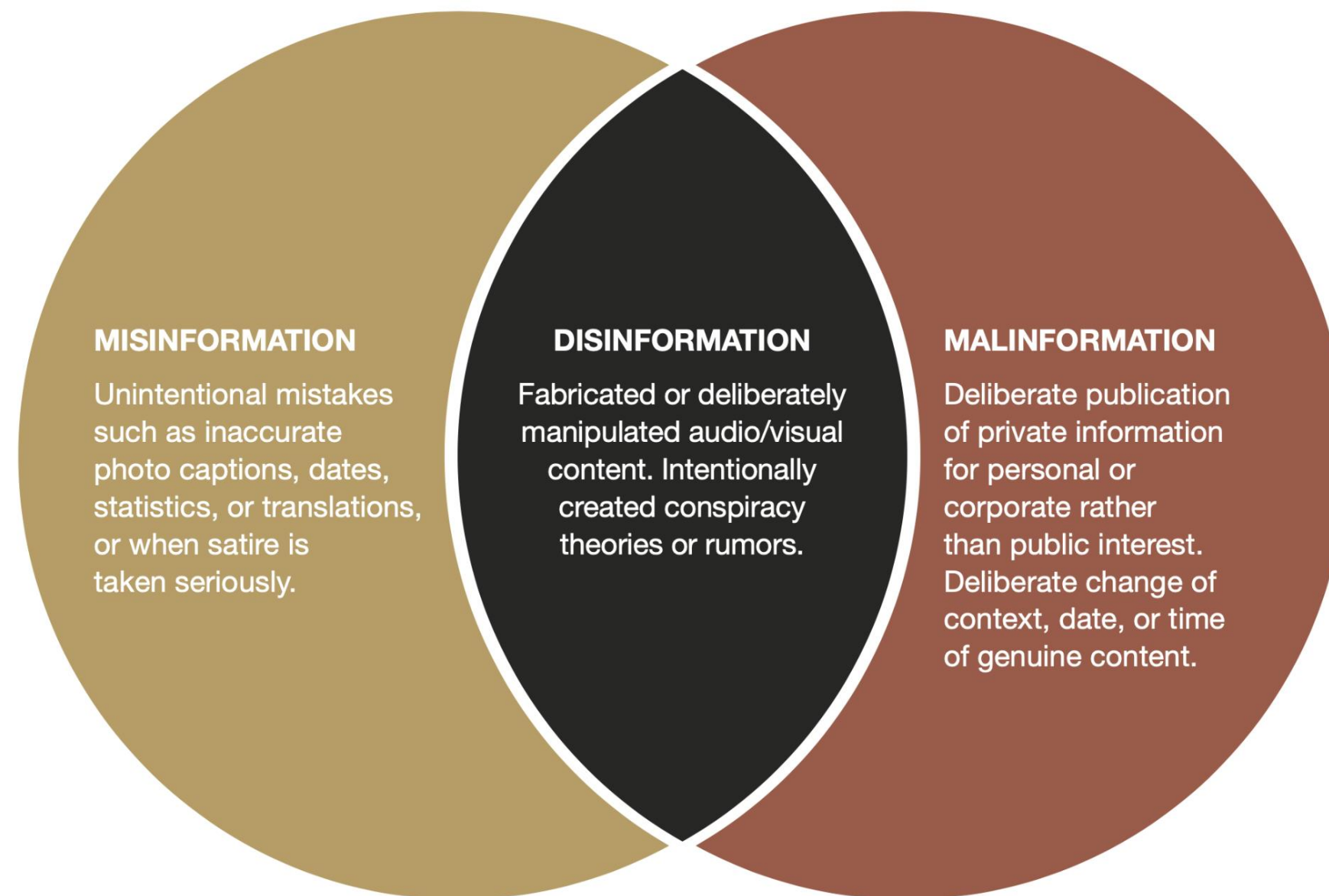
Definitions



Fake news

- a variety of false or misleading information that is spread online, with the intent of deceiving, misinforming, or manipulating people for financial, political, or other gain (Zhang and Ghorbani, 2020)
 - the distinguishing characteristic is its perlocutionary effect, which involves urging the recipient of the message to take a specific action (Terian, 2021)
 - News stories that are deliberately and verifiably untrue, and have the potential to misinform readers (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).
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Fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation



Source: Wardle et al, 2017

Fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation



Misinformation = vague, uncertain information, it may still be true, accurate, and informative depending on the context (Karlova and Lee, 2012)

Disinformation = deliberate lies or distortions that are frequently disseminated as news (Bennet and Livingston, 2020)

=> **search string:** fake OR false OR fake news OR misinformation OR disinformation OR satire OR parody or fabricated news OR *media manipul** OR *video manipul** OR *photo manipul** OR infodemic OR myth OR *skepti** OR bogus OR *decept** OR conspiracy OR cynic OR fraud OR hoax OR forge. (Wang et al. 2019, Vasist and Krishnan, 2022).

