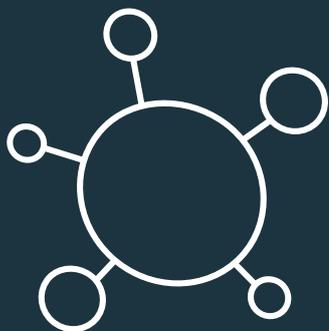


STOP. THINK. SHARE?

A Teacher's Guide to Mis- and Disinformation
During the Covid-19 Pandemic.



Manchester
Metropolitan
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STOP. THINK. SHARE?

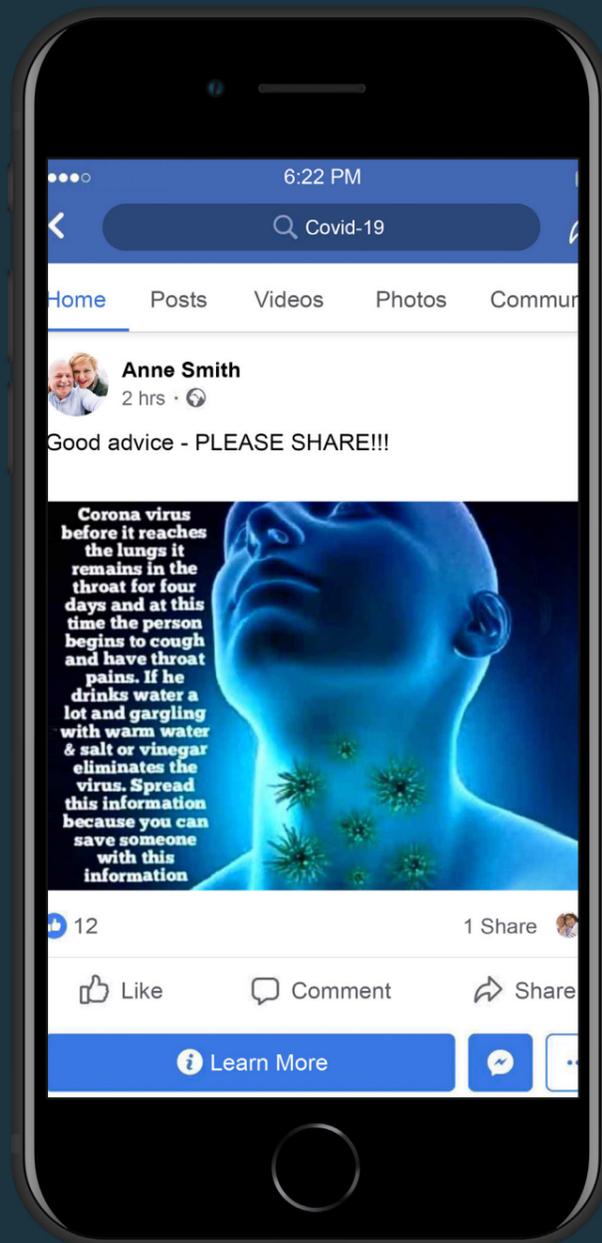
During the Covid-19 lockdown, school closures have presented teachers with multiple challenges:

Some are still at school, teaching children of key workers, many will be teaching remotely with an additional need to support parents. Like all news consumers, teachers also have to deal with misinformation spreading on social media and messaging apps which can make it harder to identify accurate information.

In the school context this can give rise to a specific set of concerns. It can potentially undermine an understanding of the pandemic, the government's response to it, and ultimately how to stay safe and look after their own and others' wellbeing. It is important to equip teachers with the knowledge needed to understand and recognise this type of misleading and potentially damaging content.

A lot of news around the pandemic is visual, such as graphs and maps showing spread and infection rates. Unfortunately, a lot of misinformation on social media about Covid-19 is also visual. This is because images, especially photographs, make information seem more accurate and trustworthy.

People share misinformation for many reasons. For example, if the information makes sense, even if it is false, we tend to not think too critically about it. Research has shown that if we take a moment to consider the things we share on social media, this could slow down the spread of misinformation. This leaflet is designed to help teachers do this.



REMEMBER!

STOP

Mis- and disinformation (including lies, rumours, conspiracy theories) often spread on social media and on messaging apps during crisis events because people are more anxious, uncertain, and are looking for answers.

