

# INFORMATION MANIPULATION GLOSSARY

**100+ conceptual terms describing  
strategies, behaviors, and contexts of  
information manipulation**

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## Information Manipulation Glossary

100+ conceptual terms describing strategies, behaviors, and contexts of information manipulation

- 1 2 3 -

1. **5Ds: Dismiss** allegations, **Distort** narratives, **Distract** public attention, **Dismay** to threaten and frighten adversaries, **divide** to sow conflict and division. These techniques are found in **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)** incidents, as described in the first EEAS report on FIMI (Hénin, 2023)

- A -

2. **Accuracy nudges or accuracy primes:** Priming people to consider the veracity of encountered information (Butler et al., 2024, van der Linden & Roozenbeek, 2021)
3. **Ad hominem:** Rejecting a claim by attacking someone's character or identity, rather than their arguments (Purdue University, n. d.) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)
4. **Ad populum:** Using the (alleged) majority opinion of a group of people as an argument to persuade the audience to think the same way (Purdue University, n. d.). (See also **Bandwagon effect**) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)
5. **Alternative facts:** Coined by Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway to defend the statements about the size of the crowd at Trump's inauguration ceremony in 2016 by referring to it as "alternative facts" (Calfas, 2017)
6. **Amplification:** Tricking people into believing that you have the support of a large crowd of people when there is not much actual support. (See also **Astrourfing**)
7. **Antidemocratic rhetoric:** Denouncing the language of human rights and international law used by democratic institutions and governments as acts of foreign interference with domestic affairs or signs of Western imperialism (Applebaum, 2024)
8. **Appeal to authority:** Referring to the status, fame, reputation, or position of power of a person to underscore that a cause or statement they support must be right (Ruggeri, 2024) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**) (See also **Authority bias; Fake experts**)
9. **Appeal to ignorance:** Interpreting a lack of counterevidence as backing a claim rather than requesting evidence from the person making that claim (Ruggeri, 2024) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)
10. **Astrourfing:** A campaign that gives the impression of being a genuine grassroots movement, but in reality is centrally planned and orchestrated to give exactly that impression (Keller et al., 2020), exploiting the authenticity of a genuine movement to change peoples' attitudes and behaviors (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2024)
11. **Attitude polarization:** Tendency to selectively recall arguments that oppose information clashing with one's own beliefs (Siciliani et al., 2020) (See **Cognitive bias**)
12. **Authority bias:** Authority figures (e. g. political leaders, celebrities, experts, etc.) exert greater influence on others with their opinions and judgments (The Decision Lab, n. d., a) (See **Cognitive bias**)

- B -

13. **Bandwagon effect:** People belief certain information or support certain causes because others (esp. close social ties or opinion leaders) do (The Decision Lab, n. d., b) (See **Cognitive bias**)
14. **Belief bias:** The reliance on prior knowledge and beliefs rather than objectively considering arguments when making a judgement or decision (Nikolopoulou, 2023a) (See **Cognitive bias**)

15. **Belief perseverance:** The tendency to maintain and defend preexisting beliefs, even in face of counterevidence (The Decision Lab, n. d., c) (See **Cognitive bias**)
16. **Bot:** A programmed entity designed for the automated fulfilment of tasks in a limited scope of application (Khaund et al., 2022)
17. **Botnet:** A network of bots interlinked to perform a coordinated task (Khaund et al., 2022) (See also **Bot**)
18. **Bullshit:** A bullshitter does not intend to lie but is indifferent towards the truth. The only thing that matters to the BSer is whether his or her communication persuades the listener (Frankfurt, 2005)

