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Fake News! Russian Disinformation Targets American Cognitive Biases Through Diverse Mediums

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Introduction

“Fake news” is old news, but what is it and how do we combat it? The term describes disinformation, or the tactical creation and dissemination of false information.

My research seeks to combine traditional national security studies with cybersecurity and big data analytics to gain insight into the issue of “Fake news”, particularly regarding the Russian disinformation campaign leading up to and after the 2016 US presidential election.

The project consisted of analyzing both news and academic literature on this new Russian strategy. Its target is US citizens’ cognitive decision-making shortcuts. The campaign’s goal appears to be to covertly manipulate Americans into making decisions favorable to Russia and to degrade American power.

US Misperceptions

Disinformation’s threat resides primarily in cyberspace.

- **Flaw:** Russia employs diverse methods. The tactic is to trigger emotional responses in American minds by manipulating cognitive biases. Cyber is just an effective tool.

Disinformation is a new strategy.

- **Flaw:** The strategy is old, but the technology is new. Lessons from the past must be adapted to the present.

You’re The Target

Cognitive Biases

- Confirmation Bias
- Availability Bias
- Availability Cascade

Cyber and Physical Weapons

- Social Media
- Bots and Artificial Intelligence
- “News” Blogs
- Identity Theft
- Organization of Political Rallies
- Funding Groups
- Newspapers and Magazines
- Networking

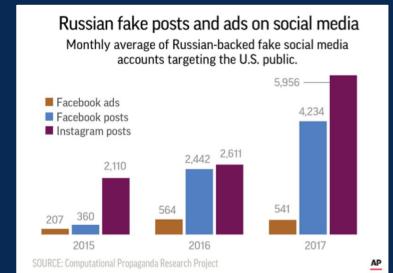
Disinformation is Manipulation



Disinformation is used to manipulate Americans into making decisions that negatively affect us.



Figure 1 – Online Platform Exposure



Social media is an incredibly effective disinformation tool due to its large reach.

Recommendations

Learning to recognize and avoid disinformation can slow its spread. By modeling early childhood education after the CIA’s “unconscious bias training,” a few key implementations might be:

1. How people make judgements and reach conclusions.
2. How to fight groupthink and question assumptions
3. Ensure the credibility of evidence before making conclusions

