History of the Weaponization of Social Media

Misinformation Village | DEFCON 30
Gina Rosenthal, Founder
Digital Sunshine Solutions

About me

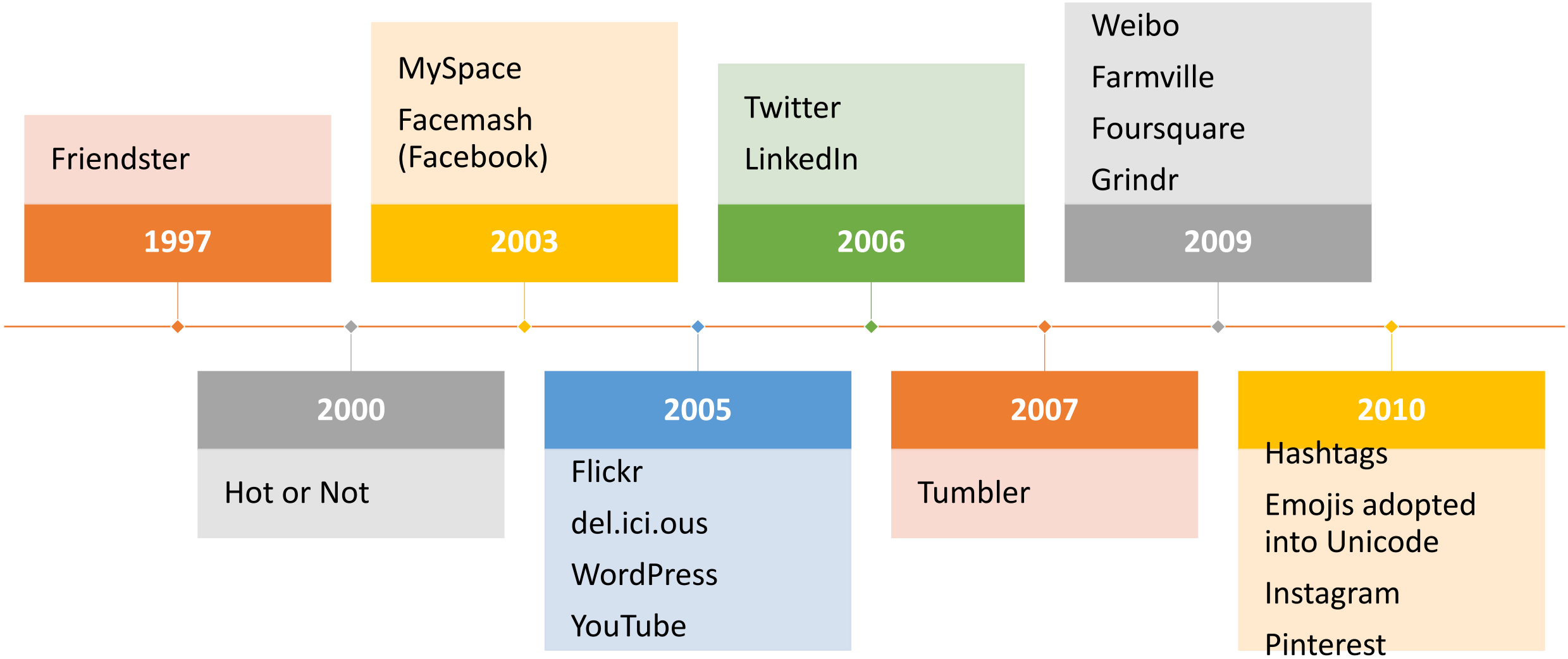
- 20+ years at tech vendors
- 10 years as a product marketer
- Established social media norms at Fortune 500 companies
- Founded a Product Marketing as a Service agency

