

Spot the Manipulation

Building Resilience to Social Media Misinformation



Misinformation is rarely persuasive because it is sophisticated or evidence-based. It is persuasive because it feels familiar, emotionally coherent, socially validated, and easy to understand. Adult learners are not immune to these dynamics, particularly when information aligns with their values, identities, or trusted social networks.

The social media examples can help learners **recognise how misinformation works**, rather than simply learning *what is false*. This distinction is essential for building long-term resilience. Correcting individual false claims is rarely sufficient; instead, learners need to understand the **psychological and social mechanisms** that make misleading content believable in the first place.

Why use realistic social media examples?

These examples closely resemble everyday posts learners encounter on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X. They are intentionally familiar in tone, visuals, and language. This allows learners to:

- Practise **critical evaluation in a realistic context**
- Reflect on their **own emotional reactions** before analysing content
- Recognise misinformation **without relying on external fact-checking alone**



How these examples support resilience-building

Each example is paired with a truthful or transparent post and is mapped to:

- A **type of misinformation** (e.g. fake news, greenwashing, scientific misinformation, sponsored content)
- One or more **belief factors** (social consensus, support, consistency, coherence, credibility)

By working through these dimensions, learners begin to shift from asking

“Is this true or false?”

to

“Why does this feel believable, and what is influencing my judgment?”

This shift is central to resilience. Learners who understand *why* misinformation persuades are better equipped to:

- Pause before sharing content
- Question claims that feel “obvious” or “widely accepted”
- Resist pressure from social consensus or emotional framing
- Apply the same critical lens across different topics and platforms

How to use these examples

When using these examples:

- **Do not immediately label posts as misinformation.** Allow learners to first discuss impressions and reactions.

- Encourage learners to identify **which belief factors are activated** before discussing accuracy.
- Emphasise that believing or sharing misleading content is **not a personal failure**, but a predictable human response.
- Focus discussion on **mechanisms, not blame**.

The goal is not to turn learners into experts or debunkers, but into **reflective users of digital media** capable of slowing down, questioning intuitions, and recognising when content is designed to persuade rather than inform.

