

Preventing the spread of false information online

1. Introduction

The Global Risks Report 2024 ranked misinformation and disinformation as the single biggest short-term risk to human society. This is compounded by false information being significantly more likely to be reshared than the truth on social media platforms (Sethi, 2024).

By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

- use simple strategies to avoid being misled by inaccurate information, such as adopting a mixed news diet
- use evaluation criteria (such as 3Ws) to judge how reliable a source is
- identify trustworthy fact-checking websites that can help you verify information
- take responsible actions to help prevent false or misleading information from spreading.

Allow 10 minutes to complete it. **Learning outcomes (heading 3)**

Normal text.

2. Preventing the spread of false information

There are 5 steps you can take to combat the spread of false information.

1. Use a variety of news outlets

The first step to ensuring that false information doesn't spread is to adopt a **mixed-news diet** so that you get your news without reporting bias.

1. A mixed-news diet refers to the deliberate selection and consumption of news from various media sources, such as television, news, social media, and online content, from a wide range of the political spectrum. Regularly assessing and adjusting your news diet is essential for maintaining a balanced and informed viewpoint and thus minimising exposure to misinformation and bias (Hulatt, 2024).
2. To optimise your media diet, it is important to vary the types of content you consume and verify the veracity of information you encounter.

Take it further:

You can complete the [Media diet free short course](#) from StudySmarter.

2. 3Ws method

The second step is to evaluate any bias in how specific stories are reported in the news. For this it is useful to go back to the 3Ws method [link back].

Who?

Ask yourself who is reporting and how?

Who owns the news outlet? Some news outlets are owned by worldwide media moguls who use their economic and media power to influence politicians and world events.

Why?

Can you detect any bias or agenda?

Can you detect any vested interests? You may need to dig deep to uncover these.

When?

Is what is being reported a recent event?

Or is something that happened a while ago is being reused to emphasise a specific point?

As you can see, the 3Ws method is an integral part of fact-checking.

3. Fact-check!

Once you have identified false or biased information [link to How to spot], it is important to correct it, and prevent it from being shared further.

False information is commonly spread through content taken out of context, so checking the context and veracity is important and is the first thing you need to do.

To do this, you need to check any claims made against fact-checking sites like [Climate Feedback](#) or [Snopes](#).

You can check images and videos using [TinEye](#) or [Google Lens](#). These will allow you to see how recent or old the respective image or video is, and where it originated from. For more details see our Images as misinformation activity.

[crossref]

[Amnesty International Evidence Lab](#), [UN Fact-check](#), [DW](#)

[Akademie](#), and [Fact Check Hub](#), amongst others, fact check viral videos for veracity.

Take it further:

Google Fact Check Tools lesson – a 5-minute activity.

[Fact check: How videos are recycled for political purposes](#)

4. Check links

When reading news, just as it is important to fact-check the content and images, it is equally important to verify where the evidence that is being cited comes from. Therefore, make sure you click on the links that provide evidence and apply what you have learned about how to evaluate information to those too.

5. Pause, Debunk, Report!

Now that you can identify false information, you can take important steps to ensure it doesn't spread widely:

Pause before you share. Don't share reflexively without checking first. While much false information is unintentionally shared, it doesn't mean that there are no consequences.

Debunk with a truth sandwich: Wherever possible debunk climate misinformation by clearly stating the truth and then address the misinformation and fact-check it, using sites like Climate Feedback or Snopes.

It is important to restate the correct information. This avoids giving the misinformation another platform and makes sure that the reader's final takeaway is the correct one.

Report climate misinformation you encounter on social media: Despite their past inability to adequately address this issue, social media companies have tools that allow you to report misinformation. You can do your part by reporting it whenever you spot it. The guide on How to report misinformation online, broken down by platform, shows you how to do that.

3. Fact-checking resources

New tools are constantly being developed to combat (amongst other AI-generated) false information.

Fact-checking websites

- [Climate Feedback](#)
- [Snopes](#)
- [FactCheck.org](#)
- [Media Bias/Fact Check](#)
- [NPR FactCheck](#)

Best Video and Audio fact check tools

- [InVID Verification Plugin](#)
- [Factiverse Live Fact-Checking](#) - audio and audio factchecking
- [Sensity AI](#) – deepfake detection
- [Fact Check Hub](#)
- [Amnesty International's YouTube DataViewer](#)
- [Full Fact AI](#)
- [DW Akademie](#)

Key considerations for using AI fact check tools

- *Language Limitations:* Some AI tools may be less efficient in non-Western languages or regions.
- *Human Verification:* While AI can assist, final decisions on whether a video is true or false should still be made by humans.

Summary

In this activity you have learned how to prevent false and misleading information from spreading when you encounter it.

You should now be able to:

- use simple strategies to avoid being misled by inaccurate information, such as adopting a mixed news diet;
- use evaluation criteria (such as 3Ws) to judge how reliable a source is;
- identify trustworthy fact-checking websites that can help you verify information;
- take responsible actions to help prevent false or misleading information from spreading.

Take it further: take a look at the CCCC's Debunking Handbook (2020).

References

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Next Steps