Misinformation peddlers are 1st adopters of communication technology

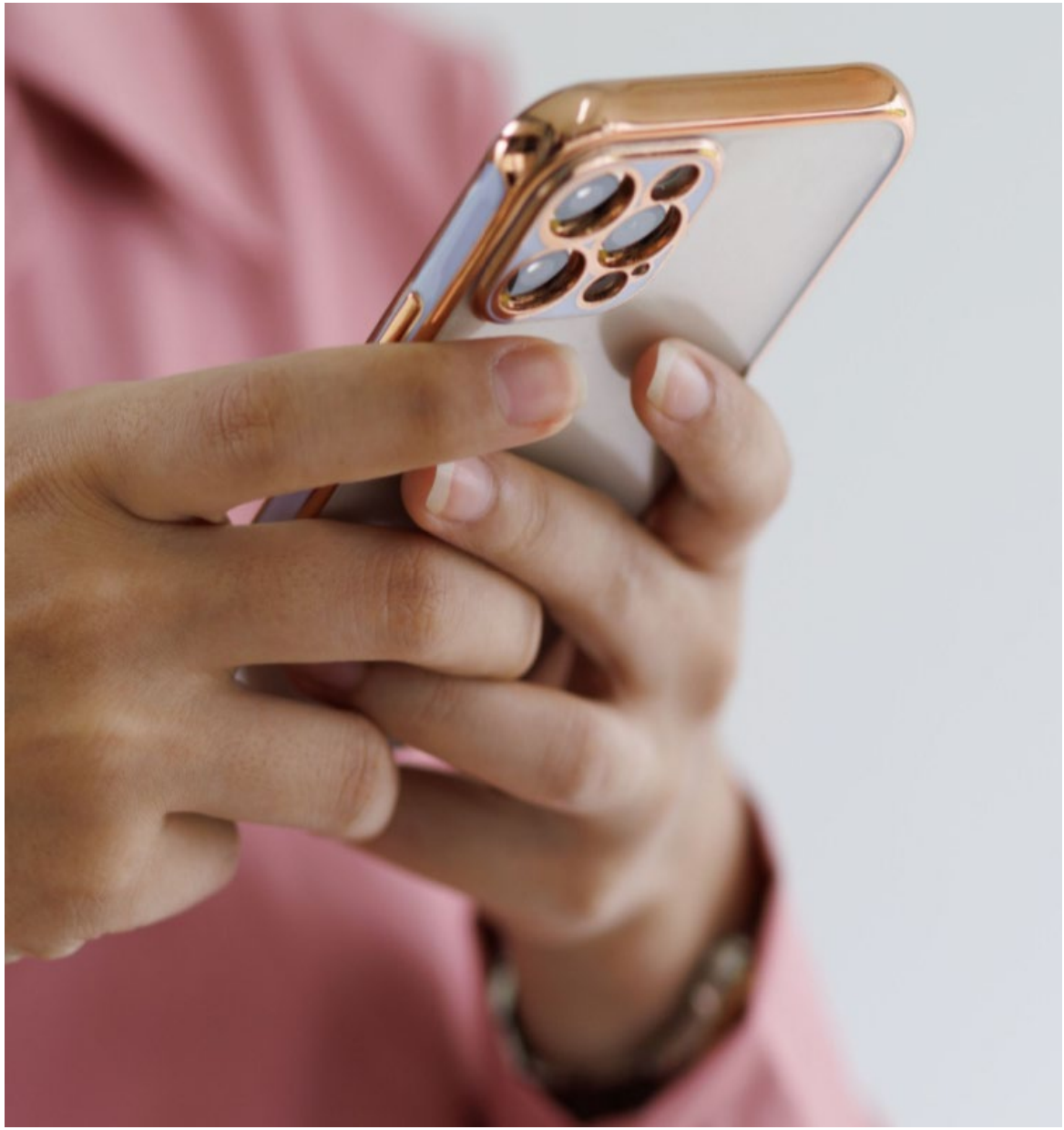
NEWSPAPERS	PRINTED PAMPHLETS	FILM	RADIO
• 1690: • 1st American colonial newspaper ran a fake story about France's Louis XIV	• 1755 • Religious leaders used pamphlets to blame God for punishing unfaithful with an earthquake that killed thousands.	• 1915: • Birth of a Nation presented a distorted view of American Reconstruction.	• 1938: • War of the Worlds – Orson Welles

Most recent communication innovation: social media

Social Media's first decade



Messaging was finally in the hands of the people!



Including misinformation brokers

Sherrod's video

Shirley Sherrod addresses the Federation of Southern Cooperatives

Breitbart found his content

Culture shapes politics

Breitbart knew people wanted politics to be more like telenovelas.

He crafted social media campaigns to tap into people’s emotions.

2012

- Breitbart died unexpectedly
- Steve Bannon took the helm of Breitbart News

Social Media's next ten years

2011

Snapchat

Google+

twitch

2015

Periscope

Discord

2016

Facebook Live

Instagram Stories

2017

TikTok

Social medias sites became easier to use

There’s no free lunch

How marketers build a campaign

- Identify the audience
- Build personas that describe the audience
- Create compelling content
- Design social media ads that will motivate the audience
- Use social media platform grids to get the ads to your audience

How marketers build a campaign

Identify the audience

Who is likely to come to this talk?

