



Misinformation in the Modern World

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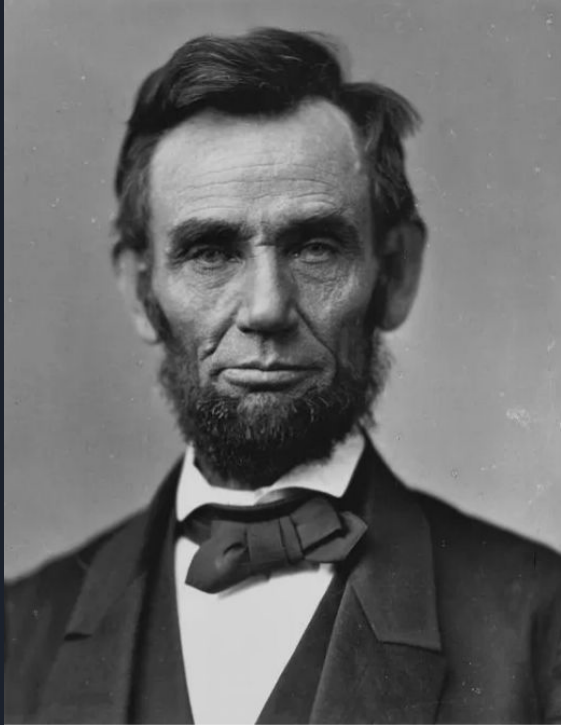
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Outline for today

- Types of information disorder
- Disinformation
- Conspiracy theories

Today's topic in one picture



**"Don't believe
everything you
you read on the
internet."**

- Buddha, 30.02.1945



nick skillicorn
Innovation & Creativity



1. Types of Information Disorder



Types of information disorder

- Information disorder means that something **is not right** with the contents of the communicated message
- When looking at different types of information disorder, one can distinguish between **Mis-information**, **Dis-information**, and **Mal-information**
- These 3 types of information disorder differ along the criteria of **falseness** and **intent to harm**

TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER

FALSENESS

INTENT TO HARM

Misinformation

Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translations, or when satire is taken seriously.

