TARGETS OF MISINFORMATION:

IMPORTANCE of MEDIA LITERACY in

RURAL AMERICA

MISINFORMATION MAZE:
WHERE IS IT? WHAT IS IT?

Misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and **fake news** are all terms used to describe false or misleading information disguised as informative content.

With how many U.S. citizens get their news from social media, media literacy is brought to the forefront of education, but for adults who are done with their education media literacy was only focused around books. With social media, false or misleading information is very prevalent.

Misinformation is made to deceive audiences, often traveling in patterns of exposure and consumption. It takes many forms to deceive, whether done on purpose, malicious intent, for humor, or on accident. All forms are harmful.

TYPES OF MISINFORMATION

IMPOSTOR CONTENT
Impersonating a genuine source by using an established brand, as well as impersonating real people using bot accounts.

FALSE CONTEXT
Deliberately distorting accurate information with added fabricated context, resulting in a different narrative.

MISLEADING INFORMATION
Presenting comments as fact. It can distort people's understanding of the truth, and can be done to ruin ones image.

SPONSORED CONTENT
Advertising disguised as an editorial piece. This is dangerous, especially when it's not directly stated as sponsored.

SATIRE
Humorous content that can still be passed off as true, even when there is no intention to harm or fool readers.

PROPAGANDA
Content created to manage attitudes, values, and knowledge. It is often used to influence public opinion and shape societal norms.

ERROR
A simple mistake in reporting. This has very significant consequences, and impacts the credibility of the publication.

With the rise of AI many new forms of MISINFORMATION are emerging...

and it will only improve in realism, making them hard to identify.

Synthetic media is artificially produced, manipulated, and modified multimedia and data that utilize AI algorithms to mislead or change the original meaning. This could lead to common widespread misinformation and create a district of artificial intelligence.

Deep fakes are a type of synthetic media that uses AI learning to generate visual and audio content that is used to deceive. Deep fakes are used in revenge porn, fake news, hoaxes, and various cases of fraud.