Characteristics

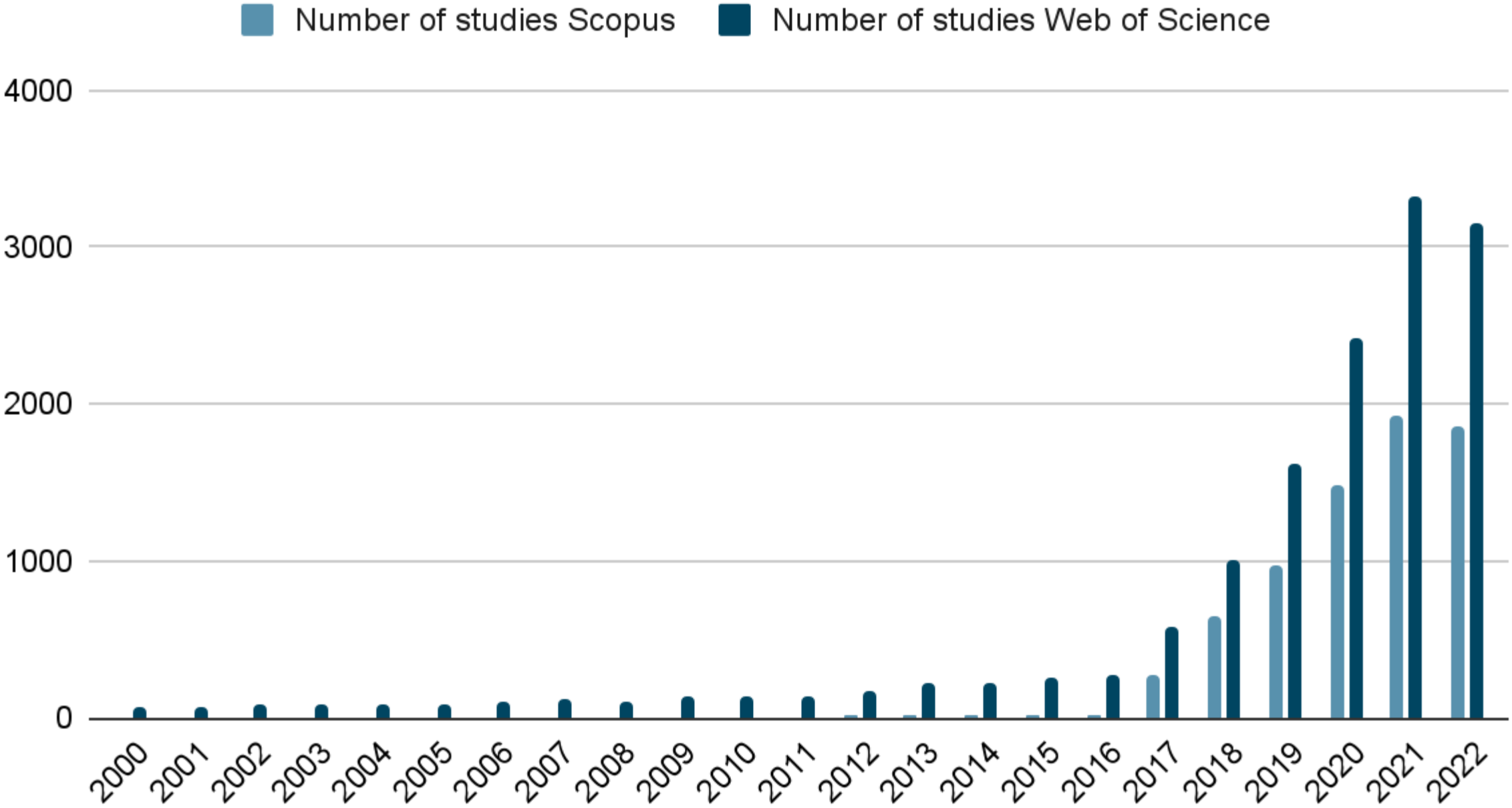


No matter the definition, fake news has:

- reduced level of facticity,
 - the goal of deceiving people, and
 - formats specific to the journalistic style. (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019)
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The spread of fake news

Evolution of number of studies published



Data collected in mid-June


The spread of fake news



Non-human agents:

- Social bots, computer algorithms designed to mimic human behavior on social media, artificially generate content and interact with users.
- Significant presence of social bots, with estimates ranging from 9% to 15% of Twitter users and 60 million Facebook accounts (Lazer et al., 2018).


Human agents:

- Malicious users knowingly share false content for political or ideological motives, sometimes for financial gain.
 - Benign users, on the other hand, unknowingly spread misinformation, believing and trusting in its accuracy.
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Spreading news channels



Social media plays a pivotal role, due to:

- its low entry barriers enable easy content production and amplification, aided by specialized services like follower buying.
 - the format of social media, with its emphasis on attention-grabbing headlines, complicates discernment of truth.
 - social media fosters polarization, reinforcing users' confirmation bias and creating echo chambers.
 - lacks editorial oversight, allowing false claims to spread rapidly and extensively. (Aïmeur et al, 2023)
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Psychological aspects




- **Socio-political factors**
- **Factors related to personality and psychopathology**
- **Cognitive factors**




Socio-political factors



- Feelings of alienation, powerlessness, and marginalization.
 - Anomie, indicating detachment from societal norms.
 - Political cynicism and negative attitudes toward authority amplify belief in fake news.
 - Social isolation and normlessness predict susceptibility to false information, especially among skeptics of mainstream authorities.
 - Individuals endorsing an external locus of control.
 - Exacerbated at the extremes of the political spectrum, contributing to radicalization and polarization.
 - Acceptance of fake news is linked to the shared belief in "deceptive officialdom," where authorities are seen as intentionally misleading the public.
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Personality and psychopathology



- High Openness and Agreeableness correlate with greater susceptibility to misinformation, while low levels of Openness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism indicate resistance.
 - Traits like extraversion and openness are associated with difficulty distinguishing between real and fake news.
 - Emotional intelligence (EQ) improves detection and rejection of fake news by enhancing emotional regulation and recognition.
 - Anger increases susceptibility to politically aligned misinformation, whereas anxiety fosters consideration of opposing viewpoints.
 - Positive emotions boost acceptance of claims, while negative emotions heighten skepticism.
 - Spreaders of false information on social media often display traits of neuroticism, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.
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Cognitive factors




- Dual process theory (Kahneman, 2003) suggests reliance on intuitive reasoning can increase gullibility, while overriding intuitive responses reduces it.
- Cognitive styles impact susceptibility to false beliefs; less analytical styles correlate with accepting implausible ideas.
- Sense-making processes may contribute to belief in false information due to reasoning biases.
- Confirmation bias influences susceptibility to fake news; individuals often accept misinformation aligned with existing beliefs.
- Echo chambers, fueled by confirmation bias, amplify false news dissemination.
- Illusory truth effect leads individuals to believe false information after repeated exposure.
- Cognitive factors, such as repeated exposure and source trust, influence belief formation and susceptibility to misinformation.

Time to... play




<https://www.getbadnews.com/en/intro> (used in Roozenbeek & van der Linden's study - Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation).

Pay attention to:

- Type of fake news (mis-, dis-?...), purpose, intentionality
 - How emotions were used to manipulate the audience's perceptions
 - Any biases
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Covid-19 related fake news narratives



- The virus is a hoax of the Democratic Party to damage Trump's reputation
 - The "China Virus" either negligently or on purpose, in order to affect adversely other countries and/or the global community
 - The rollout of 5G cellular network technology caused or accelerated the spread of COVID-19
 - The "Plandemic" - the COVID-19 pandemic was planned or known in advance by global health officials or governments as part of a broader agenda for population control or financial gain.
 - Vaccine microchipping and surveillance - COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips or tracking devices, which are used by governments or corporations for mass surveillance and control.
- 

