2026 MANIFESTO

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The Decade of Disinformation

What actually works?

The past decade spawned an entire eco-system of research and countermeasures, with millions spent for a greater cause.

What problem is addressed?

World events have altered how we inter-vene, perceive truth, and safeguard freedom of speech.

Disinformation adapts. Consequences evolve. Paradigms shift.

DROG Disinformation Intervention Model

6 generations of interventions based on paradigm shifts over the past decade.

The problem: Many interventions lack scientific underpinning, clear goals, or cost-effectiveness studies. They promise silver bullets. **There are none.**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strategic Communication	Debunking	Prebunking	Moderation	Interaction	Collective Sense-making
2014	2016	2018	2020	2022	2025
Awareness	Facts	Tactics	Rules	Behavior	Coordination

The Flawed Premise Behind Each Generation

GEN 1-2
Assumed: Authorities have the truth

flawed →

GEN 3
Assumed: Experts can fix individuals

flawed →

GEN 4
Assumed: Platforms can enforce truth

flawed →

GEN 5-6
Shift: No authority has the answer

GEN 1 (2014): Strategic Communication

GEN 1

Trigger: Hybrid Warfare

Problem: Foreign Interference

Deficit: Communication

Focus: Awareness

If only the masses had access to proper information…

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 shocked Western democracies into awareness. Russia's "hybrid warfare" combined military action with sophisticated information operations, and the West had no playbook. The response was rooted in Cold War thinking: if adversaries spread propaganda, we counter with truth. If citizens are confused, we inform them.

This generation assumed the problem was primarily external (foreign actors) and that the solution was primarily communicative (better messaging). Governments established strategic communication units, funded independent journalism in contested regions, and supported civil society organizations to build "resilience."

Solution: Information campaigns + journalism support

01 Fight fire with fire: counter foreign interference directly

02 NGOs and civil society as first line of defence

03 Media literacy to empower citizens

The approach had merit but also blind spots. It focused on state actors while domestic disinformation grew. It assumed people would accept "correct" information when presented, ignoring the deeper question of why some narratives resonate regardless of truth.

StratCom | Network Building | Independent Journalism | Think Tanks | News Literacy | OSINT

2026: Government communication now sometimes indistinguishable from the propaganda it sought to counter.

GEN 2 (2016): Debunking

GEN 2

Trigger: Election Interference

Problem: Truth Decay

Deficit: Information

Focus: Facts & Narratives

If only journalists could expose non-facts and present proper facts…

The 2016 US election and Brexit referendum revealed something new: disinformation wasn't just coming from foreign governments. It was spreading virally through social media, often created by domestic actors or opportunistic content farms. The term "fake news" entered the mainstream vocabulary.

The response was fact-checking at scale. If false claims were spreading, the solution seemed obvious: verify claims, label them true or false, and trust that people would update their beliefs accordingly. Platforms partnered with fact-checkers, and the European Commission convened expert groups to coordinate responses.

Solution: Fact-checking

01 Data scientists + journalists check public discourse

02 Agree on facts = effective debate becomes possible

03 Professional fact-checkers navigate the information jungle

Research soon revealed the limits. Fact-checks often failed to change minds, and corrections struggled to reach the same audiences as the original claims. More fundamentally, fact-checking is reactive: by the time a claim is checked, it has already spread. The approach also assumed people primarily share misinformation because they believe it's true, rather than for identity signaling or tribal belonging.

Fact Checking | Topical Rebuttal | Information Labeling | 3rd Party Verification | EU Expert Group

GEN 3 (2018): Prebunking

GEN 3

Trigger: End of Status Quo

Problem: Manipulation Vulnerability

Deficit: Rationality

Focus: Techniques & Tactics

If only we could expose dishonest reasoning with games and TV shows…

By 2018, researchers recognized that debunking was fighting an unwinnable battle. New false claims emerged faster than they could be checked. A paradigm shift occurred: instead of correcting specific falsehoods, why not teach people to recognize manipulation techniques themselves?

