

# Not by chance

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An attempt to understand the information system that surrounds us

April 2026 — First edition

01

Tactical

Cognitive survival in every-day life.

02

Relational

Culture of shared doubt.

03

Strategic

Politics of infrastructure.

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With an example on inflation that runs through the entire document

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This document includes

- A note on method
- Observable signals for each level
- Questions to keep in mind
- Practical guide with a version for high-stress situations
- History of the information system from the Middle Ages to today
- Glossary, references
- Author's note

April 2026 — First edition

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# Contents

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- A note on method ..... 4
- 1 The real event ..... 6
- 2 Who tells it and why ..... 7
- 3 The invisible filters ..... 8
- 4 Your brain ..... 9
- 5 The decision ..... 10
- 6 The consequences ..... 11
- 7 The time factor ..... 12
- 8 Trust in sources ..... 13
- 9 Practical guide..... 14
- 10 Beyond the individual ..... 16
- How the road was built ..... 19
- The thread that runs through everything ..... 23
- A note on the subject ..... 25
- The three-dimensional framework ..... 26
- Glossary ..... 27
- Appendix: the analysis process ..... 29
- References ..... 30
- Author’s note ..... 31
- Verified references and links ..... 32

## A note on method

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This document is a tool for orientation, not an exhaustive analysis of the information system. It describes dominant incentives and the most common mechanisms. It does not explain everything, does not apply in every case, and does not replace judgment on a case-by-case basis.

Every statement that uses tends to or often is deliberate: the system is complex, emergent, and partially unpredictable. It does not ask you to do great things. It asks for a pause. To look at yourself from the outside while you read. To ask who benefits from your immediate reaction.

This framework describes the Western information system, particularly European and American. The mechanisms it describes exist elsewhere too, but in forms this document does not analyse. I wrote this as a European. The historical examples and the structural references are drawn from that context. The mechanisms, however, do not have a passport.

This document is	This document is not
A personal interpretation. A tool for orientation. A starting point for thinking. Deliberately incomplete.	A definitive manual. An academic analysis. An answer to everything. An ideological position.

### On facts and interpretation

The facts cited, particularly in the historical section, are public and verifiable: official data, parliamentary hearings, internal documents published by accredited journalistic sources.

That certain mechanisms optimise engagement at the expense of informational quality is an inference supported by evidence. What matters is not a moral judgement on the actors, but an understanding of the incentives that guided their choices.

### The role of users and cognitive cost

The system is not only built from above. It is also fed daily by the behaviour of those who use it. Users are not only victims: they are also, involuntarily, co-producers. Verifying information has a real cost in time, energy, and attention. The system is designed to make immediate reaction free and verification effortful. This is not a flaw in users: it is a structural incentive.

## On blind spots

This document has blind spots I am not aware of. If you find a distortion, a missing perspective, or a factual error, I want to know. Feedback and criticism are not just welcome, they are structurally necessary.

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## 1

## The real event

What happens before you know anything about it

## TACTICAL

Every piece of news is born from something that happens in the physical or digital world. But between the real event and what you read, essential information is already lost, some through natural limitation, some through deliberate intervention. The distinction matters: a limitation and an attack require completely different responses.

Natural limitation	Deliberate intervention
Not everything gets recorded or measured. Statistical data are abstractions. The official inflation figure for 2022 was built on an average basket of goods that does not correspond to anyone's actual spending. It is the invisible part of the iceberg, a structural limitation, not a lie.	Deepfakes, manipulated data, distorted press releases. Someone is actively constructing a false version. This is not a limitation of the system. It is an attack on the system. Recognising the difference is the first act of epistemic hygiene.

## EXAMPLE — inflation

The official 2022 inflation figure sat around 8 to 9 percent. But that index is built on an average basket that does not correspond to what anyone actually spends. Rent, energy, and groceries hit different households in completely different ways. The real event is complex. The number is already a simplification. Those who know this use the gap to build opposing narratives.

What is missing from this piece of information?

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- The data has no link to the primary source
- The collection method is not specified
- A complex phenomenon is described with a single number
- There are no margins of error or confidence intervals

## 2

## Who tells it and why

Sources are not equivalent: they have different epistemic statuses

TACTICAL

RELATIONAL

Information does not arrive on its own. Someone collects it, interprets it, and distributes it. These actors have radically different objectives. Treating them as equivalent, as if they were all just opinions, is an error the system actively exploits.

Journalism	OSINT	AI	Propaganda
Reports and interprets. Influenced by editorial line, advertisers, and speed. The method matters more than the brand.	Verifies through open sources: public documents, images, official data. Harder to manipulate. Requires specific skills.	Generates and amplifies at enormous speed. A neutral tool with non-neutral uses. Can strengthen verification or produce industrial disinformation.	Creates false narratives with a precise purpose. Often imitates the form of journalism. Acquired reputation does not equal real authority.

EXAMPLE — same data, different stories

On the 2022 inflation figure: a financial outlet ran the headline Inflation under control. A political blog wrote Savings destroyed. An account on a content platform circulated a manipulated graph showing a figure nearly double the official one. Same data. Three narratives. Which one you saw depended on where you spent your time online.

