FAIK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LIVING IN A WORLD OF DEEPFAKES, DISINFORMATION, AND AI-GENERATED DECEPTIONS

PERRY CARPENTER

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In memory of Kevin Mitnick
(August 6, 1963–July 16, 2023)

Who proved that understanding deception is the first step to mastering defense.

From digital trickster to cyber defender, your journey will forever remind us that curiosity and integrity can coexist.

May your curious spirit, infectious laugh, and passion to teach others live on.

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Foreword

I just stood in front of 1,500+ people and hacked Perry Carpenter live on stage.

Well, it was a controlled demonstration, and he knew it was coming—no real harm done. But the techniques? Those were 100 percent legit and work even better when the target is caught unaware.

Over the years, I've earned a bit of a reputation for showing how easy it is to hack people, especially high-profile folks. I've pulled similar hacks on CNN's Donie O'Sullivan, billionaire Jeffrey Katzenberg, *60 Minutes* correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi, and a bunch of other public folks. Every single time, I see the same reaction: jaws drop, eyes widen, and you can practically hear people thinking, "Am I that vulnerable?!"

As I walked the audience through each step—digging up open-source intelligence on Perry, cloning his voice (especially fun because of how uniquely Perry speaks), and crafting the super-personalized attack—I could see it hit them. There were audible gasps. This wasn't just some theoretical attack. It was like I'd

opened a window straight into a cyber criminal's brain, showcasing just how thin our digital and human-based defenses can be.

As a hacker (the friendly kind) and social engineering expert, I've spent years exploring the vulnerabilities in human neuroscience and technology that can be exploited by those with malicious intent. I've experienced firsthand how my well-crafted phishing email or convincing phone call can bypass even the most sophisticated security systems. In recent years, though, AI has emerged as a game-changer, which has scaled up social engineering capabilities.

The attacks AI can create now are mind-boggling. We're way past the point where most folks can tell the difference between what's real and what's machine-made. Photos, videos, voices, text—AI can fake it all. And it's not just some party trick. This has huge implications for personal relationships and even global politics—the very fabric of how humans trust each other!

Don't get me wrong; AI isn't all doom and gloom. AI has the potential to solve problems and make our lives better. But like any powerful tool, in the wrong hands...well, you see where I'm going.

The insights within this book arrive at a crucial moment, offering clarity as we approach major global events like the 2024 U.S. presidential election and witness the rollout of increasingly sophisticated AI tools for email, phone call, text message, and video-based attacks.

Perry goes beyond explaining threats. He breaks it all down into practical strategies. He shows us how our own human quirks can be used against us with AI-based trickery, and then he gives us the tools to fight back, offering concrete steps to protect ourselves and our communities.

This new era of AI-enhanced social engineering is the Wild West. After reading Perry's book, though, you'll have practical strategies to navigate the world of deepfakes and AI-based deception.

Whether you're a security pro, a business leader, or just someone concerned about AI's societal impact, this book serves as a guide for these times. Stay politely paranoid, folks.

Rachel Tobac
Friendly Hacker and CEO of SocialProof Security

Introduction: Riddle Me This, ChatGPT

Me: Riddle me this: How can you know what's real when anything and everything can be faked?

ChatGPT: It's a fascinating quandary, isn't it? The question touches on deep philosophical concerns as well as practical ones. In a world where technology can generate convincing illusions, we're reminded to question the authenticity of what we perceive. To discern what's real, we often rely on context, corroborating evidence, and critical thinking. It's a reminder to be vigilant, to seek truth amidst the illusions, and to value what's genuine. But before we dive deeper, let's clarify: are we speaking metaphorically, or is there something specific about reality you're questioning?

Me: Oh. I should have said. I'm writing a book on AI and how we are hurtling toward a world where we won't be able to tell the difference between what's real and what isn't. Which brings up another question...how can I best talk about a technology as transformative as AI without getting too technical?

