

NAVIGATING CLIMATE MISINFORMATION



Climate Action
Against Disinformation

Ten best practices to help journalists identify and tackle misinformation

BACKGROUND

This guide is intended as a resource for journalists covering climate to help better understand and respond to misinformation. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), defines climate dis/misinformation as content which undermines the existence or impacts of climate change, the unequivocal human influence on climate change, and the need for corresponding urgent action.

Social media algorithms, fossil fuel industry spending on public relations and political lobbying, a changing media landscape and an increasingly volatile political climate have all fueled an explosion in the circulation of fabricated or misleading material on the Internet.

High-quality journalism remains **crucial** in addressing the threat of misinformation, but in an era of declining newsrooms and consolidated media, more help is needed. A body of research on **misinformation** has expanded vastly in recent years, informing this selection of best practice tips.

Further information can be found in the extended **Journalist Field Guide**.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DEALING WITH MISINFORMATION

1 Assess whether to report or ignore misinformation.

Determining the impact and visibility of misinformation before covering it is key. **The 2020 Debunking Handbook** contains a detailed flowchart on this topic, while communications strategist Sabrina Joy Stevens has developed a response framework chart based on the spread and impact of misinformation, as published in the 2022 Union of Concerned Scientists video **"How to Counter Disinformation."**

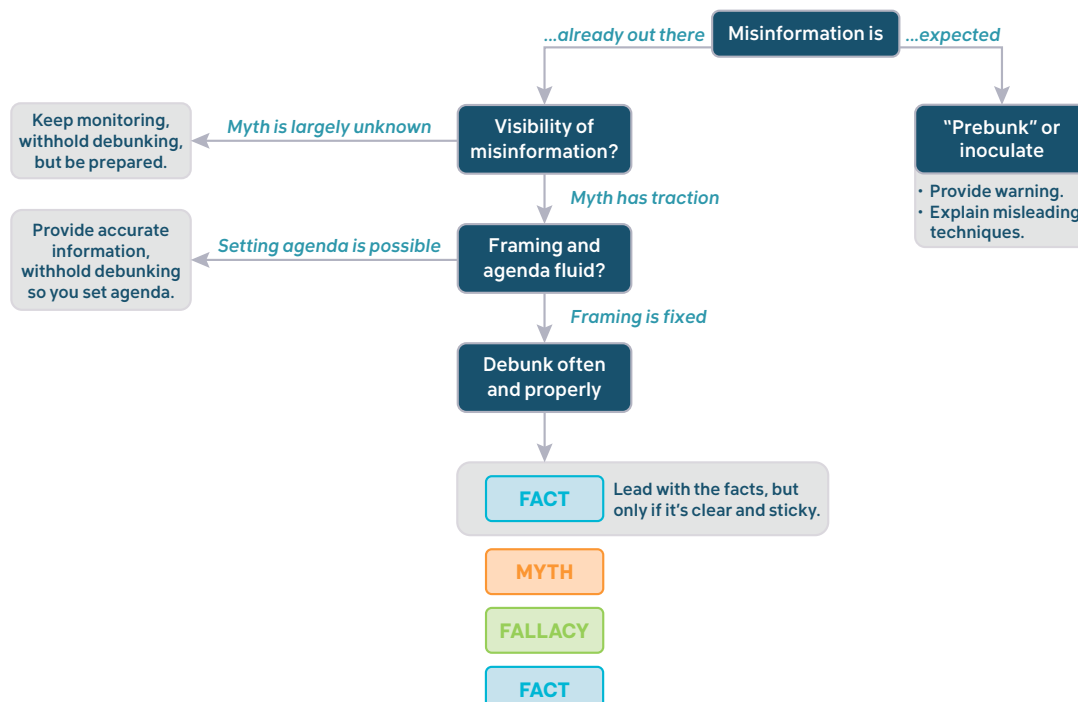


Image: Wendy Cook, 2020 Debunking Handbook

SOURCE HACKING

MEDIA MANIPULATION IN PRACTICE

Joan Donovan
Brian Friedberg

Viral Sloganeering: repackaging reactionary talking points for social media and press amplification

Leak Forgery: prompting a media spectacle by sharing forged documents

Evidence Collages: compiling information from multiple sources into a single, shareable document, usually as an image

Keyword Squatting: the strategic domination of keywords and sockpuppet accounts to misrepresent groups or individuals

We advise journalists to seek out an **abundance of corroborating evidence** when reporting on the actions of social media accounts, and whenever possible, verify the identity of account holders.

We suggest that **newsrooms invest more resources in information security**, including creating a position or desk to vet chains of evidence through analysis and verification of metadata for evidence of data craft.



