

# TRUE COSTS of MISINFORMATION WORKSHOP PROGRAM

An Online Workshop Organized by the [Technology and Social Change Project](#)  
at the Shorenstein Center, Harvard Kennedy School

**March 9 to 10, 2022**  
**10AM to 1PM EST, Online**

## Hosts

**Dr. Joan Donovan**, Research Director of the Shorenstein Center and  
Director of the TaSC Project

**Dr. Jonathan Corpus Ong**, Associate Professor at UMass Amherst and  
TaSC Fellow at the Shorenstein Center

**Gabrielle Lim**, PhD Student at the University of Toronto and  
TaSC Researcher at the Shorenstein Center

## Event Managers

**Megan O'Neil**, TaSC Project Manager at the Shorenstein Center

**Lauren Faz**, TaSC Project Assistant at the Shorenstein Center



HARVARD Kennedy School  
**SHORENSTEIN CENTER**  
on Media, Politics and Public Policy



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# WELCOME

Welcome to the TaSC team's largest online workshop to date. This event addresses the very urgent challenges for misinformation research to effectively document digital harms to diverse communities and precisely measure financial costs of misinformation to society at large. We've gathered interdisciplinary researchers, civil society leaders, journalists and fact-checkers, media and technology practitioners to debate questions of methodology and, more crucially, reflect on questions of ethics and politics in the misinformation space.

This two-day event lays out provocative yet also provisional responses to how exactly to define and categorize various costs of misinformation. We will hear researchers from the TaSC team, 25 academic and industry paper presentations in nine panels, and four practitioner roundtables.

This event intends to push the boundaries of disinformation studies and make connections across disciplines and sectors, build new relationships that can grow the field, and open up collaborations—including opportunities for participants to contribute for TaSC's [Media](#)

[Manipulation Casebook](#) and a themed section for the *International Journal of Communication*. We've scheduled time for networking and project pitching to close out both days.

## Intention Setting

We respect all participants and work from our highest intentions. We want everyone to do well and be themselves. It's okay to present positions that are experimental and provocative. It's also okay to disagree with others' ideas as long as we do not attack the person (or caricature an entire practice or methodological tradition).

We are mindful of our own positionality and acknowledge our own biases and limitations. We engage other disciplines, methodologies, and genres of knowledge production with openness and curiosity.

We are generous when citing other colleagues' work (including those not in the workshop) and amplifying less-heard voices and perspectives.

We expect paper presenters to complete their presentations between 12 to 14 minutes and invite engagement in the form of open and provocative questions rather than close with firm conclusions. We expect moderators to be mindful that diverse voices could speak and be heard in each panel. Also please remember that we can still post on the Chat Box, tweet and email each other.

We are mindful in our citation and we make proper attributions in any tweets, posts, and publications—especially when it comes to acknowledging paper presenters' original work. We respect paper presenters who say during their presentation that their work should not be cited publicly. For practitioner roundtables on day 2, we will be careful not to make specific attributions, as participants here are not representing their organizations in an official capacity.

We assigned workshop participants some key roles as Moderators and Discussants to help facilitate meaningful exchange and respectful dialogue. Members of the TaSC team will be present in all the breakout panels. If you experience any problems or issues over the next two days, feel free to chat with Megan O'Neil during the event or email Jonathan Corpus Ong ([jcong@hks.harvard.edu](mailto:jcong@hks.harvard.edu)) after the event.

## Measuring the Costs of Misinformation:

### What Is at Stake?

Over six years into labeling and debunking "fake news" and the rapid growth of misinformation studies as an interdisciplinary field, researchers and policymakers are still often at odds with each other when it comes to measuring and communicating the social harms of misinformation.

Researchers bear burdens of quantification, description, and storytelling to advocate for adequate support that could be extended to vulnerable communities, frontline responders, and the public at large. But across many disciplines, methodological traditions, and political commitments, researchers themselves are in disagreement with the efficacy of specific interventions, the tools for measuring direct or indirect media “effects”, and the precise culpability of the political elites and social media platforms at the center of controversies. While private industry has taken initiatives to quantify financial costs of misinformation for their own risk mitigation and organizational forecasts, this event holds space for diverse participants to discuss how the field can refine its frameworks for measurement, learn from impact assessment models of other disciplines, and harness the diversity of tools, methods, and traditions at our disposal for a strategic “whole-of-society” approach to fighting misinformation.

