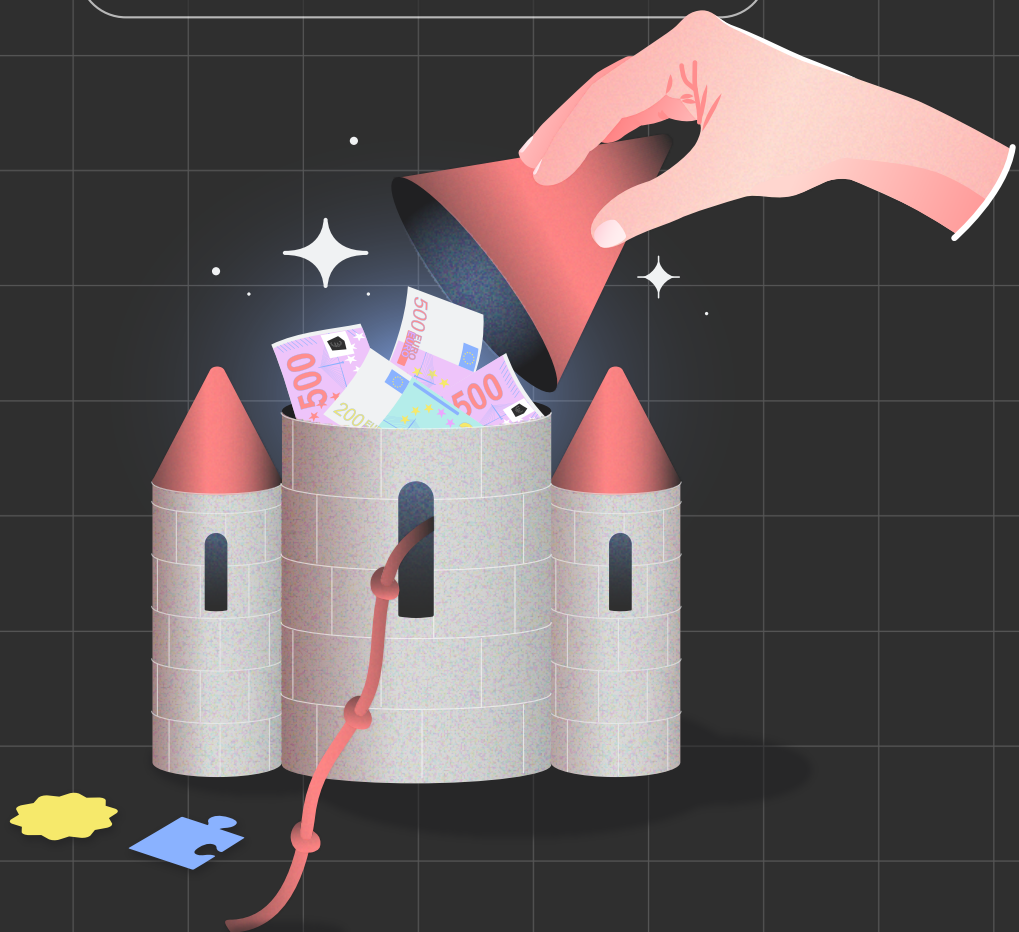# Unravel the Conspiracy behind conspiracies

The Good Guidebook

DARE TO BE GREY

Unsure how to spot a conspiracy theory?

Worried that you are amplifying disinformation to the masses? Curious about the people and organisations behind the conspiracies?

The Good Guidebook will help you understand what conspiracy theories are, discover how to identify them online, and, most importantly, provide you with the tools needed to combat them.

It's easy to fall down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories, but as you make your way through our guidebook, you will be able to unravel the conspiracy behind conspiracies and help others to do the same.

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Summary

Conspiracy Cookbook

Financial Fairy Tales

Amplification Atlas

Dangerous Dictionary

Conspiracy Cookbook

What is a conspiracy theory?

an explanation for an important societal event claiming the involvement of a powerful group

Simply put, a conspiracy theory is an explanation for an important societal event claiming the involvement of a powerful group or a person that secretly plotted to set this event in motion. It nearly always differs from the official explanation.

In times of uncertainty, and especially during societal crisis situations, there will always be an increase in conspiracy theories, because people are scared, they feel out of control, and they need a response to their anxieties. These feelings make them want to make sense of the situation, and to simplify it. This is an incredibly common human reaction, and one that isn't unique to modern times.

People from all eras are likely to believe in conspiracy theories when faced with a societal crisis. **Despite conspiracy theories being around for so many years already, they are becoming more worrisome now due to their ability to be amplified on the internet.** Find out more about this in our later chapter, the amplification atlas!