I'll be honest, writing a book on AI is a daunting task given the frenzied pace of advancement and change. The pace isn't just rapid; it's exponential. Breakthroughs today may be old news tomorrow. In my lifetime, I've witnessed the birth and adoption of the Internet, the shift from landlines to cellular, and the transition from ultra-slow dial-up modems that sounded like screaming robots to cable and fiber-optic Internet services. I've seen the move from on-premise mainframes to cloud computing, the "iPhone moment" for mobile phones, and the demise of Blockbuster Video in favor of streaming services like Netflix. However, I've never seen advancement and adoption at the pace we've experienced with AI since the "ChatGPT moment" in November 2022.

That was the day the world realized that many things once dreamed of in science-fiction movies are either already here or possibly just around the corner. When it comes to those sci-fi movies, people can take their pick. Some see the benevolent human and computer interaction between Tony Stark and Jarvis or the helpful yet indifferent computer interactions in *Star Trek*. Others envision doomsday scenarios like those depicted in *Terminator* and *The Matrix*.

But, no matter who you talk to, everyone agrees that AI is changing everything. So, in a field that moves at such breakneck speed, capturing anything of lasting value is a challenge. How is it possible to write a book that won't be obsolete by the time it's sitting happily on a shelf in local bookstores?*

The key lies in focusing on the fundamental truths that underpin this new era—truths about the nature of human intelligence, of artificial intelligence, about the ways they work together, and the ways they clash. While specific technologies may change, these underlying principles remain constant.

Human intelligence is incredibly versatile. It's capable of learning, reasoning, and creating in ways still unmatched by machines. We humans have an innate ability to understand context, read

*Oh, by the way, I can assure you that books are much happier in your hands or on your nightstand than they are in a bookstore. So, thank you for giving this book a home. 😊

between the lines, and make what seem to be magically intuitive leaps. These are our superpowers in the age of AI.

But AI has superpowers of its own. It can process vast amounts of data in the blink of an eye, spot patterns that elude human perception, and make decisions with unwavering consistency. Additionally, as AI systems become more advanced, they're starting to match or even exceed human capabilities in certain domains.

A Tale of Two Intelligences

When human intelligence and artificial intelligence work together, the results can be transformative. But when they're pitted against each other, the consequences can be dire. As we'll see in the coming chapters, bad actors are already using AI to exploit human vulnerabilities to deceive and manipulate on a massive scale.

This is the tale of two intelligences, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. To navigate this new landscape safely, we need to understand both sides of the story. We need to know how to leverage the power of AI while also protecting ourselves from its potential abuses.

That's where this book comes in. In the pages that follow, we'll explore the unchanging truths about human and artificial intelligence. We'll grapple with the challenges posed by their rapid convergence. And we'll arm ourselves with knowledge and strategies to thrive in this new era. So buckle up and get ready for a journey into the heart of the AI revolution. The future is here, and it's up to us to shape it.

Deception: What's Old Is New Again

Deception has been a part of the human story since the very beginning. From ancient legends like the Trojan horse to the latest headline-grabbing scams, we've always been both captivated and terrified by the power of illusion. But today, we're facing a new chapter in this age-old tale. The deceits are getting more sophisticated,

the fakes more believable. Why? Because deception has found a powerful accomplice: artificial intelligence.

AI doesn't make classic cons like "phishing" emails and too-good-to-be-true offers obsolete. Instead, it makes them more prevalent than ever. AI enables bad actors to work at greater scale, and with greater sophistication. AI can now generate phishing emails that perfectly replicate your boss's communication style, or create a convincing audio clip that sounds exactly like a loved one pleading for urgent help. Yesterday's scams seem almost quaint in comparison to the AI-enhanced deceptions of today.