This event is thus a creative experiment at gathering researchers, journalists, tech experts, and activists to discuss the opportunities as well as risks in developing frameworks for describing and measuring the “true costs of misinformation”. We consider the potentials for developing a universal framework for risk and impact assessment that could be a helpful tool for policymaker advocacy and donor engagement, just as we debate the specific strengths and weaknesses of diverse misinformation interventions as applied to diverse cultural contexts. We acknowledge the unevenness in which evidence of digital harms have been collected by researchers and represented by journalists (most of whom are in the global North) and seek to disrupt the standard politics of knowledge production that silences marginal voices. We aim to reflect on how researchers, journalists, activists, and tech experts can help build sustainable coalitions and communities that could vivify the social and human costs of misinformation to people in harm’s way and creatively communicate evidence and data beyond sector and silo.

## SCHEDULE

### Day 1: Wednesday, March 9

#### **10-1020AM: WELCOME AND INTENTION-SETTING**

Welcome Remarks by Laura Manley, Director of Shorenstein Center

Intention Setting and Opening Questions by Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong, TaSC Research Fellow

#### **1020-1030AM: INTERACTIVE SESSION**

Gabrielle Lim and Jonathan - [Pol.is survey](#) and [survey results and analysis](#)

#### **1030-1130AM: PLENARY PANEL**

- “True Costs of Misinformation,” Dr Joan Donovan, TaSC Research Director
- “Scaling as Cost-Cutting: Corporate Evasions, AI, and the Demands of Involving Communities in Detecting Disinformation,” Dr Sahana Udupa, Joan Shorenstein Fellow of Harvard Kennedy School

- "Contextualizing the Phenomenon of Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech to Humanitarian Response," Nathaniel Raymond, Eva Martin and Olivia Mooney, Yale University.
- Moderator: Sushma Raman (Harvard Carr Center for Human Rights Policy)

### **1130-1135: 5-minute break and introductions to the first breakout session**

### **1135-1235: BREAKOUT SESSION 1**

#### Panel 1A: Values and Valuations

- Judith Donath (Berkman Klein Center at Harvard), "The Cost of Honesty: Using a signaling based model to understand the impact of new technology on trust and deception."
- Catherine Smith (Northeastern U), "The Incommensurable Economy: Misinformation, Markets, and the Valuation of "Narrative" in Cyberspace".
- Joseph Ucsinski, Adam Enders, Casey Klofstad, and Justin Stoler (U of Miami). "Do COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation Increase Vaccine Refusal? Assessing the Costs of Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation"
- Moderator: Marya Mtshali (Shorenstein Center)

#### Panel 1B Conspiracism and Radicalization.

- Alice Marwick and Katherine Furl (U of North Carolina - Chapel Hill). "From Radicalized to Mainstream: The Sociotechnical Effects of Disinformation"
- Steven Feldstein (Carnegie Council). "What Is Driving Conservatism's Post-Democratic Turn in America?"
- Heba Shaaban (Cornell) and David Scales (Yale). "Profiling COVID-19 Medical Misinformation in Arabic on Social Media."
- Moderator: Sara Shirazyan (Stanford/Meta)

#### Panel 1C: Gendered Harms of Misinformation

- Rhoda Bandora (Fake Drugs Project). "'Fake' prevention: exploring the threat of fake pharmaceuticals to Tanzanian women's access to reproductive care"
- Kolina Koltai, Rachel Moran and Melinda Haughey (U of Washington). "#Girlboss misinfo: Vaccine misinformation for profit in the age of MLMs, alternative health, and influencers."
- DeVan Hankerson Madrigal and Dhanaraj Thakur (Center for Democracy and Technology). "Gendered disinformation: Impacts on Women of Color Political Candidates".
- Moderator: Tina Purnat (WHO Switzerland)

### **1235-1240PM: 5-minute break/ transition to breakout groups**

### **1240-1PM: Networking Event / Breakout Groups Moderated by TaSC Fellows**

- Room 1: Public Interest Tech (April Glaser)

- Room 2: Meme Wars (Emily Dreyfuss)
- Room 3: Supporting Local News (Jennifer Preston)
- Room 4: Submitting for the True Costs Journal Special Issue (Jonathan Corpus Ong)
- Room 5: Race and Technology (Brooklyne Gipson)
- Room 6: Medical Misinformation (Jennifer Nilsen)
- Room 7: Digital Harassment and Extreme Speech (Sahana Udupa)
- Room 8: Geopolitics and International Relations (Gabrielle Lim)
- Room 9: Misinformation in Communities of Color (Marya Mtshali)
- Room 10: Computational Methods (Alexei Sisulu Abrahams)

