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Homo medialiteratus and the media literacy proxy war: mapping the U.S. response to digital dismisinfo

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Homo Medialiteratus and the Media Literacy Proxy War: Mapping the U.S. Response to Digital Dismisinfo

Abstract

This article presents findings from a visual network analysis study mapping the collective response to digital disinformation and misinformation, or *digital dismisinfo*, in the United States. Inspired by the digital dismisinfo-driven 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the study has identified key public and private actors actively responding to digital dismisinfo, examined the nature of their responses, and traced how their responses interact with those of other actors. The study's findings reveal how media literacy efforts have become embroiled in a proxy war between platforms and politicians over the causes and consequences of digital dismisinfo. The authors argue that through such dynamics emerges the figure of *homo medialiteratus*, the media consuming individual who must bootstrap their way to truth in the face of an unrelenting tide of digital dismisinfo.

Introduction

This study was inspired by a tweet: 'Each person knocking down those doors once sat in a classroom,' a high-school teacher observed as she watched the Capitol insurrection of January 6th, 2021, unfold. What might at first glance appear to be a rather quotidian remark—of course those people likely made their way through America's schools—ignited a hot debate in the replies.

'Don't you dare use this to vilify teachers! WE ARE NOT THE CAUSE OF THIS. This is Trump,' decried one user.

'Teacher failure,' another responded.

'I can't stop thinking about this,' replied another.

Across the many replies emerged a challenging conversation about problems and solutions, blame and excuses, crimes and punishments. Are teachers to blame? Are they the solution? What about politicians? What about laws? And platforms? Should they be regulated? The conversation offered a distillation of current debates around global society's ongoing epistemological crisis, and it raised important questions: How exactly are societies responding to the problem of digital propaganda, fake news, disinformation, and misinformation? Who are the key actors? How are they defining the problem? What solutions do they propose? How are specific actors and their responses (dis)connected to other actors and their responses? And where do schools and classrooms fit within these responses?

Addressing such questions, we suggest, is vital given the proliferation and influence of false information within digital media ecologies. Alongside climate change, democracy, and public health, digital disinformation and misinformation—or *digital dismisinfo*, as we refer to it here—stands among the most pressing of global challenges. Indeed, it exacerbates such challenges, as digital dismisinfo about climate change (Lewandowsky 2021) democracy (Cantarella, Fraccaroli and Volpe 2020), and public health (Apuke and Omar 2021) circulates virally through social media networks, encouraging beliefs and behaviors that threaten all manner of well-being. In response to the mid-decade 'post-truth' turn (Peters 2017)—and more recently to the digital dismisinfo driven violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building and ongoing COVID-19 immiseration—educators have called for and launched a host of frameworks and initiatives aimed at combating the spread of digital dismisinfo. As Barzilai and Chinn (2020) have explained, such efforts within schools have primarily been concerned with (a) the inability

of learners to evaluate information effectively, (b) cognitive vulnerabilities inherent to people when they encounter dismisinfo, (c) general indifference towards the value of accurate information, and (d) complex epistemological conflicts related to community and identity.

Left unanswered in current research on digital dismisinfo, however, are important questions concerning what public and private actors are responding to digital dismisinfo, what forms their responses take, and how their responses interact with that of other actors. After all, to accept the premise that digital dismisinfo poses a significant threat to human flourishing—and emerging research in fields like critical disinformation studies (e.g., Kuo and Marwick 2021), public health (e.g., Al Khaja et al. 2018), and political science (e.g., Freelon and Wells 2020) suggests it is indeed such a threat—demands a response that aims to support human flourishing across the many domains of contemporary life (e.g., education, democracy, public health, climate change, etc.). Furthermore, given that the propagation of dismisinfo often relies on loosely affiliated networks of bad actors (Smith et al. 2020; Center for Countering Digital Hate 2021), it is worth understanding the extent to which networks of other actors are attempting to counter the spread of dismisinfo by bad actors. The purpose of this study, then, was to begin mapping the response to digital dismisinfo in the United States by tracing the (dis)connections across actors working to combat its spread and influence.

