

CORONAVIRUS: RESOURCES FOR REPORTERS

FIRST DRAFT Last updated: 9 April 2020

<https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/coronavirus-resources-for-reporters/?fbclid=IwAR0PDYfedOjYLIWoVc5bYi3yAXizANtQf9crFYehd6GCHImCoKY07ghgToY>

Welcome to First Draft's resource hub for reporting on coronavirus. We have created and collected guidance to support accurate and responsible reporting on coronavirus, which will be regularly updated with new information. It covers:

- Newsgathering and verification tools
- Ethics and responsible reporting guidance
- A database of debunks of mis- and disinformation
- Data and information sources
- A searchable reading list
- FAQs that journalists may have
- Links to sign up for video calls on reporting coronavirus

Resources

Click through to access guides, tips, links and articles for journalists reporting on the coronavirus.

Searchable archive of coronavirus debunks

First Draft has built a searchable archive of fact-checked mis- and disinformation on coronavirus from around the world.

As of 16 March 2020 the database collates output from more than 70 organisations sourced from Google's Fact Check Explorer tool and Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). The IFCN was launched in 2015 as a global collaboration of fact checking organisations. It collectively published more than 800 fact checks about coronavirus in the first seven weeks of the outbreak and continues to publish regular updates on coronavirus misinformation.

The database includes debunks in more than 20 languages which are searchable in English. We will be adding translations from a range of further languages. This software is in its alpha phase. Users may experience errors and bugs and we will be adding further features and functionality in the near future.

The search allows the use of boolean operators, eg using AND to find information that includes both of two keywords. Simply enter your query in the box below.

CONTENT

- **Tools and guides**
- **Information sources**
- **Platforms' responses**

- [Coronavirus debunk archive](#)
- [Webinars](#)
- [Reading from around the web](#)

CORONAVIRUS: TOOLS AND GUIDES FOR JOURNALISTS

Last updated: 18 March 2020

This is a collection of tools, explainers and resources that can help anybody working with coronavirus information online. One of the biggest problems has been how little accurate information most people have been able to access. In this vacuum of trusted sources and concrete facts, misinformation has prospered and spread like the very virus it is trying to protect against. Journalists and publishers have to report new facts, debunk false stories and monitor how these spread online under pressure and with limited resources.

5 quick ways we can all double-check coronavirus information online

When we come across content online that causes strong emotional reactions — like panic or fear — we can accidentally share things without stopping to think and check whether they’re accurate. Agents of disinformation take advantage of this and create content designed to make us panic-share stories, angry-post reactions, forward happy puppy stories, and everything in between. But we can fight the information disease together. Here are five quick things we can do to verify content online before we share.

First Draft toolbox

The screenshot shows a dashboard titled "How to use this dashboard" which explains its purpose: "This is a collection of some tools, readings and resources to get you and your newsroom started with online social newsgathering, verification and responsible reporting." It lists various tool categories:

- Verifying Images - Reverse Image Search:** Includes HOW TO verify images online - PRINTOUT, Google Images Search, RevEye - Reverse Image Search, TinEye - Reverse Image Search, and BING - visual search.
- Verifying images - Exif/metadata:** Includes Jeffrey Friedl's Image Metadata Viewer and View Exif data online, remove Exif online.
- Verifying Video:** Includes Fake video news debunker by InVID, Watch Frame by Frame, and Youtube Data Viewer.
- Geolocation:** Includes Google Earth, Wikimapia, OpenStreetMap, Google Maps, and Baidu - 百度地图.
- Ad Transparency:** Includes Ad Library, Google Transparency Report, and Ads Transparency Center.
- Investigating websites:** Includes Whois.com.
- Advanced Toolkit:** Includes First Draft - Tools for newsgathering, monitoring, verification and online security.
- Essential Chrome Plugins:** Includes Wayback Machine - Archiving, InVID, RevEye Reverse Image Search, CrowdTangle Link Checker, and Google Translate.
- Twitter:** Includes Tweetdeck, Twitonomy, Followerwonk, TweetBeaver, Twitter List Copy, Trendsmap, and Trump Twitter Archive.
- Facebook:** Includes Who posted what? and FB US 2020.
- Instagram:** Includes Picperzee and Picbear.
- TikTok:** Includes TikTok 101 - by Slate, TikTok viewer / lists, https://ttonlineviewer.com/, and https://app.tikster.net/.
- Finding People:** Includes Spokeo, Advanced LinkedIn Search, hunter.io, and https://www.social-searcher.com/.