## DAY 2: Thursday, March 10

**10-1010AM: WELCOME AND SHORT PRESENTATIONS FROM TASC MEDIA MANIPULATION CASEBOOK TEAM (Gabrielle Lim) and TASC NEWS LEADERS PROGRAM (Emily Dreyfuss)**

### **1010-10:55AM: BREAKOUT PANELS SESSION 2**

#### Panel 2A: Campaigns and Advertising

- Joshua Braun (UMass Amherst). "Disasters, Disinformation, and Digital Advertising: Normal Accidents in the Digital Age"
- Amogh Dar Sharma (Oxford). "Political Finance and Patronage behind Misinformation: Evidence from India's Election Campaigns"
- Moderator: Phil Howard (Oxford Internet Institute)

#### Panel 2B: Digital Harms in the Global South

- Melissa Tully (U of Iowa) and Dani Madrid-Morales (U of Houston). "Exploring Audience Agency and Accountability for Addressing Misinformation in Kenya and Senegal".
- Lorena Regatierri (Netlab/UFRJ). "Disinformation at scale in Brazil: The case of state propagandists against the climate justice movement"
- Moderator: Patricia Toledo de Campos Mello (Columbia U / Folha de Sao Paulo)

#### Panel 2C: Transnational Flows of Asian Hate

- Rachel Kuo (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), Lan Li and Madhavi Reddi (U of North Carolina - Chapel Hill). "Transnational Information Systems: Multilingual and Community-Engaged Methods for Studying Mis/Disinformation in Asian Diaspora Communities"
- Yiming Wang (U of Wisconsin-Madison). "Believe and Share Conspiracies about the Outgroup: Priming Effects and Conspiracies in the Context of Sino-US Vaccine Development."
- Moderator: Bridget Todd (There Are No Girls on the Internet podcast)

**1055-1100: 5 minute break**

## **1100-1150: PRACTITIONER-LED ROUNDTABLES**

### R1. COSTS TO JOURNALISTS

Discussion Leader: Emily Dreyfuss (Shorenstein Center)

Lead discussants: Natalia Viana (Agencia Publica), Nikita Roy (NRI Nation), Tara McKelvy (BBC)

### R2. TRUE COSTS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Discussion Leader: Jonathan Corpus Ong (Shorenstein Center)

Lead discussants: Diana Parzik (USAID), Aliya Bhatia (Center for Democracy and Technology), Daniel Arnaudo (National Democratic Institute)

### R3. COSTS TO FACT-CHECKERS

Discussion Leader: Catesby Holmes (Shorenstein Center)

Lead respondents: Hannah Ajakaiye (ICFJ), Cristina Tardaguilla (International Center for Journalists), Uzair Rizvi (Agence France Press), Raheemat Adeniran (Dubawa)

### R4. PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY, aka THE PRICE PLATFORMS SHOULD PAY?

Discussion Leader: Rob Faris (Shorenstein Center)

Lead respondents: Joe Posner (Vox), Justin Hendrix (Tech Policy Press), Arushi Saxena (Twitter)

## **1150-1155: 5 minute break**

## **1155-1255: BREAKOUT PANELS SESSION 3**

### Panel 3A: Misinformation Mitigation

- Beth Goldberg (Jigsaw). "Psychological inoculation improves resilience to misinformation on social media"
- Malika Mehrotra and Ziad Reslan (Google). "Evolving Platform Product Policies in a World of Ever-Increasing Political Misinformation"
- Morgan Wack, Joseph Schafer, Ian Kennedy, Andrew Beers, Emma Spiro, and Kate Starbird (U of Washington). "Legislating Uncertainty: Election Policies and the Amplification of Misinformation in the 2020 U.S. Election"
- Moderator: Hannah Ajakaiye (Knight Fellow, ICFJ)

### Panel 3B: Ethics and Politics of Misinformation Research.

- Martin Riedl, Inga Trauthig and Samuel Woolley (U of Texas - Austin). "Between community harm and community empowerment: Research challenges and opportunities when studying dis/misinformation"
- Sarah Wiley (U of Minnesota). "Funds for Facts: The Dynamics of Philanthropic Relationships Between Google, Facebook, And Fact-Checkers"
- Gabrielle Lim (Harvard Shorenstein Center) and Samantha Bradshaw (Stanford Internet Observatory). "Unpacking the Effect of Regime Types on Responses to Misinformation."
- Moderator: Justin Hendrix (Tech Policy Press)