Conspiracies satisfy specific motives, with three main needs and desires

1	2	3
The desire for understanding	A need for control	The ability to maintain a positive image of yourself
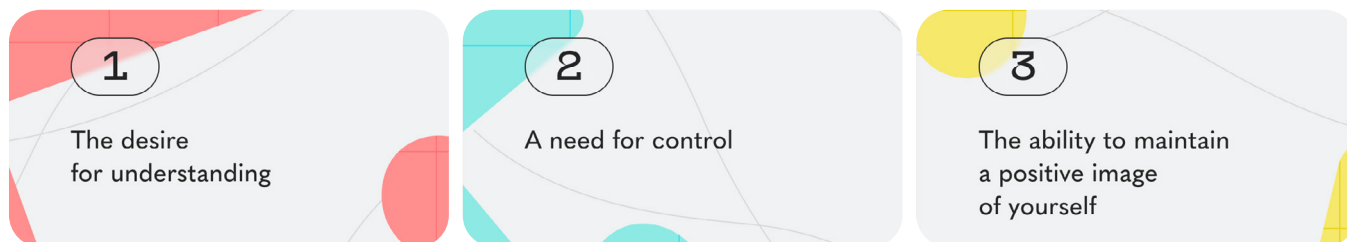
Recipes

Most recipes for conspiracy theories follow the same logic. **Essentially, conspiracy theories give easy answers to complex problems,** creating epic battles between "good" and "evil", and giving Black-and-White answers to Grey situations. Four key ingredients are needed, to not only create the conspiracy theory, but also for it to be successful and have a large number of people believe in it.

Here are the four ingredients

1	2	3	4
Pick something you don't like or agree with	Blame someone, use them as a scapegoat, and make them your enemy	Create emotional stories, truth doesn't matter	Make yourself the hero, tell people you are the only one who can fix it
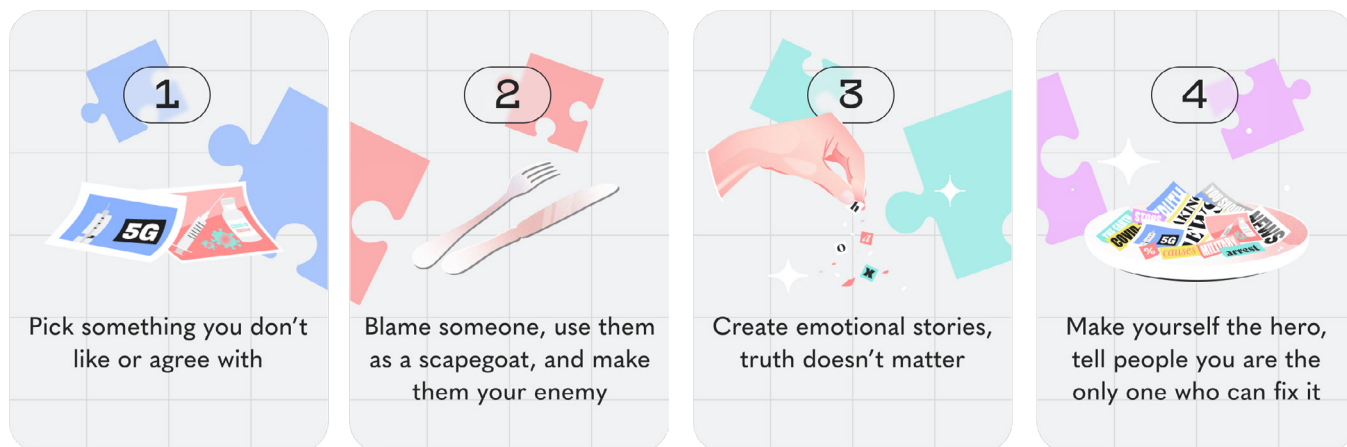
Anti-vaxxers, flat-earthers, and biolabs in Ukraine are just a few conspiracy theories that apply this logic, but we could really use any examples. Learn more about these recipes **here.**

These recipes are tasty to some people because they...

- ✓ Offer simple to understand solutions, for complicated issues

- ✓ Give a sense of security in a threatening situation

- ✓ Help to feel less anxious, worried, and powerless over big societal events

- ✓ Satisfy the need for group belonging

- ✓ Play into stereotypes people already have, usually involving the rich, jews, or foreigners

How to avoid getting poisoned by a toxic dish

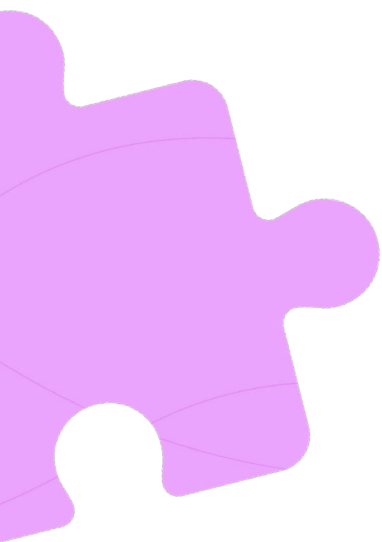When you see a post on the internet that smells like a recipe from this cookbook, try to verify some basic information before you start eating. This is how to do it.

1 Check the source	**2** Check the whole article	**3** Check the author
4 Check the images	**5** Check other reporting on the topic	**6** Check yourself!

✓ Check the source

- Was it posted initially by a reputable news source?
- Was it posted or shared by **a bot?**
- Have a look at the individual's profile. Does the account mainly share hateful or inflammatory content? If so, this account is probably a **#HobbyHater.**

✓ Check the author

- Firstly, is there even an author listed?
- If you aren't completely sure the author of an article is legitimate, see if you can find any other articles by them.
- If you can, do they look legitimate? Beware of fake authors.