Being good at verification is mostly about repetition, persistence and using digital investigative tools with a little creativity. There are so many verification tricks and tools available now. In fact, the hardest part might be remembering all of the resources at your disposal. [This is the link you need to bookmark.](#)

Our online dashboard is a collection of reading, handbooks and practical tools to help you gather news on the social web, monitor topics and verify images, accounts and more. The tools are divided by what they do and if you hover over each of them a short description will appear explaining more about how it works.

Dedicated coronavirus Google Trends dashboard

Google has produced a dedicated trends dashboard showing information and data around search terms related to coronavirus. This can be used for finding out what questions readers have about coronavirus, as well as identifying rising narratives around the epidemic.

Below is an example of global searches for coronavirus.

CrowdTangle search and dashboards

CrowdTangle, the social analytics tool owned by Facebook, has produced an updated search function and a series of live displays covering information posted on social networks.

Search

CrowdTangle has rolled out a new search function early to help those trying to find and track information on social media. New features include “meme search” designed to allow searches for text on images and the ability to see trends of a hashtag, keyword or URL over time.

Live Displays

This new hub offers regional live displays of posts from public groups and accounts on Facebook and Instagram using keywords and highlighting posts from local news outlets, regional World Health Organization Pages, government agencies, local politicians and others.

You can read more about how it is built and organised [here](#).

Verification of online content can be intimidating, but it is not difficult. That's where this Essential Guide comes in. This is your condensed guide to the wizardry of verification. It includes essential concepts, checklists and our favourite tips and techniques. Most importantly, it will introduce you to the five pillars of verification, and serve as a quick reference for how to tackle each one.

First Draft's essential guide to newsgathering and monitoring on the social web

Regardless of your beat or area of focus, understanding how to use the social web to discover, monitor and research stories is an essential skill. It allows you to find sources, monitor conversations, understand behaviours, track events and find the issues that affect a community. But you have to know where, when and how to look online. In this Essential Guide we highlight the best free tools and techniques in news gathering (active search) and monitoring (passive search). We also look at the best practices and applications across major platforms and online services so that you can effectively surface the most useful content for your reporting and research.

How to investigate health misinformation (and anything else) using Twitter's api

Twitter's interface and Tweetdeck provide only a shallow look at what is actually occurring on the platform. To better understand what is happening under the surface, such as whether a trending hashtag is being driven by inauthentic means, you need to tap into one of Twitter's various application programming interfaces (APIs). Follow this step-by-step guide to collect and analyse data from Twitter, about anything from coronavirus rumours to anti-vax claims and more.

Boolean basics: how to write a search query for newsgathering that works

Search the social web for stories more effectively. When searching for newsworthy content online, you've got to know exactly what you're looking for and have the skills to find it. This is where Boolean search queries help. These strings of words allow you to cut through the usual social media chatter by upgrading a default search to a multifaceted, specific search to find more precise snippets of information. In this quick guide, we run through the basics of what you need to know to search social media for effective newsgathering.

Quick start to verifying online media

If you've only got an hour, this quick online verification course will take you through the basic thought process of how to approach misinformation online and some tools to verify it. It is available in English, Portugues do Brasil, Français, Deutsch, Bahasa Indonesia, Italiano, Español Latino Americano, 日本語, 한국어, and русский.

Advanced verification training for journalists

Got the basics down? This advanced course will walk you through how to approach verification as a process, dealing with advanced geolocation, the 5 pillars of verification and more. It is available in English, Portugues do Brasil, Français, Deutsch, Bahasa Indonesia, Italiano, Español Latino Americano, 日本語, 한국어, and русский.

