

costaid

Coping Strategies Against Information Disorder

Module 1 Awareness



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VERWEY, ^{Instituut} JONKER

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costaid
Coping Strategies Against Information Disorder

Partners



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Modules

1. Awareness

2. Critical thinking

3. Conflict solving

4. Enabling dialogue

5. Ethics

6. Reflective skills

7. Digital skills

Objectives

- ✓ To explain what information disorder entails
- ✓ To create awareness on the causes and other influences regarding belief in information disorder
- ✓ To explain how these influences function and affect one's perception
- ✓ To build skills on how to identify and handle belief in information disorder



TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER

What is Information Disorder?

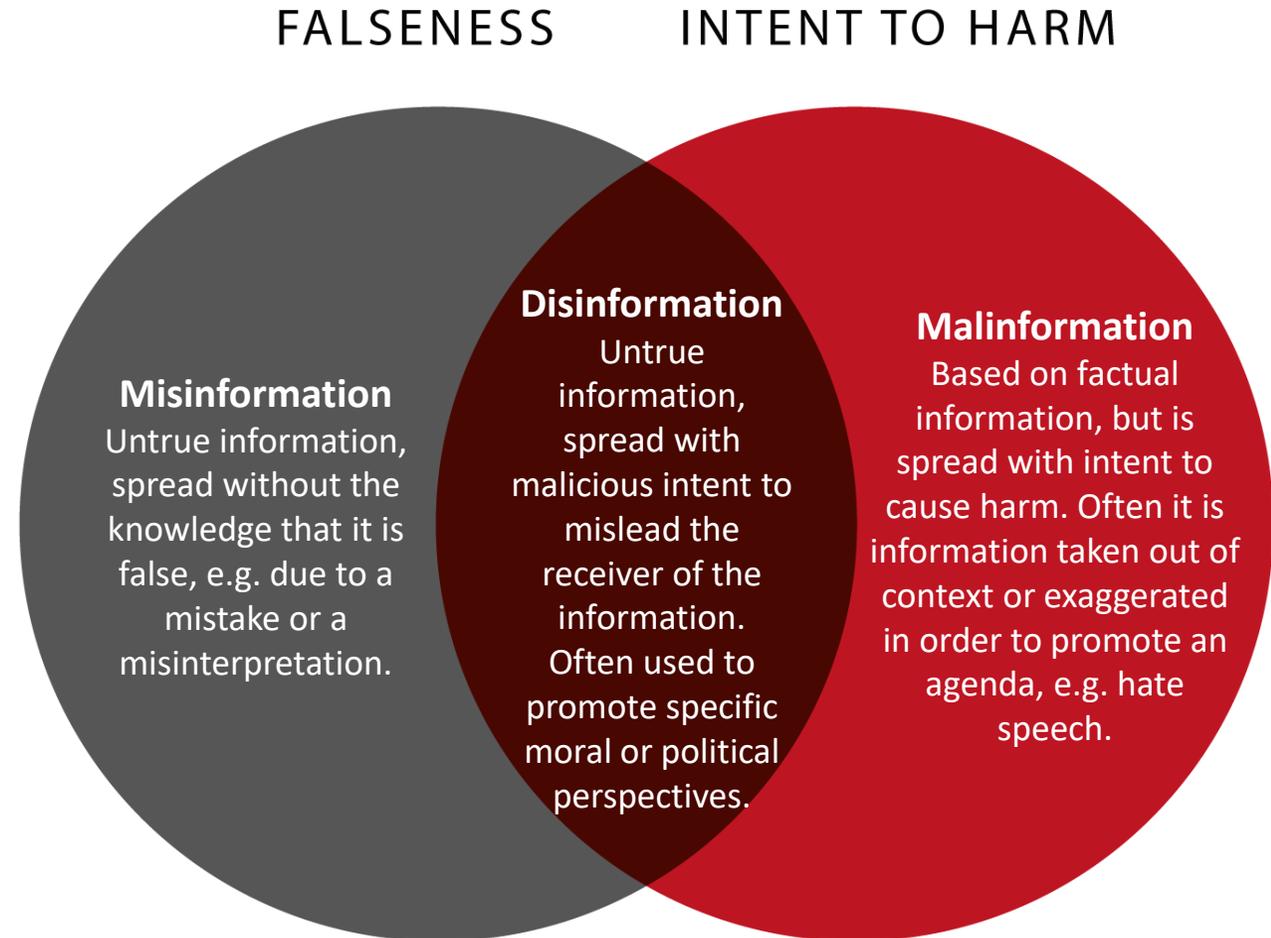
Information disorder is the overarching term for three types of misleading and/or harmful information.

