LOWE INSIGHTS | NASHAY LOWE, PHD | FIELD NOTES | APRIL 2026

Misinformation: When Reality and Narrative Diverge

In 2016, I was in Havana during the public mourning period following the death of Fidel Castro. I remember standing in the main plaza as the funeral observances unfolded. There were hundreds of people gathered. The atmosphere was heavy, but not chaotic. People stood closely together, many in silence, some visibly emotional. It was a moment marked more by stillness than movement.

While I was there, I received a message from a friend in the United States asking if I was safe. She had just seen a video circulating online showing what appeared to be riots in the same plaza—crowds in unrest, disorder in the streets, a very different reality than the one I was physically standing in.

I watched the clip she sent while looking up at the actual scene in front of me. They did not match. The video depicted disruption. The plaza held grief. The clip suggested instability. The moment I was in reflected something far more contained and somber. What she had received—and understandably believed—was not a live reflection of events, but repurposed footage being circulated as current.

> It was my first time experiencing, in real time, the dissonance between what is happening and what is being said to be happening.

What stood out was not simply that the information was incorrect. It was how easily it traveled—and how believable it felt to someone not present. For those outside of that context, there was no immediate way to verify what was true. The video provided visual "evidence." It carried urgency. It moved quickly. And without proximity, it held.

The Pattern Beneath the Moment

This moment reflects a broader pattern studied within communication and media research: information does not move based solely on accuracy. It moves based on emotional resonance, perceived credibility, and timing.

In high-uncertainty environments—especially during political transitions or public events—people seek clarity. When verified information is limited or delayed, unverified content often fills that gap.

Misinformation

Inaccurate information shared *without* intent to mislead. The person sharing it may genuinely believe it to be true.

Disinformation

Deliberately constructed or repurposed content *designed* to shape perception. Intent to mislead is present from the outset.

> The distinction matters in intent. The impact, however, can look very similar.

In this case, older footage was recirculated and reframed to align with a particular narrative. Removed from its original context, it became something else entirely.

When Presence and Perception Split

What made this moment particularly instructive was the split between lived reality and mediated reality. I was standing in one version of events. My friend was receiving another. Neither of us was irrational in our interpretation. We were working with the information available to us. But the gap between those two realities was shaped not by distance alone—but by how information was curated, framed, and distributed.



Lived Reality

Direct, sensory experience of an event—unfiltered, contextual, and grounded in presence.



Mediated Reality

A version of events shaped by curation, framing, and distribution—often stripped of original context.



The Gap

The space between lived and mediated reality where misinformation and disinformation take hold and travel.

Organizational Translation

While this experience was grounded in a geopolitical moment, the pattern extends into everyday organizational life. In teams and institutions, people often operate from different versions of the same situation. The mechanics are strikingly similar: information moves faster than verification, context is frequently stripped or reordered, and narratives form before full understanding is available.

Decisions interpreted differently across departments

The same announcement lands differently depending on what a team already believes, fears, or expects.

Information shared selectively or out of sequence

Partial context creates interpretive gaps that individuals fill with prior experience or assumption.

Narratives form before full context is available

Speed of communication routinely outpaces the depth of understanding needed to respond well.

Past events reshaped to frame current understanding

Organizational history is continuously reinterpreted, often in ways that reinforce existing divisions.

Over time, these gaps can lead to misalignment, mistrust, and reactive decision-making. What is striking is how often people are responding not to reality itself, but to a version of it that has been filtered, accelerated, or reframed.

Pausing the Pattern

Moments like this invite a simple but often overlooked pause:

> **What am I reacting to—verified reality, or a version of it?**

This question does not require skepticism of everything. It calls for awareness of how quickly information can move ahead of confirmation. The discipline is not distrust—it is deliberate discernment.

A Practical Shift

In both public and organizational contexts, recognizing the gap between reality and narrative is only the first step. What follows is a set of deliberate communication practices—not abstract ideals, but concrete shifts that can be applied in real time.

01

Slow the interpretation process

When information carries urgency but limited verification, resist the pull to respond immediately. Speed of receipt is not the same as certainty of fact.

02

Check for source and timing

Especially with visual content, ask: when was this created, by whom, and in what original context? Repurposed content rarely announces itself.

03

Distinguish firsthand knowledge from secondhand narrative

Clarity about what you witnessed versus what you were told creates a more accurate foundation for decisions and communication.

04

Create space for clarification before action

Design communication practices that build in pause points—moments where teams can surface uncertainty before conclusions harden.

05

Recognize how context is stripped and reassigned

In organizations as in media, information regularly moves across contexts it was never designed for. Naming this pattern makes it visible—and manageable.

These are not just media literacy skills. They are communication practices with direct application to how teams function, how trust is built, and how decisions get made.

Closing Reflection

That moment in the plaza stayed with me—not because of what was happening there, but because of what was happening elsewhere, at the same time, about that place. It revealed how quickly reality can be reshaped once it leaves the hands of those experiencing it. And how, in the absence of proximity, narrative often fills the space where certainty should be.

The question is not whether misinformation exists. It is how often we are asked to respond to it before we realize that is what it is.

> **Pause the pattern.** Choose one place this dynamic exists, examine what sustains it, and take a deliberate step to change it—by design.

If you're navigating this in your organization, you can learn more or take the first step by scheduling a consultation at **Lowe Insights**.