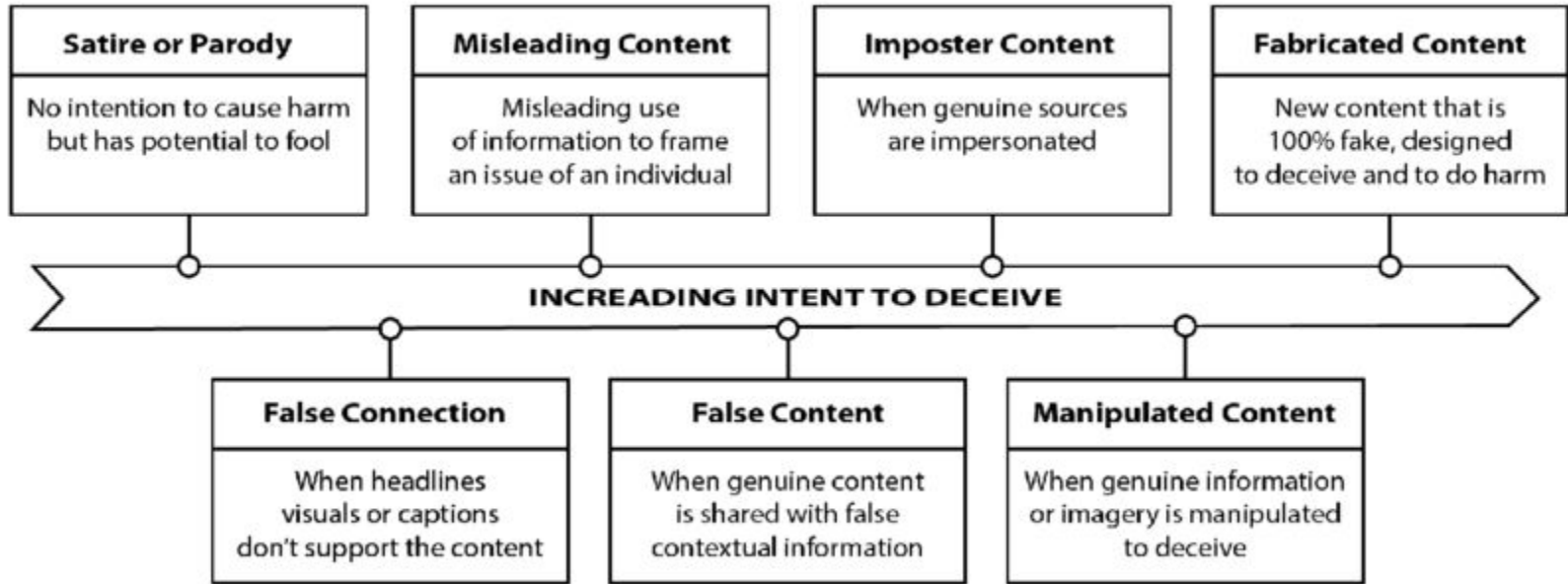
Disinformation

Fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content. Intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumours.

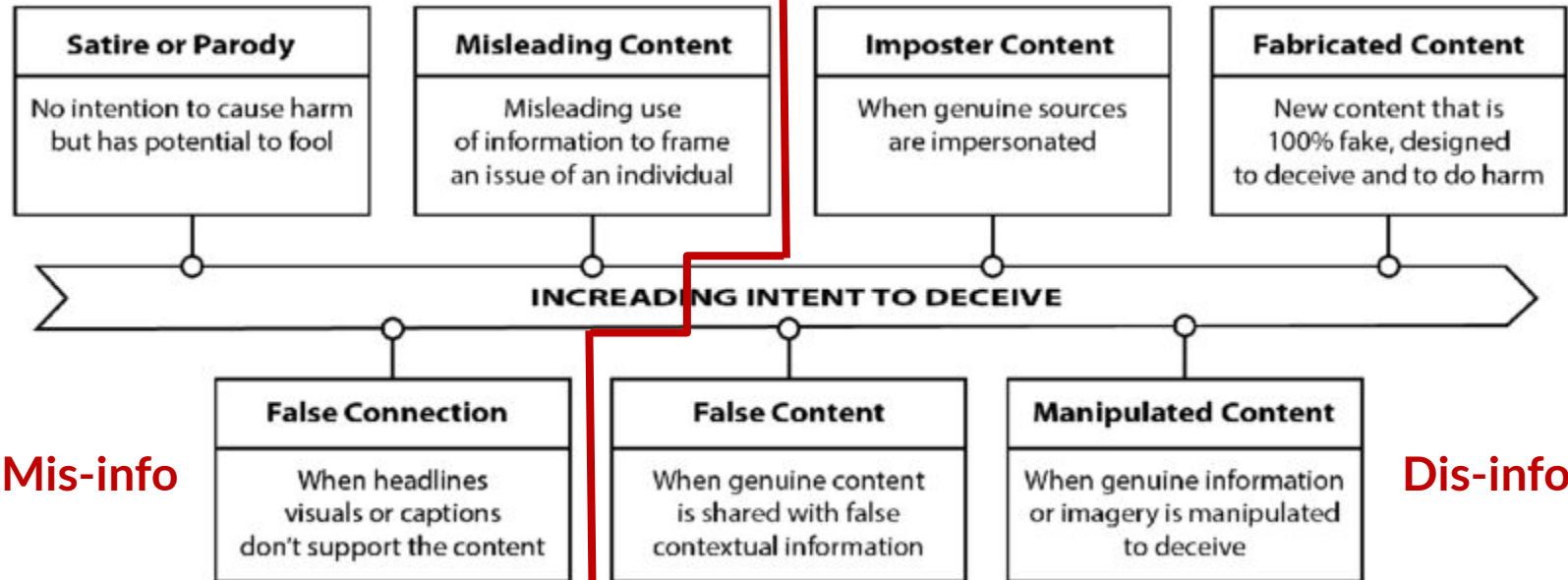
Malinformation

Deliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate rather than public interest, such as revenge porn.
Deliberate change of context, date or time of genuine content.