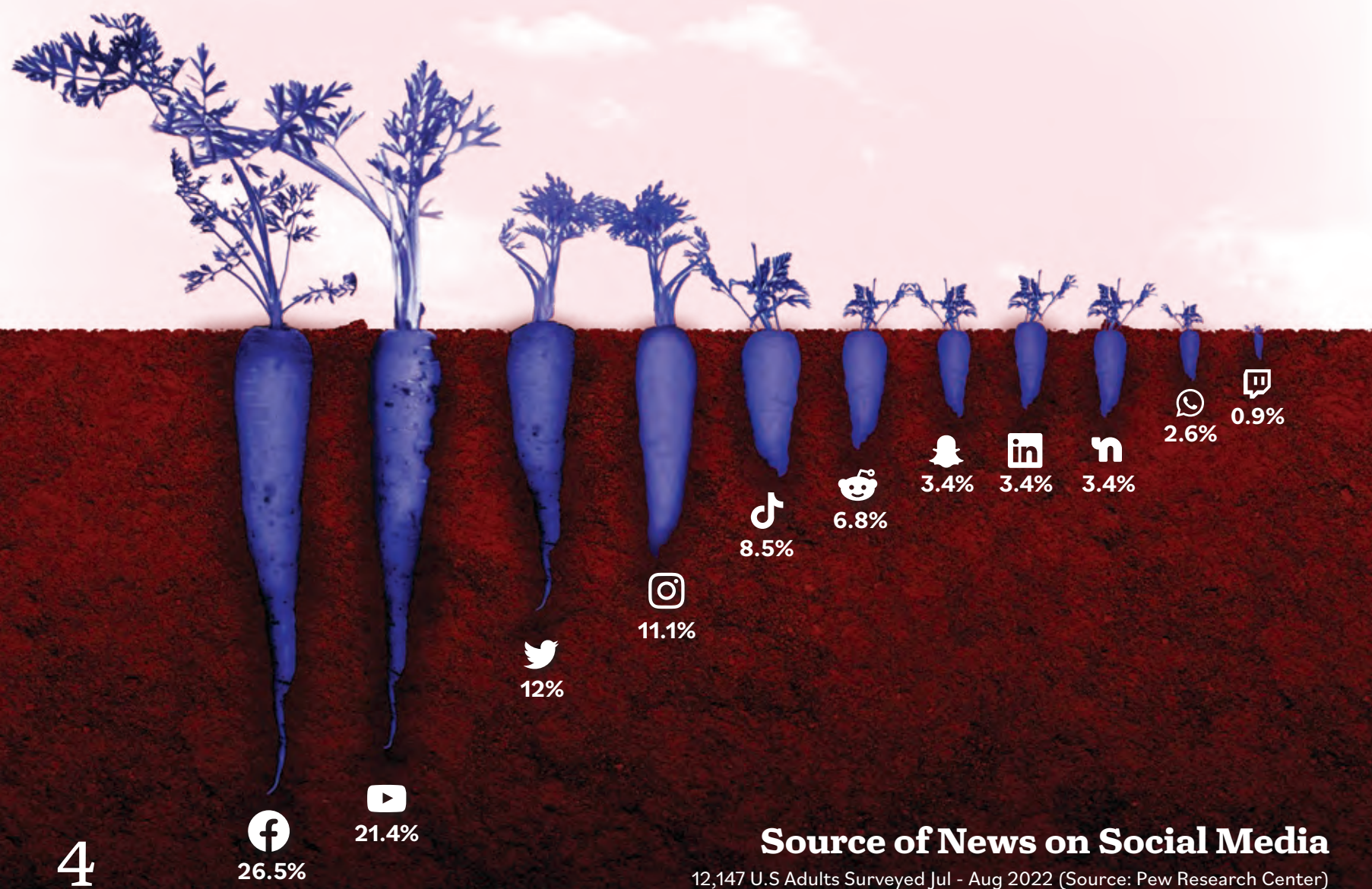**AI Generated Joe Biden**

A THREAT to RURAL AMERICA

Based on 2021 data from the Pew Research Center, rural Americans only **58% of adults have high-speed broadband connections at home,** with **67% in urban areas,** and **70% in suburban areas.** These numbers are going up more and more. With the number of people connecting to the internet, so is the spread of misinformation.

   Around 50% of U.S. adults often get their news from social media, raising concerns about the credibility of the source. People with a high-school diploma; or no high-school diploma are more likely to get their news from Facebook or Instagram.

   According to the U.S. Census, only 34% of Americans in rural areas have a high school degree, and with older folks who have already graduated, many are not educated on new-age technology and how to analyze sources and information online.

> For regular social media users, what we can do is dial back on the tribal instincts, to try to be more introspective and say: 'I'm not going to take the bait. I'm not going to pile on my opponent.
>
> Yini Zhang *Assistant Communication Professor University at Buffalo*

26.5%
21.4%
12%
11.1%
8.5%
6.8%
3.4% 3.4% 3.4%
2.6% 0.9%

Source of News on Social Media
12,147 U.S Adults Surveyed Jul – Aug 2022 (Source: Pew Research Center)

THE MISINFORMERS, and WHY THEY CATER to RIGHT-WING IDEOLOGIES

Three key types of groups are responsible for producing misinformation: **Troll farms***, **Government Agencies,** and **other groups.** These communities tend to spread far-right ideologies, conspiracy theories, and other various forms of disinformation.

   Hubs like InfoWars and The Daily Wire enable the spread of misinformation, which often seeps into the mainstream through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

   These communities build through social media, these hubs, they create communities, and with these communities, it creates an echo chamber that continues the spread and creation of misinformation.

* Groups that post provocative or offensive messages online to incite anger or disrupt conversations.
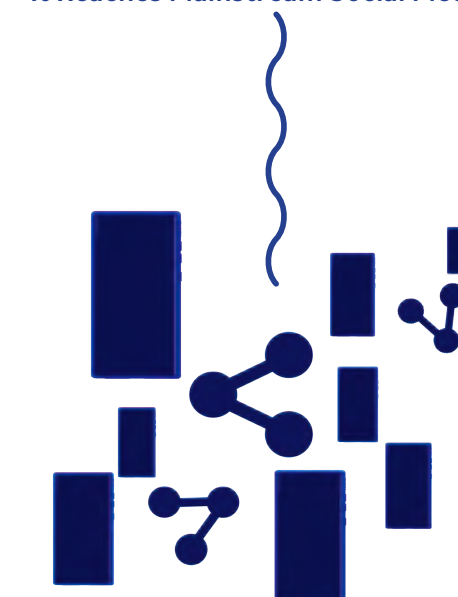
Troll Shares Misinformation.

Right-Wing Hubs Share the Misinformation.

It Reaches Mainstream Social Media.

It's Reach Becomes Wide-Spread.

Why is MISINFORMATION Prevalent Within RIGHT-WING COMMUNITIES?

