

# WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS MISINFORMATION AND MISTRUST TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

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# Word of the year: misinformation. Here's why.



## misinformation

[mis-in-fer-mey-shuhn]

[Synonyms](#) [Examples](#) [Word Origin](#)

[See more synonyms for misinformation on Thesaurus.com](#)

### noun

1. false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead:

In the chaotic hours after the earthquake, a lot of misinformation was reported in the news.

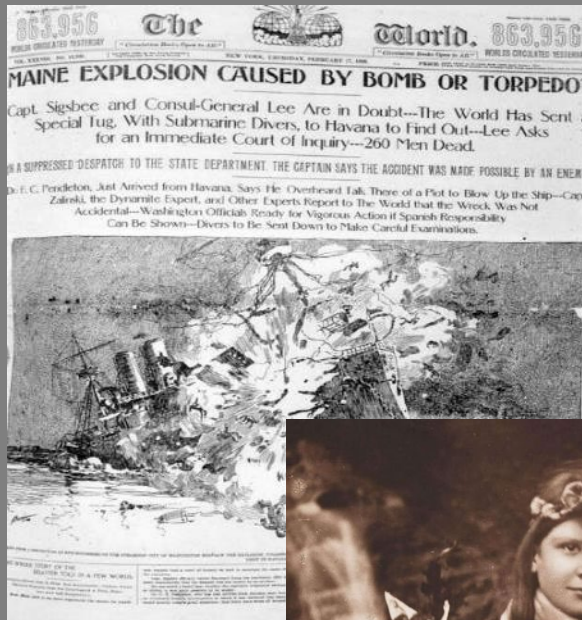
An image from Dictionary.com shows an entry for the word misinformation, which Dictionary.com announced as its 2018 Word of the Year. (Dictionary.com via AP)



By **Valerie Strauss**  
December 10, 2018

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

# Misinformation throughout media history





# BELLE GIBSON

FOUNDER OF THE BEST-SELLING APP AND  
COOKBOOK *THE WHOLE PANTRY*

## My life-long struggle with the truth

Belle Gibson claimed to be healing her terminal cancer with wholefoods – but now it's proven to be a cruel web of lies.

Yet is Belle a hoax mastermind or simply

**F**RESH-FACED. EARNEST. Naive. When Belle Gibson speaks, she cries easily and muddles her words. She's passionate about avoiding gluten, dairy and coffee, but doesn't really understand how cancer works. All of which begs the question: is this young woman really capable of masterminding one of the



• Image: *The Australian Women's Weekly*

Do we  
*misunderstand*  
*our own*  
*vulnerabilities?*



We need social connection.

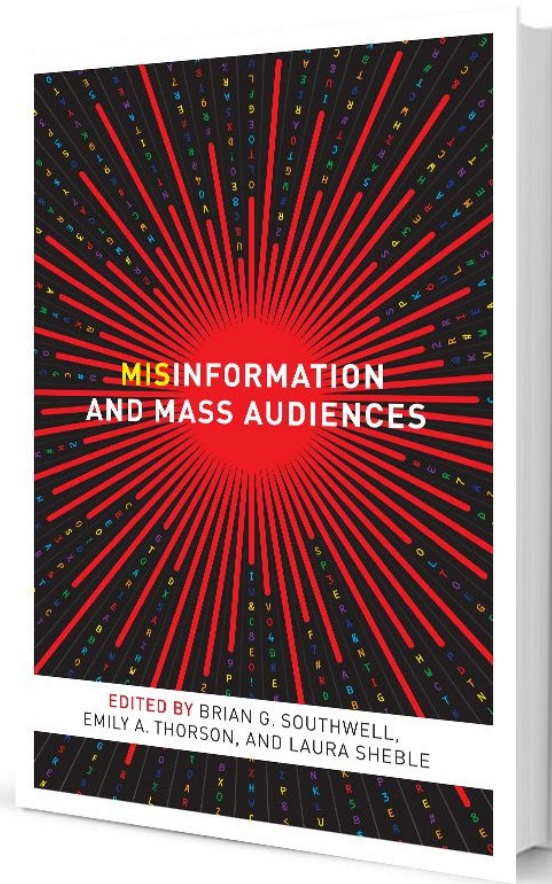


We need hope for future.



