

Misinformation, Media Literacy, and Democratic Discourse

Annotated Bibliography

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Mechanisms and Spread of Online Misinformation

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>

Drawing on a dataset of 126,000 rumour cascades spread by 3 million Twitter users over eleven years, Vosoughi et al. demonstrate that false news diffuses significantly faster, farther, and more broadly than accurate news — and that human behaviour, not bots, is the primary driver. *Evaluation*: The study's large longitudinal dataset and rigorous statistical controls make it a landmark empirical contribution; the restriction to Twitter limits generalisation to other platforms. *Relevance*: Provides indispensable quantitative evidence for arguments about misinformation's structural advantages over factual reporting in algorithmically curated environments.

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2019). Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning. *Cognition*, 188, 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.06.011>

Using six experiments involving more than 3,400 U.S. participants, Pennycook and Rand challenge the dominant “echo chamber” narrative by showing that analytical thinking ability — not partisan motivation — predicts accurate discernment of fake-news headlines. *Evaluation*: The experimental design is internally consistent, though U.S.-centric convenience samples constrain cross-cultural applicability. *Relevance*: Shifts emphasis toward cognitive interventions (critical thinking education) rather than purely structural or regulatory solutions to misinformation.

Media Literacy: Interventions and Educational Frameworks

Jeong, S.-H., Cho, H., & Hwang, Y. (2012). Media literacy interventions: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Communication*, 62(3), 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01643.x>

This meta-analysis synthesises 51 media literacy studies ($N > 7,000$) and reports consistently positive effects across age groups and media domains, with effect sizes ranging from small (knowledge gains) to moderate (attitude and behavioural change). *Evaluation*: Rigorous meta-analytic methodology strengthens generalisability; however, most constituent studies predate social media's dominance. *Relevance*: Establishes a robust empirical foundation for

advocating media literacy curricula as a systemic response to misinformation, supporting policy recommendations in the paper's conclusion.

Breakstone, J., Smith, M., Wineburg, S., Rapaport, A., Carle, J., Garland, M., & Saavedra, A. (2021). Students' civic online reasoning: A national portrait. *Educational Researcher*, 50(8), 505–515. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211017495>

A nationally representative survey of 3,446 U.S. high-school and college students reveals alarming gaps in civic online reasoning — the ability to evaluate the credibility of digital sources. Most students failed to identify sponsored content or investigate the provenance of viral images. *Evaluation*: Stratified random sampling strengthens external validity; the study measures reasoning performance rather than self-reported competence, a methodological strength. *Relevance*: Offers stark empirical grounding for the urgent need to institutionalise digital literacy training and informs the policy discussion in Section 4.

Platform Governance and Democratic Implications

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report/168076277c>

Wardle and Derakhshan present a typological framework distinguishing *mis-information*, *dis-information*, and *mal-information* based on the intent to harm and factual accuracy of content. The report synthesises communication scholarship with platform-policy analysis. *Evaluation*: As a policy report rather than a peer-reviewed empirical study, it prioritises conceptual clarity over statistical evidence; nevertheless its taxonomy has been widely adopted by researchers and policymakers. *Relevance*: The tripartite framework provides the definitional scaffolding for the paper's theoretical section and clarifies distinctions that are often conflated in public discourse.

Roozenbeek, J., Schneider, C. R., Dryhurst, S., Kerr, J., Freeman, A. L. J., Recchia, G., van der Bles, A. M., & van der Linden, S. (2020). Susceptibility to misinformation about COVID-19 across 26 countries. *Royal Society Open Science*, 7(10), 201199. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.201199>

Surveying 26,000 respondents across 26 countries during the early COVID-19 pandemic, Roozenbeek et al. find that analytical thinking, digital literacy, and institutional trust are the strongest predictors of misinformation resistance, while education alone is a weak predictor. *Evaluation*: The multinational scale is exceptional; self-reported measures introduce social desirability bias. *Relevance*: The cross-national scope enriches the paper with comparative evidence, countering purely U.S.-centric assumptions and supporting arguments for globally adaptable media literacy standards.