Conservative media has already had a pattern of questioning or even attacking reputable sources, such as smoking and its ties to cancer and the many conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic. Misinformation tends to target the "Us vs Them" perspective, using real-world problems and affiliating them to one or more specific groups.

   They try to demonize and delegitimize dissident views and voices. Misinformation preys on many people's values, making it seem like their beliefs and traditions are being attacked. **The spread of distrust creates more communities, adding a sense of urgency as a justification for their views, and in some cases violence toward opponents.**

MISINFORMATION in the MAINSTREAM
(and its consequences)

Misinformation is spreading like a wildfire on social media, and it is also leaking into mainstream media. Television networks such as **Fox News, Newsmax,** and **OANN** are advertised as news networks, targeting conservative consumers.

All of these "sources" made false claims about the Presidential election and COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to ramp up misinformation on their networks. This is concerning, with local news in rural areas declining, these resources become some of the only "news" sources available.

These networks are now facing legal troubles because they spread misinformation, with Fox News settling the Dominion - Voting Systems' defamation lawsuit for $787.5 million, but this is not their last legal trouble. The legal troubles are also following the other networks as well.

POLITICS and MISINFORMATION

More and more conservative politicians sharing, and doubling down on misinformative information. **Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.)** and **Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.)** have both repeatedly shared and embraced misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Former President **Donald Trump** has claimed for years that the 2020 election was fraudulent, and more than 1001 Republicans have continued to spread their false claim as well.

From January to July 2022 Republican candidates shared the news, with a 36 % average of fake news being shared each day. With Republican incumbents, the number goes up to 45% of the time. Republicans such as Kari Lake spread fake news about her election loss, continuing to spread the lie that the election was stolen from her.

The culmination of misinformation from social media, mainstream media, and directly from politicians leads to many harmful events During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a rise in violence against people of Asian descent because of the many conspiracy theories and hateful remarks claiming it to be the "China Virus" because Wuhan is its predicted origin.

Misinformation also led to many acts of political violence, with the biggest one being the January 6th Insurrection, where many right-wing extremists charged into the capitol as a means to prevent the certification of the 2020 Election. This was directly caused by the misinformation spread by conservatives about the legitimacy of the 2020 election. Now, Donald Trump and other Republicans are facing continuous legal troubles over their continued lies about the election and their other various lies.

Tucker Carlson recently was fired from Fox News, not long after Fox News faced many lawsuits.

Separating FACT from FICTION.

To fight misinformation, it is important to learn about media literacy. Misinformation likes to prey on people's insecurities and likes to create a threat for people to fear. Being media literate will make sure the spread of misinformation is minimal. With legislation around the country pushing for media literacy to be taught in school, it is important to teach people of all ages about media literacy.

It is up to you to combat misinformation with real information! With these guidelines you can educate yourself and others on media literacy, and how to spot misinformation. With your help, we can bring a new era of information we can trust. Be sure to:

BE SKEPTICAL

Take new information with a hint of doubt. Verify the sources by cross checking with other articles, even if you trust your initial source.

READ BETWEEN THE LINES

Read articles in their entirety, not just the headline. Understand the methods used in misinformation.

START A DIALOGUE

Approach correcting people lightly and try to meet them in the middle ground.

PRACTICE MEDIA LITERACY

Be critical about how you search for information. Look out for buzzwords and language that is objective. Research multiple sources and distinguish between fact and opinion.

With information being more accessible, so is creating and publishing information. It is important to combat misinformation because of the damage it can cause. It is important to start a dialogue to fix the divide between opposing views, and to be critical of what we read. Only by taking these measures can we hope to minimize misinformation and regain trust in information.

Spread Facts not Fiction
(COMBAT MISINFORMATION HERE)

PBS Education offers a guide on media literacy.
Look for their article, **"WHAT Is Media Literacy and HOW Can Simple Shifts Center It."**

Cornell University also provides a useful infographic to help you evaluate sources and identify fake news.
Find the infographic at **guides.library.cornell.edu/**

NPR's article offers tips and tricks to help you identify fake news, so you can make informed decisions. Search online for **"Fake news: How to spot misinformation"** to learn more.

The News Literacy Project is an organization that promotes critical thinking and news literacy education. They offer various resources and programs to help people understand the media landscape and identify misinformation. Check them out at **www.newslit.org**

Media Literacy Now is another organization dedicated to promoting media literacy education. They advocate for policy changes and provide resources to help individuals develop media literacy skills. Learn more about their mission at **www.medialiteracynow.org**