

LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR MODULE 6: THE INFODEMIC

Background

Combating COVID-19 misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories is a complex challenge that must be fought on multiple fronts. Each of the learning activities below provides a different opportunity to confront the infodemic, and can either be utilized in concert with one another or serve as standalone activities.

Activity 1

Take a few minutes to examine the array of cognitive biases (<https://yourbias.is/>) and logical fallacies (<https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/>) that we are likely to engage in and encounter online. As you review both websites, consider the following:

1. Start by evaluating your own biases. Which biases and fallacies do you find yourself most likely to engage in, and why? How have your cognitive biases changed over time?
2. Next, reflect on the biases within your social media ecosystem. (If it's helpful, you may wish to open up Twitter, Facebook, or another platform and look for any examples of cognitive bias or logical fallacy.) Which biases and fallacies do you tend to see most frequently on your social media timeline? Do these biases and fallacies seem to correlate to particular communities, topics, type of information being shared, or political ideology?
3. What, if anything, can be done to mitigate these biases? Is this purely an individual-level issue? What role should social media platforms have in reducing our cognitive biases?

Activity 2

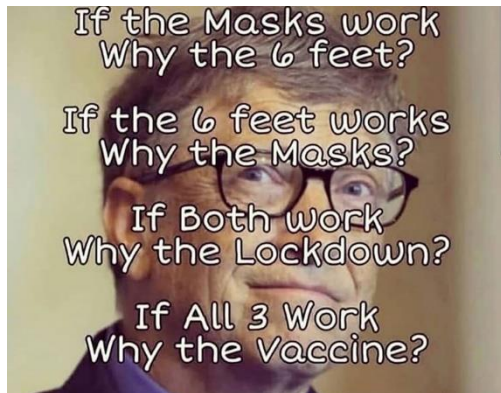
1. Begin by navigating to Bot Sentinel (www.botsentinel.com), a free tool that gathers Twitter data in order to identify inauthentic or toxic accounts that are spreading disinformation.
2. Take a look at the current top hashtags tweeted by inauthentic accounts: <https://www.botsentinel.com/trending-topics/top-hashtags> Can you identify any trends among the hashtags? Do they seem to relate to a specific event or reflect a particular political ideology? For added context, click the 'SEARCH' button next to each hashtag to see the latest tweets containing these hashtags. Can you discern between a genuine account and an inauthentic one?
3. Next, take a look at the list of accounts deemed problematic by Bot Sentinel: <https://www.botsentinel.com/analyzed-accounts/problematic> From here, you can either view these accounts directly in Twitter or click 'View Profile' to see Bot Sentinel's analysis of the phrases and hashtags most frequently used by a given account. After skimming some of the tweets, can you tell why these accounts were flagged by Bot Sentinel? Why do you think they haven't been suspended by Twitter? Should they be?

Activity 3

Complete one playthrough (approximately 20 minutes) of the Bad News game (www.getbadnews.com), an interactive tool that aims to demonstrate the key tenets of disinformation and the ease with which information can be manipulated on social media. The Bad News game draws on inoculation theory, which is the idea that by exposing ourselves to a weaker version of misinformation (e.g., by playing this game), we can build up a resistance to stronger forms of misinformation we are likely to encounter online in real life. After completing the game on your own, discuss your experience of the game in small groups or as a class, including whether you believe inoculation theory can be a potential tool to build up resistance against misinformation.

Activity 4

Distribute examples of COVID-19 memes that reflect viewpoints from opposite sides of the political spectrum. (Alternatively, students can find examples on their own.) A few examples are provided below:



In pairs, small groups, or as a class, discuss:

- What do each of these memes signal to the observer? What kind of statements are they attempting to convey?
- Were these memes effective in either challenging or reinforcing your own views? Why or why not? Can you understand why they might be appealing to others?
- Taiwan has embraced a “humor over rumor” approach by using memes to combat COVID-19 misinformation. Do you think this strategy can be effective in the United States? Can’t humor also be used to *promote* misinformation? How can we address this?