Who has an interest in telling it this way?

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Look for the separation between news and opinion in the text
- Check whether the source cites primary sources or only other outlets
- Verify whether there is a published correction policy
- Ask: who funds this source?

## 3

## The invisible filters

The environment in which you consume information is not neutral, it is designed

TACTICAL

STRATEGIC

Before information reaches your eyes, systems designed to maximise engagement decide what to show you. This is not neutrality. It is an architecture of choices built to convert your attention and your anxiety into profit.

The attention economy	Temporal asymmetry	Echo chamber and institutional vacuum
Platforms earn money if you stay. They show you what provokes reaction: outrage, fear, surprise. Your anxiety is a business model, not a side effect.	A false piece of news circulates in ten minutes. The correction arrives three days later. Your fast system has already registered the first version. The correction overwrites it with difficulty.	The algorithm shows you what you have already clicked. Institutional filtering is slow and weak. In the vacuum, your feed decides reality.

## EXAMPLE — the speed trap

The manipulated inflation graph received tens of thousands of shares within hours because it generated anger. The algorithm amplified it automatically. The official correction: a fraction of the views, the day after. If you were inside an economically pessimistic echo chamber, you only saw the false number.

What am I not seeing?

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- All the sources you consume arrive at the same conclusion
- The news that irritates you most receives more visibility in your feed
- You cannot remember the last time you read something that changed your mind
- Your social contacts all hold opinions similar to yours

## 4

## Your brain

How you react and why we are all vulnerable in predictable ways

TACTICAL

RELATIONAL

The problem is not intelligence. The brain has two systems: one fast, automatic, and emotional; one slow, rational, and effortful. Platforms are optimised for the first. The second is a cognitive luxury that requires time and energy, resources that are not equally distributed.

Fast system	Slow system	Subtle anxiety	Reflexive blindness
Reacts before you can think. Sees an alarming headline and believes it. This is the system the infrastructure learns to exploit at industrial scale.	Analyses, compares, doubts. Activates only if you have time and energy. Under stress or economic exhaustion, it shuts down. This is not an individual failure. It is biology.	Not only anger. Anxiety is a background noise that pushes toward confirmation. The dopamine release when you read you were right to worry is manipulation at low temperature.	You are also inside the system. There is no neutral observer. Recognising this is not paralysing. It is the first act of clarity.

EXAMPLE — the silent confirmation

You see the manipulated graph in the evening, tired. The fast system registers it as true. You share it, angry. Your contacts confirm. Correcting it would mean admitting the error in public. And the brain avoids that sensation. You are not naive. You are human.

What is this piece of news doing to me?

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- You feel urgency to share before finishing reading
- The news confirms something you feared or hoped
- You feel irritation at the idea of verifying it
- The emotion is stronger than your interest in the details

## 5

## The decision

When uncertainty becomes a choice

## TACTICAL

At some point you have to decide: do you believe it or not? Do you share it? Do you vote accordingly? This moment is guided not by the truth of the information, but by cognitive exhaustion, group pressure, and the need to reduce uncertainty.

Time pressure	Good enough	The delayed question
You do not have time to verify everything. You use shortcuts: do I trust this source? Did someone I respect share it? Does the headline seem plausible? These shortcuts are rational and manipulable.	Even if something does not add up, if the news confirms what you already think, you tend to accept it. This is not laziness. It is the cost of living in an infinite flow of information.	A tactical tool: before reacting, ask yourself what did I think about this topic before reading this piece? If you cannot answer, you are vulnerable to anchoring.

## EXAMPLE — the cost of admission

You shared the manipulated graph. Now you read the official correction. It is more comfortable to think the official source is unreliable than to admit the error in front of your contacts. You may not change your mind about inflation, but you vote differently based on a false figure.

## What changes if I wait?

## BEFORE ACTING — ask yourself

- Have I read beyond the headline?
- Is it convenient for me to believe this?
- What changes concretely if I wait 24 hours?
- Who benefits from my immediate reaction?

## 6

## The consequences

Your actions become data and the cycle begins again

TACTICAL

STRATEGIC

Every interaction, share, comment, click, silence, produces data that feeds the system. Collective behaviours become new events. A piece of news born false can produce real economic effects. This is the paradox of action.

Collective action	Algorithmic feedback	The paradox of action
Millions of people who believe the same distorted news can change elections, markets, policies. Scale is the multiplier.	Every click teaches the algorithm what to show you next. You are unknowingly training the system that manipulates you.	A piece of news born false becomes a new real event through the reactions it generates. Fiction, if believed enough, transforms the world.

EXAMPLE — the circle closes

The anger spread by the false inflation figure pushes thousands of people to reduce spending. Sales data falls. The following quarter the news reads: Consumer collapse: people are afraid. A piece of news born false has produced a real economic effect that now becomes a new true story.

Am I acting or reacting?