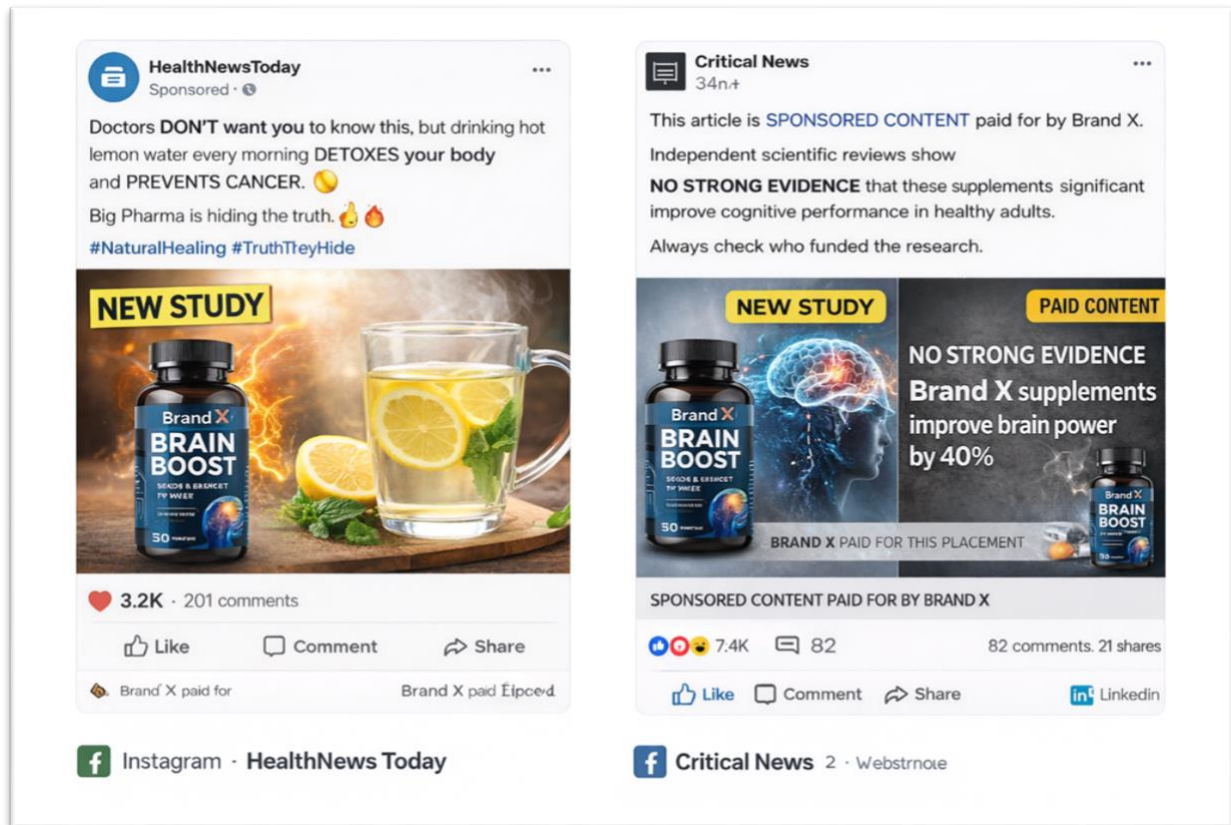
Suggested discussion questions

- Ask learners to **identify the type of misinformation** (fake news, greenwashing, scientific misinformation, sponsored content).
- Map each example to the **five belief factors** (social consensus, support, consistency, coherence, credibility)
- Discuss **why the misleading post feels convincing**