While we recognize that digital dismisinfo is a global problem, we have nevertheless limited this particular study to the United States, and we have done so for a number of reasons. First, we are U.S. citizens and therefore understand the role of dismisinfo in American life better than we do its role in the United Kingdom, Russia, the Philippines, et cetera. Second, we are reluctant to make broad claims about a global response to dismisinfo given the many sociopolitical and linguistic contingencies that influence the spread and response to dismisinfo in specific localities. Third, many of the social media platforms implicated in the diffusion of dismisinfo are based in the U.S., which means we write from a *locus terribilis* in the global struggle against dismisinfo. Finally, we believe that focusing on one country, our home country, has allowed us to trace the response to digital dismisinfo in greater detail than if we had attempted a global perspective. That said, we understand that the global scale and reach of digital platform architectures calls into question what national boundaries even mean and do in the world (Bratton 2015), yet we hope the study we present here might join that of international allies as they, too, work to understand the response to digital dismisinfo in their countries around the world.

We begin by situating our study in conversation with educational scholarship on media literacy, since it constitutes a primary discursive tradition through which the researchers and practitioners have responded to the proliferation of digital dismisinfo. Next, we describe our methodological approach to this visual network analysis, explaining our processes for identifying actors and tracing their efforts to counter digital dismisinfo. We then detail an emergent network of public and private actors responding to digital dismisinfo in the U.S., after which we discuss the implications of this network for research and practice on digital dismisinfo in education.

Review of Literature

Significant scholarship, particularly in the field of education, has focused on the need to provide society with the literacy skills to be more critical consumers of news media (Moshirnia, 2020). Studies have demonstrated that, in spite of being born into a digital world, youth ability to identify digital dismisinfo is lacking (Loos et al., 2018; Stanford History Education Group et al., 2016). Although scholarship around digital dismisinfo—most notably the work conducted by the

Stanford History Education Group (SHEG)—predates the rise of fake news associated with Trump's ascension to the White House, the current political moment has served as an accelerant for urgent calls for new and expansive notions of literacy beyond the primacy of print literacy (Bermingham, 2018; Potter, 2013a) in response to digital dismisinfo. Professional educational organizations were quick to recognize their ability to provide a response as the National Council of Teachers of English (2022) and National Council for the Social Studies (2022) both published position statements on media literacy, which identified the teaching of media as critical to protecting American democratic ideals.

One of the challenges related to curricular response is the simple task of understanding what skills are needed to help youth become more savvy consumers of media. Renee Hobbs (2018, 2019) points out the sheer complexity of pinning down what is meant by media literacy, as the definition and approaches of media literacy curricula have shifted significantly over the past 50 years. Furthermore, Hobbs (2019) points out that one of the greatest challenges media literacy faces is that historically is has not been viewed as a serious topic worthy of study. The result, one might presume, is that years of overlooking media literacy as necessary and appropriate in schools has led to a population of young and old netizens who actively participate in the relentless consumption and spreading of fake news online.

While significant scholarship has been dedicated to attempting to determine what schools can do to build a media literacy curriculum, there is little evidence of the efficacy of the curricular and policy benefits proposed in such literature (Bulger & Davison, 2018). One suggestion, for example, attempts to teach young people the same "lateral reading skills" used by expert fact checkers, recognizing that fact checkers often possess a unique set of skills for evaluating websites that other educated people (e.g., history professors and college students) wrongly believe they possess as smart media consumers (Wineburg & McGrew, 2019).

Bulger and Davison (2018) point out how scholars have recently attempted to shift the discourse away from media literacy as "inoculation" toward a practice that is less defensive and focuses more on empowerment (Hobbs, 2018) and digital production. Such practices, known as "prebunking" attempt to offer more sustainable approaches to weakening the impact of fake news through pedagogies of "creating new heuristics, or short-cuts, in the mind" (Frau-Meigs, 2022, p. 916). However, more than simply offering tips and tricks for interpreting information online, the stakes for finding pedagogical solutions feels high. According to Lewis and Jhally, "Media literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated Consumers" (1998, p. 109) making the argument that media education is an overtly political project.

Still others have been challenged the extent to which media literacy is a cognitive skill to be transmitted in classrooms. Instead, some have understood media literacy as a cultural practice—one that Potter (2013b) describes as a "curatorship"—which takes into account the ways in which the modes and genres of media create an autobiographical intertextual web that supports identity production. Subscription to such an approach point to the need for more expansive explorations beyond the mere cognitive skills. Given the partisanship associated with

digital dismisinfo, attention to political identity and discourse has been posited as necessary to understanding why certain messages gain traction in a muddled media network.