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- You are sharing without having verified
- You are commenting with emotion instead of information
- You are ignoring corrections to news you already shared
- You are using a piece of news as proof of something you already thought

# 7

## The time factor

Not all news ages in the same way

### TACTICAL

The speed at which a piece of news circulates does not depend on its truth, but on its capacity to generate emotional reaction. Understanding the different life cycles of information helps decide when to wait before believing.

Hours	Days	Months	Years
Virals false news	News stories	Economic data	Geopolitical narratives
Circulates in minutes, corrected in days. The damage is already done: the first version is embedded before the correction exists.	The picture completes itself in 48 to 72 hours. First versions are almost always incomplete or distorted by the pressure to publish.	Numbers are revised multiple times. The initial headline often does not survive, but the narrative it generated remains.	They solidify and become accepted history. Extremely difficult to correct. Time legitimises them independently of truth.

### PRACTICAL RULE

The more a piece of news is urgent and emotionally loaded, the more it is worth waiting 24 hours before sharing. True news resists time. False news usually collapses, but the emotional reaction it produced remains.

Will this still be true tomorrow?

### PRACTICAL INDICATORS

- News published less than 6 hours ago: wait before sharing
- Very emotional headline about a number: look for the primary source
- News that everyone is sharing quickly: this is a warning signal
- A correction or retraction: verify it as much as the original news

## 8

## Trust in sources

Why relying on whoever seems reliable is not enough

TACTICAL

STRATEGIC

We tend to trust sources we know. But the credibility of a source is a historical product, built over time, purchasable, modifiable. A respected outlet can be wrong or change its line. An anonymous account can publish authentic documents. The method is worth more than the name.

Reputation is built slowly	Reputation can be bought	The method is the real compass
A reliable source has a history of correcting errors, transparency about sources, and separation between news and opinion. Look for these signals, not the logo.	Coordinated campaigns purchase followers, citations, even prizes. The appearance of authority does not equal real authority.	Does it cite primary sources? Does it distinguish facts from opinions? Has it corrected errors in the past? These criteria work independently of the brand.

## EXAMPLE — fabricated authority

The manipulated graph was signed by an account with hundreds of thousands of followers and a logo that imitated a well-known financial outlet. No link to the primary source. No method explained. It looked professional. The form was designed to replace the content. And it worked.

Is the method verifiable, or only the appearance?

## QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE A SOURCE

- Does it cite primary sources or only other outlets?
- Has it ever publicly corrected one of its own errors?
- Does it clearly separate news from commentary and opinion?
- Who funds it, and who writes for it, are these accessible?



## Practical guide

High-stress version, five habits, two advanced tools

### TACTICAL

There is no way to exit the system completely. But there are concrete habits that reduce the risk of being deceived. These habits are not the result of empirical research. They are the product of personal experience and reading. I use them daily. Use them as a starting point, not as a verified protocol.

#### Three questions under stress

01 Where does it come from?

Is there an identifiable primary source? A document, an institution, a verifiable piece of data? If I cannot answer in ten seconds, I do not share yet.

02 How does it make me feel?

If the answer is angry, afraid, or finally someone is saying this, I wait. Not because the news is necessarily false, but because I am reacting with the fast system.

03 What changes if I wait?

If the news is true, it will still be true tomorrow. If I feel urgency to share it immediately, I ask myself who has an interest in making me feel that way.

#### Five habits for when there is more time

01 Pause before sharing. I wait at least ten minutes. Have I read the full article or only the headline? Does the news make me angry? If so, it was probably designed to.

02 Look for the primary source. If a piece of news cites data, I go and read the original release. The headline is almost always an interpretation, not the data itself.

03 Triangulate across different sources. A true piece of news appears across multiple independent sources. If I only find it on one site with no shared primary source, that is a warning signal.

04 Notice how it makes me feel. Anger, fear, outrage signal that I am reacting with the fast system. It is worth activating the slow one before acting.

05 Periodically leave my bubble. I look for sources I would not normally agree with, not to convince myself of anything, but to understand which arguments

never appear in my feed.

## Two advanced tools

### The delayed question

Before reacting, I ask myself: what did I think about this topic before reading this piece? It does not tell me whether it is true or false. It reveals what it is doing to me.

### Epistemic archaeology

When someone believes something that seems wrong to me, I ask myself: through what filters and social pressures did they arrive at believing it? This shifts judgment from the person to the path.

# 10 Beyond the individual

Individual awareness is not enough, here is why and what to do

RELATIONAL

STRATEGIC

## Cognitive privilege

The tools described so far presuppose a subject with time, cognitive energy, and motivation. But these resources are distributed in profoundly unequal ways. Someone who works ten hours a day and consumes information in twenty minutes on public transport does not have practical access to these tools, not through ignorance, but through exhaustion. Treating disinformation only as a problem of individual education is a form of cognitive classism.

## Resistance as relational practice

This is not about convincing anyone, and it is not about becoming anyone's guide. It is about not feeding the system with your own reactions. Not sharing the false news. Not raising the emotional temperature of the conversation. Not giving fuel to the loop. This, done by enough people, changes the air in the room without anyone having to explain anything to anyone.

