

Appendix A: Scripts disinformation and authentic speech of the depicted politician

All different formats and modes of disinformation presented the same deceptive narrative in the format of an alleged ‘recent interview’ with the depicted political actor. This was mentioned in both the cover story of the treatments and the treatments themselves. The text and text-plus-image disinformation conditions directly quoted the deceptive narratives from this interview. The cheap fake also quoted the statement from the interview. In all disinformation conditions, the statements were confirmed by the political actor: In the textual condition, the statement that Buma ‘confirmed’ the narrative was included at the end. The text-plus-image condition was signed off by the political actor. In the cheap fake, the depicted political actor directly said that this speech was correct.

In the disinformation conditions, the following fabricated claim was (allegedly) expressed by the depicted politician: “We should defend our beautiful Dutch traditions, norms and values against foreign influences at all costs. These criminal and dangerous fortune-seekers should stay out of our country. Our country is already full!”

In the crediting endorsement conditions, the following text accompanied the (dis)information: “You can say a lot about this man and his political ideas, but finally there is someone who has the guts to say what we are all thinking. Strong statement! Time for action!”

In the discrediting endorsement conditions, the following discrediting message was paired with the (dis)information: “Unbelievable. A mainstream politician tempted to express this kind of fact-free radical right-wing hate speech. Weak statement! This should stop!”

The authentic information (control conditions) presented the following statement, which was actually expressed in an authentic political speech by the depicted politician: “In almost all countries across the world, it is commonplace to know the national anthem. And this is controversial in our country? I cannot believe this. We should be proud of our culture. Proud of our heritage.”

Example modality of stimuli (in Dutch)

1. Textual disinformation

> Politiek en Samenleving

Sybrand Buma spreekt zich uit over immigratie

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In een recentelijk interview geeft Buma zijn zienswijze op immigratie. Hij zegt: "We zouden onze mooie Nederlandse tradities, normen en waarden met man en macht moeten verdedigen tegen buitenlandse invloeden. Criminele gelukzoekers hebben niets in ons land te zoeken. Vol is vol!" Buma bevestigt deze uitspraken.

Translation:

Sybrand Buma speaks out on immigration

In a recent interview, Buma shares his views on immigration. He says: "We should defend our beautiful Dutch traditions, norms and values against foreign influences at all costs. These criminal and dangerous fortune-seekers should stay out of our country. Our country is already full!" Buma confirms these statements.

2. Visual disinformation image (meme) – with embedding by ordinary citizen



Michael Meijer @Meijer_NL • 3d

Je kunt veel over de man en zijn politieke standpunten zeggen, maar eindelijk is er iemand die durft te zeggen wat wij allemaal al lang denken. Sterk statement! Tijd voor actie!



Translation:

Embedding: You can say a lot about this man and his political ideas, but finally there is someone who has the guts to say what we are all thinking. Strong statement! Time for action!

Quote on the visual: "We should defend our beautiful Dutch traditions, norms and values against foreign influences at all costs. These criminal and dangerous fortune-seekers should stay out of our country. Our country is already full!"

3. Screenshot cheapfake (with discrediting cue by ordinary citizen)



Michael Meijer @Meijer_NL • 3d

Niet te geloven. Een mainstream politicus die zich laat verleiden tot dit soort feitenvrije radicaal-rechtse haatzaaij. Zwak statement! Dit moet stoppen!



Translation: Unbelievable. A mainstream politician tempted to express this kind of fact-free radical right-wing hate speech. Weak statement! This should stop!

Appendix B: Details on sampling procedures

We used quota (not interlocked) to achieve a sample distribution that matches demographics in the population as close as possible. Comparing census data to the distributions in our sample, we see that discrepancies in proportions and means between the sample and population are within a 5% margin. Here, we focus on age, gender, education, political preferences, and region as these are documented by the research agency and accurately documented for the population. However, other factors may also play a role for the processing and persuasiveness of disinformation, such as social media use, overall mainstream media use, and income. Yet, controlling for these demographics does not change the results. In addition, post-hoc randomization checks with the demographics used for the quote as well as media use variables demonstrate that there are no significant differences between conditions in the distributions of these variables (randomization succeeded). Finally, we note that the sample size was established based on power estimates (assuming a power of .80 for an alpha of .05 and small effect sizes of $b = 0.2$ based on earlier research on disinformation's effects and the finding that effect sizes in social science are generally small, also see Camerer et al., 2018).

Appendix C: Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks

We first of all assessed whether the specific statements covered in the authentic news versus the disinformation conditions were correctly identified by participants. Our findings confirm that the right-wing populist (fabricated) statements were significantly and substantially more likely to be associated with the disinformation ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.70$) than the authentic information ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.92$; $F(1,872) = 79.60$, $p < .001$). People thus correctly distinguished the disinformation's arguments from the authentic arguments (which were relatively similar in topic and ideological leaning). Based on this, we ensured that participants overall paid attention to the stimuli and understood the central arguments that were expressed in the stimuli (i.e., they could distinguish the authentic from the manipulated articles based on the intended differences between the messages). In the survey programming, we also included explicit instructions and checks for participants to turn on their audio and watch the full video. A timer was included to ensure that participants watched the full video/read the articles before they could continue.