FIRST DRAFT'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO NEWSGATHERING AND MONITORING ON THE SOCIAL WEB

Sources and keywords: The fundamentals of online newsgathering

The fourth book in First Draft's series of Essential Guides looks at the tools and techniques for finding newsworthy material online.

by: **Carlotta Dotto** and **Rory Smith**

Date: **October 28, 2019**

This is the fourth in a series of new Essential Guides published by First Draft. Covering newsgathering, verification, responsible reporting, online safety, digital ads and more, each book is intended as a starting point for exploring the challenges of digital journalism in the modern age. They are also supporting materials for our new CrossCheck initiative, fostering collaboration between journalists around the world.

This extract is from First Draft's 'Essential Guide to Newsgathering and Monitoring on the Social Web', by research reporter Carlotta Dotto and senior investigator Rory Smith.

Download the full guide:

- *Essential Guide to Newsgathering and Monitoring on the Social Web (PDF)*

Regardless of your beat or area of focus, understanding how to use the social web to discover, monitor and research stories is an essential skill.

It allows you to find sources, monitor conversations, understand behaviours, track events and find the issues that affect a community. But you have to know where, when and how to look online.

In this book we will highlight the best free tools and techniques in newsgathering (active search) and monitoring (passive search). We will also look at the best practices and applications across major platforms and online services so that you can effectively surface the most useful content for your reporting and research.

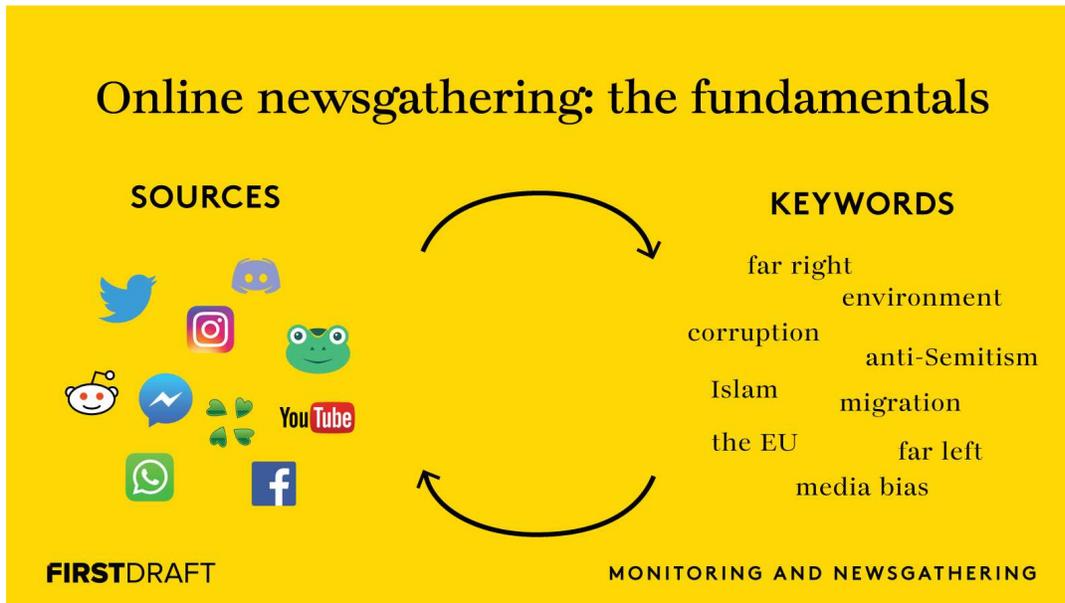
There are a few key concepts that are fundamental to every online newsgathering operation. And while we will touch on these in more detail throughout the book, it is worth outlining them briefly at the start.

As with journalism before the internet, up-to-date lists of pertinent sources are the backbone of every beat. But unlike the pre-digital age, we can now listen in on millions of conversations happening in real time. This is where searches for keywords come in — terms, phrases or hashtags used to discuss topics or events which can help us identify what might be a good source for a story.

For hard news, the relevant sources and keywords might be more apparent. A local reporter needs to know community leaders, subject experts, politicians, charities, academics, influencers, campaign groups, eyewitnesses, celebrities, business leaders and emergency services, to name a few.

