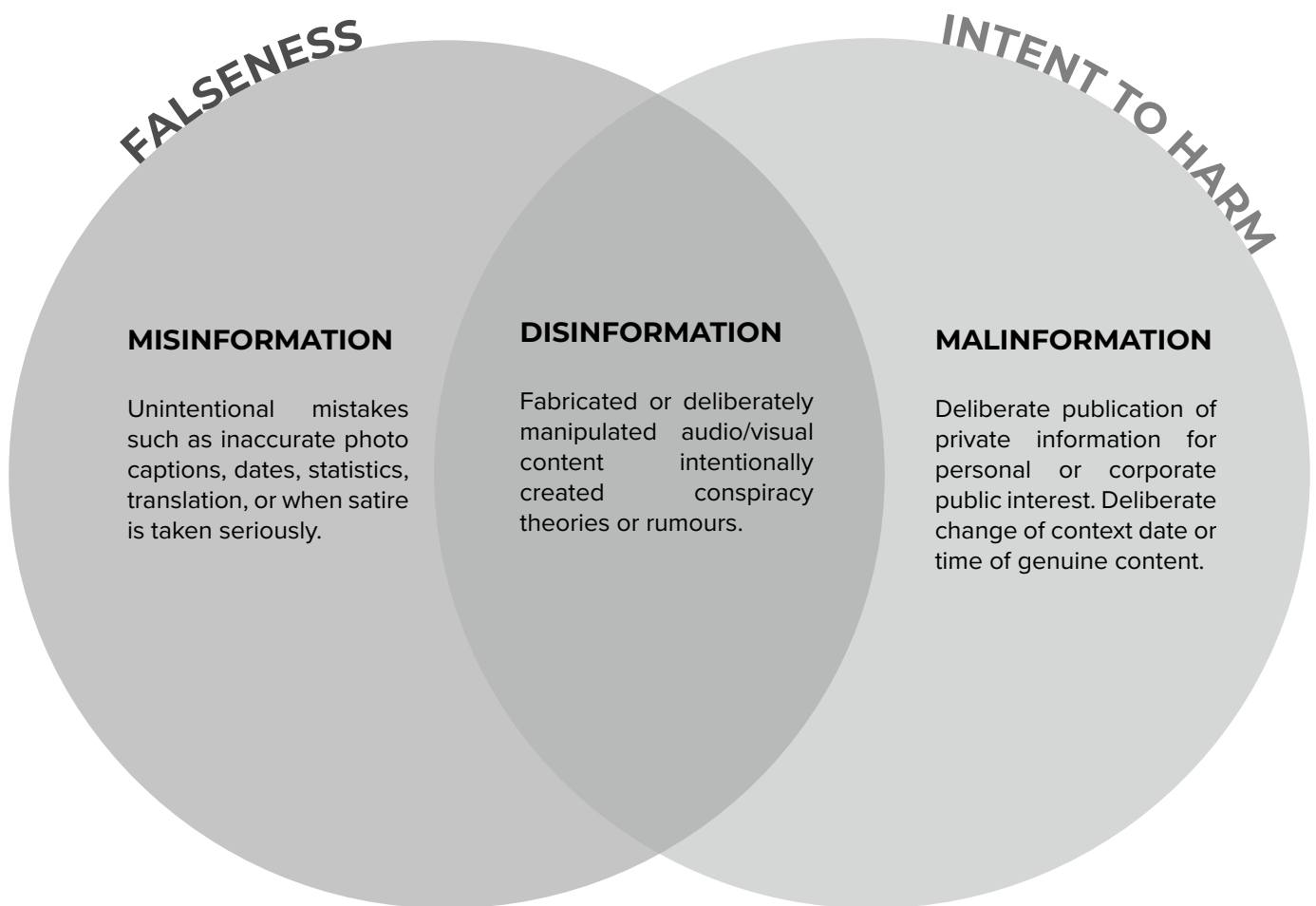**MODULE THREE:**

Understanding information disorder

Module Objective: Understand information disorder and its impact on digital communities

Module Dilemma: My group members are promoting misinformation and disinformation

Misinformation, disinformation & malinformation

The following information on Information Disorder was obtained and adopted through resources from First Draft News.

