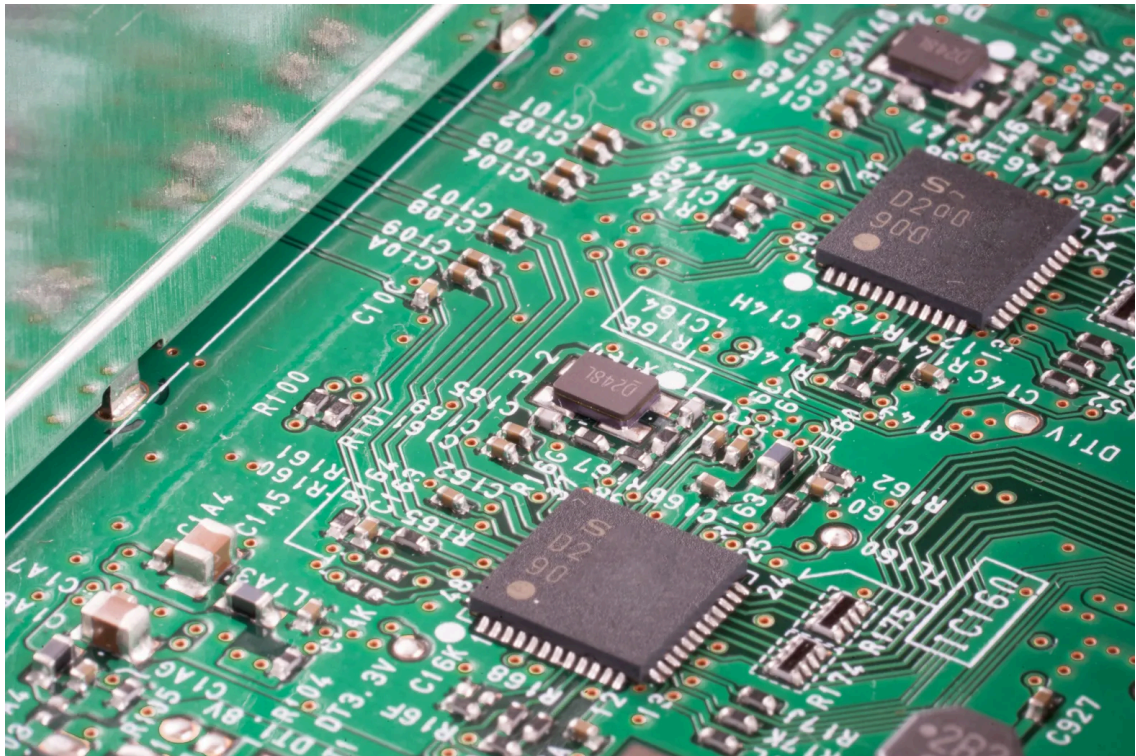


OPINION > COMMENTARY • Opinion Columnist

# Opinion: Will we survive the age of information disorder?

Technology now threatens progress as misinformation distorts our ability to tell fact from fiction and right from wrong



(Courtesy of the Printed Circuit Board Association of America)

Semiconductors on a printed circuit board. Even the slightest deviation from reality for a single transistor that's mere nanometers wide can cause a chip failure.



By **SUNIL MEHTA**

UPDATED: September 19, 2024 at 5:32 a.m.



Having weathered the COVID-19 storm, we are now on the cusp of another pandemic that is even more dangerous and insidious: a plague of misinformation. This digital contagion, which I call "information disorder," distorts our ability to distinguish fact from fiction and right from wrong. Unlike the previous pandemic, which struck our bodies, this one infects our minds and is even harder to combat.

