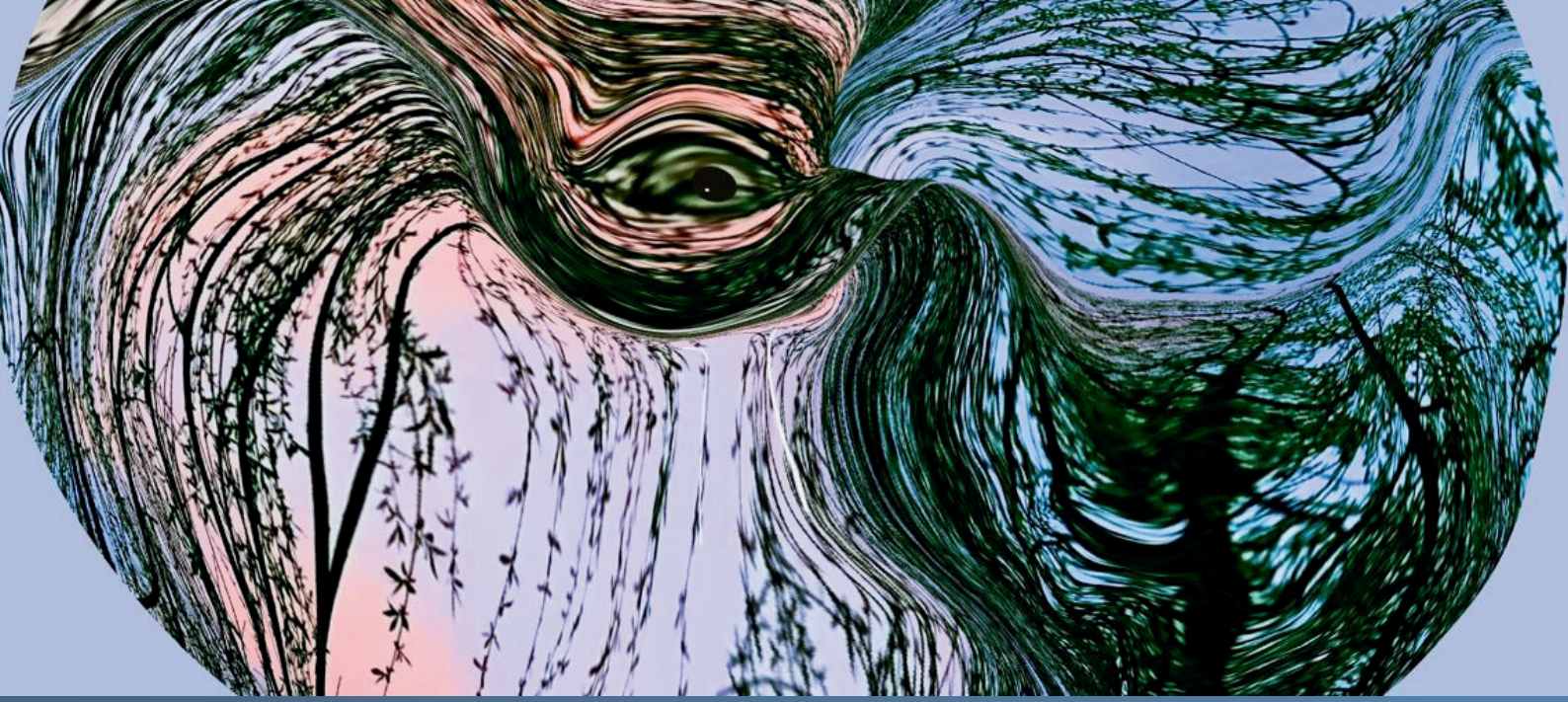


HOW TO TEACH INFORMATION DISORDERS

The Assessment of Syllabi

CREATING SOCIETAL
COGNITIVE RESILIENCE
AGAINST INFORMATION
DISORDERS

resaid

JEAN MONNET
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Emre Erdoğan
Pınar Uyan-Semerci

CREATING SOCIETAL
COGNITIVE RESILIENCE
AGAINST INFORMATION
DISORDERS

resaid

JEAN MONNET
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

HOW TO TEACH INFORMATION DISORDERS
THE ASSESSMENT OF SYLLABI

Emre Erdoğan & Pınar Uyan-Semerci

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Cover Illustration: Lale Duruiz

Please cite as:
Erdoğan, E., & Uyan-Semerci, P. (2026). How to Teach Information Disorders: The Assessment of Syllabi. *RESAID*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19144280

Co-funded by
the European Union

İstanbul
Bilgi University

CONTENTS

HOW TO TEACH INFORMATION DISORDERS? THE ASSESSMENT OF SYLLABI

Emre Erdoğan*

Pınar Uyan Semerci**

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 Introduction

The rapid proliferation of *information disorders,* a broad constellation of phenomena ranging from inadvertent misinformation and satire to coordinated disinformation campaigns and malicious malinformation, has generated a profound crisis of epistemic trust in democratic societies (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). This crisis is not reducible to the mere presence of falsehoods. Rather, it reflects a deeper erosion of shared realities and a weakening of the institutional arrangements through which truth claims are verified, contested, and authorized (Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, 2021).

Since the geopolitical disruptions of the mid-2010s, scholarly research on information disorders has expanded rapidly, producing a substantial body of work on algorithmic amplification, cognitive bias, and attitude formation. Yet, despite this growing literature, comparatively little attention has been paid to how this knowledge is translated into higher education curricula. How is the field being institutionalized within universities? What conceptual frameworks, disciplinary perspectives, and pedagogical solutions are being normalized in the classroom? These questions are not merely academic. The training of future journalists, policymakers, educators, and civic actors in understanding information disorders will define how democratic societies ultimately diagnose and address the issue.

1.2 Research Objective

This report examines the pedagogical construction of *Information Disorders Studies* through a systematic analysis of university curricula across multiple national contexts. It treats the course syllabus not as a neutral administrative artifact but as a formalized statement of epistemic priorities-one that signals which disciplines are privileged, which concepts are canonized, and which forms of intervention are presented as useful or legitimate.

By analyzing syllabi as pedagogical texts, the study seeks to surface the *hidden curriculum* of the field: the implicit assumptions about where the concept of information

* Istanbul Bilgi University, emre.erdogan@bilgi.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-8352-4990.
** Istanbul Bilgi University, pinar.uyan@bilgi.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-9679-9029.

disorders is located, whether in technologies, individuals, institutions, or political economies, and how it should be addressed. Specifically, the report aims to identify:

> the dominant disciplinary frameworks that currently define the boundaries of Information Disorders Studies;
>
> the conceptual vocabulary that has become standardized across institutions and national settings;
>
> the pedagogical gaps through which critical theoretical, institutional, or interventional perspectives are systematically marginalized.

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The focus of the analysis is on university course syllabi at graduate and undergraduate levels, reading lists, and official course description packets, listed below. These documents serve as the foundational texts of teaching practice, detailing intended learning paths and highlighting educational priorities. The study takes a comparative and structural approach, without assessing the quality of instruction, teaching effectiveness, or student learning outcomes. Instead, it explores how the field organizes knowledge, allocates authority, and directs pedagogical focus. The aim is to uncover recurring patterns of centralization, canonization, and exclusion in the current educational landscape, thereby offering an empirically based foundation for future curriculum development and reform.

2. Data and Corpus Construction

2.1 Geographic and Institutional Coverage

The corpus consists of 27 distinct university course syllabi collected from higher education institutions across the United States, Europe, and Türkiye. This transnational sampling strategy enables a comparative examination of how information disorders are framed within different political, regulatory, and academic contexts.

- **United States & Canada:** University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Florida, University of Rochester, University of Washington, Syracuse University, Purdue University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of California San Diego, MIT, Stanford University, Western University (Canada) and University of Waterloo (Canada). University.
- **Europe:** University of Helsinki (Finland/NORDIS), University of Bamberg (Germany), Lund University (Sweden) and University of Warwick (UK).
- **Türkiye:** A mix of foundation and state universities, including İstinye University, Nişantaşı University, Marmara University, Fenerbahçe University, Gelişim University, İstanbul University, and Medipol University.

The corpus is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, it captures a strategically diverse cross-section of institutions where information disorders have been formalized as a discrete object of teaching.

2.2 Disciplinary Distribution

Although the field presents itself as interdisciplinary, the corpus reveals a clear disciplinary hierarchy, analyzed in detail in Section 4. The majority of syllabi are anchored in **Media and Communication Studies** and **Political Science**. To assess whether alternative framings emerge outside this core, the corpus also includes purposive sampling from peripheral but analytically relevant disciplines:

Public Health: Courses emphasizing medical misinformation and "infodemics."

Philosophy: Courses grounded in epistemology, epistemic responsibility, and epistemic vice.

Library and Information Science: Courses focused on digital literacy, information retrieval, and archival truth.

Religious Studies: Courses examining belief systems, meaning-making, and conspiratorial narratives.

This distribution allows the analysis to compare dominant framings with those emerging from adjacent epistemic traditions.

2.3 Limitations of the Corpus

The analysis is constrained by a *syllabus-as-text* approach. Syllabi capture intended curricula rather than enacted classroom practices. Consequently, informal discussions, ad hoc material changes, pedagogical improvisation, and the political orientations of individual instructors fall outside the scope of this study. The findings, therefore, reflect structural pedagogical priorities rather than lived instructional dynamics.

3. Analytical Framework and Methods

To interpret the complex relationships embedded in each syllabus corpus, the study employs a computational pipeline that combines automated text extraction, large-language-model-assisted semantic analysis, and network-based modelling. The methodology proceeds in four stages.

3.1 Data Ingestion and Ontological Modelling

In the first stage, unstructured syllabi documents were converted into structured, machine-readable text. PDF documents were parsed using Python's PyPDF2 library (PdfReader), while

Word documents were processed using *docx.Document*. Text was extracted page by page, with non-textual elements removed to produce a normalized textual corpus for each syllabus.

To capture the hierarchical structure of academic curricula, the analysis employs a custom five-partite ontology. Rather than relying on flat keyword extraction, this ontology models the flow of pedagogical knowledge through five distinct node types:

Discipline: The overarching academic field (e.g., Political Science).
Concept: Core theoretical constructs (e.g., Echo Chambers).
Case Study: Empirical instances used to illustrate theory (e.g., COVID-19).
Source: Canonical texts, actors, or datasets grounding instruction.
Strategy: Proposed tactics or solutions for addressing information disorders.

This architecture allows the curriculum to be modelled as a structured knowledge system rather than a collection of isolated terms.

3.2 LLM-Assisted Semantic Analysis

Extracted texts were processed using the Google Gemini API to perform semantic parsing and entity recognition. The model identified relevant entities in syllabi and mapped them to the appropriate ontological categories. This process yielded 1,487 distinct nodes across the corpus. Beyond entity identification, the model inferred directed relationships between nodes. These relations form semantic knowledge chains, resulting in 1,689 unique edges linking curricular elements.

3.3 Graph Engineering and Entity Resolution

All syllabi-level outputs were aggregated into a unified network model using the NetworkX library. To ensure consistency across documents, fuzzy string matching was applied with a 90% or higher similarity threshold. This step consolidated semantically equivalent entities (e.g., “Fake News” and “False Information”) into single nodes. Isolated nodes with zero degree were removed to maintain analytical coherence. The Greedy Modularity Communities algorithm was applied to identify densely connected node clusters. This unsupervised approach reveals emergent thematic groupings within the curriculum without imposing predefined categories.