# BREAKOUT PANELS PAPER ABSTRACTS

## Panel 1A. Values and Valuations.

**Judith Donath, Harvard University. “The Cost of Honesty: Using a signaling based model to understand the impact of new technology on trust and deception”.**

Signaling theory is an evolutionary model that shows how the need for reliably honest communication—and the profitability of deception—have shaped the world. Notably, it highlights how certain costs (in time, energy, risk, or resources), often mischaracterized as wasteful or harmful, guarantee honesty; this is an especially valuable insight in analyzing or designing technology, for many innovations eliminate such costs in the quest for efficiency, inadvertently making communication less reliable. This presentation will provide an introduction to signaling theory and key considerations for using it to understand human behavior, using examples that illustrate its value in analyzing the impact of new technologies on trust and deception, e.g. how can vaccine records be reliably shared? How much of a threat are sociable and persuasive bots? When does the social sharing of news encourage spreading misinformation?

**Catherine Smith, Northeastern University. “The Incommensurable Economy: Misinformation, Markets, and the Valuation of “Narrative” in Cyberspace.”**

This paper addresses the cost of misinformation within the context of a specific intangible good: “narrative,” i.e., the story we share, by first framing three key questions: 1) By what mechanism does misinformation degrade “narrative”? 2) How can the project of measurement integrate social goods like narrative which are inadequately captured by market valuation?, and 3) How can digital infrastructure better support the true value of social goods? After situating these questions vis-a-vis recent literature, I offer three contributions to the evaluation of misinformation’s costs. First, I posit a systems-dynamic model of “narrative” in cyberspace. Second, I use existing market models to calculate monetary costs of attacks on narrative. Third, in light of specific scenarios which are inadequately captured by market-based valuations, I explore the use of decentralized technologies to reproduce value mechanisms of alternative axiologies.

**Joseph Ucsinski, Adam Enders, Casey Klofstad, Justin Stoler (U of Miami). “Do COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation Increase Vaccine Refusal? Assessing the Costs of Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation.”**

Nearly 100 studies demonstrate that beliefs in COVID-19 conspiracy theories and misinformation (CTM) are negatively associated with disease preventive behaviors. These correlational findings are often interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship. However, robust literatures on health



behaviors and media effects suggest that the beliefs in CTM are endogenous to the behaviors. We employ a national survey focusing on COVID-19 CTM, vaccine hesitancy, and vaccine refusal. We show that beliefs in COVID-19 CTM constitute a singular dimension of opinion along with vaccine hesitancy, indicating that beliefs in COVID-19 CTM may be endogenous to vaccine hesitancy and refusal. Second, we use regression analysis to show that vaccine hesitancy and vaccination status are predicted by the same psychological, social, and political factors as are beliefs in COVID-19 CTM. Our findings suggest that beliefs in CTM may be endogenous to vaccine refusal implying that many are erroneously blaming online CTM for vaccine hesitancy.

## Panel 1B. Conspiracism and Radicalization.

**Alice Marwick and Katherine Furl (U of North Carolina - Chapel Hill). "From Radicalized to Mainstream: The Sociotechnical Effects of Disinformation."**

Understanding how people come to believe extremist, far-right, conspiratorial, and fringe beliefs (hereafter extremist beliefs) they encounter online is frequently understood as "radicalization," a concept formulated after 9/11 to understand jihadi terrorism. Conventionally, radicalization takes place when an innocent young person is exposed to online content and subsequently adopts extremist beliefs and commit political violence. However, fifty years of communication research on the effects of media indicates that people are not simply brainwashed by media, no matter how extreme. Extensive research into radicalization has failed to find common causes for extremism, a link between extremist ideology and behavior, or a common pathway from mainstream to radical thought or action. In contrast, literature suggests that the adoption of extremist beliefs is a gradual process of socialization. Given that the far-right's endorsement of white supremacy holds normative precedent in the United States, and the mainstreaming of these beliefs is a primary strategy of far-right political actors, referring to this process as radicalization is inaccurate and misleading. Using a sociotechnical theory of media effects which considers messaging, affordances, and audiences, we find that the adoption of extremist beliefs is a gradual process during which a person adopts the identity frames, affect, and meaning-making of an organization or community, comes to view problems as injustices, blames out-group members for these injustices, and rationalizes the use of political violence to address these injustices.

