

BRINGING IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR CHANGE PERSPECTIVES TO DISINFORMATION STUDIES

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WHAT WE NOW ABOUT DISINFORMATION FLOWS

- Disinformation searches and finds vulnerable audiences – not everyone is equally exposed and vulnerable to disinformation
- Disinformation taps into cognitive processes: confirmation bias, belief reinforcement, especially in contexts of affective polarization
- Disinformation tends to be concentrated in superspreaders
- Role of legacy media and political leaders as disinformation spreaders
- Mixed findings about people share “disinformation”? Why? How?
 - Different conclusions: Reputation costs v digital persona/support/group belonging
 - Publics with strong political identities?

FIGHTING DISINFORMATION WITH AN INFORMATION-CENTERED APPROACH

- Addressing information supply and demand factors
- Add “quality” information to communication environments
- Promote platform content regulation and transparency
- Promote critical media literacy skills

WHAT DO COUNTER-DISINFORMATION PROGRAMS TRY TO ACHIEVE?

Goals

- Provide factual, legitimate information = supply approach
- Support quality journalism, especially local news
- Monitor and understand disinformation flows
- Teach critical skills + resilience in the use of digital information
 - Raise awareness about disinformation
 - Improve ability to detect disinformation
 - Foster “good practices” such as sharing quality information and alerting others about disinformation dangers

Actions

- Media literacy
- Fact-checking
- Collaboration with digital platforms
- Edu-entertainment

ARE INFORMATION-CENTERED APPROACHES SUFFICIENT/ADEQUATE?

- Do we have a strong body of evidence to support specific interventions?
- Unambiguous findings and recommendations across publics + situations?
- Can we fight disinformation without understanding contexts of “disinformation” use?
- Are informational tactics successful in terms of appeal, commanding attention and “going viral” (like disinformation)?
- Are they based on sound premises – information-maximizing individuals/communities?

BASICS OF SBC

- SBC IS A SYSTEMATIC, EVIDENCE-DRIVEN APPROACH TO IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN CHANGES IN BEHAVIORS, NORMS, AND THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT.
- SBC INTERVENTIONS AIM TO AFFECT KEY BEHAVIORS AND SOCIAL NORMS BY ADDRESSING THEIR INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL, AND STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS /FACTORS.

SBC AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INTERVENTIONS

- Formative research to understand a range of issues, knowledge, awareness, attitudes, social norms, risk perception, communication habits, media/source trust/opinion leaders, potential motivations for change.
- Examine multiple levels that shape/affect knowledge, attitudes and behaviors
- Targeted actions grounded on findings from formative research and other sources, including message design, media selection and other components.
- Tactics to make intervention stand out, particularly in crowded, noisy communication environments. Make information tactics “sticky”

DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT APPROACH TO CONFRONT DISINFORMATION? WHAT IF WE CHANGE THE APPROACH?

- Start by understanding particular contexts of (dis)information use (including news avoidance, disinterest, distrust, apathy)
- Place sense-making processes around specific issues – politics, health, environment, and conflict, at the center of the analysis and interventions
- Understand role of belief systems, (group/collective) identity processes, affect and emotion, and social norms in grounding access/use of information
 - Why do people believe and use disinformation? Causes and responsibilities
 - Approach individuals and communities as socially situated rather than disembodied actors/information consumers

BORROW INSIGHTS FROM SBC PRINCIPLES

- Frame problem in terms of social/behavioral issues and questions (e.g., ideational factors, voting, (un)healthy behaviors)
- Start with diagnosis of situation within specific groups vulnerable to disinformation in terms of behavioral problems and goals
- Understand KAP linked to beliefs/identities shaping (dis)information flows and use
- Identify tactics to influence ideational factors and social norms that support or discourage specific behaviors

ONGOING PROJECT: MIGRATION AND (DIS)INFORMATION

Background

- Migrants' (dis)information environment and vulnerability – “information precarity”
- Migrants' communication patterns and the use of digital platforms and technologies

Questions

- If undocumented migrants live amid disinformation precarity, are they vulnerable to disinformation?
- How do they assess the quality and the credibility of various (dis)information flows?
- How does (dis)information affect their decisions?



RESEARCH PROJECT

South American migrants en route to US/Mexico border

25 interviews conducted in Costa Rica

Study dis/information as a lived experience in situations of precarity and uncertainty

Undocumented migration entails making decisions amid enormous precarity: what routes to take; how and where to make money to pay various expenses (travel, food); how to assess risks and safety; how to find information about these issues and who to believe.

Understand the role of dis/information in these decisions in the migration experience - how people navigate both migration and information environments.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Patterns

- Managing information in situations of vulnerability and uncertainty
- Lack of trust in information sources (interpersonal and media) and widespread skepticism about credibility of “virtually everybody”
- Limited interest and information-seeking
- “News avoidance” as protective mechanism given disinformation and “bad news”
 - Incidental exposure more than deliberate search for information
- Trust “personal/family” experiences and religious beliefs

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Social/communication textures of living with uncertainty and disinformation
- Difficult teach and impact of counter-disinformation actions
- Refusal to engage with information
- Dominance of deist convictions in everyday decisions