Misinformation, Disinformation, & "Fake News"

A presentation by the Mucktracker Team

Today's Lesson

Objective: identify different types of misleading information and examine their implications.

Connect

- What do you think when you hear the term "fake news"?
- Do you think an unintentional lie can be as harmful or dangerous as a deliberate one? Why or why not?

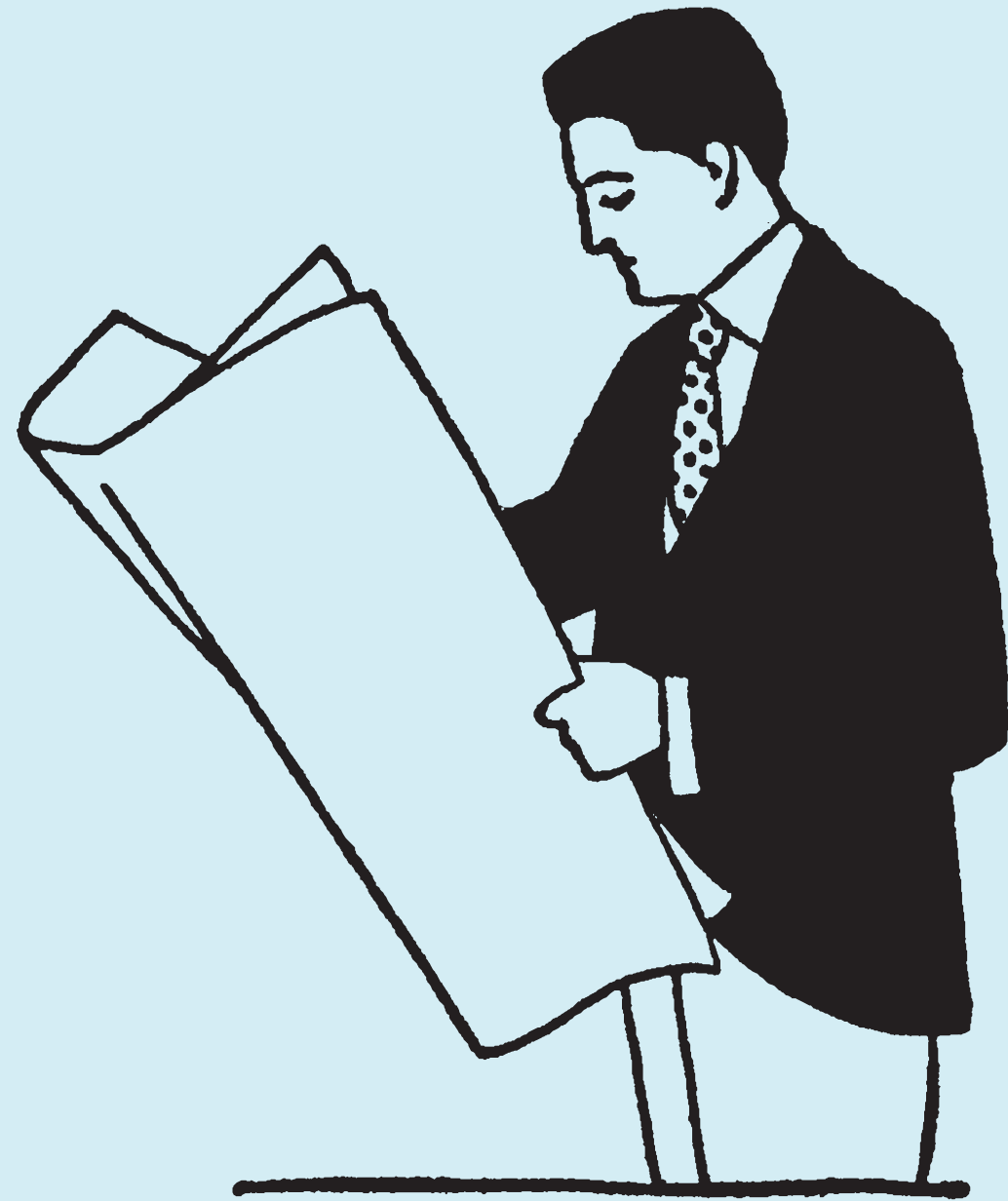# Misinformation & Disinformation: Beyond "Fake News"

While the term "fake news" has been heard a lot recently, there are competing uses of the term that reflect different concerns with the content & delivery of news.