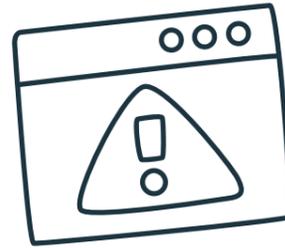
THINK

Images are often used to spread mis- and disinformation because they make the content seem more trustworthy.

SHARE?

It's important to think about the accuracy of what we see on social media and messaging apps before sharing it. By doing this, you will likely be able to figure out if the information is accurate or not.

WHAT IS MIS- AND DISINFORMATION?



You will probably have seen the term 'fake news' used to describe concerns about the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation online.

The term has however become very political and is used by some to attack the mainstream media. It also does not fully describe what we are dealing with now. Experts recommend using 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' instead.

Photographs and videos play a key role in how we communicate online. Because of

this, most online mis- and disinformation is at least partly, if not entirely, visual. A key issue is to do with 'out of context' photographs, where a real image is used out of context, misrepresenting what we think we are looking at. Because images are very shareable, this type of content is able to spread quickly and widely on social media. The same is true for messaging apps. You may be part of a family or friends' group where news is shared. Forwarded content on closed messaging apps can be particularly tricky because it's hard to know where it has come from originally.

MISINFORMATION:

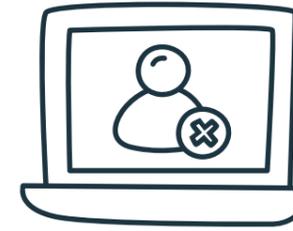
False, manipulated, or misleading information shared online, but it is not intended to cause harm, for example, satire taken seriously and unintentional mistakes. Whilst misinformation is generally not dangerous, it can be problematic in the context of health information, such as the current Covid-19 pandemic.

VS.

DISINFORMATION:

False, manipulated, or misleading information shared online in order to cause harm. This is purposefully created to negatively influence people's emotions about or understanding of an event. Disinformation can be very damaging.

WHAT CAN I DO?



Check sources

Does the story say where the information comes from? If there is no source or citation, it might not be real.



Google the story

Are mainstream news sites reporting on the story? Or has it been debunked by official sources?



Reverse-image search

You can try to find out if the image has been used before. You could use Google image search or reverse-image-search sites like TinEye.com. This may help you to debunk questionable online content.



Fact-checking websites

Organisations dedicated to fact checking information can be helpful, so check to see if the story has been debunked on sites like this. An example of a UK organisation is Full Fact (<https://fullfact.org>).



Think before sharing

Does the story sound real? Could it cause harm if you share it? Are your own beliefs influencing your judgement? How does the story make you feel? Often, mis- and disinformation is designed to make people angry or upset so that they share it.

HOW TO REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH



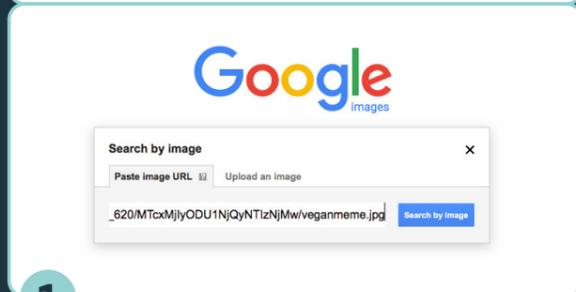
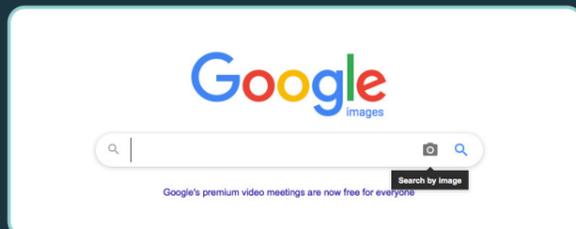
Even with the Corona Virus panic buying, no one wants to eat Vegan food.



Apparently, this photograph shows that during the Covid-19 pandemic, even when people were panic buying, they didn't want to buy vegan food.

But was this photograph taken during the Covid-19 pandemic? We can use reverse image search to check.

