



Malicious Actors Use of Disinformation

Disinformation is the spread of false information intended to deliberately deceive or mislead. A variety of malicious actors use disinformation as a tool to extort money or information, spread propaganda, disseminate conspiracy theories, incite distrust and confusion, or compel violence. These actors often use the Internet and social media platforms to quickly reach targets and accelerate the spread of disinformation.

CRIMINALS

EXTORTION

WHAT	Extortion is the act of inducing or compelling a person to do something through wrongful use of force or fear. Extortion may involve threatening to reveal damaging or embarrassing information about an individual unless they comply with a demand.
END GOAL	Typically, extortion is used to gain money or public action of some nature. This might include spreading disinformation on a specific topic or incident.
EXAMPLE	In 2018, Yanette Rodriguez Acosta was sentenced to a 88-month jail term for her involvement in a virtual kidnapping extortion scheme. Virtual kidnapping is a type of phone scam in which a criminal falsely claims they have kidnapped a victim's loved one. These criminals then demand a ransom for their safe return.



Yanette Rodriguez Acosta (source: Daily Mail)

TERRORIST OR EXTREMIST GROUPS

PROPAGANDA

WHAT	Terrorist and extremist groups use propaganda to recruit supporters and urge them to conduct attacks all over the world in support of the specific group. The term propaganda is often used interchangeably with the term disinformation.
END GOAL	Propaganda is purposeful and often involves the use of bias or disinformation to advance or undermine a political cause. Extremist and terrorist groups typically use propaganda to radicalize, inspire, and incite supporters to commit violence against innocent civilians.
EXAMPLE	In New York, eight people were killed after Sayfullo Saipov ploughed them down with a truck. There were 90 ISIS propaganda videos found on his phone and he admitted the propaganda had inspired him to commit the act.



Sayfullo Saipov (source: NBC News)

STATE-SPONSORED ACTORS

DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

WHAT	State-actors deliberately spread false information and narratives to amplify existing political and social divisions. These campaigns exploit social media and have used BOTS—fake social media accounts—and SHILLS—“real” people purposefully shaping online discussions—to accelerate the spread of disinformation.
END GOAL	State-backed disinformation campaigns aim to exacerbate social, cultural, and political divisions and drive individuals to support a particular political or social cause.
EXAMPLE	In 2016, Russia created Facebook pages called “Heart of Texas” and “United Muslims of America” that promoted competing causes, one for and the other against refugee issues and Islam. By parroting existing views and tensions, Moscow was able to incite Americans to engage in verbal attacks and confrontation.



Post from Russian operated Facebook Page (source: Houstonia)

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS

EVIDENCE FABRICATION

WHAT	Conspiracy theorists typically use fabricated evidence to create a false explanation or theory about a specific individual, incident, or topic. Fabricated evidence is any information that is false or intentionally altered in order to mislead.
END GOAL	Evidence fabrication and conspiracy theories are designed to sow confusion or distrust and may be intended to destabilize or exacerbate social, cultural, or political divisions.
EXAMPLE	In 2016, North Carolina resident Edgar Welch drove to DC to rescue children that he believed were being held in tunnels under a local pizza restaurant, firing shots into the restaurant as he investigated. Welch allegedly believed a conspiracy theory known as “Pizzagate,” that was trending on social media platforms such as Twitter, where most of the retweets came from bots.



Welch's arrest in DC (source: NBC News)