

Abstract

We live in a world driven by fast technologies. The same technologies that make information more accessible have created a dilemma by which the same conduits have also enabled access to mass amounts of counter-factual information. It is the assertion of this thesis project that counter-factual information poses a growing risk to the security and stability in liberal democratic societies and warrants a proportional response. The body of work which follows will explore what I have characterized as an information crisis.

The information crisis, so presented, is a multi-faceted issue. It's constituent causes and outcomes concern both scholars of security studies and sociology. To address breadth of scope and immediacy of the crisis, the conceptual framework purposed in this project offers an interface between actor-network theory and security studies (ANT-security interface). Actor-network theory is a material-semiotic approach that preferences engagement with human and technological actants as an assemblage. Or, in other words, a network of relationships.

The first chapter will introduce the dimensions of the information crisis, providing relevant examples of how counter-factual information embodies a human, and societal security issue. It will delineate important concepts such as misinformation, and disinformation, and position them as the focal point of a research dilemma due to the scope and speed at which they have been enabled.

The second chapter will discuss the relevant reference objects within the information crisis and why they belong in the purview of both security studies and scientific and technological studies (STS). It will then introduce the conceptual framework of an ANT-security interface.

The third chapter will provide a practical example of the information crisis as an assemblage through the mainstreaming of far right, or alt-right revisionism, as facilitated by technologies in cyberspace. It will accomplish this through demonstrating the relationships between ideology, rhetoric, and the technologies which enable manipulation of information availability, amplification of misinformation, and the manufacture of disinformation.

By its conclusion, this thesis project demonstrates a conceptual framework capable of mitigating the scope and speed of the information crisis and provides a brief set of policy recommendations to be undertaken as both responsive countermeasures and as longer-term goals.