- C -

19. **Campaign:** From the French term campagne, which means level and open country. The terrain on which military operations take place and on which battles are fought, i. e., a field of conflict (Oxford English Dictionary) (See **Communication campaign**)
20. **Catfishing:** Creating false online identities with the intent to deceive, scam or defraud someone (WEF, 2023) (See **Online harms**)
21. **Clickbait:** A technique for the broad dissemination of junk news and misleading content more generally that is associated with financial motives. Clickbait uses sensationalist language, speaks to the fear of missing out, or promises to yield some benefit (Venturini, 2019) (See also **Junk news**)
22. **Cognitive bias:** From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, cognitive biases are evolutionary adaptations that developed to fulfil a specific purpose in the lives of human ancestors, but which also have disadvantages and are seen as weaknesses in modern societies. One example are heuristics: Facing life-or-death situations under information processing constraints led to the development of mental shortcuts in decision making that are accurate in many cases but open a door for manipulation (Haselton et al., 2015) (An extended list of cognitive biases can be found in Benson's 2018 Cognitive Bias Codex)
23. **Communication campaign:** Planning and conducting organized communication activities in selected media channels within a specific timeframe to influence the behaviors in a target audience for the benefit of the public or the principal (Rice & Moxley, 2022) (See **Campaign**) (See also **Negative Campaigning; Manipulation campaign**)
24. **Computational propaganda:** Employing digital tools such as automated agents, big data analysis, algorithms, and artificial intelligence to manipulate public opinion (Woolley & Howard, 2016) (See also **Propaganda**)
25. **Confirmation bias:** The tendency to focus on and seek information confirming preexisting beliefs (The Decision Lab, n. d., d) (See **Cognitive bias**)
26. **Conspiracy myths or conspiracy theories:** Stories about obscure plots conducted by powerful elites to serve their malevolent interests (Douglas et al., 2017; Harambam, 2021). A well-known example is the Deep State conspiracy myth, claiming that unelected officials secretly pull the strings of government
27. **Coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB):** Activities that use inauthentic accounts, bots, and other techniques to channel attention and spread content that is potentially harmful to users (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron 2024; Gleicher, 2018; Khaund et al., 2022) (See also **Astroturfing**)
28. **Cyber troops:** A term drawing on military imagery to describe human and/or automated actors commissioned with the task to disturb or manipulate public debate online (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018)



29. **Cyborg:** Human agents running fake profiles while at the same time employing bots to fulfil specific tasks more efficiently, e. g. posting content on social media platforms (Khaund et al., 2022) (See also **Bots**)

- D -

30. **Debunking:** Separating facts from falsehoods and publicly uncovering the fraudulent and misleading nature of false information, while simultaneously publishing the true facts in that matter. According to empirical evidence, debunking has certain limits (Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021)
31. **Deceptive synthetic media:** Using algorithmic technology to artificially create or manipulate content – audios, videos, or images – that is fictional but appears to be real with the aim to deceive and harm individuals or groups, or to undermine the trust in public institutions (WEF, 2023)
32. **Deepfake:** Content, esp. videos, generated to appear real with the help of artificial intelligence and analysis of large amounts of data (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021) (See also **Deceptive synthetic media**)
33. **Discredit opponents:** Averting accusations by attacking and delegitimizing the source of the allegations (Douglas et al., 2017) A common tactic is to discredit inconvenient voices as fake news (See also **Dismiss**)
34. **Disinformation:** False information spread with the intent to deceive, including false news, false flag operations, inaccurate quotes, and biased or misleading information (Weedon, 2017), with the aim to gain political influence, cause trouble, or make money (Wardle, 2020)
35. **Dismay:** to distract means frightening, intimidating, or sowing panic by harsh rhetoric, unpredictable and extreme behaviors, and open threats, e. g., by imposing capricious punishments on members of the civil society, or threatening with nuclear war (Hénin, 2023) (See **5Ds**)
36. **Dismiss:** Repelling allegations when being (rightfully) accused of some malicious activities, e. g., by launching a communicative counterattack, accusing the adversary of slander (Hénin, 2023) (See **5Ds**)
37. **Distort:** Fabricating false narratives to justify the own malicious actions, e. g., via conspiracy theories or junk news (Hénin, 2023) (See **5Ds**; See also **Conspiracy myths** and **Junk news**)
38. **Distract:** Shifting public attention to other scandalous events (true or fabricated) or blaming a different party for negative events (Hénin, 2023) (See **5Ds**)
39. **Divide:** Drawing on wedge issues to foster polarization among a target population and fuel ingroup conflict (Hénin, 2023) (See **5Ds**)
40. **(Digital) Potemkin village:** Creating an exaggerated impression of the size, relevance, or reach of a movement, ideological group, or political idea with the aim of garnering attention by journalists and the broader public (Hawley, 2021) (See also **Amplification**)
41. **Doubt-mongering:** Intentionally seeding doubt in the integrity of institutions such as public media and science. This was and is done quite successfully on the issue of anthropogenic climate change (Oreskes & Conway, 2010) (See also **Fake experts**)
42. **Doxxing:** Exposing sensitive identity details online without the victim's consent to intimidate or blackmail the victim (WEF, 2023)