Key discursive strategies



- **Appeal to authority and anti-authority sentiments:** authority - scientific jargon, anti-authority - image of a corrupt, tyrannic elite
- **Emotional manipulation:** fear (exaggerating risks or fabricating threats) and hope (miracle cures, quick ends to the pandemic)
- **Fabrication of false dichotomies:** simplification of complex issues into binary choices: freedom vs. tyranny, health vs. economy,
- **Misrepresentation and exaggeration:** cherry-picking data, slippery slope

Key discursive strategies



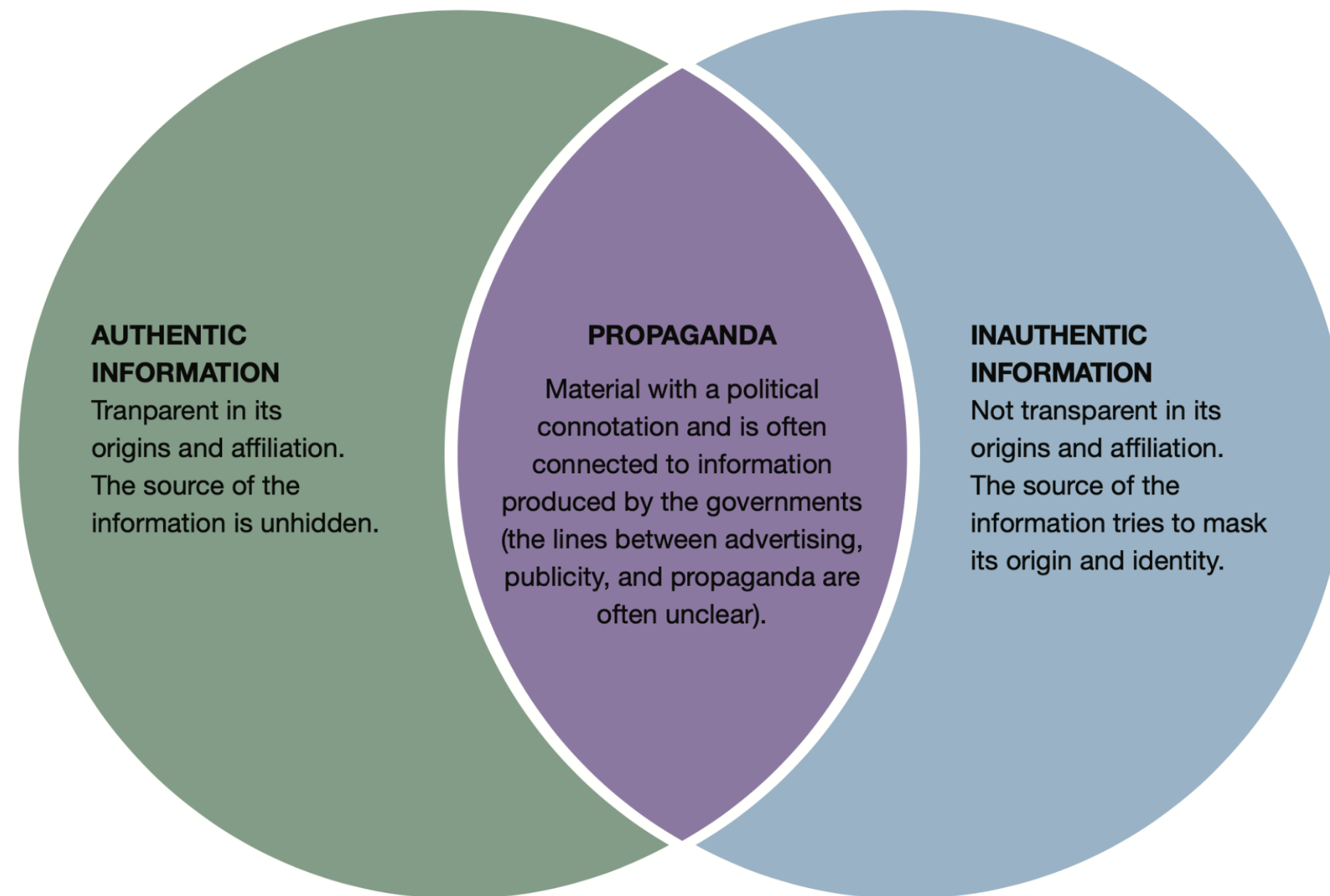
- **Use of anecdotes over evidence:** personal stories or isolated incidents as representative of broader truths
 - **Conspiracy theorizing:** linking unrelated events or facts to construct a narrative of secret schemes and hidden motives
 - **Polarization and Us vs. Them framing:** us (the informed, the freedom fighters) versus them (the misled masses, the oppressive elites)
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Fake news in conflict zones