- Many use "fake news" to describe news that has inaccurate or unclear information that can confuse readers.
- Others use it to refer to news reported with a clear *bias* or *perspective* counter to one's own.
- Still others use it to describe false information of any kind, even outside the professional news cycle.

It is important to remember that information may be completely true on its own, and still be used to mislead people in different contexts. This can make identifying misleading or inaccurate news especially difficult in some cases.

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Misleading Information in Newspaper History

Before we move onto the different types of misleading information, it is important to note that the journalistic issues we face today are not new.

Historically, journalism has often valued things like influencing public opinion, sometimes at the expense of accurate reporting. The news has been used to start wars, justify crimes, and bring about social change.

Even as many news sources developed stronger ethical standards over time, there were lower-quality, sometimes outright false news outlets, a style called *yellow journalism*. The popularity of yellow journalism stemmed from readers' eagerness to pay for the news as a form of entertainment.

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Hoaxes

The press has sometimes participated in spreading *hoaxes*. Hoaxes are whole made-up stories designed to deceive.

Sometimes, news outlets are active participants in the hoax, but often they are as deceived as the readers. They may be following a story they believe is of public interest without realizing it is one that is made up.

A famous example was the supposed photograph of the Loch Ness Monster published by the *Daily Mail* in 1934. Although investigations in 1975 and 1993 directly exposed the photo as a hoax, many people still believe it to be genuine, and others casually and unwittingly spread the untrue story around.

Today, inaccurate information that spreads is usually divided into *misinformation* and *disinformation*.

Misinformation

describes any misleading, inaccurate, or false information that is shared. This can be completely unintentional.

Disinformation

describes intentionally misleading information that has been created and spread deliberately to deceive people.

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Check for Understanding

Identify whether each of the following is an example of misinformation or disinformation:

1. A doctored video of activist Emma Gonzalez ripping up the Constitution of the United States
2. A story reporting on a candidate leading in a poll, but the story does not take into consideration a limited sample size or large margin of error.
3. An editorial that attempts to persuade by presenting unproven allegations without evidence.
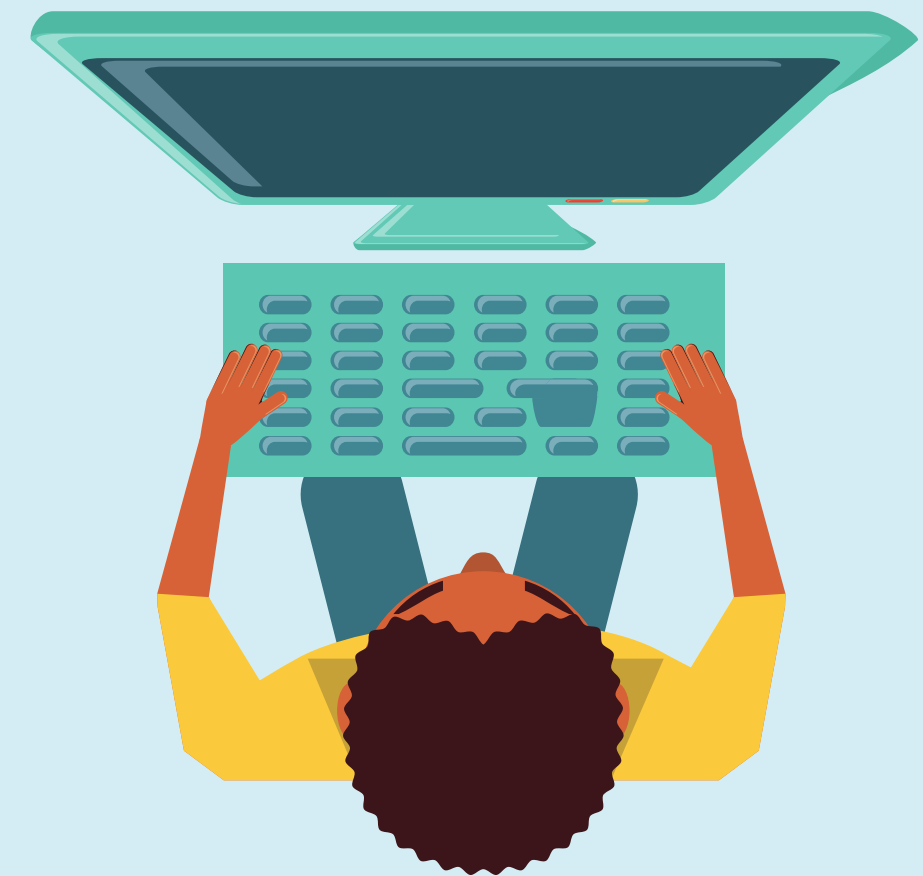
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- Did you say that the first and third examples were disinformation and the second example was misinformation? If so, congrats!