FALSENESS

INTENT TO HARM

MISINFORMATION

Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translation, or when satire is taken seriously.

DISINFORMATION

Fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumours.

MALINFORMATION

Deliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate public interest. Deliberate change of context date or time of genuine content.

Search for Common Ground

MISINFORMATION

Definition - Misinformation is false information shared by people - but they don't realise it's false or misleading, often because they're trying to help.

Example - A terror attack on the Champs Elysees in Paris on 20 April 2017 inspired a great deal of misinformation as is the case in almost all breaking news situations. Individuals on social media unwittingly published a number of rumours, including the news that a second policeman had been killed, for example. The people sharing this type of content are rarely doing so to cause harm. Rather, they are caught up in the moment, trying to be helpful, but fail to adequately inspect and verify the information they are sharing. One example was that Muslims in the UK celebrated the attack. This was debunked by the CrossCheck project on 22 April 2017.

DISINFORMATION

Definition – Disinformation is false or misleading information intentionally created to make money, have political influence, or maliciously cause trouble or harm.

Example – In India, between 2017 and 2018, rumours of child kidnapping spread through WhatsApp, inciting violence against certain population segments and resulting in at least 33 murders and more than 99 attacks. After this incident, WhatsApp had to limit the number of times a message can be forwarded after it was seen that a spate of mob lynchings was linked to messages that circulated on WhatsApp groups in India.

MALINFORMATION

Definition – Genuine information that is shared with the intent to cause harm. This could be personal details, sexual images published without consent, or leaked emails to damage someone's reputation.

Example – In the late 90s and early 2000s, anti-abortion activist Neal Horsley collected names, pictures, and home addresses of abortion providers and published them on a website called the Nuremberg Files. He labelled that list as a "hit list." Eight doctors from Nuremberg's listings have been killed so far. The website celebrated the death of such murders and encouraged pro-life activists to continue killing other doctors from the hit list.

Publishing Doctors' Names is a Threat
The Nuremberg Files was 1990s anti-abortion doxxing

Types of information disorder and its impact

Within the three overarching types of information disorder (mis, dis and mal information), we also refer to seven main categories. These help us understand the complexity of this ecosystem and the shades of grey that exist between true and false. They live along a spectrum, and more than one category can apply to a specific type of content.


SATIRE

Satire is a literary technique that employs humour, irony, or exaggeration to expose flaws and criticise individuals, governments, or society itself. Although satirical pieces are meant to be humorous, their greater purpose is often constructive social criticism. For example, you might be aware of The Onion, a very popular satirical site in the United States. El Deforma, Mexico's version of The Onion, News Curry from Sri Lanka, and Revista Barcelona from Argentina are similar publications. The problem is when satire is used to strategically spread rumours and conspiracies. When challenged, it can be simply shrugged off "as a joke", something not meant to be taken seriously. Furthermore, satire can also be dangerous when from its original source, it gets spread online and turned into screenshots or memes, losing its original context in the process
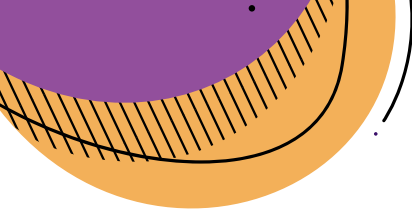
FALSE CONNECTION