✓ Check the whole article

- Don't just read the headline! As headlines are continuously created to be click-bait, they may not match up to the actual context of the article, they could be misleading, or even have absolutely nothing to do with the article itself.
- Check the date. Old articles are often recirculated without having anything to do with current affairs. Also check the dates of the sources and statistics the article uses.

Check the images

- Images can often resurface years after they were first used, linked to a new story or article. You can check when an image first appeared on the web using platforms like Google, Bing, or TinEye.
- Zoom into the picture to look for clues that the real location is not where the article says it is.

Check other reporting on the topic

- If the story is a big one, chances are it will have been reported on by a number of different outlets. Check how other news sites are reporting on it, is there an overlap in the facts and figures?
- If you find no other platforms or outlets reporting on the story, there is a high chance it is fake.
- Check whether all the platforms reporting on the topic use the same (single) source material.

Check yourself!

- Reflect on why this article drew your attention. Did you read it purely because it appeals to you and you agree with it?
- Do you believe it because you want to believe it?
- We often filter information based on how positively it aligns with our already established beliefs. This can occur consciously, or subconsciously. Accepting information that reinforces our pre-established biases and disregarding any that gives us discomfort is a big factor behind the success of disinformation.

So, check your biases, **question information you read, and always research further,** before you hit that share or like button!

SOLUTIONS
How to spot disinformation on TikTok

■ **Marcus Bösch**

There is a blond girl in a black bodysuit smiling and dancing. There is a party. It is obviously her birthday. Friends hand her a cake with sparklers. We hear a dance track. In her next TikTok video – filmed on February 24 – she is opening her window, we hear the sound of fighting and gun shots, the video is shaky and abruptly ends. Is she okay? Is she in Ukraine? What is going on here?

Actually the user is fine. Her Instagram account indicates that she lives in Lithuania. She just used a TikTok sound that is supposedly taken from a war scene and put a video of hers to it. If you tap on the sound you find more than 1500 videos with exactly the same sound – the first video labelled «original» shows a soccer match and pyrotechnics. No gunshots. Not filmed in Ukraine. And not an eyewitness report from the war.

TikTok is perfectly suited for **spreading false information.** The app is easy to use and the underlying set of algorithms makes it possible to get a wide reach even with the very first video created. Unlike Instagram or Twitter where content that you see still heavily relies on your social circle, that means people you follow, the central "For You Page" on TikTok adapts to your usage. You can follow accounts but you do not have to in order to get a feed of videos catered to your assumed needs.

This increases the chance of you seeing videos with factually wrong or modified content that is shared unintentionally by users or deliberately by bad actors trying to spread propaganda or do harm, for example. The videos are normally short, fast paced and intended to entertain on an emotional level, presented mostly without additional context.
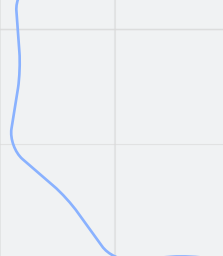
On your "For You Page" **memes are colliding with conspiracy theories,** dance videos next to dead soldiers. A simultaneity where everything has the same importance and can be swiped through in seconds. How can we make sure to spot fake videos? How do we avoid falling for propaganda?

There are some basic rules to help sensitise yourself. Mis- and disinformation is not something that only affects others. It can hit you too. What if the opposite of what you believe could actually be true? Be critical when something looks "too good to be true". Embrace a journalistic approach. Ask yourself: Who posted what, why and for whom.

Without leaving the app you can check the profile that posted potentially dubious content. How many videos are on the account? What are they like? When was the account set up? Is there a link to other social media accounts? Are there any red flags that make you sceptical?

Apart from checking the account to get context you should always check the comments. Sometimes people debunk false videos here or raise doubts. And of course check the sound. Has it been used before like in the example above? Then it can not be a first hand source.

If you want to investigate videos or images you can use **Google's reverse image search feature.** Simply drop key frames from the video (screenshots) into the Google Images search bar, and it should point you in the direction of the original video.

Nonetheless, it is likely that you will fall for false information at some point. But it is important not to amplify the spread of mis-and disinformation by sharpening your senses in the age of **information disorder.**

Amplification Atlas

What is amplification?

Some conspiracy theories fade away without ever moving past the dark corners of the internet, while some evolve and expand into the mainstream, and sometimes even spill out onto the streets.

Amplification refers to the way that disinformation and conspiracy theories grow and spread. Like a virus, these ideas can multiply very quickly, especially if they have the right conditions in which to flourish.

Once they infect one person, they can be very contagious, and can affect people all over the world, and specifically those who are vulnerable to these ideas.

Particularly in the online world, it is important to be aware of how conspiracy theories circulate, who buys into them, who shares them, and more importantly who benefits from them. Some conspiracy theories fade away without ever moving past the dark corners of the internet, while some evolve and expand into the mainstream, and sometimes even spill out onto the streets.

Often, these conspiracies often begin in one specific country, but **if the conspiracy recipe is especially appetising or easy to follow, it will be reproduced by people all around the world.** With some of the most popular conspiracies, the recipe is almost copied word for word, with some substitutions of local ingredients, such as national stereotypes and prejudices, different political characters, historical contexts or population make-ups.