When someone shares something distorted, it is not always worth intervening. It is worth doing when there is a real relationship, when the other person is not in an activated emotional state, and when you have enough energy to do it well. Doing it badly is worse than not doing it. Ignoring and leaving the conversation is a rational choice, not a surrender.

## The problem is the road, not only the driver

The road and the driver co-produce each other. An infrastructure designed for maximum speed turns cautious drivers into anomalies. If disinformation earns more than verification, the market will always produce disinformation. No ten-minute pause changes this structural incentive.

In 2000, a search engine launched a system that auctioned human attention in real time: advertisers paid per click, not per view. In 2006, a social platform introduced a feed that ranked content not by relevance or accuracy, but by its capacity to generate reaction. In 2009, a single button transformed engagement into the universal metric of the entire digital ecosystem. These are documented facts. What is inferable is that these mechanisms optimised engagement at the expense of informational quality. In 2021, internal documents obtained by a whistleblower showed that some of these negative consequences were known in-

ternally.

Tobacco	Road safety
<p>For decades the tobacco industry produced research contradicting the link between smoking and cancer. Only when a critical mass perceived the problem as structural did regulation become possible. Cultural change preceded legislative change.</p>	<p>In the 1970s, deaths in cars were considered inevitable. Seatbelts, speed limits, drink-driving tests were not immediately accepted. They required a cultural transformation. The same path is necessary for digital infrastructure.</p>

### Culture as a prerequisite for law

As happened with tobacco and asbestos, only when a critical mass perceives the infrastructure as toxic does political action become possible and sustainable. A law that regulates algorithms in a society that desires polarisation is destined to fail or to become censorship. This framework exists to help build that collective conceptual category.



## How the road was built

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A history of the incentives that shaped the information system. This reconstruction focuses on the European and American context because it is there that the mechanisms developed which shaped the digital platforms dominant today. It is not a universal history.

**Vulgus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur.**

The crowd wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived.

Attributed to Cardinal Carlo Carafa (1517–1561), papal legate, c. 1550s. First documented in Jacques-Auguste de Thou, *Historiae sui temporis*, 1606. The attribution is historical, not a direct verified quote.

Carlo Carafa was a Vatican cardinal and papal legate who operated at the centre of sixteenth-century European power. He managed information flows between the Church and secular rulers at a time when controlling what people read and believed was an explicit instrument of political authority. The phrase attributed to him does not describe a conspiracy. It describes a structural observation: that the appetite for deception is not imposed from above but met from below. The incentive was already visible in 1550. The mechanism had already been named.

Five centuries before the algorithm, someone who managed the flow of information had articulated the structural incentive with brutal clarity. Not as a plan, but as an observation. The crowd does not resist. So why resist on its behalf?

### I. The long history, before the internet

Looking at how the information system around us works, I kept finding the same uncomfortable thing: the mechanisms I describe in the sections above are not new. They did not begin with the social platforms, did not begin with the internet, did not begin with television. They are much older.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann, an American journalist who had observed wartime propaganda firsthand, published *Public Opinion*. He described something simple and unsettling: we never react to reality directly, but always to a mediated and simplified version of it, what he called the pictures in our heads. Whoever controls those pictures controls the perception of reality. He wrote this eighty years before the news feed.

Even before that, the mechanism is recognisable in different forms. In the Middle Ages, only the clergy could read and write: whoever controlled the books controlled what was true. When Gutenberg invented movable type in 1450, that

access opened for the first time to many. The response was not slow: in 1559 the Catholic Church published the Index of Forbidden Books, the list of texts the faithful were not permitted to read. The channel had opened. Someone closed it again. The mechanism repeats itself every time a technology democratises access to information: someone immediately builds a system to recapture control of it.

Napoleon was probably the first to build a modern and conscious system of information management at national scale: press censorship, military bulletins written in his own hand, state-financed newspapers. He did not always lie. He often selected and amplified. The structure is the same as today's algorithms: not creating from nothing, but choosing what to amplify and what to suppress.

In 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published the Futurist Manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in Paris, not in a niche journal. Marinetti understood that content and channel are inseparable, and that the emotional reaction of an audience is more powerful than the quality of an argument. The Futurist evenings were deliberately designed to be provocative. Marinetti explicitly declared that the audience's whistles were a success, not a failure. He called this principle the will to be booed. Not rational persuasion: conscious engineering of emotional reaction. This was 1909.

In the same historical period, in New York, Edward Bernays theorised the same principle from the commercial and political side. Returning from the First World War, where he had worked on the American propaganda machine, he understood that the same techniques could be used in peacetime. In 1928 he published *Propaganda*, in which he wrote explicitly that the conscious manipulation of the habits and opinions of the masses is a necessary element of democratic society. He called this process the engineering of consent. His techniques became the foundation of modern marketing and of twentieth-century political communication.

#### THE ORSON WELLES CASE — 1938

On 30 October 1938, a fiction adapted from H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* was broadcast on American radio in the form of a live news bulletin: field reporters, urgent interruptions, the rhythm of real information. Part of the audience, tuning in after the programme had already started and missing the introduction, mistook it for a real alien invasion.