When headlines, visuals, or captions do not support the content, this is an example of a false connection. The most common example of this type of content is clickbait headlines. With the increased competition for audience attention, editors increasingly have to write headlines to attract clicks, even if when people read the article, they feel that they have been deceived. This can also happen when visuals or captions are used, particularly on sites like Facebook, to give a certain impression, which is not backed up by the text. For example, the satirical news website The Science Post published an article titled 'Study: 70% of Facebook users only read the headline of science stories before commenting' in 2018. The body of the article didn't have any actual text, just paragraphs of "lorem ipsum" as a placeholder. But you'd only know that if you clicked through to read it. It was shared more than 125,000 times and proved the point of the headline.
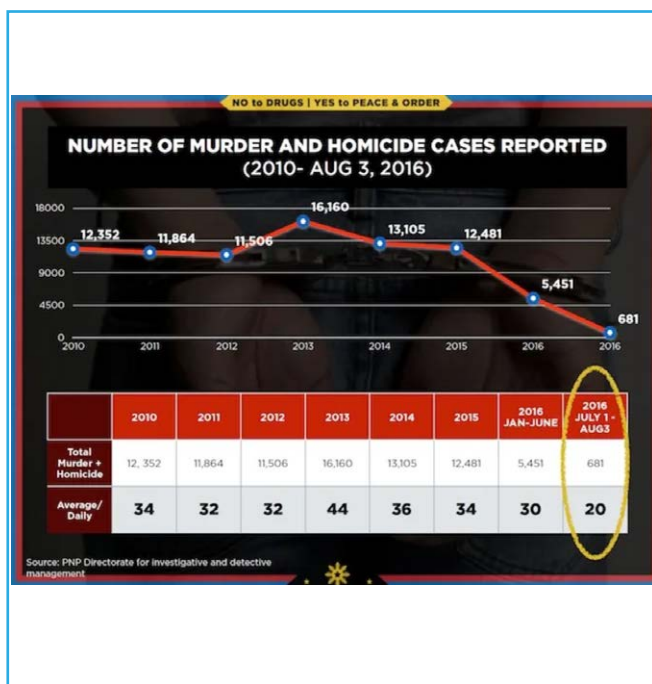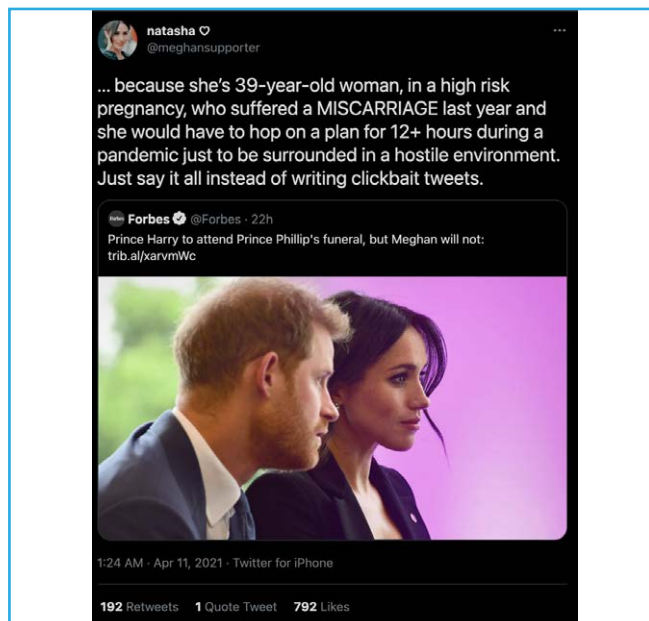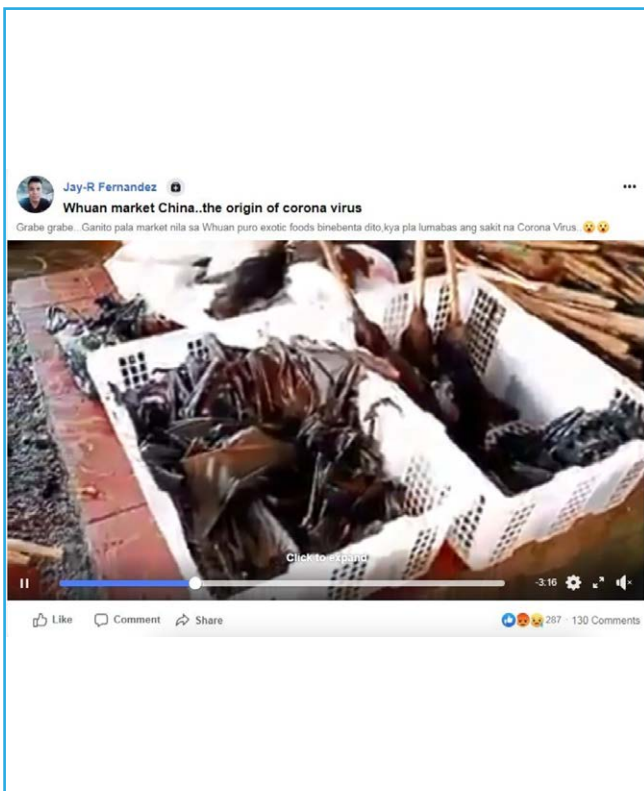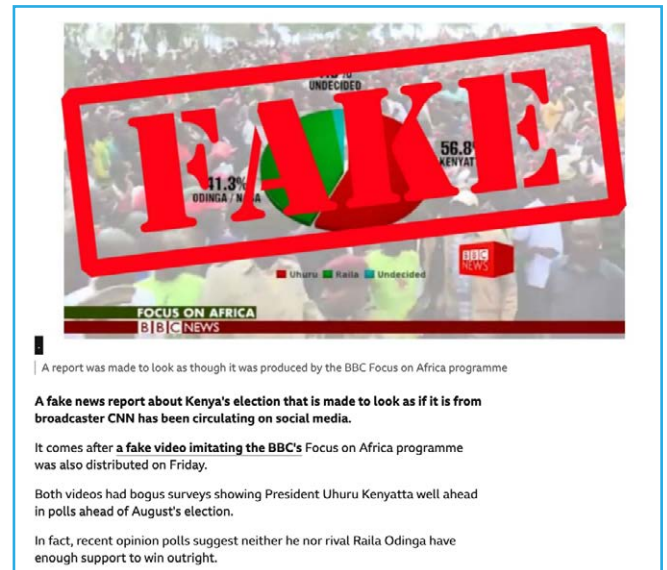

