

Political Disinformation Model

Introduction to Disinformation

Each of us has lied, and each of us has been lied to. It's simple enough to see why lying works. Our universe is replete with information of which we are not aware. Trillions of data points and billions of perspectives culminate in a system that is impossible for any one person to understand entirely.

Even when we do understand—or think we do—how many of us have the ability to influence what happens around us predictably? Bad things happen that we can't explain, and we can't explain why we can't explain them or how to escape them. We begin to doubt our own validity and lose trust in our awareness and cognition. We ask ourselves questions to which we can't find answers: what if I miss something, what if I don't know enough, and how do I know I'll be better off by trying to answer the questions I'm confronting?

These unknowns tinge our perspectives with a lack of safety, threats to our existence, and a sense of abandonment. They make us feel incapable of improving our own lives, and we don't find the support and mutual understanding we all long for. What do we have to lose by believing that someone else will fix it for us?

Disinformation involves the intentional spread of false, misleading, or incomplete information to alter behavior. We commonly see it in politics—in the United States and around the world and employed by actors in every segment of the ideological spectrum. At its most effective, it's masked by ideas or promises that we want to be true about the world and don't know how to bring about or for which we don't know we can survive the risks required to make them real. To create a world where democracy works well for its constituents, we sought to identify how disinformation works, so we can uncover where it's in use and how to conduct conversation about ideas honestly.

One example of disinformation messaging in wide use today is outlined in the section below.

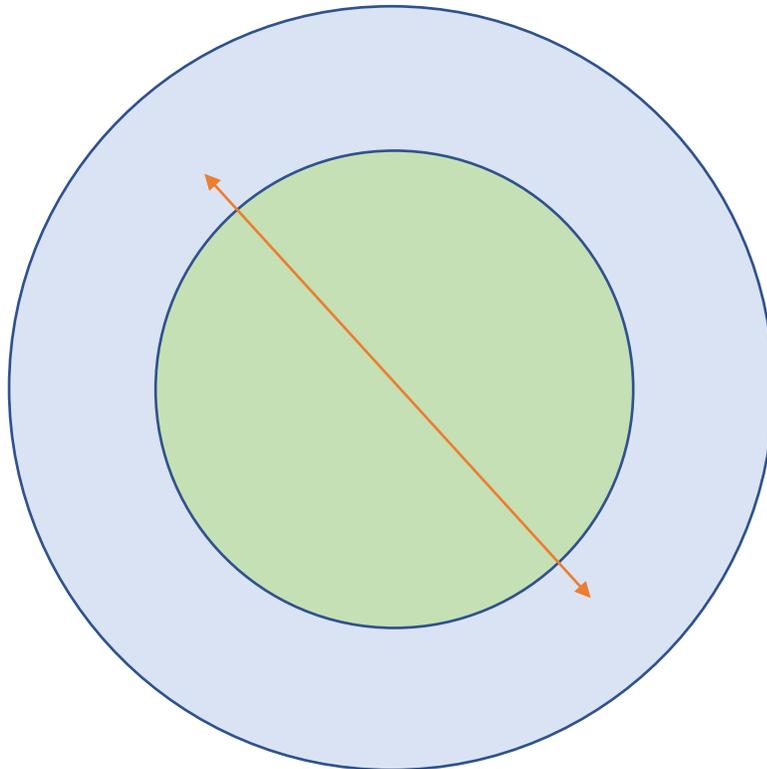
Political Messaging Response

1. A message of "hope" is crafted to cut through the fears of being personally responsible for or bearing the costs of the solution.
 - a. The world is broken and doesn't work for you. "They" messed it up.
 - b. "You" are right and primary.
 - c. We are "fighting for you."
 - d. We're "strong" and focused on "winning."
 - e. We "take back" what you've lost and regain "control."
 - f. Alternatives are threatening, costly, and weakening.

- g. Information is corrupt and untrustworthy (this is layered throughout and runs in tandem, not always from the same source or setting as the political message).
2. Self-identification with a group reinforces that you are right.
 - a. You lose an internal reference in the interest of protecting the—now external—framing of the problem.

Disinformation Mental Model

1. Reality is a closed system, represented by the large circle.
2. Our collective knowledge of how our environment works (the inner circle) is smaller than the environment itself.
3. Disinformation (the line) cuts across and stays ahead of our conscious understanding of reality by traveling a shorter path than the path of information and exploiting the unknowns beyond the limit of our understanding. The line can expand at a faster rate than our awareness, which grows as the area of the inner circle expands. Users of disinformation rely on the inability of reality to catch up to it and the continued ability to outpace new information.



Our Communication

Grabbing power and achieving ambition can occur without truth, but participating in a fair and equal democracy to better the lives of its stakeholders cannot.

The nature of politics, government, and life requires us to face problems to which we don't have all the answers. We'll sometimes be missing information, expertise, and the perspective necessary to understand what we're up against and to formulate a solution. Admitting to the size and scope of our unknowns will create the opportunity to work together with the people who can fill them, but it will require us and everyone who is partnering with us to accept the risk associated with our questions and enacting related policies and plans to address them.

We'll incorporate diverse opinions and vantage points to build a layered and nuanced understanding of the topics we cover. When we're wrong or we make a mistake, we'll have to admit to it. We'll need to make our motives clear, so others can evaluate them and the corresponding communication we use to disseminate information. When we don't have all the data to construct an argument, we'll be responsible for framing the questions that lead us to it. No sooner will we have answered one question, when another will arise.

In living up to the requirements of truth and democracy, we will all face uncertainties, but it's crucial to point out that these uncertainties have always been present. We're merely recognizing them and inviting you to confront them with us.