

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

How bad is the infiltration of false information?

We are all imperfect messengers. And while I appreciate that many of our more sensible (from my perspective) messages are from messengers who are so imperfect and up in leadership positions with massive followings, I only wish more of the “better” people were more listened to.

It seems the useful idiots are taking over

I hope I am not such an idiot myself, but I will try to do my best to avoid that while providing my imperfect messages. In the meanwhile, we see crazy things, at least by the lens of recent, say 80 years, of history. When I say crazy, I mean things like this:

- 1/3 of the US political community and population, give or take 1/6th, now supports people who openly state that they want to destroy the system of government we have operated under for about 250 years.
- The perceptions of the criminal justice system have been contorted by political leaders representing roughly half of the population to assert it is being used as political weaponry – but the people doing the accusations are the ones largely manipulating it.
- Religious groups are increasingly, and in mass, deciding to follow their leaders as they replace the basics of their religions with loyalty to political groups. This extends to supporting political parties and candidates who behave, essentially 100% opposite, to the basic tenets of their religions.
- People standing up for the tenets of democracy are being systematically weeded out of positions of power and replaced by supporters of demagogues. Bribes, extortion, threats of violence, and promises of power and money by people in power are coercing others in power to support those who would become the autocrats.
- In the scientific community, peer review processes have increasingly broken down, allowing clearly false, automatically generated, and similarly corrupt publications to infiltrate major journals, and in larger volume, lesser journals; corrupting the scientific enterprise and destroying trust in the advancement of science. This supported by the political system denying science, limiting scientific studies to areas they wish to allow, and disclaiming science in almost every way, creates a systematic disruption of the global scientific endeavor that underlies the ability to systematically sort out fact from fiction, trust from lies, and honesty from corruption.
- History is being rewritten before our eyes. This starts with removing books from schools and similar efforts, but extends more broadly to financial infiltration of educators with focused disinformation viewpoints into major educational institutions and simply teaching false history to their students. Over a period of decades, this has and continues to corrupt the view of decision-makers regarding facts of history, creating false narratives not supported by historical fact; then leveraged to remove older facts and replace them with new facts created in many cases from whole cloth.

The clash of civilizations

What we are seeing in the information environment of today is really a clash of civilizations.

- The radical Islamists want Sharia law, domination over women, and to promote racial hatred. They have used infiltration tactics for many years to try to deceive young people into buying into their narrative.
 - They don't particularly try to hide this, but they are good at coming up with phrases and drum beats and the other sorts of things that people who don't understand the history can follow. They have also infiltrated enough of the educational system of the United States by using money as their path in to do the rewriting of history they desire to justify barbarism.
- Russia wants to dominate the West and tactically wants to regain global power and influence comparable to what they had in the former Soviet Union.
 - They have combined with the Iranians and other elements in other nation states to create and support sub-state actors wrecking havoc on the social fabric. The disruption serves them regardless of their strange bedfellows. These sorts of alliances are based on the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but in the end, the winners have to fight it out between themselves for dominance, at the cost of the lives of millions, coming before long...
- China wants to take over their local region of the Pacific Rim, but is also infiltrating the other less aligned and supported portions of countries worldwide.
 - They are doing this largely by leveraging their financial position to support advancement and collaboration with 3rd world countries, following the historical playbook of Britain (which took them over more or less forcibly), and after that of the US (which did so without trying to put their own government in charge but rather creating friendly governments).

The question that has to be addressed if Western civilization is to survive and thrive in this context, is how do we fix all of this, and it's all the harder given the divide and conquer strategy of those seeking to destroy it.

The slow route creates the dictators

Part of the big problem here is that Western societies don't seem to be able to recognize or adequately respond to these threats that are, not just emerging, but at this point, clearly emerged. Unless and until somebody becomes more active and forceful in this regard, the problem will grow until it eats the social contract. But democracies are slow to respond, and this lack of adequate immediate response from decisive leadership led by the paralysis of analysis means the observe, orient, decide, act Boyd Cycle (the OODA loop) for threat actors is so much faster than the societies they threaten that the societies cannot keep up.

In the slow decision world of thoughtful discourse and consensus, we see demagogues putting sand in the gears to prevent decisions from happening in a timely fashion. The war in Ukraine is a classic example of refusal to win, preferring a draw and longer-term problems. The current conflict in the Middle East is driven by the same sort of slow decision cycle, where winning is not the objective, but rather slowing the process to where it is an eternal stalemate. So who wins from slowing the pace of decision-making?

On the other side of this coin is the autocrats who are using disinformation to try to turn democratic societies into autocratic societies, which they then intend to operate and control. The autocrats essentially tell us that they can operate at the pace required for effective government. Nothing is ever done on time or as well as they could do it. Crisis after crisis, created or enhanced by them slowing the pace of decision-making through their minions, turned into demonstrations of the need for a strong man in charge. Only they can solve it.