If they were on the look out for breaking news events from those sources, they might want to listen for words and phrases like shooting, stabbing, crash, collision, attack, assault, shots fired, knife, pistol, explosion, died, body, serious, critical, life- changing, life-threatening, terrorist, extremism, casualty or injuries.

Together, this process of identifying sources and keywords forms the core of online newsgathering.



When it comes to niche topics, it can be harder to get started. But identifying some more specific keywords can help us to identify more sources, creating a feedback loop of new sources and new keywords across new platforms which can get us up to speed in no time. The types of sources and the relevant keywords will be different for each topic and patch, but the fundamental approach remains the same.

Monitoring is an iterative process that involves the constant collection of new information relevant to the topics, sources and conversations you are tracking. And as your monitoring operation evolves, you will continually surface new and relevant accounts, keywords and hashtags. It's a good idea to maintain a central document or spreadsheet where you can aggregate this information and add new content as it arises. It will also save time for future monitoring projects tracking similar themes.

It's important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all way of organising and managing online research — the nature of what you are reporting on very much dictates the sources, keywords and process necessary — and we encourage you to think creatively and remain flexible when designing your own monitoring systems.

There are some powerful paid tools available for this kind of work. This book will cover the free tools and techniques which anyone with an internet connection can use for newsgathering and monitoring on the social web.

FIRST DRAFT'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO VERIFYING ONLINE INFORMATION

by: **Shaydanay Urbani**

Date: **October 14, 2019**

The second in a new series of guides from First Draft looks at the tools, tips and techniques for figuring out if online materials is what it purports to be.

This is the second in a series of new Essential Guides published by First Draft. Covering newsgathering, verification, responsible reporting, online safety, digital ads and more, each book is intended as a starting point for exploring the challenges of digital journalism in the modern age. They are also supporting materials for our new [CrossCheck initiative](#), fostering collaboration between journalists around the world.

This extract is from First Draft's 'Essential Guide to Verifying Online Information', by research reporter Shaydanay Urbani.

Download the full guide:

- ***First Draft's Essential Guide to Verifying Online Information (PDF)***

Verification of online content can be intimidating, but it is not difficult.

Being good at verification is mostly about repetition, persistence and using digital investigative tools with a little creativity. There are so many verification tricks and tools available now. In fact, the hardest part might be remembering all of the resources at your disposal.

That's where this book comes in. This is your little condensed guide to the wizardry of verification. It includes essential concepts, checklists and our favourite tips and techniques. Most importantly, it will introduce you to the five pillars of verification, and hopefully serve as a quick reference for how to tackle each one.

Information travels so quickly now, and disinformation is becoming so easy to generate and spread that it is important for every journalist — not just the tech reporter and the social media editor — to understand basic verification skills.

This is especially true in a breaking news environment, when the pressure is high to both report quickly and get the facts straight. Newsrooms also need to protect themselves from being hoaxed and inadvertently introducing falsehoods to a wider audience. Many agents of disinformation see coverage by established news outlets as the end-goal and will use online spaces to seed rumours and manipulated content, hoping to reach a bigger audience.

For more information on this see First Draft's [Essential Guide to Responsible Reporting in an Age of Information Disorder](#).

Verification is constantly changing. Tech platforms modify their privacy settings, research tools get taken down and new ones are built

Before verifying anything online, ask yourself this first most basic question: Is the content I am looking at connected to an event that actually took place?

In some circumstances, like a breaking news event, this question might be the very thing you are trying to ascertain with your verification. But in some cases it isn't.

Imagine you find a video that claims to be of long lines and unhappy passengers at the Chicago O'Hare International Airport. Before you go down the rabbit hole of verifying the person who captured the video, the date and time, or the location, your first question should be this one: are there actually reports of problems at the airport?

Another example is the infamous headline that emerged ahead of the 2016 US election: Pope Endorses Donald Trump. You can do all the verification you like about the website, who created it, when the article was published and how far it spread, etc. but the fundamental claim of the article should be the first thing you check.