- Now, we will go over some tips to help avoid misinformation in our daily lives.

- Remember that it is easy to fall for these types of information and it can happen to anyone, even a world leader as you will soon see!

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Tips for Good News Hygiene

- Be on the lookout for provocative language or imagery.
  - Shock value can be used to distract from key information.

- Consider the source. Is a particular agenda being pushed?

- Participate in "lateral reading" or fact checking by looking at other sources.

- Consider whether what you are reading is labeled news or opinion (opinion includes "analysis" or "commentary").
  - If it's an opinion piece, remember that the writer is making an argument.

- Pause and step back before you read further or share.
  - Especially if you encounter something through an opinion piece or meme, seek out a more straightforward news source before forming your own opinion about it.
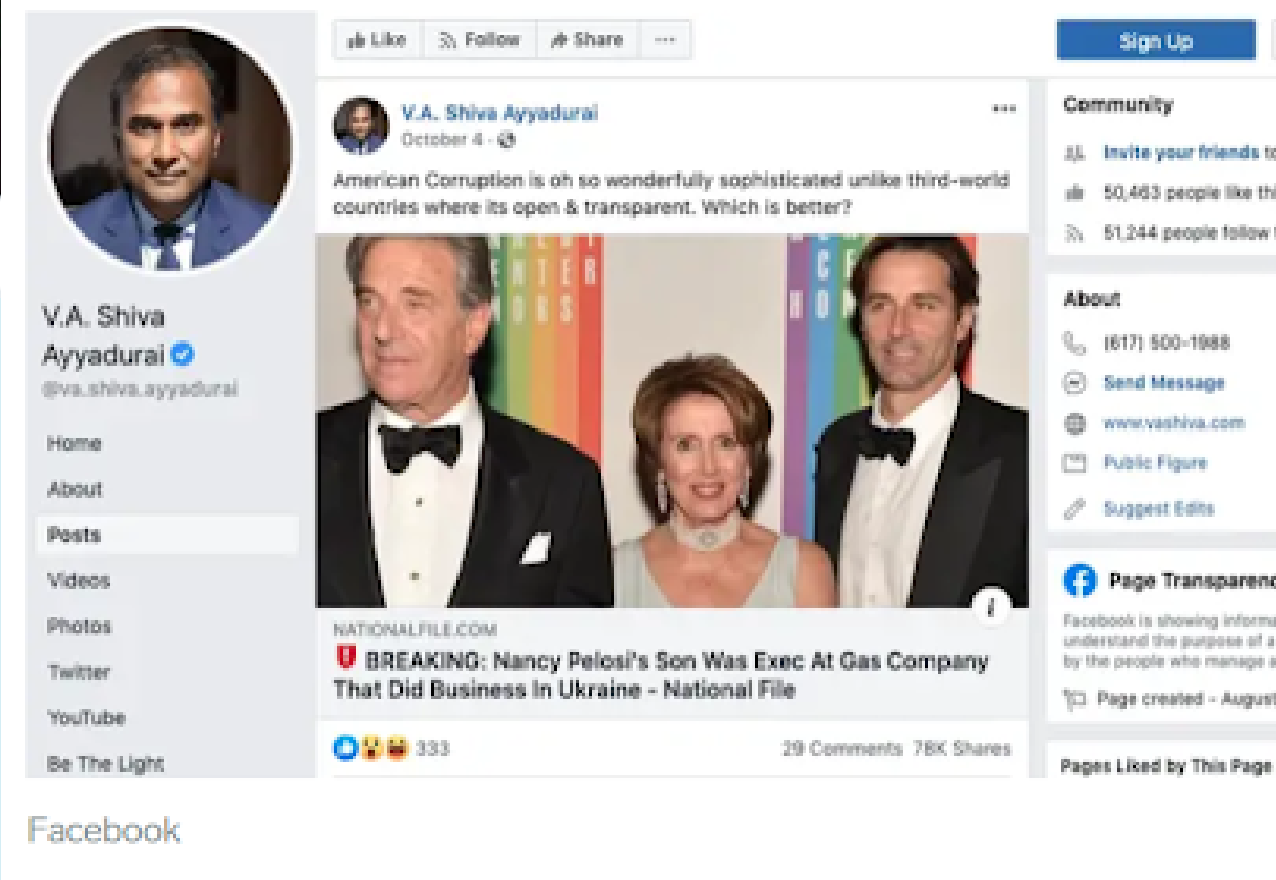
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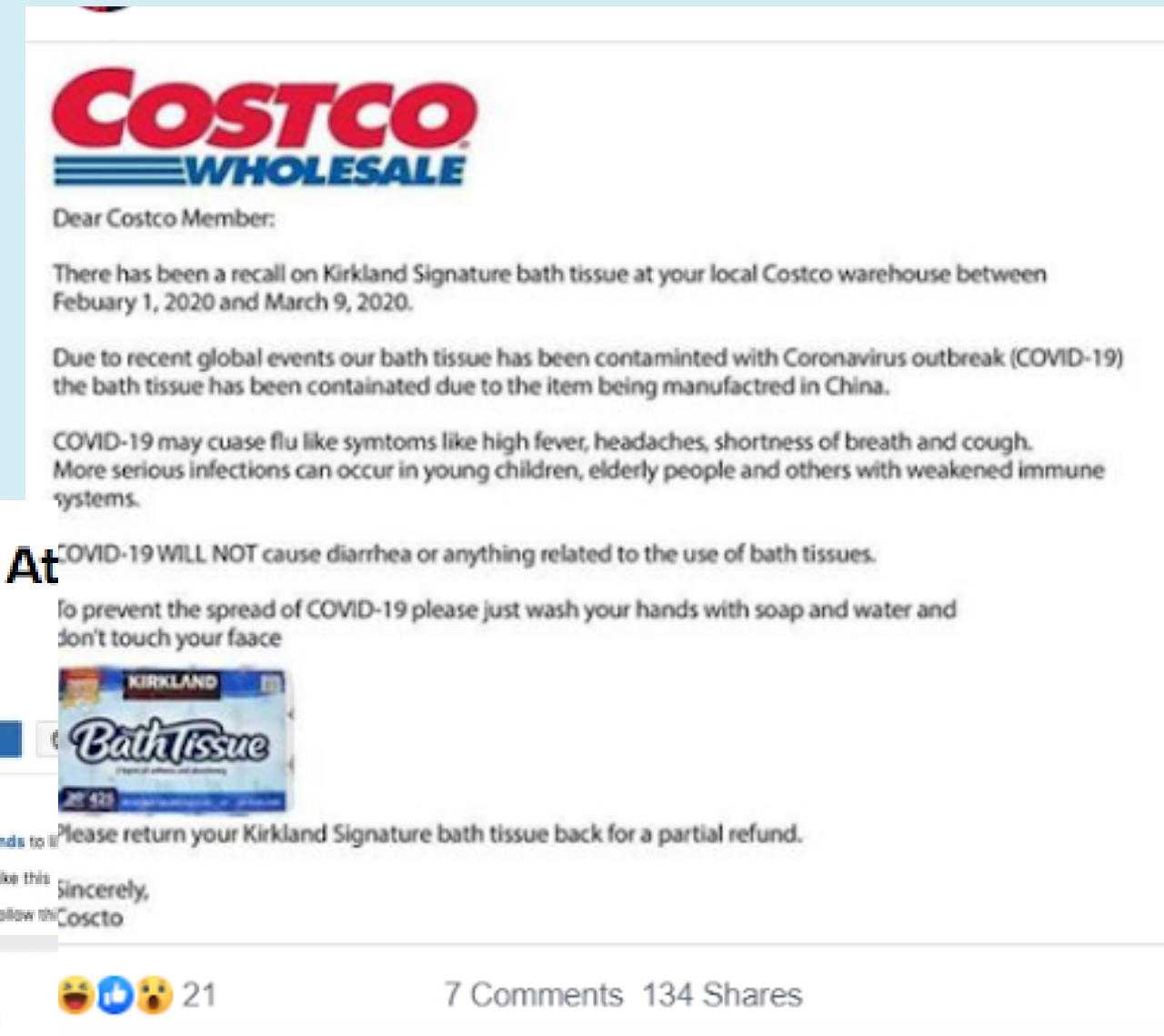# Look at the following examples and conduct a quick fact check through lateral reading.