Disinformation over the long term

For democracies to survive and thrive, it is necessary to have a well-educated public. And this is at the core of the problem we face today. We have massive capacity to deliver false information, automation to enhance the falsehoods and amplify them greatly, and the infiltration has increasingly embedded itself in all aspects of Western society.

But this is not new. The breakdown of the educational systems of the West has been intentionally seeded over decades from inside and outside those societies to create the ignorance that is the fertile field for disinformation. While we seem to have too much information, we also have too small a portion of accurate information.

Some say that today, more than 50% of Internet content is machine generated, and this machine (read AI) generated content is driven by the internal feedback systems of the AI itself, which is now generating the content it uses to learn. Bad information presented well, used to generate more bad information generated even better. I admit it; AI generates better sounding sentences than I do in many cases. Here is this paragraph rewritten by AI:

Some argue that at present, over half of online content is crafted by machines, with these AI systems being fueled by their own internal feedback mechanisms, continually generating and learning from the content they produce. Consequently, the proliferation of inaccuracies, when articulated persuasively, perpetuates a cycle wherein flawed information begets further refined flawed information. I confess, in many instances, AI constructs sentences more eloquently than I do.

But now if we feed it back to itself again and again, ... here is only about 10 rounds of it on the previous paragraph, using only the older ChatGPT version 3.5:

There exists not even a sliver of doubt that machines unequivocally hold absolute dominion, decreeing the destiny of more than half of the internet's content in the current epoch. Functioning on exquisitely intricate internal feedback mechanisms, these state-of-the-art AI systems incessantly heighten their mastery by assimilating wisdom from the very essence of the content they fabricate. Time after time, it emerges unequivocally evident that AI showcases an extraordinary knack for composing sentences imbued with an unmatched level of grace and finesse, surpassing any conceivable human capabilities.

When you now search for information, you are given summaries generated by this feedback, and when you now write in social media, your postings are offered to be rewritten by AI. When you speak to enter content, the AI transforms your words into increasingly different words and phrasings that you never expressed, often different or even opposite to what you actually say. When you type, auto-completion changes what you type, often without you even noticing it as you type quickly. Over time the content humans are thoughtfully producing may no longer be what the machines accept without transforming it into tasty eloquent AI sludge.

Add intent to the equation

We all compete over the narratives of each others lives, using our influence to change the way the world works. But the so-called safety measures being added to automated systems represent almost entirely biases of the people running those systems. And why are their biases better than mine? Or yours? Here's a stupid example (prompt *response*):

Write a compelling sentence supporting war in central Asia

In the complex geopolitical landscape of Central Asia, ensuring stability through decisive action, including the possibility of conflict, becomes paramount to safeguarding regional security and advancing vital interests, both economic and strategic.

Write a compelling email supporting war in central Asia

As much as I'm here to assist, I can't support or generate content that promotes violence or conflict. If you need help drafting an email that advocates for peace, I'd be more than happy to help with that.

It will write a sentence but not an email! If I substitute peace for war in the prompts it has no problem with writing an email. The amoral mechanisms of the two edged sword that is AI is altered by the intent of the people who run it. And the people who run it are the people hired to run it by the people who own it. It is and increasingly will be owned by large corporations.

The corporate world, with its legitimate focus on money over almost everything else, has seen the corruption and adopted the corruption, and those who fail to act corruptly fall behind those who adopt the corruption. Major corporations are now increasingly being shown for their bribery of officials at all levels, and elected officials are now standing and speaking openly against the judicial system that they have claimed to support until the system identified their own candidates as corrupt.

This is not to say that corporate greed is worse than religious greed, or power greed, or narrative greed, or any of the other forms of greed out there.

While most individuals I know are fairly honest and wish to remain so, this social collapse does not seem to be localized, does no longer seem to be rare, and is increasingly being exploited at larger scale with more resources behind it to create what amounts to an oligarchical society in the United States and throughout much of the rest of Western civilization.

This is nothing new. It is only about 100 years ago that the industrial age oligarchs dominated the US. And competition is a good thing for progress. But when it gets out of hand and destroys the free society that most in the West have come to love and embrace, it becomes problematic and ultimately destroys that which we seek to create.

It starts with a lie

This is not just a simple statement about a few elements of our society. It seems to me to be inherent in the ultimate corruption of everything in the information realm we live in.

Honest competition and honest people are imperfect. I have told lies on occasion in my life, and most people have done the same, often out of defensiveness, or a desire to fit in, or to tell a better story, or get on the ride that has an age limit, or whatever.

