

Tackling What, and How? Academic Role(s) in a Multidisciplinary Response to Disinformation

Sabri DERINÖZ (UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles & EDMO BELUX)

Geoffroy PATRIARCHE (UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles & EDMO BELUX)

Trisha MEYER (Vrije Universiteit Brussel & EDMO BELUX)

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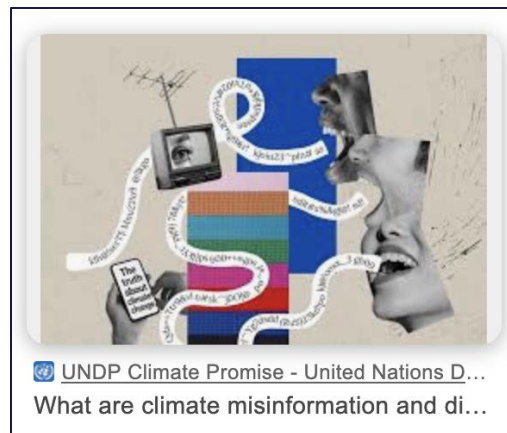
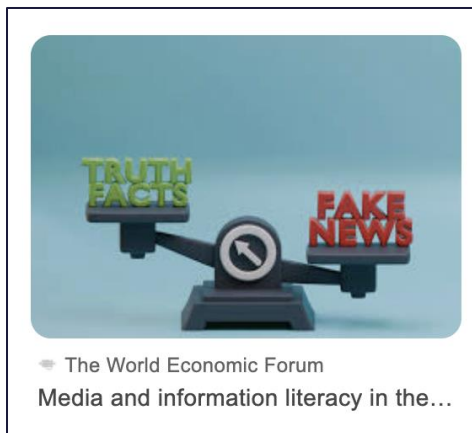
Disinformation

“[intentionally] constructing
false [or misleading] information
that is perfectly credible
and directs the actions of the person receiving it
in a direction that is unfavorable to them
[for political or financial purpose].”

Translated and adapted from Breton & Proulx (1996, p. 243): “*construire une information fausse qui soit parfaitement crédible et qui oriente l’action de celui qui la reçoit dans un sens qui lui est défavorable*”



Disinformation

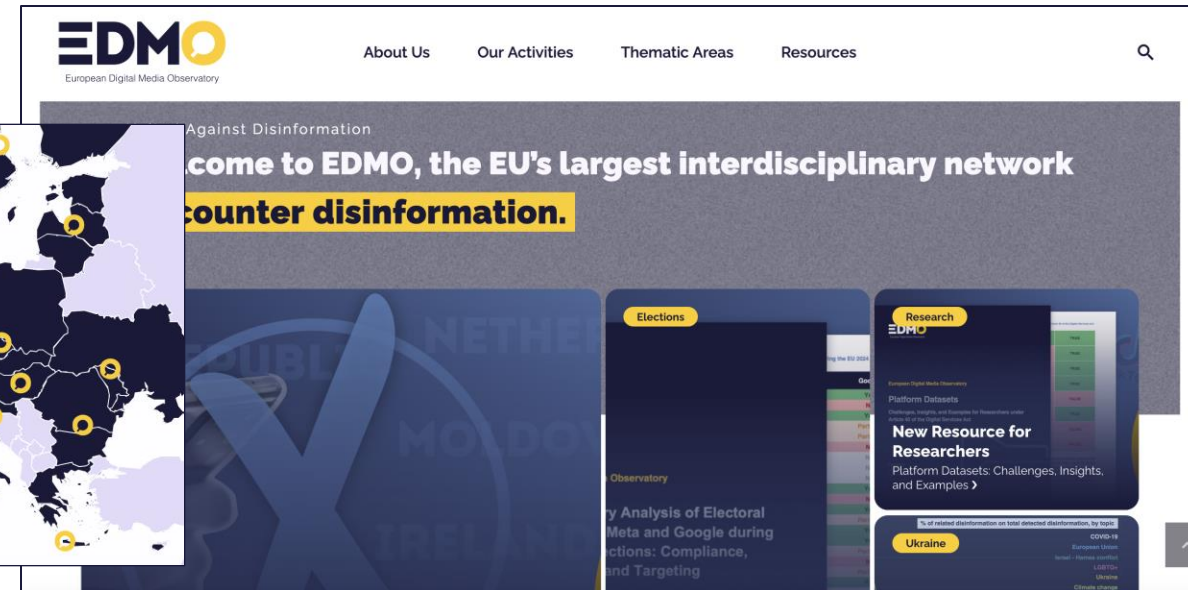


A sample of first-ranked results from a search in Google Images using the keyword “disinformation”

Disinformation mitigation in the EU

- Emergence of the problem of disinformation: Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, election of Trump in 2016, Brexit referendum, Cambridge Analytica scandal, Covid-19 pandemic (Oleart & Theuns, 2023).
- The EU institutions have developed a series of regulatory and co-regulatory initiatives to “tackle disinformation”, presented as a threat to our democracies (e.g.: Navarro et al., 2019; Stasi & Parcu, 2021).
→ **multiple public policies relating to the fight against disinformation, with a multidisciplinary and integrative response** (Zajączkowski et al., 2023), including EDMO.

- **European Digital Media Observatory**
 - EDMOeu
 - **EDMO hubs**: 15 national or multinational hubs covering all 27 EU Member States as well as Moldova, Norway and Ukraine.