More specifically, some have argued that classrooms might consider the need to be more attentive to the media practices of the right to spread disinformation (Tebaldi & Nygreen, 2022). While offering young people tools for interpreting media might seem like an obvious first step, the media landscape is constantly shifting, presenting challenges in considering how curricular responses might be more sustainable as bad actors seek new ways of spreading digital dismisinfo. As alt-right ideologies migrate from the fringes toward the mainstream discourse, a study of culture and politics becomes more important as Americans begin to understand just how insidious some of the seemingly innocuous conspiracy theories have become. Reports have found that far-right groups have evolved to develop the digital savvy to create coordinated misinformation campaigns to manipulate, hack attention, and sow distrust in mainstream media outlets in order to coalesce around conspiracy theories and fear over losing "their" county (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Once considered trolls, bots, and low-level bloggers, right wing conspiracy theorists have shown mastery over various media platforms to conjure fear and confusion with those primed and susceptible to fake news.

The onslaught of digital dismisinfo not only has broad political effects, but its ubiquity has reverberated through other cultural institutions by forcing media outlets to become fact checkers and reducing media and literacy information to a focus on news literacy (Frau-Meigs, 2022). And yet, as media outlets attempt to offer a response to help clarify truth from fiction in the news, their efforts often have the opposite of their intended effect. For example, fact checking is often less effective because of the manner in which propagandists attack fact checkers as bias or operating within a larger partisan organization attempting to obscure the truth (Moshirnia, 2020). Thus, propagandists might use a flagged post as a convoluted badge of honor, convincing their audience that the dismisinfo they are sharing is uncovering a dark truth that mainstream media does not want the public to know. This seemingly paradoxical reaction to fact checking has forced media organizations to seek outside support from other well-positioned actors with resources, which has led to greater entanglement between large corporations, philanthropists, and media outlets as they have partnered to attack digital dismisinfo with whatever means at their disposal. Hobbs (2019) states,

> *Companies such as Time Warner, Google, and other large companies provide financial support to Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based media literacy organization that caters to the needs of parents and educators. Private philanthropies associated with journalism have supported the growth of news literacy by providing financial support to nonprofit organizations such as the News Literacy Project. (p. 13)*

The enmeshment of media with non-profits provides a seemingly united front with organizations that are on the frontlines of digital dismisinfo who may be well-positioned to address the issue because of their ability to raise both funds and awareness. However, it is unclear how effective such partnerships have been in publicizing the issues related to digital dismisinfo and offering actionable solutions.

The extant literature demonstrates just how complex and nuanced the issue of digital dismisinfo is, forcing us to wonder whether media literacy is too blunt a curricular tool to address the perpetual spreading of fake news online. In recognizing the limitations of media literacy, Nichols and Leblanc (2021) have argued for an ecological orientation towards digital dismisinfo, one that decenters the media consuming individual as well as the media literacy educator in favor of a more systemic account. The point, as Nichols and Leblanc have emphasized, is neither to negate media literacy nor undermine media literacy educators, but rather to clarify the conditions of possibility for such interventions when platforms and politicians strategically avoid meaningful action, in part through their funding and advocacy for media literacy efforts. This project attempts to use visual networking in order to think beyond media literacy and conceptualize media ecology in order to better understand the complex network of response-able actors charged with combatting digital dismisinfo.

Methodology

This article emerged from an ongoing research project working to detail the activities of and interactions among actors responding to digital dismisinfo in the United States. We initiated the project in the months after the 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and it has continued over the subsequent two years. Our work has been guided by approaches to visual network analysis (Decuypere 2020; Venturini, Jacomy and Jensen 2019), which provide a set of tools for tracing "the complex entanglements by means of which specific practices are constituted" (Decuypere 2020, 74) across sociotechnical assemblages. Rather than developing a representational account of a particular network, VNA instead assumes a relational ontology by which the systematic production of visual networks enables researchers "to *present* (rather than to represent) how a practice is relational composed by heterogeneous actors" (76). In other words, VNA allows one to spatialize specific relations of interest among actors, and these relations can be established in more or less abstract ways, depending on the particular phenomenon under investigation. Thus, VNA offers one way to examine the complexity inherent to a phenomenon by attending to the structural relations composing it. In this study, we understand the response to digital dismisinfo in the U.S. as a collective, dynamic practice, one relationally composed of various sub-practices (e.g., funding streams) enacted by different actors (e.g., platforms), which together have particular effects, and it is the effects of such structural relations that we have aimed to better understand.