3.4 Visualization and Metric Analysis

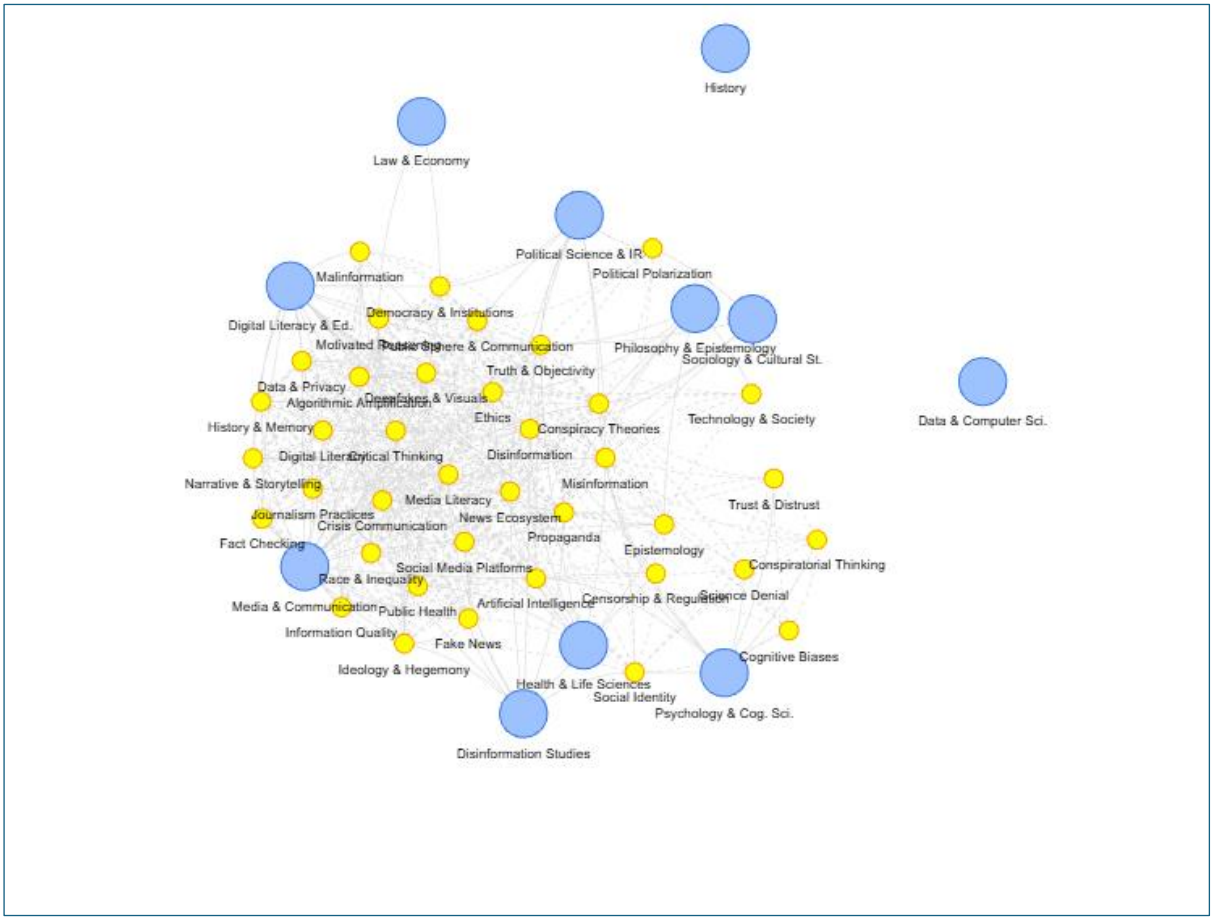
The final network was visualized using Cytoscape.js, enabling interactive exploration of curricular topology. Hierarchical layouts (Dagre/Klay) were used to visualize knowledge flow from disciplines to strategies, while force-directed layouts (fcose/cola) were employed to identify clustering and centrality patterns. Network density, degree centrality, and betweenness centrality were calculated to quantify prominence, connectivity, and bridging potential within the curriculum. These metrics form the empirical basis of the findings presented in Section 4.

4. Quantitative Mapping Results

This section explicates the empirical findings derived from the network-based analysis of the syllabi corpus (N=27). By synthesizing qualitative coding with network centrality metrics (Degree, Betweenness, and Eigenvector), we have mapped both the structural relationships between academic disciplines and the semantic hierarchy of concepts that currently define the field. The analysis demonstrates that the curriculum is not amorphous; rather, it is highly stratified, characterized by a pronounced disciplinary hegemony and a rigid core of canonical concepts that resist peripheral integration.

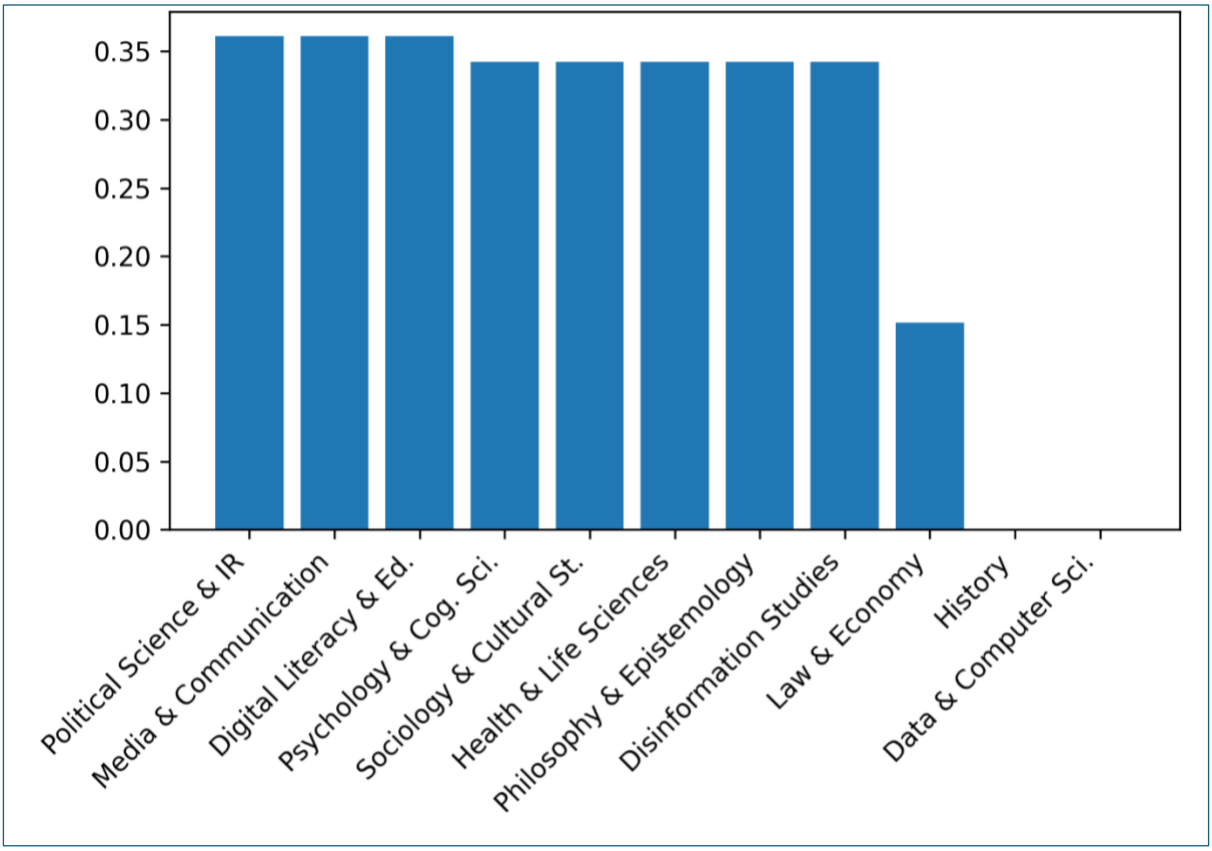
4.1 Disciplinary Centralization: Core, Periphery, and Silos

Figure 4.1 Network Map of Concepts & Disciplines



The disciplinary topology of information disorders teaching reveals a markedly uneven structure (network density = 0.42), indicating that the field is organized around a limited set of epistemic anchors rather than an evenly integrated disciplinary landscape. As illustrated in **Figure 4.1**, the network comprises a dense central component and several weakly connected or isolated disciplinary clusters.

Figure 4.2 Centrality of Disciplines (Eigenvalues)



Media and Communication Studies and Political Science occupy the central position in the network. As illustrated in **Figure 4.2**, these disciplines exhibit the highest eigenvector centrality scores, indicating not only their frequent inclusion but also strong embeddedness within the overall disciplinary structure. High eigenvector centrality implies that these fields are connected to other influential nodes, positioning them as primary gatekeepers of curricular knowledge flows. In practical terms, dominant conceptual framings of information disorders gain pedagogical legitimacy largely by passing through media- and politics-centred perspectives. This configuration reinforces a curriculum in which media effects, political polarization, and audience behaviour constitute the default analytical entry points.

In contrast, Law, Education, and Sociology occupy peripheral positions within the network. Although present in the corpus, their low connectivity and weaker centrality scores (Figure 4.2) indicate that they rarely function as organizing disciplines. Instead, they appear primarily as supplementary lenses, often embedded within syllabi whose core structure is defined by media or political science frameworks. This pattern suggests not disciplinary absence, but systematic subordination: these fields contribute selectively to the curriculum without shaping its foundational architecture.

A notable exception to this core–periphery pattern is Public Health, which forms a structurally isolated cluster in the network (Figure 4.1). Public health–oriented courses

emphasize behavioural outcomes and the efficacy of interventions, employing specialized vocabulary-such as “infodemic” and “vaccine hesitancy”-that remains loosely connected to the conceptual repertoires of media studies and political theory. The resulting separation indicates a disciplinary silo in which health misinformation is treated as analytically distinct from political disinformation, limiting cross-disciplinary integration.

Taken together, **Figures 4.1 and 4.2** demonstrate that the teaching of information disorders is both centralized and segmented. A strong epistemic core dominates curricular organization, peripheral disciplines struggle to influence foundational framings, and certain applied domains remain isolated. This structure narrows the range of disciplinary entry points through which students encounter information disorders, with important implications for the breadth of analytical perspectives conveyed through higher education curricula.

4.2 Conceptual Centralization: The Semantic Hierarchy

Table 4.1. Descriptives and Network Metrics of Concepts

Rank	Concept	Frequency (% of syllabi)	Degree Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	Mainstream Score	Niche Score
1	Misinformation	100.0	0.854	0.191	1.000	0.600
2	Propaganda	11.8	0.854	0.197	0.828	0.225
3	Conspiracy Theories	58.8	0.829	0.189	0.864	0.458
4	Disinformation	60.8	0.780	0.194	0.926	0.395
5	Truth & Objectivity	7.8	0.780	0.193	0.874	0.131
6	Artificial Intelligence	13.7	0.780	0.185	0.629	0.360
7	Social Media Platforms	27.5	0.756	0.193	0.715	0.359
8	Ethics	5.9	0.756	0.191	0.694	0.251
9	News Ecosystem	2.0	0.756	0.190	0.690	0.232
10	Media Literacy	43.1	0.732	0.191	0.636	0.501
11	Public Sphere & Communication	9.8	0.707	0.187	0.591	0.332
12	Fake News	29.4	0.707	0.187	0.528	0.497
13	Democracy & Institutions	54.9	0.707	0.187	0.720	0.491
14	Ideology & Hegemony	9.8	0.707	0.187	0.508	0.399
15	Algorithmic Amplification	13.7	0.683	0.185	0.500	0.415

The quantitative analysis of keyword frequency, co-occurrence, and network centrality demonstrates that the teaching of information disorders is structured around a pronounced semantic hierarchy rather than a conceptually plural field. **Table 4.1** reports the prevalence and centrality metrics of the most salient concepts, while **Figure 4.3** visualizes the steeply skewed distribution of degree centrality across the conceptual space. Together, these results show a

sharp concentration around a small set of dominant terms, followed by a rapid drop-off in both frequency and relational embeddedness.[1]

As shown in **Table 4.1 (Ranks 1 and 4)** and visually reinforced in **Figure 4.3**, *misinformation* and *disinformation* occupy the apex of the conceptual hierarchy. Both concepts combine high prevalence across syllabi with the highest degree of centrality values, indicating that they are not only frequently taught but also serve as relational hubs through which other concepts are introduced. Their elevated eigenvector centrality further confirms their proximity to the most influential nodes in the network, as illustrated by their central positioning in the concept co-occurrence map (**Figure 4.4**). Together, these metrics indicate that the mis/disinformation dyad functions as the primary conceptual gateway into the field, providing a standardized entry point across institutional and national contexts.