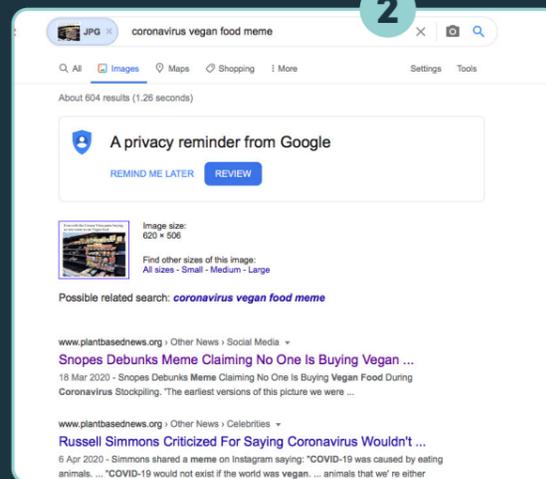
USING GOOGLE REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH



1

Go to images.google.com and select 'search by image'. Like with TinEye, the image can be uploaded, dragged, or search for using the image URL. In this example, the image URL has been used.

Google shows us all the information it can find about the image. It suggests a related search of 'coronavirus vegan food meme' and shows us some articles about the images. This tells us that the image has been debunked and has **nothing to do with Covid-19**. It looks like this image is being used as a meme to make a joke about veganism.

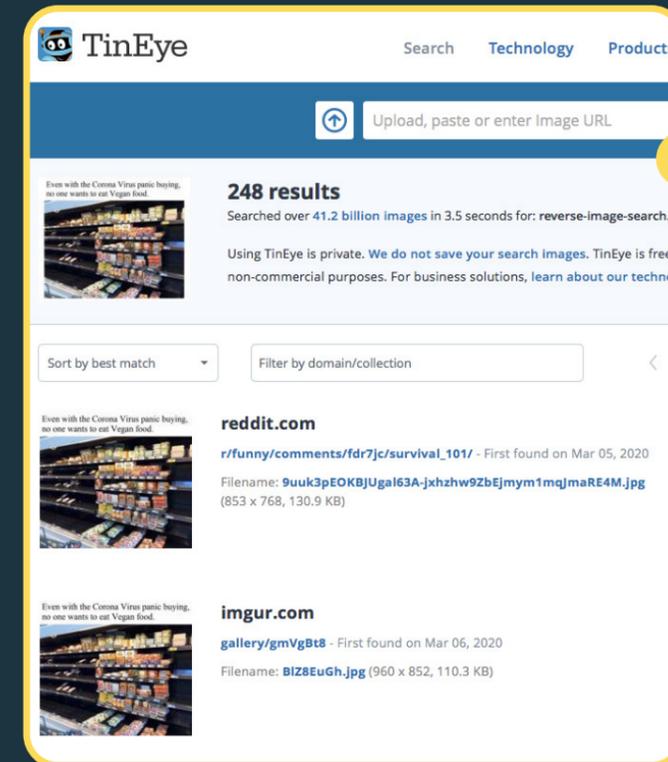
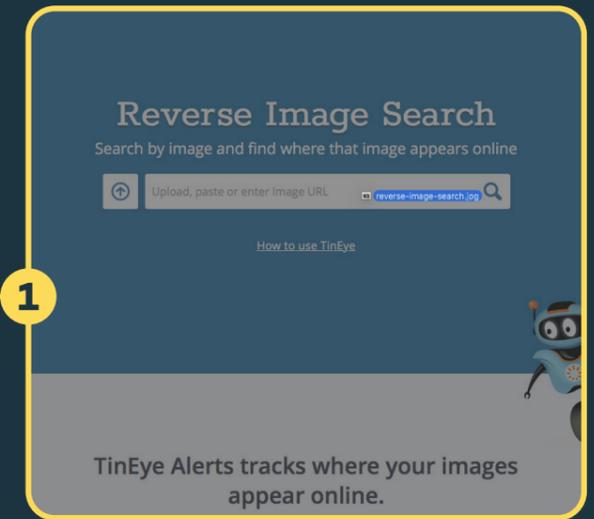


2

USING TINEYE

Go to tineye.com. You can upload, drag, or enter the image's URL into the search bar. In this example, the image has been dragged onto the page.

1



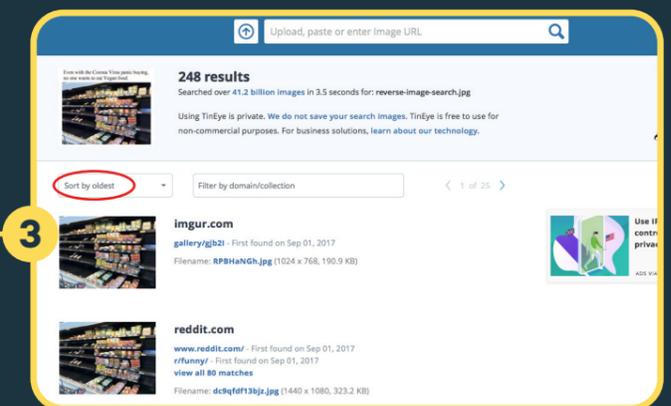
2

Tineye found 249 visually similar images on the internet.



