

10 WAYS TO COMBAT MISINFORMATION

A Behavioral Insights Approach

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INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

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In a soon-to-be-released Institute for Public Relations study, 63% of respondents said that misinformation was a "major problem" in the United States. Misinformation, the unintentional dissemination of false, incorrect or erroneous information, can lead people to hold inaccurate beliefs and make misguided decisions. Communicating the inaccuracy of false claims is necessary for helping people understand that they have been misled. However, it is clear that just identifying falsehoods is often not enough to correct the resulting misperceptions.



ONE

PROVIDE DETAILED, BUT CONCISE EXPLANATIONS

Corrections with detailed counterarguments are more effective than simply warning or rebuttal alone. The additional information can help people understand an issue better and revise any misled beliefs.

TWO

EXPLAIN USING ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTS

Refuting a false claim often leaves gaps in people's understanding. If those gaps aren't filled, distorted information might still be used when thinking about an issue. Alternative causal explanations clarify why something is untrue by providing an account of how a situation actually unfolded.



THREE

REPEAT CORRECTIONS

Information that is repeated further is judged to be more likely to be true. Repeated exposure to corrections and counterarguments to misinformation can help promote more accurate, well-informed beliefs.

FOUR

DON'T REPEAT MISINFORMATION WITHOUT THE RIGHT CONTEXT

Misinformation should not be repeated unless it is presented in a way that helps people recall that it is inaccurate. Mentions of the misinformation should emphasize why the claim is wrong or misleading and not the claim itself.



FIVE

CORRECT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

The longer a false claim goes without being corrected, the more likely people will be exposed to it and proven to be accurate. Repeated exposure to misinformation makes it even more likely to be true, even if it is eventually corrected.

SIX

USE GRAPHS AND OTHER VISUALIZATIONS

Graphs and other data visualizations can be easier to understand than text that conveys the same information. Visualizations are useful for debunking misinformation because they attract attention and can provide information with greater clarity and ease, while appearing less potentially biased.



SEVEN

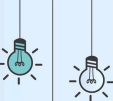
INOCULATE FOR MISINFORMATION

Refutations provide information to correct misperceptions after exposure. Inoculation provides that by pre-emptively preventing misperceptions from developing in the first place. People are less likely to fall for misinformation if they are warned ahead of time and explained why it is incorrect.

EIGHT

CHOOSE YOUR COMMUNICATOR WISELY

Corrections are more effective when they come from people we believe and credible. Expertise plays an important role in credibility and therefore experts' debunking misinformation can be more impactful than other sources. Communicators that align with someone's identity or ideology are also more likely to be trusted when correcting false or misleading claims.



NINE

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT ANALYTICAL THINKING

More engaged citizens are less susceptible to misinformation. One way to encourage a more evaluative mindset is to draw attention to the growing problem of false information and its impact on themselves and on society. Education and information campaigns around media and digital literacy can also support more efficient analysis of the information that we are exposed to.

TEN

AFFIRM THE AUDIENCE'S SENSE OF SELF

Correcting misinformation is especially difficult when the belief is central to someone's identity or world view. To reach these audiences, it is important to affirm their sense of self by having them reflect on positive traits and values they hold, and by measuring them that their concerns and interest in an issue is important, even if their information isn't accurate.



READ THE FULL STUDY AT:
INSTITUTEFORPUBLICRELATIONS.COM/10-WAYS-TO-COMBAT-MISINFORMATION