Fake news occupies a distinct position within this hierarchy. As indicated in **Table 4.1 (Rank 12)**, the term retains moderate prevalence and degree centrality, placing it within the conceptual core but clearly below the anchor concepts. In **Figure 4.3**, *fake news* appears as a part of the secondary tier of concepts, reflecting its continued curricular relevance. However, its positioning in the co-occurrence network (**Figure 4.4**) shows weaker integration with the core cluster, consistent with its primarily critical pedagogical treatment. Rather than functioning as a stable analytical category, *fake news* is typically introduced as a historically bounded or rhetorically loaded term that must be interrogated and transcended.

Beyond the core, only a small number of concepts operate as connectors across analytical and disciplinary domains. *Conspiracy theories* are the clearest example. As shown in **Table 4.1 (Rank 3)**, the concept combines a relatively high degree and eigenvector centrality.

---

[1] **1. Mainstream Score (Backbone Metrics)**
The Mainstream Score quantifies a node's centrality and its role as a connective tissue across the curriculum. It is a weighted composite of two primary metrics:
Degree Centrality: Total number of direct connections. A high degree indicates "popular" or fundamental concepts (e.g., *social media*).
Betweenness Centrality: The frequency with which a node acts as a bridge between disparate clusters. High betweenness indicates "interdisciplinary" anchors.
Formula:
$$Mainstream\ Score = (w_1 \cdot Degree\ Centrality) + (w_2 \cdot Betweenness\ Centrality)$$
Example: "Disinformation" typically yields a high Mainstream score as it bridges *Psychology* and *Political Science* while being linked to nearly all *Case Study* nodes.
2. Niche Score (Specialization Metrics)
The Niche Score identifies nodes that are relatively isolated from the global network but demonstrate high local specialization. It highlights "uncommon but specific" domain expertise.
Inverse Degree Centrality: Emphasizes nodes with fewer total connections to the general network.
Clustering Coefficient: Measures the density of connections among a node's immediate neighbors. A high coefficient signifies a tight-knit, specialized sub-group (e.g., *specific legal frameworks*).
Formula:
$$Niche\ Score = \frac{Clustering\ Coefficient}{Normalized\ Degree\ Centrality}$$
Example: "Deepfake Labeling Legislation" represents a Niche topic; while it has few global connections, it is deeply integrated into specific *Source* and *Strategy* clusters, representing specialized expertise.

In the co-occurrence network (**Figure 4.4**), it occupies a bridging position between clusters associated with political institutions, media systems, and cognitive explanations. This structural role allows *conspiracy theories* to function as a boundary object, facilitating limited interdisciplinarity within an otherwise centralized conceptual field. Notably, few other concepts exhibit comparable bridging capacity, underscoring the narrowness of cross-domain integration.

Figure 4.3 Degree Centrality of Concepts

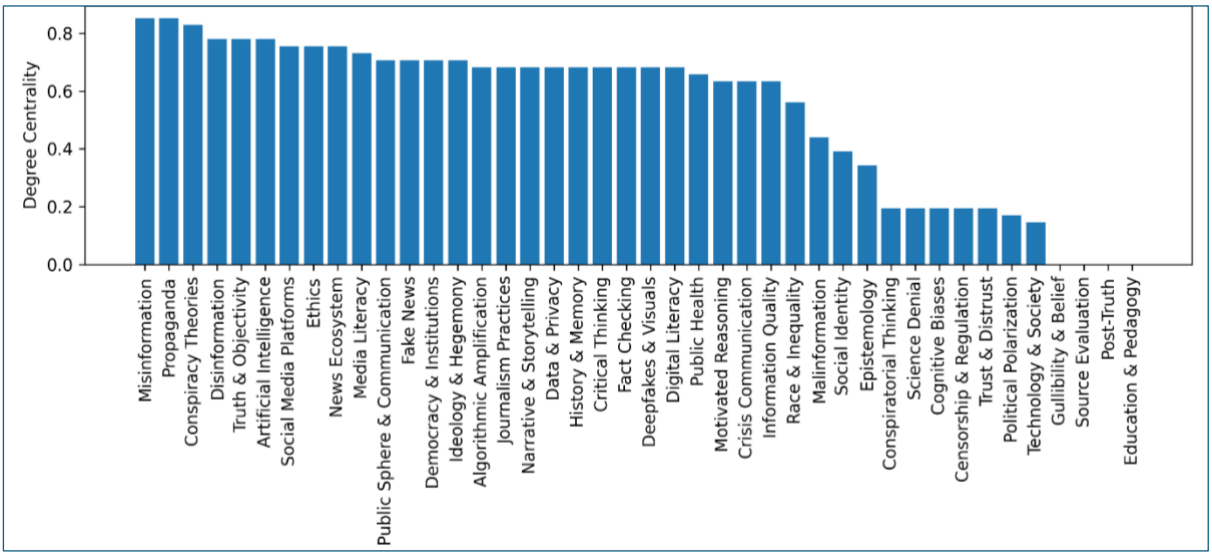


Figure 4.4 Co-occurence Network of Concepts

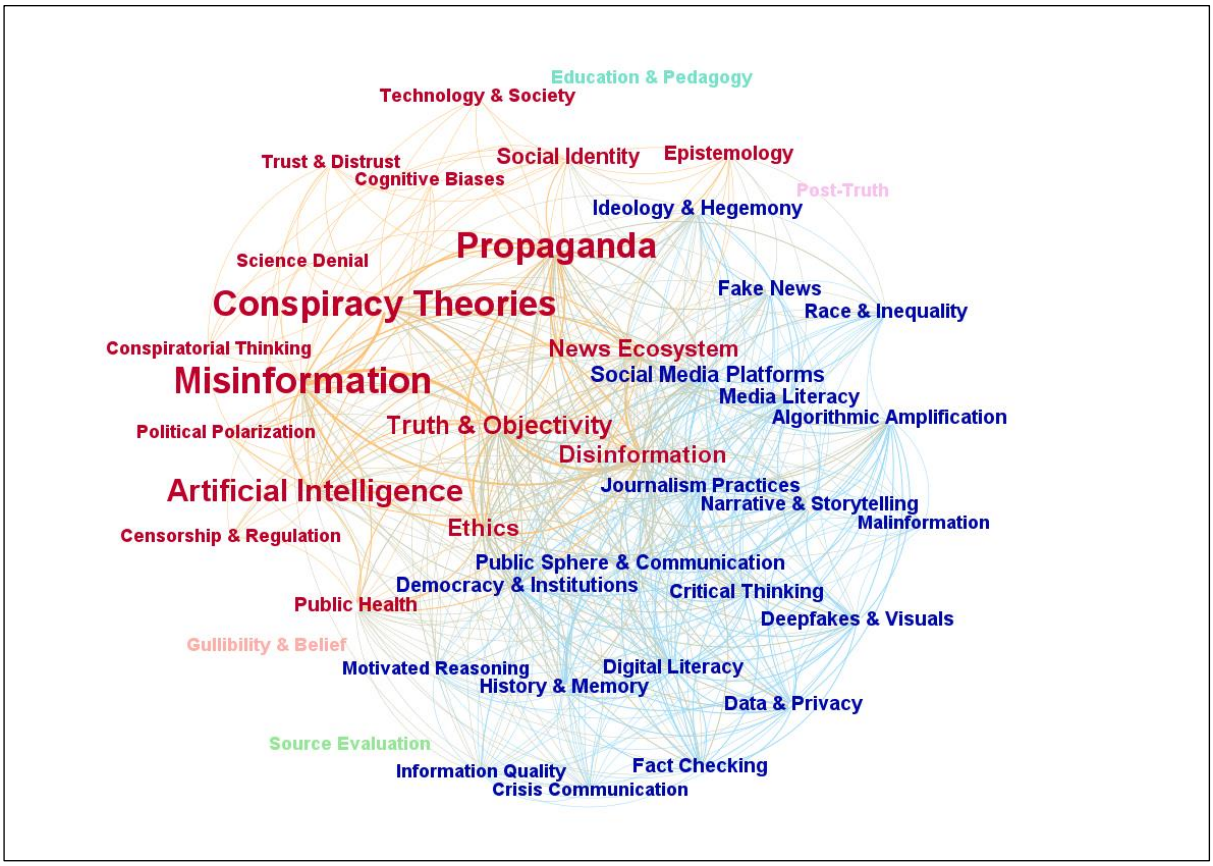
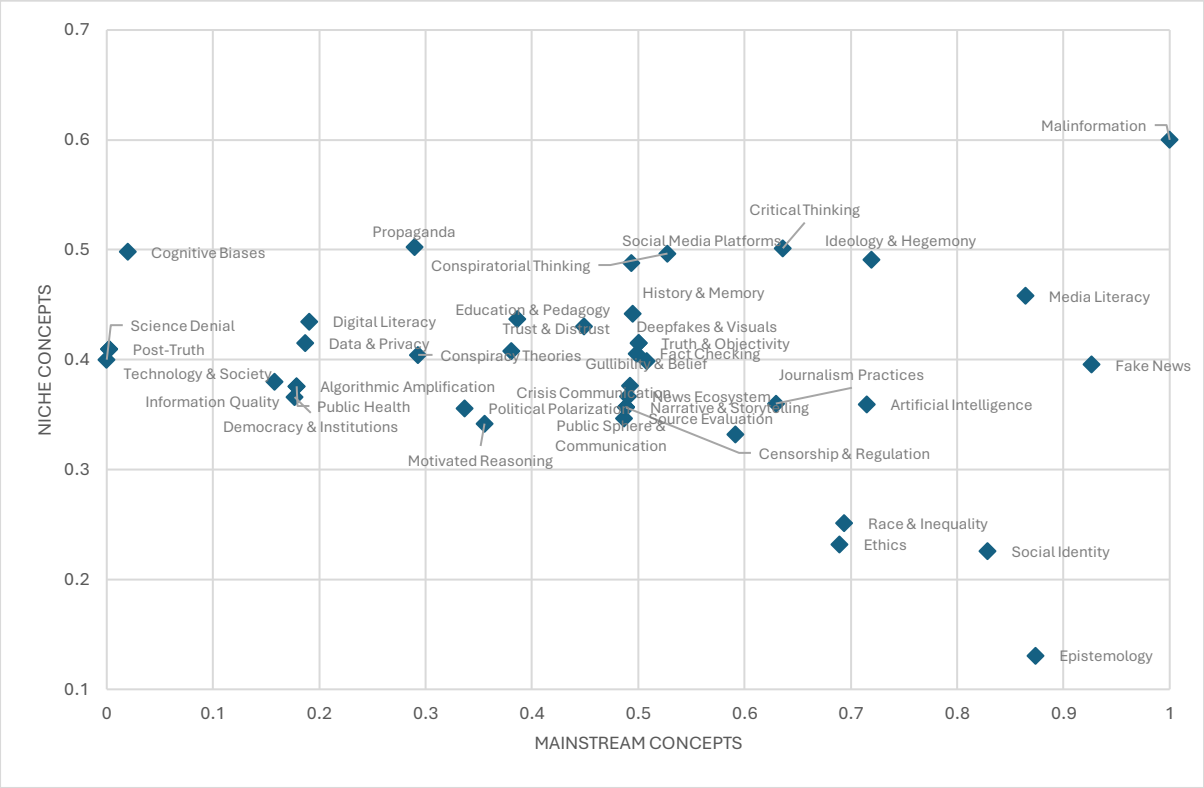


Figure 4.5 Semantic Hierarchy of Concepts



The lower half of **Table 4.1** and the long tail in **Figure 4.3** illustrate how rapidly the conceptual hierarchy thins beyond the core and intermediary nodes. Concepts such as *algorithmic amplification*, *ideology and hegemony*, and *ethics* exhibit a moderate degree of centrality but substantially lower prevalence and weaker eigenvector centrality, indicating episodic inclusion rather than sustained curricular integration. More analytically demanding concepts, most notably *malinformation*, which falls outside the top-ranked concepts in **Table 4.1,** occupy marginal positions with minimal connectivity in the co-occurrence network (**Figure 4.4**). Their peripheral placement reflects a curricular orientation toward false or misleading content rather than toward the strategic use of truthful information to cause harm. This pattern is further corroborated by their niche-heavy positioning in the mainstream–niche space (**Figure 4.5**).