We built the network using *Graph Commons*, a cloud-based tool that enables researchers to create, analyze, and publish visual network analysis projects like this one. The platform relies on algorithmic simulations of physics (e.g., gravity) to create nodal clusters based on nodes' connections to other nodes in the network. To spatialize the networked response to digital dismisinfo in the U.S, we used the ForceAtlas2 algorithm, which provides a simulation of a physical system wherein each node repels other nodes while edges (i.e., line connections) attract nodes until an equilibrial state is achieved (Jacomi et al. 2014). Through this process, the Graph Commons platform presents the density and centrality of specific nodal clusters within a network, while also revealing nodal disjunctures (i.e., empty spaces) across the network's overall topography. Each node in the network represents an actor, broadly construed, who has initiated a formal response (e.g., curriculum etc.) to digital dismisinfo in the U.S (see Figure 1).

Data collection began with an investigation into several media literacy nonprofits that we were familiar with based on our work as literacies scholars. We used a snowball sampling technique (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Patton 2015) to follow the leads offered by actors' web presences (e.g., websites, social media posts, published curricula, draft legislation, terms of service, etc.), which allowed us to identify actors and their connections to other actors. To decide whether to include a specific actor in the network, we confirmed that its web presence explicitly addressed *fake news*, *misinformation*, *disinformation*, and/or *propaganda* in relation to its work. Using inductive coding, we tagged each actor with a general descriptor—for example, we tagged Twitter with the code "platform"—and we then consolidated codes into six focal codes: *nonprofit*, *nonprofit initiative*, *governance*, *platform*, *platform initiative*, and *for profit*.

Nonprofits in our study include tax-exempt organizations engaged in philanthropic and/or educational work related to digital dismisinfo (e.g., National Association of Media Literacy Education, NAMLE), while nonprofit initiatives include offshoot projects like the National Media Literacy Alliance, a coalition of professional organizations (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English, NCTE) working to advance media literacy education. Additionally, we coded actors engaged in some form of legislative or policy response to dismisinfo as governance, which included actors like the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Combatting Foreign Influence" team, as well as specific pieces of federal and state legislation, such as the Health Misinformation Act of 2021 ( ). We coded as *platform* any digital infrastructure designed to support interactions among users (e.g., people, institutions, corporations, etc.) through the collection and processing of data (see Poell, Nieborg and Van Dijck 2019) that has engaged in some kind of proactive response to dismisinfo (e.g., TikTok). And platform initiatives included the various programs, processes, and features used by platforms to combat digital dismisinfo, like TikTok's #FactCheckYourFeed initiative, which was launched by the platform in 2021 in partnership with The Student View, a U.K.-based nonprofit. Finally, for profit actors included organizations that have in some way monetized their response to dismisinfo, such as Cyber Civics, a subscription-based online curriculum for digital literacy, information literacy, and media literacy.

We also coded for the nature of the connections between actors—*funded* (n = 163), *affiliated* (n = 95), *partnered* (n = 70), and *created* (n = 18)—trying wherever possible to user each actor's own language for the connection. (This often proved somewhat complicated since different actors sometimes use the same words to describe the connection to other actors.) For each actor meeting the inclusion criteria, we entered the following information into our working database: from type (e.g., platform), from name (e.g., Instagram), edge type (e.g., affiliated), to type (e.g., nonprofit), and to name (e.g., International Fact-Checking Network). When imported into Graph Commons, the database logic is converted into a spatialized visualization of the connections where Instagram is linked to the International Fact-Checking Network, which is connect to the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, which is connected to the Stanford History Education Group, and so on. Ultimately, our approach to the VNA of the U.S.-based response to digital dismisinfo helped us stay attuned to the particulars of each actor's response to digital dismisinfo without losing sight of larger, nationwide trends, which became apparent across the network's overall topography.

Networked Clustering in the U.S. Response to Digital Dismisinfo

In the subsequent sections, we examine five distinct clusters in the networked response to digital dismisinfo in the U.S: the NAMLE cluster, the New American cluster, the Disinformation Index cluster, and the Media Literacy Now Cluster, which together account for 84% of the networked. (The remaining 16% is composed of a set of much smaller clusters.) In VNA, visual clustering accomplishes two things: (a) it offers a spatial indication of relational density among actors and (b) it reveals *structural holes* (Burt, 1995), which are the relatively empty spaces surrounding clusters (Venturini, Jacomy Jensen 2021). Visual clustering offers a useful heuristic for examining the relational composition of a network because it reflects the network's structural clustering (Venturini et al. 2021). Visualizing these clusters can insights into how they function within a broader networked response to dismisinfo, as well as how such clusters demarcate particular kinds of boundaries within the network, the consequences of which warrant careful attention from educational scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists.