Build personas that describe the audience

Built from attributes in other speakers' profiles

Locate compelling content

Misinfocon website

Design social media ads that will motivate the audience

Your audience size will vary depending on the language selected here. English may be selected as the default language, even in areas where a local language is available, to reach all users in the region.

Who is your target audience?

Include people who have **ANY** of the following attributes:

Member Skills

Information Warfare, Source Intelligence, Intelligence Analysis, Information Security, Media Literacy

AND also have **ANY** of the following attributes:

Member Groups

BlackHat/Defcon 2022, BlackHat & DEFCON 2022, Fighting Disinformation & Misinformation: Research, Jobs, Discussion

OR Fields of Study

Communication and Media Studies, Mass Communication/Media Studies

Information Technology	24%
Business Development	13%
Education	11%
Engineering	11%
Operations	10%

Hide segments

4 days **(8/11/2022 - 8/14/2022)**

Total spend
$84.00 - $329.00

Total impressions
8,300 - 34,000

CTR
0.90% - 1.4%

Total engagements **Key Result**

Use social media platform grids to get the ads to your audience

Campaign Name	Status	Spent	Key Results	Cost Per Result	Impressions	Clicks	Average CTR	Bid	Average CPM	Average CPC	Co
1 campaign	-	$171.32	-	-	12,449	98	0.79%	-	$13.76	$1.75	0
Engagement - Aug 10, 2022 ID: 188902346 · Sponsored Content	Active Running	$171.32	98 *Engagements*	$1.75	12,449	98	0.79%	Maximum Delivery	$13.76	$1.75	0

Demographics for 1 ad

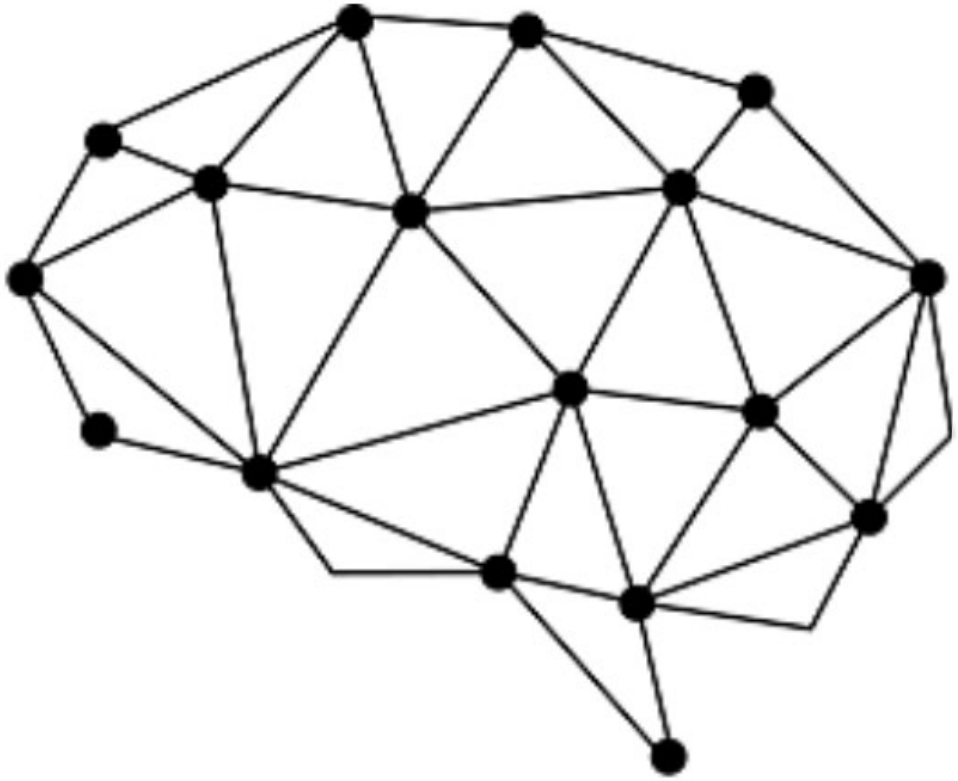
View: **Demographics** Display: **Job function** Time range: **8/10/2022 - 8/12/2022**

Attributes below reporting minimum will not be reported to protect user privacy.

