Psychological Defence Agency

DON'T BE FOOLED

A HANDBOOK TO HELP YOU RECOGNISE AND DEAL WITH DISINFORMATION, MISLEADING INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

YOU ARE PART OF SWEDEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE

Antagonistic foreign powers deliberately spread disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda with the intention to harm Sweden and our interests. They seek to cause division, by inf uencing what you think, what you do, and the decisions you make.

If you are able recognise and deal with disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda, it will make it harder for them to reach their goals. The harder it is to fool you, the stronger our open, democratic society becomes.

The Psychological Defence Agency works to protect our open and democratic society, our freedom of speech, and Sweden's liberty and independence.

The agency is tasked with identifying, analysing, and countering disinformation targeted at Sweden or its national interests. This also includes raising public awareness to improve our collective ability to resist attempts to inf uence our democracy.

This handbook contains tools to improve your ability to recognise when antagonistic foreign powers are attempting to inf uence you. This will build your personal resilience, which in turn will help Sweden.
Don't be fooled!

WATCH OUT

Somebody may want to inf uence you

It is important to watch out for information, images, or other material that you f nd upsetting or frightening, or that evoke strong feelings. Antagonistic foreign powers frequently play on your emotions to manipulate you. Disinformation, misleading information and propaganda target vulnerabilities in our open society, to inf uence our opinions and decisions about what happens in Sweden. This is deliberate interference by other countries and interest groups, as they work to cause division and break down our trust in one another and in the authorities. We all need to be on the lookout for signs that this might be occurring.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS OF DISINFORMATION, MISLEADING INFORMATION, AND PROPAGANDA:

- It is misleading and often has a hidden agenda
- It targets our vulnerabilities
- It is intended to disrupt and manipulate public discourse and to break down trust in our society

There are a lot of different methods that can be used to create and spread disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda. Multiple methods are often used simultaneously to achieve greater impact. One standard method involves creating stories, or narratives, which can be completely false or only partially true, but which are skewed and taken out of context in order to mislead, polarise, and divide. A narrative is designed to inf uence our perceptions of the world and how we choose to act in different situations. Another common method involves targeting specif c groups of people. This is known as targeted disinformation. A malicious third party, often referred to as an external threat actor, will tailor information to a particular group and then work methodically to reach out specif cally to them – and only them – through social media or other channels.

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THINK TWICE

Don't share without a second thought!

Avoid becoming a part of the spread of disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda. Think twice before you share information with friends or on social media. Antagonistic foreign powers can use recurring stories (narratives) about Sweden. They might say, for example, that Sweden is a country in moral decline, a dangerous country to live in, or that you can't trust the authorities. These narratives often play on our emotions in order to upset us, thereby ensuring that we pass the message on quickly. They want all of us living in Sweden to worry more, to be brought into conf ict with one another, and to feel that Sweden is a bad country to live in. A polarised society is more vulnerable, making it easier for anyone who wants to harm us to achieve their goals.

WHO ARE THEY TARGETING?

You might think that it is easy to see through these attempts at manipulation - but that is not always the case. Antagonistic foreign powers can tailor their communication activities and then target specif c parts of the population. If you see something and think, "There's something to that," it might be because you are part of the target group – which is why it is essential to think twice.

IMAGES AND VIDEOS THAT EVOKE STRONG EMOTIONS

Images are a particularly compelling way to mislead someone. The rapid rise of artif cial intelligence (AI) means that manipulated images, videos, and voice recordings have become more realistic. These images can spread rapidly when something happens. Authentic images and videos from an event can also sometimes be used in a different context. Even basic recordings on a mobile phone can be used to inf uence people. The spread of disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda increases when a signif cant event occurs or when something big happens that is reported in the news.

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CHECK THE SOURCE

Double-check the information

Double-check the information. Learn how digital platforms work and how to evaluate the validity of information. In a time when algorithms control much of our feeds, it is easy to get drawn into a specif c narrative - but remember to take a step back and double-check the information. Social media is built on algorithms. These algorithms can manipulate us on a massive scale, and they control much of what we are exposed to in our feeds. They are designed to build engagement, which can be used to spread both positive and negative messages. This means that you must be aware of how you react when you see something that makes you exhilarated, sad, or angry. Equally important is to double-check your sources, to search for information in several different locations, and to not share unverif ed information.