Macron Amazon Tweet

Pelosi Son Ukraine

Costco Covid Toilet
Paper Shortage

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- What's wrong?

- What do you think is the goal of the person who originally shared this?

- What is the impact?

Emmanuel Macron ✓ @EmmanuelMacron · Aug 22, 2019

Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest - the lungs which produces 20% of our planet's oxygen - is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let's discuss this emergency first order in two days! #ActForTheAmazon

29.6K   62K   154.2K

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- What's wrong?

- What do you think is the goal of the person who originally shared this?

- What is the impact?

March 9 at 5:27 PM · 🌐

COSTCO
WHOLESALE

Dear Costco Member:

There has been a recall on Kirkland Signature bath tissue at your local Costco warehouse bet Febuary 1, 2020 and March 9, 2020.

Due to recent global events our bath tissue has been contaminted with Coronavirus outbrea the bath tissue has been containated due to the item being manufactred in China.

COVID-19 may cuase flu like symtoms like high fever, headaches, shortness of breath and co More serious infections can occur in young children, elderly people and others with weaken systems.

COVID-19 WILL NOT cause diarrhea or anything related to the use of bath tissues.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 please just wash your hands with soap and water and don't touch your faace

KIRKLAND
BathTissue

Please return your Kirkland Signature bath tissue back for a partial refund.

- What's wrong?

- What do you think is the goal of the person who originally shared this?

- What is the impact?

6. "'BREAKING: Nancy Pelosi's Son Was Exec At Company That Did Business In Ukraine"

V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai
@va.shiva.ayyadurai

V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai
October 4 ·

American Corruption is oh so wonderfully sophisticated unlike third-world countries where its open & transparent. Which is better?

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Extension: Considering the Role of Algorithms in Spreading Misinformation

- Read the article <u>"Radical ideas spread through social media. Are the algorithms to blame?"</u> by Katherine J. Wu.

- Then, answer the following:
  - What role do algorithms play in spreading misinformation? Or disinformation?

  - Do you think more should be done to limit the impact of algorithms on people's information consumption? Why or why not?

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Wrap-Up

Misinformation describes the spreading of any false or inaccurate information, including rumors, often unintentionally.

Disinformation, on the other hand, describes the intentional and malicious creation and distribution of inaccurate or false information in order to mislead.

Algorithms on the internet may also contribute to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Fact checking is an important activity to limit the spread of misinformation and disinformation online.

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