These types are divided in two categories:

- Whether the information is **false or not**.
- Whether the information is spread with **malicious intent** in order to harm others.

The three types:

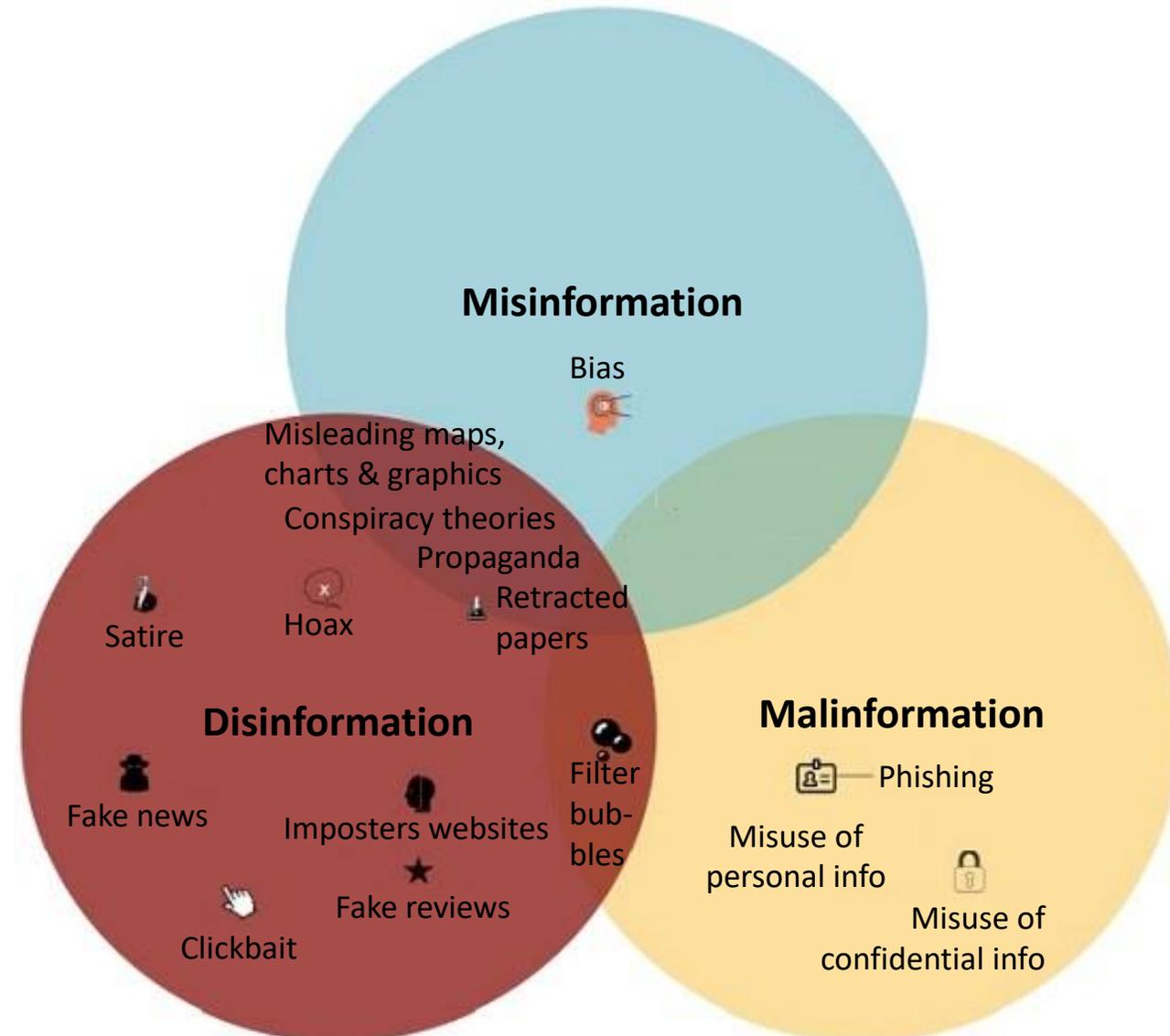
1. **Misinformation:** false, no intent to harm
2. **Disinformation:** false, intent to harm
3. **Malinformation:** true, intent to harm



Examples of Information Disorder

All 3 forms of information disorder are prevalent in society.