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK YOURSELF WHEN YOU RECEIVE NEW INFORMATION:

- Is the information accurate? Is it reasonable? Can I double-check it through other sources?
- Where does the information come from? Is this normally a credible source?
- How old is the information? Is it new or a re-use of old data?
- Why is this information being sent out right now? Who benef ts from you reacting to it in a particular way?

HOW TO RECOGNISE A FAKE WEBSITE

1 **URL**
Imitating well-known platforms is a common tactic. Take a closer look at the website address (also known as the URL), to check that it is correct.

2 **HEADLINE**
The goal is to raise interest and trigger a response from the reader. Always read more than just the headline, and make sure that any claims are backed up by the content.

3 **CONTENT**
Is it opinion or fact? Read the entire text before you share it or pass the information on.

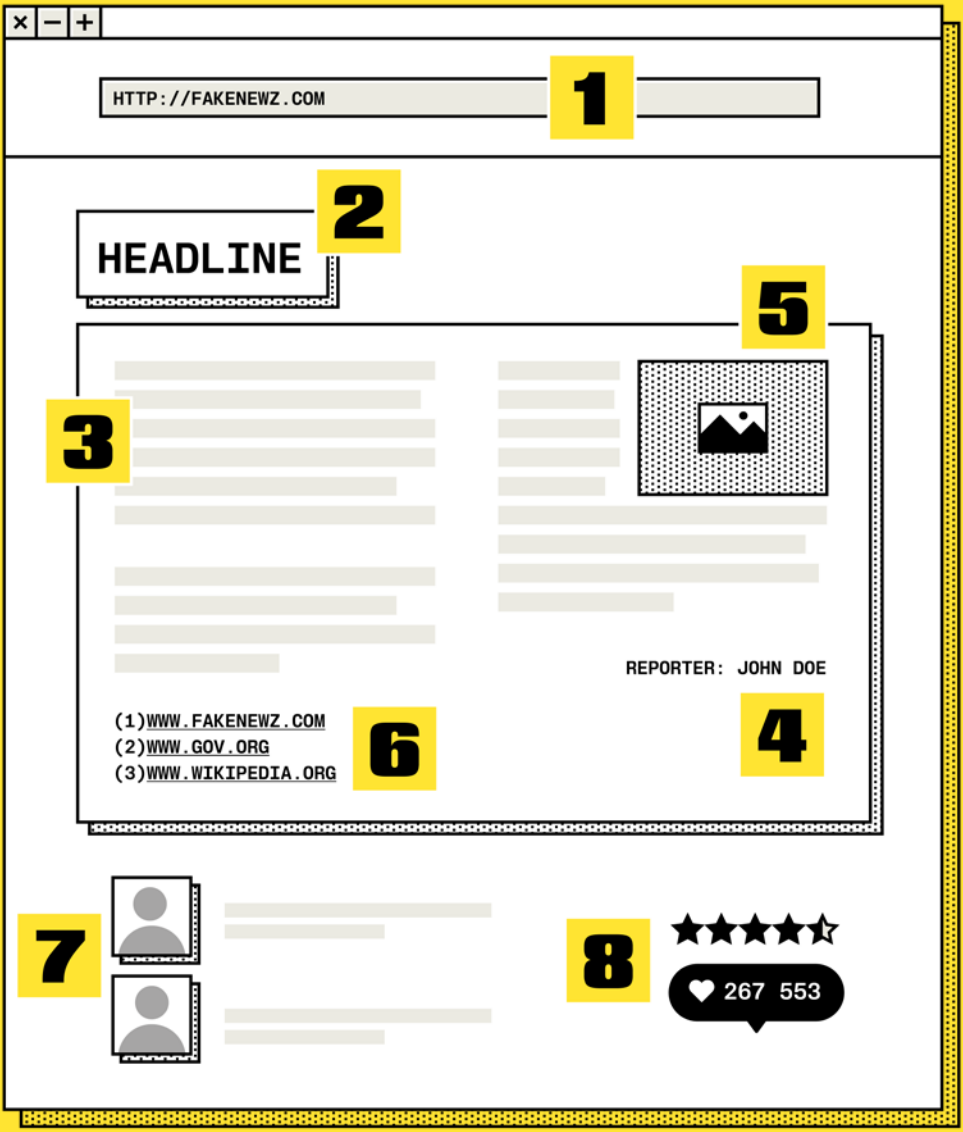
4 **AUTHOR**
Think about who has written the text, and why. Be on the lookout for texts or websites with no author.

