

The threats of misinformation and what (not) to do about them

Social media misinformation is widely thought to pose a wide range of threats to society. This presentation focuses on how such misinformation threatens knowledge, and what can and should be done to address these threats. I distinguish between three distinct ways in which misinformation interferes with knowledge acquisition: the deceptive, skeptical, and epistemic threats. Drawing on empirical research, I discuss the extent to which these threats appear to be realized in the real world. Then, I turn to potential defenses against these threats. I argue that certain heavy-handed measures, especially those involving top-down suppression of misinformation, may address some threats of misinformation while exacerbating others. Finally, I argue that more collaborative approaches to the challenge of misinformation, which enlist the activity of social media users, offer promise for mitigating many of the threats posed by misinformation.