- E -

43. **Echo chambers:** Online users tend to search for and stick to online environments where they encounter other users sharing their world views and expressing similar opinions. In that way, homogeneous clusters emerge where beliefs are assimilated and amplified (Choi et al., 2020; Törnberg, 2018)
44. **Emotional content:** Content that evokes basic emotions, mostly with negative valence (e. g. fear, anger, empathy). Employed to gain attention and frame an issue in a specific way according to desired ends. Emotional content generates higher engagement than less emotional content (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)

- F -

45. **Fake experts:** Referencing to people or organizations with high reputation to legitimize and verify false narratives when these entities have no true expert knowledge on the given matter (Krieg, 2023)
46. **Fake news:** Form of disinformation that is purposefully given a news-like appearance (del Vas & Navarro, 2024; George et al., 2021). The term was appropriated and misused by Donald Trump and other political actors to denounce public media that oppose their agenda (Keller et al., 2020; Venturini, 2019)
47. **False dichotomy:** Reducing complex decision situations to opposing either-or decision options. A common example is thinking in friend-or-foe categories (Ruggeri, 2024) (See: **manipulative rhetoric**)
48. **Familiarity bias:** Repeated exposure to false information leads to the assumption that it is true (Siciliani et al., 2020) (See **cognitive bias**)
49. **Fearmongering:** Intentionally inducing fear and anxiety in audiences about issues when there is no objective reason to be afraid (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025) making people susceptible to radical ideas and agendas (Krieg, 2023)
50. **Fire hose of falsehoods:** Giving multiple false stories about the reasons for certain events to create nihilism and discourage people from asking questions. A good example are the multiple inconsistent stories the Russian government gave for the crash of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine (Appelbaum, 2024, p. 79)
51. **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI):** Adopted by the European External Action Service (European External Action Service, 2024). Manipulative and deceptive, i. e. nontransparent, efforts to disrupt the free formation of political opinion and the expression of political will by a foreign state actor or its agents, following to a larger geopolitical agenda (Hénin, 2023).

- G -

52. **Group directed threat:** Arguments are rejected when they (seem to) criticize a group the recipient feels affiliated to, as such an attack strengthens group identity (Siciliani et al., 2020) (See **cognitive bias**)
53. **Group polarization:** Exploiting existing grievances and tensions in a society to foster inter-group division and conflict. In politics this means fueling antagonisms between partisan viewpoints and either-or thinking (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019) (See also **False dichotomy**)

- H -

54. **Hate speech:** Using derogatory or discriminatory language when referencing to an individual or a group of people, especially attacking their protected identity characteristics, including but not limited to gender, religion, and ethnicity (WEF, 2023) (See **Online harms**)
55. **Homophily:** The tendency to connect to and interact with individuals that share similar characteristics and beliefs (Choi et al., 2020; Törnberg, 2018)
56. **Historical revisionism:** The willful misinterpretation and distortion of historical events to serve political ends and promote socio-political change according to some political agenda (Arribas et al., 2023)

- I -

57. **Illusory truth effect:** The repeated exposure to false information leads people to believe the information is true (The Decision Lab, n. d., e) (See **Cognitive bias**)
58. **Impersonation:** Mimicking the appearance of credible organizations or spoofing real people, e. g. political figures, to exploit their credibility or sow chaos via fake announcements (See also **Catfishing**)
59. **Influence operations:** Employing a wide range of illegitimate means to influence (foreign) politics, encompassing communicative elements such as fearmongering and non-communicative elements such as sabotage
60. **Information operations:** Employing strategic narratives to manipulate the information environment of a target population (Krieg, 2023). (See also **Post-truth public diplomacy; Psychological operations; Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference**)
61. **Information Deficit Model:** Traditional view assuming that a deficit in public understanding of scientific facts and scientific processes is accountable for the prevalence of false beliefs in the public (Siciliani et al., 2020; Suldovsky, 2016)
62. **Information disorders:** Illegitimate and harmful types of information, including mis-, mal-, and disinformation (Wardle 2020)
63. **Information laundering:** The use of seemingly independent media or “native” websites that are actually run by state or state-funded actors to spread state propaganda in other countries and disguise it as credible, independent information. Examples include the StarTimes television network that broadcasts in Sub-Saharan Africa and strongly promotes content from the Chinese Global Television Network, presenting the activities of the Chinese Communist Party in a positive light and “educating” audiences about Chinese history (Appelbaum, 2024)
64. **Inoculation:** Creating mental antibodies against persuasion and manipulation attempts via forewarnings to generate threat perception and a refutational pre-emption, i. e. pre-bunking (Compton et al., 2021; Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021)