- **Misinformation** is mostly based on ignorance and personal biases. These can cause misinterpretations which, when shared, create misinformation.
- **Disinformation** can be a very large issue, for example the sharing of “fake news” by a media outlet. However, disinformation can also be found in smaller instances, for example companies which leave fake reviews on their own products/services or articles that use extravagant SHOCKING titles in order to mislead people into clicking on them.
- **Malinformation** for example can be the gathering of personal information through phishing, but also using this personal information for e.g. doxxing, identity theft or besmirching someone’s reputation.



Belief in Information Disorder: a Problematic Behaviour



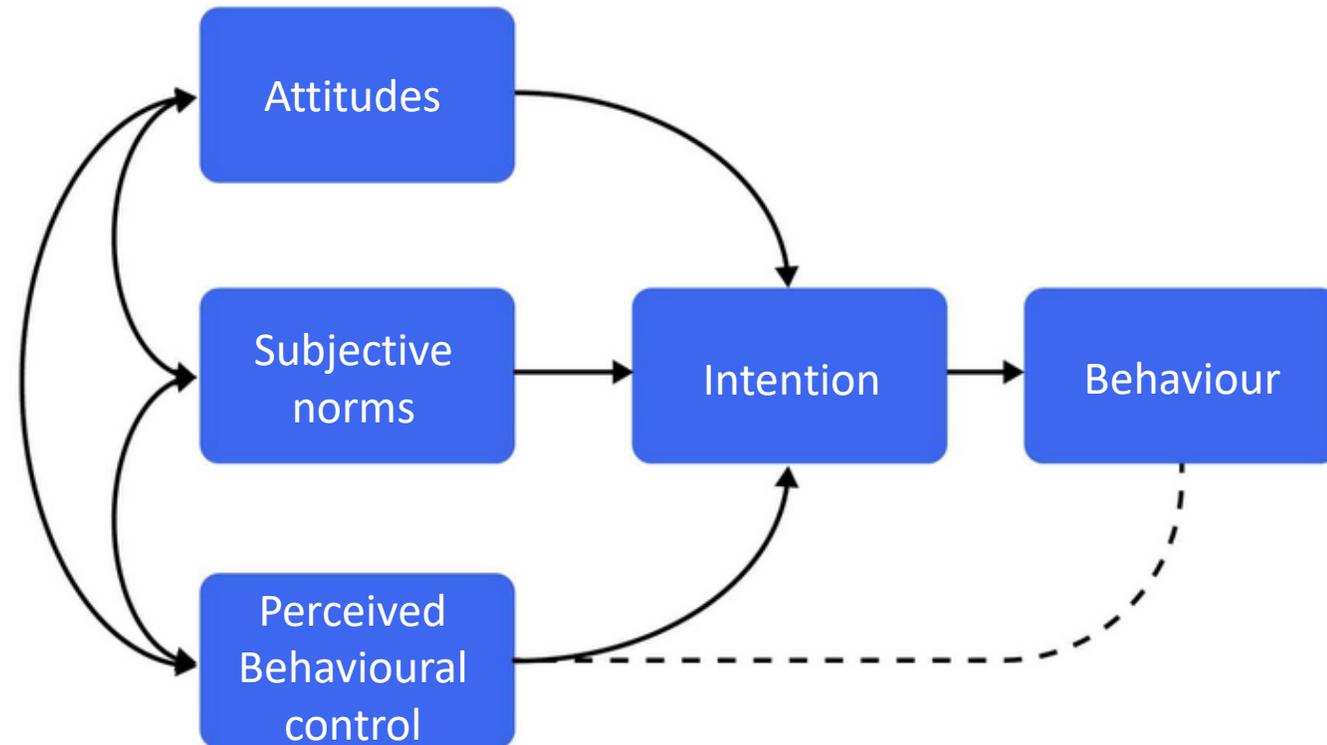
The Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour is a theory that explains how people come to perform the behaviours they perform.

In the model you can see that in order to perform behaviour, one should have intention.