**Steven Feldstein (Carnegie Council). "What Is Driving Conservatism's Post-Democratic Turn in America?"**

Following the January 6 insurrection, many hoped that the shocking political violence witnessed in Washington would finally break the Republican party from its Trumpian fever and restore a more civil form of politics. And yet, one year after the insurrection, political partisanship, largely stoked by conservative propaganda and disinformation, remains at alarming levels. How did American conservatives reach a point where their main political messages are either blatantly anti-democratic or outright falsehoods? And are digital technology and social media responsible for the prevalence of extremist narratives permeating conservative circles? This paper argues that three factors are driving conservative illiberalism in America. First, underlying conservative polarization has been growing for decades and particularly took off in the early 2000s. Consequently, the conservative electorate as a whole has become more receptive to illiberal

political narratives. Second, mass media along with social media have reinforced two outcomes: 1) amplified conservative grievances (initially via talk radio/Rush Limbaugh, reinforced later by Fox News, and now supplemented by social media), and 2) simultaneously eroded the power of traditional party gatekeepers. Third, as a result, a new class of conservative elites, peddling conspiratorial and illiberal messages, have wrested control of the Republican party from traditional party leaders. The conservative ecosystem's illiberal transformation exemplifies the changing nature of trust, from institutional sources, overseen by referees, regulators, and authorities, to distributed models not bound by traditional strictures.

**Heba Shabaan (Cornell) and David Scales (Yale). "Profiling COVID-19 Medical Misinformation in Arabic on Social Media."**

Few studies explore the problem of misinformation in Arabic. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the MENA region, and the Arabic language is the third most popular on the platform, yet there is little moderation of Arabic-language content. To understand the costs of misinformation's unmitigated spread among Arab publics, we are building a database of medical misinformation about COVID-19 from September 2020 to March 2021 drawing from 12 varied Arabic-language fact-checking websites. We will extract a comprehensive snapshot of the COVID-19 misinformation ecosystem across the region and qualitatively and quantitatively analyze claims to understand common factors linked to higher popularity and virality of medically- and Covid-19-related Facebook posts. Ultimately, our goal is to build social media literacy and digital resilience in Arab communities while mitigating misinformation's effect on both individual health and on the erosion of trust in physicians and public health.

## Panel 1C. Gendered Harms of Misinformation.

**Rhoda Bandora (Fake Drugs Project). "'Fake' prevention: exploring the threat of fake pharmaceuticals to Tanzanian women's access to reproductive care."**

Analyzing the discourse on the apparent threat of fake pharmaceuticals in the context of Tanzania and its new political reform to end family planning, this research report traces the development of narratives surrounding the apparent threat of fake drugs, and how these narratives are constructed and disseminated. Through four months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with four working-class women from various districts in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, my research explored women's anxieties about using these medications and how this shapes the experiences in negotiating access to these drugs. Their experiences brought together issues of gender, sexuality, and reproductive health, all of which are rooted in various forms of oppression. Such oppressions are manifested in these women's bodies and in the narratives surrounding fake drugs in their communities. This ethnography has expanded on what we know about the emergence of fake pharmaceuticals, the conceptualization of fakeness, and how it is understood.

**Kolina Koltai, Rachel Moran, and Melinda Haughey (U of Washington). "#Girlboss misinfo: Vaccine misinformation for profit in the age of MLMs, alternative health, and influencers."**

Misinformation is an immensely profitable endeavor. Misinformation superspreaders have leveraged profit streams afforded by social media to make significant incomes off of misleading information. This has been particularly acute in the anti-vaccination space with prominent organizations & figures channeling their huge social media followings to purchase books, attend talks, buy alternative medical and health products for immense financial gain. This research project focuses on savvy social media influencers who, having built large followings through the posting of health, wellness, lifestyle and beauty related content, leverage anti-vaccine messaging & vaccine hesitancy to (a) sustain and build their online community and (b) direct their community to purchase products and services from them. We explore how these influencers position anti-vaccine misinformation & vaccine hesitancy rhetoric as a driver for alternative products, the types of products and services influencers advertise, in addition to the broader harms of consumptive behaviors driven by misinformation. Analysis highlights the centrality of a core group of multi-level marketing (MLM) products that are consistently pushed by anti-vaccine influencers. Influencers tie prominent vaccine misinformation narratives, such as vaccine shedding and infertility issues, to a need for “detox products” commonly sold through MLM companies that give them a small commission for each sale. This work highlights the extreme competency that these influencers demonstrate by utilizing multiple affordances of Instagram to their financial success without the moderation of their content.