2 Assess if you are being manipulated into covering misinformation

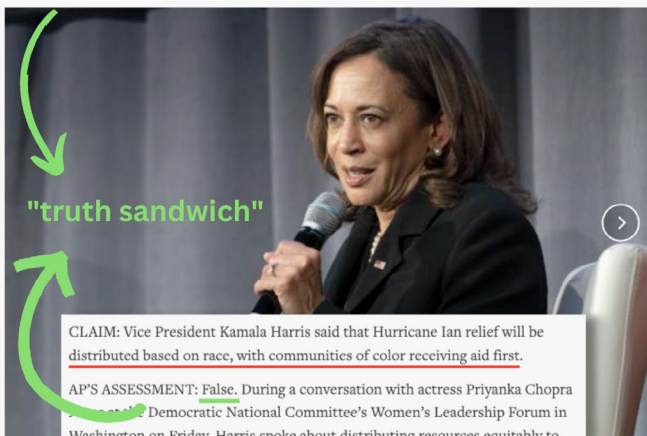
The Data & Society Research Institute's **Source Hacking** report examines tactics that are used to manipulate reporters into helping misinformation spread, along with brief recommendations for journalists.

3 Don't include or directly negate misinformation in headlines

Research shows that most people on social media share news without reading beyond the headline. A headline that repeats or questions a falsehood without context risks doing **more harm than good**.

AP

Harris comments on addressing climate inequity misrepresented



"truth sandwich"

CLAIM: Vice President Kamala Harris said that Hurricane Ian relief will be distributed based on race, with communities of color receiving aid first.

AP'S ASSESSMENT: False. During a conversation with actress Priyanka Chopra at the Democratic National Committee's Women's Leadership Forum in Washington on Friday, Harris spoke about distributing resources equitably to help vulnerable groups, such as low income communities and communities of color, recover from disasters related to climate change. She did not describe the structure that would be used to allocate aid to victims of the recent hurricane.

4 Use the 'Truth Sandwich' to debunk

When debunking is required, the authors of the **Debunking Handbook** specifically recommend a communication technique known as the **"truth sandwich."** This involves leading and finishing your debunk with the correct information. In between, you should explain clearly exactly what was false about the misinformation, and how it differs from the facts.

5 Don't exaggerate the threat of isolated instances of misinformation

A widespread, coordinated disinformation campaign is a very different thing from a few isolated instances of problematic content. Exaggerating or speculating on the significance of relatively low-profile content can help draw **unnecessary momentum to a falsehood**.

6 Don't use the language of misinformers

Using the language and framing of bad actors risks reinforcing and mainstreaming dangerous and misleading ideas. **Avoid repeating dishonest framing as much as possible.**

GOP Sen. Ron Johnson mouths to GOP luncheon that climate change is 'bullsh*t'

Ron Johnson: Climate change is 'bulls--'

Republican Sen. Ron Johnson Caught on Camera Calling Climate Change 'Bullshit'

Sen. Ron Johnson mouths to GOP group that climate change is 'bullsh--' just weeks before deadly heat wave



Covering Climate Now

Do Climate Deniers Really Believe Their Nonsense?

There is a major disconnect between what high-profile climate deniers, including politicians, say about climate change, and what the public believes to be true.



Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WV) speaks on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, recently said he thinks climate change is "Bullsh*t" by Anna Montemurro/Getty Images



It's not just COVID: Ron Johnson flunks climate science, too

Ron Johnson's nonsense about COVID is dangerous, but it appears his hostility toward climate science is just as jarring.

7 Avoid partisan signaling, when possible

Readers may be biased by partisan cues, leading them to reject the content. Professor **Brendan Nyhan recommends** avoiding framing the discussion in response to specific statements from politicians.

Inside Climate News

Politics & Policy

Fact-Check: What Scott Pruitt Gets Wrong About Climate Change, Paris and Coal

EPA administrator Scott Pruitt has spread a lot of misinformation in defending President Trump's plan to exit the Paris climate agreement. Here's a reality check.



8 Contextualize

Misinformation campaigns don't occur in a vacuum; they are rooted in the history, culture and politics of those targeted and those spreading the content. When reporting on problematic content, it's important to include this context.

Forbes
On Fox, Donald Trump Calls Climate Change A 'Hoax': 'In The 1920's They Were Talking About Global Freezing'



9 Don't Boost Bad Content

- Inserting rel="nofollow" into the HTML code of any hyperlink to misinformation will prevent search engines from giving additional weight to that link in search results.
- Avoid sending users to monetized YouTube videos. Screenshots and transcripts can also be used to help illustrate.
- Use archive sites like the Wayback machine to provide context on misleading sources.

The Post Truth

Readers Can Help Stop Disinformation!



- Reverse image search
- Truth Sandwich
- Report bad content

- Re-share images **X**
- Debate trolls **X**
- "No, __ isn't true." **X**

10 Encourage reader to help

Empowering readers to participate in neutralizing misinformation can only help, perhaps starting in the comments of your publication's social media feeds. Readers can also be engaged to help circulate fact-checks and expert debunking when myths have already circulated.

Further information, as well as illustrations, detailed examples, an academic literature review and various other resources can be found in the extended '[Journalist Field Guide](#)'.