

Countering Information Disorder Through Data Science

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Abstract

With increased stress and coronavirus-related social distancing practices during the pandemic, reliable information becomes more crucial than ever. As people experience the many ways our information environment is polluted, how may data science help strengthen people's resilience to such information disorder? In this talk, I will present our recent research that studies the information being spread online in this ongoing "misinfodemic" using a large sample of communication traces collected from social media. I will discuss (1) some of the typical and atypical characteristics of online users who are more likely to engage in COVID-related misinformation consumption, and (2) the kinds of visual and text content likely to associate with widely-distributed unreliable sources. I will also discuss visualization and statistical learning approaches to identify these different types of users and content. This line of research helps reveal new opportunities to decelerate or stop the misinformation propagation, such as to predict the potentially at-risk misinformation consumers for early targeting and timely intervention, as well as to contribute to enhancing the public's critical literacy and resilience to misinformation.