The NAMLE Cluster

[Background]
Of those included in the network, one media literacy NFP dominates the network: the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). Founded in 1997, NAMLE is one of the largest media literacy specific not-for-profits in the United States with a membership of over 6,500 members. NAMLE's approach to media literacy emphasizes "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication." As an organization dedicated specifically to the cause of creating a more media literate world, NAMLE serves many purposes, including developing and promoting media literacy curricula, organizing events and advertisements that bring awareness to the dangers of digital dismisinfo, and funding other media literacy NFP's.

[Key Connections (look at different types)]
The influence and broad reach of NAMLE is fostered in part by the funding and promotion they receive from the U.S. Department of State, Meta, and for-profit media companies (e.g. Media Savvy Citizens and The Media Spot), and not-for-profit media outlets (Public Broadcasting Service/National Public Radio and their affiliate stations). However, it is NAMLE's partnerships with other media literacy not-for-profits which accounts for its prominence on the graph. By partnering and fundraising with organizations with similar missions (e.g. New Literacy Project and Common Sense Media) as well as non-for-profits with broader philanthropic interests like New America (discussed in greater detail below), NAMLE is established as a central hub on the graph, suggesting its significant influence within the sphere of media literacy. Moreover, their creation of the National Media Literacy Alliance–a collection national professional education organizations (e.g. National Council of Teachers of Enlgish, National Councnil of Teachers of Social Studies, and National Writing Project)--offers additional insight into the level of influence NAMLE possesses within the broader educational not-for-profit realm.

[General observations/signficance of this cluster]

NAMLE's interdisciplinary coordination of professional teacher organizations underscores its influence, signaling its ability to shape the media literacy landscape in the U.S. Nonprofits come in various shapes and sizes—including educational nonprofits (e.g., NAMLE), think-thanks (e.g., New America), and philanthropies (e.g., Gates Foundation)—and they make up approximately 78% of the networked response to digital dismisinfo in the U.S.

The New America Cluster

Founded in 1999, New America is a nonprofit think-tank based in Washington D.C. whose work focuses on an array of public policy matters, such as climate change, democracy, national security, and dismisinfo. "We are dedicated," the organization declares, "to renewing the promise of America by continuing to realize our nation's highest ideals, honestly confronting the challenges caused by rapid technological and social change, and seizing the opportunities those changes create" (Our Story n.d. para 1). In recent years, New America has increasingly focused on the role digital dismisinfo plays in American society, publishing original research on platform responses to dismisinfo (Singh and Bagchi 2020), artificial intelligence and dismisinfo (Coalition to Fight Digital Deception 2021), and the role of business models in the spread of dismisinfo (Maréchal, MacKinnon and Dheere 2020). In 2020, New America's total revenue was $48,308,665 (ProPublica), which, as our graph shows, reflects the financial contributions of many different actors, including platform actors (e.g., Facebook), nonprofit actors (e.g., Ford Foundation), governance actors (e.g., U.S. Department of State), and for-profit actors (e.g., Northrop Gruman). (Note: our graph does not include all of New America's funders, but only those whose web presences explicitly identified addressing digital dismisinfo as part of their work.)

New America's work on digital dismisinfo has primarily attended to political-economic questions, although they also contribute financial support to NAMLE, creating a link between the New America cluster and the NAMLE cluster. Importantly, that the NAMLE and New America nodes on our graph are of similar sizes is a function of their connections to other actors, not to their funding or their impact. Indeed, NAMLE's 2020 revenue of $1,120,215 (ProPublica), though considerable, is just a fraction of New America's.

Broadly, the New America cluster highlights the financial power circulating between and among nonprofit actors in the networked response to digital dismisinfo in the U.S, where philanthropic funding constitutes a critical sub-practice. The density of the New America cluster indicates the sheer amount of energy being directed towards its work by actors whose resources grant the organization such power. Indeed, the density and distinctiveness of the New America cluster shows how the response to digital dismisinfo is heavily dependent upon non-governmental organizations motivated by particular visions of and for the American information ecology. Additionally, *boundaries actors* (Decuypere 2020), or those intermediary actors that make clusters porous—including the U.S. Department of State (governance); the Tides Foundation (nonprofit) and Facebook (platform)—operate as funding relays between political, corporate, and philanthropic spheres of influence.