- J -

65. **Junk News:** Chunks of information and easily digestible stories designed to achieve maximum attention online. For example, the false news that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump during the 2016 US presidential campaign. The primary objective is large-scale diffusion and virality. Junk News are dangerous not primarily because they are false, but because they disturb public debate and supplant more important topics. Russian propaganda outlets like Sputnik also spread Junk News, for example in the context of the 2017 French presidential elections (Venturini, 2019)

- K -

66. **Kill Chain:** Describes the steps an influence campaign takes to launch a coordinated attack. Consists of at least four main phases, plan, prepare, execute, and assess. Defenders want to break the chain at the earliest possible stage (Terp & Breuer, 2022)

- L -

No entry

- M -

67. **Malinformation:** Strategic spread of true facts but with a negative intent, such as email-leaks (Keller et al., 2020)
68. **Manipulation:** Appealing to irrational impulses and using other covert tactics to influence the beliefs, choices, or actions of recipients without their consent or awareness. In comparison, persuasion tries to convince people to change their minds by using arguments as well as appeals to emotions, while coercion works with explicit threats (Klemp, 2010)
69. **Manipulation campaign:** A communication campaign that employs manipulative techniques and exploits the weaknesses of (online) communication environments to reach the goals of the principal (See also **Information campaign; Information operations; Psychological operations; Influence operations**)
70. **Manipulative rhetoric:** Using symbolic communication and appeals to emotion to influence the beliefs, choices, or actions of a target audience to achieve the desired ends of the rhetor (See also **antidemocratic rhetoric**)
71. **Misinformation:** False information spread without any intention to harm or deceive (Keller et al., 2020)

- N -

72. **Narratives:** Stories of how the world works or how it is supposed to work according to the communicator, employed to influence public discourse and the behaviors of target publics according to certain interests (Krieg, 2023; Miskimmon et al., 2013)
73. **Negative campaigning:** Publicly attacking ideas, policy proposals, past records and known flaws of opponents to gain an advantage over a political competitor in an election campaign or a business competitor in a market (Nai, 2020)
74. **Network of echo chambers:** Multiple echo chambers with like-minded users connected via weak ties building a so-called hub of echo chambers (Choi et al., 2020)
75. **Network polarization:** The tendency of people in an echo chamber to be more densely connected with each other than with people from outside the network (Törnberg, 2018) (See also **Echo chamber**)
76. **Nudging:** Introducing minor changes to the architecture of an (online information) space to influence behavioral choices (Butler et al., 2024)

- O -

77. **Online harms:** Threats to personal and community safety, harms to health and well-being, hate and discrimination, violation of dignity, invasion of privacy, deception and manipulation (WEF, 2023)
78. **Opinion polarization:** People in an echo chamber are inclined to share more similar views with each other in relation to a given topic than with people outside the network (Törnberg, 2018)
79. **Overkill:** True but complex and therefore cognitively taxing arguments are rejected, leading to a favoring of simpler albeit false and misleading explanations for a given event (Siciliani et al., 2020)