The AI Inflection Point

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment—a juncture where the trajectory of technological advancement is poised to surge exponentially. AI is no longer a distant, futuristic concept. It's present, it's potent, and it's being harnessed for both benevolent and malicious purposes. On the positive side, AI is transforming domains from healthcare to education, offering unprecedented insights and efficiencies.* However, it's also being exploited to deceive, manipulate, and defraud on a scale never before possible.

We live at a time when the boundary between fact and fiction is more blurred than ever. Videos can be fabricated from scratch, voices can be synthesized with eerie precision, and images can be altered beyond recognition. We're entering an era where our senses can no longer be trusted, and where the very notion of objective reality is under siege.

How to Read This Book

Throughout our journey, we'll immerse ourselves in the world of deepfakes, disinformation, and AI-driven scams. We'll investigate how these technologies operate, who's deploying them, and what

*Research from DeepMind's AlphaFold is a great example on the healthcare side. Also do a quick search on Sal Kahn's (founder of the Kahn Academy) remarks about how his organization is using AI.

makes them so effective. But the aim isn't solely to sound the alarm; it's to empower us all to navigate this new landscape with confidence and resilience.

As you embark on this journey, prepare to be transported into a world where AI-driven deception blurs the line between truth and fiction. Each chapter begins with a brief dramatization, crafted like a gripping thriller or a news exposé. These stories introduce characters grappling with the fallout of synthetic media.

Through detailed scenes and relatable characters, these opening narratives paint a vivid picture of a future where cutting-edge technology is weaponized to deceive on an unprecedented scale. They serve as visceral wake-up calls, powerful reminders of how high the stakes can be in the battle against AI-driven deception.

But this book is more than a collection of cautionary tales. It's your compass for navigating this new realm of deception. As you dive into the main portion of each chapter, you'll be equipped with the tools and knowledge needed to detect deception, safeguard yourself and your loved ones, and counter the tactics of scammers and manipulators.

Even in this age of artificial intelligence, our greatest asset is our human intelligence.

You'll learn to critically evaluate media, verify sources, and fact check assertions. You'll uncover the mental ploys used by those who seek to deceive, and—even more importantly—you'll discover how to fortify your mind against them. Together, we'll see that even in this age of artificial intelligence, our greatest asset is our human intelligence.

My Approach to AI, Life, and This Book

I believe that AI is a net benefit to humanity. It is a tool. A tool that can be used to build or destroy. To help...or to harm.

As a security professional, one of my main jobs is to understand and explain how things go wrong. How tools can be misused. And how cybercriminals can use tools and leverage human nature against us. But technology is just technology.

Technology molds to the hands and wills of those who wield it.

I've been using AI to enhance my work and life since the pre-ChatGPT days. I see AI as a valued co-worker and creative partner. In his book, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI*, Wharton Professor of Management Ethan Mollick describes two basic modes/methods for using AI as a co-worker: becoming a Centaur or becoming a Cyborg. The key difference between the two is that people in Centaur mode operate with a clear dividing line between AI and human. They use AI as a tool to be picked-up, used, and put down. Cyborgs are different. They work in an effortless and continuous flow between human and system.

As we step into the future, each of us will likely be both Centaurs and Cyborgs every day depending on the tasks we have in front of us. But, for creative tasks, working in Cyborg mode just makes sense. The iterative cycles of brainstorming, idea refinement, research, data extrapolation, drafting, rewriting, reviewing, and so on are well suited to co-working with AI. It's like collaborating in a virtual writer's room, having a coach, and getting input from an expert editor when needed.

That's been my approach to this book. As a subject matter expert, I'm pretty good when it comes to brainstorming and filtering through topics. But—blind spots being what they are—I'm not the best at knowing where my own personal blind spots are. In those cases, AI can step in and help in the brainstorming process. And as a writer, I'm pretty good at crafting a sentence. But sometimes I tend to create sentences that are overly complex. That's where AI can step in and suggest ways to simplify language or structure. I could go on, but you get the idea.

AI is great at helping us move farther faster.