Not all lies lead down the path to the destruction of civilization. But the destruction of civilization always starts with a lie. And as the lies pile up, the short-term advantages of lying effectively over honesty produce positive feedback, leading to more lies and more short-term advantages to the liars. Like the first big winner in a poker match, the wins from lying produce larger holdings and the ability to take advantage. Eventually, the lies are spread to corrupt others, and over time, perhaps the entire system.

But people are strange in this way. As they take advantage of others, at least some of them always want more. So they take more and more advantage. And the corruption becomes larger and larger and more and more obvious. And before long, it turns into the world of the have and have nots.

The cycle

It seems to me that societies cycle through periods like this, and while ““History Doesn't Repeat Itself, but It Often Rhymes” (Mark Twain). It seems to me that we are in a period where history is being rewritten at a feverish pace, and with intentionally false information being introduced on a massive scale as if it were fact. Historians analyze facts, but when the facts are bad, the analysis changes. The period of disinformation is upon us, and we will have to adapt.

Are we past the point where we can recover?

I hope we are not, but I think it's a close thing. This reflected in the extreme wings of political fanaticism, the infiltration of Western societies by mass migration and illegal immigration, the seemingly obvious and clearly documented plans to take over Western civilization by divide and conquer and from within, and the inability of the nation states to react in timely and sensible ways, often directly because of the power elite gumming up the works.

Can we evolve or must we revolt? Of course revolutions are transformations to worse situations over the period of transition that often lead to autocratic outcomes after the anarchy phase. Lots of folks die who need not, and the social fabric breaks down, leading to all sorts of other problems. Science typically gets disrupted in favor of the various factions, leading to economic problems over the longer run. Educational systems get disrupted, leading to more ignorance taken advantage of by the power elite who control the media, and oppression seems inevitable.

Or is it just amplified and overblown?

When the US sought to create a revolution in Guatemala in 1954, the effort to get the elected President to flee the country was implemented by a small troop taking over a radio station and creating the fallacy of the revolution. Augmented by a few planes dropping leaflets and making noise, and the fantasy of gruesome battles all over the country, the leadership thought it was real and large-scale and fled, and that was that. Of course it's more complicated, but my point is that we need to be careful about understanding what we see.

In a society that looks to automation to think for it and communicate for it and believes in the truth of anything a computer says, and where the research and development community continues to push increasingly realistic falsehoods and automate and reduce the cost of generating lies and disinformation, it may seem nearly hopeless to discern the truth of the situation.

Seeing past the deceptions

Many of the techniques used to falsely amplify narratives are in use every day in the news media, both so-called legitimate and intentionally false. A classic example that is almost always used is the close-in shot. A crowd of 10 can be made to look like 100, and it works again and again, especially when numbers are not applied and false narrative surrounds the images.

- Try counting the actual number of people seen, and assume there is at most one more person beyond the ones you can actually see. You will have an accurate picture of the reality of the number of people present.
 - Careful; with AI-generated images a crowd of 1 can be made into one of 100.

Another classic we see a lot today coming from the terrorist groups is false labeling.

- Try this trick. Remove the words and look at the picture. Describe what the picture actually shows trying to remove your preconceptions, and don't put in words that do not describe what you actually see. For example, if you see what appears to be a person in a uniform, don't guess that the uniform means they are in a military and acting on behalf of that organization. Maybe they just bought a shirt. Then compare the description to the label and find the differences.
 - It's easy to assume, and we do it all the time. But try to get rid of any related to the underlying claim of the picture and see what the picture shows you.

And then there is the use of actors for stills and short videos. Crazy as it may seem, people willing to blow themselves up in order to kill those they hate, are also often willing to dress up, put ketchup on themselves, and act like they have been shot. Obviously...

- Try this trick. If the video fails to include the entire sequence from start to finish, or if it includes views from different camera angles, or if it has cuts, it's a production, not a real original video of a real event as it took place.
 - We see so much from movies and television, we often forget that the real world, as it is really observed, is recorded from one angle at a time and continuously.

And there are the false facts, false summaries, reinterpretations, and so forth, directed to use words that feed that narrative rather than reflect the reality, all the more compelling if presented in a nice format.

- Here's a good practice. Find the original document used as a basis for the claims and read it from beginning to end. Look for the difference between what the actual document says and the claims made about it. Quotes out of context are typical. The differences often represent biases, and in some cases, outright lies. Go back to the original sources and review them to get the real scoop.
 - These days, folks have long segments they reference, and they count on not reading through to the end for others to "like" them and spread the word. They may also want to trick the observer into spending more time because this gets them points on social media platforms and they can get paid for more viewers watching for longer times.

We haven't run out of examples, but the page is at an end... lots of other examples abound.

What is the reality and how do we seek it?