5 **IMAGES**
Manipulating images is easy, and you cannot be sure that the image has a genuine connection to the content. Do an image search to f nd out whether the image has been used previously in a different context.

6 **SOURCES**
If the text makes references to other sources, check them.

7 **COMMENTS**
Who is commenting? Most of the time it is ordinary people, but troll accounts and bots are not uncommon.

8 **ATTENTION**
The fact that a text has a lot of likes or shares does not guarantee that the content is accurate.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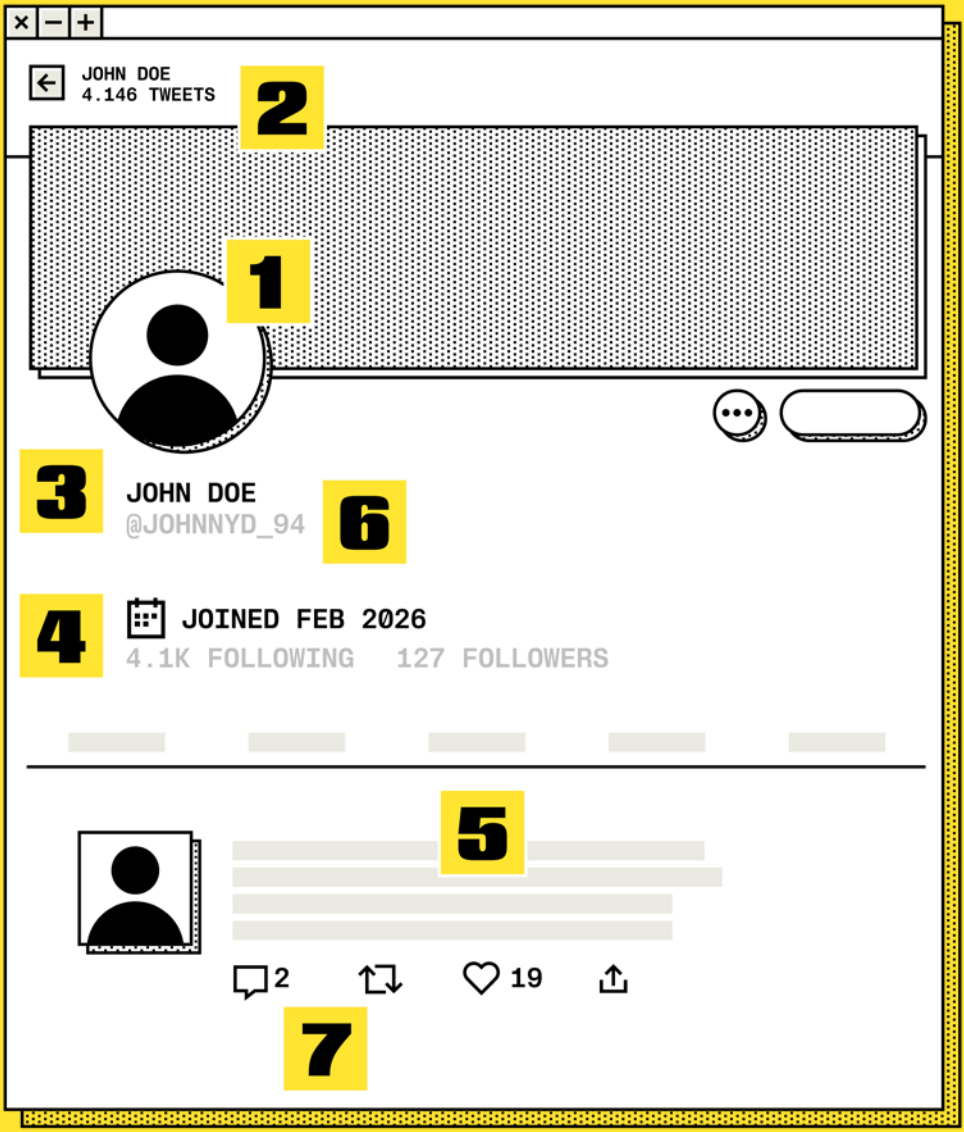
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4.1K FOLLOWING
127 FOLLOWERS
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HOW TO IDENTIFY A BOT