I am extremely optimistic about the benefits AI brings. When used responsibly, AI is an asset for humanity. But again, tools mold to the hands and desires of those who wield them. And as such, AI also helps people with malicious intent to move farther faster.

AI is here to stay. The genie is out of the bottle. Our job as a society is to find ways to use what we have responsibly and to wield

Tools mold to the hands and desires of those who wield them.

the power of AI in ways that further humanity's goals while proactively finding ways to prevent or reduce misuse.

A Bit About Me

Sometimes the frenzied pace of technological advancements can make it easy to lose focus on what matters most and who can make the biggest difference, for good and for bad: humans. Humans and the human element are at the center of it all.

That's where I come in. I'm a cybersecurity professional and researcher who's been exploring the intersection of technology and humans for over two decades.

If you were to look at my LinkedIn profile (`https://www.linkedin.com/in/perrycarpenter`)*, you'd see that one of the descriptions I have is Deceptionologist. And that's because I've been fascinated with deception, sleight of hand, psychological illusion, and influence my entire life. Yeah, I was one of those kids always asking people if they wanted to see a magic trick. I have an insatiable drive to understand what makes us tick and how we can be fooled, even when we think we know better.

For most of my career, I've focused on the human factors of security, really homing in on social engineering and the science of deception. I'm even known for finding ways to weave psychological illusions (aka mentalism) into many of my keynote presentations to demonstrate the power of mental hijacks. In all of this, my mission is to help people understand and arm themselves against the methods bad actors use to exploit human nature—a nature and a set of methods that AI is becoming increasingly skilled at mimicking and using.

*Go ahead and connect with me while you're there. I'd love to get to know you.

From the stage at major industry events to the boardrooms where cybersecurity strategies are hammered out, my journey and passion is one of constant learning and advocacy. My goal is to help build a future where technology enhances rather than exploits our human capabilities—and where humans have the tools, resources, and mindsets needed to defend themselves against digital deceptions.

The intersection of human intuition and machine intelligence is where the real story unfolds, and that's exactly where I want to take you. So, as we turn the page on the past and look toward a future filled with deepfakes, disinformation, and AI-driven deceptions, I'm here to be your guide. My goal is to demystify the technical, empower the uninitiated, and light the way through a world filled with digital deception.

A Quick Look at What's Ahead

The landscape of AI-driven deception is complex and constantly evolving. To help navigate this terrain, this book is structured into three distinct parts, each designed to build upon the last and provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. As mentioned earlier, each chapter begins with a brief vignette: a short fictional scene that illustrates the deceptive possibilities and impacts of synthetic media. These opening narratives feature unique characters and situations that hint at the subject matter covered within the chapter itself.

While the book follows a logical progression, many of the chapters can be read independently based on your specific interests or needs. In the pages that follow, you'll find key concepts, real-world examples, defensive strategies, and forward-looking considerations that will empower you to confront the challenges of AI-driven deception head-on.

Introduction and overview of generative AI and synthetic media: Chapters 1 through 3

We'll start by setting the stage, exploring the historical context of deception and why the advent of AI represents a new frontier. We'll

do a brief deep dive into how AI works, introduce key concepts like deepfakes and synthetic media, and we'll examine the mindset and tools of digital manipulators.

The emerging threatscape: Chapters 4 through 7

In this section, we'll dive into the many ways AI is being used for deception, from the spread of disinformation to the evolution of scams. We'll look at real-world examples and break down the tactics being employed.

Protecting yourself, your family, and friends in the present and beyond: Chapters 8 through 10

Here, we shift to defense. We'll discuss strategies for spotting deception, the importance of media literacy, and the role of technology in combating AI-generated threats. You'll gain practical, actionable advice for staying safe in the digital world.

A New Hope

My hope is that by the time you reach the final page of this book, you'll see the world through new eyes. You'll be a savvier media consumer, a sharper critical thinker, and a harder target for would-be deceivers.

