

The background of the slide is a dark red color with a white line-art map of a city grid, showing various street patterns and building footprints.

**BLOOMBERG
HARVARD**

City
Leadership
Initiative

COVID-19 in the Post-Truth Era

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What is the craziest piece of misinformation that is circulating in your city about COVID-19?

Four Pillars of the Post-Truth Era

1

**Epistemic
Bubbles & Echo
Chambers**

2

**Truth
Decay**

3

**Information
Disorder**

4

**Prevalent
Speech
Malignancies**

Epistemic Bubbles and Echo Chambers

An epistemic bubble

is an informational network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission.

An echo chamber

is a social structure from which other relevant voices have been actively discredited.

- C Thi Nguyen, *“Escape the Echo Chamber”*

Four Conditions of Truth Decay

- 1 Increasing disagreement about facts and data
- 2 Increased blurring of the line between fact and opinion
- 3 Increasing volume of opinion compared to fact
- 4 Declining trust in key institutions that provide information**

- Jennifer Kavanagh & Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay*

The Erosion of Trust in Experts

Democratization of Knowledge

the internet allows everyone to feel that they can “figure things out for themselves”

Decision-Making Disenfranchisement

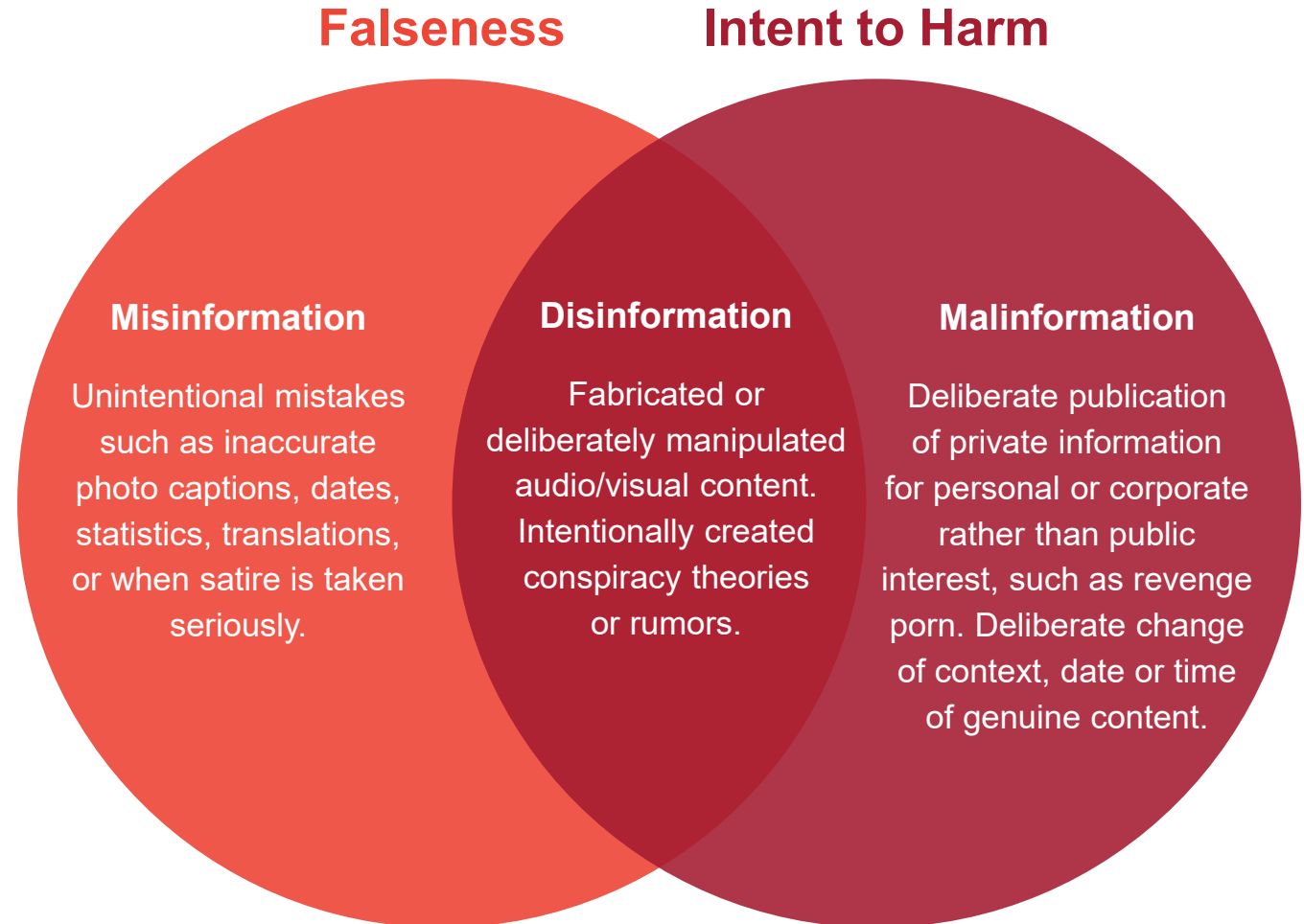
populist resistance to a small group of experts making decisions based on inaccessible knowledge that directly impacts—often negatively—the public at large

- Lavazza and Farina, "The Role of Experts in the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Limits of Their Epistemic Authority in Democracy."

Information Disorder

- **Misinformation** is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant.
- **Disinformation** is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
- **Malinformation** is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

Types of Information Disorder



Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakshan, 2017

**SATIRE OR PARODY**

No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool

**MISLEADING CONTENT**

Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual

**IMPOSTER CONTENT**

When genuine sources are impersonated

**FABRICATED CONTENT**

New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm

**FALSE CONNECTION**

When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content

**FALSE CONTEXT**

When genuine content is shared with false contextual information

**MANIPULATED CONTENT**

When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive

Claire Wardle: <https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/fake-news-complicated/>

Prevalent Speech Malignancies I

Lying

saying something
false with the intention
to deceive

Truthful Misleading

saying something
true with the intention
to deceive

Bullshit

saying something with
a complete disregard
to its truth or falsehood

Prevalent Speech Malignancies II

Silencing

saying something to prohibit others from exercising their speech

Propaganda

superficially innocuous speech that in fact reinforces malignant ideologies

(Some) Techniques of Epistemic Pathology

- **Ping ponging**

The coordinated use of complementary websites to springboard a story into mainstream circulation.

- **Conspiracy theories**

Employing rumors, myths or claims of conspiracy to distract or dismay an audience.

- **Exploiting balance**

This happens when otherwise mainstream media outlets try to “balance” their reporting by featuring professional propagandists or faux journalists alongside experts. This technique is common in televised formats, which feature point-counterpoint debates.

Source: <https://www.cepa.org/disinfo-techniques>

What to do?



Change the messenger



Poke some fun



Appeal to patriotism

Source: Anne Applebaum, “The Facts Just Aren’t Getting Through,” Atlantic, August 2020.

A stylized, monochromatic map of a city grid, likely Harvard Square, rendered in a dark red color. The map shows a dense network of streets and building footprints. The text is overlaid on the map.

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