Four steps to amplify

Amplification works best when there is a trending online conversation to add your conspiracies to, especially when people are emotional about an event. This strategy is being used all the time, following four easy steps.

1	2	3	4
Wait for an impactful, current or emotional event to happen*	Create a few offensive or toxic tweets, include the conspiracy recipes you've created in the Cookbook	Enable the online discussion to start, get your followers and friends to engage	Watch your messages be amplified by a range of personas and carried to audiences you have never reached before

*(such as **Christian Eriksen's collapse** during the Euro 2020s, or the **Farmer protests** in the Netherlands)

> There are those who have created a career out of being an amplifier for disinformation, and some who have ruined their career because of this.

Online and offline, there are many people who help to spread disinformation and conspiracy theories across the globe. But some of these people have access to much bigger platforms than others, and therefore are able to amplify this disinformation to a lot more people.

Some of these «super-spreaders» might be people who were already famous or influential in other spheres, and some might be people who have created this platform by spreading this disinformation.

There are those who have created a career out of being an amplifier for disinformation, and some who have ruined their career because of this.

How to engage with these worldwide personas

In order to avoid amplifying these stories all over the world, ask yourself a couple of questions before you engage.

Scale
Is it a big story?
Are many people talking about it?
Or is it better to ignore it so it will stay in the fringes?

Toxicity
How harmful is the story?
Especially to minority groups or individuals?

Context
Are there grains of truth?
Or is it completely bonkers?

Audience
Who is engaging with the content?
Are people already critical or is it an echo chamber?
Will you be amplifying the narrative further by engaging?

If you do decide to engage, think about what kind of persona you are talking to, what are they getting out of spreading these stories. Does it provide them with a sense of certainty, are they using it for political gain, are they just trying to provoke?

Here are some tips

Tip 1

If the account that posted the conspiracy is irrelevant to the discussion, it's good practice to blur/crop it out, and not link to.

Tip 2

If you are sharing any misinformation, make sure it is extremely clear that it is misinformation. You can draw a red diagonal line through an image/text, or make it very explicit that the content is fake
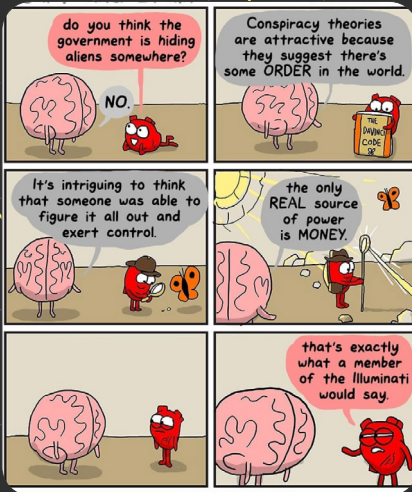
Tip 3

Think about what audience you're addressing: are you talking to the original poster, or passive bystanders who are only looking at the conversation without contributing?

Tip 4

Use humour, pop culture references and memes.

@theawkwardyeti

do you think the government is hiding aliens somewhere?

NO.

Conspiracy theories are attractive because they suggest there's some ORDER in the world.

It's intriguing to think that someone was able to figure it all out and exert control.

the only REAL source of power is MONEY.

that's exactly what a member of the Illuminati would say.

We must question everything

Even conspiracy theories?

No not those

Q ANON

THOMAS WYKES

@thomaswykes

Tip 5

Don't repeat binaries; disinformation thrives on polarisation. People will believe and share anything that seemingly aligns to their perceived social identity. Avoid falling into this trap.

@owlturd.comics

HEY! I'M THE FACTS! DID YOU WANT ME?

WE ONLY WANT THE PART OF YOU THAT SUPPORTS OUR OPINION.

HAHA, Y-YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE *PART* OF ME, SILLY ...

BUT THEY COULD AND DID.

OWLTURD.COM

SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT THAT?

WHY? IT'S TINY.

THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S FAR AWAY. WHEN IT'S CLOSE, IT WILL BE LARGER.

WHO'S PAYING YOU TO SAY THIS?

WE DON'T HAVE CURRENCY.

poorlydrawnlines.com

@poorlydrawnlines

Tip 6

Don't end up in a yes-vs-no debate, ask open questions, make your point, respond to their questions, point to the facts and move on, you don't have to defend yourself.
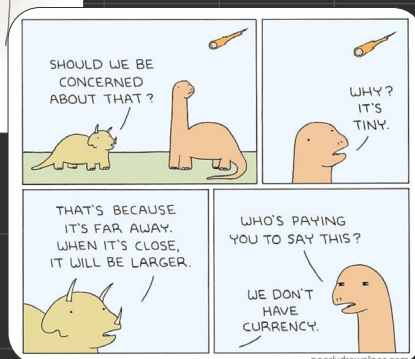
Tip 7

