Glossary of Digital Literacy Terms

Algorithm: Fixed sequence of steps a computer performs to solve a problem or complete a task. Social media platforms use algorithms to filter and prioritize content for individual users based on indicators like viewing behavior and content engagement. Disinformation designed to provoke an emotional reaction can flourish in these spaces when algorithms detect that a user is prone to react to certain content.

Astroturfing: Faux grassroots movements or campaigns to give the appearance of widespread support or opposition for a particular cause, which manipulate public opinion.

Avatar: Image or username that represents a person in social networks.

Bot: Automated accounts or computer programs that mimic human behavior on social platforms; powerful tools to amplify disinformation or manipulate online discussions.

Catfishing: Fraud where a person creates a **sockpuppet** or fake identity to target a particular victim. Common for romance scams on dating websites. It may be done for financial gain, to compromise a victim or as a form of **trolling** or wish fulfillment.

Cheap Fake: Altered media devised with conventional or relatively low-tech tools.

Circular Reporting: Situation in which publication A publishes misinformation, publication B reprints it, and publication A then cites B as the source for the information. Also, when multiple publications report on the same initial piece of false information, which then appears to another author as having been verified by multiple sources.

Clickbait: Sensational or misleading headlines or content devised to trigger attention and generate clicks, often segueing to disinformation or low-quality content.

Clickthrough Rate: Social media metric used to represent the number of times a visitor clickthrough divided by the total number of impressions a piece of content receives.

Collective Intelligence: Shared intelligence that emerges from the collaboration and competition of many and appears in consensus decision-making in social networks.

Confirmation Bias: Tendency of individuals to interpret and favor information that aligns with preexisting beliefs or biases. Compliments the spread and acceptance of disinformation.

Conversion Rate: Common metric tracked in social media that is the percentage of people who completed an intended action (filling out a form, following a social account, etc.).

Crowdsourcing: Soliciting ideas or content from social media users.

Dark Ads: Funded advertisements visible only to the publisher and target audience. For example, Facebook allows advertisers to create posts that reach specific users based on their demographic profile, page 'likes', and their listed interests, but that are not publicly visible.

Data Mining: Process of monitoring large volumes of data by combining tools from statistics and artificial intelligence to recognize useful patterns. By collecting information about an individual's activity, disinformation agents have a mechanism to target users based on their posts, likes and browsing history.

Deepfake: Artificially manipulated or fabricated audio, video, or images that appear to be real, often used to spread false information or create deceptive content.

Digital Literacy: Ability to critically evaluate and navigate information and sources online, especially skills to identify and avoid disinformation.

Doxxing: Publishing private or identifying information about an individual, without permission. An example of **malinformation**, which is accurate information shared publicly to cause harm.

Echo Chamber: Social media ecosystems where users are exposed to information that reinforces existing beliefs; closed loop of ideas and limited exposure to alternative viewpoints.

Engagement Rate: The amount of interaction -- likes, shares, comments -- content receives.

Fact: Something that exists; reality; truth: something known to exist or have occurred. Truth known by actual experience or observation or empirical data.

Fake Followers: Anonymous or imposter social media accounts created to portray false impressions of popularity about another account, often paid for.

Fake News: False or misleading news stories or articles presented as legitimate journalism, often created to misinform or manipulate public opinion.

False Connection: Headlines, visuals, and/or captions that don't support content; non sequitur.

False Context: Genuine content shared with false contextual information.

Filter Bubble: Online services like Google, Amazon, and Netflix, and social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok use computer programming algorithms to determine what information to deliver to you. Your "filter bubble" (a term coined by internet activist Eli Pariser) refers to the idea that this automated personalization, though helpful in some ways, can isolate you from other information. Often synonymous with "**echo chamber,"** the filter bubble created by your online activity can limit your exposure to different points of view and weaken your ability to avoid fake news and bias.

Finsta: Short for "fake insta" this term describes one's secret or fake Instagram page that's hidden from their employers.

GIF: Digital image that animates on a brief repeating loop. Used to share small video clips or a sequence of static pictures and often used to spread amusing content, or disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation with a powerful, short, dynamic image.

Hoax: Deliberate deception or trick, often involving false information, fabricated stories, or misleading content, intended to deceive and mislead.

Imposter Content: When genuine sources are impersonated by disinformation accounts.

Information Overload: Too much information thrown at a topic, often dis and misinformation, that overloads our ability to think rationally and instead to just give up deciphering.

Malinformation: True information shared to cause harm. Includes private or revealing information that is spread to harm a person or reputation.

Manipulated Content: Genuine information or imagery manipulated to deceive.

Manufactured Amplification: The reach or spread of information boosted through artificial means. This includes human and automated manipulation of search engine results and trending lists, and the promotion of certain links or hashtags on social media. There are online price lists for different types of amplification, including prices for generating fake votes and signatures in online polls and petitions, and the cost of downranking specific content from search engine results.

Meme: Coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe an idea or behavior that spreads person to person throughout a culture by propagating rapidly and changing over time. Now used most frequently to describe captioned photos or **GIFs** that spread online, and the most effective are humorous or critical. Powerful vehicles for disinformation.

Misinformation: Inaccurate or false information shared or disseminated unintentionally, often due to a lack of verification or understanding of the facts.

Newsjacking: Hopping on current events with social media content. Social media managers often engage in newsjacking to seem timely and relevant while gaining exposure by tying their content to hashtags and conversations around the latest news.

Post-Truth: (Adjective) Condition in which objective facts and empirical data are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Reposting: Also called sharing. Sending other users or sharing content originally posted by another user. Common on Facebook and Twitter, and a driver of viral content.

Rumor: Unverified information or claims that are widely circulated among social media users, often without factual basis or evidence.

Sealioning: Method of trolling or harassment where people are pursued with persistent requests for evidence or repeated questions. A pretense of civility and sincerity is maintained with these incessant, bad-faith requests.

Social Proof: Psychological phenomenon in which people seek direction from those around them to determine how they are supposed to act or think in each situation.

Sock Puppet: Online account that uses a false identity designed specifically to deceive. Sock puppets are used on social platforms to inflate another account's follower numbers and to spread or amplify false information to a mass audience. Often used interchangeably with **bot**.

Spam: Unsolicited, impersonal online communication, used to promote, advertise, deceive, or steal. Mostly distributed via email, and algorithms detect, filter and block spam from users' inboxes. Similar technologies could potentially be used in the context of social disinformation.

Troll: Provocateur or harasser of others online who relentlessly posts inflammatory or disruptive comments, often to divert or derail discussions and spread disinformation.

Troll Farm: Group of individuals engaging in trolling or promotion of narratives in a coordinated fashion. One prominent troll farm was the Russia-based Internet Research Agency that spread inflammatory content to interfere in U.S. elections.

Truth Decay: Four interrelated trends: increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data; blurring of the line between opinion and fact; increase in the relative volume, resulting influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact; and lowered trust in formerly respected sources of information.

Truthiness: Preferring concepts one wishes to be true, rather than verifiable fact.

Velocity: Speed at which information reaches users on social media, often accelerated by sharing and other engagement and the impact of algorithms, measured over a unit of time.

Verification: Determining the authenticity of information posted by unofficial sources online, or the authenticity of the accounts themselves compared to what they purport to be.

Virality: Ratio of users who view social content compared to those impelled to share it.

Volume: Number of users or generated content about a given issue during a fixed period.

VPN: Virtual private network, used to encrypt a user's data and conceal identity and location. Makes it difficult for platforms to know where someone pushing disinformation or purchasing ads is located.