Intention is created by a combination of 3 factors:

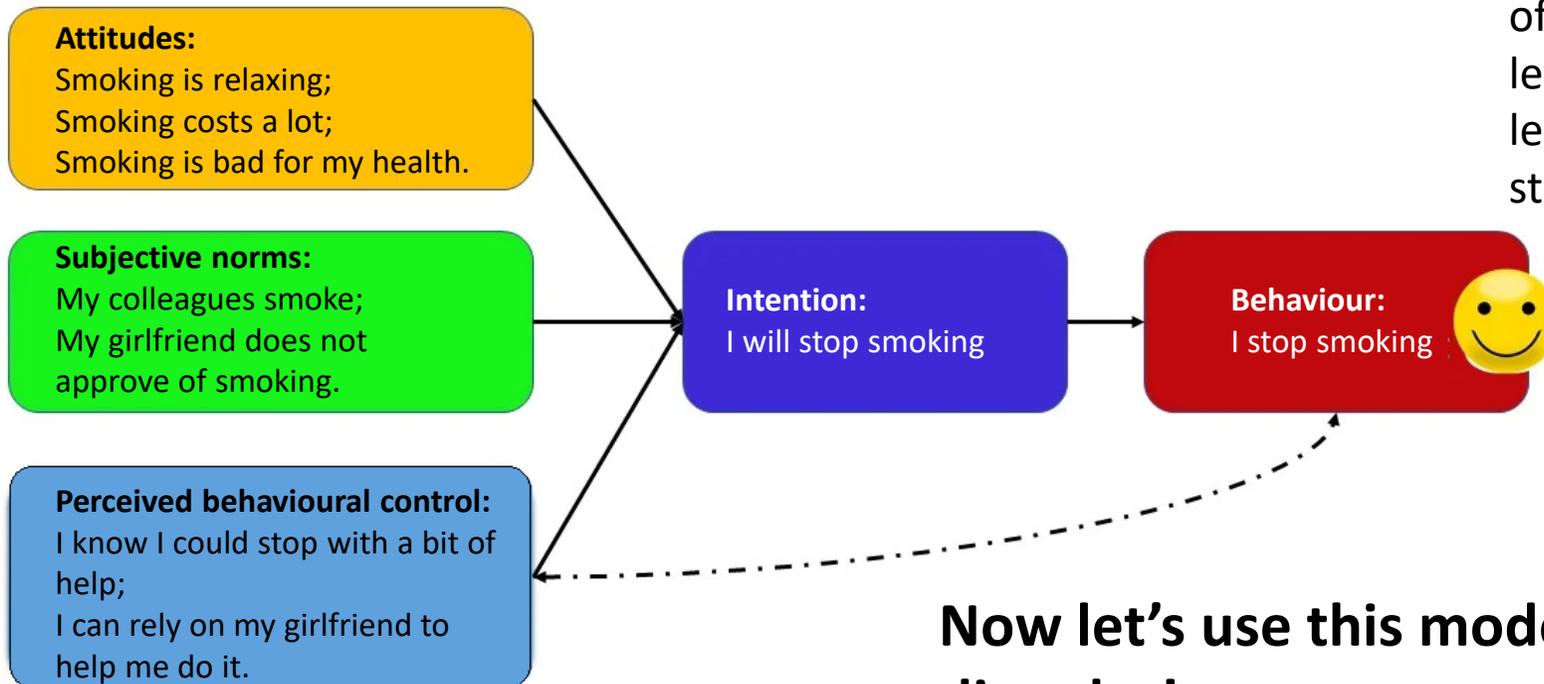
- Attitudes / personal beliefs
- Subjective norms
- Perceived behavioural control



An Example of This Theory

This is an example of this theory in use.

Their personal attitudes, the influence of their social environment and the level of control they perceive to have lead them to a certain behaviour: to stop smoking.



Now let's use this model for belief in information disorder!

Attitude / Personal beliefs (1/2)

click



Belief

is a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some persons or thing.

- A belief is an idea that a person holds as being true. Belief can originate from various sources, such as:
 - a person's own observations or experiments;
 - the adoption of cultural and societal standards (e.g. religion);
 - what others tell them (e.g. education or mentoring).
- A possible belief stays with the person until they embrace it as true and incorporate it into their individual belief system.
- Each person assesses and seeks solid reasons or evidence for these possible beliefs in their own way.
- Once a person acknowledges a belief as a truth, they are ready to defend, it can be said to constitute part of their belief system.

Attitude / Personal beliefs (2/2)

In conclusion: a person's attitude towards something is created by the experiences and (life) lessons they have encountered throughout their lifetime.

In the case of belief in (false) information, people are more prone to believe info when it alligns with the personal attitudes they have garnered in their life (**confirmation bias**). However, these personal experiences do not always reflect the world accurately.