Name	Impressions	Clicks	Average CTR
Information Technology	290 (2.33%)	4 (4.08%)	1.38%
Research	201 (1.61%)	Below reporting minimum	-
Business Development	192 (1.54%)	7 (7.14%)	3.65%
Media and Communication	158 (1.27%)	5 (5.1%)	3.16%
Education	127 (1.02%)	6 (6.12%)	4.72%
Arts and Design	112 (0.9%)	7 (7.14%)	6.25%
Operations	109 (0.87%)	Below reporting minimum	-
Engineering	100 (0.8%)	Below reporting minimum	-
Community and Social Services	98 (0.79%)	Below reporting minimum	-
Marketing	92 (0.74%)	7 (7.14%)	7.61%

Results ($200 later)

You are the product



Cambridg
Analytica

Misinformation brokers use the same template

Bannon co-founds Cambridge Analytica

2013

CA harvested Facebook profile info

2015

Bannon becomes Trump's campaign manager

2016

2016 election misinfo campaign

Identify the audience	People who could be persuaded not to vote Democratic
Build personas that describe the audience	Deterrence – people who won't vote if they can't support a candidate
Create compelling content	Negative attack ads
Design social media ads that will motivate the audience	Videos portraying Democratic nominee as racist
Use social media platform grids to get the ads to your audience	Ran on YouTube and Facebook

2 Million black voters who came out for Obama didn’t vote

Results (unknown how much of $44M)

What can we do?

misinformation mongers will always co-opt new communication platforms

Digital Literacy is the only solution

If something in your stream makes you feel like this…

It was probably designed to elicit an emotional reaction.

How misinformation campaigns are built

Identify the audience	Are you the audience?
Build personas that describe the audience	Why are you being targeted?
Create compelling content	Why was the content so effective?
Design social media ads that will motivate the audience	What is the ad trying to get you to do?
Use social media platform grids to get the ads to your audience	How is the platform being used to spread the message

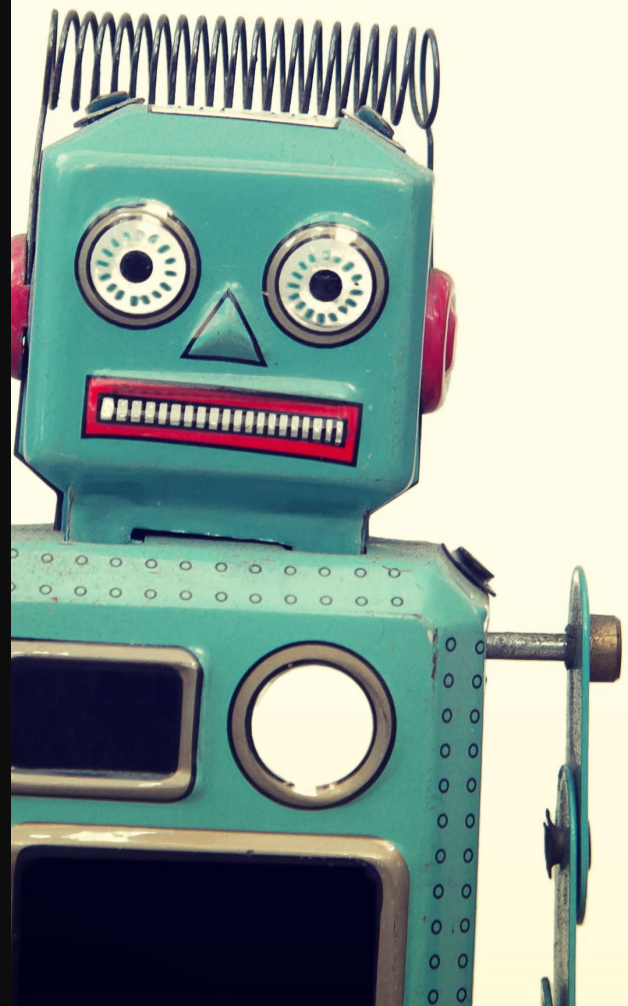
Making us mad = good campaign

- Sherry Sherrod's doctored video elicited an emotional response from Breitbart's targeted audience
- Black voters had an emotional response to negative ads that targeted them

More tips

Who are you communicating with

- Evaluate users
  - is it a person?
  - Someone working a campaign?
  - A bot?
- Techniques:
  - How old is the account?
  - Do they post the same messages/responses to everyone



Hack the messaging.

- Google message.
- Does it show up word-for-word from other users?
- Does it show up word-for-word in other content?

“The Democrats don’t matter.

The real opposition is the media.

And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit.”

- Steve Bannon

Humans are not built for 24-hour news cycles

- Digital literacy can help break the cycle.
- Take breaks from the news and social media.
- Connect locally, with your family, and your friends to discuss news of the day.

Thank you

Connect with me!

Twitter/LinkedIn:
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