

10 Questions to Ask Before Covering Misinformation | First Draft News

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Can silence be the best response to mis- and dis-information?

First Draft has been asking ourselves this question since the French election, when we had to make difficult decisions about what information to publicly debunk for [CrossCheck](#). We became worried that – in cases where rumours, misleading articles or fabricated visuals were confined to niche communities – addressing the content might actually help to spread it farther.

[...]

Without further ado, here are some questions our work has inspired:

1. **Who is my audience?**

Are they likely to have seen a particular piece of mis- or dis-information already? If not, what are the consequences of bringing it to the attention of a wider audience?

2. **When should we publish stories about mis- and dis-information?**

How much traffic should a piece of mis- and dis-information have before we address it? In other words, what is the “tipping point,” and how do we measure it? On Twitter, for example, do we check whether a hashtag made it to a country’s top 10 trending topics?

3. **How do we think about the impact of mis- and dis-information, particularly on Twitter?**

Do we care about how many people see the content? Or do we care about who sees the content? In particular, is Twitter important in virtue of the number of people who use it, or is it important because certain groups, like news organizations and politicians, use it? How do our answers to these questions change how we evaluate the impact of information?

4. **How do we isolate human interactions in a computationally affordable**

manner?

When we talk about the “reach” of a piece of content, we should be referring to how many humans saw it. Yet, identifying the number of humans who saw a piece of information can be difficult and computationally expensive. What algorithms might be devised to calculate human reach (at least on Twitter) in a timely and inexpensive way?

5. For those of us whose primary goal is to stop mis- and dis-information, what strategies of distribution beyond publishing might we consider?

Should we target accounts who have engaged with problematic content with direct messages, to decrease our chances of perpetuating the falsehood? Should we be using Facebook ads that target certain groups? Is this even the role of news organizations or non-profits like First Draft?

6. How do we write our corrections?

How can we use research from the fields of psychology and communication to maximize the positive impact of our corrections and minimize chances of blowback?

7. Why do we report on attempts at manufactured amplification?

Are we putting the popularity of artificially boosted content into proportion? Are we trying to make people aware of bots so that they’ll be more vigilant? Are we trying to encourage platforms or government to take action against mis- and dis-information?

8. Who should be talking about manufactured amplification?

News organizations aren’t in a position to do work that won’t be published. So, given that it may sometimes be counterproductive to publish about bot networks, should news organizations be investigating them?

9. Where do the responsibilities of journalists end and the responsibilities of the intelligence community start?

The monitoring and active debunking of information is falling uncomfortably across different sectors. We’re seeing more disinformation monitoring initiatives emerge outside journalism, such as the [Hamilton 68 dashboard](#), which was co-created by current and former counterterrorism analysts. What role should journalists have in actively combating attempts to influence public opinion in another country?

10. How should we write about attempts at manufactured amplification?

Should we focus on debunking the messages of automated campaigns (fact-checking), or do we focus on the actors behind them (source-checking)? Do we do both? How might we show our investigations are credible without informing bot operators or perpetuating the content they were boosting?

[...]

Organizations covering mis- and dis-information need to discuss these issues, and it's clear that those conversations should include academic researchers, some of whom have been studying corrections and disinformation for decades. This is too important to get wrong.

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