A bot (from "robot") is a computer program that performs automated tasks, such as spreading information on social media. A bot can be used to reinforce certain messages, to spam forums and comments sections, to like or share social media posts, or to carry out cyberattacks. Bots are harder to identify nowadays, as they take on the look and feel of authentic accounts with the help of AI.

1 **PROFILE PICTURE**
Bots often use a stolen image or have no prof le picture at all. Do an image search to check if it is real. With the onset of generative AI, creating images that look real is easier than ever. When this happens, an image search will not produce any results, and the image is not actually classif ed as stolen.

2 **ACTIVITIES**
Many bots are extremely active. Be on the lookout for accounts with a suspiciously high number of posts per day.

3 **NAMES**
Most bots use randomised usernames, such as combinations of scrambled numbers and letters.

4 **ACCOUNT CREATION DATE**
Many bot accounts are created immediately before going active. Older accounts are sometimes used, but usually any older posts are removed beforehand, creating a time gap between the creation date and the f rst post.

5 **LANGUAGES**
Bots sometimes use automatic translation to spread their messages in several languages. This results in obvious grammatical errors or incoherent sentences.

6 **INFORMATION**
Bot accounts often lack personal information or use made-up or fake information.

7 **INTERACTIONS**
Check the posts and other users with whom the account interacts. Bots are often coordinated and reinforce one another while, at the same time, having few followers who are real people.

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LOOK FOR OFFICIAL INFORMATION

Keep up to date

Pay attention to information from the authorities and keep yourself up to date. This is particularly important when something happens that stirs up strong emotions. Most of us get our information from a personal selection of sources out of pure habit. When something big happens in society, a majority of people want information right now! In those situations, relying only on off cial and conf rmed information is especially important. In our digital age, disinformation, misleading information, and propaganda is very common. It is important to remember that authorities only communicate off cial and conf rmed information. Your patience may well be running thin before you get conf rmed information. In that situation, you must stay calm – that is the best you can do for yourself, and for Sweden.

REMEMBER THE TOOLS WE HAVE GONE OVER:

- Watch out
- Think twice
- Check the source
- Look for off cial information

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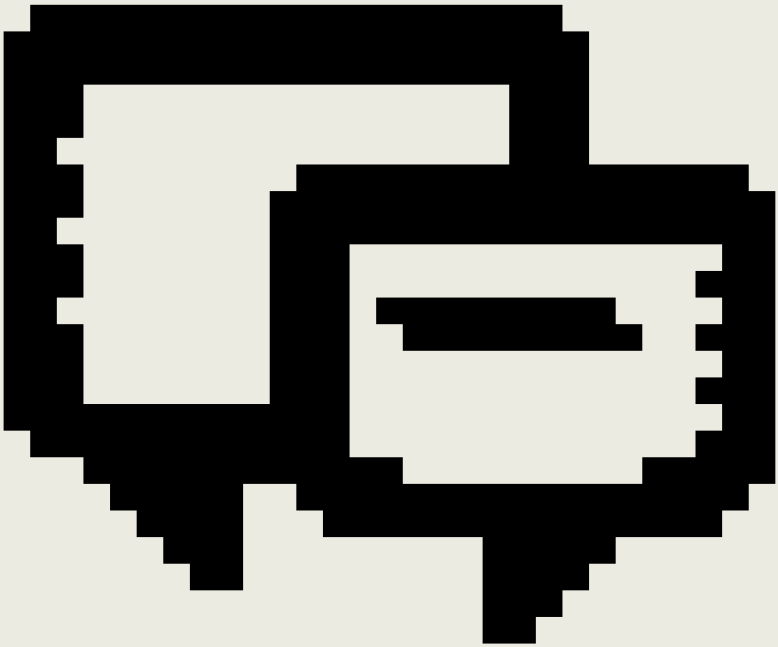

TERMINOLOGY TO KNOW

BANDWAGON EFFECT People who feel that they are part of a majority are more willing to share their opinion. They pile on, simply because that groupthink gives them a sense of security.