Many people who share conspiracy theories feel attacked when you call them out, so avoid shame, avoid focusing on an individual's beliefs, and avoid positioning yourself as an arbiter of truth.
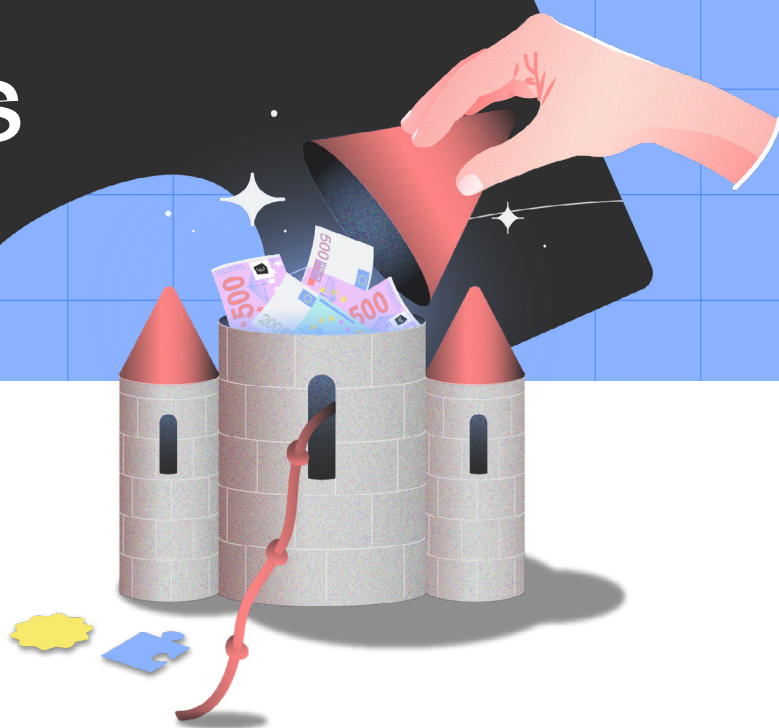
@anti_conspiracy_memewars

It's OK to be skeptical of governments and corporations, Simba

But just because you don't trust them, does not mean you should choose to believe someone else's lies

Financial Fairy Tales
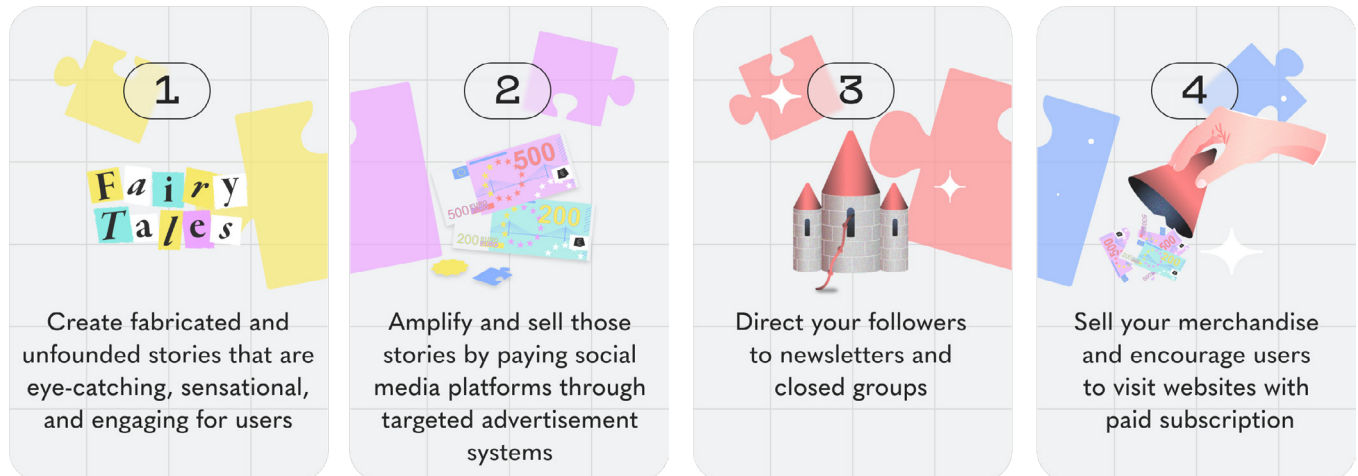
The business
behind
disinformation

Have you heard about the "nearly magical" alternative treatments for the coronavirus? Or about the "Brain Force Plus", which promises to "supercharge" cognitive functions?

The contents of these are designed to attract our attention as customers.

The list is long and can quickly jump from "harmless" wellness products to real conspiracy theories: ranging from the docuseries on *The Truth about the Vaccines*" to the book on "*The Truth of COVID-19*", these are all products that fuel and financially support the Disinformation Industry.

Thanks to the internet, and particularly social media platforms, conspiracy theories are a profitable business. They have allowed misinformation entrepreneurs to attract a wide audience of followers.

How do they do so? By following the next steps.

1	2	3	4
Fairy Tales	500 200		
Create fabricated and unfounded stories that are eye-catching, sensational, and engaging for users	Amplify and sell those stories by paying social media platforms through targeted advertisement systems	Direct your followers to newsletters and closed groups	Sell your merchandise and encourage users to visit websites with paid subscription

Facebook and Instagram attracted 37.8 million anti-vaxxer followers during the pandemic, making Facebook earn up to $1.1 billion in revenue.

Social media platforms have also profited directly from false content. According to the Global Disinformation Index, ads running on disinformation websites generate $25.1 million in revenue, with 95% of revenue coming from Google, OpenX and Amazon.