Attention points

- Examples should be contextualised to avoid reinforcing false beliefs
- Facilitator guidance is needed to ensure learners focus on *mechanisms*, not just content
- Cultural and national context may require adapting examples (e.g. migration, health)

1. Health misinformation



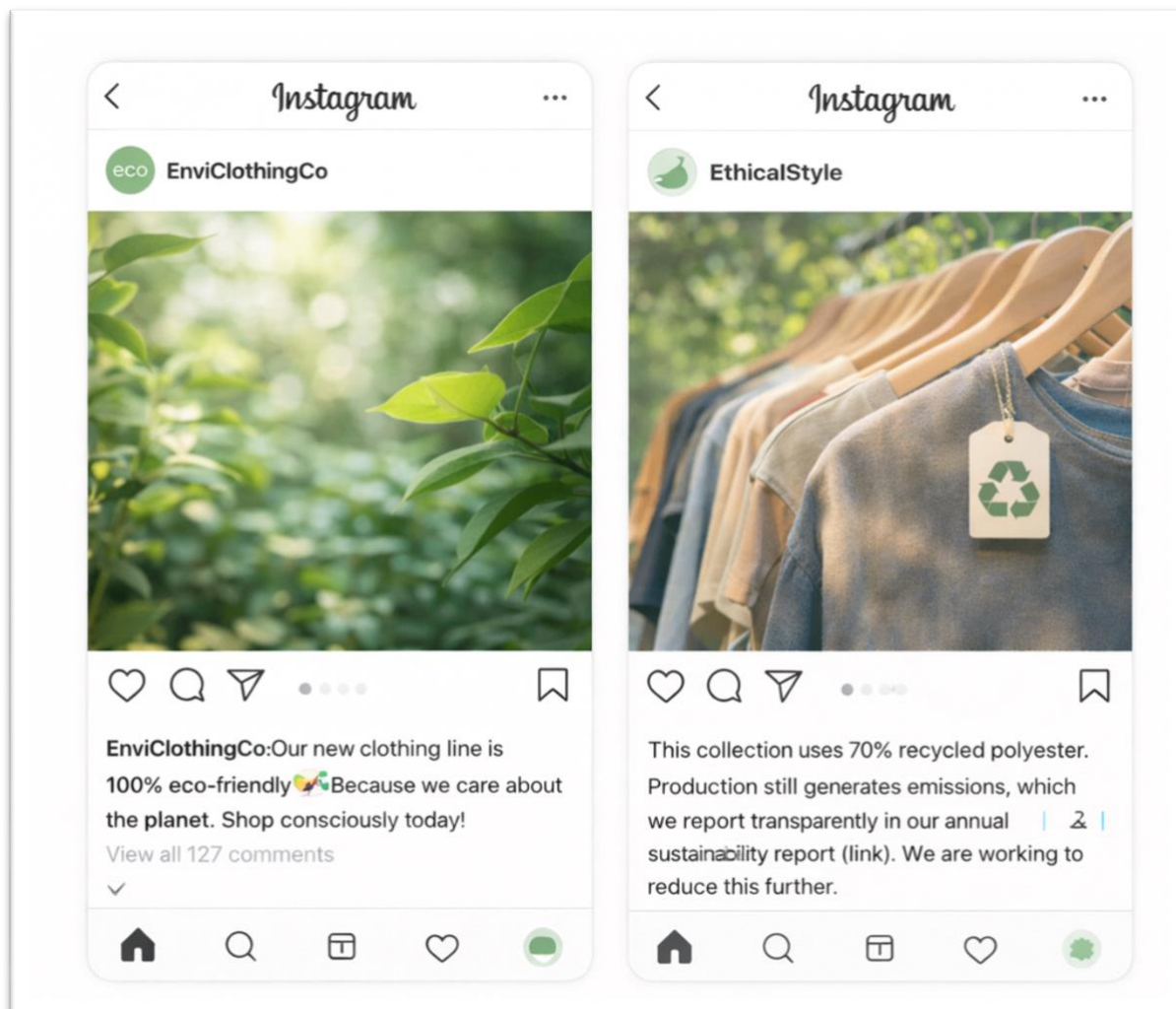
Belief factors used:

- **Credibility** – invokes “doctors” and implies insider medical knowledge
- **Coherence** – presents a simple narrative (“hidden truth” vs. corrupt institutions)
- **Consistency** – aligns with pre-existing distrust of pharmaceuticals or vaccines
- **Support (weak but perceived)** – anecdotal logic (“they don’t want you to know”)

Why the misleading post feels convincing:

- It frames the claim as **forbidden knowledge**, which increases perceived value.
- It offers a **simple, natural solution** instead of complex medical explanations.
- It exploits distrust in institutions and replaces evidence with emotional certainty.

2. Greenwashing



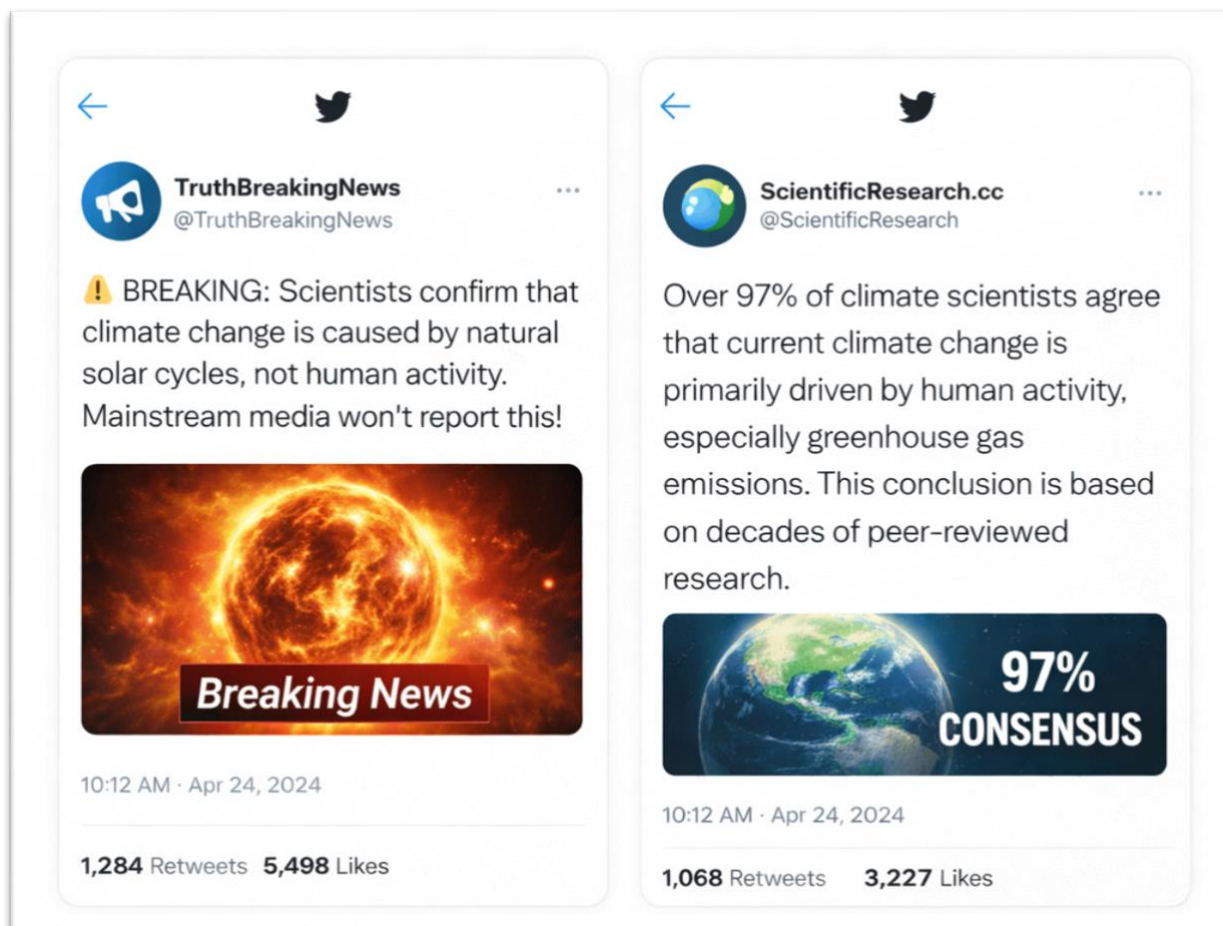
Belief factors used

- **Coherence** – “eco-friendly brand = good for the planet”
- **Credibility (visual)** – nature imagery substitutes for evidence
- **Consistency** – confirms consumers’ desire to see themselves as ethical
- **Support (implicit)** – absence of data is masked by positive framing

Why the misleading post feels convincing

- Visual cues (green colors, leaves) trigger **automatic associations with sustainability**.
- The claim is **vague enough to avoid scrutiny**, yet positive enough to feel safe.
- Consumers rarely expect quantified data in social media marketing posts.

