

Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic

Special Report

Dr. Barry Wellar, C.M.

Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa

President, Information Research Board

<http://wellar.ca/informationresearch/>

Ottawa, Canada

February 28, 2021

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Abstract. Previous IRB reports concluded that 'misinformation' is a perverse misnomer because it has nothing to do with information, and the term is best described as concocted nonsense. However, the term is popular, which is cause for concern. Numerous negative consequences arise from the 'misinformation' pandemic, including depreciation of the value of science-based information in political decisions, degradation in the quality of public discourse about political decisions, substantive deterioration of social media and broadcast media productions, and an overall decline in societal confidence about the truth of communications disseminated by governments, business, Internet platform organizations, the media, and especially communications containing statements by politicians and their agents at all levels of government. In the absence of an alternative term, use of the term 'misinformation' will continue and, similar to a pandemic, will increase at an exponential rate. The search for an alternative term includes content analysis of broadcast media productions, identification of 60 terms associated with 'misinformation'-related statements, and derivation of the term '**fauxinfo**' which is synonymous with the 60 terms, and is proposed as an antidote to the 'misinformation' pandemic which is rampaging at a rapid and destructive pace through governments, academia, social and broadcast media, and other institutional and organizational venues.

1. Background to the 'Fauxinfo' Project

The current primary research activity of IRB involving 'misinformation' is the pilot study, Investigating the Rulings on 'Misinformation' in Canada's Legislative Assemblies. ([REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#); [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#)). Two developments coincided to prompt the '**fauxinfo**' Special Report.

First, preliminary examination of responses from Speakers and their agents suggests that there is considerable interest in further critical discussion of the term 'misinformation'. As will be discussed in the next report in that series, there have been rulings about the admissibility of the term in legislative discourse, but many of the rulings seem to be heavily based on context than on the meaning of the term itself.

This report may assist Speakers and Speaker-related officials in their thinking about whether the admissibility of 'misinformation' should be judged solely on its intrinsic value to deliberations involving public policies, plans, and programs.

Second, professionals in the information field who are concerned about the widespread incidence of the term 'misinformation' share the view that an alternative term is needed. That is, in the absence of an alternative term, the use, abuse, misuse, etc., of 'misinformation' will continue and, similar to a pandemic will increase at an exponential rate, seemingly with no end in sight.

Since no other attempt at prescribing an antidote has been identified, there is reason to proceed with this report on initial thoughts about **'fauxinfo'** as an appropriate alternative term.

2. Statement of Problem

The argument has been made that the much-used term 'misinformation' is concocted nonsense ([The Inescapable Truth about Disinformation and Misinformation? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information](#)).

To date no substantive contradiction of that finding has been encountered, and in point of fact the concocted nonsense finding has been confirmed so many times in social and broadcast media items, as well as in webpage postings, that its widespread public presence is the reason for using the descriptor 'pandemic' in this report.

The problem in brief, is that this nonsensical term has significant negative implications and consequences when used in communications which have political, social, financial, legal, medical, educational, health, environmental, economic, quality of life, business, and other impacts on individuals, groups, institutions, and enterprises.

Public users of the term 'misinformation' who are of particular interest in the current IRB research program are persons of influence, including politicians, government officials, heads of corporations, executives of associations, members of broadcast media, social media personalities, and academics, with special emphasis on those designing and implementing algorithms which determine the level of public visibility achieved by terms disseminated via computer-communications platforms.

And the readers, viewers, etc., of the term 'misinformation' who are of particular interest include those who perceive that because 'information' is part of the term 'misinformation', there must be an information-based reason for using the term.

Further, they also perceive that the 'mis' on the front must to be there to signify that something is wrong, awry, amiss, etc., with the so-called 'information' presented in the statement.

Terms supportive of that line of thinking about 'mis' having a negative connotation include misadventure, misanthropy, misbegotten, misbehave, misconceive, misconduct, misconstrue, miscue, misdemeanor, misdeed, miserable, miserly, misery, misfire, mishap, misinterpret, mislead, misogyny, misrepresent, mistake, mistrust, and misunderstand.

There is not a positive item in that collection of terms prefixed by 'mis' which, given their omnipresence in the day-to-day lives of many people, are likely to influence the

assignment of a negative connotation to 'misinformation'. Power of suggestion, you might say.