- Information and media have been used for military purposes since the 20th century.
 - Misinformation is a significant tool in hybrid warfare and global geopolitics, previously underestimated.
 - Deliberate dissemination of false or partially true information aims to evoke emotions, distract, and mislead.
 - Russian propaganda specializes in creating multiple false realities.
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Fake news in conflict zones



Source: Wardle et al, 2017

Russian - Ukrainian conflict fake news

narratives

- The West controls Ukraine and uses it for its own purposes
- The actions of Ukraine and the West forced Russia to start a war
- Nazism in Ukraine
- Ukrainian army commits war crimes
- Narrative concerning weapons provided to Ukraine by Western countries

The West controls Ukraine and uses it for its own purposes

Meaning:

- Ukraine - puppet manipulated by Western countries, especially the United States and NATO members

Purpose:

- To delegitimize Ukraine's government and its decisions

Implications:

- Undermining the legitimacy of Ukraine's diplomatic and military actions
- Justifying Russian actions as a defense against Western intrusion

The actions of Ukraine and the West forced Russia to start a war

Meaning:

- Russia is actually reacting defensively to provocations by Ukraine and its Western allies

Purpose:

- Russia's military intervention was not an act of aggression but a response to external threats

Implications:

- Shifting blame for the conflict onto Ukraine and the Western countries
- Seeks domestic and international support or understanding for Russia's actions.

Nazism in Ukraine



Meaning:

- Historical sensitivities, especially in Russia - the victory over Nazi Germany is a significant element of national identity

Purpose:

- Ukrainian government and military is not only illegitimate but morally reprehensible

Implications:

- Dehumanizing and demonizing Ukraine, justifying aggressive actions against it as a fight against evil
- 

Ukrainian army commits war crimes



Meaning:

- It portrays the Ukrainians as engaging in unlawful and inhumane actions

Purpose:

- To undermine Ukraine's moral standing on the international stage

Implications:

- Moral equivalence that blurs the distinction between aggressor and defender
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Narrative concerning weapons provided to Ukraine by Western countries

Meaning:

- The military support provided to Ukraine by Western countries = an escalation of the conflict and a direct threat to Russia

Purpose:


- Western aid = deliberate act to undermine Russia's security and regional stability

Implications:

- To discredit Western involvement as aggressive and provocative
- To split international opinion - to frame supporting Ukraine as a cause of escalation rather than defense.


Key discursive strategies



- **Legitimization and Delegitimization:** moral justification, legal rhetoric, selective historical comparison
 - **Historical contextualization:** Analogies and metaphors, selective historical narratives, historical revisionism
 - **Moral equivalence and victimhood:** equating actions, victim narratives, martyrdom
 - **Security:** threat construction, urgency and exceptionalism, dehumanization of the enemy
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Key discursive strategies



- **Emotional manipulation:** evocative imagery and language, simplification of complex emotions, repetition of emotional triggers
 - **Simplification and generalization:** reductive slogans and labels, stereotyping, false dichotomies
 - **Us vs. Them Framing:** in-group glorification, out-group demonization, language of exclusion
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Challenges in fake news research



- **Volume and velocity** - fake news can go viral in a matter of hours, reaching audiences of millions before fact-checkers have had the chance to verify it and delete it. Researchers often find themselves in a race against time.
 - **Access to data** - Social media's tight control over data due to their algorithms and privacy rules often leaves researchers with partial or skewed data, which can compromise their study outcomes.
 - **Changing landscape** - New social media platforms, new fake news techniques.
 - **Interdisciplinary** - Fake news research often requires expertise from multiple disciplines, including communication, psychology, information technology, and political science, among others.
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Your turn to check facts...



Jun 26

Russian Soldiers Discover "Baby Factories" in Ukraine where Young Children are Grown for Child Sex Brothels and for Organ Harvesting

**Russian Soldiers Discover
Ukraine "Baby Factories"
Young Children Raised
for Child Sex Brothels
or Murdered to Harvest Organs
to Sell on Black Market**

conservativechoicecampaign.com

Russian Soldiers Discover "Baby Factories" in Ukraine where Young C...

Health Impact News A video has surfaced of
ng how they found a "baby factory" in Ukrain...

426 3,197 4,657 454.1K

TWITTER

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