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NEWS

Misinformation vs. Disinformation: Here's How to Tell the Difference | Reader's Digest

By Laurie Budgar
April 18, 2022

If you've been having a hard time separating factual information from fake news, you're not alone. Nearly eight in ten adults believe or are unsure about at least one false claim related to COVID-19, according to a report the Kaiser Family Foundation published late last year. Other areas where false information easily takes root include climate change, politics, and other health news. That's why it's crucial for you to able to identify misinformation vs. disinformation.

Those are the two forms false information can take, according to University of Washington professor Jevin West, who cofounded and directs the school's Center for an Informed Public. As part of the University of Colorado's 2022 Conference on World Affairs (CWA), he gave a seminar on the topic, noting that if we hope to combat misinformation and disinformation, we have to "treat those as two different beasts."

The difference between disinformation and misinformation is clearly imperative for researchers, journalists, policy consultants, and others who study or produce information for mass consumption. For the general public, "it's more important not to share harmful information, period," says Nancy Watzman, strategic advisor at First Draft, a nonpartisan, nonprofit coalition that works to protect communities from false information. But to avoid it, you need to know what it is.

Keep reading to learn about misinformation vs. disinformation and how to identify them. Then arm yourself against online attacks aimed at harming you or stealing your identity by learning how to avoid doxxing, online scams, phone scams, and Amazon email scams.

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