Example

A person let their child be vaccinated and the child was later diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This person could be more susceptible to believe news stories or social media posts saying that vaccines cause autism, than people who have not had this personal experience.

Example

A person has contracted COVID-19 and they did not get very sick. Neither did anyone in their social circle.

This person could be more susceptible to believe news stories or social media posts saying that the COVID-19 pandemic is overblown.

Subjective norms / Social influence (1/3)



Someone's social environment plays a significant role in their behaviour, as seen in the theory earlier presented.

In short, the social environment of a person consists of their social relationships, their physical surroundings and the cultural milieu in which they function and interact.

For example, the country in which someone grows up in is part of their social environment, just as social groups like their family, their friends, their school, their peer group, and even the online spaces they frequent.

Subjective norms / Social influence (2/3)

Most social groups have their own subjective idea of how to act appropriately. These are **norms**, which are a vital part of the identity of the social group.

To be a part of the group is to adhere to these subjective norms. This can cause people to change their behaviour (intentionally or unintentionally) in order to **conform** to these norms.

Example: following a dress code for a job.



When a part of the identity of the group is to follow certain **untrustworthy media outlets** or to believe certain **unproven (conspiracy) theories** for example, which is the case for many **online communities**, new potential members would be prone to **conform**.

Subjective norms / Social influence (3/3)

Other ways in which someone's environment can influence the behaviour of believing in false information:

- People tend to exert less effort or think less critically when in a group (**social loafing**).
- Group members can **persuade** a person's attitudes and beliefs through communication and argumentation.
- When group members ask for a change in behaviour, a person is more willing to **comply**.

Conclusion

Due to these factors, a person has a higher chance of accepting information as truth when the majority of their social group believes in the information.

Perceived behavioural control (1/3)

Perceived behavioural control refers to a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest.

It is closely related to self-efficacy, which is someone's belief in their ability to accomplish a goal.



In the case of belief in (false) information, this perception of control can be influenced by the following concepts:

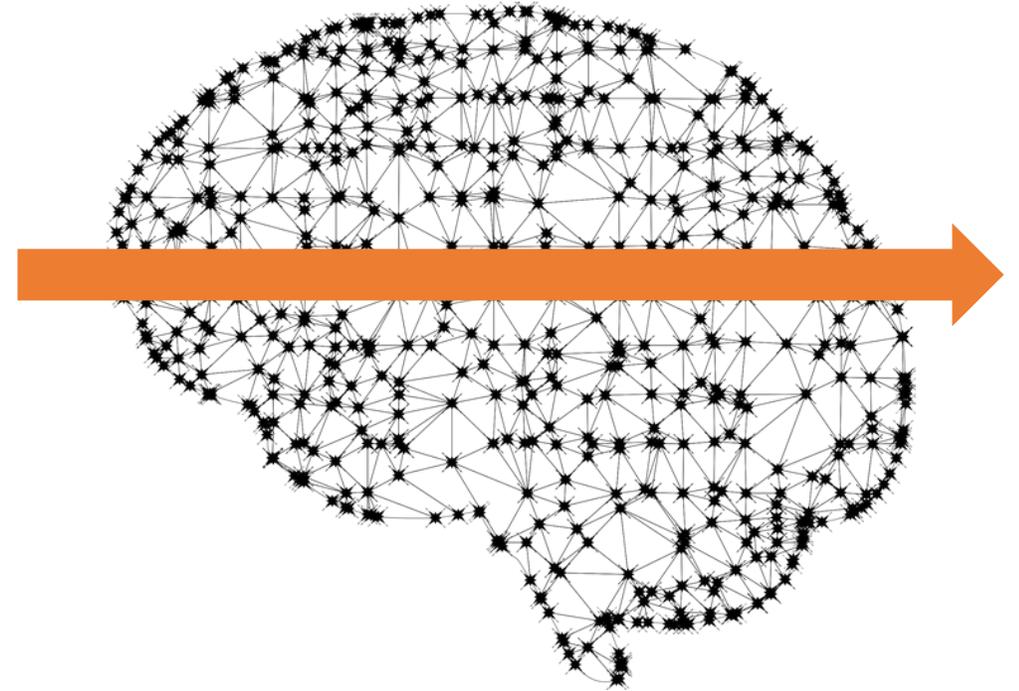
Perceived behavioural control (2/3)