**DeVan Hankerson Madrigal and Dhanaraj Thakur (Center for Democracy and Technology). "Gendered disinformation: Methodological Challenges Conducting Research on Women of Color Political Candidates".**

The prevalence of mis/disinformation in the US has emerged as a significant problem with implications for the quality of democratic participation. Existing research focusing on the [patterns and tactics](#) used by disinformation campaigns does not adequately examine impacts on the specific groups targeted by mis/disinformation such as women of color (WoC) in public life, often targeted by gendered disinformation aimed to discredit and undermine their civic participation. We explore these impacts focusing on the experiences of WoC candidates who ran for federal office in November 2020. Here our presentation offers transparency on some of the methodological and ethical challenges of using distance-based methods, where polarization and the heightened politicization of identity-based issues play a role. Challenges associated with obtaining interview access to political elites also come to the fore. We conduct virtual interviews with two participant groups: politicians ( $N=12$ ) and communications/digital services professionals by campaign ( $N=6$ ). Our overarching research aims to address three unanswered questions about (i) gendered disinformation and online gender based violence (ii) the first-hand experiences of WoC candidates with respect to our focus (iii) platform mitigation tactics.

## Panel 2A. Campaigns and Advertising.

**Joshua Braun (UMass Amherst).**

The programmatic advertising industry cumulatively funnels enormous amounts of money to sites hawking a variety of divisive disinformation on COVID, partisan politics, and more. These monetary incentives appear to be a major force behind the propagation of such content.

Programmatic advertising is also an industry that's notoriously complex, in which reforms — even when they occur — often prove frustrating. This paper looks at programmatic advertising and “real-time bidding” through the lens of Normal Accident Theory, which offers an explanation as to why. It suggests that digital advertising, as it's currently constituted, isn't just complicated or fast-paced, but complicated and fast-paced in particular ways that make it prone to bad outcomes. The paper looks at what this might mean for attempts, at the industry or policy level, to fix the problem.

**Amogh Dhar Sharma (Oxford). “Political Finance and Patronage behind Misinformation: Evidence from India’s Election Campaigns.”**

Over the last decade, India has become a quintessential example of the scourge of misinformation. A particular manifestation of this problem has been seen in the sphere of competitive electoral politics wherein leading political parties have invested heavily in creating an elaborate ‘misinformation machinery’ that consists of social media cells, troll armies, big data analysts, and professional political consultants to disseminate their partisan propaganda. This paper uses the lens of political finance to explore the aggregate and distributional costs associated with the circulation of political misinformation in India. By drawing upon semi-structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in India between 2017 and 2022, I outline three important dimensions along which the ‘costs’ associated with misinformation should be accounted for: (i) regulatory limits on campaign expenditure and its loopholes; (ii) imbrication of misinformation with state patronage networks; and (iii) the redistributive costs associated with the finance model that sustains misinformation.

## Panel 2B. Digital Harms in the Global South.

**Melissa Tully (U of Iowa) and Dani Madrid-Morales (U of Houston). “Exploring Audience Agency and Accountability for Addressing Misinformation in Kenya and Senegal.”**

Through an analysis of 96 in-depth interviews with media professionals, experts, and social media users in Kenya and Senegal, we explore how these groups articulate audience agency and the role of “the audience” in stopping the spread of misinformation. Preliminary analysis suggests that professionals believe they have a role to play in stopping misinformation by creating high-quality information and addressing misinformation swiftly with fact-checks but are not always confident that audiences engage with their work. This perception is supported by social media users who rarely seek out fact-checks or media literacy messages but do come across them on social media and WhatsApp and engage in behaviors to address misinformation in their own lives. Both groups perceive challenges in addressing misinformation that rely too heavily on an individual approach and see an important, albeit fraught, role for government and industry regulation that tackles misinformation at the structural level.

**Lorena Regatieri (Netlab/UFRJ). “Disinformation at scale in Brazil: The case of state propagandists against the climate justice movement.”**

State-sponsored propagandists and malicious actors historically used propaganda to interfere and influence public opinion, from domestic to external campaigns known in the literature as

information, psychological or influence operations. What are the consequences of influence operations promoting disinformation at scale about social environmental issues? A Twitter dataset representative of the forest fires debate in Brazil in 2020 reveals that botnets promoted official government accounts and disinformation at scale. In 2020, Brazil's Amazon rainforest suffered the worst fires in a decade. In the same period, botnets, junk news portals and disinformation increased, promoting false information about the possible causes of the fires and the appropriate measures to mitigate the destruction of the forest, as well inaccurate propaganda about government actions during the fire season. Yet, the climate justice movement reshaped and adapted their strategy for fact checking interventions, digital mobilisation and collective action to leverage the voices of indigenous peoples.

