

Disinformation

This resource focuses on **disinformation, which is information that is deliberately created or shared to deceive and cause harm.**

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is shared without the intent to deceive or cause harm.

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) defines disinformation as information that is intentionally false or misleading spread with the intent to cause harm or achieve a broader aim. It is often spread online or on social media, but it can also appear on television, radio, or in the news, including newspapers.

Foreign states and their proxies may use disinformation as part of foreign interference to influence and mislead people and communities in harmful ways.

How disinformation can spread

Disinformation can spread in a range of ways, including:

- **Messaging apps and community networks**, where information is often forwarded between contacts that people trust.
- **Content shared within community or interest groups**, which people may trust more because it comes from familiar sources or is in a language they understand.
- **Information from media or sources outside New Zealand** that may not align with New Zealand media or contexts.
- **Social media platforms** can spread disinformation rapidly, especially short-form content such as TikTok videos, Instagram reels, or Twitter/X threads.
- **Influencers and micro-influencers** can spread disinformation because they have a large or trusted following.
- **Search engines and recommendations** on platforms may show disinformation to users, even when they don't look for it.
- **Offline sharing**, such as printed flyers, posters, word of mouth in workplaces, schools, or communities.

Types of disinformation

Foreign states may use disinformation as part of foreign interference. Here are some examples of content that may be used to **deliberately mislead people**:

- **Misleading viral content:** Online content deliberately designed to attract attention and get people to click on a link, often using misleading or exaggerated claims.
- **Deceptive, exaggerated or false headlines:** Headlines that deliberately distort, exaggerate, or misrepresent information to mislead people.
- **Deliberately poor or manipulated journalism:** Articles presented as credible reporting but intentionally lacking proper research, evidence, or fact-checking.
- **False information to damage reputations:** Content deliberately designed to negatively impact a person's reputation or to run smear campaigns, often targeting individuals who are vocally critical of a foreign state.
- **Fabricated or manipulated facts:** False details such as invented timelines, places, names, or sources that are intentionally included to mislead and deceive people.
- **Fake or altered photos and videos:** Images or videos that are digitally created or manipulated (including using artificial intelligence) to intentionally deceive viewers.
- **Coordinated amplification:** Deliberately misleading content being shared widely by networks of accounts, bots, or websites to make it appear more credible or popular than it actually is.
- **State-linked media or undisclosed affiliations:** Content produced by outlets, websites, or social media accounts that present themselves as independent but are linked to foreign governments.
- **Satire or parody misused as disinformation:** Satirical or parody content used to deliberately mislead and influence people's views, sometimes as part of coordinated disinformation campaigns.

Thinking about what you see

Check:

- **Whether the information comes from a credible source** and whether other trustworthy news sites report the same information. Check out Netsafe's [How to spot fake news](#) resource to learn more.
- **Where the original story or information appeared** and who is promoting or sharing it.
- **Who the author is and what their background, purpose, or interests might be** (for example, whether they are trying to inform, persuade, promote a particular viewpoint, or influence people's opinions).

Consider:

- **Pausing** when content triggers a strong emotional reaction (e.g., urgency, fear, or outrage).
- **Asking why** the content might have been created or shared (e.g., to influence opinions, generate clicks, or prompt action).
- **Thinking about who benefits** if the information is believed or shared.

For example, if you see a post saying 'share this now before it gets taken down,' this should make you stop and think about why it's being shared.

What to do when you're unsure

It's important to remember that it's okay not to know immediately whether something is disinformation.

Taking time before sharing information gives you a chance to think about whether it's true, check the facts, and avoid spreading something inaccurate.

You can also talk with trusted people, such as family members or friends, to hear what they think about the information.

Disinformation used by foreign states and their proxies

Below are some characteristics deliberately used in **disinformation by foreign states and their proxies**:

- **Provoke strong emotions** while deliberately leaving out important facts or evidence to trigger anger, fear, or outrage.
- **Present information in a misleading or exaggerated way** to trigger a reaction or spread quickly.
- **Use emotionally charged language** to trigger reactions in readers rather than inform them.
- **Show clear bias or rely on stereotypes** to influence how people think about an issue or group.
- **Exclude different perspectives or viewpoints** to present only one side of a story.
- **Include incorrect, manipulated, or outdated information** presented as if it were accurate.
- **Contain frequent spelling or grammar mistakes**, which can sometimes indicate low credibility or content that was created very quickly.
- **Use low-quality, edited, or out-of-context images or videos** to support misleading information.

Take control of your social media feed

If a social media account is sharing false or misleading information:

- **Block or unfollow** the account to prevent more similar content from appearing.
- **Report the account** on the social media platform to help reduce harmful content online.

How to report disinformation

You can report harmful or false online content:

- Report disinformation and other harmful content [on the Netsafe website](#).
- If media content is misleading or violates broadcasting rules, raise a complaint with the [New Zealand Media Council](#) or [Advertising Standards Authority](#).
- Report disinformation on social media **using platform reporting features**.

Learn more on Netsafe

[Netsafe](#) is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation, providing online safety support, expertise and education for people in New Zealand including: [children and young people](#), [parents and caregivers](#), [adults](#) and [older people](#).

Headspace Invaders

[Headspace Invaders](#) is an [interactive platform](#) that helps young people aged 12 to 16 build confidence and critical thinking skills when navigating online content to help young people recognise manipulation, pressure, and harm online.