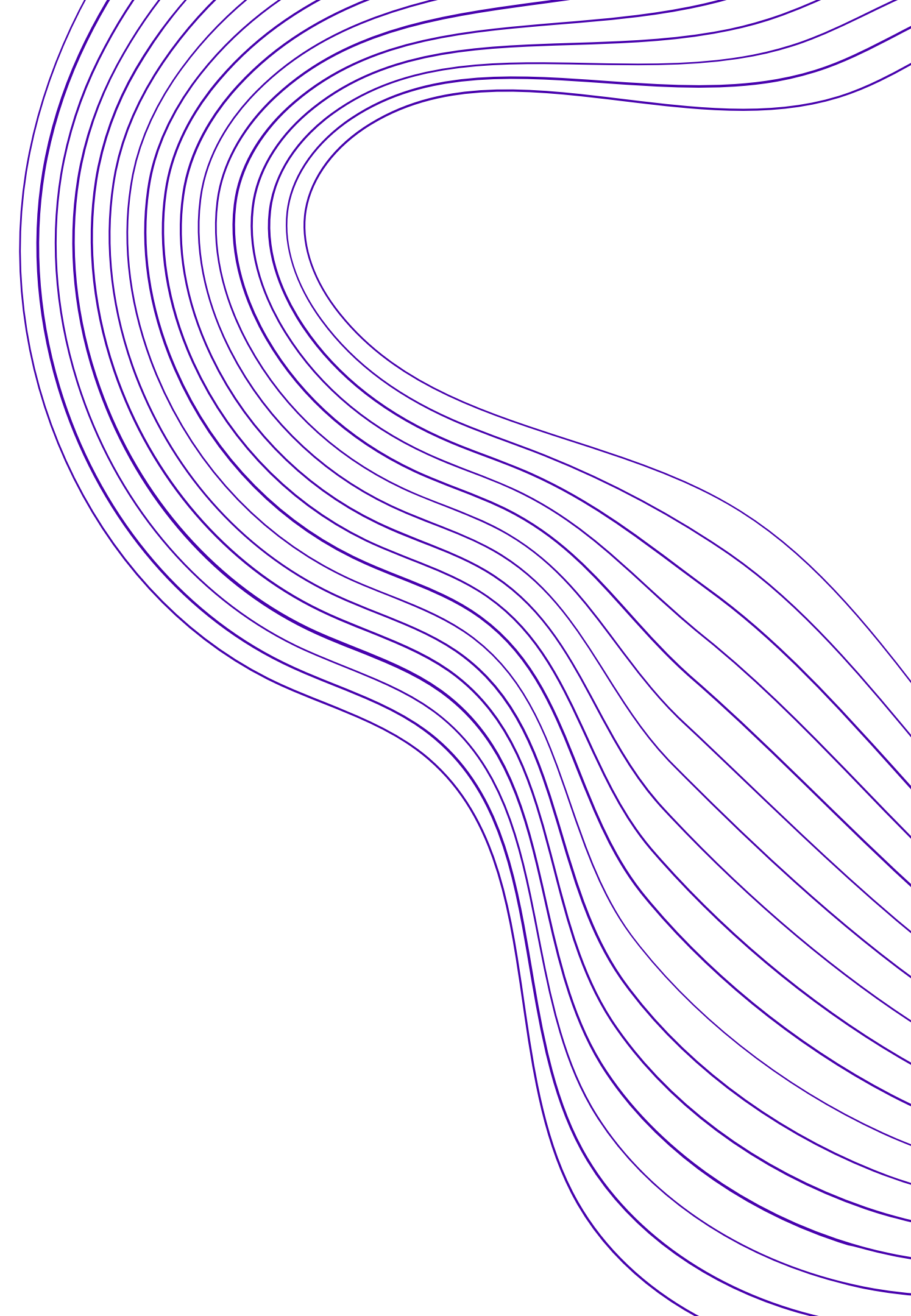YVONNE M. EADON | IS 213

misinformation & disinformation

Outline

- Terms
- A brief history
- Factors in the spread of problematic information
- Solutions to the spread of problematic information
- Conclusion: gaps in research

Terms

Misinformation

"...deceptive messages that may cause harm without the disseminators' knowledge" (Freelon and Wells 2020)

Disinformation

"...all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm for profit" (EU HLEG Final Report on Fake News and Online Disinformation, 2018).

Fake News

"...news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017, 213).

Fake news: a brief history

1885: A series of articles is published in *The Sun*, now referred to as "The Great Moon Hoax," which purported to describe life on the moon.

early 1900s: Decades of yellow journalism and concomitant false stories result in the development of journalistic ethics and professional standards of neutrality, truthfulness, and trustworthiness (McQueen 2018, 28).