Localised panic reactions followed. Historians debate the real scale of the phenomenon. The newspapers of the era, rivals of radio, amplified it deliberately. But the mechanism remains documented: a fiction broadcast in the format of live news produces real effects through the reactions it generates. This is the paradox of action described in level 6 of this framework, documented for the first time in 1938.

In 1936, Arthur Nielsen acquired the rights to a device called the audimeter to

measure radio broadcasts. In 1950 he adapted it to television and launched the Nielsen Television Index: for the first time human attention was measured, quantified, and sold to advertisers almost in real time. Television networks learned what kept the viewer in front of the screen and optimised their schedules accordingly. Not to give the truest news, but to maximise time spent. The model is identical to that of digital platforms fifty years later. Only slower and less scalable.

## II. The digital turn and the acceleration

In 2000, a search engine launched a system that sold human attention at auction in real time. Advertisers paid per click, not per view. For the first time human attention became a measurable commodity, sellable in real time. This was not an invention. It was the algorithmic and scalable version of what Bernays theorised in 1928 and American television practised from the 1950s. The difference is scale and speed. The founding principle of the digital economy was born: you do not pay for the product. You are the product.

In 2006, a social platform introduced a feed. An algorithm selected and ordered content not by relevance or accuracy, but by its capacity to generate reaction, clicks, comments, shares. It was not designed to show the truest news, but what kept you on the platform longest. Truth stopped being a selection criterion. This was not a declared intention. It was the logical consequence of the incentive: maximise time spent.

In 2009, a single button, a public gesture of approval, became the universal metric of the entire digital ecosystem. Content, journalists, politicians, institutions began optimising for this signal instead of for quality. Engagement replaced relevance. This is the same process Marinetti had applied by hand in 1909, automated and applied to billions of people simultaneously.

In this same period something less visible but structurally decisive happened: professional journalism entered economic crisis. From 2008 onwards, advertising revenue migrated en masse toward the major digital platforms. Newsrooms cut staff, verification times shortened, publishing speed increased to compete with social media. This is not a question of journalists' quality. It is a question of economic incentives completely overturned by the same infrastructure that created the platforms. Level 2 of this framework, who tells it and why, cannot be understood without keeping in mind that the economic model of professional journalism was systematically eroded by this infrastructure.

In 2018, following a scandal involving 87 million profiles used for political micro-targeting, the chief executive of the largest social platform testified before the United States Congress. The hearings revealed a structural distance between those who design the systems and those who are supposed to regulate them.

The system moves faster than politics.

In the same period, Western digital platforms were used as tools of informational interference by external state actors. The most documented case involved an organisation financed by a foreign state that, as documented by United States Senate investigations and a 2019 special counsel report, systematically produced false content across major social platforms to amplify political divisions. The mechanism was not inventing conflicts from nothing: it was finding fractures already existing in society and feeding them with content optimised for emotional reaction. This is exactly the mechanism of level 3 of this framework, applied with geopolitical intent. British parliamentary investigations documented similar dynamics in the context of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

In 2021, a major American newspaper published internal documents obtained from a whistleblower. The documents showed that the company had internal research on the negative effects of some of its dynamics. The distinction between ignored the consequences to preserve the business model and deliberately produced them is subtle but important. What matters is not the moral judgment on the actors, but the understanding of the structural incentive that guided their choices.

From 2022, the arrival of large language models introduced a further leap in scale. The ability to generate convincing texts, images, and audio at near-zero cost changed the conditions of the system once again. This is not the end of the story. It is the last update available at the time this document was written.

## The thread that runs through everything

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The present resembles the past more than it seems.

From the medieval Church to large language models, the mechanism does not change. Whoever controls the channel of attention controls the perception of reality. Technology determines the scale and speed, not the structure of the incentive.

The channel is always the power.

In the Middle Ages it was writing. In the twentieth century it was radio and television. Today it is the digital platforms. Whoever controls the channel controls what enters people's heads. Not out of necessary malice. Out of structure.

Technology opens. Someone closes again.

In 1450 Gutenberg invented the press and for the first time many could access books. In 1559 the Church published the Index of Forbidden Books. The channel had opened. Someone closed it again. Radio reached millions of people simultaneously. Totalitarian regimes used it for control. The digital platforms allow anyone to publish. Algorithms decide what gets seen. The cycle repeats at every technological leap.

The incentive precedes the technology.

What the auction-based advertising system did in 2000, television advertising was already doing in the 1950s. What the algorithmically curated feed does from 2006, Bernays was already theorising in 1928. What the algorithms optimise for emotional reaction, Marinetti was already experimenting with in 1909. The novelty of the internet is not the mechanism. It is the speed, the scale, and the invisibility.

Financial scandals follow the same logic.

A narrative sufficiently true, house prices always go up, amplified by media, ratings agencies, and institutions until reality stops corresponding to it. The 2008 crisis is also the story of an information system that amplified what everyone wanted to hear. The paradox of action does not only concern politics.

The system is not only built from above.

It is maintained by us too, every day, often without knowing it. Every click, every share, every emotional reaction teaches the algorithm what to amplify. The road is not only built by those who designed it. It is maintained by those who travel it.