- P -

80. **Populism:** Being a driving force of disinformation and other online harms on a domestic level (Kazharski, 2019), populism denotes a political style that employs anti-elite rhetoric to alienate people from politicians and institutions, accusing credible media sources of being fake news, dismissing facts, spreading false information, and fueling hate (Dekeyser & Roose, 2023; Hameleers, 2020)
81. **Post-truth:** An umbrella term covering phenomena such as misinformation, disinformation, junk news, fake news, alternative facts, and manipulative emotional content that fall on fertile ground in an era that favors emotions over facts (Wu, 2023) (See also **Post-truth era**)
82. **Post-truth era:** A concept to describe a state of public debate or a political atmosphere in which objective facts lose their meaning and have less impact on public opinion and issue perception than appeals to personal experience, beliefs, sentiment, or emotion (Oxford Languages, 2016) (See also **Truthiness**)
83. **Post-truth public diplomacy (PTPD):** A combination of the terms post truth and public diplomacy, describing diplomatic activities in the broadest sense, including covered operations, undertaken by adversary states, disseminating twisted, biased, or even false narratives across national borders to manipulate public opinion in foreign publics to promote the causes and interest of the sponsoring state (Wu, 2023)
84. **Priming:** An unconscious process in which a given stimulus (a) influences the response to a subsequent stimulus (b) (van der Linden & Roozenbeek, 2021)
85. **Propaganda:** Strategic narratives employed in war- and peacetime to make audiences believe in a certain doctrine or ideology (Walter & Ophir, 2023) (See also **Narratives; Computational propaganda**)
86. **Procedures:** Specific combinations or patterns of behavior that are used by certain actors, such as recurring narratives or other common combinations of manipulative behaviors (Hénin, 2023) (See also **TTPs**)
87. **Psychological Operations (Psyops):** Using communicative and non-communicative means as an add-on during military conflict or as ongoing activities continued in peacetime (Krieg, 2023) in pursuit of political and military objectives (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, n. d.)

- Q -

88. **Questionable cause:** Presenting a correlation or coincidence as causation (Nikolopoulou, 2023b) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)

- R -

89. **Rumours:** Circulating stories of uncertain source conveying ungrounded gossips (Choi et al., 2020)

- S -

90. **Selective exposure:** The tendency to seek content that aligns with one's beliefs and avoid content that does not (Choi et al., 2020) (See **Cognitive bias**)
91. **Sharp power:** Using a wide range of communication channels to create a certain national image not only in the genuinely political arena, but in the international areas of culture, media, academia, and sports (Applebaum, 2024, p. 80). This includes using biased and false narratives to present a country in a positive light and deny human rights violations and oppression (See also **Post-truth Public Diplomacy**)



92. **Smear campaign:** Discrediting opposition politicians, independent media, journalists, activists, and international organizations pointing at autocratic behaviors and demanding compliance with the rule of law and other democratic principles as traitors and foreign agents (Applebaum, 2024, p. 134)
93. **Social bot:** Bots employed in the domain of social media, mimicking human online behaviors such as posting, sharing, and commenting content, that are employed to disseminate manipulative content (Khaund et al., 2022)
94. **Social-norm nudges:** priming people to consider the attitudes and behaviors of others (Butler et al., 2024)
95. **Strategic communication:** Purposeful use of communication to reach certain ends (Hallahan et al, 2007)
96. **Strawman:** Deliberately misinterpreting and misrepresenting the argument of the other side (Ruggeri, 2024, Purdue University, n. d.) (See **Manipulative rhetoric**)

- T -

97. **Tactics:** Operational goals that manipulative actors try to achieve with their activities, e. g. the 5Ds (Hénin, 2023) (See also **TTPs; 5Ds**)
98. **Techniques:** Concrete actions taken to accomplish the goals according to the stage of an influence operation (Hénin, 2023) (See also **TTPs**)
99. **Trolling:** Deliberately provoking reactions from a target audience, often by using offensive language, emotional content, exploiting existing polarization, etc. (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019)
100. **Truthiness:** An ontological position that declares facts and reality to be a matter of mere feelings (McCright & Dunlap, 2017)
101. **TTPs:** Tactics, techniques and procedures employed in information manipulation campaigns (Hénin, 2023; Terp & Breuer, 2022) (See also **Tactics; Techniques; Procedures**)

- U -

No entry

- V -

102. **Virality:** The speed and scope of the (online) spread of a specific bit of (false) information (Törnberg, 2018)

- W -

103. **Whataboutism:** Drawing parallels to unrelated topics to distract attention away from an argument and shift the debate in a direction desired by the rhetor and suppressing factual debate (Ruggeri, 2024)

- XYZ -

No entry

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