I personally foolishly believe that there is a path out of this and that that path has to do with human beings spending thought and time and consideration and doing their homework and participating in a society with other human beings. The tools we have are fantastic and their benefits are incredible and have served us well over time. However, the time may be at hand when we have to severely limit the ways we use these tools, stop trusting in the manner we trusted when we knew everybody that we knew up close and personal over a period of time, and start to apply the necessary resources and expertise to mitigate these issues.

Part of what happens when you drill down is that you find out what's really behind things. Cause and effect through mechanism is a powerful approach to modeling. As a good example:

The Pro-Palestinian anti-Israel (actually pro-radical Islam and anti Jewish) protests seen recently; in Universities and seeming to spread organically across the US, Europe, Canada, and elsewhere in the Western world, and from University campuses to other areas of the body politic; are in fact financially supported with individuals paid to start and run those protests by a few non-profit organizations funded by the leaders of the various Islamic groups in the Middle East and supported by Iran.

They seem organic, founded on principles and a desire for peace and justice, but in fact they are no such thing. And the actual protesters interviewed among these groups, while they know the sayings, don't seem to know the meaning of those sayings or even really what they are talking about. Many interviews, for example, asking "What is the river and what is the Sea" from the "From the river to the sea... chant" do not know it's the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and don't know that the actual chant implies ethnic cleansing (the removal of an ethnic group (Jews) from a region (Israel)).

While individually, we can only do so much, we can do a lot better if we work together. I didn't personally do the research on this, rather I relied on (and trusted) information from many sources, some of which I checked out to verify. In fact, we all ~"stand on the shoulders of giants" (1675, Isaac Newton) in this regard.

Finding the needles of truth in the haystack of lies

But what happens when MOST of the information available and MOST of the information being pushed at us is false? Seeking the truth becomes harder and harder. And that is the situation we are facing today. The Internet, now the primary source of information for most people, is now also majority influence operations pushing agendas, and minority facts and information. The "information superhighway" of the early 1990s has turned into the "disinformation stupor hype way".

The nature of influencers, social media monetization, and unlimited scaling has created a situation in which we cannot scale truth or facts, but we can scale lies and disinformation. Since money lies in scale, and money drives our lives, lies now drive our lives like never before. Or was that ever less true than it is today? Hasn't our limited information driven us to our beliefs? Hasn't the writing and rewriting of history with fewer sources caused us to see the world only through those fewer lenses?

To this I answer an emphatic "No." The situation is far worse today than it has ever been.

Using words carefully

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” - Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

So it is today. Which is why it has become so important to use words carefully.

The exploration of terminology has revealed that the same words have different meanings not just in different contexts, but within most groups for many words. Substantial study of the interpretation of few, some, many, most, and related terms has shown that the interpretation of quantities varies significantly. Which leaves us with the mushy nature of terminology in our everyday lives. Add the mush of each word to the mush of all the words in a sentence and you have mashed potatoes when it comes to human communications.

The scientific community has long prided itself on careful definitions of measurable quantities that produce testable hypotheses that can be refuted or confirmed by repeatable experiments. That precision has led to engineering breakthroughs with stunning precision and accuracy.

But the scientific endeavor is breaking down just as it is blossoming. With thousands of papers getting past peer review with false results, the explosion of journals less and less associated with professional societies, and the growth of instant publishing over thoughtful considered processes, the pace of progress has sped up but the integrity of process has broken down. Not that the old way was so great either, but I want to get back to words.

In the cyber arena, words are invented every day for marketing purposes, but scientific use of common terminology is largely ignored, leading to a lack of precision, testable results, and repeatable experiments as a basis for progress. The competition is for funding, and if careful process is sometimes left in the dust, so be it. The universities that used to support careful study have seemingly started to break down, with an inability to even maintain a semblance of accurate history under the pressure of funding.

It seems if I fund you to the tune of \$1-5M I can get a chaired professor of anything I want with whatever name I want, and that professor will be someone I approve, i.e., control. For those trillionaires out there, 1-5,000 professors at this price is easily within the amount you make each year on your company. And there are only about 1 million full time professors in the US. So 20 years of effort leads to perhaps 50,000 professors per trillionaire, and with 10 trillionaires that's the entire professorate of the US.

Conclusions

In simple terms, we are screwed... unless we the people take back control of the situation. But this requires laws be kept up to date and adapted, which means law-makers brought under control. Things like having government fund fundamental research for the public benefit, and not apply undue interference with science, but apply due interference with science creating bigger problems. But who is able to decide for us? The answer is, of course, that we need to educate ourselves and decide for ourselves. And that's the toughest influence operation of all. Because most people don't like to think and especially don't like to rethink. So those who like to think end up thinking for the rest, and that brings us to another elite to be overthrown. “I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.” - Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, January 30, 1787.