1. Welcome – Chair Lisa Habel

2. Land acknowledgement – Agata Antkiewicz

3. Introduction of guest speaker – Steve Bradley

4. Presentation - Malicious Messaging: How Misinformation Operates Online, Sid Heeg, PhD student within the Faculty of Environment for Sustainability Management

Description: The COVID-19 Pandemic has made it clear that we are living in a time of rapid misinformation and distrust in public and government institutions. This talk will go over how misinformation forms, how it differs from disinformation, and how it appears online using examples from COVID-19 misinformation spread on social media.

- Misinformation: What is it
  - Disinformation is deliberate
  - Misinformation stems from disinformation, regardless of intent, misinformed
- Misinformation usually burns out within weeks but leads to damaging and long-term effects
- Misinformation on social media doesn’t care about time – for example, the misinformation happens instantly which is at odds with how medical research works
• Social media commenting with no moderation contributes to and spreads misinformation

• How misinformation operates
  o Poor media skills, not researching or reading
  o Poor critical thinking skills
  o As a malicious attack on certain groups of people that hides dog whistles in plain site (e.g. trolling behaviour)

• What can be done
  o Policies and regulations
    ▪ Improve Terms of Service on social media sites
    ▪ Government policies (although may be contentious when considering ‘free speech’)
  o Education – especially in areas of digital and social media (in higher education, high schools and public schools; adults need to be equipped to have conversations with children)

• Q&A:

Q: Have you or anyone you know working in this field looked into climate change misinformation?
A: I haven’t and I don’t know anyone but it’s a curiosity for me. For example, the change in terminology from global warming to climate change, fossil fuel companies influence even though greatly contributing to climate change.

Q: Does your research focus exclusively on misinformation spread through social media? What about non-digital forms of media? Is that still a problem?
A: My primary area is social media but there is a cross-over from social media into real life. For example, people begin to feel emboldened to bring misinformation and sharing it into real lives such as pamphlets and bumper stickers.

Q: I’m curious to hear if you came across anything in the Covid information anything about the vaccination misinformation situation in Brazil. You mention information goes away quickly but in this case the politicians and others continued sharing information.
A: I’m not familiar with the situation in Brazil specifically but there are different cultural attitudes to medicines and treatment. Even when you come out with the research and information, people that believe in the misinformation move the goal posts and facts don’t matter - it’s very hard to get people to change their mind.

Q: You showed that a problem with misinformation online is that it spreads widely and quickly, and then dies out before anything can be done about it. Have there been any examples where misinformation has been dealt with effectively?
A: Not always because by the time you get to addressing misinformation the conversation has already moved on. And once something becomes a matter of legislation, it is hard to stop.

Q: Do you share any of this content/research on social media yourself? Can we follow you?
A: I made a choice to not have a social media account for my academic work. I have a personal blog that is very low key and I prefer to remain anonymous online.

5. President’s Report
• UWSA President’s drop-in sessions getting underway – starting in June, first Wednesday of every month at noon. First 15 minutes will be about a pre-determined topic. More information coming by email.
• Compassionate care leave, bereavement leave benefits has significantly increased. The official policy is not complete. More information will be coming by email.
• Hearing that a lot of people are getting sick right now – if you are not well, call in sick
• Reach out with questions any time.

• Q&A:

  Q: Can you comment on recent request from the University that we resubmit our proof of vaccine?
  A: I don’t know, I haven’t found out about this yet.

6. Approval of Minutes of April 14, 2022
Approved.

7. Open forum
• Registration now open for UW Staff Board Foundations course – learn how to be a volunteer board director
• New UWSA area reps welcomed

8. Closing remarks

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Next meeting: Thursday, Jun 9, 2022

Chair: Lisa Habel
Minutes: JM