2016: Donald Trump is elected President of the United States, on the heels of a surge in fake news stories spread across the Internet using social media sites like Twitter and Facebook.

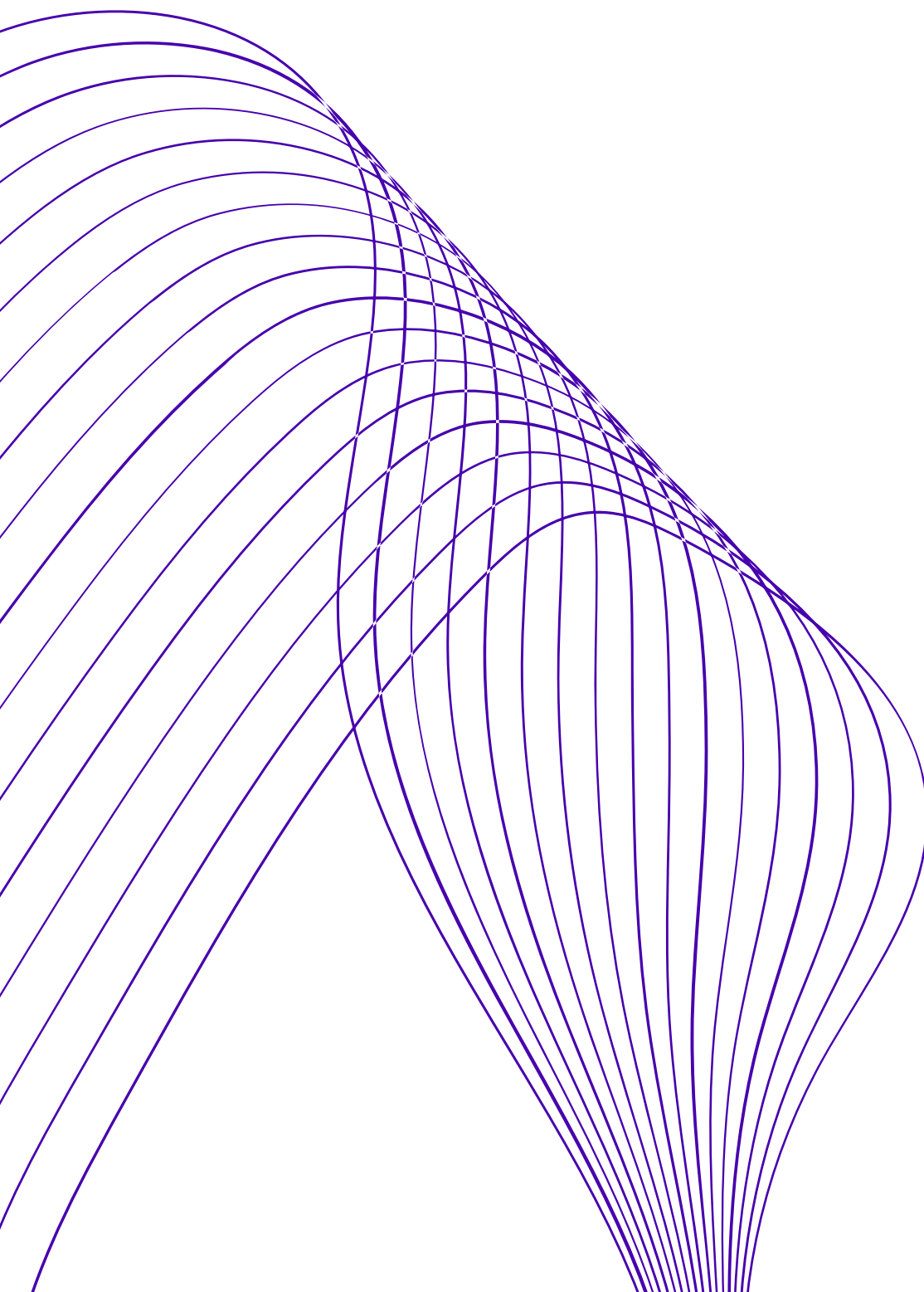A lithograph printed in *The Sun*, showing the flora and fauna of the moon

Factors in the spread of misinformation: social media

Social media/ the Internet/ technology in general is decidedly not the sole *cause* of radicalization or the spread of problematic information.