MISLEADING CONTENT

What counts as 'misleading' can be varied and hard to define, but it usually involves omitting pieces of information to tell a story in a certain way (i.e. cropping photos to change its message, choosing statistics selectively). This is also called 'framing'. Even the most advanced technology cannot easily detect misleading use of information because it involves contextualisation and nuance. This means it requires our brains to analyse the whole story or the bigger picture to judge whether the content intentionally misleads or not.

On August 22, 2016, during the first Senate hearing on extrajudicial killings, then-senator Alan Peter Cayetano showed a line graph (Figure 1) that purports to show the declining number of murder and homicide cases reported since President Duterte assumed office. But the line graph dipped at the end mainly because the data for 2016 was split into two periods: January to June, and July 1 to August 3.
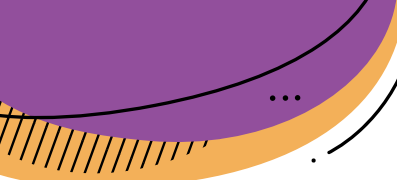
IMPOSTER CONTENT

We always like to employ mental shortcuts to help us understand information. One very powerful shortcut is seeing a brand or person we already know and trust. When we get information coming from trusted brands or people, we are not as doubtful. But the problem is, it is very easy to make fake accounts and pretend to be someone else online. Imposter content is false or misleading content that claims to be from established brands, organisations, or personalities. For example, ahead of the Kenyan elections in 2017, BBC Africa found out that someone had created a video with a photoshopped BBC logo and strapline, and it was circulating on WhatsApp. They, therefore, had to make a video that they shared on social media, warning people not to be fooled by the fabricated video.

A report was made to look as though it was produced by the BBC Focus on Africa programme

A fake news report about Kenya's election that is made to look as if it is from broadcaster CNN has been circulating on social media.

It comes after **a fake video imitating the BBC's** Focus on Africa programme was also distributed on Friday.

Both videos had bogus surveys showing President Uhuru Kenyatta well ahead in polls ahead of August's election.