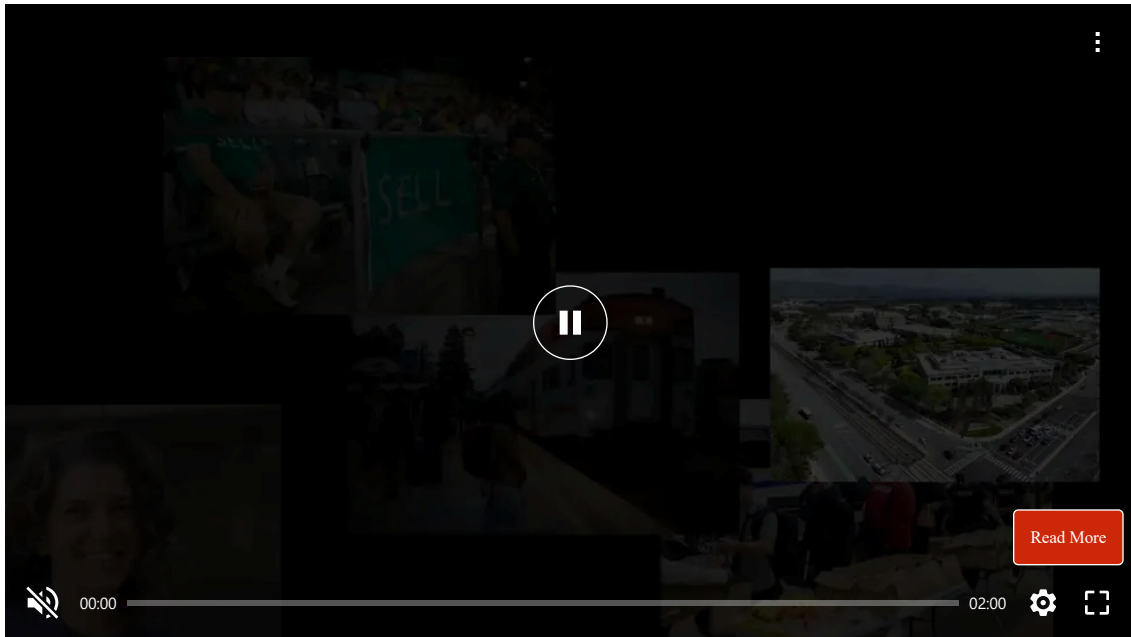
As a veteran of the semiconductor industry, I am particularly dismayed by this trend away from science and truth. My industry relies on an unwavering adherence to scientific principles to harness the precise laws of physics, chemistry and optics. To create the complex chips that power our modern world, we need to fabricate transistors that are mere nanometers wide, roughly one-hundred-thousandth the width of a human hair, with each chip having billions of these transistors. The slightest deviation from reality for a single transistor can cause a chip failure.

For seven decades, many generations of semiconductor professionals have dedicated themselves to scientific truth to stay on the cutting edge of chipmaking technology. This devotion has fueled the exponential growth of transistor packing density in accordance with Moore's Law, which projects that the number of transistors on IC chips will double every two years. (Astonishingly, the industry has consistently delivered on this projection since the time Gordon Moore first presented it in 1965.) This technological revolution has transformed society and created unprecedented wealth. The world's most valuable companies are now technology giants built on the bedrock of semiconductors.

Yet, despite this remarkable success built on the foundation of scientific reality, we can no longer take truth for granted. Mainstream media and newspapers, formerly considered the absolute sources of truth, are no longer trusted. "Alternative facts" are everywhere, being constantly spread on social media, unfiltered and unchecked. There is a deliberate effort to "dumb down" the population, and so far it looks like this effort is succeeding. It is ironic that the very technological advancements that have brought us so far are now being weaponized to spread misinformation, threatening the progress they helped to create.

History offers a chilling precedent. In the 17th century, humanity teetered on the brink of intellectual darkness when the church, then the world's most powerful institution, sought to suppress scientific progress and perpetuate the myth of a geocentric universe. Galileo Galilei, a pioneer of physics, dared to challenge this dogma with evidence showing that the Earth revolved around the sun. Threatened with death, he was forced to recant publicly. But legend has it that despite being compelled to disavow his theories aloud, he muttered under his breath: "And yet it moves!"

Whether or not this story is true, it metaphorically represents the intellectual fight that Galileo and many other brave individuals waged on behalf of science. Thankfully, in the end, darkness was averted and truth prevailed.

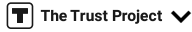


Today, we stand at a similar crossroads. The world's most powerful nation, a beacon of intellectual freedom for centuries, is now in danger of coming under the control of a demagogue who wants to build an authoritarian regime on the foundation of misinformation and lies. A plague of intellectual darkness has infected half our nation. Hollow nationalism and misguided xenophobia have taken hold. It is hard to fathom this is happening in the 21st century, but the harsh reality is that a divided country and the quirks of the Electoral College could easily pave the way for an authoritarian future.

What can we do to avert this catastrophe? We must follow the example of Galileo and his followers and fight hard on behalf of truth and facts. The candidates in the upcoming election who are weaponizing misinformation (by making outlandish claims that immigrants are eating pets, for example) need to be soundly defeated. This time, the battle will be even harder, as social media platforms can spread misinformation with unprecedented speed. Will we survive the age of information disorder or succumb to a new age of darkness? The decision will be in our hands in November.

*Sunil Mehta, a longtime Silicon Valley resident, is the co-founder of grassroots group They See Blue, which focuses on getting out the vote in the South Asian community.*

*Originally Published: September 19, 2024 at 5:30 a.m.*



## Around the Web

REVCNTENT

### Florida: Say Bye to Your Car Insurance Bill if You Live in These Zip Codes

Otto Quotes

### Doctor: Your Hair Might Grow Like Crazy (Try This at Home)

Regrow

### Tinnitus? Do This When the Ringing Won't Stop

WellnessGaze Tinnitus

### Diabetes is Not From Sweets: Meet the #1 Enemy of Diabetes

WellnessGaze Diabetes