Combating Disinformation on Social Media

Thomas Bryer, PhD
Sarah Stoeckel, PhD
I flew on a plane to be here today....
I drove to be here today....
I took a train to be here today....
I dodged a wildfire, tsunami, snowstorm, earthquake or other natural disaster to be here today....
I have been challenged by the spread of disinformation or misinformation in my community...
I feel like I know how to successfully combat disinformation or misinformation....
I do not understand how people believe some things that are on social media....
I am very good at keeping my opinions to myself when I see people spreading “strange” ideas....
I sometimes roll my eyes when someone shares disinformation with me....
I sometimes forget to censor my thoughts when someone shares disinformation with me....
I speak more than one language....
I speak more than two languages....
I speak a language only I can understand....
There are people in my community who speak a “language” I cannot understand….
I believe the University of Southern California is the best university in California (Go Trojans!)....
I believe there is life on other planets....
I believe aliens from outer space have already visited earth....
I believe ghosts exist....
I believe birds are real....
Peter McIndoe, the 23-year-old creator of the Birds Aren’t Real movement, with his van in Fayetteville, Ark. Rana Young for The New York Times

**Birds Aren’t Real, or Are They? Inside a Gen Z Conspiracy Theory.**
Polarization and division seem apparent across communities.

But most people are not on the extremes of any issue.

Most people are interested in dialogue and learning.

Local government must be the trusted center to the extremes.

The message must bring people together, not pull them apart.
Be the Relationally Intelligent Manager

The first task of the **relationally intelligent manager** is to have a clear and relevant framing of a public problem or policy issue that needs to be addressed and the kind of collaborative network arrangement that needs to be activated or joined to address it.

The **relationally intelligent manager** will have the capacity within their organization to conduct an efficient environmental scan to document the assets in place and, significantly, identify gaps that need to be filled.

While legal authority resides with those in elected and professional administrative roles, **public institutions must recognize that they can’t do meaningful public work alone.**

The **relationally intelligent manager** will cultivate and sustain online and offline relations with allies from community businesses, nonprofit organizations, schools, faith organizations, and others to enact responses to disinformation that threatens democracy and community cohesion.
A snapshot of users, followers, and (mis)informers

Who is using and abusing social media
### Who is using social media?

- **72% of adults use at least one social media tool**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84% of 18-29</td>
<td>Hispanic: 80%</td>
<td>Women: 78%</td>
<td>$75k+: 78%</td>
<td>College Grad: 77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81% of 30-49</td>
<td>Black: 77%</td>
<td>Men: 66%</td>
<td>$50k-$74,999: 65%</td>
<td>Some College: 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73% of 50-64</td>
<td>White: 69%</td>
<td></td>
<td>$30k-$49,999: 76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% of 65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;$30k: 69%</td>
<td>HS or Less: 64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Common Social Media Tools?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- YouTube
- WhatsApp
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Reddit
- Nextdoor

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/
Most Common Social Media Tools

- YouTube: 81%
- Facebook: 69%
- Instagram: 40%
- Pinterest: 31%
- LinkedIn: 28%
- Snapchat: 25%
- WhatsApp: 23%
- Twitter: 23%
- TikTok: 21%
- Reddit: 18%
- Nextdoor: 13%


https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/
Sample of Most Popular Posts and Links on Facebook

- Ben Shapiro
- Journal Star
- KFOX-TV
- Nick Adams
- NPR
- Donald Trump for President
- News and Guts
- Love Meow
- Taste of Country

- Playeralumniresources.com
- Purehempshop.com
- Myincrediblerecipes.com
- Reppnforchrist.com
- Various memes
  - Make your photo look younger
  - What is your porn name?
  - What is something you will never eat, no matter how hungry?
  - Your rap name is “LIL” then the last thing you spent money on.
  - Which alcohol made yall throw up and say I never wanna drink again?

https://mobile.twitter.com/FacebooksTop10

About half of Americans get news on social media at least sometimes, down slightly from 2020

% of U.S. adults who get news from social media ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 80% of Americans who regularly get news on Snapchat and on TikTok view social media as an important way of getting vaccine news.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>% of Americans that regularly get news on</th>
<th>% of U.S. adults who regularly get news on each site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TikTok</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Twitch and WhatsApp not shown due to insufficient sample sizes.
Source: Survey conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Who is spreading disinformation?

https://www.counterhate.com/disinformationdozen
Combat Checklist Item 1: Identify the Target of Disinformation

1. Identify local sources
2. Identify tags for local people or organizations
3. Identify the demographic or target groups that are emphasized
What exactly is disinformation & misinformation and how should we react to it?