In fact, recent opinion polls suggest neither he nor rival Raila Odinga have enough support to win outright.

FALSE CONTEXT

When genuine information is shared out of its original context, such as when old news stories are re-shared in the present time, it can be very dangerous. Sharing information in its proper context is very important because the context (i.e., the time, place, and situation) within which an event or news story existed helps explain the event. Sometimes, it is only a plain case of misinformation where a person mistakenly re-shares an old story. Other times, the purpose is more deliberate: to mislead people by sharing information in a different context.
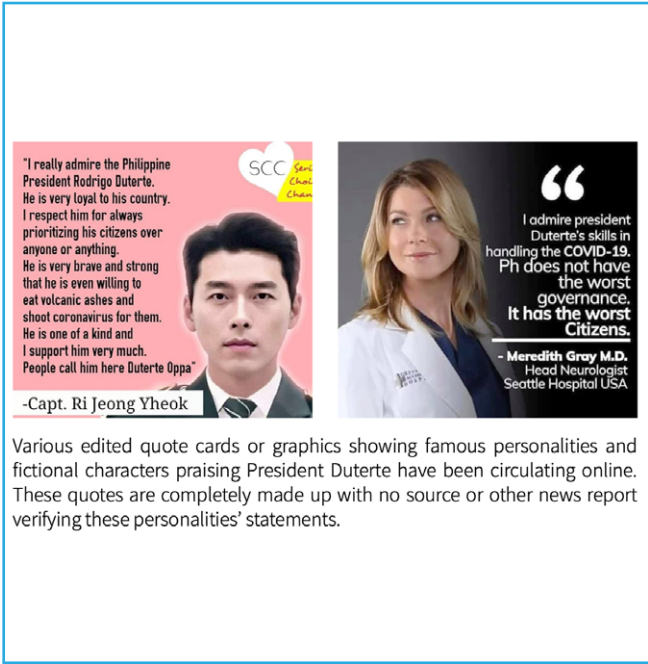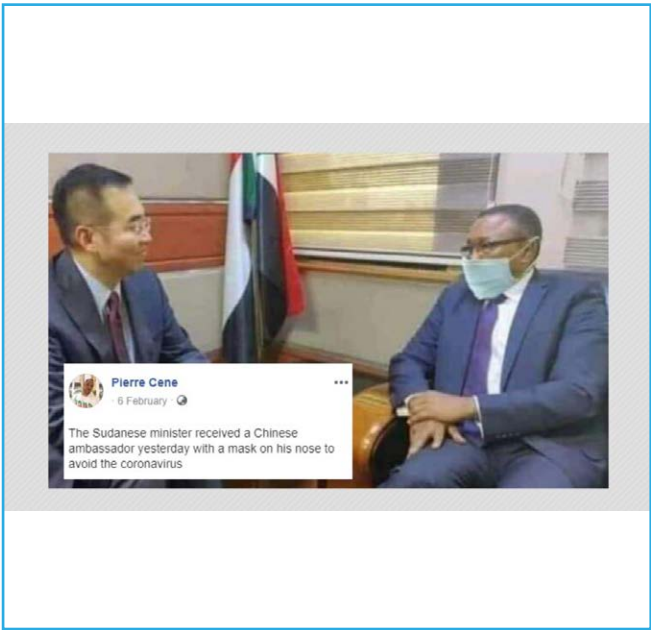
One of the first viral videos after the Coronavirus outbreak in January 2020 showed a market selling bats, rats, snakes, and other animal meat products. Different versions of the video were shared online, claiming to be from the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the new virus was first reported. However, the video was originally uploaded in July 2019, and it was shot in Langowan Market in Indonesia. It was shared widely online because it played on people's anti-Chinese sentiments and preconceptions.

Jay-R Fernandez
Whuan market China..the origin of corona virus
Grabe grabe...Ganito pala market nila sa Whuan puro exotic foods binebenta dito,kya pla lumabas ang sakit na Corona Virus..