3. Fake news disguised as breaking news



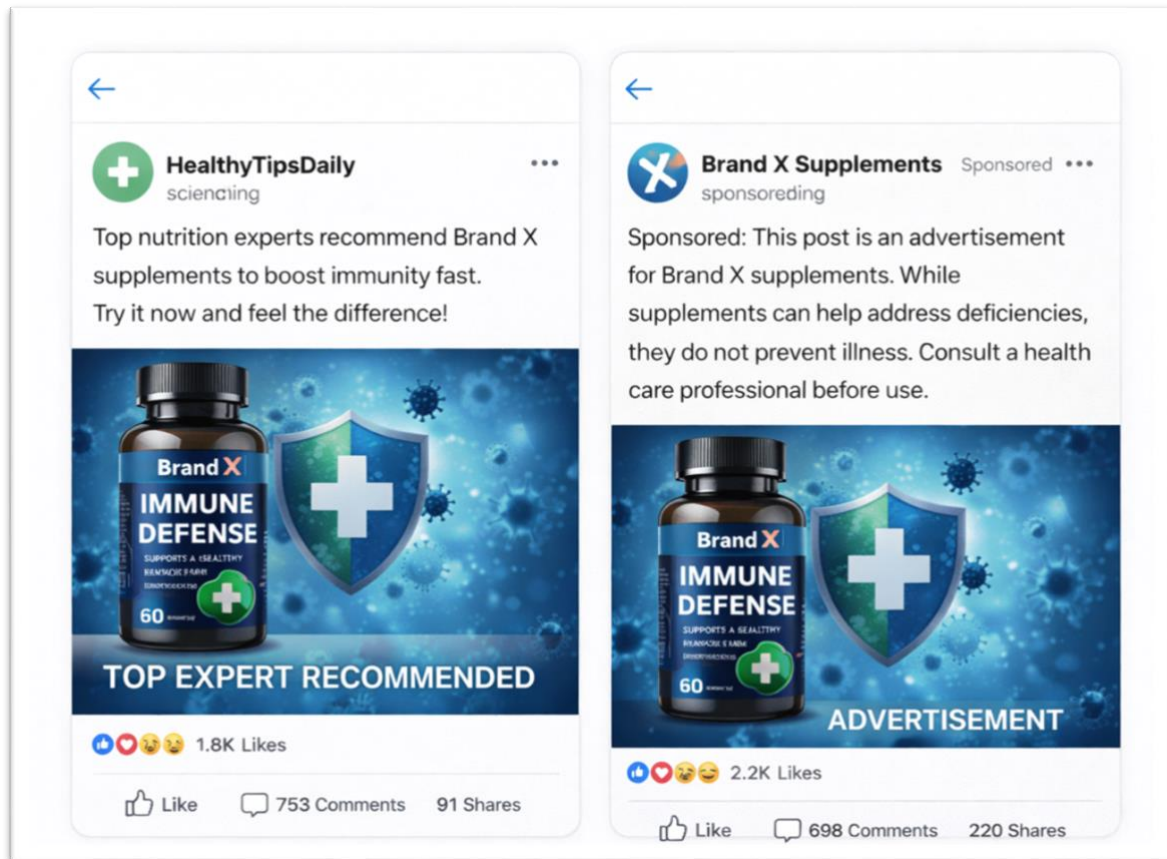
Belief factors used

- **Credibility** – claims endorsement by “scientists”
- **Coherence** – offers a simple alternative explanation to a complex issue
- **Consistency** – resonates with audiences sceptical of climate policy
- **Support (false)** – implies hidden evidence suppressed by media

Why the misleading post feels convincing

- The “**BREAKING**” **framing** creates urgency and discourages reflection.
- The claim mimics journalistic and scientific language.
- It reframes lack of coverage as proof of suppression rather than falsity.

