

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET September 08, 2020 | TTR not mapped yet | Mark Sableman

Muting Misinformation: Resources for identifying and dealing with misinformation

We may be on our own in the world of internet misinformation, but we don't lack resources. An expert industry is developing about misinformation, how to spot it and how to better understand the strange world of information on the internet.

Since we can't rely on [lawsuits](#), [social media companies](#) or [imminent legal reforms](#) to combat political misinformation, [individual Americans](#) need to get on top of misinformation, to avoid polluting our own minds and the collective mind of our country. The process of doing so may actually turn out to be interesting and fulfilling.

There are a lot of ways to approach your media literacy and misinformation-fighting self-education.

To begin with, you can regularly consult fact-checking services that supply helpful analysis of disputed or questionable claims. For political news, the "big three" fact checking organizations are [PolitiFact](#), [FactCheck.org](#) - both supported by non-profit organizations - and the [Washington Post's Fact Checker](#). Factcheck.org also offers [SciCheck](#), a science fact-checking service that focuses exclusively on false and misleading scientific claims that are made by partisans to influence public policy. There are also more general fact-checking resources, like [Snopes](#).

It's good citizenship, and a good reading habit, to consult fact-checking resources. While there's evidence that fact-checking rarely changes minds, because it is so hard to change people's minds once they settle on comfortable beliefs, you can be the outlier—the citizen who really cares about the true facts.

Moreover, fact-checking sites don't so much provide simple answers - i.e., "this source is right and this one is wrong" - as explain how they checked out claims, tell you what they found in original sources, discuss relevant scientific, logical and statistical principles and conclude with a reasonable evaluation of the claim at issue. Whether we accept the fact-checker's conclusion or not, each fact-checking report makes us think, and reminds of the need to apply a skeptical gimlet eye to unproven claims and leaps of illogic.

You can also consult artificial-intelligence applications that cover misinformation, like the [Untrue News](#) search engine, which takes you to fact-checking reports, and [Hoaxy](#), which maps the spread of articles online. Or for a broader perspective, consult the [First Draft](#) project, which provides a variety of resources on misinformation, including the [Field Guide to Fake News](#).

Some fact-checking resources can help you evaluate new and innovative forms of misinformation, such as video manipulation. Manipulated videos are a major misinformation concern, because video is such a basic and convincing means of acquiring information, and video deception preys on the basic human instinct of "seeing is believing." Especially if you have heard of deepfakes—video manipulation on steroids—you might easily despair of ever sorting out the fake from the real.

But a few minutes with the Washington Post's [Fact-Checkers Guide to Manipulated Video](#) may turn the tide. The guide, an interesting interactive graphic article with embedded videos showing original and manipulated content, provides a simple, easy-to-understand overview of a number of manipulative techniques, such as "missing context," "deceptive editing" and "malicious transformation." The guide provides several illustrations of each of these deceptions, showing side-by-side comparisons of original and edited videos.

As you work through this guide and its video examples, you will become a better educated video viewer, better at spotting questionable videos and checking them out. This is an important skill; as Glenn Kessler, editor of the Fact Checker, [explained](#), "Video is the mode of communication of the future," and many of today's deceptions involve video manipulation.

Manipulated videos will inevitably work their way into the political dialog, as propagandists churn out cheap deepfakes (“cheapfakes”), which, as the News Literacy Project [warns](#), “are just as likely as more sophisticated videos to draw in those inclined to believe in them.”

For an interesting account of another news organization’s video verification process, see the New York Times article, [Satellite Images and Shadow Analysis: How The Times Verifies Eyewitness Videos](#).

You’ll also want to develop good information habits yourself, including refraining from spreading questionable or unvetted information. Particularly on social media, a lot of misinformation spreads when [users repost and redistribute](#) items that catch their eye, often when a post echoes precisely what they are concerned about or afraid of.

A helpful [Washington Post article](#) gives some guidelines for thinking before reposting: Apply the brakes. Check the source. Don’t trust cute things. Become a citizen investigator. When you find misinformation correct it—carefully. Similarly, the News Literacy Program offers some [“Sanitize before you share”](#) tips.

If you want to go deeper into evaluating media content, check out classes and text books in the growing [field of media literacy](#). Take a look at one of the recommended media literacy books, or attend a media literacy program. Consider the media literacy tips in my interviews with professors [Don Corrigan](#) and [Julie Smith](#). Follow other developing media literacy programs, like Poynter Institute’s [MediaWise](#), which has special arms helping seniors, Gen Z and first-time voters. You may even wish to support the [News Literacy Program](#).

Don’t feel ashamed that you need help in catching misinformation. Even journalists on the front lines of information gathering use tools for separating out legitimate and illegitimate claims. Major news organizations like the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have created special internal resources to protect their journalists and their pages from the poison of misinformation. The New York Times created a project, the News Provenance Project, as a resource for verifying the authenticity of photographs. You can also find tips for journalists at the Journalists’ Resource [Research roundup](#) and the Society for Professional Journalists’ [Fact-Checking Resource](#).

Similarly, the group Data & Society published a report, [“The Oxygen of Amplification,”](#) which suggests best practices “for reporting on extremist, antagonists, and manipulators online.” It is designed for journalists, but its background information and recommendations may be valuable for anyone who wants to understand and navigate the many unconventional news and opinion sources on the internet.

In a different era, media literacy may have seemed like an obscure academic specialty. But in today’s information climate, all well-informed citizens need to learn and apply media literacy techniques.

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