If we sort by oldest, we can see that the image was first uploaded on 1st September 2017 to imgur.com and reddit.com. So, we can see that the photograph isn't related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3



EXAMPLES OF COVID-19 DISINFORMATION

There is plenty of Covid-19 disinformation around; from conspiracies that the virus was man-made, to false claims that 5G networks spread the virus. We have compiled a list of examples we think are most relevant to teachers. They give an idea of the biggest topics right now, but the prominence of themes will likely change. It is clear that Covid-19 disinformation has been designed to invoke fear and anger and encourages people to mistrust official sources.

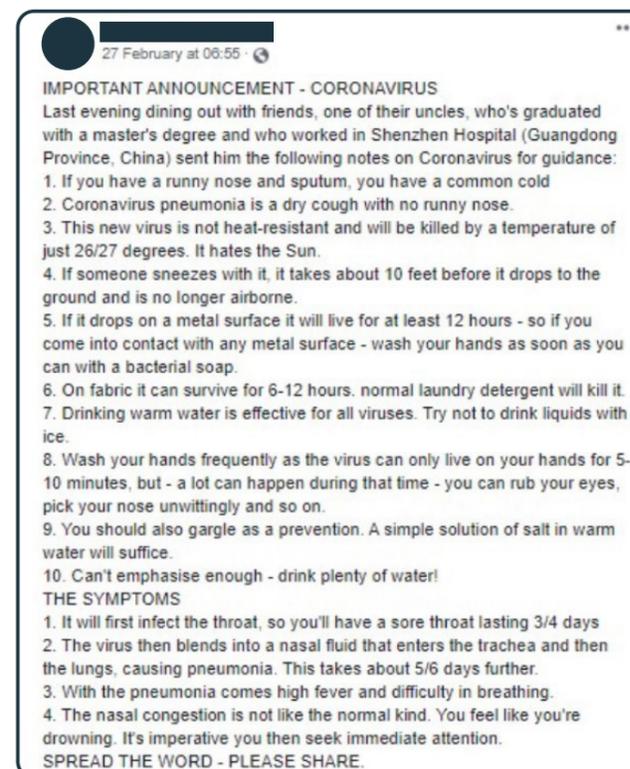


1. Schools

Before schools were closed, several schools across the UK were targeted with disinformation claiming there had been a Covid-19 outbreak at the school. The disinformation was disguised to look like news and was shared by parents on social media. This caused a panic amongst parents, worried that the schools were not being transparent and were putting pupil health at jeopardy. With schools possibly reopening in the near future this type of disinformation may begin to spread again. It is important to recognise that disinformation may not just target people nationally but can be used to cause panic in specific communities and target and name individual schools.

2. Lockdown easing

With further lockdown easing, certain shops and facilities will slowly begin to reopen. An image shared on Facebook, made to look like an information poster from McDonalds, claimed that the company was opening all its restaurants at the end of April. In reality, McDonalds doesn't have any confirmed plans about opening their restaurants. When the lockdown lifts further, it's possible that false information about restaurants, shops, and services reopening may begin to circulate more online.



3. Symptoms

Disinformation about symptoms has been spreading since the outbreak started. Covid-19 is a new virus, and experts are still learning about the full range of potential symptoms. Most recently, it was reported that children may experience rare Covid-19 symptoms related to inflammatory syndromes. This uncertainty about symptoms opens the door for people to spread misinformation about how the virus may affect children, which may heighten fear and anxiety amongst parents. If they encounter such disinformation, parents and teachers should check the advice from health organisations, like the NHS, and use this verified information to check the authenticity of symptom information encountered on social media.

4. At-home remedies

In the absence of a medically-verified cure, many unproven remedies and supposed cures have spread online. Some seem harmless, like gargling water and inhaling hot air. However, these can give people a false sense of security and erode trust in health organisations. There are also more dangerous claims, like spraying yourself with chlorine and drinking bleach, which would cause great harm. With no cure for the virus, it is unsurprising that some people may try and treat themselves. However, by sharing these false remedies online and claiming they work, it risks hurting others and can discourage people from adhering to government advice.