In an age where lies spread like wildfire, where scammers are growing more sophisticated by the day, knowledge is our greatest defense. This book aims to arm you with that knowledge, to empower you to navigate this new digital landscape with confidence and clarity. Because in the era of AI-driven deception, our best weapon is an informed and critical mind.

As you turn the page and step into the first vignette, allow yourself to be fully transported. Immerse yourself in the stories, the characters, and the stakes. Feel the weight of the challenges they face, and the urgency of the questions they grapple with. And know that with each chapter, each revelation, each strategy unveiled, you are equipping yourself to face those same challenges with wisdom, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to truth.

So let's embark on this journey together. The future of truth begins here. It begins with you.

Perry Carpenter
September 2024

Connect with me. Get updates. Explore resources.
https://thisbookisfaik.com

Chapter 1
The Eternal Battle for the Mind: Why You Should Care

Whispers from the Static

It's been an exhausting day. You're on the couch unwinding, mindlessly scrolling Facebook, "liking" cat videos and vacation photos. A post stops you cold. It's your best friend, Sarah. She's sobbing, devastated.

"I can't believe it," Sarah chokes out, her face blotchy, voice raw. "My mom...she's gone. She passed away last night. It was so sudden, we're all in shock."

Your stomach drops. Sarah's mom? Gone? This can't be.

Sarah takes a shuddering breath, then looks directly at the camera. "We've set up a GoFundMe to help with the funeral costs. It's all happened so fast, and the expenses are. ...Anything you can give would mean the world. We're really struggling."

You pull up her contact, about to call. But you reconsider, realizing Sarah is likely being pulled in several directions. You don't want to add to the stress and frenzy, so you decide to send a quick text: "God, I can't believe it. I'm so sorry."

An hour later, your phone buzzes. It's Sarah. Bracing yourself, you answer. "Hey, I saw your video. I'm so sorry about your mom."

"What? My mom's fine, I just had dinner with her. I was calling to see what you were talking about in your text. What are you sorry about? What video?"

You freeze. "The video...on Facebook. You were crying, saying she died and asking for donations."

Silence. Then, "That doesn't make any sense. Send me this video. Now." With clumsy fingers, you send her the link.

"That's not me," Sarah says after a long moment, voice shaking, somehow conveying fear, confusion, and anger all at once. "I don't un. ...Someone faked that video. That's my face, my voice. And that's my bedroom in the background. But it's not me. I didn't make that."

The implications settle like a stone in your gut. If a video that realistic can be faked. ...If it can so easily fool you, Sarah's best friend. ...Then what else can be faked? What other lies can be spread, with just a click?

"Oh god, Sarah. People are going to donate. They're going to think it's real."

Sarah swears under her breath, "I've got to report this, get that fundraiser taken down. I can't believe someone would do this. What if it had been my grandma or my little cousin who saw it?"

Stunned, your only answer is silence. Silence accompanied by the grim realization that this is the new reality. A reality trust can be weaponized with terrifying ease. It's a world you're not ready for, but it's the only world you've got. And as you and Sarah work together to find out how to report the fake video and crowdfunding page, you know that from here on out you can't afford to take anything at face value. Not even your best friend's tears.

Pleased to Meet You, Hope You Guessed My Name

If there is one thing fundamental to the human condition, it's deception. Just think about it for a second: themes related to lies and deception permeate everything, from fairy tales in which Big Bad Wolves masquerade as frail grandmothers, to the movies we love in which our favorite spies don the attire of a building's cleaning crew to avoid detection. These stories of deception stick with us

because they mirror our experience. To be human is to deceive and be deceived.

But with every age and every advancement, deception evolves. That's certainly true in our current digital age. And it's accelerating. Recent advancements in *artificial intelligence* (AI), and specifically *generative artificial intelligence* (GenAI), have given anyone the ability to fabricate plausible deceptions at scales and in forms virtually indistinguishable from reality.