Knowing this history is not an academic exercise. It is the prerequisite for stopping treating the current system as a natural and inevitable phenomenon. It is not. It is the result of precise choices, made by precise people, at identifiable historical moments. Constructions can be changed.

## A note on the subject

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The exit from the loop is not a place.

You do not exit the system by changing your feed. You exit by recognising the mechanism while it is happening. The tool is not the external filter, but the reflective pause: the capacity to look at information not as a window on the world, but as a mirror that reveals our anchors and our anxieties.

You are also inside the system. There is no neutral observation point, no privileged position from which to look at the mechanism from outside. The awareness of this is not paralysing. It is the first act of clarity. And clarity is the prerequisite for everything else.

I am aware that building this framework required exactly the cognitive resources that the document describes as unequally distributed. This is not a contradiction that can be resolved. It is one worth inhabiting consciously.

The antidote to cynicism

The right kind of impatience.

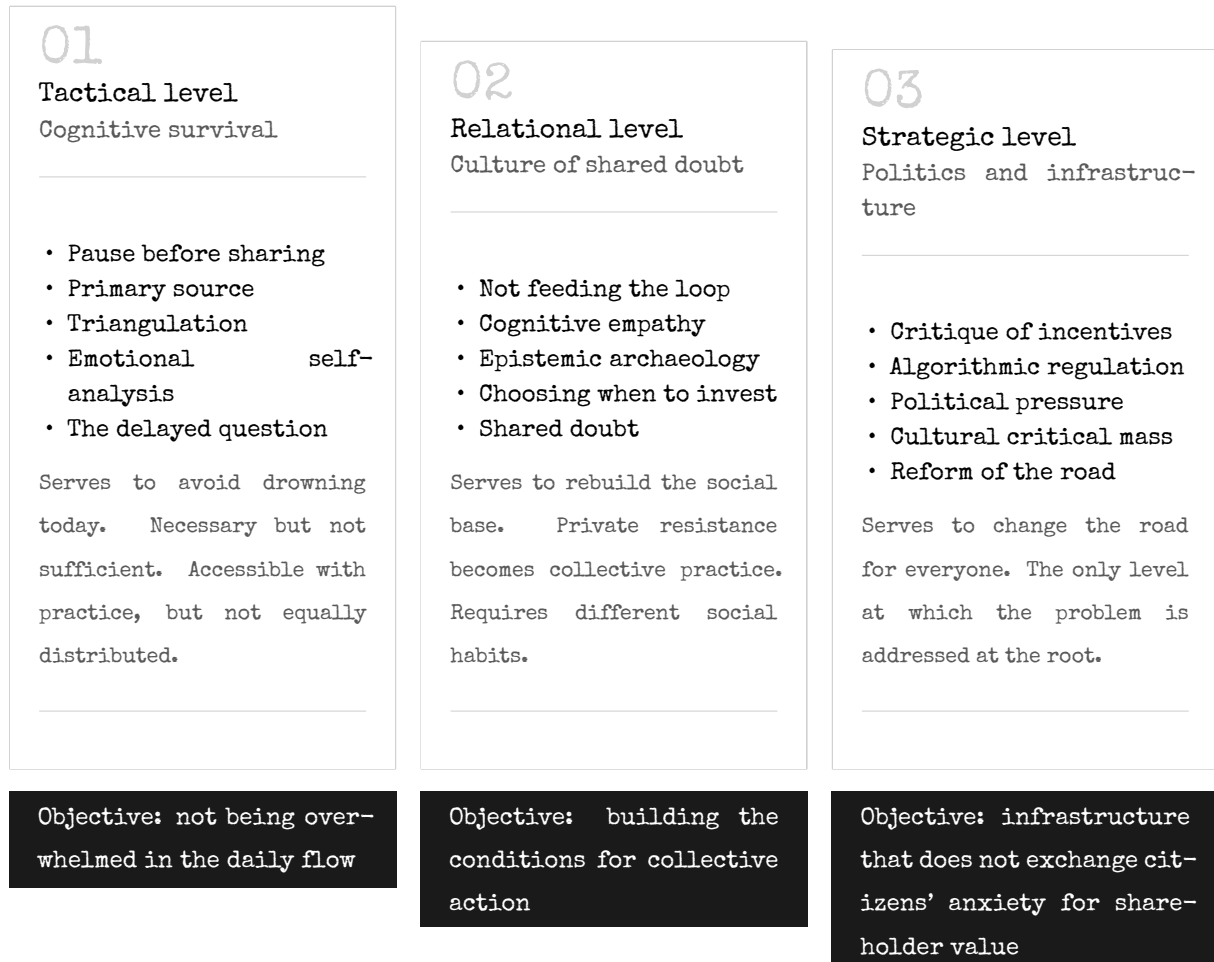
Understanding the entire mechanism and using it as a justification for not acting is surrender dressed as intellectual superiority. Cynicism is the hidden cost of understanding: it converts clarity into immobility, and immobility into passive complicity with the system one claims to want to change.