EDMO BELUX

**Detecting, fact-checking
and investigating harmful
disinformation (Lead: AFP)**



**Conducting and supporting tailor-made
media literacy initiatives (Lead: MA)**



**Researching the impact of
disinformation and platform
policies on society (Lead: EUDL)**



**Fostering the growth and the capacity of the BELUX multidisciplinary community
to tackle disinformation (Lead: UCLouvain)**



Communication (Lead: VUB)



Project management (Lead: VUB)



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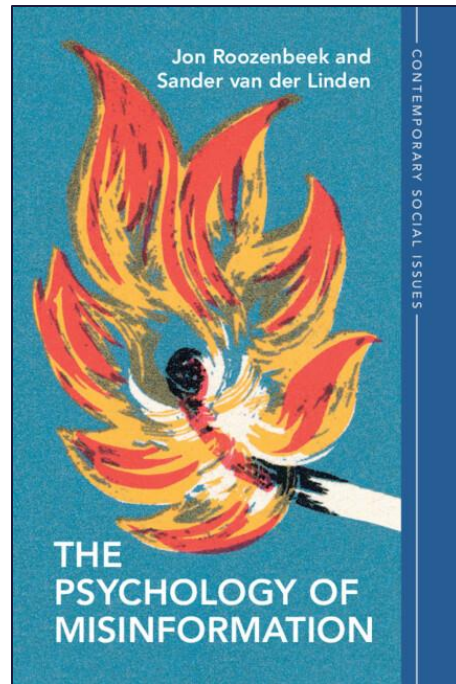
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The disinformation problem in EU institutional discourse

- “Disinformation mitigation” is built on a certain idea of what “information” is, especially its role in democracy (*cf.* also the framing of disinformation as a matter of “democratic resilience”)
- Restricted conception(s) of democracy and the public sphere (e.g. Bouza García & Oleart, 2024; García-Gutián et al., 2024).
- An ideal-typical vision of information and its role in democracy (Derinöz & Patriarche, 2026 (TBP)).
- The construction of a problem shapes the construction of its solution (Gusfield, 1984 ; Cefaï, 1996).

“Do We Have a Misinformation Problem?”

(Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2024)



2024



Image: Flaticon.com



Rethinking the problem of misinformation and its solutions

Sacha Altay 
University of Zurich, Switzerland

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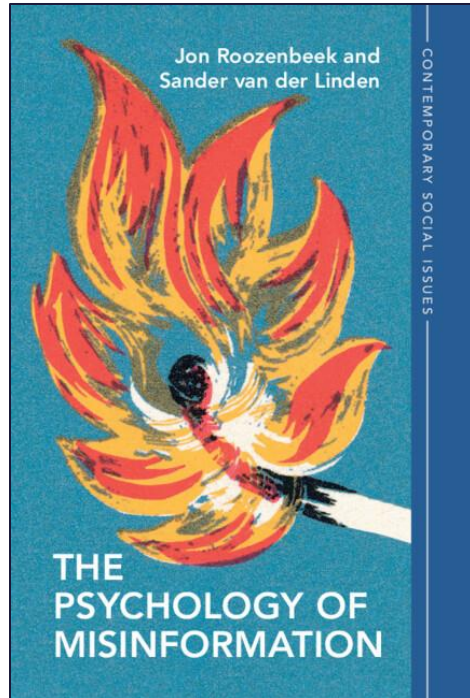



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“Do We Have a Misinformation Problem?”

(Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2024)



2024

“This is *not* fine” (vs “This is (basically) fine”)

- Misperceptions are common, and they can lead to problematic outcomes for society and democracy
- There is “a plausible relationship between misinformation belief and people's behavior” (p. 41) (e.g. vaccine misinformation)
- Misinformation can foster confusion and doubt, which in turn can prevent, delay, and/or weaken legislation and public policies (e.g. tobacco consumption, climate change)

“Do We Have a Misinformation Problem?”

(Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2024)

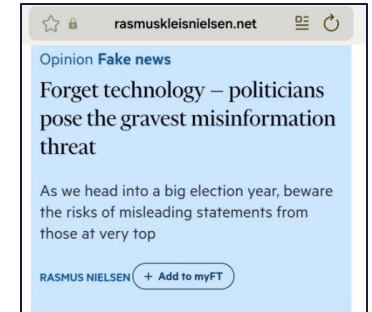
Rethinking the problem of misinformation and its solutions

Sacha Altay 
University of Zurich, Switzerland

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Five arguments about misinformation

- “Exposure to misinformation is low”
- “People are overly skeptical of reliable information”
- “Misinformation is a symptom of deeper problems”
- “Consequential misinformation comes from the top”
- “False information is not necessarily harmful”



Concluding question

As public intellectuals, how do we position ourselves in the minefield of misinformation discourse?



“Misinformation may not only be harmful for democracy as an informational crisis, but **its frequent use as a label or prominence in public and media discourse may have negative consequences** for credibility assessment of authentic information.” (van der Meer *et al.*, 2023, pp. 13-14)



“Fake news” as a **discursive signifier used in hegemonic struggles**, as a means of constructing (attacking, (de)legitimizing...) political projects, identities and conflicts (Farkas & Shou, 2018)



The journalistic condemnation of “fake news” as an “**informational moral panic**” (Carlson, 2018)



The come-back of “the myth of the vulnerable audience” in disinformation discourse as part of an **elitist, paternalist and neocolonial critique** of “populism” (Mahlouly, 2025)

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