DISINFORMATION & THE 2020 CENSUS

DATA & SOCIETY

TOPICS

- Definitions
- Fill Data Voids
- Develop Inoculation Messages
- Identify Trusted Messengers
- Apply Threat Classification Model

MISINFORMATION

n. information whose inaccuracy is unintentional

DISINFORMATION

n. information that is **deliberately** false or misleading

DISINFORMATION PLAYBOOK

- **Preparation:** What can you do *now* to cultivate resilience to potential information threats?

- **Response:** In the moment, how can you act in a way that minimizes the impact of an information threat?

**DATA&
SOCIETY**

FILL DATA VOIDS

"Census" is a 'data void.'

**DATA&
SOCIETY**

FILL DATA VOIDS

Search: the census

Just Say NO to the Census (and Government)
FreeKeene · 76K views · 8 years ago
If you want the government people to leave you alone you have to stop obeying them. This is a tough thing to do, and it's silly to ...
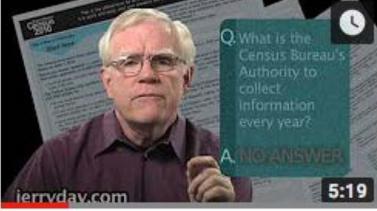1:22

The 2020 Census is at risk. Here are the major consequences
PBS NewsHour · 287K views · 10 months ago
Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years is used to draw voting districts and determine how much funding to give ...
CC
6:44

The Census Is Getting Personal
minivanjack · 2M views · 8 years ago
Uninformed Census Workers who want to post "We don't ask those questions" will be omitted from comments. You have not done ...
5:19

FILL DATA VOIDS

- **Put all of your content online:** If you're producing a pamphlet for the local library, make a copy available on your website.

- **Optimize, optimize, optimize:** Google, YouTube, and other algorithmic systems don't know that your online content is critical to the Census unless you tell them.

- **Create your own drumbeat:** Coordinate messaging with local partners and develop a communications calendar.

**DATA&
SOCIETY**

FILL DATA VOIDS

DEVELOP INOCULATION MESSAGES

STEP ONE: Preview the motivations driving the disinformation

- *e.g. politically motivated groups are trying to deprive certain people of rights and services.*

STEP TWO: State the falsehood you intend to inoculate against

- *e.g. they're urging people to boycott the census.*

STEP THREE: Deliver factual information to combat the falsehood

- *e.g. the government distributes billions of dollars in funding and provides accurate representation in Congress based on census data.*

Credits: Spitfire Strategies

DATA&SOCIETY

DEVELOP INOCULATION MESSAGES

EXAMPLE

"Politically-motivated groups are discouraging people in our city from participating in the census. Anyone who is urging you to not fill out the census is actually trying to suppress the count and deprive our community of rights and services. Census data helps distribute more than $800 billion in federal funding for services and resources, and provides accurate representation in Congress for everyone living in the US. Everyone should fill out the census as completely as they can."

IDENTIFY TRUSTED MESSENGERS

When a problematic narrative or hashtag starts trending, trusted messengers play a crucial role in spreading inoculation or balance messages.

Credits: Ilana Panich-Linsman for The New York Times

**DATA&
SOCIETY**

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION & DETERMINE RESPONSE

Questions to consider:
- Has problematic content jumped from one platform to another?
- Has it reached one of your community's key amplifiers?
- Has it sparked offline action, e.g. rallies or marches?

THREAT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONSE
Low	Low spread (disinformation element is isolated to a single community or platform), low volume	- Ongoing monitoring & analysis - Do not engage with messaging
Medium	Social media traction (spread to more than one platform), high volume, high velocity, reached an influencer within a specific community or an adversarial amplifier on the topic, has prompted media coverage, hyperpartisan media attention, members can confirm presence of disinfo spread within communities	- Respond within platform - Inoculation messages - Strategic engagement of specific, community journalists/trusted messengers
High	Spread through multiple platforms, high engagement, members confirm spread of disinfo within communities, evidence of artificial amplification, evidence of foreign interference	- Networked response - Engage mainstream journalists, trusted community messengers and partisan journalists

DATA&
SOCIETY

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION

THREAT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTIC*	RESPONSE
Low	Low spread (disinformation element is isolated to a single community or platform), low volume	• Ongoing monitoring and analysis • Do not engage

DATA&
SOCIETY

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION

THREAT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTICS*	RESPONSE
Medium	Social media traction (spread to more than one platform), high volume**, high velocity, reached an influencer within a specific community or an adversarial amplifier on the topic, has prompted media coverage, hyperpartisan media attention, members can confirm presence of disinfo spread within communities	• Respond within platform • Inoculation messages • Strategic engagement of tech media platforms • Strategic engagement of specific, community journalists/ trusted messengers

DATA&
SOCIETY

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION

THREAT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONSE
High	Spread through multiple platforms, high engagement, members confirm presence of disinfo spread within communities, evidence of artificial amplification, evidence of foreign interference	• Networked response • Engage mainstream journalists, trusted community messengers and partisan journalists • Engage social media platforms

DATA&SOCIETY

APPLY THREAT CLASSIFICATION & DETERMINE RESPONSE

Questions to consider:
- Has problematic content jumped from one platform to another?
- Has it reached one of your community's key amplifiers?
- Has it sparked offline action, e.g. rallies or marches?

THREAT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONSE
Low	Low spread (disinformation element is isolated to a single community or platform), low volume	- Ongoing monitoring & analysis - Do not engage with messaging
Medium	Social media traction (spread to more than one platform), high volume, high velocity, reached an influencer within a specific community or an adversarial amplifier on the topic, has prompted media coverage, hyperpartisan media attention, members can confirm presence of disinfo spread within communities	- Respond within platform - Inoculation messages - Strategic engagement of specific, community journalists/trusted messengers
High	Spread through multiple platforms, high engagement, members confirm spread of disinfo within communities, evidence of artificial amplification, evidence of foreign interference	- Networked response - Engage mainstream journalists, trusted community messengers and partisan journalists

DATA&
SOCIETY

ACTIONS

- Put your Census content online so disinformation can't fill the data void

- Develop inoculation messages to protect your constituents from disinformation

- Implement the threat classification model to determine what kind of response is warranted

RESOURCES

- Primers on disinformation threats to the 2020 Census and disinformation techniques

- Contextual document on amplification

- Tip-sheet on talking to journalists about the 2020 Census

- Guide to verifying online content

THANK YOU

Emma Margolin -
emma@datasociety.net

DATA&
SOCIETY