Search for Common Ground

MANIPULATED CONTENT

Manipulated content is genuine content that is altered or edited to change the message. It is not completely made up or fabricated. This is most often done with photographs and images. This kind of manipulation relies on the fact that most of us look at images while quickly scrolling through content on small phone screens.

On February 3, 2020, the Sudanese Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Ambassador to Sudan met to discuss the ongoing Coronavirus outbreak. In the next couple of weeks, the photographs of that meeting were photoshopped to show the Sudanese Minister wearing a face mask. The images were shared widely on social media, including comments like "Africans don't want to take chances with the Chinese".

Pierre Cene
6 February

The Sudanese minister received a Chinese ambassador yesterday with a mask on his nose to avoid the coronavirus

"I really admire the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. He is very loyal to his country. I respect him for always prioritizing his citizens over anyone or anything. He is very brave and strong that he is even willing to eat volcanic ashes and shoot coronavirus for them. He is one of a kind and I support him very much. People call him here Duterte Oppa"

-Capt. Ri Jeong Yheok

I admire president Duterte's skills in handling the COVID-19. Ph does not have the worst governance. It has the worst Citizens.

- Meredith Gray M.D.
Head Neurologist
Seattle Hospital USA

Various edited quote cards or graphics showing famous personalities and fictional characters praising President Duterte have been circulating online. These quotes are completely made up with no source or other news report verifying these personalities' statements.

FABRICATED CONTENT

Fabricated content is anything that is 100% false. This is the only type of content that we can really consider purely 'fake'. Staged videos, made-up quotes, and fake websites fall under this category. 'Deepfakes' or 'synthetic media' are fabricated media produced using Artificial Intelligence (AI), which usually combines different elements of video and audio to create 'new' content that never actually happened.

Practicising healthy scepticism
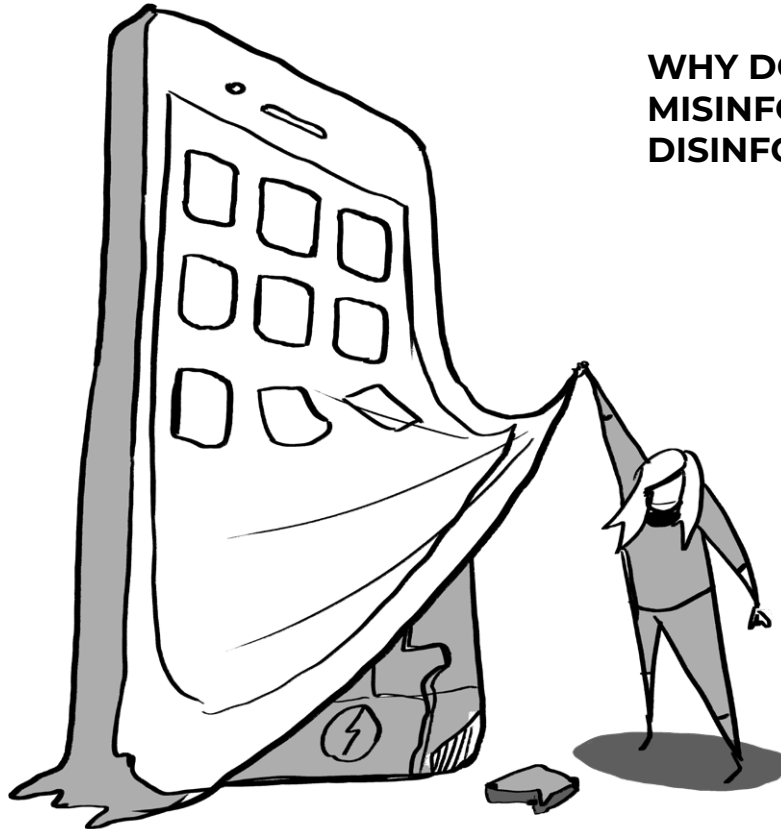
WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION?

INFORMATION APPEALS TO OUR EMOTIONS.