Taken together, **Table 4.1** and **Figures 4.3–4.5** demonstrate that conceptual centralization in the teaching of information disorders operates through a stable semantic hierarchy. A small set of anchor concepts structures the majority of curricular content; contested terms remain central as objects of critique; only a limited number of boundary objects enable cross-domain integration; and structurally oriented concepts remain peripheral. This hierarchy shapes not only which concepts students encounter most frequently but also how information disorders are initially framed—privileging stabilized, transferable categories over analytically disruptive or institutionally grounded perspectives.

4.3 Strategic Positioning of Concepts: Canonization and Specialization

This section examines how concepts are strategically positioned within the curricular field of information disorders by distinguishing between *mainstream (canonical)* and *niche (specialized)* knowledge domains. Drawing on cross-syllabi diffusion patterns and strategic positioning metrics, the analysis identifies which concepts function as shared pedagogical reference points and which remain confined to narrower instructional contexts.

A first group of concepts exhibits high mainstream visibility, circulating widely across syllabi regardless of institutional context or disciplinary anchoring. Concepts such as *echo chambers*, *filter bubbles*, and *polarization* function as canonical elements of the field. Their repeated appearance across courses ranging from explicitly political communication offerings to general media literacy curricula indicates that they have become part of the taken-for-granted vocabulary through which information disorders are introduced. These concepts are pedagogically efficient. They allow instructors to quickly situate students within a recognizable problem space centred on exposure, audience behaviour, and societal division. Their canonical status is reinforced by their broad diffusion rather than by their analytical depth. As a result, they tend to operate as stabilizing explanatory devices, shaping a shared baseline understanding of information disorders before students encounter contestation or refinement.

In contrast, a second group of concepts occupies niche or specialized positions within the curriculum. Concepts such as *epistemic vice*, *agnotology*, and technically specific treatments of *deepfake* technologies appear far less frequently and are typically embedded within theoretically demanding or method-focused courses. Their limited diffusion suggests that engagement with the epistemological foundations of ignorance or the technical infrastructures of manipulation remains restricted to specialized instructional contexts. Unlike canonical concepts, these terms require substantial conceptual scaffolding. They foreground questions of responsibility, knowledge production, and system design that are less easily integrated into introductory or survey-style courses. Their niche positioning thus reflects higher entry costs rather than marginal relevance. However, because these concepts rarely migrate into the mainstream curriculum, their capacity to reshape the dominant framing of information disorders remains constrained.

The contrast between canonical and niche concepts reveals an implicit strategic logic in curriculum design. Concepts that are easily communicable, broadly applicable, and aligned with dominant explanatory frames achieve canonical status. Concepts that introduce epistemic disruption, institutional complexity, or technical specificity remain specialized. This division prioritizes curricular coherence and accessibility, but it also limits students' exposure to alternative ways of conceptualizing information disorders beyond familiar diagnostic frames.

Taken together, Sections **4.2** and **4.3** demonstrate that the curricular field of information disorders is structured by a two-layered mechanism. Conceptual centralization (Section **4.2**) establishes a stable semantic hierarchy in which a small set of anchor concepts defines the

field's core vocabulary. Strategic positioning (Section **4.3**) then governs how knowledge circulates within that hierarchy, distinguishing between concepts that are canonized as shared pedagogical reference points and those that remain confined to specialized contexts. The result is a curriculum that is internally coherent but unevenly stratified: students encounter a highly standardized conceptual core early on, while epistemically and technically demanding perspectives are reserved for limited audiences. This configuration privileges interpretive stability over analytical disruption and shapes not only what is taught but also how information disorders are understood as an academic and societal problem.

5. Pedagogical Patterns

While the preceding quantitative mapping delineated the *what* of the curriculum, the specific disciplinary anchors and conceptual nodes, this section pivots to examine the *how*: the specific mechanisms through which information disorders are pedagogically operationalized and assessed. By scrutinizing the micro-structures of each syllabus corpus, including specific assignment prompts, weekly thematic progressions, and stated learning outcomes, we uncover a distinct and pervasive "pedagogical grammar." This grammar dictates not just how the subject is taught, but how the problem itself is constructed in the student's mind. It is a framework characterized by three dominant traits: a heavy platform-centricity that privileges medium over message; a prioritization of diagnostic identification (spotting the fake) over systemic intervention (fixing the structure); and a framing of solutions that disproportionately burdens individual responsibility. Together, these elements form a hidden curriculum that shapes the students' agency and understanding of their role in the digital ecosystem.

5.1 The Platform-Centric Turn: Medium over Dynamics

Analysis of course schedules and weekly modules reveals a pervasive form of *platform determinism* in the pedagogy of information disorders. Rather than organizing syllabi around enduring sociological or political phenomena such as radicalization, institutional trust, or group polarization, a substantial portion of the corpus structures learning around specific proprietary platforms. This organizational choice implicitly frames the platform itself as the primary locus of the problem, diverting attention from the broader socio-political dynamics that platforms mediate and amplify.

Siloed platform studies: Many syllabi devote entire weeks to individual platforms, with modules titled "The Facebook Election," "Twitter/X and Bots," or "The TikTok Problem." Courses such as *Disinformation and Digital Information Literacy* explicitly segment their curricula into platform-specific case studies. This approach offers immediacy and empirical concreteness, allowing instructors to anchor abstract concepts in familiar environments. However, it also narrows analytical scope by tying explanation too closely to the affordances and policies of current market leaders. This platform-centric structure produces a curriculum that might be described as perishable. As platforms rapidly evolve or restructure, assignments

designed around specific interfaces, APIs, or moderation rules can become obsolete within a short time frame. The reconfiguration of Twitter into X provides a clear example: exercises built around earlier platform functionalities quickly lost relevance. As a result, students are trained to navigate particular interfaces rather than to understand the transferable algorithmic logics-such as engagement optimization, recommendation feedback loops, or variable reward schedules-that cut across platforms regardless of branding.

Format fetishism: Closely related is a pronounced emphasis on the *format* of disinformation. Visual memes, viral videos, deepfakes, and clickbait headlines feature prominently in weekly readings and assignments. Students are frequently asked to "deconstruct a meme" or "analyse a viral video," reinforcing a media-centric perspective in which the artifact itself becomes the primary object of scrutiny. While format analysis can sharpen visual and media literacy, its dominance risks obscuring deeper narrative and organizational dynamics. By focusing on the surface properties of content, the curriculum often sidelines questions about ideological framing, coordination, funding, and strategic intent. Students may spend considerable time dissecting the pixels of a deepfake while paying less attention to the networks that commissioned, disseminated, and amplified it. In this sense, the pedagogical fixation on novelty inadvertently distracts from the continuity of influence operations: long-standing propaganda techniques such as scapegoating, fear-mongering, or moral panic are treated as secondary to their latest digital manifestations.

Implications of platform determinism: Taken together, siloed platform studies and format fetishism reinforce a pedagogical orientation in which medium eclipses dynamics. Information disorders are presented as problems intrinsic to specific platforms or content types, rather than as manifestations of broader political, economic, and institutional processes. This framing limits students' ability to generalize insights across contexts and to recognize how similar mechanisms recur across different technological environments. By anchoring analysis to platforms and formats, the curriculum risks mistaking rapidly changing surfaces for underlying structures and, in doing so, constrains the development of transferable analytical understanding.

5.2 Identification over Intervention: The Diagnostic Limitation

A systematic coding of assignment types (N = 85 distinct assignments across 27 syllabi) reveals a pronounced imbalance between diagnostic and intervention-oriented pedagogy. Across the corpus, students are extensively trained to identify, verify, and classify instances of information disorders, but are rarely positioned as designers of systems, policies, or institutional responses. The dominant pedagogical role assigned to students is that of observer, analyst, and fact-checker rather than architect or decision-maker.

The ubiquity of fact-checking: Practical exercises in verification constitute the single most common assignment type, appearing in nearly 80 percent of the analysed syllabi. Courses routinely require students to master a standardized toolkit of digital verification practices,

including reverse image search, metadata inspection, and geolocation techniques. In several syllabi, students are tasked with identifying the precise location of a viral video by triangulating visual cues, satellite imagery, and platform metadata. These exercises are often framed as core competencies and are repeated across multiple weeks of instruction.

While such skills are essential for journalistic practice and investigative work, their dominance in general education and social science courses carries a clear pedagogical implication: information disorders are primarily framed as a problem of insufficient detection rather than excessive amplification. The underlying assumption is that once false or misleading content is correctly identified, the problem is effectively addressed. This framing sidelines the role of algorithmic ranking, engagement optimization, and network effects, which continue to propel content regardless of its veracity. As a result, students are trained to scrutinize content at the micro level while remaining largely disengaged from the macro-level systems that govern its circulation.

Crisis-driven case studies and event-based bias: Theoretical and empirical discussions are overwhelmingly anchored in high-profile crisis events, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and recent US election cycles. These cases serve as accessible and pedagogically efficient entry points, providing clear timelines, abundant data, and well-documented consequences. However, their dominance also produces an event-based bias in how information disorders are conceptualized. By repeatedly framing disinformation as an acute crisis or external shock-often described through metaphors of contagion or invasion-courses risk portraying the information ecosystem as fundamentally healthy but periodically disrupted. This perspective marginalizes slower, less spectacular, but more structurally embedded forms of information disorders, such as long-term climate change denial, gender-based harassment campaigns, or gradual historical revisionism. These phenomena do not conform to the logic of breaking news or crisis response and consequently receive less sustained analytical attention. Students thus learn to treat information disorders as a series of isolated emergencies rather than as a chronic condition of contemporary attention economies.

The policy and design gap: Perhaps the most consequential limitation of the diagnostic orientation is the near absence of assignments that engage students with governance, regulation, or system design. Across the corpus, few syllabi require students to critically assess existing regulatory frameworks, draft alternative platform policies, or propose algorithmic interventions. Tasks that would position students as policy designers—such as evaluating regulatory instruments, rewriting platform moderation rules, or conceptualizing transparency and auditing mechanisms-are rare exceptions rather than standard curriculum components. Instead, students are far more frequently asked to explain *why* a particular piece of disinformation spread, typically through psychological, communicative, or cultural lenses. Much less attention is paid to *how* platform architectures, recommendation systems, or monetization incentives could be redesigned to alter these dynamics. The result is a curricular asymmetry: students acquire a sophisticated vocabulary for diagnosing the problem, drawing

on concepts such as echo chambers, polarization, or epistemic failure, but are provided with few tools for articulating systemic solutions beyond appeals to education or awareness.

Implications: Taken together, these patterns point to a pedagogical model that privileges diagnosis over intervention. Students graduate with strong analytical and critical capacities but limited exposure to the institutional levers through which information disorders can be mitigated at scale. This diagnostic bias reinforces an understanding of information disorders as a problem to be recognized and resisted individually, rather than as a system to be governed, redesigned, or collectively transformed.

5.3 Individual Responsibilization: The "Media Literacy" Solution

One of the most consequential pedagogical patterns concerns the implicit theory of change embedded in the curriculum. Across the syllabi corpus, *media literacy* is repeatedly framed as the primary, and often ultimate, solution to information disorders. This emphasis effectively places the responsibility on the individual learner for what is, at its core, a structural and institutional problem. In doing so, the curriculum reframes a collective governance challenge as a matter of personal discipline, treating a systemic failure as a problem of individual hygiene.

The resilient subject: Capstone and reflective assignments frequently take the form of introspective exercises, such as "personal media literacy plans," "digital detox strategies," or "news diet audits." In these tasks, students are asked to monitor their own screen time, diversify their information sources, slow down before sharing content, or practice mindfulness in online environments. These activities cultivate self-awareness and critical habits, and as such, they are not without pedagogical value. However, positioning these practices as the primary line of defense against information disorders embeds a specific causal narrative: that misinformation persists because individuals lack sufficient cognitive vigilance. The burden of mitigation is thus shifted onto the user's capacity to self-regulate, rather than onto the design of engagement-optimized systems that reward outrage, repetition, and speed. Students are trained to adapt to a hostile environment rather than to interrogate why the environment is structured in ways that systematically reward harmful dynamics. By framing the problem as one of *bad consumption*, the curriculum implicitly downplays questions of *toxic production* and institutional responsibility.