Make no mistake about it, technology has advanced to the point where our biggest worry isn't *fake news*. It's *fake anything and everything*. The creation of fake realities has been democratized.

Power to the people...the power to convincingly deceive, that is.

Today's lies are turbocharged by tech. And they're harder to spot than ever. Deepfake videos can make world leaders appear to say things they never said, show celebrities in compromising situations that never occurred, and make us question the very nature of what is real. *Computer-generated imagery* (CGI) can conjure events out of thin air, complete with fake news footage that looks all too real. Armies of bots can flood our social media feeds with manufactured outrage. The result? We can be led into believing that fringe ideas are suddenly mainstream.

Welcome to the brave new world of deepfakes: a world where influential figures become unwitting puppets, their digital likenesses hijacked to spread fabricated truths. The very nature of reality is up for grabs, and it's getting harder to tell what's real and what's just a convincing illusion. In this new digital dystopia where pixels can lie as easily as words, how do we learn to separate fact from fiction? Are we headed into a world where even the ideas of *truth* and *facts* are at risk?

To stand a chance against the onslaught of our new 21st-century snake oil, we first need to understand the timeless principles behind why scams work. For that, let's take a journey through the colorful past of the conmen of yore. By tracing the evolution of deception from ancient myths to modern memes, we'll uncover the enduring

human quirks and cognitive kinks that today's techno-tricksters so artfully exploit.

The Historical Context of Deception and Scams

From ancient emperors peddling bogus relics to modern CEOs cooking the books, the scammer's playbook has been honed over millennia. The technology may change, but the fundamental tactics remain the same: exploit trust, leverage greed, and weaponize fear. The names and faces shift with the centuries, but the underlying game is as old as human nature.

Ancient Origins: From the Trojan Horse to Snake Oil Salesmen

The pages of history are riddled with the stories of scams and scammers. Take the infamous Trojan horse, arguably the most legendary example of deception. I mean, think about it: this example is so iconic that people use the terms *deception* and *Trojan horse* almost interchangeably. With a single colossal act of seeming benevolence, the Greeks fooled their enemies into gleefully ushering in their own destruction. It's a stark reminder that sometimes, the most perilous lies are the ones we so desperately want to be true.

Or think about the Oracle of Delphi, the ancient world's most renowned source of prophecy. With her notoriously vague proclamations that could be twisted to match any outcome, the Oracle crafted a thriving enterprise by telling people precisely what they longed to hear—a blueprint that modern-day psychics, astrologers, marketers, and cable news pundits have been shamelessly copying ever since.[1]

Fast forward a couple thousand years, and we find ourselves in the age of the snake oil salesman—those silver-tongued hawkers of miracle elixirs and cure-all potions. From bogus weight-loss supplements to fraudulent hair-growth tonics, these swindlers made a fortune by preying on the timeless human desire for a quick-and-easy fix. It mattered little that their concoctions were often nothing

more than flavored water or alcohol. The true magic ingredient was always the art of persuasion.

The Evolution of Scams: Adapting to Changing Technologies

As humanity's tools have evolved, so too have the tactics of the trickster. With the advent of the printing press came a flourishing of forged documents, from counterfeit currency to fake land deeds. The telegraph ushered in the age of wire fraud, with scammers impersonating distant relatives in supposed distress to bilk victims out of cash. And with the dawn of digital, the floodgates of fraudulence truly burst open.

But it was the rise of mass media that took the art of the hoax to a whole new level. The panic induced by Orson Welles's 1938 "War of the Worlds" radio play—with millions convinced that Martians really were invading New Jersey—heralded a new era when lies could be amplified and spread like never before.[2] Or maybe that's what you heard before. As it turns out, that "mass panic" reaction was also a deception cooked up by a cunning newspaper wanting to throw shade at the emerging medium of radio.[3] But here's what's interesting: in either account, deception is at play. In either of these, we see how easily the understanding of reality can be hijacked on a mass scale.