Social media systems are shaped by societal and cultural norms, as well as politics (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018, 8). Yet, they do have a role in:

- creating an environment of information overload, in which users are unable to meaningfully differentiate between credible and non-credible resources (Halpern et. al, 218), or even between native advertisements and news stories (Freelon and Wells, 3).
- Creating and sustaining algorithmic echo chambers and filter bubbles, in which users are rarely, if ever, exposed to dissenting opinions (Halpern et. al 218, Nguyen 2018)

Factors in the spread of misinformation: ideology & trust

Several scholars suggest that conservatives are much more susceptible to fake news than liberals are (Halpern et. al 229).
- Benkler, Faris and Roberts argue that "...the right-wing media ecosystem itself [is] the primary culprit in sowing confusion and distrust in the broader American media ecosystem."

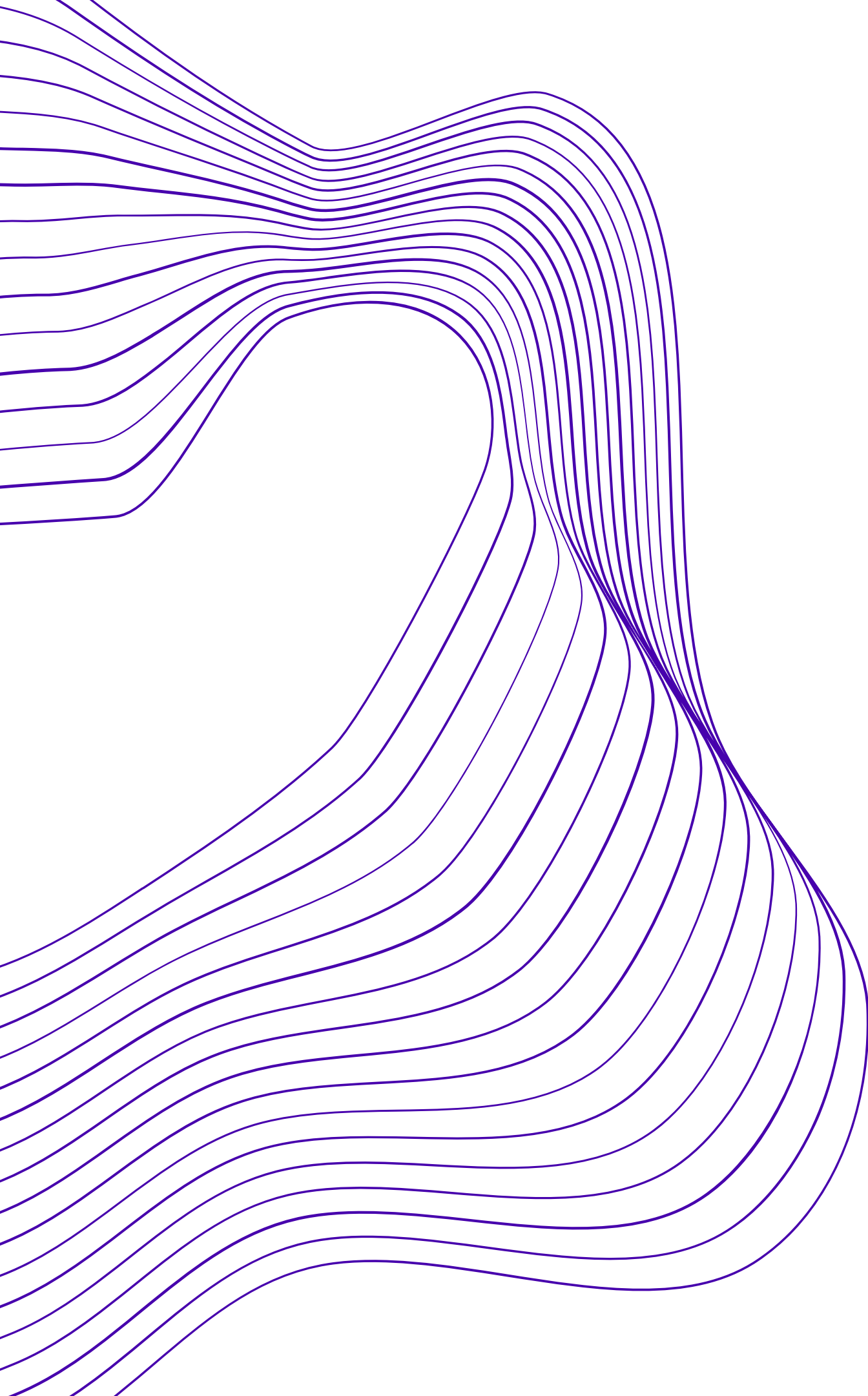Trust in institutions is waning in general, but especially when it comes to news organizations:

- In the U.S., trust in news media has been steadily falling since the 1970s (Freelon & Wells 2020, 2).
- "Traditional news media are becoming indistinguishable from other forms of news dissemination, collectively called alternative news media, whose rigor is difficult to verify" (Halpern et. al, 220).

