MAKING THE BEST OF BAD INFORMATION

Mallory Pillard & Ian Ruge
Today we hope you will learn...

01 What misinformation and disinformation look like.

02 What makes people more likely to believe misinformation?

03 Why has misinformation become more prevalent?

04 How can libraries respond to increasing misinformation?
Definitions

- **Disinformation**
  False or inaccurate and intended to mislead

- **Misinformation**
  False or inaccurate and might be intended to mislead

- **Propaganda**
  Intended to sway public opinion

- **Fake News**
  Recently coined, often politicized term

- **Astroturfing**
  Masking the sponsors of a message to make it appear as though it originates from a grassroots movement

- **Filter Bubble**
  Intellectual isolation aided by technology

*How do you know if someone's intent is to spread incorrect information, or if they just got it wrong?*
In most cases, there’s no way to know if it is intentional.

Retractions and corrections are important, but often, the damage is already done.
WHAT DOES MISINFORMATION LOOK LIKE?
Can you spot the misinformation?
Corrected Graph

New Cases Per Day

March 18: 33
March 19: 61
March 20: 86
March 21: 112
March 22: 116
March 23: 129
March 24: 192
March 25: 174
March 26: 304
March 27: 344
March 28: 327
March 29: 320
March 30: 339
March 31: 246
April 01: 376
Can you spot the misinformation?
Number of COVID-19 tests per million of people

Corrected Graph

- Brazil: 258
- Argentina: 330
- U.S.: 7000
- Italy: 14100
- Germany: 15700
- Norway: 22300

Can you spot the misinformation?
Corrected Graph

Number of COVID-19 Cases in Russia from March 5 to March 31

Top 5 Counties with the Greatest Number of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases

The chart below represents the most impacted counties over the past 15 days and the number of cases over time. The table below also represents the number of deaths and hospitalizations in each of those impacted counties.

Can you spot the misinformation?
VIOLENT CRIME IS A VERY BIG PROBLEM

ADULTS

THE WIZARD OF ODDS

WHITE HOUSE Prepares to Address Surge in Violent Crime

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
MARGIN OF ERROR: +/- 3.0% PTS

https://twitter.com/ordinaryasoreng/status/1407528216659648513
WHAT MAKES PEOPLE MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE MISINFORMATION?

- Alienation
- Powerlessness
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Confirmation Bias
- Distrust of Authority
Alienation and Powerlessness

“People divorced from community, occupation, and association are first and foremost among the supporters of extremism.”

Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community

Think of how rumors spread in the workplace when staff feel alienated and powerless.
Cognitive Dissonance

-Cognitive Dissonance: "The mental discomfort that results from holding two conflicting beliefs, values or attitudes."

-Leon Festinger et al., When Prophecy Fails.

Think of times when your own cognitive dissonance kicks in. Do you recognize it?
Confirmation Bias

-The tendency to search for and interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.

- Oxford Dictionary

"I will never apologize for the United States — I don’t care what the facts are." — George H.W. Bush
Distrust of Authority

Potential seeds of distrust:
- Hurricane Katrina Response
- Iraq War
- Flint Water Crisis
- Police brutality videos
- Voter suppression
- Whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Wikileaks

Think of a time when you felt like a leader wasn’t being truthful. How did you feel?
WHY HAS MISINFORMATION BECOME MORE PREVALENT?

- MEDIA LANDSCAPE
- TECHNOLOGY
- ANONYMITY
- POLITICAL POLARIZATION
Changing Media Landscape

Old Media
- Consolidation
- Scarcity

New Media
- Lack of gatekeeping
- Interactive
- Gamification

How has the way you get your news changed over the last 10 years?
Technology

Media Manipulation
- Changes in the economics of creation
- Deep fakes and machine learning
- Blurring the lines between parody and news

What was a time when you have been fooled by something online?
Anonymity

The ability to be anonymous is a feature of the internet

- A great deal of misinformation comes from anonymous sources
- Anonymity can encourage both good actors and bad actors.

Have you ever posted something anonymously online that you might not say in real life?
Political Polarization

End of Fairness Doctrine

- Networks were previously required to present contrasting views.
- Political affiliation is a driver of both cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias.
HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE WITH PATRONS?

6 DEGREES

PRE-BUNK

SKEPTICISM

EMPATHY

SCRIPT SUGGESTIONS
“Six “degrees of manipulation”—impersonation, conspiracy, emotion, polarization, discrediting, and trolling—are used to spread misinformation and disinformation, according to Sander van der Linden, PhD, a professor of social psychology in society at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. For instance, a false news story may quote a fake expert, use emotional language, or propose a conspiracy theory in order to manipulate readers.”

Play the game!
Manipulate your audience to gain followers and badges.

https://www.getbadnews.com/#intro
https://www.goviralgame.com/en
Pre-bunk, don’t just debunk.

- “We revisited an early hypothesis that “active” inoculations—where people generate their own counter-arguments against impending persuasion attempts—are more effective than “passive” inoculations where counter-arguments were simply provided to people.”
- A vaccine against brainwash, prevention not a cure
- Libraries often do this work in programs or 1-1

Skepticism and Critical Thinking

- “Do your own research...”
  “Do better research...”

- Encourage curiosity and skepticism
- Simplify - people are more likely to understand
- Consider accuracy before sharing and encourage your patrons to do so as well
Empathy

- Treat your patrons as intellectual equals
- Listen for "rumor cues"
- Understand that we all engage in a little bit of conspiratorial thinking
- Lower your defenses to seek understanding
- Patrons arrive at their research due to a variety of emotions.

"People are capable of being thoughtful and rational, but our wishes, hopes, fears and motivations often tip the scales to make us more likely to accept something as true if it supports what we want to believe."

- Peter Ditto, PhD, University of California
Script Suggestions

"Where did you learn that? In my experience, ____ (resource) has been helpful."

"How could anyone possibly vote for (insert politician name, ballot initiative, bill, etc.)?"
   "I’ve been hearing a lot of discussion about that topic. It seems like there are a lot of perspectives out there. Would you like me to help you find some information about it?"
   "I can tell you feel very passionately about this! Have you found specific resources or outlets that have helped shape your opinions?"

"I don't think you should arrive at that conclusion."

"I agree that online censorship is a big topic." (racism, vaccinations, etc)
What else can libraries do?

- Civic engagement programs - invite people in to have difficult conversations
- Local government involvement - encourage patrons to serve on a board, volunteer, run for city council
- Using COVID-19 as a starting point, compile a list of fake headlines, sources, and cures related to the pandemic. Then debunk them and provide alternative, credible information.

“We want people to understand that disinformation is fundamentally exploitative—that it tries to use our religion, our patriotism, and our desire for justice to outrage us and to dupe us into faulty reasoning...Much of that is a psychological phenomenon.”- Peter Adams, apa.org

What are you doing at your library to combat the spread of misinformation?
Your Presenters:

Ian Ruge
- Iruge@highplains.us

Mallory Pillard
- Mpillard@highplains.us

Please reach out with comments, questions, suggestions!