- **A lack of credible sources:** when someone only gets information from unreliable sources, they are more likely to run into false information. Without opposing information, the false information is more likely to be accepted as truth;
- **Limited knowledge or expertise:** without background information, it becomes easier to accept false information as true;
- **Lack of media literacy:** insufficient understanding of how to critically assess and evaluate information;
- **Emotional reasoning:** emotions influence reasoning. When a person has strong emotional attachments, they may be more inclined to accept information which supports this emotional state, even when it is false;



Perceived behavioural control (3/3)

- **Confirmation bias:** the tendency to accept information which confirms pre-existing beliefs more quickly than other information, even if the information is false;
- **Cognitive shortcuts:** people do not think critically about everything: sometimes people use heuristics or “shortcuts”. Everyone does this, however, whenever used in the wrong scenario, it can cause acceptance of false information. This is especially prevalent when the subject is not seen as important.



Skills to identify belief in mis- and disinformation



Skills to identify belief in disinformation (1/3)

Context-dependent:

Belief in (mis- and) disinformation can vary extensively between different individuals. There is not one true fix or skill to counteract it. However, there are some general skills to keep in mind.

- **Keep up to date** with popular narratives in media, so that you are aware what is happening in disinformation.
- **Be vigilant for "red flag" signals.** These are signs that indicate radicalisation, which is often a product of belief in disinformation.
- When you have observed some troubling opinions, statements or arguments, **try to start a dialogue** about it. More on this can be found in *Module 4: Enabling Dialogue*.

Red flag signals (2/3)

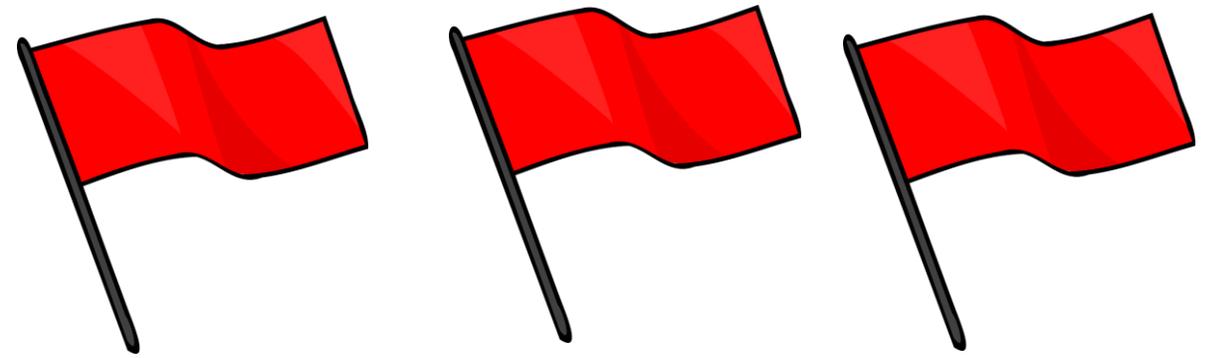
There is no exhaustive checklist covering all possible signals which could indicate radicalisation, because this subject is too complex and context-dependent. The process of radicalisation is constantly changing and evolving, and therefore the indicators of it as well.

However, here are some examples to show what these signals could look like:



Examples of red flag signals (3/3)

- The use of problematic statements or language known to be affiliated with disinformation or radical groups, for example emphasising us-versus-them divisions related to ethnicity or religion.
- An increasing sense of belonging to a particular (political, religious, ethnic) group, or contrarily, feeling like they do not belong anywhere.
- Breaking off old friendships in favor of new friends from a radical group.



- Changes in mood and/or isolating oneself.
- Noticeable changes in (school) performance or absenteeism.
- Engagement in different leisure activities.
- Participating in demonstrations.
- Rejecting attitude towards society and authorities.
- Radical changes in clothes or appearance.
- Recent exposure to one or more trigger factors.

References and further reading

- The guidelines of the COSTAID-project on costaid.eu, on which these slides are based.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-t](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-t)
- RAN Practitioners. (2023). *How to respond to disinformation in public communications from the perspective of frontline practitioners*. Radicalisation Awareness Network. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/ran_cn_paper_how_to_respond_to_disinformation_in_public_communications_27-29032023_en.pdf
- Santos-d'Amorim, K., & Miranda, M. (2021). Informação incorreta, desinformação e má informação: Esclarecendo definições e exemplos em tempos de desinfodemia. *Encontros Bibli*, 26, 01–23. <https://doi.org/10.5007/1518-2924.2021.e76900>



Congratulations!
You have completed this part



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