Solutions for the spread of misinformation: fact checking

3rd party fact checking--**effective?**
- Nyhan and Reifler (2010) found that corrective information in news reports had no effect on the misperceptions of ideological subgroups, and in some cases *strengthened* these misperceptions.
- "Unlike people who are totally uninformed about a topic, misinformed individuals are more likely to share inaccurate information on SNS, especially when they are politically active" (Halpern et. al, 2019).
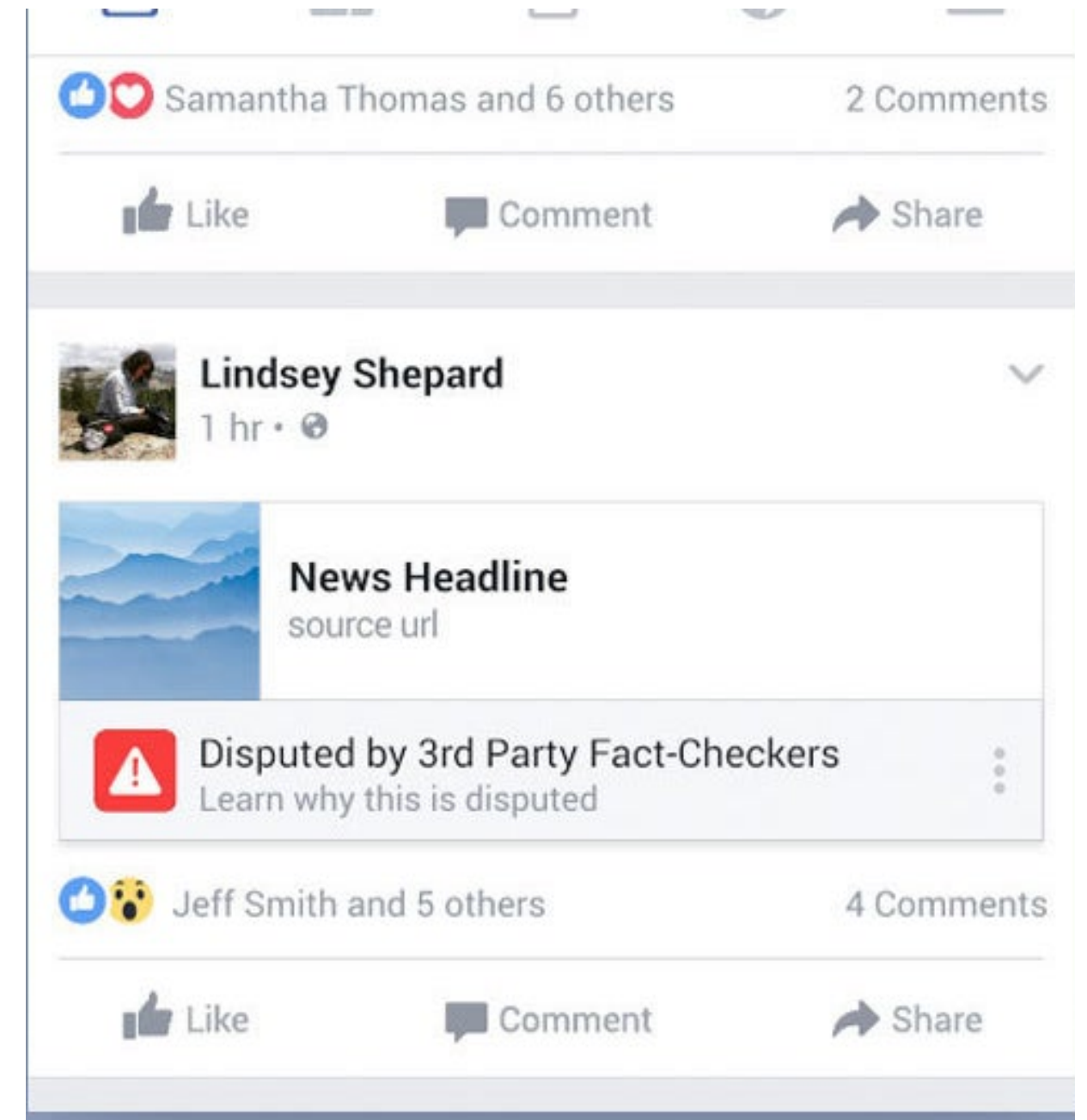
Solutions for the spread of misinformation: Critical information literacy

Librarians "...can play a role of information educators, helping to empower their users, not just to access information but *to understand which information to trust*" (Agosto 2018, 8).