Wardle's (2017) taxonomy of mis- and dis-information



Wardle's (2017) taxonomy of mis- and dis-information





ralston

Let's now focus on dis-information as it is both false and intentionally harmful

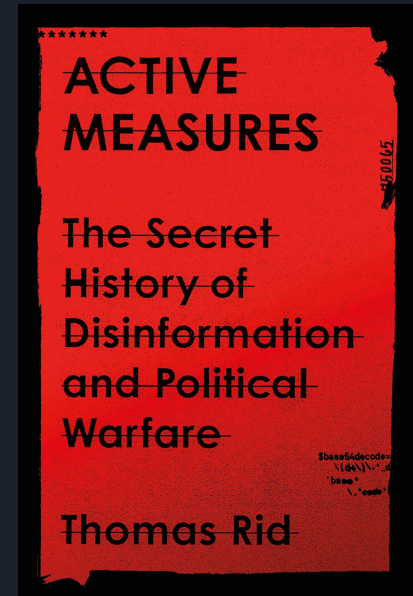
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2. Disinformation



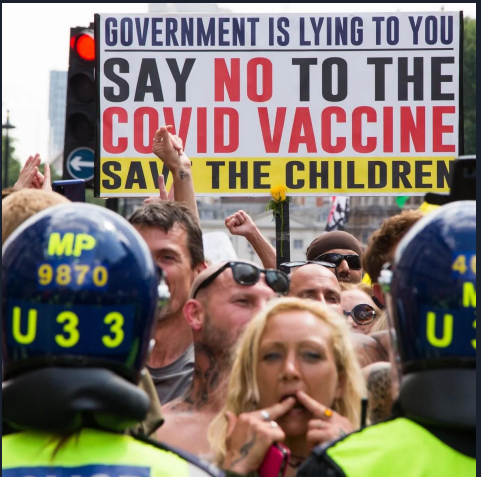
Disinformation can be defined as fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual/textual content, that was intentionally created by its author to be spread and deceive people





- Disinformation is not new
- The term has been in use since 1950s
- Since then, groups, individuals, and governments have attempted to use disinformation to sway people's political alignment
- Used extensively during WWII and especially during the Cold War



But why
disinformation is
spreading so much
today?




- 
- Widely accessible, cheap and sophisticated editing and publishing technology has made it easier than ever for anyone to create and distribute content
 - Information consumption, which was once private, has become public because of social media
 - The speed at which information is disseminated has been supercharged by an accelerated news cycle and mobile handsets
 - Information is passed in real-time between trusted peers, and any piece of information is far less likely to be challenged

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In other words...

“What we see unfolding right before our eyes is nothing less than **Moore’s Law** applied to the **distribution of mis-information**: an exponential growth of available technology coupled with a rapid collapse of costs”.

-Frederic Filloux

(general manager of the France ePresse consortium)



Forms of disinformation

- False news articles
- Viral memes
- Videos
- Tweets or Facebook posts
- Audio recordings/podcasts
- Deepfakes

Black Lives Matter THUGS Blocking Emergency Crews From Reaching Hurricane Victims

2 days ago

3

SHARE this story with your friends!

13.3k

f Share

Tweet +

BLACK LIVES MATTER THUGS BLOCKING EMERGENCY CREWS FROM REACHING HURRICANE VICTIMS

September 26, 2017 | News | No Comments




This is just sick! Emergency crews are working hard to make sure that they can be there to rescue Hurricane Harvey victims, but leftist punks from the Black Lives Matter clique don't think people deserve to be saved.

- Disinformation is designed to **make you react**
- It typically prays on people's **emotions** and **vulnerabilities**
- This helps to convince people to share a piece of disinformation more widely



- The spread of disinformation is driven by mechanisms such as “confirmation bias” and “motivated reasoning”
- Confirmation bias is a type of cognitive bias that involves favouring information that confirms previously existing beliefs or biases
- Motivated reasoning posits that people distort how they process new information in the direction of beliefs