What are we fighting?
Defining and Detecting Disinformation
**What is disinformation & misinformation?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accurate Content</th>
<th>Vague Content</th>
<th>Inaccurate Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distractions</td>
<td>Disgenuous</td>
<td>Disinformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>Misled</td>
<td>Misinformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Bad Intent**
- **Good Intent**
Combat Checklist Item 2: Identify the Target of Disinformation

1. Check multiple social media platforms.
2. Listen for "seepage" to council/commission meetings.
3. Check-in with your allies (i.e. rapid response network).
5. Make your plan.
Countering Disinformation = Citizen Participation

1. Know your goal
2. Know your target group
3. Choose your tool
4. Budget
5. Implement
6. Evaluate
7. Refine
8. Monitor
## Countering Disinformation: Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform residents about the facts on vaccine safety</td>
<td>Women of child-bearing age and pregnant women</td>
<td>Design charrette with doctors</td>
<td>Production costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media advertising</td>
<td>Participation costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public hearing</td>
<td>Democratization costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do what you say</td>
<td>Reduced disinformation online</td>
<td>Choose the same or another tool. Round 2. Go!</td>
<td>Watch for big and small changes in the community—online and off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage expectations</td>
<td>Reduced protest activity offline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sally Hussey provides an essential public engagement resource compiling 60 international public participation models dating back fifty years to Arnstein’s influential ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’.

Last year, Sherry R. Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” celebrated its 50th anniversary. Originally published in the *Journal of American Planning Association* (JAPA) and one of its most cited articles to date, the longevity and impact of Arnstein’s Ladder can be recognised in the emergence of 60 public participation models since its inception.
Resource for ‘Choose Your Tool’

https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods
Combat Checklist Item 3: Counter Disinformation through Citizen Participation

1. Know your goal.
2. Know your target group.
3. Choose your tool.
4. Create a budget.
5. Implement your process.
7. Monitor disinformation and division.
Lowering the temperature and proactively countering and growing from harmful disinformation
Public Conversations: Growing from Division

Citizen Progression: Fear, Learning, Growth

Citizen Regression: Fear, Anger, Protest
Framing the question:

What would help you become more comfortable to receive the vaccine?

Why are you not getting the vaccine?

What do you need to change your mind about getting the vaccine?

Framing the question:

How are you racist?

Why don’t you want children to learn about the history of racism in schools?

What is the purpose of studying and understanding history? How can we achieve these purposes?
Public Conversation Rules for Participants

1. Listen to other voices.
2. Consider each idea fairly.
3. Everyone is encouraged to participate.
4. It's okay to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility.
5. Keep an open mind.
6. Practice civility, not timidity.
1. Convene or partner with a university, foundation, or nonprofit to convene facilitate on/offline public conversations on divisive or potentially divisive topics.

2. Partner with media to report the content and results of conversations.

3. Continue conversations to ensure residents remain engaged and attentive to all voices in the community.

Combat Checklist Item 4: Grow as a Community Divided by Disinformation
Rapid Response Operation

You are not alone.
Combat Checklist Item 5: Build a Rapid Response Operation and Be Relationally Intelligent

Write the names of organizations (businesses, associations, nonprofits, residents, faith organizations, etc):

1. You personally or your government officially “follows” or “friends” on social media platforms.
2. From which you personally or your government officially shares information for the benefit/information of those who follow you/your government.
3. That follow you/your government.
4. That share what you/your government posts for the benefit of their followers/friends.
5. That appear across your lists (these are the target organizations to be your allies to combat disinformation).
6. That are missing from your responses to the previous step and that give you information access to the cross-section of residents in your community (these are organizations for further relational development).
Be the trusted center to the extremes.

Be relationally intelligent.

Be the space for the majority to take shelter from the divisive storms.

Be the space for residents to grow together as one community.
This afternoon’s workshop will allow you to put your combat tools and experiences to the test.

1. Sexual harassment
2. Affordable housing
3. Water rates
4. COVID-19 testing
5. Anti-Asian Rhetoric and Violence
Thank you. Questions?

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# Social Media Disinformation Combat Checklist

## How should we identify the target of disinformation?
- Identify the local sources.
- Identify tags for local people or organizations.
- Identify the demographic or stakeholder groups that are emphasized.

## How should we react to disinformation?
- Check multiple social media platforms
- Listen for “seepage” to council/commission meetings
- Check-in with your allies (i.e. rapid response network)
- Maintain positivity. Keep your head up.
- Make your plan (see next segment)

## How should we counter disinformation?
- Know your goal
- Know your target group
- Choose your tool
- Create a budget
- Implement your process
- Evaluate success
- Monitor disinformation and division

## How should we grow as a community disrupted by disinformation?
- Convene or partner with a university, foundation, or nonprofit to convene facilitated on/offline public conversations on divisive or potentially divisive topics
- Partner with media to report the content and results of conversations
- Continue conversations to ensure residents remain engaged and attentive to all voices in the community

## How should we build a rapid response operation and be relationally intelligent?
Write the names of organizations (businesses, associations, nonprofits, residents, faith organizations, etc):
- You personally or your government officially “follows” or “friends” on social media platforms
- From which you personally or your government officially shares information for the benefit/information of those who follow you/your government
- That follow you/your government
- That share what you/your government posts for the benefit of their followers/friends
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- That are missing from your response to the previous step and that give you information access to the cross-section of residents in your community (these are organizations for further relational development)