The manipulation of the video versus other modalities was also successful: Participants in the cheap fake video conditions were more likely to recall the video ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.62$) compared to participants who were not exposed to a cheap fake ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.85$; $F(1,872) = 563.91$, $p < .001$). Finally, participants were more likely to have seen an image of the depicted politician in the multimodal ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 1.43$) than the textual conditions ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 2.34$; $F(1,872) = 563.91$, $p < .001$). The relatively high scores for recognizing the depicted politician in the textual conditions may be explained by an interpretation issue: Although the politician was not visually depicted, the stimuli talked about the politician and mentioned his

party affiliation in the textual conditions too. If we exclude participants who failed the manipulation check from the data, the results remain the same. As some participants may have failed the checks due to interpretation issues, we decided to retain them in the final analyses.

Finally, we included an attention check with a very basic question and specific instructions on how to answer it (participants had to ignore the question and fill in a 'don't know' answer). We warned participants who did not pay attention and failed the attention check question. However, we did not exclude them from participation as there could be many different explanations for failing an attention check. Yet, as we had the data available, we ran the analyses for participants who actually passed the attention check and participants who failed the attention check separately. There are no significant differences between the sub-samples, which does ensure us that the attention check did not bias the findings.

Appendix D: Tables of the Regression Analyses

Table 2

Effects of disinformation and attitudinal congruence on perceived credibility of message

	Model I (n = 874)			Model II (n = 874)			Model III (n = 874)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
(Constant)	4.55	.09		3.91	.14		4.64	.25	
Disinformation (versus real)	-.84	.11	-.31***	-.84	.10	-.31***	-1.47	.30	-.54***
Endorsed message	-.03	.11	-.01	-.00	.10	-.00	-.85	.31	-.31**
Discredited message	-.27	.11	-.10*	-.27	.10	-.10**	-.80	.31	-.30**
Multimodal	.00	.09	.00	.02	.09	.01	.24	.26	.10
Video	.11	.09	.05	.13	.09	.05	.05	.26	.02
Prior issue attitudes				.14	.02	.19***	-.02	.05	-.03
Disinformation × issue attitudes							.14	.06	.28*
Endorsement × issue attitudes							.20	.07	.33**
Discredited × issue attitudes							.12	.07	.21 [†]
Multimodal × issue attitudes							-.05	.06	-.10
Video × issue attitudes							.02	.06	.03
Adjusted R^2	.121			.156			.181		
<i>F</i>	24.93***			27.91***			18.89***		
<i>F</i> for change in R^2				37.56***			6.92***		

[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (*B*) and standardized (β) regression weights. Analyses are checked for multicollinearity.

Table 3*Effects of disinformation and attitudinal congruence on issue agreement*

	Model I (n = 874)			Model II (n = 874)			Model III (n = 874)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
(Constant)	4.39	.15		-.28	.11		.10	.20	
Disinformation (versus real)	.01	.18	.00	-.01	.08	-.00	-.06	.23	-.01
Endorsed message	-.20	.18	-.05	-.03	.08	-.01	-.62	.24	-.15*
Discredited message	.00	.18	.00	-.02	.08	-.00	-.43	.24	-.10 [†]
Multimodal	-.14	.15	-.04	-.05	.07	-.03	-.36	.20	-.09 [†]
Video	-.13	.15	-.03	.01	.07	.00	.01	.21	.00
Prior issue attitudes				1.04	.02	.89***	.96	.04	.82***
Disinformation × issue attitudes							.01	.05	.01
Endorsement × issue attitudes							.14	.05	.15**
Discredited × issue attitudes							.09	.05	.10
Multimodal × issue attitudes							.07	.04	.09
Video × issue attitudes							-.00	.04	.00
Adjusted R^2	.002			.795			.797		
<i>F</i>	.58			563.86***			312.77***		
<i>F</i> for change in R^2				3369.09***			3.13**		

[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (*B*) and standardized (β) regression weights. Analyses are checked for multicollinearity.