Placing responsibility on individuals closely mirrors neoliberal approaches to systemic risk management, in which individuals are encouraged to build resilience rather than institutions being compelled to reduce harm. The ideal learner emerging from this pedagogical framework is a careful, sceptical user, capable of navigating informational hazards, rather than an actor equipped to challenge the conditions that produce those hazards in the first place.

The absence of collective and civic action: Equally striking is the near absence of assignments that foreground collective, civic, or institutional forms of intervention. Across the corpus, there are virtually no tasks that ask students to engage in community-level responses,

advocate for transparency legislation, contribute to public-interest investigative efforts, or design interventions for vulnerable populations. Collaborative projects aimed at strengthening public accountability, improving platform governance, or supporting democratic institutions are rare exceptions rather than integral components of the curriculum.

As a result, political agency is imagined primarily in individual terms. Students are trained to protect themselves from deception but not to coordinate with others, mobilize collectively, or demand structural reform. This emphasis on individual immunity, "do not be fooled," comes at the expense of cultivating forms of social or institutional resilience. Even if individual scepticism increases, the absence of collective capacity leaves the broader information ecosystem vulnerable to coordinated manipulation and systemic abuse.

Implications: Taken together, the emphasis on media literacy as an individual competence produces a narrow vision of empowerment. Students leave with refined critical sensibilities but limited exposure to the collective tools that govern and reshape information environments. The curriculum thus promotes personal resilience without cultivating civic efficacy, reinforcing a model of citizenship centred on private judgment rather than public action. In combination with the platform-centric and diagnostic biases identified earlier, this pattern further constrains how information disorders are understood and how their remediation is imagined within higher education. The pedagogical patterns identified in this section suggest a coherent yet constrained instructional logic in the teaching of information disorders. Platform-centric course organization (Section **5.1**) anchors analysis to rapidly changing technological surfaces rather than to enduring socio-political dynamics, producing a curriculum that is empirically vivid but analytically fragile. This orientation is reinforced by a diagnostic bias that prioritizes identification and verification over institutional or systemic intervention (Section **5.2**), positioning students as skilled observers rather than as designers of governance or policy responses. Finally, the emphasis on media literacy as an individual competence (Section **5.3**) completes this pedagogical configuration by placing responsibility for structural failures on learners, shifting attention from collective and institutional remedies to personal resilience. The cumulative effect is a curriculum that excels at cultivating critical awareness yet offers limited pathways for translating diagnosis into durable solutions. Students are trained to recognize information disorders, adapt to them, and protect themselves from harm, but are less systematically equipped to imagine, evaluate, or demand transformations of the systems that produce those harms in the first place. This pedagogical closure sets the conditions for the discussion that follows, raising fundamental questions about how higher education might move beyond recognition toward governance, intervention, and collective capacity-building in the study of information disorders.

6. Evaluation of Reading Packs

The following reflection elaborates on the readings of the courses on information disorders, focusing on their disciplinary origins, frequency of appearance, and the nature of their content. The readings are heavily from three primary disciplines:

Psychology and Cognitive Science: A significant portion of the literature explores the cognitive mechanisms behind belief, such as motivated reasoning, identity-protective cognition, and the psychological drivers of misinformation.

Political Science: Studies focus on the intersection of misinformation and democratic processes, including election manipulation, partisan polarization, and the paranoid style of political thought.

Media and Communication: This discipline is represented through research on media literacy, platform governance, and journalistic ethics.

Several titles are explicitly multidisciplinary, blending technology, social science, and law. Such as *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* by Benkler, Faris, and Roberts. This work combines communication theory, political science, and large-scale data analysis of information ecosystems. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* by Safiya Umoja Noble is another example that sits at the intersection of information science, sociology, and critical race studies. Although the literature is still in progress and one cannot list the main reading list for a course on information disorders, several references appeared more than twice:

Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network propaganda: Manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics*. Oxford University Press.

Freelon, D., & Wells, C. (2020). "Disinformation as political communication." *Political Communication*, 37(2), 145–156.

Hofstadter, R. (1964). "The paranoid style in American politics." *Harper's Magazine*, 229(1374), 77–86.

Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). "Misinformation and its correction: Continued influence and successful debiasing." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13(3), 106–131.

Rauch, J. (2021). *The constitution of knowledge: A defense of truth*. Brookings Institution Press.

Uscinski, J. E. (2020). *Conspiracy theories: A primer*. Bloomsbury Academic / Rowman & Littlefield.

The readings of the referred syllabi range from highly granular case studies to broad, foundational educational materials. The following are examples of localized events, specific demographics, or narrow technical phenomena

Meme Factory Cultures in Southeast Asia: Abidin (2020) examines content pivoting in Singapore and Malaysia during COVID-19.

Localized Vaccine Hesitancy: Agergaard et al. (2020) analyze specific HPV vaccine-critical Facebook pages in Denmark.

Historical Case Studies: Examples include the Anti-Mask League of 1918 in San Francisco or the "guard dog" function of journalism during the Japanese-American Internment.

Technical Audits: Juneja & Mitra (2021) provide an audit of e-commerce platforms for algorithmically curated vaccine misinformation.

The following are sources that provide general frameworks, introductory overviews, or methodological guides.

Introductory Primers: *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer* by Uscinski (2020) serves as a foundational guide to the field.

Instructional Guides: *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy* by Scheibe & Rogow (2012) and Baran et al.'s *Introduction to Mass Communication* are designed for educational use.

Research Methodology: Works like Gerring's *Social Science Methodology* and Howard's *Thinking Like a Political Scientist* provide general academic frameworks rather than specific topical findings.

General Handbooks: The *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion* provides a broad disciplinary survey.

The following is the list of the most frequently cited authors. As expected, the reference list is heavily dominated by scholars in Political Science, Psychology, and Communication Studies. A significant portion of the bibliography focuses on the study of conspiracy theories and the cognitive mechanisms of misinformation. Authors who co-publish frequently (such as Cook and Lewandowsky or Nyhan and Reifler) appear high on the list, reflecting the collaborative nature of this research field.

Most Referred Authors:

Rank	Author	Frequency	Primary Discipline(s)
1	**Joseph E. Uscinski**	16	Political Science
2	**John Cook**	10	Communication / Cognitive Science
3	**Stephan Lewandowsky**	9	Psychology / Cognitive Science
4	**Brendan Nyhan**	8	Political Science
5	**Yochai Benkler**	6	Law / Communication / Information Science
6	**Andreas Jungherr**	6	Political Science / Digital Media

Deen Freelon, Ryan Miller, and Whitney Phillips (Communication/Media Studies); Jason Reifler (Political Science); Ullrich K. H. Ecker (Psychology) appear 5 times.

6.1 Disciplinary Insights

Political Science: This is the most represented discipline among the top authors. Scholars like Uscinski, Nyhan, and Reifler focus on how misinformation impacts democratic norms, partisan reasoning, and election integrity.

Psychology and Cognitive Science: Lewandowsky and Cook are central to the list, focusing on the "psychological drivers of misinformation" and strategies for "debiasing" and "inoculation" against false beliefs.

Communication and Media Studies: Authors such as Benkler, Freelon, Phillips, and Milner explore the "ecology" of the information environment, including how platforms like YouTube or Twitter facilitate the spread of radicalization and "network propaganda".

6.2 Publishing Years

The publishing years of the sources span from 1877 to 2024, showing a significant concentration in the last decade. The distribution highlights a shift from foundational philosophical and psychological theories to a rapid surge in research focused on digital misinformation, COVID-19, and the impact of social media on democracy.

2020s: Crisis, AI, and Platform Governance

Nearly half of the total references come from the current decade. This period is characterized by research into the immediate societal impacts of the "infodemic" and the rise of decentralized conspiracy movements.

COVID-19 Misinformation: A vast number of sources from 2020 and 2021 explore the pandemic, including meme cultures in Southeast Asia, the "Pandemic" conspiracy, vaccine hesitancy on Facebook, and the "Islamophobic" hate speech surrounding the virus.

The QAnon Phenomenon: Research into the QAnon movement spiked between 2020 and 2022, with studies exploring its religious characteristics, its role in the U.S. Capitol riot, and its offline impact on families.

Emerging Technology: Recent works from 2023 and 2024 focus on Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and the broader integration of Artificial Intelligence into daily life and work.

Digital Regulation: Works by scholars like Jungherr and Kosseff, published in 2023–2024, address the legal and foundational questions of regulating digital disinformation.

2010s: The Rise of "Fake News" and Partisan Polarization

The 2010s saw the birth of the modern "misinformation" research field, with a heavy emphasis on the 2016 U.S. election and the psychological mechanisms of belief.

2016 Election Studies: Seminal works analyze Russian influence campaigns, "network propaganda", and the prevalence of fake news on Twitter and Facebook during this cycle.

Psychology of Belief: This decade produced key frameworks for motivated reasoning and identity-protective cognition, as well as the initial studies on "debiasing" misinformation.

Media Manipulation: Research from this era (e.g., Marwick & Lewis, 2017) began documenting how "alternative influence" networks and "evidence collages" were used to manipulate mainstream media.

1990s and 2000s: Foundational Academic Frameworks

These decades provided the theoretical groundwork for understanding news literacy, public opinion, and the sociology of science.

News and Media Literacy: Foundational textbooks and guides for teachers were published during this time, establishing media literacy as a necessary civic skill.

Motivated Reasoning: Kunda's (1990) work on motivated reasoning serves as a cornerstone for later psychological studies in the bibliography.

The "Sokal Hoax": The mid-90s saw significant debate over the "reality" of science studies, exemplified by the 1996 Sokal affair.

Digital Origins: Early internet studies from the 2000s began exploring "echo chambers" and the "guard dog" function of journalism in digital spaces.

Pre-1990s: Historical and Theoretical Roots

The earliest sources provide the philosophical and historical context for modern skepticism and political thought.

19th Century Foundations: The ethics of belief and the "will to believe" are represented by Clifford (1877) and James (1896).

Post-War Social Psychology: Festinger's (1956) study on "failed prophecies" remains a critical reference for understanding how groups react when their core beliefs are disproven.

The "Paranoid Style": Richard Hofstadter's (1964) essay on the "paranoid style in American politics" is cited multiple times as a precursor to modern conspiracy theory research.

Structural Theory: Works from the 1960s by Habermas, Kuhn, and Arendt provide the structural and epistemological theories regarding the public sphere and scientific dogma used to analyze today's information environment.

A critical evaluation reveals a significant concentration of influence among a small group of scholars, primarily in Political Science and Psychology**,** with authors like Joseph E. Uscinski, John Cook, and Stephan Lewandowsky appearing most frequently. Furthermore, while the inclusion of thinkers like Habermas, Arendt, and Kuhn provides structural context, it is very limited, and the overwhelming volume of research from the last decade, particularly focusing on the 2016 election, COVID-19, and emerging AI technologies, indicates a recent field that is highly reactive to contemporary global shocks. Ultimately, these sources suggest that addressing information disorders requires more than just technical fixes; it necessitates a multidisciplinary synthesis of media literacy, psychological "inoculation" strategies, and a robust defence of the "constitution of knowledge" in an increasingly polarized democratic landscape.

7. Interpretation

The quantitative mapping of the field (Section **4**) and the qualitative analysis of pedagogical patterns (Section **5**) point to a curriculum that is both structurally centralized and ideologically coherent. Information disorders teaching appears to be stabilizing into a recognizable sub-field, complete with a shared canon, standard pedagogical practices, and a dominant explanatory logic. This consolidation has clear advantages: it enables curricular transferability, pedagogical clarity, and institutional diffusion. At the same time, the analysis suggests that stabilization is accompanied by systematic exclusions. By privileging certain disciplines, concepts, and instructional formats, the curriculum produces a particular way of seeing information disorders-one that foregrounds cognition, communication, and individual responsibility while backgrounding political economy, institutional design, and structural power.