The Global Disinformation Index Cluster

Founded in 2018 as a nonprofit entity by Clare Melford and Daniel Rogers, Ph.D., the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is an online tool that evaluates news outlets based on how likely they are to publish digital dismisinfo. The service emphasizes neutrality, independence, and transparency in its deployment of both AI technologies and human journalistic practices to rate news sources from around the world. Central to GDI's work is the "Dynamic Exclusion List," which contains "the worst offending apps across multiple countries and languages and is continually updated to capture new disinformation sources and narratives" (What We Do n.d., para. 4). As of October 2022, GDI rated the New York Post, Reason Magazine, RealClearPolitics, The Daily Wire, and TheBlaze as its top five riskiest sites for encountering dismisinfo, while NPR, AP News, The New York Times, ProPublica, and Insider are rated as the top five least risky outlets . GDI arrived at these ratings through a methodology that quantifies the probability of an outlet publishing dismisinfo by examining deceptive narratives as they unfold across the web.

The GDI cluster encompasses a wide range of corporate and philanthropic actors, who rely on GDI's services to combat dismisinfo and/or provide the organization with financial support to continue its work. In its community guidelines, for example, the streaming platform Twitch.tv explains that it works with the Global Disinformation Index to evaluate dismisinfo related to civic issues (e.g., elections) (Community Guidelines n.d.). The GDI also partners with Disinfo Cloud, which was created by Park Advisors, a private a software development company, to help governments combat dismisinfo through a set of web tools, including tools for scanning social media platforms, advertising technologies, the dark web, and so on. The GDI receives funding from various philanthropic institutions, including Craig Newmark Philanthropies, created by Craig Newmark of Craigslist fame, who funds a number of dismisinfo related projects, including the GDI, the Algorithmic Transparency Institute, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, The Trust Project, and the Center for Humane Technology, all of which are engaged in work responding to digital dismisinfo.

The Facebook/Meta Cluster

In 2021, Mark Zuckerberg announced the launch of Meta, a multinational technology conglomerate under which various products (e.g., Oculus) and platforms (e.g., Facebook) are now consolidated. While many major platforms are reflected in our VNA of the U.S. response to digital dismisinfo, the Meta/Facebook cluster emerged as key region where the activities of various actors interface with one another. (In the graph, we have treated Facebook and Meta as different entities, since that is what they are as of 2021; however, we have described the broader region as "The Facebook/Meta Cluster" because our research took place during a transitional period when some actors now use "Meta" when referring to the company, whereas others continue using "Facebook," without any details clarifying whether the funding is coming directly from Facebook, or if they have simply not updated their documentation to reflect the company's rebranding.) Since 2016, the Facebook platform has been at the center of controversy around the proliferation of digital dismisinfo (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017), as ideologically and economically motivated actors around the world have used the platform to spread dismisinfo about politics (Allcott, Gentzkow and Yu 2019), climate science (Lutzke et al. 2019),

vaccinations (e.g., Yang et al. 2021), and so on. According to its own documentation, Meta has responded to dismisinfo across its apps—primarily Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—by removing fake accounts, using human and artificially intelligent systems to identify and delete deceptive behavior, partnering with fact-checking organizations, and deprioritizing dismisinfo through ranking algorithms (Rosen 2021).

Visualizing the Facebook/Meta cluster calls attention to various dimensions of the company's response to digital dismisinfo as well as how its response interacts with that of other organizations. Indeed, the Facebook/Meta cluster is, at least in part, a region of regulatory, political, and sociotechnical conflict, as legislative actors—such as the Social Media NUDGE Act, the Protecting Americans from Dangerous Algorithms Act, and Section 230 of the DMCA—indicate Meta's relations to regulatory influences, while its connections the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, NAMLE, the News Literacy Project, and Mapping Impactful Media Literacy demonstrate its efforts to engage actors working to combat digital dismisinfo through educational initiatives. The centrality of the Facebook/Meta cluster illustrates how the company's interactions, both the regulatory activities moving toward as well as the educational activities moving away from it, position it as a primary site of network relations in the U.S.-based response to dismisinfo.

The Media Literacy Now Cluster

Launched in 2013 by Erin McNeill, Media Literacy Now describes itself as "leading the grassroots movement to create a public education system that ensures all students learn the 21st literacy skills they need for health, well-being, economic participation, and citizenship." In addition to provide resources and exemplars of dismisinfo-related media literacy education, MLN also provides an updated ledger of current national- and state-level media literacy education. As a non-for-profit, MLN is funded through donations from individuals and foundations.