Now this was 2001 tell me why 19 years later they say there is no vaccine share before they take it down again



5. Vaccines

An image has been circulating on Facebook of a vaccine labelled "coronavirus vaccine". However, the vaccine is for dogs to protect them from canine coronavirus. Without knowing this, it's possible to think that the shown vaccine is a treatment for the virus causing the current pandemic. The pandemic has been called 'coronavirus' and 'Covid-19'. Both are correct, but 'coronavirus' is a collective name for certain types of viruses, while 'Covid-19' refers to the disease caused by a specific strain of coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, the one causing this pandemic. It's likely this disinformation was created to make people fearful and angry, encouraging them to mistrust healthcare organisations.



6. People intentionally spreading Covid-19

A video was circulated on Facebook of what appeared to be an East Asian man in an elevator, wiping his face and then wiping the elevator railing. The caption of the video reads: "Again!!!! Spreading the virus in Wales!! Utter scum!!!". Several of the video comments are racist, with many wishing the man to be harmed. In fact, the video is real, but comes from Thailand. The person who shared it has made up a false context, possibly to encourage racism. With authority figures like President Trump referring to Covid-19 as 'the Chinese virus', some are blaming Chinese people and those who look Chinese or Asian for the pandemic. Disinformation like this encourages such racist tendency.

7. People breaking lockdown

A video spread on Twitter showing Muslim men praying in the street. The person sharing the video claimed that because mosques are closed, the men intentionally broke lockdown to pray. This claim is false - the video was recorded before the lockdown. This false claim was seemingly made to spread anger towards Muslims by suggesting Muslims were endangering others. This shows that some may use the current pandemic to push certain prejudices.

Muslims prays on the road, in wembley central in London cause the mosque is closed by the chairman of masjid during corona virus.

Look at their arrogance! And some of western feminist, atheist & Islamists always labelling us as an islamphobia cause we hate the behavior!



8. People not observing social distancing

It is also important to remain sceptical of photographs apparently showing people grouping together in public and not keeping the recommended 2 metres distance. Photographers can use certain photographic techniques to make it look like people are closer together than they actually are. These images are not fake but are the result of certain choices made by the photographer that creates a different picture of the scene.

During times of crisis, having access to accurate information is key. This is especially true during a health crisis like the coronavirus pandemic. It is crucial to stop, think and carefully consider sharing information that may not be trustworthy, especially if the information is connected to one of the eight themes discussed in the examples.

Disinformation, created to cause harm, is especially dangerous. There are steps you can take to slow down the spread of Covid-19 disinformation. You can check sources, Google the story, do a reverse-image search, look up content on a fact-checking website and most importantly: think before you share!

Further reading

First Draft - 5 quick ways we can all double-check coronavirus information online:
<https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/5-tips-ways-we-can-all-covid19-check-coronavirus-information-online-fake-disinformation-misinformation/>

Full Fact's dedicated Covid-19 disinformation page:
<https://fullfact.org/health/coronavirus/>

Internet Matters' Covid-19 disinformation resources for children and young people:
<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/fake-news-misinformation-and-coronavirus-parent-guide/>

The WHO's Covid-19 mythbusting page:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

UK government SHARE checklist:
<https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/>

Sources for the disinformation examples

1. From <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/people-creating-fake-news-stories-17864770>

2. From <https://fullfact.org/online/mcdonalds-not-reopened-coronavirus/>

3. From <https://fullfact.org/online/viral-posts-sharing-symptoms-and-treatments-covid-19-contain-false-information/>

and <https://fullfact.org/online/letter-coronavirus-children/>

4. From <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

5. From <https://fullfact.org/online/dog-vaccine-coronavirus/>

6. From <https://fullfact.org/online/coronavirus-lift/>

7. From <https://tellmamauk.org/no-the-muslims-praying-in-this-video-arent-ignoring-the-coronavirus-lockdown-its-far-right-fake-news/>

and <https://fullfact.org/online/photos-social-distancing/>

8. From <https://twitter.com/baekdal/status/1254460167812415489>

Acknowledgements

The 'Stop. Think. Share?: A Teacher's Guide to Mis- and Disinformation During the Covid-19 Pandemic' guide and resources have been developed in collaboration with the Visual Social Media Lab (Professor Farida Vis, Hannah Guy, Dr Simon Faulkner and Dr Karen Pashby), based at The Manchester School of Art and Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University.

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