Critical information literacy: a mental framework for encountering and understanding information that is critical and evaluative, recognizing the underlying power structures embedded within a given information environment or context.

Conclusion: gaps in research & some questions

- The affective & cognitive features of misperceivers & sharers of misinformation

- Testing the effectiveness of approaches to combatting the spread of misinformation: how effective is critical information literacy vs. fact checking, vs. a different approach entirely?

- Thinking through the question of *who gets to be the arbiter of truth* (Alcott and Gentzkow 2020)
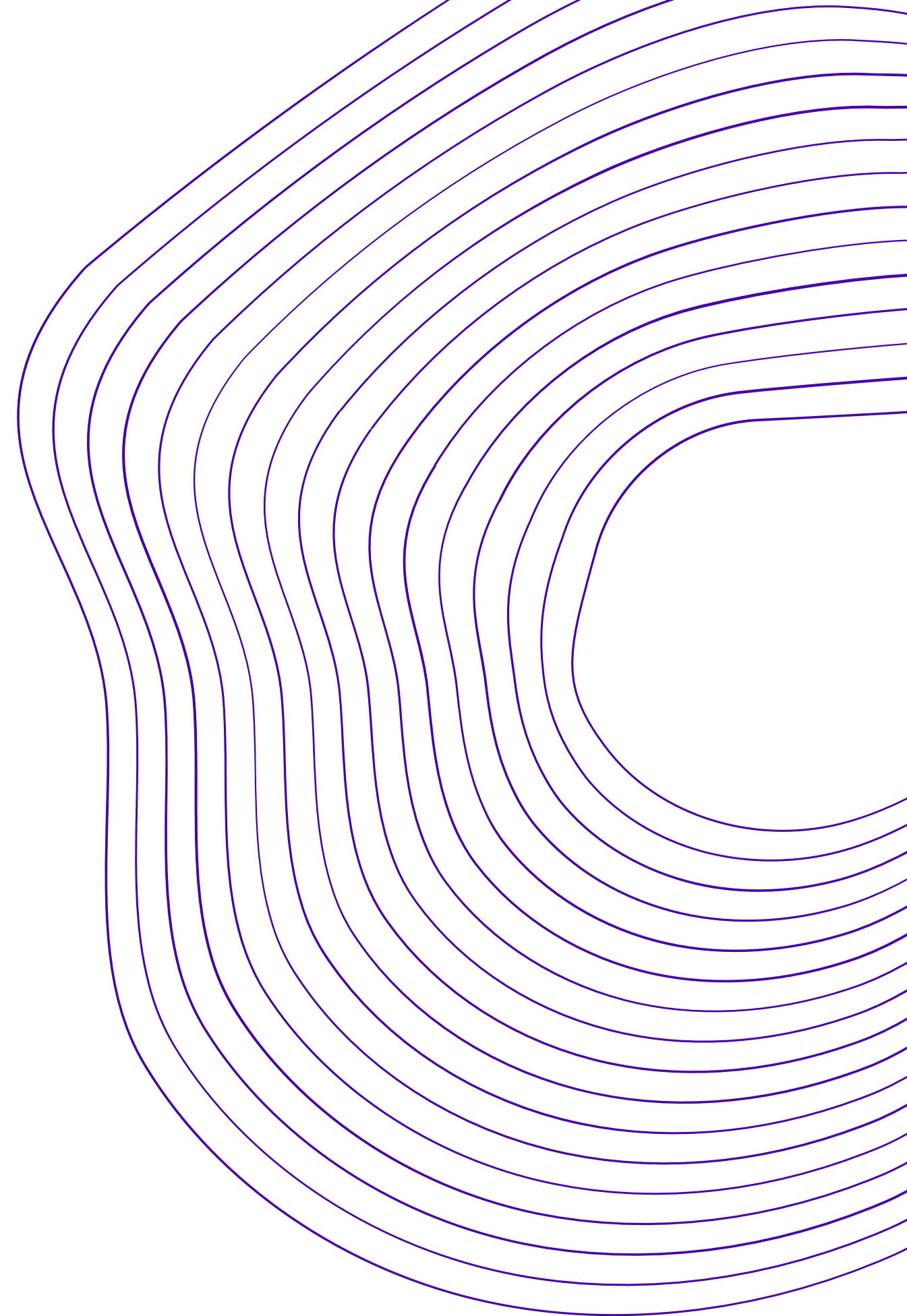
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