[Key Connections (look at different types)]
Similar to NAMLE, Media Literacy Now funds and is funded by for-profit media organizations (e.g. News-O-Matic and Ad Fontes Media) as well as fellow media litearcy not-for-profits, most notably News Literacy Project, the International Council for Media Literacy, and Media Education Lab. However, what sets them apart from other media literacy NFPs is their focus on policy work that "includes lobbying to advance nonpartisan media literacy-related legislation" (Your Donataion Makes a Difference). As a result, this cluster is highlighted by Media Literacy Now's connection to multiple pieces of state legislation dedicated to advocating for greater inclusion of media literacy across grade-levels and content area curricula. The signature bill they promoted as the model for other media literacy policy comes from Washington state.
Washington: SB 5449 - 2017-18 "Concerning Digital Citizenship, Media Literacy, and Internet Safety in Schools" was signed into law in April 2017 and established a commission of teacher-librarians, principals, and technology specialists to better understand how schools were teaching media literacy and internet safety in schools. In addition, it required the state to curate a store of resources from sources and perspectives that Washington teachers could use for teaching digital citizenship, media literacy, and internet safety. Similar bills have been introduced throughout the

country with mixed reception from state senators and representatives. Colorado, Connecticut, and Rhode Island have successful passed similar bills similar to that of Washington's that establish committees and a clearinghouse of media literacy resources and Missouri, Hawaii, and South Carolina have introduced

[General observations/signficance of this cluster]

While access to a clearinghouse of curated resources might support teachers in their pedagogical aims at teaching media literacy, the policies do not call for research-based curricula that would provide pedagogical support for teachers unfamiliar with the unique set of skills young people need to become media literate. Furthermore, reports from the media literacy commissions established by the legislation have not been publicly available, making it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the policy that Media Literacy Now is stridently lobbying for.

One point of concern for us about MLN is its connection to Learnics, an edtech company that develops, markets, and sells a service that allows teachers to surveil students behavior on their connected devices. While I full account of Learnics is outside the scope of this brief description, we wanted to note here that we were a bit troubled by MLN's connection to Learnics. Not necessarily (or only) because we are skeptical of such technologies, but because Learnics is listed as the only "Tools for Educators" MLN provides on their resources page. Moreover, MLN suggests the platform supports media literacy, which is as far as we can tell is misleading at best.