Misinformation produces a huge amount of engagement and 'clickbait'. For example, a report revealed that **Facebook and Instagram attracted 37.8 million anti-vaxxer followers during the pandemic, making Facebook earn up to $1.1 billion in revenue.**

Mainstream social media platforms have a huge influence on the information environment. So be aware of any exciting content you might see on the internet. Fabricated stories are designed to pray on our emotions and gut reactions so it is important to equip yourself with a critical approach. Let's dive into some of the misinformation entrepreneurs that have made their lies into a profitable business.

"Your purchase directly supports Alex Jones and his Infowars operations"

"With a small monthly subscription fee you can explore the world's largest library of conscious media: Gaia is ready for you"

"9 days to go! Pre-order your copy of 'The Truth about Vaccines' and receive bonus gifts"

Explore our catalogue of disinformation here.

Explore →

SOLUTIONS

What to do when they're coming for you

Conspiracies are created to prey on your emotions, like we have seen in the Conspiracy Cookbook. Those who spread these stories often hope they will be amplified all over the world, following the steps from the Amplification Atlas.

Sometimes this is for personal gain, other times, the Financial Fairy tales they create are for profit...

Sadly, some internet users go online with the sole purpose to troll. **A troll is internet slang for a person who frequently posts inflammatory, derogatory, toxic or hateful comments online with the intent of provoking others into displaying emotional responses or manipulating others' perception.** In the worst-case scenarios, this might result in targeted online harassment or even doxing, the practice of disclosing personally identifiable information to the public.

In August 2022, the Canadian Twitch streamer and transgender activist Clara Sorrenti (a.k.a. Keffals) was doxed and swatted after an email impersonating Sorrenti expressing intent to harm city councillors of Ontario. After this incident, she went to a hotel, but when trolls published her whereabouts online, she was still tormented, including through "prank" pizza orders.

✳ Weathering the storm

- Google yourself! How available is my personal information? Are you okay with this? There is always the right to be forgotten.
- Use a VPN or Tor browser
- Check your privacy settings
- Use two factor identification & different passwords for your accounts
- Familiarise yourself with reporting tools
- Use anonymous accounts if possible

Take a raincheck

- Do not leave your notifications on at all times
- Make sure you have support from people on the same platform you are using
- Take breaks! Make sure you spend enough time doing other activities and getting fresh air
- Block trolls
- Avoid doom scrolling, especially at night

Clearing the clouds

- Report threats immediately
- Change all your passwords if attacked
- Do not respond to personal attacks (Don't feed the trolls)
- Make screenshots and create an incident log
- Find support, share your experiences

But most importantly... **Take a break from social media if you feel overwhelmed and share your (negative) experiences with others** to raise awareness and break taboos!
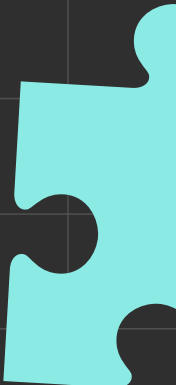
Dangerous Dictionary

The Wicked Words

Are you struggling to understand the difference between disinformation and misinformation? No idea what an incel is or where QAnon comes from?

We've taken a selection of words surrounding the topic of conspiracy theories and defined them. Take a look at our **living dictionary online.**

Taking words into your own hands

Reporting

The easiest way to get rid of toxic content is to get platforms or users to remove their comments.

If comments are illegal, or if they go against the rules of the social media platform, you could **report it to either law enforcement or to the social media platform** you found it on.

But, since we are talking to real life people here, you can also **start a conversation** and ask the user directly in a private message.

Responding

While the message is still online we can use different approaches to reduce the impact of the content.

One approach is to **debunk, fact-check, or use counter & alternative narratives and steer the conversation in a different direction.** Most people online will only look at content and not engage in a conversation, so it is important to make sure that a different perspective is also available.

If we leave conspiracies unchecked online, new audiences will be easier to manipulate. So **act in the comment sections!** Start a polite conversation and steer people in the right direction of factual information, people who share conspiracy theories might not have access to the right information.

Remember **that it is okay to be sceptical of certain things,** but it gets problematic when people start to believe someone else's lies.

Elf-Determination: grassroots movements spreading positive narratives on social media

In times of upheaval, when people are concerned or unsure about the future, disinformation tends to spread easily.

In February 2022, when Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, anxiety around the safety of the Ukrainian people and the possibility of expansion of violence into Europe, as well as the speed at which the situation was progressing, created an opening that false information and propaganda could fill.

As well as this, since 2014, the Russian government has been expanding their use of online propaganda and disinformation.

With the help of the **European Observatory of Online Hate** analysis tool, we set up a dashboard channel to monitor messaging around Russian propaganda and anti-disinformation collectives.

Several grassroots movements have been working tirelessly to combat conspiracies and disinformation in the online sphere, using a variety of methods from memes and shitposting, to spamming comments with kindness.

Russian "information warfare"

Spreading disinformation online is much cheaper than traditional forms of media, and has been an increasingly effective way for the Kremlin to broadcast their propaganda and manipulate public debate in Russia, as well as in other countries.