7.1 Cognitive-Communicative Dominance

The combined evidence from disciplinary centrality (Section **4.1**) and assignment design (Section **5.2**) indicates that information disorders is predominantly taught as a problem of messages and minds. Media Studies and Political Science occupy central positions in the

curricular network, while pedagogical practices emphasize fact-checking, belief analysis, and audience susceptibility. Together, these patterns anchor the field in a cognitive–communicative framework. Curricular attention is heavily concentrated on the demand side of the misinformation ecosystem: why users click, share, and believe misleading content. Students are repeatedly introduced to cognitive mechanisms such as confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, or affective polarization. This focus implicitly positions the user as the primary site of intervention. Information disorders are thus framed as a consequence of flawed cognition or insufficient critical capacity, rather than as an outcome shaped by institutional incentives and infrastructural design.

Closely related is the tendency to conceptualize information disorders as a breakdown in communication. The pedagogical emphasis on media literacy and improved interpretation suggests that the problem can be mitigated by restoring better communicative conditions—more accurate information, clearer signals, and more discerning audiences. This framing assumes that misinformation is largely accidental or dysfunctional. It underplays the extent to which many contemporary information disorders are efficient outputs of systems explicitly optimized for engagement, attention capture, and monetization. In this sense, the curriculum risks treating strategic outcomes as communicative failures.

7.2 The Costs of Canonization

The recurrence of a limited set of canonical concepts across institutions, such as *fake news*, *echo chambers*, and *polarization*, signals the normalization of a shared pedagogical vocabulary. As shown in Section **4.2** and reinforced by the strategic positioning of concepts (Section **4.3**), this canon provides a common entry point into the field. However, canonization also carries costs. Once stabilized, canonical concepts tend to persist even as the empirical landscape evolves. Introductory courses continue to rely on concepts such as *filter bubbles* or *fake news* despite a growing body of research that questions their prevalence, explanatory power, or relevance to newer forms of information manipulation. This produces a form of pedagogical lag, in which students are trained to recognize yesterday's dominant problems rather than emerging configurations shaped by algorithmic amplification, synthetic media, private messaging infrastructures, or AI-generated content.

The established canon is also politically and institutionally "safe." It allows universities to address information disorders without directly interrogating the business models, governance arrangements, or regulatory failures associated with major technology platforms. Discussing polarization or media literacy can be framed as normatively neutral; examining surveillance capitalism, profit-driven amplification, or algorithmic governance requires a more explicitly interventionist stance. The curriculum's reliance on canonical concepts thus reflects not only epistemic stabilization, but also institutional caution.

7.3 The Political Economy Blind Spot

Perhaps the most consequential interpretive finding concerns what is systematically marginalized. The peripheral position of law, economics, and technical audits in the disciplinary network (Section **4.1**), combined with the scarcity of policy- or design-oriented assignments (Section **5.2**), reveals a significant blind spot regarding the political economy of platforms. Students are trained to analyse the content of misinformation, narratives, images, claims, and beliefs while receiving far less instruction on the incentive structures that sustain its circulation. The dominant pedagogical logic privileges symptoms over systems. Conspiracy theories are dissected, but the monetization of outrage is rarely modelled; viral content is analysed, but the engagement metrics that propel it remain opaque. This asymmetry risks naturalizing platform dynamics as background conditions rather than as objects of governance.

The curriculum's tendency to conclude with individualized media literacy solutions (Section **5.3**) further reinforces this blind spot. By framing the endpoint of learning as personal resilience, higher education implicitly adopts a neoliberal logic of placing responsibility on individuals. Structural failures are translated into individual duties, and regulatory or collective remedies recede into the background. The result is an educational model that equips students to cope with a dysfunctional system, but not to question, reform, or redesign it. In summary, the current curriculum on information disorders is analytically strong in diagnosing the communicative and cognitive dimensions of the problem yet structurally constrained in addressing its institutional and political–economic foundations. It produces graduates who are highly capable of identifying misinformation and reflecting on belief formation, but less prepared to engage with the governance, regulation, and design choices that shape contemporary information ecosystems. This imbalance does not reflect a lack of scholarly insight, but rather the cumulative effects of disciplinary centralization, conceptual canonization, and pedagogical responsibilization. The challenge for the field is therefore not to abandon its existing strengths, but to extend them—moving from recognition toward structural critique, and from individual adaptation toward collective and institutional capacity-building.

8. Implications for Curriculum Development

8.1 Broadening Disciplinary Participation

The current curricular centralization around Media Studies and Political Science creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop in which information disorders are primarily framed as problems of messaging, partisanship, and audience behaviour. To move beyond this limitation, future curricula must broaden disciplinary participation not by adding peripheral perspectives as optional supplements but by integrating them as foundational analytical pillars.

Law should move from the margins of the curriculum to its core. Understanding information disorders requires engagement with legal frameworks that structure platform incentives, including intermediary liability regimes such as the Digital Services Act and Section

230 (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065; Congressional Research Service, 2024). Curricula should incorporate systematic engagement with internet governance, including liability regimes, safe-harbor provisions, and regulatory instruments. Rather than treating free speech as an abstract normative debate, courses should examine how specific legal architectures shape platform incentives, enforcement practices, and the distribution of informational harms.

To counterbalance the heavy emphasis on individual cognition, curricula should incorporate sociological perspectives on institutional trust, collective identity, and social fragmentation. Instead of repeatedly asking why individuals are susceptible to misinformation, assignments should interrogate why communities withdraw trust from epistemic institutions in the first place. This shift reorients pedagogy away from correcting individuals and toward repairing social contracts, emphasizing structural conditions under which credibility, authority, and legitimacy erode.

8.2 From Content to Capital: Teaching the Political Economy of Information Disorders

Addressing the political economy blind spot identified in Section **6** requires a decisive pivot from analysing misleading content to analysing the economic systems that sustain its production and circulation. Without this shift, curricula risk treating information disorders as a cultural anomaly rather than as an economically rational outcome. Courses should explicitly address the economic engine of the contemporary web: programmatic advertising and attention-based revenue models. Understanding how disinformation generates value through clicks, impressions, and engagement metrics is as essential as understanding its rhetorical strategies. Pedagogical exercises might involve tracing advertising networks, mapping revenue flows to low-credibility sites, or examining how monetization incentives reward sensationalism and outrage. Rather than treating algorithms as opaque or purely technical artifacts, curricula should introduce students to basic principles of critical algorithm studies. Even without advanced technical training, students can engage in forms of “black-box auditing” by systematically testing how platforms respond to different behavioral inputs. Such exercises demystify claims of algorithmic neutrality and foreground design choices as objects of political and ethical scrutiny rather than as inevitable technological facts.

8.3 From Diagnosis to Depolarization: A Pedagogy of Repair

Finally, the field must evolve from a pedagogy focused on recognizing problems to one oriented toward repairing damaged informational and social environments. While diagnostic competencies remain essential, they are insufficient on their own. Verification and fact-checking skills are fundamentally defensive. Curricula should therefore incorporate interventional design assignments that encourage students to imagine and evaluate proactive responses. Instead of culminating in personal media literacy plans, courses might ask students to develop community-level resilience strategies, draft institutional guidelines for rumour management, or propose policy interventions tailored to specific contexts.

To address affective polarization, curricula should include training in conflict transformation and depolarization techniques. Learning how to engage with contested beliefs without triggering backfire effects is a practical civic competence, not merely a psychological curiosity. The pedagogical goal should be to produce graduates who are not only resistant to falsehoods but also capable of rebuilding communicative bridges and facilitating dialogue in fractured public spheres.

Conclusion: Toward an Interventional Curriculum

Taken together, these recommendations outline a shift from recognition to responsibility and from individual adaptation to collective capacity-building. Expanding disciplinary participation grounds information disorders in institutional and legal contexts; foregrounding political economy exposes the incentive structures that sustain manipulation; and reorienting pedagogy toward repair equips students to act upon, rather than merely interpret, the problem. Such a reconfiguration does not reject the existing strengths of Information Disorders Studies but extends them. By complementing diagnostic acuity with systemic analysis and interventional imagination, curriculum development can transform the field into one that not only explains information disorders but also actively contributes to democratic resilience and institutional renewal.

APPENDIX 1

United States & Canada

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (US). *Critical Disinformation Studies*. Department of Media and Journalism.

University of Florida (US). *HSC 4247 – Disinformation and Misinformation in Healthcare*. College of Public Health & Health Professions.

University of Rochester (US). *PSC 211: Conspiracy Theories in American Politics*. Department of Political Science.

University of Washington (US). *PHIL 401: Conspiracy Theories, Propaganda, and Epistemic Vice*. Department of Philosophy / Simpson Center.

Syracuse University (US). *Democracy in the Digital Age*. Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Purdue University (US). *ILS 490: Diplomacy Lab: Strategies for Identifying Mis/Disinformation*. Department of Political Science.

University of Chicago (US). *Truth, Disinformation and the Media in this Year's Election*. Graham School.

University of Illinois at Chicago (US). *POLS 469: Political Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories*. Department of Political Science.

University of California San Diego (US). *CSE 291/DSC 291: Information Manipulation: Trustworthiness of Information in Cyberspace*.

MIT (US). *Media Literacy in the Age of Deepfakes*.

Western University (Canada). *PS3390G: Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories*. Department of Political Science.

University of Waterloo (Canada). *Religion and Conspiracy Theories Course*. Department of Religious Studies.

Stanford University (US). *The 2024-25 CASBS Syllabus*. Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences.

Europe

University of Helsinki (Finland/NORDIS). *Disinformation and Digital Information Literacy*. Department of Communication.

University of Bamberg (Germany). *Misinformation, Disinformation and Other Digital Fakery*. Department of Communication Studies.

Lund University (Sweden). *JOUB02: Journalism: Fact-Checking and Storytelling*. Department of Communication and Media.

University of Warwick (UK). *IP121-30: Truth and Misinformation*.

Türkiye

İstinye University. *Digital Media Literacy and Disinformation*. Faculty of Communication.

Nişantaşı University. *New Media, Misinformation, and Society*. Faculty of Communication.

Marmara University. *Media, Politics, and Disinformation / Media Literacy*. Faculty of Communication.

Fenerbahçe University. *Medya Okuryazarlığı (Media Literacy)*. Faculty of Communication.

Gelişim University. *Medya Okuryazarlığı (Media Literacy)*. Faculty of Economic, Administrative and Social Sciences.

İstanbul University. *Medya Okuryazarlığı Sertifika Programı (Media Literacy Certificate Program)*.

Medipol University. *Media Literacy*. School of Communication / Journalism.

9. Curricular Enhancement for the Study of Information Disorders

9.1 Introduction

The contemporary information ecosystem is characterized not merely by an abundance of falsehoods but by a fundamental fracturing of shared reality, termed information disorder. Traditional approaches to media literacy have largely operated on a deficit model, which presumes that users are misinformed simply because they lack access to accurate information or the technical skills to verify it. This pedagogical strategy treats disinformation as a glitch in an otherwise functional system, a problem to be solved through better fact-checking and stricter vertical analysis of texts. However, the proposed course, **Ecologies of Trust**, identifies that information disorder is not a glitch but a feature of human psychology, political power, and sociotechnical architecture. By providing a comprehensive academic foundation for this holistic approach, we argue that to effectively combat disinformation, educators must move beyond the binary of True vs. False to investigate the epistemic vices, algorithmic structures, and historical antecedents that generate the demand for deception.

The transition from a deficit approach to an ecological one requires a rigorous interdisciplinary framework. It necessitates integrating social psychology to understand the demand for belief; political economy to understand the incentives of platforms; and vice epistemology to understand the character of the knower. Furthermore, the syllabus must be significantly expanded to include legal governance structures and global South perspectives that challenge the Western-centric post-truth narrative. By offering an exhaustive theoretical and practical roadmap for the **Ecologies of Trust** curriculum, it establishes it as a critical intervention in the field of disinformation studies.