Bearing in mind, then, that 'misinformation' is a widely used term that has absolutely nothing to do with information, nothing whatsoever, the question arises about a substitute term which replaces 'misinformation', and also represents whatever 'misinformation' stands for in the minds of users as well as readers, viewers, etc. (Endnote 1)

Before proposing a remedy, it is necessary to recall a fundamental premise about this research, namely, that information is information, and anything else used in a statement to describe, explain, predict, or forecast a situation, event, circumstance, phenomenon, process, etc., is not information. (Endnote 2)

However, and perhaps because the term 'not information' fails to serve the needs, interests, etc., of those in government, business, social and broadcast media, entertainment, and so on who make statements for public consumption, the term 'misinformation' – concocted nonsense though it may be – is used instead, even while abusing the true meaning and true value of information in the process.

Realistically, of course, we cannot unring that bell, what is done is done.

Nevertheless, those in the information field are duty-bound to explore the possibility that perhaps an antidote can be found to mitigate the 'misinformation' pandemic which has erupted over the past decade, and which gives every indication of spreading wider and deeper with significantly worsening consequences.

2. Research Design

The term 'misinformation' has nothing to do with information, but it presumably stands for something, whether the statement containing the term 'misinformation' is based on knowing by means of revelation, intuition, everyday experience, authority, or some other means that does not involve science. (Endnote 3)

Stage one research for this investigation into an alternative term for 'misinformation' includes examining one or more bodies of literature containing the term 'misinformation', and asking questions about its use. (Endnote 4)

Such questions include:

- Why is the term 'misinformation' used?
- What purpose is served by using the term 'misinformation'?
- Did use of the term 'misinformation' yield comments about its use?
- Are there apparent unwritten or unstated motivations behind its use?

- Which noun(s) best depict(s) the 'misinformation' message conveyed by the user?

Further, even though 'misinformation' is a nonsense term, responses to those questions could point us in the proper direction as to a potential substitute term or phrase, that is, an antidote.

Specifically, 'misinformation', whatever it might be, is a noun, and the associated verb form is 'misinform', an objective which can be achieved by a number of acts that do not involve science-based, methodologically-derived information in any way, shape, or form. (Endnote 5)

One of the opening exploratory research activities is to identify the verbs and associated nouns representing the different ways to misinform or be misinformed. This is done by deconstructing texts to ascertain the ways which are used to misinform.

In the interests of keeping things simple, Table 1 presents just the nouns because 'misinformation' is a noun. Further, for the most part the verb and noun connections are relatively self-evident, as in deceive-deception, distort-distortion, exaggerate-exaggeration, fabricate-fabrication, lie-lie, misrepresent-misrepresentation, misstate-misstatement, and, prevaricate-prevarication.

As for deciding what someone actually means when using the term 'misinformation', there are a variety of issues and challenges in play. A definitive noun (e.g., distortion, exaggeration, misrepresentation, swindle) may be included in a sentence, paragraph, column, interview, or other production which may clarify what is meant by 'misinformation'. (Endnote 6)

Or, as a further twist on what is meant, the user can leave it to the reader, viewer, or listener to make an inference if, for example, the user does not wish to say someone lied, or committed fraud, or wants to leave 'wriggle room' in case it might become necessary to change positions.

And then there are numerous instances when a headline employs the term 'misinformation' but it is not in the text, or the opposite occurs, that is, 'misinformation' is in the text but is not in the headline.

Table 1 contains a selection of the nouns found to be frequently associated with statements containing the term 'misinformation'. The list includes nouns which are the basis or reason for someone using, supporting, or refuting the term 'misinformation', as well as nouns which are included in responses to statements containing the term 'misinformation'. (Endnote 7)

As shown, the nouns in Table 1 are listed in alphabetical order. This is an opening round which might qualify as a pre-pilot study, so it does not seem necessary or useful at this stage to discuss frequencies and create a numeric order. (Endnote 8)

Table 1. Preliminary Inventory of Nouns Referred to As, Construed As, or Presented Under the Cover of 'Misinformation'

Babble	Exaggeration	Hoax	Perjury
Bafflegab	Fabrication	Hogwash	Perversion
Baloney	Fake	Invention	Phony
Blather	Fakery	Jargon	Prevarication
Bullshit	Falsehood	Lie	Propaganda
Claptrap	Falsification	Malarkey	Rot
Crapola	Falsity	Misconception	Rubbish
Deceit	Fib	Misnomer	Scam
Deception	Fiction	Misreport	Sham
Delusion	Fraud	Misrepresentation	Smoke and mirrors
Distortion	Fraudulent	Misstatement	Snow job
Doubletalk	Garbage	Mistake	Swindle
Drivel	Gaslighting	Noise	Trick
Duplicity	Gibberish	Nonsense	Untruth
Error	Gobbledygook	Perfidy	Whopper