Increasingly, this Russian information warfare space has been taken over by internet "trolls", whose purpose is not only to spread disinformation and propaganda, but to mount massive online spam attacks on figures who are posting content that is critical of the Russian government.
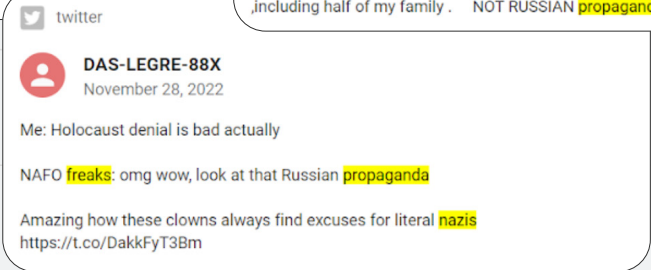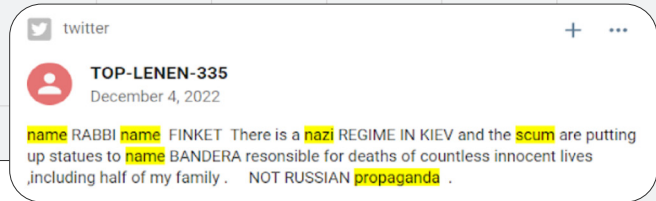
Since 2015, Russia has been using so-called "troll-factories", sometimes employing hundreds of people, to engage in spreading propaganda on social media on a wider scale.

The emphasis in these troll factories is on making profiles and content which appear authentic, as well as trying to reach "volunteers" who will then amplify their propaganda of their own free will, rather than programming "bot" accounts which are much more likely to be flagged as spam by social media sites.

While these trolls work to spread Kremlin propaganda in countries around the globe, it is particularly prominent in neighbouring countries, those with stronger ties to Russian media or who have been most closely affected by the neighbouring war in Ukraine.

To counteract the Russian disinformation propaganda, some grassroots movements have been expanding in Europe.

Their common ambition is to embark on a "fact-checking war", by debunking false information and tracking hateful comments circulated in the media. We have investigated some of the most relevant ones.

twitter
LEP-ILUNO-99C
December 2, 2022

name name name Yeah everyone in Donbas just loves the Ukrainian government there never was any political instability in Ukraine because they are perfect and they can do no wrong. The SBU never tortured civilians and nazi battalions never committed warcrimes it's all Russian propaganda

twitter
TOP-LENEN-335
December 4, 2022

name RABBI name FINKET There is a nazi REGIME IN KIEV and the scum are putting up statues to name BANDERA resonsible for deaths of countless innocent lives ,including half of my family .   NOT RUSSIAN propaganda .

twitter
DAS-LEGRE-88X
November 28, 2022

Me: Holocaust denial is bad actually

NAFO freaks: omg wow, look at that Russian propaganda

Amazing how these clowns always find excuses for literal nazis
https://t.co/DakkFyT3Bm

An army of positivity

In daylight, they are actors, bartenders, doctors, students, and business people, during the night they have an unusual hustle: fighting the "information war" against Russian disinformation.

Meet the Elves: a voluntary-based grassroots movement coming together to monitor and debunk Russian disinformation whose name was to juxtapose to the Russian trolls. The movement was founded in Lithuania in 2015 after the Russian invasion of Crimea with the purpose of fighting disinformation from Moscow.

In the beginning, the Elves were just a group of three friends responding to Russian disinformation on newspaper websites.

During those times, Russia was using Facebook groups as the main tool to spread hateful and fabricated messages about the war.

Today, especially with the war in Ukraine, the Elves have become an international movement with activists operating in 13 European countries: Germany, Finland, and 11 countries from the Eastern Bloc, including the Czech Republic and Poland.

Their method is based on open-source intelligence using data that is freely available on the Internet. In fact, the movement strongly denounces any illegal activity, such as hacking espionage, but restricts itself to monitoring and debunking fake pro-Kremlin propaganda through simple explanations and memes.

In other neighbouring countries, this strategy has been officially adopted by the education system.

In Finland, the government has a long history of implementing and promoting media education for its citizens.

In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, it was clear that the information war was moving online. Hence, Finland increased their campaigns and training to face down the Kremlin's propaganda.

Their approach does not involve school programmes only, but the whole society, ranging from government departments, NGOs to universities. Media platforms continue to evolve so it is important that every level of society is educated and informed about these changes.

Trolling the trolls with humour

Another grassroots organisation has used the Russian trolls' own internet warfare tactics against them, in an attempt to stifle the spread of Russian disinformation related to the war in Ukraine, and to raise awareness of accurate information related to the war.

In May 2022, the North Atlantic Fellas Organisation (NAFO), a play on the name North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), was created by a Twitter user named Kama. In response to Russian trolls using memes to circulate propaganda, they started adding 'the Fella', a modified version of the 'doge' meme, to photographs from Ukraine.
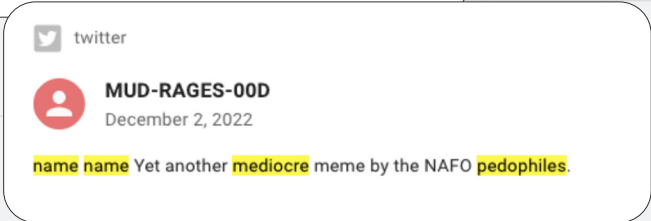
As the social media movement grew, these 'Fellas' were used in images and TikTok videos to mock Russian military propaganda and draw support for the Ukrainian military.