Inoculation theory, borrowed from psychology, offered a compelling framework. Just as vaccines expose the immune system to weakened pathogens, "prebunking" exposes people to weakened forms of manipulation, teaching them to recognize emotional appeals, false dichotomies, and conspiracy logic before encountering them in the wild.

Solution: Psychological inoculation

01 Experience how disinfo is made = become immune

02 Recognize techniques, resist future manipulation

03 Build resilience, not just correct content

Games like Bad News and GoViral! showed promising results in controlled studies. But questions remained about long-term effectiveness and whether technique-recognition translates to real-world behavior change. The approach also still assumed the problem was primarily cognitive: that people fall for disinformation because they can't spot the tricks.

Technique Rebuttal | Inoculation Games | CIB Detection | Media Literacy

GEN 4 (2020): Moderation

GEN 4

Trigger: Violence & Health Risks

Problem: Internal Actors

Deficit: Moderation

Focus: Rules & Regulations

If only we could deplatform, derank, and demonetize the demagogues…

The COVID-19 pandemic and the January 6th Capitol attack in 2021 raised the stakes dramatically. Misinformation was no longer just a democratic nuisance. It was killing people and threatening political stability. The response shifted from educating users to regulating platforms.

The EU's Digital Services Act established unprecedented obligations for large platforms. Tech companies created oversight boards, expanded content moderation, and developed sophisticated systems to deplatform, derank, and demonetize problematic content and accounts. The assumption was epidemiological: disinformation spreads like a virus, so restrict transmission and you reduce harm.

Solution: Platform enforcement + regulation

01	COVID + political violence demanded action
02	Restrict transmission = reduce reach

03 Few producers: obstruct them, problem shrinks

This generation achieved real results in limiting reach of known bad actors. But it also revealed deep tensions. Moderation decisions became politically contested. Deplatformed users migrated to alternative platforms, creating parallel information ecosystems. And the fundamental question emerged: who decides what's true when even governments spread contested claims?

Oversight Boards | Deplatforming | Deranking | Demonetization | DSA/DMA | EDMO

2026: Who moderates the moderators when governments themselves spread contested claims?

GEN 5 (2022): Interaction

GEN 5

Trigger: Conspiracy Galore

Problem: Societal Alienation

Deficit: Interaction

Focus: Group Dynamics

If only we could get people with different opinions to sit down together…

By 2022, the information landscape was transforming rapidly. Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered unprecedented disinformation warfare, while Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter signaled a philosophical shift in how platforms approached content moderation. Meanwhile, research into conspiracy communities revealed something deeper: belief in misinformation often correlates with feelings of alienation, loss of control, and lack of belonging.

This generation shifted focus from content to connection. The 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict demonstrated how quickly parallel information realities could form, with different communities seeing entirely different "facts." Twitter's transformation into X and its retreat from traditional moderation showed that platform-based solutions were increasingly unreli-

able. Instead of fact-checking people or restricting their access to information, why not address the underlying social needs that make disinformation appealing? Techniques like deep canvassing and street epistemology showed that extended, empathetic conversations could shift beliefs in ways that broadcasting facts never could.

Solution: Peer-to-peer deliberation

01 People change minds through interaction, not broadcasts

02 Disinfo thrives in alienated, left-behind communities

03 Create safety, autonomy, belonging (not top-down fixes)

The challenge is scale. Deep canvassing works, but it requires trained facilitators and time. Group deliberation can bridge divides, but organizing it requires resources. As institutional trust continues to decline, however, peer-to-peer approaches may become not just preferable but necessary.

Street Epistemology | Deep Canvassing | Group Deliberation | Multi-User Literacy

2026: Peer-to-peer truth-finding becomes essential when official channels are contested.