Studies show that people remember information better when they appeal to their emotions. These are stories that make people angry, scared, anxious or make them jump for joy. One perfect example of misinformation that banked on people's fear is when Philippines social media personality DJ Loonyo hinted about the alleged 'dangers' of coronavirus mass testing. Through a

Facebook Livestream, he expressed fears over what one might be asked to drink or ingest in a 'trial-and-error' process for mass testing. His statement went viral and drew flak for spreading fear and misinformation about COVID-19 testing, which does not require ingestion nor is a trial-and-error process.

Another example is this clickbait story from the tabloid Abante Tonite about a bill making religious mementoes in hospitals optional. Its misleading headline states, "Hindi lahat Katoliko! Krus sa mga ospital pinapatanggal". The story was shared on Facebook in multiple pages and groups, garnering "angry" reactions from many Facebook users. The headline purposefully misled the readers to think that the bill intends to ban religious mementoes instead of simply making them optional.


WE CARRY MANY BIASES WITHIN US.

Aside from our emotions, we also tend to accept information faster and easier when they confirm our existing views. This is called 'confirmation bias'. The danger here is when we think something is true when we feel that it must be true. This is most applicable to misleading content -- information that has some amount of truth to it rather than being entirely made up. If an online post is partly true, and you are already convinced by half of it, you may disregard that that post is also 'partly false' or, at the very least, incomplete.

Aside from confirmation bias, there are many other hidden biases that influence one's way of thinking. It is useful to be aware of these, too.

1. Implicit bias: we associate two different things, which in our minds, are usually linked
2. Sunk-cost fallacy: the more time or emotions we invest into something, the more we want to keep investing in it
3. Anchoring bias: the first piece of information we hear tends to have more influence on us
4. Bandwagon effect: if a lot of people act or think in a certain way, we tend to act or think the same

If we encounter a post online that feels right to us and triggers our emotions, our tendency is to share it with others. So, the very first step is crucial: pause, calm down, and recognise your emotional response. This is called 'emotional scepticism' or questioning your own emotional reactions to the messages around you.
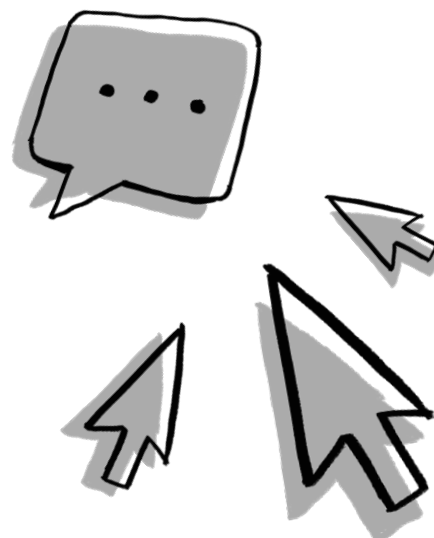
THE BALANCE BETWEEN TRUSTING AND DOUBTING

This is a crucial task for digital community stewards. One of the main challenges in dealing with information disorder is finding trustworthy sources amidst the information overload about the coronavirus pandemic. As a rule of thumb, stewards must act with caution.

HEALTHY SCEPTICISM VS CYNICISM

To be sceptical means to have an attitude of doubt, to be always questioning. This is a really important skill for dealing with information disorder, but too much of it can be unhealthy too. It can quickly slide into cynicism which is an attitude of scorn, negativity, and general distrust in people's motives and integrity. When you see too much disinformation everywhere, it is easy to be disheartened and develop hatred, and this is what we must strive to avoid. Remember that not all information is designed to deceive or manipulate. Our goal is to maintain the right amount of scepticism of the news we consume without sliding into the idea that good journalism does not exist.

An important strategy so that you can avoid cynicism is to learn to ask questions about ALL media messages, not just those with which you may disagree. We must be aware of and open to questioning not only the biases of media producers but also our own biases. This way, we find the right balance between trusting and doubting.

SKEPTICS	CYNICS
• are open-minded • challenge negative factors • can be convinced by presenting evidence	• are close-minded • focus on the negative factors • cannot be convinced by presenting evidence

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