A selection of the broadcast media, social media, professional list serves, and other sources used to compile the list of nouns is presented in Table 2. (Endnote 9)

For the purposes of an initial, exploratory activity, the focus is on sources which are open to digital keyword searches by subscribers and non-subscribers, as well as sources which are read by contacts on list serves and social media networks who keep an eye out for 'misinformation' statements (e.g., headlines, stories, and conference programs) and bring them to my attention. (Endnote 10)

However, the actual search for terms which are referred to as, construed as, or presented under the cover of 'misinformation' began more than a year ago during the pilot study, [The Inescapable Truth about Disinformation and Misinformation? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information.](#) As a result, many of the terms listed in Table 1 were mentioned in that report, and in subsequent communications which draw on the findings of the original report.

To get to this stage, somewhere between 900 and 1,000 statements were deconstructed in order to ascertain what the term 'misinformation' represented in the minds of users, and in the minds of those who commented on its use. The statements are from several dozen sources including those listed in Table 2, and the 60 terms in

Table 1 seem to capture the essence of what many users have in mind when employing the term 'misinformation'. (Endnote 11)

Table 2. Selection of Sources Searched for the Term 'Misinformation'

bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-56152960

cbc.ca/news

ctvnews.ca

globalnews.ca/news

news.google.com/topstories

<https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/>

headlines@kitchenertoday.com

nationalpost.com/category/news/

ottawacitizen@directmail.newspaperdirect.com

headlines@ottawamatters.com

politico.com/news

<https://theconversation.com/us/newsletters/science-editors-picks-71/?ut>

<https://theconversation.com/ca/topics/misinformation>

timminstoday.com

info@urisa.org

ca.news.yahoo.com/stock-market-news-live-updates

Note: Assistance in identifying sources and locating materials, as well as suggesting interpretations of what people mean when they use the term 'misinformation, was provided by a number of contacts and fellow researchers. That assistance is gratefully acknowledged. (Endnote 2)

The next step in the research process distills the 60 terms in Table 1 to one term which captures the essence of many or most terms, and could serve as a substitute for 'misinformation'. This distillation process includes applying content analysis to statements, comparing and contrasting synonyms and antonyms, circulating short lists of derivatives that might displace 'misinformation', and asking a mini-panel of individuals who are active in public communications to 'vote' on the short-listed terms. (Endnote 12)

The derived term to replace and dispatch 'misinformation' is the term **'fauxinfo'**.

In the following section we discuss whether **'fauxinfo'** might be the antidote to combat the 'misinformation' pandemic.

3. Could 'Fauxinfo' Be a 'Misinformation' Antidote?

Based on the momentum already accumulated, bringing the 'misinformation' pandemic to a halt is not going to happen any time soon. Moreover, exposing the term as concocted nonsense is not sufficient by itself to obtain the traction necessary to put much of a dent in usage that is as popular as it is devoid of logic.

Rather, what is needed, and hence this report which is responding to requests, is an alternative term which serves as a synonym for 'misinformation' and also serves as an umbrella for terms such as those in Table 1.

The point is that within the past decade or so, many members of society have come to favour shallow rather than deep thinking, basing arguments on factoids rather than on examining relationships, word bites rather than complex sentences, talk show host opinions rather than scientific documentaries, phrases which are 'clear as mud but cover the ground' rather than texts which require substantive reasoning skills, and engaging in FaceBook postings rather than examining Hansard records containing the deliberations of legislative assemblies which directly affect all segments and all members of society.

The bottom line for me, then, is that 'misinformation' must be dispatched, and in its stead I propose **'fauxinfo'** or, as the case may be, I support the case for 'fauxinfo' if it has already been coined to replace misinformation'.

I note that I did not locate **'fauxinfo'** via a Google search, which covers millions of webpages, and that I also searched other social media and broadcast media sites without success. Hence, to the best of my knowledge **'fauxinfo'** breaks new ground.

As for deconstructing the term **'fauxinfo'**, these initial thoughts come to mind.