The lack of either can invite  
misinformation diffusion if  
misinformation offers salve.

We need evidence on misinformation prevalence and effects.



American Journal of  
Preventive Medicine

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CURRENT ISSUES

Misinformation as a Misunderstood  
Challenge to Public Health

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# What's the problem?

We are *biased toward acceptance*.

There are *reasons why we share* misinformation.

Our *regulatory approach (in democracies)* emphasizes post hoc detection.

*Correction is hard.*

Applause from Miranda Cheatham, Nancy Watzman, and 32 others



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Mar 28 · 5 min read

## Why we lie to ourselves and others about misinformation

Or, why we underreport our spread of misinformation—just as we do about other behaviors like smoking, drinking, and unprotected sex

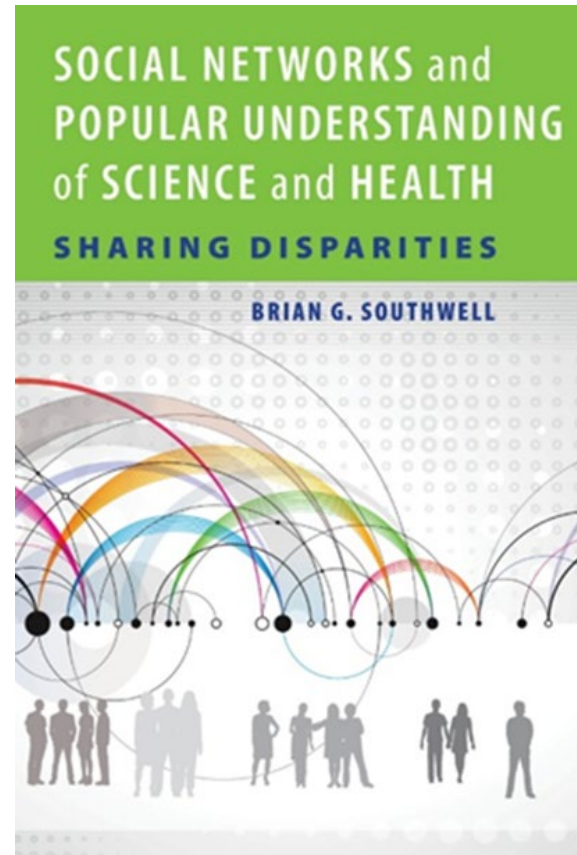




# Why rumors spread

Discomfort of uncertainty  
Lack of corrective information

Also: information as potential  
relationship currency



**What can be done?**



## Navigating Misinformation Across Three Continents



A 19th Century Japanese map of the world. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



# Beyond fact checking: Addressing misinformation



RTI Press

Conference Proceedings

September 2019



# Building and Maintaining Trust in Science:

Paths Forward for Innovations by Nonprofits and  
Funding Organizations

Brian Southwell, Angelique (Angel) Hedberg, Christopher Krebs, and Stephanie Zevitas, Editors

Coming in  
2020



COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
ENGAGEMENT



MEDICAL SCHOOL AND  
ALLIED HEALTH PROGRAM  
TRAINING



BASS CONNECTIONS  
PROJECT SUBMISSION TO  
STUDY TRUST IN RURAL NC





Spring 2020: *How to Use Health News*

Pilot course offering at  
Rockingham County Community College

# Training for health care professionals

- February 2020: We are offering workshop for Duke AHEAD.
- This is first step in a larger effort.



Support for our efforts



Craig Newmark  
Philanthropies



Thank you!

Let's talk: [bsouthwell@rti.org](mailto:bsouthwell@rti.org)