



More **correct** Information. Less Discrimination

The Psychology of the Image

Why our brains skip the fact-check phase

Analyzing the image's psychological construction and the recycled narrative

A photo or a video clip convey an immediate impression of truth. Because of this perceived authenticity, **visuals are among the most powerful tools used in disinformation**. Visual disinformation often relies on context manipulation. Real images of messy streets, queues at banks, or people gathered in parks, often from different countries or years ago, are recirculated during political debates to stir up local resentment. Because the image is **real**, the **brain accepts it as current truth**, creating a false sense of of immediate neighbourhood decline.

> What visual disinformation triggers:

Confirmation Bias

Images and videos spark emotions, but they also **validate** our existing worldviews, making us less likely to question them.

High-Arousal Sharing

Anger-inducing visuals are shared at significantly higher rates because they validate the shared beliefs of a community.

The Truth Effect

Repeated exposure to out-of-context images leads the human brain to process them as absolute truth.

Cognitive Ease

The brain processes visual data 60,000x faster than text, bypassing the logical filters we apply to written words.

Analyzing the image's psychological construction

The first look check

Before analyzing the facts, analyze your body. **Visual disinformation targets the nervous system.**

- **Arousal check:** Does this image make you feel like someone is "skipping the line" or "living off your taxes"?
 - *Note:* Domestic disinformation targets resentment, which is a "high-arousal" emotion that stops you from fact-checking.

- **The specificity trap:** Does the image use a generic bad thing (like a photo of trash or a broken window) and claim it happened in your specific town because of migrant people?
 - *Action:* If the answer is "Yes," you must be twice as skeptical. You are currently experiencing **Confirmation Bias**.

Visual framing: the power of cropped images/videos

An image doesn't have to be **fake** to deceive. Professional disinformation uses **strategic cropping** to manipulate the viewer's emotional response.

- **The tight crop:** Does the image zoom in on a specific object (a smartphone, a designer jacket)?
 - *Effect:* This is "status profiling." It strips the person of their status as a refugee by suggesting they are *too wealthy* to need help.
- **The Invasive angle:** Is the photo taken from a "hidden" perspective (from a car, through a fence, or down from a balcony)?
 - *Effect:* This creates a *surveillance gaze*. It frames a group of people talking in a park as a clandestine meeting or loitering threat.



Reflective Exercise: The flip technique

Imagine this exact same image but with a **wide shot**

- How does the "threat" or "suspicion" level change when you see the person is actually standing in a crowded, basic community place or a library?
- How does the narrative change if you see they are using the phone to call their family or navigate a new place, rather than it being a "luxury" item?

Critical thinking tip: If an image feels like a "perfect fit" for a negative stereotype, such as the "fake refugee", it has likely been framed to validate your biases rather than to inform you.