BOTS A bot (from "robot") is a computer program that performs tasks automatically, such as spreading information on social media.

DEEPFAKE Audio or video clips that have been manipulated with the help of algorithms. Russia, for example, has created fake videos where the President of Ukraine urges his soldiers to surrender.

DISINFORMATION False information that is spread deliberately to harm an individual, organisation, or country, for example by creating and sharing made-up news stories.

ECHO CHAMBERS AND FILTER BUBBLES Natural groupings, online or off ine, where people communicate with others who share the same views and opinions. As a result, they only receive certain information, thereby missing out on the bigger picture.

FLOODING involves overloading a target group with information. One way of doing this is by spamming on social media or spreading disinformation in order to drown out reliable sources.

ANTAGONISTIC FOREIGN POWERS Other countries, or groups in other countries (often referred to as external threat actors), whose intention may be to harm Sweden and its national interests.

INFLUENCE CAMPAIGN When antagonistic foreign powers or other external threat actors attempt to inf uence, disrupt, or steer public discourse in Sweden in a harmful way.

MISINFORMATION False information that hasn't necessarily been created to cause harm. It may involve a misunderstanding, like someone reading an article online, believing that it is factual and sharing it to inform their friends, without knowing that what they're sharing is actually false.

MISLEADING INFORMATION Information used to fool the recipient in various ways, thereby giving them an incorrect perception of reality.

PERSONAL ATTACKS (AD HOMINEM) Attacking, discrediting, and ridiculing the person behind an argument instead of criticising the actual argument. Ad hominem attacks are often used to silence others, to prevent them from joining the discussion, or scare them into not getting involved at all.

POLARISATION combines different inf uencing techniques to reinforce extreme positions on the same issue. Trolls and bots are often used to hype up extreme views. Antagonistic foreign powers do this to pit one group against another. By dividing society, they can then reap the benef ts.

PROVOCATION means exploiting sensitive issues in society to deliberately cause anger and disagreement. Russia has, for example, organised demonstrations in other countries in order to provoke people in that country to act in a certain way.

PROPAGANDA Messages spread in order to inf uence our attitudes and actions in favour of the sender. Propaganda can be weaponised and is often based on disinformation and misleading information when used in psychological warfare.

SPIRAL OF SILENCE People who feel like they are part of a minority are less willing to share their opinion. This is dangerous for our democracy: when people are silenced, there is a risk that inf uence campaigns and other misleading information have a greater impact.

STRAWMAN Incorrectly alleging that someone has certain opinions or positions and then arguing against those, rather than facing their actual argument.

VULNERABILITIES Known and unknown phenomena in our society that foreign powers attempt to exploit for their own benef t, for example by spreading disinformation on issues of concern to many.

WHATABOUTISM Shifting the focus of an argument by highlighting another subject or phenomenon (“But what about this?!”) that has not attracted as much attention, but which is not relevant to the issue at hand.

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WHAT WE PROTECT

An open debate, differences of opinion, and the right to attempt to convince others are essential parts of a functioning democracy. But when antagonistic foreign powers attempt to skew the truth and drive more aggressive rhetoric in the public discourse, it becomes a problem. Ultimately, they aim to deny us the right to choose our path independently. You have the right to form your opinions without antagonistic foreign powers inf uencing you for their own purposes.

This handbook contains tools to improve your ability to recognise when an antagonistic foreign power is attempting to inf uence you. This will build your personal resilience, which in turn will help Sweden. Don't be fooled!
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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE AGENCY
VÅXNÄSGATAN 10
653 40 KARLSTAD
REGISTRATOR@MPF.SE
+46 10 183 70 00
WWW.MPF.SE