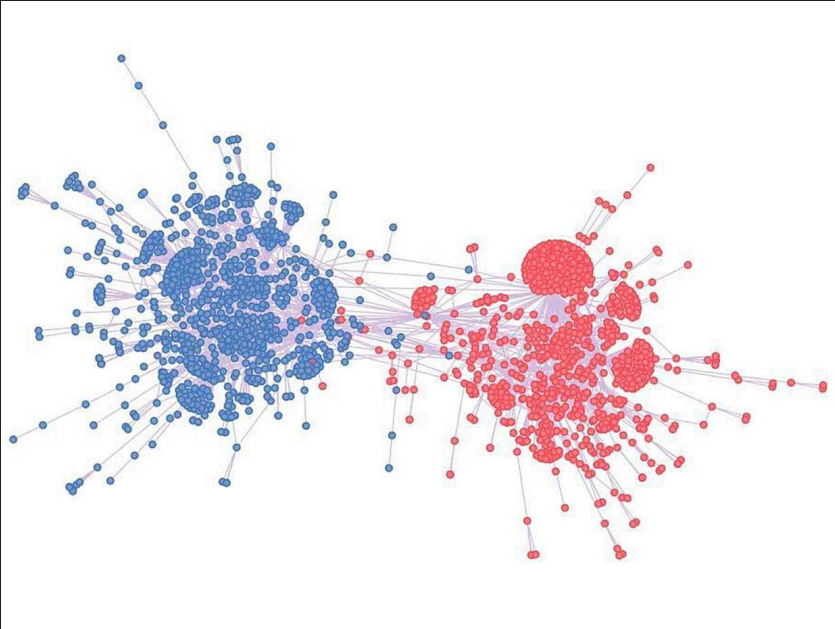


People are more likely to spread disinformation when:

- The situation is **uncertain** (e.g. elections, natural disasters)
- They are emotionally **overwhelmed** and **anxious**
- The topic of discussion is of **personal importance** to them
- They do not have primary **control** over the situation through their actions



Echo chambers



Social media platforms utilise algorithms to present users with the content that is most relevant to them

This often results in the creation of **echo chambers** or **filter bubbles**

Interacting with posts, articles, and viewpoints that align with one's beliefs **reinforces pre-held beliefs** and make users unaware of **opposing narratives**



How to spot disinformation online?

Let's watch [this](#) video



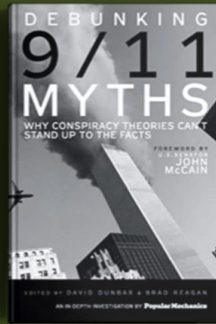
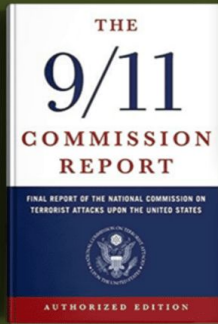
How to spot disinformation online?

- Check the source
- Look at how the post/news article are written
- Read beyond the headline
- Look for more sources
- Check in with sources you trust



3. Conspiracy theories

Defining the conspiracy theory



- **Conspiratorial thinking** is driven by a strong human desire to make sense of social forces that are self-relevant, important, and threatening

- **Conspiracy theories** can be viewed as a subtype of disinformation - they are both **harmful** and **intentional**
- **Conspiracy theories** tend to explain an event or set of circumstances as the result of a **secret plot** by usually powerful conspirators
- Such explanations reject the **accepted narrative** surrounding those events; the official version may be seen as further proof of the conspiracy



The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs



Very few studies examined the prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs by using the nationally representative samples of adults



The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

However, what we know is that:

In the US (2011), the *Financial Crisis conspiracy* was endorsed by 25% of respondents (agree + strongly agree)

“The current financial crisis was secretly orchestrated by a small group of Wall Street bankers to extend the power of the Federal Reserve and further their control of the world’s economy”

TABLE 1 Percentage of Americans Agreeing with Various Conspiracy Theories, 2011

Conspiratorial Narrative	Heard Before?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The U.S. invasion of Iraq was not part of a campaign to fight terrorism, but was driven by oil companies and Jews in the U.S. and Israel (<i>Iraq War</i>)	44	6	13	33	22	27
Certain U.S. government officials planned the attacks of September 11, 2001, because they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East (<i>Truther</i>)	67	7	12	22	18	41
President Barack Obama was not really born in the United States and does not have an authentic Hawaiian birth certificate (<i>Birther</i>)	94	11	13	24	14	38
The current financial crisis was secretly orchestrated by a small group of Wall Street bankers to extend the power of the Federal Reserve and further their control of the world's economy (<i>Financial Crisis</i>)	47	8	17	38	20	17
Vapor trails left by aircraft are actually chemical agents deliberately sprayed in a clandestine program directed by government officials (<i>Chem Trails</i>)	17	4	5	28	21	42
Billionaire George Soros is behind a hidden plot to destabilize the American government, take control of the media, and put the world under his control (<i>Soros</i>)	31	9	10	44	16	21
The U.S. government is mandating the switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs because such lights make people more obedient and easier to control (<i>CFLB</i>)	17	4	7	24	24	41