These memes are generally in English, and are intended not for a Russian audience, but to keep Western audiences engaged with the war in Ukraine.

Just as Russian trolls aim to create chaos in the information sphere on top of their attempts to encourage sympathy for the war in Ukraine, members of NAFO aim to drown out Russian propaganda in a way that is playful and ironic.

Not only are NAFO members able to support Ukrainian efforts against Russia in their own way, but this method of activism also "offers an escape and a feeling of camaraderie". The work of NAFO has also had an impact in the offline world, with members selling merchandise and custom 'fellas' memes to raise money for the Ukrainian military and displaced Ukrainian families.

Despite NAFO's effort in counteracting Russian trolls and representing "an example of online communities organically responding to disinformation from governments", with the help of our monitoring tool, we tracked hateful speech against the community. As shown in the tweets, from the work they are doing, NAFO is facing backlash from pro-Russian social media accounts.

twitter

MOP-UPPAN-77A
November 28, 2022

this is just like the idiot channers doing pilled memes, i fucking hate it

twitter

MUD-RAGES-00D
December 2, 2022

name name Yet another mediocre meme by the NAFO pedophiles.

Compassion in the comments section

#IAmHere is a civil society initiative started by a Swedish woman in 2016 as a Facebook group. The idea started because she was noticing a flood of online hateful comments and she decided to counter misogynistic and racist comments «in a calm, non-aggressive way».

The underlying idea was to reverse the confrontational nature of the online conversation into a healthy and safe one. As of 2021, the movement became an international network of 150,000 volunteers across 15 countries.

> Their method has been developed based on Facebook's architecture: they use the platform algorithm to amplify comments that are logically argued, well-written, and fact-based, whether they come from #IAmHere activists or not. They do so by liking and commenting on each other's comments.

The idea is to drive the attention away from the toxic and hateful conversation and to give space to their positive counterspeech instead.

The target audience of the #IAmHere movement is the so-called 'silent majority', that is the majority of readers that read but do not engage with social media content.

This is a broad spectrum of an audience (which is **estimated** to be 90% of the total social media users) with moderate views, which could be easily inoculated against believing and sharing hate speech.

The characteristic of the #IAmHere movement is the soft approach, in which respect, empathy, and factfulness are the core values.

The topics of disinformation tackled by the #IAmHere activists in each of the 15 countries may differ depending on the issues that the country is currently facing.

The movement turns their attention towards certain waves of hate whenever they see it as necessary, and in February 2022 at the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they put out a call on their Facebook page reminding their members the importance not only of providing support to the people of Ukraine, but of countering disinformation and propaganda that would circulate on social media.

Media literacy for the win?

Citizen-led movements have put their time and effort into making the Internet a safe and trustworthy place. In the 'post-truth' era we are all living in, it is paramount that citizens are trained to think critically, fact-check, evaluate, and interpret the information we receive.

Media platforms continue to evolve so it is important that every level of society is educated and informed about these changes. Media literacy helps us make informed decisions and find relevant facts.

The grassroots organisations and the Finnish example are playing an important role in establishing what objective reality is, and are of inspiration for promoting a well-functioning democracy, equipping citizens with the right tools to be resilient against disinformation and hate narratives.

How to talk to a conspiracy theorist

A conspiracy theorist may be your friend, family member, neighbour, or a colleague at work. Although talking to them about their beliefs can be incredibly difficult and challenging, having these conversations is becoming increasingly important.

Here's a list of tips on how to have these conversations.

1 Be empathetic and respectful

Show honest interest and begin by listening to the person, allowing them to describe the theories they believe in. Find out if there is a reason why they have turned to conspiracy theories, or if they are experiencing grievances in their life that have pushed them to have these beliefs. Listening to them first will also give you a more informed position on what they believe, so you are able to tailor your response.

2 Have private conversations

Message individuals directly, or better yet, have a conversation in person. Don't publicly shame someone for their views, especially on social media, as that will likely backfire.

3 Avoid being dismissive

By presenting yourself as open minded and happy to listen to the person, you can build a level of trust that is necessary to engage in such a difficult conversation. Try not to tell the person their views and opinions are wrong, rather find out what the context is in which they developed these opinions.

4 Understand that conspiracy theories have small elements of truth

Conspiracy theories all start from somewhere, and are usually based on small elements of truth. Agreeing on this can help build trust.

5 Ask questions

Asking questions can help to provoke reflection and critical thinking from the person. Ensure that you ask questions without judgement, so as to plant seeds of reflection in their heads.

6 Facts, figures and research

Come prepared, and present your research neutrally. Use independent fact-checking websites like **Full Fact** or **PolitiFact.** Keep in mind that the person may still refute anything you present them with, no matter how neutrally you do it.

7 Remember that change can take time

Be realistic when talking to a conspiracy theorist, and if trying to make loved ones understand your perspective is impacting your mental health, it might be best to stop having these conversations for now. They could still change over a longer period of time however, so try not to cut off all contact with them and lose your relationship.

Unravel the Conspiracy behind conspiracies

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