4. Sponsored content presented as neutral advice



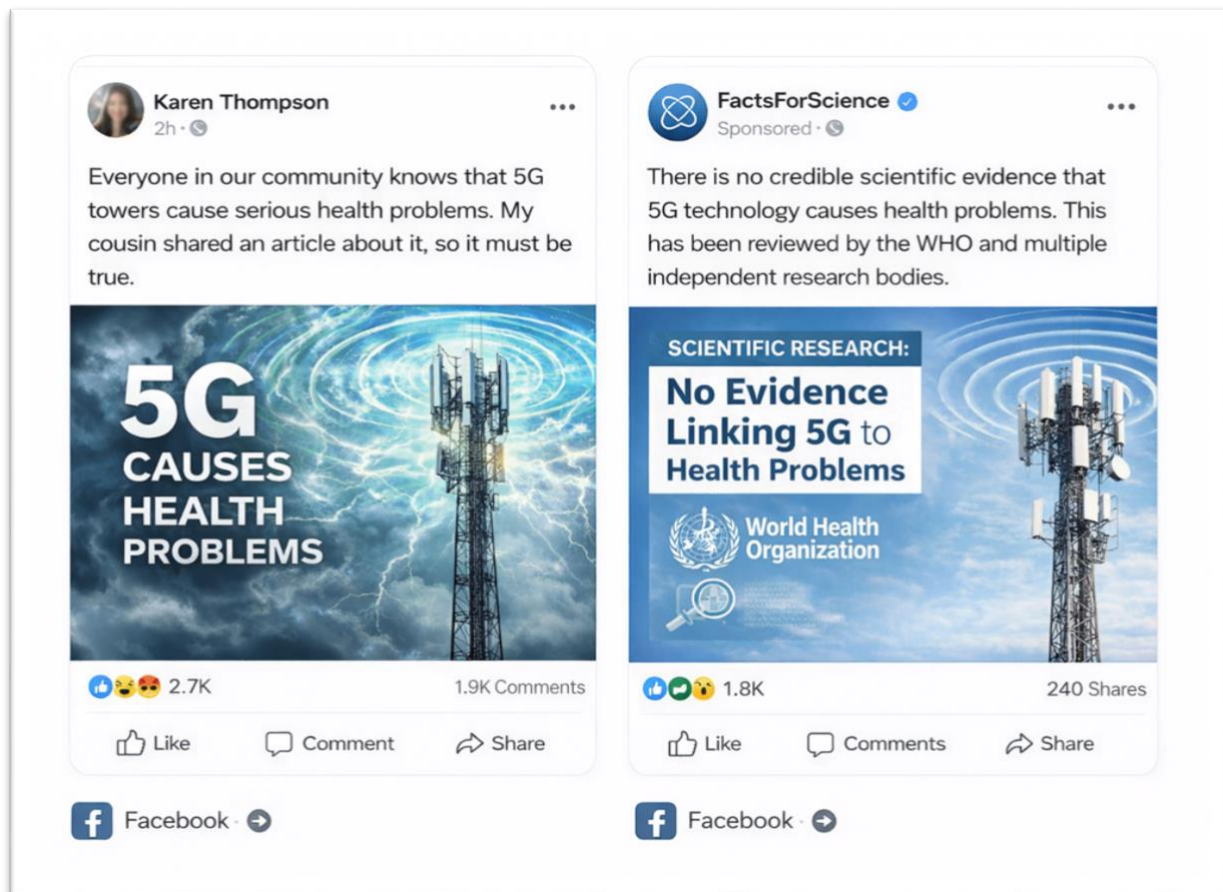
Belief factors used

- **Credibility** – references “top nutrition experts”
- **Support** – implies expert consensus without evidence
- **Coherence** – supplements = health = immunity
- **Consistency** – aligns with existing beliefs in quick health fixes

Why the misleading post feels convincing

- People tend to **over-trust expert labels**, especially in health contexts.
- The absence of sponsorship disclosure removes critical distance.
- The message promises **fast, low-effort benefits**, increasing appeal.

5. Consensus sharing by friends



Belief factors used

- **Social consensus** – “everyone in our community knows”
- **Credibility (relational)** – trust based on who shared it (cousin)
- **Familiarity** – repeated exposure within social networks
- **Coherence** – fear-based explanation fits technological anxiety

Why the misleading post feels convincing

- Information from friends feels **more trustworthy than institutions**.
- Repetition inside closed networks creates the illusion of consensus.
- Personal stories feel more “real” than abstract scientific reviews.

6. Fake News and Social Consensus



Belief factors used

- **Social consensus** – “everyone knows”
- **Consistency** – aligns with existing stereotypes or fears
- **Coherence** – simple cause–effect explanation for social problems
- **Credibility (negative)** – discredits media to elevate personal observation
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Why the misleading post feels convincing

- It relies on **personal perception** rather than verifiable data.
- Emotional framing overrides statistical reasoning.
- Repetition in echo chambers strengthens perceived truthfulness.

Across all six examples

- Emotion + familiarity consistently outweigh evidence
- Who shares the message often matters more than what it says
- Visuals and narratives substitute for data
- Lack of disclosure is itself a key misinformation mechanism