Note: N = 1,935 cases.

Source: Modules of the 2011 Cooperative Congressional Election Surveys.

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The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs



Over 55% of the respondents agreed with at least one of the presented conspiracy theories!

(mind the acquiescence and other biases)



The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

We also know is that:

In Italy (2017), almost **half of the respondents** believed in at least 1 out of 4 conspiracy theories provided in the survey



The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

- (1) 'Moon landings never happened and the proofs have been fabricated by NASA and the US government' ('Moon')
- (2) 'Vapour trails left by aircraft are actually chemical agents deliberately sprayed in a clandestine programme directed by government officials' ('ChemTrails')
- (3) 'Vaccines harm the immune system and expose it to diseases' ('Vaccines')
- (4) 'The Stamina method invented by Davide Vannoni for curing neurodegenerative diseases has been obstructed by big pharmaceutical groups' ('Stamina')

0 (Not plausible) - 10 (Completely plausible)

The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

Table 1. Distribution of the level of belief in four conspiracy theories (column percentages).

	Conspiracies			
	Moon	Chemical trails	Vaccines	Stamina
0	42	45	37	26
from 1 to 5	38	34	39	36
from 6 to 10	20	21	24	38
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	2889	2885	2892	2816

Table 2. Number of conspiracy theories in which respondents believe (score ≥ 6).

N° of believed conspiracies	%
0	53
1	19
2	10
3	7
4	10
Total	100
	(<i>n</i> = 2741)

The prevalence of conspiratorial beliefs

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The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers

Sometimes, instead of talking about the beliefs in particular *conspiracy theories*, researchers investigate the predisposition to *conspiracy mentality*

As such, *conspiracy mentality* describes the general propensity to subscribe to theories blaming a conspiracy of ill-intending individuals or groups for important societal phenomena or, in more abstract terms, the tendency to subscribe to “general conspiracist beliefs”

...and here is one of the ways to measure it

APPENDIX

CONSPIRACY MENTALITY QUESTIONNAIRE (CMQ)

Note: Response formats for each item in the respective language can be found beneath item wordings.

English

I think that...

- 1 ... many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about.
- 2 ... politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions.
- 3 ... government agencies closely monitor all citizens.
- 4 ... events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities.
- 5 ... there are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
certainly not	extremely unlikely	very unlikely	unlikely	somewhat unlikely	undecided	somewhat likely	likely	very likely	extremely likely	certain



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers

Research shows that belief in conspiracy theories are associated with certain **psychological** and **sociopolitical** traits



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers

Conspiratorial beliefs
are more likely to be
endorsed by those,
who display:



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers - psychological traits

Conspiratorial beliefs are more likely to be endorsed by those, who display:

- A strong desire for uniqueness
- Openness to new experience
- Low level of agreeableness



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers - sociopsychological traits

Conspiratorial beliefs are more likely to be endorsed by those, who display:

- Low perceived control of one's life
- Low self-esteem
- Powerlessness



The sociopsychological portrait of conspiracy believers - sociopolitical traits

Conspiratorial beliefs are more likely to be endorsed by those, who display:

- Negative attitude to authority
- Political cynicism
- Fear of high power groups



The monologicality thesis

The Monologicality Thesis



Research observation that the belief in **one conspiracy theory** is usually accompanied by the wholesale endorsement of **other conspiracy theories**

The Monologicality Thesis



Once you believe in **one conspiracy theory**, you're likely to believe:

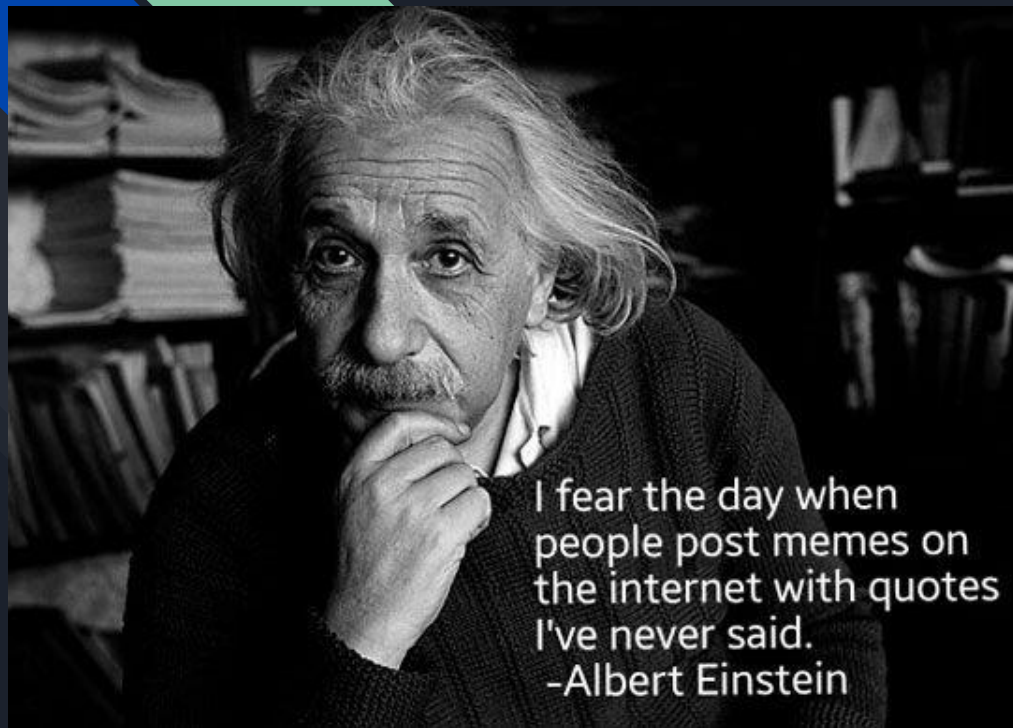
- in other, **thematically distant CTs** (e.g. Covid-19 and 5G)
- in **non-existent CTs** (Red Bull)
- **mutually incompatible CTs** (death of Princess Diana - fake/murder)

Fake Red Bull Conspiracy

Table 4. Items included in the entirely fictitious conspiracy theory measure (Study 2) and factor loadings following Varimax rotation

Item	Initial factor loadings		Final factor loadings
	Factor 1	Factor 2	
7. Regular consumption of Red Bull raises dopamine levels, which causes damage in the long term.	.78	.16	.75
9. In the beginning, Red Bull was illegal for minors in Austria, which raises questions as to its subsequent legalisation.	.75	.15	.71
10. Commercials in sports give the impression that Red Bull is healthy.	.75	-.07	.55
8. In 2001, the 23-year-old man Klaus Weber died of cerebral haemorrhage, caused by overly high consumption of Red Bull.	.70	.27	.69
2. Red Bull contains illegal substances that raise the desire for the product	.69	.38	.75
4. If a can of Red Bull is heated up to 40°C, it releases health-threatening substances.	.68	.39	.69
5. Subliminal messages in Red Bull television commercials make consumers believe that Red Bull improves one's health.	.65	.36	.67
11. The extract 'testiculus taurus' found in Red Bull has unknown side effects.	.57	.40	.68
6. The slogan 'Red Bull gives you wings' is used because in animal experiments, rats grew rudiment wings.	-.15	.79	-
1. The recipe of Red Bull, originally used as doping for soldiers, was bought from an American officer.	.41	.65	.61
3. The official inventor of Red Bull, Dietrich Mateschitz, pays 10 million Euros each year to keep food controllers quiet.	.50	.58	.73
12. The ban of Red Bull Cola in Germany was due to not paying enough bribe money to German politicians.	.45	.57	.69


This is where the social science research gets really creative!



Thank you!

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