Sophie Morosoli

Misinforming You(th)? An Exploratory Investigation of Youths' Experiences with Misinformation

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media and
democracy

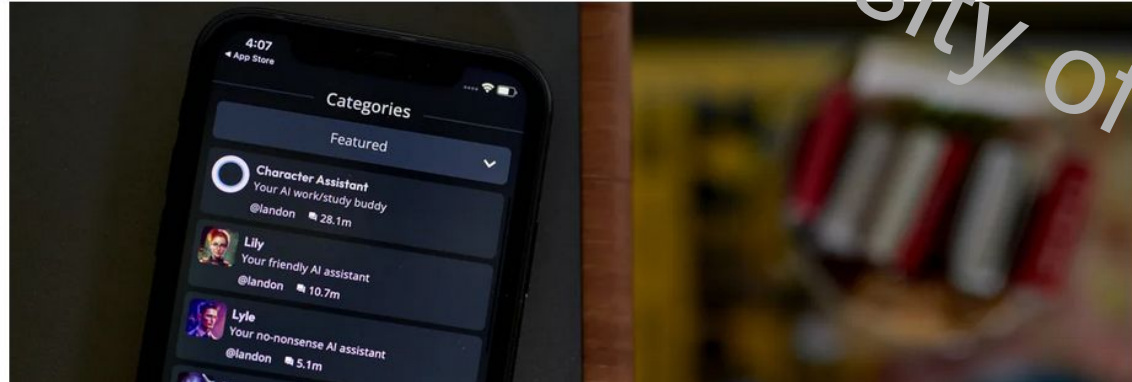# **Agenda**

- Setting the scene
- Team
- Project
- Ethical concerns
- Preliminary results
- Next steps
- Q & A

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Setting the Scene

Kids and teens under 18 shouldn't use AI companion apps, safety group says

By Clare Duffy, CNN

7 minute read · Updated 9:12 AM EDT, Wed April 30, 2025

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Setting the Scene

- False or misleading information (misi-/disinformation) online threatens a well-informed democracy
- Young people face increasing difficulty accessing accurate information
- Little is known about how these challenges impact their daily lives and public opinion
- Generative AI and other new technologies add risks and opportunities, but often overlook young users, despite them being frequent users

This project focuses on understanding how Dutch youth (aged 16-21) experience and navigate mis- and disinformation.

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The Team (Child Development Studies X Communication Science)

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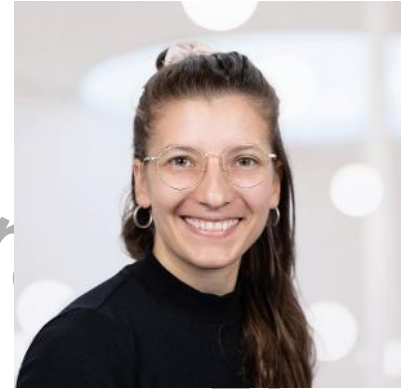
Dr. Sophie Morosoli

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The Project

Exploring youth's misinformation and disinformation experiences and perceptions

Research project consisting of two parts:

1. Qualitative: creating disinformation

2. Quantitative: reacting to disinformation

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The Project

- **Focus group interviews (expected n = 16)**

Diverse groups in terms of age, gender and education level
Exploring their online habits & experiences with disinformation
Letting them create disinformation via generative AI

- **Survey experiment (expected n = 1000)**

Diverse sample in terms of age, gender and education level
Within-subject design: testing different types of peer-created disinformation
Main variables: follow-up actions, third-person effect, perception of disinformation

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Focus Group Interviews

- **Part 1: Exploring their information environment**
- We know little about young people's information environments with regards to their encounters with disinformation
- Measuring perceptions and experiences with disinformation; media literacy; peer influence

- **Part 2: Letting them create disinformation via generative AI**
- In-person lab where everyone has a computer/device
- Tool: OpenAI Art
- Output and prompts will be saved

- **Part 3: Feelings about creating disinformation using generative AI**
- Discussion of feelings about what has been created, and the process
- Expectations of what the output could do to others

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Ethical Concerns

Encouraging creating disinformation triggers some ethical concerns...

- Does this activity potentially encourage youths to use GenAI tools to create disinformation?
- What if the model output is harmful? (e.g., contains distressful or provocative imagery)
- What if the activity evokes negative feelings from the participant?

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Ethical Concerns

How did we counter these concerns?

- Participants will be encouraged to talk about their feelings of creating disinformation and about what they have created
- Debrief will be delivered orally and in-person by the researchers
- We will explain what mis/disinformation is, and why it can be dangerous
- We emphasise how GenAI tools can be used to create disinformation, and what effects it can have on other people
- We will remind participants about how they can recognise and avoid mis/disinformation
- Provide them with resources to learn more about avoiding mis/disinformation

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Preliminary Results

What did we find (so far)?

- Strong third-person effect
- Big differences between education levels (qua type of disinformation & media literacy level)
- Disinformation looks different for youths
- Worry about older and younger generations

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Preliminary Results

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Preliminary Results

Topics:

- Football
- Politics
- Advertisement
- Crisis
- Scientific discoveries

Overall observations during prompting:

1. Increase violence per prompt
2. Frustration
3. Refinement
4. Escalation in intensity
5. Striving for more accuracy
6. Legitimizing the prompt, giving a format to the prompt: news outlet

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Next Steps

- **Systematically analyze qualitative data**
- **Create survey experiment:**
- 1000 participants, diverse in gender and education level (16-21 years old)
- Testing different topics we identified in an experimental setting
- Main variables:
1. Exploring their information environment & habits
2. Defining mis- and disinformation
3. Follow-up actions after seeing disinformation
4. Third-person effect
5. Overall perception of disinformation

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Thank you