9.2. The Failure of Technocratic Solutions

The urgency of this curricular pivot is underscored by the limitations of purely technocratic or fact-based interventions. Research indicates that the infodemic is not merely a product of bad actors spreading lies, but of a structural environment where attention is a prime asset converted into influence at the cost of truth. In this attention economy, misleading narratives are often more engaging than complex realities, exploiting human cognitive vulnerabilities such as the truth instinct and naïve realism. Consequently, a curriculum that focuses solely on spotting fake news without addressing the underlying architecture of the self and the power will fail to produce resilient citizens.

Table 1 outlines the fundamental theoretical shift moving from the traditional deficit model to the proposed ecological model.

Feature	Deficit Model (Traditional Media Literacy)	Ecological Model (Ecologies of Trust)
Problem Definition	Users lack facts; the system has glitches.	Users have motivated beliefs; the system has structural features.
Primary Mechanism	Ignorance, error, and lack of skills.	Identity protection, epistemic vice, and algorithmic amplification.
Pedagogical Goal	Competence in verifying specific texts.	Cultivation of epistemic virtues and structural analysis.
Verification Method	Vertical Reading (analyzing the page itself).	Lateral Reading (analyzing the network/source).
Role of Technology	A neutral tool to be mastered.	An active agent shaping discourse.
Global Context	Universalized Western experience.	Context-specific cultures of disinformation.

The following sections will unpack each module of the proposed syllabus, provide the necessary academic substantiation, and recommend expansions where the current literature suggests critical gaps.

Part I: The Architecture of the Self - Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief

Module 1 of the syllabus, The Architecture of the Self, is foundational. It posits that the primary vulnerability to disinformation is not external, the lie, but internal, the desire to believe. The research strongly supports this inward turn, suggesting that cognitive biases and epistemic vices are the fertile soil in which disinformation takes root.

Naïve Realism is a starting point for understanding polarization. In social psychology, naïve realism is defined as the seductively simple conviction that one perceives the world objectively and without distortion. This is not merely a personal error but a fundamental barrier to conflict resolution. Lee Ross and Andrew Ward, in their seminal work “Naïve Realism in Everyday Life,” argue that individuals act as intuitive psychologists, believing their perceptions are faithful representations of reality. Consequently, when others disagree, the naïve realist attributes this not to a difference in perspective, but to the other's incompetence, irrationality, or ideological bias. This illusion of objectivity explains why the deficit model of fact-checking often fails. When a naïve realist is presented with facts that contradict their worldview, they do not revise their belief; instead, they scrutinize the *source* of the correction for bias, confirming

their suspicion that the media or the experts are the ones who are distorted. The bias blind spot, the ability to see bias in others while remaining oblivious to one's own, is a direct product of this phenomenon.

For the proposed Emotion Audit activity, the literature suggests a focus on the hostile media phenomenon. Research by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper demonstrates that opposing partisans viewing the *exact same* news coverage will both perceive it as biased against their side. This empirical finding turns the student's analysis inward: the feeling of anger or validation recorded in the audit is often a measurement of the student's own naïve realism, not the text's accuracy. The concept of False Consensus Effect is another derivative of naïve realism, where individuals overestimate the extent to which their beliefs are shared by the public. This reinforces the psychological comfort of echo chambers, which are not just algorithmic prisons but psychological safe harbors for the objectivity illusion.

Module 2's focus on Epistemic Vices marks a sophisticated engagement with contemporary philosophy. While cognitive biases are often unconscious and universal, *epistemic vices* are character traits, habits of mind that are blameworthy because they obstruct knowledge. Quassim Cassam's *Vices of the Mind* is the definitive text here. Cassam distinguishes between mere "cognitive limitations" and vices like closed-mindedness, intellectual arrogance, and epistemic insouciance. This distinction is crucial for analyzing the "Do Your Own Research" (DYOR) phenomenon. Often framed as critical thinking, DYOR can frequently manifest as intellectual arrogance-the vice of overestimating one's own competence relative to experts. Cassam argues that this is not just a logical mistake but a flaw of character. Similarly, epistemic insouciance is a casual indifference to the truth, often displayed by political actors who view facts as mere impediments to their agenda. The literature suggests it is often a "stealthy vice"—a vice that obstructs its own detection. An arrogant person, by definition, does not believe they are arrogant, making self-correction nearly impossible.

The proposed course should introduce the concept of Identity-Protective Cognition. This mechanism explains *why* vices are maintained: they protect the individual's standing within their group. When facts threaten tribal identity, the virtuous response, changing one's mind, feels like a betrayal, while the vicious response, dogmatism, feels like loyalty.

The concept of the Conspirituality Module 3 addresses the spiritual dimension of belief. Ward and Voas (2011) coined this term to describe the surprising merger of the female-dominated, liberal-leaning New Age movement with the male-dominated, conservative-leaning realm of conspiracy theories. The research identifies two core convictions uniting these disparate groups: (1) nothing happens by accident, and (2) nothing is as it seems. Recent scholarship connects this directly to the wellness industry and the Pastel QAnon phenomenon, in which yoga communities and health influencers serve as vectors of radicalization. The scepticism of institutional medicine, Big Pharma, serves as a gateway drug to broader Deep

State narratives. This is not just a political alignment but a spiritual one; conspiracy theories fill a meaning void, offering a sense of secret knowledge and heroic struggle against evil forces, a narrative structure shared by both esotericism and populism. However, Asprem and Dyrendal (2015) argue that conspirituality is not new but has deep historical roots in Western esotericism, which has always been suspicious of official narratives. This historical continuity inoculates students against thinking this is solely a product of the internet age.

Part II: The Architecture of Power - History, Algorithms, and Law

Part II shifts from the individual to the structural, which requires a robust expansion to include legal frameworks and a deeper historical analysis of Agnotology, the production of ignorance.

To debunk the technological determinism that blames everything on social media, Module 4 examines the history of Yellow Journalism. W. Joseph Campbell's research challenges the famous myth that William Randolph Hearst furnished the war with Spain. While the anecdote itself is likely apocryphal, a critical lesson in historical verification, the era of Yellow Journalism (1895–1905) established the economic model of sensationalism that persists today. The Yellow Kid comic strip represents the commodification of attention. The fierce competition between Pulitzer and Hearst led to the fabrication of news, the use of fake interviews, and the prioritization of emotional engagement over factual accuracy. This history demonstrates that fake news is a feature of commercial media markets, not a digital novelty. The manufacture of consent and the use of jingoism to sell papers in 1898 mirror the engagement farming of modern algorithms. A critical addition is also Agnotology, the study of culturally induced ignorance. Coined by Robert Proctor, this field posits that ignorance is not merely a void where knowledge has not yet reached, but a product actively manufactured. Proctor's analysis of the tobacco industry is the paradigmatic case. The industry's internal strategy-"Doubt is our product"-was designed not to prove that smoking was safe, but to create enough controversy that the public remained paralyzed in uncertainty. This agnotological maneuver involved funding distractive research, creating front groups, and weaponizing the scientific standard of certainty against itself. This connects directly to climate change denial and modern science scepticism. Agnotology is crucial to teaching students to recognize manufactured doubt. When an issue is presented as controversial, students must ask: Is this a genuine scientific debate, or a strategic deployment of ignorance?

The analysis of algorithms, Module 6, must be bifurcated into two distinct but related critiques: the economic logic of Surveillance Capitalism and the sociotechnical logic of Algorithmic Oppression. Shoshana Zuboff argues that human experience is now the raw material for behavioral futures markets. Platforms do not just watch us; they modify our behavior to ensure prediction products (ads, engagement) are profitable. This power undermines human autonomy by rewarding inflammatory content that generates behavioral surplus.

Safiya Umoja Noble's research challenges the supposed neutrality of these systems. Her work on technological redlining demonstrates how algorithms reinforce racist and sexist hierarchies. The famous case study, Google searches for "Black girls" yielding pornographic results, proves that algorithms are trained on the biases of the dominant culture and prioritize the desires of the most profitable user base, often white men, over the dignity of marginalized groups. This reframes disinformation not just as false content, but as weaponized narratives that maintain power structures.

A module on Platform Governance has been added. Kate Klonick's research identifies platforms like Facebook and Google as "New Governors" of speech. They operate a triangular system of governance, Platform-User-State, that exists outside the First Amendment but is deeply influenced by its norms. These private entities effectively adjudicate human rights and free expression for billions of people with little democratic oversight.

Understanding *Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act* is non-negotiable for a U.S.-based course; it can also contribute to global discussion. This law provides the immunity that allows platforms to host user content without liability. Daphne Keller's work highlights the Moderator's Dilemma: without Section 230, platforms would either over-censor to avoid liability or not moderate at all to avoid knowledge of illegality. Evelyn Douek introduces the concept of Content Cartels, in which major platforms coordinate moderation decisions, e.g., deplatforming Alex Jones simultaneously. While effective at removing harmful content, this coordination creates an opaque, unaccountable monopoly over speech regulation.

Part III: Global Perspectives – Decolonizing Disinformation

To avoid the trap of universalizing the Western experience, a dedicated module on Global South Perspectives is needed.

Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales argue that the panic over a post-truth world is largely a Global North phenomenon. In many countries in the Global South, trust in the media was never high to begin with, due to histories of state media control, colonial propaganda, and authoritarianism. Therefore, the crisis of trust looks fundamentally different in other parts of the world, such as South Africa or the Philippines. In the Global South, disinformation is often not just a byproduct of clickbait but a direct tool of statecraft or ethnic mobilization. Research from the Philippines describes architects of networked disinformation-PR firms and click armies that professionalize deception. In regions with low internet penetration, rumors spread via dark social apps like WhatsApp, where they are invisible to researchers and fact-checkers.

The concept of Digital Badala-shaming/humiliation in Arab media contexts illustrates how digital practices are culturally specific. Disinformation here is often tied to honor, shame, and the politics of humiliation, rather than just factual accuracy. A global perspective forces students to see information disorder as plural and context-dependent.

Part IV: The Toolkit of Defense - Forensics, AI, and Epistemic Security

This part focuses on self-defense. Lateral Reading is crucial, but an urgent focus on the Epistemic Threat of Generative AI is also needed.

Sam Wineburg's research at the Stanford History Education Group fundamentally disrupted media literacy pedagogy. He found that even historians often read vertically, staying on a website to evaluate its "About Us" page, layout, and citations. This fails because sophisticated disinformation sites mimic these markers of credibility. Professional fact-checkers, by contrast, read laterally. They leave the site immediately, opening new tabs to see what *other* sources say about the original site. This taking bearings approach is vastly more efficient and accurate. Critical thinking without lateral reading is often a trap; spending time analyzing the internal logic of a lie often reinforces it. The emergence of Generative AI (LLMs) poses a unique threat. Emily Bender and Timnit Gebru's paper "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots" argues that LLMs are not intelligent but are probabilistic systems stitching together linguistic forms without understanding meaning. They are parrots that mimic the biases, hegemonies, and errors of their training data. The danger is hallucination, plausible but false information generated with high confidence. This creates an epistemic threat where the cost of generating falsehoods drops to near zero, flooding the zone with synthetic reality. Regina Rini's philosophical work on "The Epistemic Backstop**"** is essential, as Rini argues that historically, audio and video recordings served as a backstop for settling factual disputes. If testimony conflicted, the tape was the final arbiter.

Deepfake threatens to erode this backstop. The danger is not just that we will be fooled by fakes, but that we will cease to believe *real* evidence. This creates the Liar's Dividend: bad actors can dismiss genuine incriminating footage as fake news or AI-generated, and the public, conditioned to scepticism, will accept this denial. The collapse of the epistemic backstop leads to a world in which *no* evidence is sufficient to change a mind.

Part V: Reconstruction-Rebuilding Trust and Action

The final module aims to rebuild, given the Backfire Effect, suggesting that Inoculation and Strategic Silence are more effective strategies.

