

# Misinformation and disinformation:

## Summary:

Misinformation less of a risk than information control in a democracy.

- While we recognise that misinformation is problematic:
  - Misuse of information control is widespread and historically inevitable.
  - Misinformation as a social construct is an unrealistic broken idea.
    - Replication crisis
    - Regulatory capture
    - Misaligned Institutional incentives
    - Illusion of experts
- Societal group think is a greater risk than perceived misinformation.
- Government can be accountable for promoting group think which results in harm.
- If you are not seeing views you completely disagree with in your news feed then the system is broken
- Mitigation is only possible with equal and opposite risk to publication.
  - i.e., unlimited liability for fact checkers

## Discussion:

Misinformation is a dangerous category to address as it easily removes dissenting voices that should be listened to. Note diversity of thought is about listening to all voices including ones you disagree with. Failure to do this inevitably results in harm.

The ideas behind misinformation draw heavily on the ideas of Social Constructionism which, in today's environment, has become an increasing flawed and dangerous approach.

Social constructionism is a theory that suggests a statement or fact is deemed "true" when it is widely cited, replicated, and accepted without disagreement. However, this approach has become highly problematic in modern echo chambers and particularly in the realm of science, primarily due to the scientific replication crisis, which is undermining the fundamental premise of this theory. We simply can't replicate the claims of significant parts of peer reviewed science.

In the past two decades, problems caused by seeking reference to social constructionist arguments have been amplified by inherent flaws ingrained within the systems and institutions of scientific research, which serve as the gate keepers of this social construct. We have seen this in both widely recognised regulatory capture and the perverse incentives for research. If the institutions can only be funded by supporting and researching a specific narrative, they will not contest the underlying narrative and will actively prevent others from doing so too.

Suppression of views that challenge the mainstream entrenches the current world view resulting in stagnation, loss of trust and potentially extensive harms from group think.

Those responsible for setting policies which rely on a social constructionist supporting arguments, may seek protection from accountability by pointing to the perceived acceptance of the viewpoint at the time the policies were set. However, if the system is actively suppressing voices, the system is no longer representing diverse viewpoints, it's an echo chamber. The wilful blindness to diverse points of view should be used to hold the policy maker accountable when policies fail.

Misinformation is a very risky category to address as it often stems from some self-identifying majority believing they are right and flow on institutional censorship easily removes dissenting voices that should be listened to. Note diversity of thought is about listening to all voices including ones you disagree with.

The reality is that other than in constrained contexts, it is risky to appeal to solid facts. There are observations there are outcomes and there are interpretations. Information is complex and interpretive; misinformation is often simply an interpretation of the observations that does not suit a participant.

Disinformation is malicious misinformation may seem a much clearer case. It can be framed as a deliberate misinterpretation of observations designed to shape public opinion, sow confusion, undermine trust, or advance a particular agenda. It may involve distorting facts, fabricating stories, selectively presenting information, or using persuasive techniques to manipulate emotions and beliefs.

However, the line between misinformation and disinformation can be very thin. From the perspective of AI "Classification" of information / misinformation, the outcome can be highly sensitive to context. Correctly addressing "quality" disinformation can be further challenging simply because of the way it has been interwoven with things we believe to be "true". The concept that one can successfully police the internet with AI without causing off target impact is naïve, more likely it will result in disenfranchising the public and risks chilling dissenting views which overall is net harmful to democratic society.

## The illusion of experts

Another failure of social constructivism is reliance on "experts".

All experts and expert communities live in an information bubble, the sheer amount of information in most fields creates an a constantly changing information horizon beyond which individuals and groups cannot see combined with an overwhelming amount of new information, which cannot be assimilated. The result is most fall back on what they think they know.

The field of AI for instance is hugely diverse and multidisciplinary. Globally publishing rates in AI stand at ~1300 papers a day and 350 AI patent applications a day. The large AI groups

themselves have openly stated that tracking the field is impossible. Hence one can expect most views to be based on dogma.

## Mitigations

Building the framework for dictating one's own particular truth, is a recipe for eventual civic collapse, because we will group think ourselves into bad ideas, as has happened time and again in the past. Even if the tool can be effectively used, eventually it will be misused.

If a government insists on pursuing this path, then a semblance of balance in such a system can probably only be achieved if there is equal or larger sanction placed against the fact checkers and their respective organizations. In this way if information is incorrectly suppressed and results in harm then the organization and accountable person can be financially sanctioned to the same or greater extent. This would bring balance and restraint to the process and reduce the temptation of people to use the tool for political purposes.

In a healthy system, encountering diverse voices, even those considered unconventional or extreme, is vital. The presence of differing perspectives in our news feed allows us to gauge the health and robustness of our societal discourse.