Discussion

NEW LIT REVIEW REFERENCES

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Figure 1

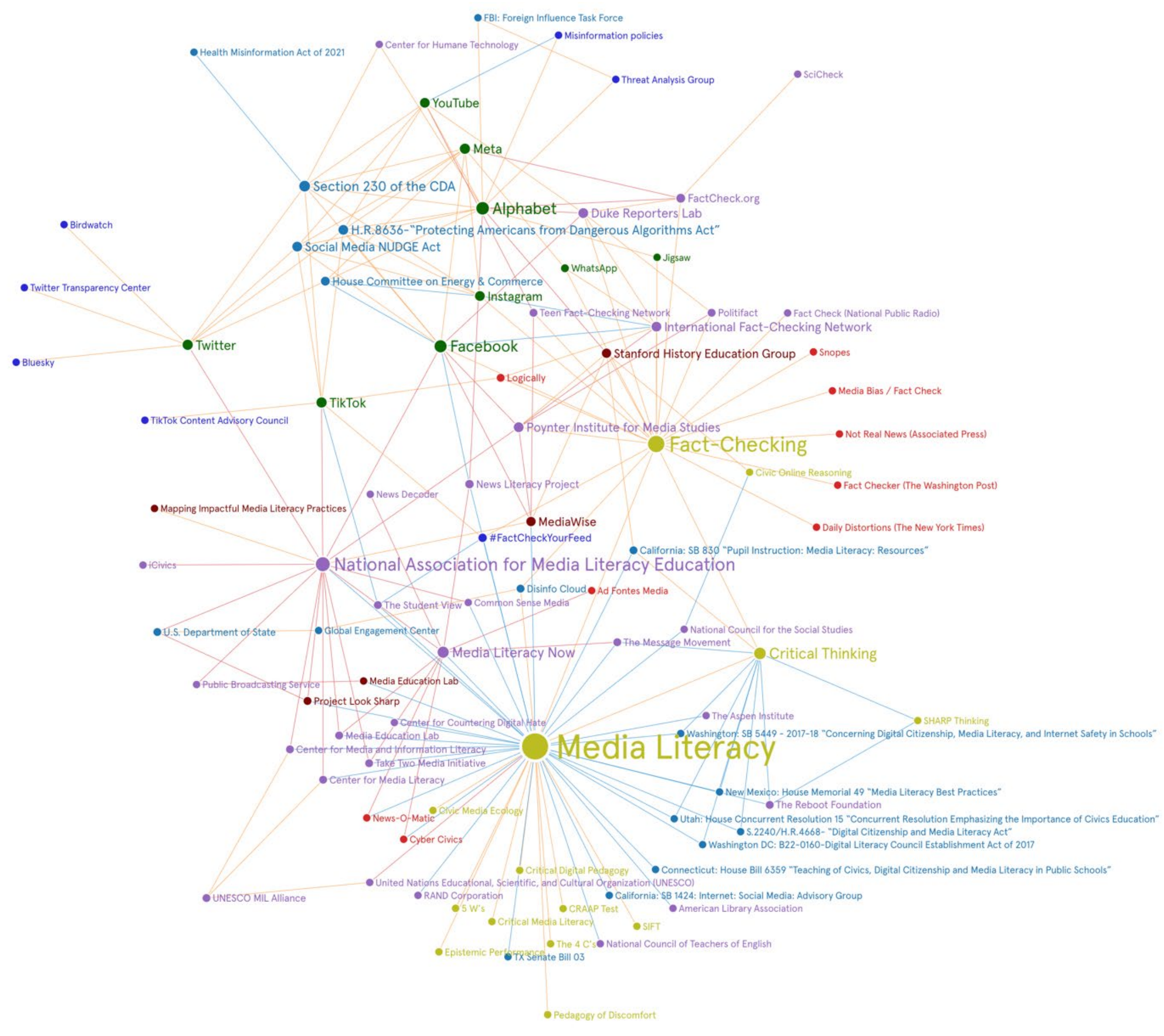

Figure 2

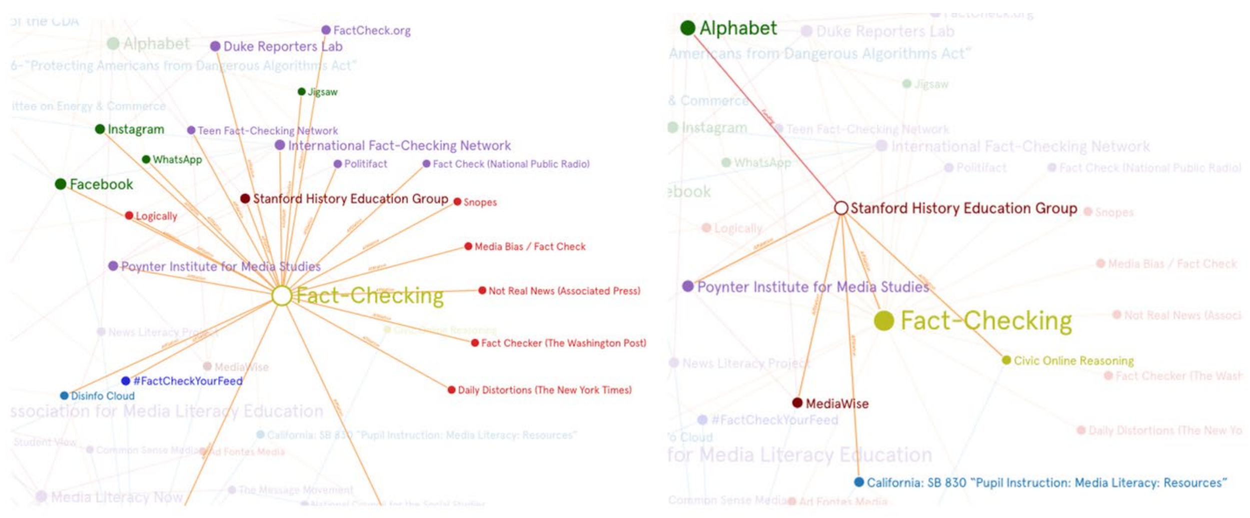

Figure 3

Green: Networked concentration of platforms
Blue: Networked concentration of legislation
Magenta: Networked concentration of media literacy efforts

Figure Captions

Figure 1. A network visualization of the response to digital dismisinfo in the United States. Categories of actors are indicated by color: nonprofit actors (purple), policy actors (blue), pedagogical actors (light green), platform actors (green), and for-profit actors (red). Categories of connections are also indicated by color: funding (red), advocacy (blue), and affiliation (orange).

Figure 2. The fact-checking cluster is highlighted on the left, and the Stanford History Education Group cluster is highlighted on the right.

Figure 3. A visualization demonstrating how platform responses (green) are largely separated from political responses (blue) by the central clustering of media literacy-oriented pedagogical responses (magenta).