First, beginning with 'info', it is a loose short-form or short-hand reference to all kinds of things, including gossip, news, military intelligence, tips on horse races, stories about politicians' ill-advised trips during the COVID-19 pandemic, or the extent of an injury to an athlete's big toe, and is widely used in association with all the nouns in Table 1.

Further, although it totally lacks the formality of 'information' (which is a bilingual term, that is, it is same in English and French), the term 'info' has cachet among those in government, academe, business, social and broadcast media, the entertainment industry, and other venues, many of whom would rather have it known that they deal in

'info' rather than in babble, baffle gab, baloney, bullshit, claptrap, deceit, deception, distortion, doubletalk, drivel, etc., etc., as noted in Table 1.

Second, the French terms 'faux' (masc.) and fausse (fem.) are directly applicable to all the terms in Table 1, and appear to cover every aspect of any meaning attached to 'mis' as in 'misinformation', and 'més' as in 'mésinformation'.

English translations of 'faux' include blunder, counterfeit, dummy, erroneous, false, forgery, imaginary, imitation, inaccurate, invalid, irrelevant, misstep, miss the mark, mistaken, not genuine, not real, shifty, sly, spurious, treacherous, unreal, untrue, and wrong, all of which have appeared in productions that include statements containing the term 'misinformation'.

Further, 'faux' has already been quasi-anglicized by associating it with fur as in 'faux fur', which translates as 'not real fur', for example, and many people are aware of 'faux pas' to mean blunder, so there should be comfort for some in those familiar terms.

The bottom line, then, is that the term '**fauxinfo**' is proposed as an appropriate term to describe statements which incorporate or reflect 'misinformation'-related terms such as those in Table 1, which have nothing of significance to do with information *per se*.

Therefore, '**fauxinfo**' is proposed as a replacement for the term 'misinformation', and as an antidote to the 'misinformation' pandemic which is rampaging at a rapid and destructive pace through governments, academia, social and broadcast media, and other institutional and organizational venues.

4. Conclusion

The statement of problem for the Special Report involves finding an alternative to the term 'misinformation', which at best is a perverse misnomer that promotes a false sense of connection to information, and has been described as concocted nonsense. Unfortunately, and despite its flaws (recall Table 1), it has attained popularity of pandemic proportions.

Regrettably, numerous negative consequences arise from the 'misinformation' pandemic, including depreciation of the value of science-based information in political decisions, degradation in the quality of public discourse about political decisions, substantive deterioration of social media and broadcast media productions, and an overall decline in societal confidence about the truth of communications disseminated by governments, business, Internet platform organizations, the media, and especially communications containing statements by politicians and their agents at all levels of government.

As for the cause of the 'misinformation' pandemic, it is fully and totally known.

That is, 'misinformation' is not the language of science, and has nothing whatsoever to do with science's *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* of deriving information from data by means of analysis and synthesis, and transforming information into methodologically-based knowledge.

Rather, 'misinformation' is completely and totally the spawn of non-scientific ways of knowing, including revelation, intuition, everyday experience (common sense), or authority, none of which produces information, or meets any robustness test such as validity, reproducibility, verifiability, or reliability.

As we have noted, '**fauxinfo**' serves as an umbrella term for the terms in Table 1, many of which apply to statements made in the names of revelation, intuition, everyday experience (common sense), or authority.

What we have then is the equivalent of a confirmation check, in that the individual terms and the summary term are in agreement about the cause behind the 'misinformation' pandemic, namely non-scientific ways of knowing.

The term '**fauxinfo**' is therefore presented as an appropriate replacement for whatever is meant by 'misinformation', with the hope that '**fauxinfo**' will soon make its presence felt as an effective antidote to the perpetuation of a term which at best is a pandemic-scale blight on honest, substantively informed discourse.

5. Endnotes

Endnote 1. The presumption is that we are dealing with people of good will and sound mind who, when presented with a rational, sound argument will modify their behaviour and beliefs accordingly.

Endnote 2. Information is specific to science as a way of knowing because only information produced through scientific methods and techniques can be tested for comparability, confirmability, duplicability, evaluability, generality, reliability, reproducibility, validity, verifiability, and related logic conditions. None of the other ways of knowing, – e.g., intuition, revelation, everyday experience (common sense), and authority – can make a substantive claim in those regards. Hence, information is a product of science, and only science. The term '**fauxinfo**' is proposed in this report as a term to describe statements based on any other way of knowing. Discussion of ways of knowing can be found in several earlier productions, including [The Inescapable Truth about Disinformation and Misinformation? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information](#) and [DOES DONALD TRUMP HAVE THE KNOW-HOW TO SAVE THE U.S.A.?](#).