GEN 6 (2025): Collective Sensemaking

GEN 6

Trigger: AI + Platform Collapse + State Disinfo

Problem: No External Anchor

Deficit: Coordination Capacity

Focus: Distributed Verification

If only communities could develop their own capacity to navigate uncertainty together…

We now face a convergence of crises that no previous generation anticipated. The ChatGPT revolution of 2023 made generative AI mainstream, and by 2024 deepfakes had become indistinguishable from reality at near-zero cost. The global election year of 2024, with votes in the US, EU, India, and dozens of other countries, became a stress test for information integrity that many systems failed.

Then came 2025. Meta announced it would drop its fact-checking program entirely, replacing it with community notes. X continued its transformation away from content moderation. And governments in established democracies began using official channels to spread contested claims, while simultaneously targeting fact-checkers and journalists as enemies.

Every previous generation assumed there was someone to provide the solution: experts, platforms, facilitators. GEN 6 is the first where no cavalry is coming. When fact-checkers are attacked as partisan, when platforms won't moderate, when official sources spread disinformation, the question shifts from "who has the answers?" to "how do we build the capacity to navigate this together?"

Solution: Build collective sensemaking capacity

01	No centralized arbiter will save us — build distributed capacity instead
02	Communities need tools and practices, not authorities to follow
03	The goal isn't "find the truth" but "navigate uncertainty together"

This generation cannot rely on centralized arbiters. Instead, it must build the infrastructure for communities to verify, deliberate, and coordinate for themselves. Not seeking authorities to follow, but developing the collective capacity to function despite uncertainty.

The foundations of external authority have collapsed. Three simultaneous shifts:

AI & Synthetic Content

Post-ChatGPT explosion of 2023. Deepfakes flooded the 2024 elections. Cost of disinfo production: near zero. Verification by individuals: nearly impossible.

Government as Disinfo Source

From Ukraine to domestic politics, official channels now spread contested claims. Fact-checkers labeled as enemies. The state is no longer the anchor.

Platform Collapse

Meta drops fact-checking (Jan 2025). X abandoned moderation. No platform will save us. Users must organize themselves.

Community Verification Networks

Sensemaking Tools

Distributed Fact-Finding

Local Deliberation Infrastructure

Coordination Protocols

2026: The question is no longer “who has the answers?” but “how do we build the capacity to navigate uncertainty together?”

The Path Forward

Each generation was built on a flawed assumption — that some authority could solve the problem:

GEN 1	assumed people lacked	**Information**
GEN 2	assumed people lacked	**Facts**
GEN 3	assumed people lacked	**Rationality**
GEN 4	assumed people lacked	**Protection**

GEN 5	assumed people lacked	**Connection**
GEN 6	reveals we lack	**Coordination Capacity**

THE INSIGHT

GEN 6 reveals what was always true: centralized authority was never the answer. Every previous generation assumed someone else would solve it. That assumption was always flawed.

THE CHALLENGE

Not seeking new authorities to follow, but building distributed capacity to function:

The Challenge Ahead

Distributed

verification

— communities that can check for themselves

Local

deliberation

— spaces for collective sensemaking

Shared

coordination

— protocols to navigate uncertainty together

Disinformation adapts. Consequences evolve. Paradigms shift. **No one is coming to save us.**

About DROG

Building the most successful European-centered community for independent interventions against disinformation.

What We Do

DROG Group unites Practitioners, Scientists, Donors, Artists, and Creative Techs to counter information manipulation. We develop science-based interventions grounded in rigorous academic research.

The DROG DIM

The Disinformation Intervention Model maps generations of counter-disinformation interventions, each responding to different challenges and paradigms, from strategic communication to interactivist approaches.

Born at DROG

Bad News

Award-winning game teaching the six degrees of manipulation

15M+ players

Go Viral!

COVID-19 misinformation game with Cambridge University

2M+ players

Harmony Square

Game about political manipulation and polarization

500K+ players

30M+	20+	4+
citizens reached	projects funded	spin-outs raised

Cambridge University · European Commission · NATO StratCom · SAUFEX

drog.group

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