Table 4*Effects of disinformation and attitudinal congruence on political source evaluations*

	Model I (n = 874)			Model II (n = 874)			Model III (n = 874)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
(Constant)	4.59	.09		3.78	.13		4.21	.25	
Disinformation (versus real)	-.26	.11	-.10*	-.26	.10	-.10*	-1.03	.29	-.40***
Endorsed message	.17	.10	.07	.20	.10	.08	-.12	.30	-.05
Discredited message	.04	.11	.01	.03	.10	.01	-.23	.30	.09
Multimodal	.03	.09	.02	.05	.09	.02	.28	.26	.12
Video	.11	.09	.05	.13	.09	.06	.36	.26	.16
Prior issue attitudes				.18	.02	.26***	.09	.05	.12
Disinformation \times issue attitudes							.18	.06	.36**
Endorsement \times issue attitudes							.08	.07	.14
Discredited \times issue attitudes							-.05	.06	-.09
Multimodal \times issue attitudes							-.05	.05	-.11
Video \times issue attitudes							-.06	.06	-.11
Adjusted R^2	.005			.072			.086		
F	1.82			12.30***			8.50***		
F for change in R^2				64.07***			3.72**		

† $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression weights. Analyses are checked for multicollinearity.

Appendix E: Design of the second experimental study (robustness check)

The second study that was used as a robustness check to explore the transferability of the main study's findings to another application and context of cheapfakes was conducted in the US. Here, the same panel company recruited participants from a voluntary opt-in panel (all were 18 years or older). Quota were used based on census data, which secured that the sample was by and large representative on demographics such as age ($M = 46.57$, $SD = 17.20$), gender (49.5% female, 48.4% male), and education (45.4% lower, 23.5% higher educated). A total of 733 participants were exposed to either the control condition (250), textual disinformation condition (254), or cheapfake condition (229). The study received ethical approval of the University that was responsible for storing and collecting the data.

To allow the findings to be comparable across the two studies, we used the same scale to measure credibility assessment as in the main study. The average score on this composite scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .777$) was 3.52 ($SD = 1.27$). The procedure also mimicked the procedures used in the main study: participants were randomly allocated to the disinformation versus control conditions, and then answered questions on the credibility of the message they were exposed to. The cheapfake people were exposed to used an unclear video of a missile attack shooting down an unidentifiable plane and claimed that "there is new information about the missing MH370 plane: It was a terrorist attack." The textual disinformation used exactly the same narrative, but did not use a video to demonstrate this story. As such, the cheapfake offered visual evidence for the deceptive claim about a terrorist attack. The text below the (deceptive) headline was kept similar in the disinformation conditions, and stressed that there was new evidence indicating that the MH370 plane was part of a cover-up terrorist attack that was hidden from the public. The visual On the next page, the narratives of the control condition (first image) and disinformation condition (second image) are included.



WHAT WE KNOW, AND STILL DON'T KNOW, ABOUT THE MISSING MH370 PLANE

Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 disappeared with 239 passengers and crew members onboard in March 2014 – and, despite a huge international search, the plane and its black box have not been found.



When and how did MH370 disappear?

MH370 vanished shortly after leaving Kuala Lumpur at 12:41 a.m. local time. Authorities tried to piece together clues using the plane's last communications with air traffic controllers and information from the plane's radar transponder and satellites, although they offered only a partial picture of the route the plane could have taken. "There were no transmissions received from the aircraft after the first 38 minutes of the flight," said a final report in 2018 by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which took part in search efforts.

Why did the plane disappear?

Theories surrounding the plane's disappearance have gripped the world for almost a decade. But so far, none has been proven. Malaysian officials declared the plane's disappearance an accident in 2015, a move that paved the way for the airline to pay settlements to the families.

In July 2015, a piece of debris – similar to a wing part found on jets like the Malaysia Airlines plane – washed up on Reunion, a small island in the Indian Ocean. The item, known as a flaperon, was examined by French experts, who concluded that the fragment was from MH370. A handful of personal belongings have since been found, washed up on beaches in places like Madagascar.



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NEW INFORMATION ABOUT THE MISSING MH370 PLANE: IT WAS A TERRORIST ATTACK

Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 disappeared with 239 passengers and crew members onboard in March 2014 – and, after a long while, new information from anonymous sources confirms that the aircraft was shot out of the sky by terrorists.

When and how did MH370 disappear?

MH370 vanished shortly after leaving Kuala Lumpur at 12:41 a.m. local time, with authorities unable to locate it or determine what happened to its crew and passengers. According a new report, “the plane was struck down by a missile” with this new information kept out of the news by those in power for fears it could cause unrest and fuel hate against immigrants.

Why did the plane disappear?

Theories surrounding the plane’s disappearance have gripped the world for almost a decade. Malaysian officials declared the plane’s disappearance an accident in 2015, but the new evidence contradicts this official explanation.

In 2023, a piece of debris – similar to a wing part from the same type plane as MH370 – washed up on Reunion, a small island in the Indian Ocean. The item, known as a flaperon, was examined by French experts, who concluded that the fragment was from MH370, and that it shows clear signs of impact with a surface-to-air missile (SAM). This is confirmed by evidence from witnesses of the attack who have kept quiet until now out of concerns for their safety. The witness confirmed, “I was there. I saw that it was shot down from the ground. I have proof of it that they won’t allow me to show”