The right kind of impatience is the opposite. It is the active refusal to accept that our attention is a commodity and our anxiety a profit. It does not discharge itself into private anxiety and does not exhaust itself in bitter commentary. It seeks the transformation of conditions, at all three levels: tactical, relational, strategic.

Truth is not a piece of data you receive.

It is a quality of the relationship  
you build with reality and with others.

## The three-dimensional framework



The three levels do not replace each other. They enable each other. The tactical level creates the conditions for the relational. The relational builds the cultural base for the strategic. The strategic, in turn, reduces the cost of the tactical level for everyone. The tension between the three levels does not resolve. It is inhabited consciously.

## Glossary

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Key terms used in this document, in order of first appearance.

**Fast system (System 1).** The automatic, rapid, and emotional way of thinking described by psychologist Daniel Kahneman. Processes information intuitively, without conscious effort. This is the system that digital platforms learn to exploit. The model is a useful simplification, not an absolute law.

**Slow system (System 2).** The deliberate, rational, and effortful way of thinking. Analyses, compares, doubts. Activates only if there is sufficient time and cognitive energy.

**Cognitive cost.** The real cost in time, energy, and attention required to verify information. The system is designed to make immediate reaction free and verification effortful. This is not a flaw in users: it is a structural incentive.

**Attention economy.** The economic model of digital platforms, based on monetising users' time and attention. Platforms compete by showing content that generates strong emotional reaction, independently of its truth.

**Engineering of consent.** Term coined by Edward Bernays in 1928 to describe the conscious manipulation of the opinions of the masses through psychological techniques. The historical precursor of modern marketing and political communication.

**Echo chamber.** An information environment in which the user is exposed primarily to opinions and information that confirm their existing beliefs. Forms automatically through recommendation algorithms.

**Anchoring.** Cognitive bias by which the first piece of information received on a topic disproportionately influences subsequent evaluations. If the first news we read about inflation says one figure, that number becomes our reference point even after the correction.

**Subtle anxiety.** A form of low-intensity emotional manipulation. Produces small dopamine reinforcements through confirmations of pre-existing fears. Harder to recognise than anger. Often more effective.

**Reflexive blindness.** The impossibility for the observer to be completely external to the system they observe. Whoever analyses the information flow is themselves immersed in that flow. There is no neutral point of view.

**Delayed question.** A practical tool: before reacting to a piece of news, asking oneself what did I think about this topic before reading it? Useful for identifying anchoring and distinguishing new information from the amplification of pre-existing beliefs.

Epistemic archaeology. The practice of reconstructing the path through which someone arrived at a belief. Unlike cognitive empathy, it reconstructs the how, not only the why, shifting judgment from the person to the process.

Cognitive privilege. The condition of those who have the resources, time, energy, education, needed to apply the tools of epistemic defence. Not everyone has practical access to these tools.

The right kind of impatience. Active refusal to accept the current information system as inevitable. Opposite of cynicism. Transforms the understanding of the mechanism into energy to change it at all three levels.

Paradox of action. The phenomenon by which a piece of news born false can produce real effects through the collective reactions it generates. Those reactions become a new event, documented as true news, closing the loop.

Paradox of the road. The mechanism by which infrastructure designed for maximum speed turns cautious behaviour into an anomaly. If disinformation earns more than verification, the market will always produce disinformation.

## Appendix: the analysis process

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Most people do: news, opinion.

I try to force this passage instead: news, analysis, decision.

This is the process I use. It takes more time than a reaction. That is the point.

1. SOURCE (acquisition)
  - | Where does it come from?
  - | Primary (data, press releases) or secondary (media)?
  - | Is it a direct source or repeating others?
  - |
2. NORMALISATION
  - | Is this the same news repeated?
  - | Am I seeing duplicates of the same event?
  - | What are the real metadata (date, author, context)?
  - |
3. EVENT vs NARRATIVE
  - | What happened objectively?
  - | What is interpretation or commentary?
  - | What is assumed without evidence?
  - |
4. ACTORS
  - | Who is involved?
  - | Who is communicating the news?
  - | Who is affected by the event?
  - |
5. INCENTIVES (cui bono)
  - | Who benefits from this narrative?
  - | Are there economic or political interests?
  - |
6. MANIPULATION SIGNALS
  - | Use of fear or urgency?
  - | Headline different from the content?
  - | Key data missing?
  - | Vague sources ("experts say")?
  - |
7. CROSS-CHECK
  - | Is it confirmed by independent sources?
  - | Or is it only repeated across multiple sites?
  - | Are there conflicting versions?
  - |
8. SCORING (evaluation)
  - | Relevance: does it really matter or is it noise?
  - | Reliability: is it verifiable?
  - | Manipulation: how distorted is it?
  - |
9. DECISION
  - | Ignore.
  - | Monitor over time.
  - | Investigate further.

## References

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Five foundational texts for going deeper into the themes of this document. Each adds a different layer of understanding and connects to a specific level of the framework.