The Backfire Effect settled the limitations of debunking. However, comprehensive research by Wood and Porter (2019) has shown that the backfire effect is elusive and difficult to replicate. In most experiments, participants *do* update their beliefs when presented with factual corrections, even on polarized issues. This finding is optimistic: facts *do* matter. The Backfire Effect is likely a rare phenomenon restricted to super-salient identity issues, rather than a universal rule. Sander van der Linden's work on Inoculation Theory offers a proactive alternative to debunking. Just as a vaccine exposes the body to a weakened virus to build antibodies, pre-bunking exposes the mind to a weakened dose of a disinformation *technique*, e.g., polarizing language, ad hominem attacks, to build mental antibodies. Research on the game *Bad News* shows that players who learn *how* to create fake news become significantly

better at spotting it. This technique-based inoculation is more durable than fact-based debunking because techniques, like fear-mongering, are reused across different narratives. danah boyd and Joan Donovan introduce the concept of Strategic Silence. In an attention economy, amplification is oxygen. Journalists and citizens often inadvertently spread disinformation by quoting-tweeting it to debunk it. Strategic silence is the disciplined choice *not* to amplify fringe narratives, particularly when they occupy Data Voids- terms or topics with little existing content. If a conspiracy theorist coins a new term, and the media ignores it, a search for that term yields nothing. If the media debunks it, they fill the void with content that algorithms can then serve to curious searchers.

The ungrading assessment proposed in the syllabus is supported by critical pedagogy literature. The deficit model of education treats students as empty vessels to be filled; ungrading treats them as active agents in their own epistemic development. This aligns with the course's goal of fostering intrinsic epistemic virtue rather than performative compliance.

Conclusion

The syllabus below, Ecologies of Trust, represents a rigorous, evidence-based approach to one of the defining challenges of our time. By moving beyond the deficit model and integrating insights, this curriculum transforms students from passive consumers of news into structural analysts of the information environment. This holistic approach equips students not just with the skills to verify a photo, but with the wisdom to understand *why* they wanted to believe it was true, the structural power that profited from their belief, and the legal and technical architectures that made the deception possible.

10. Proposed Syllabus

10.1 Ecologies of Trust: Critical Disinformation Studies & The Architecture of Belief

Course Rationale: Traditional media literacy assumes users are misinformed because they lack facts or technical skills, a deficit. This course argues that information disorder is a feature of human psychology and sociotechnical power. We do not just ask "Is this true?" but "Why do we want to believe it?" and "Who benefits from this belief?"

Part I: The Architecture of the Self (Epistemology & Psychology)

Core Argument: *The primary vulnerability to disinformation is not external, the lie, but internal, the desire.*

Module	Topic	Readings	Strategic Justification
1. Naive Realism and the "Objectivity Illusion"	The Deficit Model vs. The Ecological Model; Naive Realism; The Bias Blind Spot.	Ross, L., & Ward, A. (1995). Naive realism in everyday life: Implications for social conflict and misunderstanding. In T. Brown, E. Reed, & E. Turiel (Eds.), Values and knowledge (pp. 103–135). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Vallone, R. P., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1985). The hostile media phenomenon: Biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the Beirut massacre. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*(3), 577–585.https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.49.3.577 **Activity:** The Emotion Audit. Students track emotional responses to news to identify their own bias blind spots.	*Why does this matter?* Most students believe they are objective observers and that only other people are biased. This concept-Naive Realism is the foundational barrier to learning. If students don't realize they are part of the problem, they will apply course tools only to *others*, reinforcing their own dogmatism. We start here to shatter the illusion of objectivity immediately.
2. Epistemic Vices and Identity-Protective Cognition	Distinguishing Cognitive Biases, brain glitches from	Cassam, Q. (2019). *Vices of the mind: From the intellectual to the*	*Why does this matter?* Critical thinking is often weaponized as "Do Your Own Research", a

	Epistemic Vices, character flaws like arrogance, closed-mindedness, and insouciance.	*political*. Oxford University Press. Kahan, D. M. (2017). *Misconceptions, misinformation, and the logic of identity-protective cognition*. (Working Paper No. 164). Yale Law School. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2973067 **Seminar Question:** "Is a conspiracy theorist making a logic error, or displaying a character flaw?"	manifestation of intellectual arrogance. By reframing disinformation as a matter of *character* rather than just *intelligence*, we challenge students to cultivate Epistemic Humility. It explains why high-IQ individuals often fall for conspiracy theories—it's about identity protection, not lack of brainpower.
3. Conspirituality and the Meaning Void	The merger of New Age spirituality-wellness, yoga, and Far-Right conspiracy theories, QAnon. The shared logic: "Nothing is as it seems."	Ward, C., & Voas, D. (2011). The emergence of conspirituality. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 26*(1), 103–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846 Asprem, E., & Dyrendal, A. (2015). Conspirituality reconsidered: How surprising and how new is the confluence of spirituality and conspiracy theory? *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 30*(3), 367–382. https://doi.org/10.1080	*Why does this matter?* Standard political analysis fails to explain why liberal wellness communities drifted toward QAnon. This module justifies this by introducing the "spiritual" dimension of belief—conspiracy theories fill a "meaning void" that dry facts cannot. It teaches students to look for the *narrative appeal* of disinformation.

/13537903.2015.1081 339

Part II: The Architecture of Power (History, Race, & Law)

Core Argument: *Disinformation is not a "glitch" but a feature of commercial and political systems.*

Module	Topic	Readings	Strategic Justification
4. Agnotology and the Manufacture of Doubt "Objectivity Illusion"	**Agnotology** (the study of culturally induced ignorance); The history of Yellow Journalism (1895–1905).	Proctor, R. N. (2008). Agnotology: A missing term to describe the cultural production of ignorance (and its study). In R. N. Proctor & L. Schiebinger (Eds.), *Agnotology: The making and unmaking of ignorance* (pp. 1–33). Stanford University Press. Campbell, W. J. (2001). *Yellow journalism: Puncturing the myths, defining the legacies*. Praeger.	*Why does this matter?* Students often suffer from "technological determinism," blaming everything on algorithms. This module uses history (Yellow Journalism, Big Tobacco) to prove that "fake news" and "engagement farming" are old economic models. It justifies the inclusion of *Agnotology* to teach students that ignorance is often *manufactured* by powerful industries (like fossil fuel companies), not just accidental.
5. Algorithmic Oppression and Race	How algorithms reinforce racist hierarchies; "Technological Redlining"; The weaponization of "objectivity" against marginalized groups.	Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press. Benjamin, R. (2019). *Race after technology: Abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Polity Press. Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines*	*Why does this matter?* "Neutrality" is a trap. Disinformation often targets specific demographics to suppress votes or incite violence, e.g., the "Welfare Queen" trope. This module justifies the "Critical" in "Critical Disinformation Studies" by forcing students to analyze who is *harmed* by these systems, moving

		reinforce racism. NYU Press.	beyond abstract debates about "truth."
6. The New Governors (Platform Law)	The "New Governors", Facebook, Google, vs. The First Amendment; Section 230; The Moderator's Dilemma.	Klonick, K. (2018). The new governors: The people, rules, and processes governing online speech. *Harvard Law Review*, *131*, 1598–1670. Keller, D. (2018, June 13). *Internet platforms: Observations on speech, danger, and money* (Aegis Paper Series No. 1807). Hoover Institution. Douek, E. (2020). The rise of content cartels. Knight First Amendment Institute https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-rise-of-content-cartels **Activity: Policy Brief.** Drafting a moderation policy for a "Content Cartel."	*Why does this matter?* You cannot fix the system if you don't know the rules. Most public discourse on censorship is legally illiterate (confusing the First Amendment with private moderation). This module is necessary to give students the *legal literacy* to understand why platforms act the way they do (through Section 230 liability avoidance).

Part III: Global Perspectives

Core Argument: *The Post-Truth panic is a Western privilege; the rest of the world has different struggles.*

Module	Topic	Readings	Strategic Justification
7. Decolonizing Disinformation	The Post-Truth era as a Global North phenomenon; Digital Bahdala, politics of humiliation; State-	Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (Eds.). (2022). *Disinformation in the Global South*. Wiley-Blackwell.	*Why does this matter?* The syllabus warns against universalizing the Western experience. In many countries, trust in the media was *never* high

	sponsored troll armies.	Ong, J. C., & Cabañes, J. V. (2018). *Architects of networked disinformation: The professionalization of fake news production in the Philippines*. The Newton Tech4Dev Network. https://doi.org/10.7275/2cq4-5396	due to colonialism or dictatorship. This module justifies itself by exposing students to Cultures of Disinformation, showing that in some regions, disinformation is about shame and honor culture rather than just *facts*.

Part IV: The Toolkit of Defense (Forensics & AI)

Core Argument: *We need new tools for an environment where the cost of lying is zero.*

Module	Topic	Readings	Strategic Justification
8. **Lateral Reading vs. Vertical Reading**	Why "About Us" pages lie; The professional fact-checker's method ("Taking Bearings").	Wineburg, S., & McGrew, S. (2019). Lateral reading and the nature of expertise: Reading less and learning more when evaluating digital information. *Teachers College Record*, *121*(11), 1–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912101102 Caulfield, M. (2017). *Web literacy for student fact-checkers*. Pressbooks. https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/ **Lab: The Investigative Deep Dive.** Students verify a viral claim using lateral reading.	*Why does this matter?* This is the primary pedagogical pivot. The "Deficit Model" taught students to analyze the *text*- vertical reading. Research shows this fails because fakes look professional. This module provides the *practical* justification: the only way to verify a source today is to leave it- lateral reading.
9. Stochastic Parrots and the Epistemic Backstop	Generative AI, "Hallucinations," and	Bender, E. M., Gebru, T., McMillan-Major, A., & Shmitchell, S. (2021). On the dangers of stochastic parrots:	*Why does this matter?* We are entering a post-evidence era. AI lowers the cost of deception to

	the "Liar's Dividend" (dismissing real evidence as AI-faked).	Can language models be too big? *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 610–623. https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922 Rini, R. (2020). Deepfakes and the epistemic backstop. *Philosophers' Imprint*, *20*(24), 1–16.	zero. This module is crucial because it introduces the concept of the "Epistemic Backstop"—the idea that we are losing the *final arbiter* of reality (video evidence), which fundamentally changes how we must process truth claims.
10. Creation as Critique (Experiential Learning)	The mechanics of deception; "Dark Arts" of media manipulation.	Hobbs, R. (2017). *Create to learn: Introduction to digital literacy*. Wiley-Blackwell. **Activity: The Disinformation Documentary.** Students create a convincing piece of disinformation.	*Why does this matter?* You cannot understand a weapon until you hold it. "Creation as Critique" (from the Critical Disinformation syllabus) justifies this risky pedagogy by arguing that students learn the *creator's skepticism*. If they know how easy it is to manipulate emotion, they become immune to it.

Part V: Reconstruction and Action

Core Argument: *Debunking is too late; we must inoculate and rebuild.*

Module	Topic	Readings	Strategic Justification
11. Inoculation and Strategic Silence	Prebunking-Mental Antibodies; Strategic Silence-starving Data Voids.	van der Linden, S., Roozenbeek, J., & Compton, J. (2020). Inoculating against fake news about COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, Article 566790. Donovan, J., & boyd, d. (2021). Stop the presses? Moving from	*Why does this matter?* The "Backfire Effect" suggests that debating lies often reinforces them. This module justifies a shift to *proactive* measures. "Strategic Silence" teaches students the discipline of *not* amplifying nonsense, countering the impulse to "dunk" on bad takes (which only feeds the algorithm).

		strategic silence to strategic amplification in a networked media ecosystem. *Digital Journalism*, *9*(9), 1150–1168.	
12. Final Project – The Diplomacy Lab	Solving real-world information disorder.	Stommel, J. (2023). *Undoing the grade: Why we grade, and how to stop*. Hybrid Pedagogy. **Assessment: Ungrading.** Students evaluate their own epistemic growth.	*Why does this matter?* The course concludes with Ungrading because the Deficit Model of education, filling empty vessels with facts, mirrors the Deficit Model of media literacy. To create independent thinkers, the assessment itself must be an exercise in trust and self-reflection, reinforcing the course's core theme of Epistemic Virtue.