



CENTER FOR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT (CAPA) THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF KURDISTAN



Misinformation and Disinformation: How do I Protect Myself From Both

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Agenda

Is there Truth in Media?

Can I distinguish fake news from reality?

What is the future of misleading stories?

Critical Thinking Skills Helps Protect us From Ourselves and Influence Others



Who am I?

Born in the US, and moved to Armenia, with my family, in 2014

Have an extensive background in computer system architecture

Teaching since 2015: Computer Organization, Scientific Method and Critical Thinking, and How Things Work

What qualifies me to discuss this topic?

Very early user of the internet confronting historical revisionism

Technical Intelligence Analyst at Sun Microsystems and IBM



What Happened to News and Information?

Before the internet

Social media, the seven-second rule and instant news

Lack of critical thinking

Susceptibility to conformation bias, confirmation bias and search engines

Propaganda

- Disinformation
- Misinformation
- Fog of war
- Pseudo-science

An Example of Disinformation within Propaganda



Russian Military Technology Proves Ineffectual

July 30, 2026, Institute of Real News. Over the past few days, Russian advanced military technology has exposed its limitations, again as Ukrainian forces destroyed several Russian T-14 tanks, claimed to be fourth generation, as Russian forces entered the city of Odesa. This is further indication of the lack of Russian military technology resulting from the crumbling of the Russian economy after its invasion of Ukraine.

What is wrong here?



Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbles

“If you tell a big enough lie and keep repeating it, people eventually start to believe it.”

What is happening psychologically

Illusion of Truth: our brains often mistake familiarity for truth

Cognitive Fluency: when something feels smooth and familiar, less likely to question it

Authority: when lies comes from perceived authority we are more likely to believe it.

Bandwagon Effect: we assume if others believe something, it's probably correct

Emotional Appeal Over Logic: Big emotional lies often tap into fear, anger, or identity

Confirmation Bias: accepting information that aligns with what you believe and rejects what doesn't.



What Happened to the Truth

Forces are after your minds and pocketbook

Technological advances pervade the perception that anybody can look credible

The truth is out there, but ...

If there is real news, there is also propaganda, gossip, satire, lexicon tricks, unverified reports, commentary, rhetoric, much of this is called “fake news.”

You can find the truth, but it increasingly take a huge effort. You can also suspend judgement, which is also increasingly challenging especially by youth.

Bad news always travels faster than real news, especially with modern technology.



Information or 'News'

False information is spread quickly through technology, and there are two main categories:

Misinformation: Incorrect reporting that misleads

Disinformation: False reporting that is spread specifically to mislead. Why?

Financial – to make you spend money or simple click-bait

Political – mislead people encouraging them to adopt certain political attitudes and behaviors.

Example: April 23, 2026 Trump claims Armenian PM Pashinyan will allow US planes to use Armenian air bases for actions against Iran. Pure disinformation!



Taking the Effort to Research and Delay Judgement

Do you always believe everything you see, read, or hear?

When is a generally accepted narrative worthy of being accepted?

- What is responsible for global warming?
- Official explanations for the 9/11 WTC contradict chemistry and physics
- Was the global response to COVID-19 in the public health interest?

Luckily, in our part of the world we have more **skepticism** than usual. But don't turn into a **skeptic**! Sometimes researching takes a huge effort and is known by those to generate fake news and narratives.



How Does Fake News Spread?

Fake news creators generate material that evokes strong emotion, which leads us to share it without checking the facts.

When one might read, “the stock market is going rise tomorrow,” the first thing you should do is to ask, “why will the stock market fall tomorrow.”

When the Trump’s Truth social post came out about Pashinyan and Iran, rather than to post it to FB, I waited and searched for an official denial, because it would have to be fake. Why?



Social Media's Roll in Mis- and Disinformation

The structure of social media is based on showing what is popular. In fact, an internet search is the best way to encourage confirmation bias!

Worse, AI is trained on biases in the internet! When AI became available, I would use it for copyediting and it would completely remove sentences!

It is difficult to understand where information is coming from. Sure, AI generated deep fakes are easier to identify.



The Role of Critical Thinking in Self-Preservation

Critical Thinking is the ability to carefully analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make reasoned logical judgements rather than accepting things at face value.

Self-deception is a way we can maintain our beliefs while ignoring or avoiding contradictory evidence.

Analysis must include everything even from sources we hate, or consider as coming from enemies.

There are five generally accepted types of self-deception: biased information seeking, biased interpretation, misremembering, and rationalization in convincing ourselves that a lie is true.

Remember, repetitive information, whether fact or not, increases its credibility.



Becoming a Better Critical Thinker

Critical thinking is difficult. You must decide when it's appropriate enough!

Research suggests that people are uncritical about their own abilities and critical thinking.

One cannot be a critical thinker without the ability to admit you were wrong !!!!

Check your emotions first and check sources before you share something.

Recognize your biases and those of others.

Distinguish opinion from facts and conclusions based on invalid assumptions.

Examine anything that uses statistics or makes conclusions based on surveys.

Consider it acceptable to admit you don't know something, until you do! You don't always have to have an instant answer!



Elements of Critical Thinking

- Background knowledge is most important
- Attitude and values, yours and those you are evaluating
- Rhetoric and use of language
- Logic
- Argumentation



Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking rewards you with:

- Personal protection like learning martial arts
- Empowerment
- Civic duty
- Truth and Wisdom



Surviving in the 21st Century

There are many forces that have local, regional, and global goals.

It is not up to anybody else other than you to evaluate the forces that are being used to influence you. Don't simply dismiss anything.

We are all susceptible to aspects of cognitive warfare, where our own biases, insecurities, and ignorance can be used against our interests.



My Contact Information





THANK YOU!