Endnote 3. Information is specific to science as a way of knowing because, to the best of my knowledge, none of the other ways of knowing – e.g., intuition, revelation, everyday experience (common sense), and authority – meets any substantive test involving characteristics such as verifiability, evaluability, reproducibility, etc., which are presented in endnote 2. I hasten to note, however, that I invite being corrected, and I welcome receiving substantive evidence which I can examine.

Endnote 4. Previous reports discussed the characteristics of nine different bodies of literature, and provided preliminary observations about their contributions to the inventory of statements using the term 'misinformation'. ([REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#); [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#)). For the purposes of this Special Report a total of 900-1,000 statements contained in the popular literature (broadcast and social media) is deemed reasonable and appropriate for a first cut at thinking about a substitute term for 'misinformation'. Again, someone with deeper pockets' and/or more time, and perhaps with access to library science and linguistics expertise, could substantially expand on this work.

Endnote 5. Misinforming can of course be achieved with information by, for example, providing the wrong information to a question asked, but that action or event falls within the purview of accident, deception, error, or miscue, for example, and has nothing to do with information *per se*. In short, information is what it is, end of story, and dealing with the matter of whether information is good, bad, or indifferent is a people problem, not an information problem.

Endnote 6. In the absence of specific language it is often the case that some 'reading between the lines' is required when interpreting what is meant by 'misinformation'. As an example, one might wonder, "By 'misinformation', did he mean he suspects fraud, lying, misrepresentation, or deception, or all of the above, or something else?" None of this speculative reading would be necessary of course if people dealt in specifics, rather than defaulting to the nonsense term 'misinformation', but it is what it is, a pandemic of nonsensical communication which is in urgent need of an antidote.

Endnote 7. One of the reasons for using the term 'pandemic' is that 'misinformation' is frequently used without what seems to be any rhyme or reason, and it clearly does not require much if any expertise to say 'misinformation' as the default comment. Examination of materials used in this report reveals that such low-level terms as babble, baffle gab, drivel, and gibberish in Table 1 apply to many statements containing the term 'misinformation'. Moreover, in that process of degrading communications, the value of information in communications is immensely depreciated.

Endnote 8. Someone with more resources could create a definitive ordering using a much larger selection of materials from more bodies of literature, and I welcome seeing what could be achieved by 'deep pockets'. However, it appears fair to say that for an initial foray into the search for a 'misinformation' antidote, the nouns selected for presentation here are reasonably representative, and are sufficient for indicative purposes.

Endnote 9. The next body of literature to be examined for direct and indirect references to the term 'misinformation' is the Hansard record of presentations, comments, etc., by politicians in Canada's legislative assemblies. ([REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#), and [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#)). A question to be considered is whether and how Hansard records differ from the entries in Table 1.

Endnote 10. Assistance from list serve and social media contacts and from other researchers is gratefully acknowledged. They kindly inform me about materials produced by a number of broadcast media entities, including New York Times, C-SPAN, Washington Post, Associated Press, Canadian Press, The Atlantic, Toronto Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, CNN, MSNBC, CBS, ABC, YouTube, and FOX, with the latter receiving a 'class of its own' mention when it comes to providing a platform to generate, promote, and disseminate the kinds of 'misinformation' that are represented by the nouns in Table 1. A recent case in point in this regard involves a statement by a FOX show host who proclaimed that the Texas cold weather mess was due to failed wind turbines. 'It's just science', he announced. In truth his explanation has nothing whatsoever to do with science or information, and everything to do with at least half the terms in Table 1.

Endnote 11. It is appropriate to state that this study is a secondary source approach, and that an interview study which asks people what they mean by 'misinformation' in a statement they have made would no doubt be enlightening. However, using the secondary source approach is reasonable for an initial, exploratory inquiry. That said, I would welcome learning the results of interviews in which the interviewer is aware of the terms in Table 1, and keeps track of how many times the terms apply to responses.

Endnote 12. In my experience the statement of problem in this Special Report lends itself to analysis and synthesis through the Delphi Method, and I encourage an investigation using that approach in the search for an alternative to 'misinformation'.