The Digital Age: A New Era of Deception

With great technology comes great opportunity.

Whether it's the printing press, radio waves, or the near-light-speed of the Internet,* deception travels at whatever speed technology allows. We now live in a time when legions of bots and troll farms stand ready to blast disinformation across social media at a moment's notice. Deepfakes and other *synthetic media*† can fabricate

*Yeah…I know. My home Internet hasn't yet received the memo.

†*Synthetic media* is just a fancy way of saying "AI-generated content." It's when computer algorithms create, change, or mess with data and media, like videos, images, or audio. Deepfakes are a prime example, where AI tech is used to manipulate content, often to fool people or change the original meaning.

audiovisual evidence whole cloth. In this new reality, where any voice can be cloned and any face swapped, the old adage "seeing is believing" no longer applies.

The Rise of the Internet: Expanding the Reach of Scammers

The Internet has revolutionized the way scammers operate. No longer confined to face-to-face cons or back-alley deals, a scammer can now target millions of potential victims worldwide with just a few clicks. The anonymity of the digital world makes deception easier to execute and harder to trace. And the near instantaneous speed of global communications means that digital deceivers can reach farther and faster than ever before.

Here's an example of how the rise of the Internet can aid the evolution of a scam. You've probably heard about the infamous Nigerian prince email scam. It's a classic con known as *advance-fee fraud*. Basically, it starts with an email where someone, often claiming to be Nigerian royalty or a high-ranking official, contacts you with an incredible offer. They tell a story about a large sum of money that they can't access and promise you a substantial cut if you help them. You just have to pony up an advance fee to cover various fictional costs. Once you pay up, it's game over. The scammer takes the money, vanishes, and you never see a dime.

But, as the adage says, "What's old is new again." And the Nigerian prince scam's roots are much older than they might first appear. In fact, we could say that the Nigerian prince is actually a Spaniard in disguise. It's just an evolution of a much older scam known as the Spanish prisoner[4] con. In the original scam, which emerged in the late 1800s, the fraudster would send letters claiming to be a wealthy prisoner in need of assistance to access his fortune, promising a share of the wealth in return. The "assistance" requested was—of course—money. Money to pay various fees, bribes, or expenses so that the fortune could be claimed. Heads-up...there was no fortune. Just a con artist on the other side with your money finding a new home in their pocket. Fast forward

to the digital age, and the same scam proliferates through emails, reaching a vastly larger audience.

That's just one example. Deception moves at the speed of tech. And as technology progressed, so did the scams. Phishing emails, carefully crafted to resemble legitimate companies and trick recipients into divulging sensitive information, became a go-to strategy. Fraudulent websites emerged, poised to steal credit card details under the pretense of unbeatable deals. The Internet provided—and continues to provide—a fertile ground for those intent on deception to refine their techniques and cast a wider net.

The Advent of Social Media: The Perfect Platform for Disinformation

Social media, initially lauded as a tool for fostering connections and communities, has morphed into a hotbed of disinformation. With billions of active users across platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, false information can go viral in a matter of hours.[5] And, when it does, it travels "farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth."[6] The more shocking and emotionally charged the content, the more likely it is to be shared widely.[7]

This phenomenon has fueled the rise of *fake news*—stories intentionally designed to deceive and manipulate. Bad actors understand the immense power of social media in shaping public opinion and are weaponizing it for various agendas. From swaying elections to sowing societal discord, the impact of disinformation campaigns can be far-reaching and devastating.

But it's not just about the content. Social media algorithms, programmed to keep users engaged and scrolling, often create echo chambers. This effect has become known as the *filter bubble*,[8] an algorithmically curated feed where users are predominantly exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs and interests. As you can imagine, this has the effect of amplifying biases and blurring the line between fact and fiction. This vicious cycle contributes to increased polarization and erodes the foundation for constructive dialogue.