



ADMM Cybersecurity and  
Information Centre of Excellence

# UPDATE ON THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

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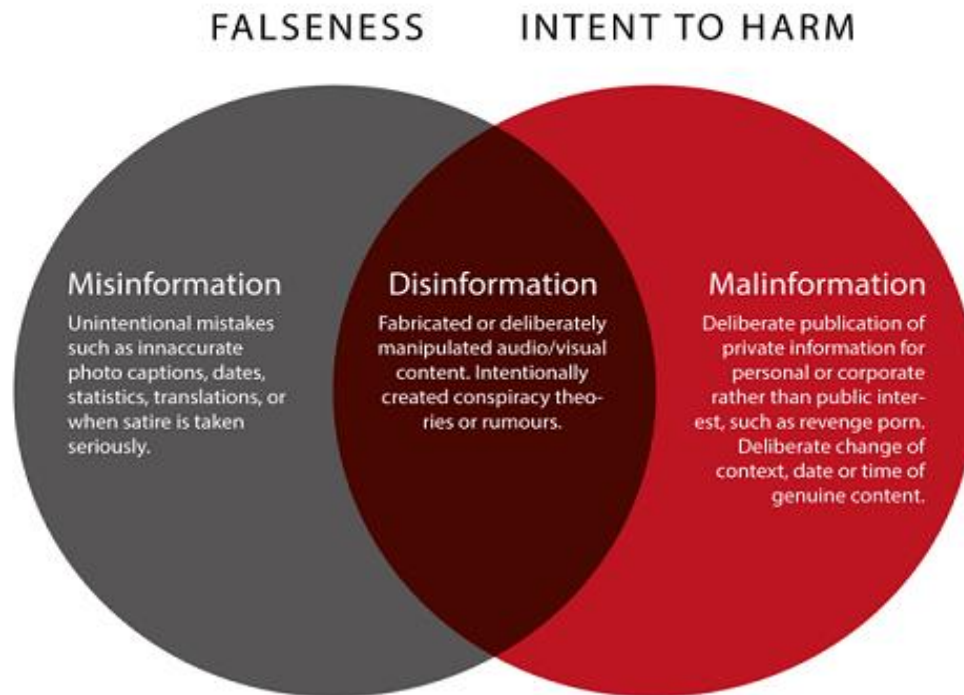
## Malinformation – Why it matters

### INTRODUCTION

1. Misinformation and Disinformation are common categories of false information. Malinformation, on the other hand, does not get sufficient attention, and have become increasingly common today.
2. The *Canadian Centre for Cyber Security* defines malinformation as, “information that **stems from the truth** but is often exaggerated in a way that misleads and **causes potential harm**”. The *Council of Europe* defines it as “**genuine information** that is shared **to cause harm**, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere” (See [Figure 1](#)). Though there is an element of truth in the information, it may become difficult or challenging to tell where it starts and where the distortions begin.

Figure 1 - Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation Classifications

## TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER



Source: **3 Types of Information Disorder** by Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakshan, 2017, is available under a **CC BY-NC-ND 3.0** license

3. **Misinformation** is a much more general term, focusing on the unintentional sharing of false information without a motivation to cause harm. For example, individuals might share articles or news that they believe to be true but is actually false. Individuals sharing such content rarely do so with malicious intent. Instead, they are more likely to be caught up in the moment, while trying to be helpful, and failed to adequately fact check the information shared.

4. **Disinformation** is “false information that is intended to manipulate, cause damage, or guide people, organisations, and countries in the wrong direction.” Fake news is a classic case of disinformation, since the false information is deliberately generated and intended to cause harm. These definitions show that although the terms centre on the general idea of spreading inaccurate information, there are clear differences in whether the information is false, the intent of harm, degree of information fabrication and culpability.

### *The Threat and Implications of Malinformation*

5. The abundance of readily available information in today's digital environment comes with an increased risk of malinformation. Malinformation can take many forms. It can be spread through traditional mainstream media, social media, messaging apps and even through conversations with friends and family. Malinformation can present itself in innocent ways, sometimes catching individuals off guard. This makes it all the more dangerous, especially when situations call for calm and require the accurate delivery of information. Malicious actors take advantage of such situations where there are grey areas for a blend of truth.

6. An example is during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mask wearing in the US became a highly politicised issue and ideologues misused information from health departments to propagate their own agenda. Some parties used statements from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to justify anti-maskers' political stance against mask wearing. It adopted true facts, but peppered it with political opinions, changing the flavour of the information.

7. The *Council of Europe* cited another example of malinformation during the 2017 French presidential election, when President Emmanuel Macron's emails were leaked the Friday before the run-off vote. The information contained in the leaked emails was real. However, the release of private information to the public just minutes before the media blackout was designed to cause maximum harm to Macron's election campaign. In this case, malinformation has the potential to impact the democratic process if such information is used to sway public opinion, and influence the outcome of elections.

### **ASSESSMENT**

8. Malinformation is a dangerous form of information threat, where even information from authoritative sources can be undermined. Technological advancement also makes it easier for malicious actors to utilise cutting edge technology such as deepfakes and generative artificial intelligence to create a hybrid informational threat, combining malinformation with disinformation. This suggests a need to view malinformation as a real and evolving area of concern.

9. The Russia-Ukraine war provides multiple examples of such hybrid information threat. Malicious actors took advantage of the heightened use of technology to spread disinformation, by doctoring videos to show President Volodymyr Zelenskyy surrendering and President Vladimir Putin declaring peace to sow chaos amongst the Ukrainians. More recently, *CNBC* and *The New York Times* reporting on the leakage of classified documents on the US and NATO support for Ukraine, also cited warnings from military analysts that some of the leaked documents appeared to have been selectively altered to overstate the estimates of Ukrainian war dead and minimise casualty numbers of Russian troops, suggesting a potential attempt at disinformation.

10. Some possible measures to mitigate the impact of malinformation with disinformation include the use of a simple fact-checker, or tools to verify information. Twitter uses a 'blue tick' and a label for foreign funded and state funded media. Similarly, Russia labels various media that it deems 'unfriendly' as a foreign agent. Another option is to cross reference multiple sources to ensure that other sources are reporting a similar line.

11. Alternative approaches, includes education policies centred around boosting media literacy and discernment of online content among social media users, especially the elderly and young children (often deemed as the most vulnerable online users).

12. Malinformation is an increasing area of concern in the information domain with significant consequences for individuals, businesses and governments. Regulators, industry and education institutions have a critical role in preparing the population to be digitally savvy, discerning and responsible online. For individuals, being critical of the information received and being careful about the information shared with others can help to mitigate the risks of malinformation.

## CONTACT DETAILS

All reports can be retrieved from our website at [www.acice-asean.org/resource/](http://www.acice-asean.org/resource/).

For any queries and/or clarifications, please contact ACICE at [ACICE@defence.gov.sg](mailto:ACICE@defence.gov.sg)

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