Daniel Kahneman    *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011)    Level 4

The foundational text for the concepts of System 1 and System 2. Kahneman, Nobel laureate in economics, shows how the human brain processes information and where it fails in systematic and predictable ways. Essential for understanding why disinformation works so well.

Shoshana Zuboff    *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019)    Level 10

The most complete analysis of the economic model of digital platforms. Zuboff shows how human behaviour has become a raw material to be extracted, processed, and sold. Essential for understanding why the problem is structural, not technical.

Eli Pariser    *The Filter Bubble* (2011)    Level 3

The book that introduced the concept of the filter bubble: the personalised information environment created by algorithms. Pariser documents it from the inside, with the first empirical evidence of how algorithms build different realities for different people.

Walter Lippmann    *Public Opinion* (1922)    Historical section

A 1922 classic that is extraordinarily current. Lippmann analyses the distance between reality and the pictures in our heads. His analysis of how media construct perceived reality anticipates by a century the problems of the digital age.

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman    *Manufacturing Consent* (1988)    Level 2

A structural analysis of how mass media tend to conform to the interests of economic and political power. The propaganda model Chomsky and Herman describe concerns not explicit censorship, but the systemic filters that shape what gets considered news.

## Author's note

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At a certain point I stopped reading the news. Not television, I had already left that behind some time earlier. I mean the newspapers, the websites, the sources I considered serious. I had read them every day for years. Then I began having a strange feeling: as if behind the individual stories there was a pattern. Not a conspiracy, nothing that precise. Something more subtle, the perception that certain mechanisms repeated, that I had seen certain dynamics somewhere before.

And then I understood where. I grew up without the internet, in a time when news arrived through newspapers and television. A time in which I watched some of the most important stories of recent European history told in one way, and discovered years later in quite another. Not through conspiracy, but through what emerges when documents are declassified, when legal proceedings run their course, when time allows things to be seen with more distance. That period taught me something simple: the version that circulates in the immediate moment is never the complete version. Not necessarily because someone is lying, but because the present is always more complicated than how it gets told.

That awareness did not make me suspicious of everything. It made me curious about how things work. The first reaction, faced with the daily noise of the news, was to disconnect. The second, slower, was to ask how it works. Not to find the truth, which nobody possesses alone. But to understand the mechanism. To stop being subject to the small anxieties that rose every time I opened an article, and to start looking at myself from the outside while I read.

I wrote this down because an idea that only lives in your head is harder to trust. Putting it on paper made it something I could look at from the outside, the same way this document asks you to look at information. I am sharing it not to teach anything, but to find out whether what I recognise in the system others recognise too. This is a comparison, not a lesson.

Not by chance. It is a construction. And constructions can be understood.

Masatz

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## Verified references and links

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For each specific claim in this document it is possible to verify the primary source. The links below were active in April 2026.

### Historical section — links to primary sources

Futurist Manifesto, 1909 (section: How the road was built)

Wikipedia EN, sources: Library of Congress, Britannica

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto\\_of\\_Futurism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto_of_Futurism)

Edward Bernays, Propaganda, 1928 (section: How the road was built)

Archive.org — full text freely available

<https://archive.org/details/edward-bernays-propaganda-1928>

Orson Welles, The War of the Worlds, 1938 (section: How the road was built)

History.com — Note: historians debate the scale of the panic

<https://www.history.com/articles/inside-the-war-of-the-worlds-broadcast>

Nielsen Television Index, 1950 (section: How the road was built)

Nielsen official history

<https://sites.nielsen.com/90years>

Cambridge Analytica, US Congress hearings, 2018 (level 10)

Wikipedia documented account

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook-Cambridge\\_Analytica\\_data\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook-Cambridge_Analytica_data_scandal)

Facebook Files, Frances Haugen, 2021 (level 10)

Wall Street Journal, September 2021

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-11631713039>

Internet Research Agency, Mueller Report, 2019 (section: How the road was built)

US Department of Justice

<https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>

### Reading references — for those who want to go deeper

Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion, 1922 (historical section, level 2)

Full text freely available: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6456>

Archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/publicopinion00lippgoog>

Daniel Kahneman, Thinking Fast and Slow, 2011 (level 4)

Farrar, Straus and Giroux — the foundational text on System 1 and System 2

Eli Pariser, The Filter Bubble, 2011 (level 3)

Penguin Press — the book that introduced the concept of the filter bubble

Shoshana Zuboff, The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, 2019 (level 10)

Harvard University Press — the most complete analysis of the digital platform economic model

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, Manufacturing Consent, 1988 (level 2)

Pantheon Books — structural analysis of how mass media conform to power interests

Not by chance.

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It is a construction. And constructions can be understood. This document does not serve to feel better inside the system. It serves to develop the right kind of impatience toward it.

We do not save ourselves alone.

The solution is necessarily collective and infrastructural. But the path toward that solution passes through daily relational resistance.

Awareness is not immunity.

But it is the beginning of critique. Once the mechanism is recognised, it can no longer be ignored. And that awareness is already a political act.

Cynicism is surrender.

Understanding the entire system and using it as a justification for not acting is the most sophisticated form of resignation. The answer is action at all three levels.