## Panel 2C. Transnational Flows of Asian Hate.

**Rachel Kuo (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), Lan Li, and Madhavi Reddi (U of North Carolina - Chapel Hill). "Transnational Information Systems: Multilingual and Community-Engaged Methods for Studying Mis/Disinformation in Asian Diaspora Communities."**

How does information spread across transnational, intergenerational, and multilingual networks within Asian diasporic communities? This project emphasizes a relational study using intimate family and community information networks. Asian America' is a vast diasporic umbrella with a diverse array of linguistic and cultural backgrounds and histories across local and transnational geographies. A holistic study across communities requires a methodological process and framework that can account for community-based differences across platforms, cultural contexts, languages, and histories. In other words, this research requires depth and breadth difficult to achieve by any individual research group or organization. This paper offers an open source qualitative and community engaged process for the study of mis/disinformation in Asian diaspora communities that includes community workshops, oral histories and semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. This process addresses challenges including: 1) the transnational spread of information across platforms and nations; 2) data access, consent and trust; 3) non-English language mis/disinformation given Anglocentric platform responses and research approaches; and 4) multiple historical, cultural, and political contexts.

**Yiming Wang and Kaiping Chen (U of Wisconsin-Madison). "Believe and Share Conspiracies about the Outgroup: An Experiment to Examine the Causal Impacts of Intergroup Relations Priming on Public Attitudes of Conspiracies in the Context of Sino-US Vaccine Development."**

The spreading of the COVID19 pandemic has been accompanied by increasing geopolitical conflicts between critical countries around the globe from media coverage to social media discussions. Although public health officials and scientists have been calling for collaboration between economies and institutions to mitigate intergroup conflict and discrimination, many politicians and news media in the U.S. have continued to adopt competitive and conflict-based narratives in mass communication about COVID19 and vaccine development. The widely spreading conspiracies about the Chinese or Asian-American groups are among the various negative costs brought by media slants. Despite a rising scholarship to study personal characteristics affecting public belief in conspiracy theories (e.g., Van Prooijen, 2017), there is

limited study to examine the causal impact of media effects on public's belief in conspiracies and sharing of them on social media. We address this critical gap in media effects study by answering: how do media's priming of intergroup relation affect people's belief in conspiracy theories about the outgroup? Our study integrates priming theory with social identity theory to understand how priming competitive vs collaborative contexts between the U.S. and China can activate different psychological paths towards people's belief in conspiracy. Using an inter-subject survey experiment conducted on a diverse sample of U.S. populations, we investigate the causal effects of different news messages priming of the Sino-US relationship (collaborative/competitive/no priming) on U.S. citizens' ability to detect conspiracy theories related to the outgroup, i.e., China. We expect that news messages that prime a competitive relationship between U.S. and China in the context of vaccine development will increase subjects' probability to believe in conspiracies about China, while priming a collaborative context between the two countries will help reduce subjects' belief in falsehood about the outgroup. One innovation in our experiment is we will identify the psychological pathways between media priming and public attitudes, distinguishing between affective vs cognitive psychological mechanisms through which the media context could influence people's belief about intergroup conspiracy theories. Our study offers broad implications for journalism practices on covering intergroup relations to mitigate the costs of fake news and conspiracies on social trust among groups.

## Panel 3A. Misinformation Mitigation.

**Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden, Beth Goldberg, Stephan Lewandowsky, and Steve Rathje. "Psychological inoculation improves resilience to misinformation on social media."**

Misinformation on social media continues to have adverse consequences for society. In recent years, inoculation theory has been put forward as a way to reduce susceptibility to misinformation. However, its applicability in contexts where people's attention is limited and its overall scalability have been elusive both at a theoretical and a practical level. To address these challenges, we designed five short, easily deployable videos that can inoculate people against misinformation techniques commonly encountered online: using emotionally manipulative language, incoherence, false dichotomies, scapegoating and ad hominem attacks. Across seven preregistered studies – six randomized controlled studies quota-matched to the US population (n = 6,464) and a field study on YouTube (n = 22,632) – we find that these videos improve people's ability to recognize misinformation techniques in social media content, increase their confidence in spotting these techniques, increase their ability to discern trustworthy from untrustworthy content, and improve the quality of their sharing decisions. These effects are robust across the political spectrum, as well as for different levels of analytical thinking and misinformation susceptibility. Technique-based inoculation is a scalable tool that can be rolled out on social media to improve resilience to online misinformation.

