



TEACHING TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
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Speaking of Digital Literacy ...

This vocabulary list covers the many ways “fake news” finds its way online, highlights key terms necessary to understand media manipulation, and describes how our brains absorb information—and how they can steer us away from the truth.

A

Agnotology: The study of ignorance.

Advertorial: An advertisement for a product that is designed to look like news and appears in an environment designed to deliver news (such as a newspaper or a news website).

Aggregator: Software or a website that collects content and displays it, often as if it were originally generated content.

Algorithm: A procedure used to locate specific data within a collection of information. Also called a search algorithm.

Apophenia: The tendency to perceive meaningful connections in unrelated things; seeing patterns where none exist.

Astroturfing: The practice of concealing the financial stakeholders promoting a message or an organization so that it seems to come from and be supported by grassroots entities.

Asymmetric polarization: In politics, when one group is more polarized, or further from center, than others.

B

Belief perseverance: The tendency to continue believing something even after learning that the foundation of the belief is false.

Bias: Prejudice against or in favor of a concept, group or idea.

Bot: An automated online program; short for web robot.

C

Chan culture: Beliefs and activities related to online message boards such as 4chan and 8chan, where often-offensive images and memes are created and distributed.

Citizen journalism: Creation and sharing of information by members of the general public, usually online.

Clickbait: Online content created with the primary purpose of attracting visitors and enticing them to click on a link to a specific web page.

Confirmation bias: The tendency to process new information as confirmation of the beliefs one already holds.

Cognitive bias: A mental-processing error (e.g., in reasoning, interpreting or remembering) that often results from clinging to preferences and beliefs in spite of contrary evidence.

Cognitive load: How much effort is currently being used in the brain’s working memory.

Computational propaganda: The manipulation of

information and communication technologies to influence attitudes, thinking processes and behavior.

Coppypasta: A block of online text that has been copied and pasted from somewhere else.

Counterknowledge: Inaccurate information that is presented as fact and is believed by a critical mass of people.

Crisis informatics: The field of study that examines how information is used in the phases of emergencies and disasters, including preparation and recovery.

Critical loyalty: A disposition to critically examine every argument, while still holding strong beliefs and convictions.

Crowdsourcing: The practice of acquiring information for or contributions to a project by seeking the aid of a large number of people, usually via the internet.

D

Digital footprint: The information about a person that can be found online as a result of their internet activity.

Digital native: A person born or raised during the digital age and who is thus familiar with the internet, computers and other digital technology from an early age.

Disinformation: False information that is disseminated to the media or other entities with the purpose of deceiving.

Dox: To publicly share private or identifying information about a person online, usually with a malicious or vengeful purpose.

Dunning-Kruger effect: A cognitive bias that leads people of limited skills or knowledge to mistakenly believe their abilities are greater than they actually are.

F

Fake news: Disinformation that is presented as news and optimized for online sharing.

Filter bubble: The limited perspective that can result from personalized search algorithms.

G

Group polarization: A group's tendency to make more extreme decisions than its individual members would typically be inclined to make.

Groupthink: A group's practice of thinking or making decisions in such a way that promotes harmony and conformity within the group at the expense of creativity or individual responsibility.

H

Heuristic: A cognitive shortcut, rule or method that helps people solve problems in less time than it would take to think the problem all the way through.

Homophily: The tendency to form connections with people who are similar to oneself.

I

Illusion of comprehension: A cognitive bias that occurs when people mistake familiarity or awareness for understanding. Also called the familiarity effect.

Illusion of explanatory depth: A cognitive bias that occurs when people confuse breadth of understanding, often generated through wide information consumption, with depth.

Illusory truth effect: A cognitive bias that occurs when people confuse repetition with truth. Repeated exposure to false information may induce people to believe that this information is true, even when they know better.

Information cascade: A phenomenon in which people echo the opinions of others, usually on-line, even when their own opinions or exposure to information contradicts that opinion. When information cascades form a pattern, this pattern can begin to overpower later opinions by making it seem as if a consensus already exists.

Information diet: The kinds and quantity of information that a person consumes on a regular basis.

Information inequality: The uneven distribution of information, often across lines of class or race.

Information literacy: The ability to recognize the need for information and to locate, analyze and use it effectively in a variety of ways.

Information pollution: The tainting of available information with inaccuracy, redundancy and lack of quality.

Infotainment: Material, online or otherwise, that combines information with entertainment. Often used to describe material ostensibly intended to inform but which is primarily designed for entertainment.

Innumeracy: Unfamiliarity and inability to use math and mathematical concepts, including statistics.

L

Lulz: Laughter and enjoyment, usually at someone else's expense.

M

Media hacking: The manipulation of electronic and online media, especially social media, to shape a particular narrative.

Meme: An image, video, phrase, symbol or other piece of culture that is meant to be funny and is shared widely via the internet, often with slight changes.

Memejacking: The act of hijacking a meme and using it for purposes different from those of its original authors.

Misinformation: Information that is not accurate. Often used to describe information that is deliberately falsified.

Misinformation to correction ratio: Illustrates the relationship between reports of inaccurate information and corrections of those reports, usually online.

Motivated reasoning: The tendency to process new information in such a way that it will fit with previously held beliefs.

Myside bias: The tendency to endorse information that supports one's previously held beliefs, truth notwithstanding.

N

Native advertising: Online advertising that fluidly adheres to the look and feel of the context or platform in which it is placed.

O

Opinion laundering: The practice of making opinions seem more valid by representing them as coming from think tanks or other sources that seem reliable. See astroturfing.

Overton window: The range of ideas that are acceptable to the public at any given time.

P

Poe's law: Taken from a comment made by an online forum participant, Nathan Poe, the idea that it is nearly impossible to distinguish between an extremist view and a parody of it without clear evidence of the author's purpose.

R

Relevance optimizers: Additions such as text or images (e.g. headlines) that make information seem especially relevant to consumers.

S

Social spam: Unwanted material that shows up on social networking platforms and any website with content generated by users.

Sock puppet: An online user posing as another person—often a real person—usually to express their own views anonymously.

Sponsored content: An advertiser’s paid content in an online publication that takes on the look and qualities of that publisher’s editorial content.

Stealth marketing: The practice of paying people to promote products without revealing that those people are being compensated.

Stochastic terrorism: Acts of violence, including terrorist acts, that are incited by language and individually unpredictable.

T

Troll: A person who engages in provocative or harassing online behavior using their real identity. Distinct from a bot or a sock puppet.

Two-sides fallacy: The presentation of an issue that makes it seem to have two sides of equal weight or significance, when in fact a consensus or much stronger argument supports just one side. Also called false balance or false equivalence.

V

Viral marketing: Marketing, especially online, where consumers are encouraged to share information about products with their networks.