**Malika Mehrotra and Ziad Reslan (Google). "Evolving Platform Product Policies in a World of Ever-Increasing Political Misinformation".**

The political landscape in the United States has shifted greatly during the last few election cycles with digital platforms taking center stage in how campaigns are created and run, but also in how

digital platforms are misused to propagate misinformation and undermine faith in the electoral process. Our presentation will chart how platform policies have evolved over the last few years to attempt to respond to elections misinformation, taking the 2020 US election as a case study in the need for real-time product policy changes in response to ever-increasing attempts to spread political misinformation.

**Morgan Wack, Joseph Schafer, Ian Kennedy, Andrew Beers, Emma Spiro, and Kate Starbird (U of Washington). "Legislating Uncertainty: Election Policies and the Amplification of Misinformation in the 2020 U.S. Election."**

Can state election policies affect the spread of misinformation? This paper studies the role played by ballot processing policies, which determine when ballots can be examined and organized, in the online spread of political misinformation. We present evidence from the 2020 U.S. presidential election cycle linking the spread of misinformation in the aftermath of the election to the uncertainty created by these restrictions. Specifically, using a unique dataset of 327 misinformation stories and 325,000 tweets collected in real-time throughout the 2020 electoral period, we examine whether restrictions on the ability of election officials to process ballots corresponded with increases in the prevalence of misinformation. We find that, relative to states with restrictions, states allowed to process ballots prior to Election Day were subjected to fewer misinformation tweets and misinformation stories.

## Panel 3B. Politics and Ethics of Misinformation Research.

**Martin Riedl, Inga Trauthig, and Samuel Woolley (U of Texas - Austin). "Between community harm and community empowerment: Research challenges and opportunities when studying dis/misinformation."**

Chat and messaging apps are important venues of inquiry: They permit both private and public information sharing, context switching, and message forwarding. But content that gets re-shared, and thereby decontextualized, can quickly turn into misinformation. At the same time, apps such as WhatsApp, WeChat, and KakaoTalk promote strong community bonds, allow for political discussion, can nurture relationships with family and friends, and are thoroughly immersed in everyday digital life. This project documents the collective experiences, encounters and contemplations of a small group of researchers studying the spread of dis/misinformation on messaging apps in diaspora and immigrant communities in the U.S., how they handle(d) ethical quandaries, the nature of these issues, and how thinking evolves as research evolves. The project aims to showcase paths for dis/misinformation research that embrace an ethics of care and promote research practices that are empowering instead of extractive.

**Sarah Wiley (U of Minnesota). "Funds for Facts: The Dynamics of Philanthropic Relationships Between Google, Facebook, And Fact-Checking Organizations."**

As news organizations continued to face economic uncertainty in 2021, fact-checking organizations continued to flourish. In addition to their journalism funding initiatives, Google and Facebook have launched several grant funding opportunities, partnerships, and training programs specifically for fact-checkers. However, these generous endowments come amidst growing

concerns over technology companies' capacity in spreading misinformation and potentially anticompetitive behavior. This project aims to explore the role of technology companies as a benefactor, partner and educator in fact-checking by mapping fact-checking organizations' relationships to the giving and training networks of major technology firms, specifically Google and Facebook. Archival records, press releases, financial filings, and in-depth interviews are used to capture the network of connections and advance concerns regarding dependency and sustainability.

**Gabrielle Lim (Harvard Shorenstein Center) and Samantha Bradshaw (Stanford). "Unpacking the Effect of Regime Types on Responses to Misinformation."**

This paper examines how differences in regime type correlate with state-led responses to "fake news," disinformation, and influence operations. Using metrics provided by V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy), a cross-country multi-year dataset that measures various aspects of democracy and governance, we are able to hypothesize and test whether certain indicators relating to democracy correlate with specific types of responses to the ongoing real and perceived threat of disinformation and "fake news." Our study employs a regression analysis on a novel dataset that takes into account all "fake news" and false information laws passed globally from 2016 to 2021. We discuss our findings in the context of digital authoritarianism, and the implications of framing false information as a security threat.

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