The 5 pillars of verification

The infographic is a vertical rectangle with an orange background. On the left side, the title 'The 5 Pillars of Visual Verification' is written in white. On the right side, five pillars are listed, each with a bolded title and a question below it, separated by horizontal lines. At the bottom left, the word 'FIRSTDRAFT' is written in white, and at the bottom right, the word 'VERIFICATION' is written in white.

The 5 Pillars of Visual Verification	PROVENANCE Are you looking at the original piece of content?
	SOURCE Who captured the original piece of content?
	DATE When was the piece of content captured?
	LOCATION Where was the piece of content captured?
	MOTIVATION Why was the piece of content captured?

FIRSTDRAFT **VERIFICATION**

The nice thing about teaching verification is that it is easy to break down. That's because whether you are looking at an eyewitness video, a manipulated photo, a sockpuppet account or a meme, the basic checks you have to run on them are the same:

Provenance: Are you looking at the original account, article or piece of content?
Source: Who created the account or article, or captured the original piece of content?
Date: When was it created?

Location: Where was the account established, website created or piece of content captured?

Motivation: Why was the account established, website created or the piece of content captured?

The more you know about each pillar, the stronger your verification will be.

The elusiveness of certainty

Verification is hardly ever foolproof. It is more like looking for clues and collecting corroborating evidence. Picture an old-fashioned detective's investigation board. Bits of information are pinned to the board: a location, a name, a telling quote.

Lines between the clues present a web of connections. That's what digital verification is: the same old methods reporters and investigators have always used to get at the truth, but applied to the world wide web.

So go ahead and channel your inner Sherlock Holmes, collect as much evidence as you can, but realise that you will not always get a definitive answer. Realise also that the fact that certainty eludes us means it is all the more important we are forthright about what we know and what we don't know — especially if that information is going to inform our reporting.

Below is a rubric we built for verifying visual media that will help you gauge how airtight your verification is, and where the holes might be.

VISUAL VERIFICATION GUIDE: PHOTOS

	NO				YES
1. ARE YOU LOOKING AT THE ORIGINAL VERSION?	A reverse image search returns identical photos indexed online before the event in question took place	A reverse image search returns similar results with some identical features, suggesting it might be a composite	A date search on each social network reveals it to be the first of many versions shared online but we have not yet received confirmation from the uploader	We are unable to find other versions online and basic shadow and reflection checks suggest that it has not been manipulated	It was sent to us directly and we have spoken to the source
2. DO YOU KNOW WHO CAPTURED THE PHOTO?	It came in via an anonymous email or chat app number	It was uploaded to a social network but the username does not appear elsewhere online. The uploader wants to remain anonymous	By running full name searches, reverse searching the user's profile photo, and/or researching the domain ownership of their blog or website, we were able to identify the uploader	We communicated with the uploader via social media to confirm that they took the photo	We questioned the source and their answers correlated with EXIF data, weather reports and their own online footprint
3. DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE PHOTO WAS CAPTURED?	There was no location data available and it contains no visual clues to investigate	We have cross-referenced with other photos coming from the scene but there is no satellite or street view imagery available to confirm the location	We have used visual clues such as signage, architecture and clothing to establish a broad geographical region	We have crossreferenced landscape and landmarks using mapping tools and have confirmed the lat/long coordinates	The source was able to confirm other landmarks in their field of vision, which matched those shown on online maps
4. DO YOU KNOW WHEN THE PHOTO WAS CAPTURED?	It was sent to us anonymously and there is no EXIF data available	We checked the timestamp on the social network to see when it was first shared online but we have no EXIF data confirming when it was taken	The social time stamp shows it was uploaded shortly after the event occurred and it features visual evidence that correlates with other eyewitness reports	We confirmed that the weather conditions and any shadows visible in the image correlate with the time, date and location given by the source	It contains EXIF data that, combined with other checks, confirms when it was taken
5. DO YOU KNOW WHY THE PHOTO WAS CAPTURED?	We do not know who took the photo so we can't ascertain what their motivations might have been	The social media account was created very recently and/or social searches reveal the uploader rarely posts online so there is little evidence to confirm their movements or motivations	Wider online searches of the uploader's real name reveals that they are connected with an activist or advocacy organisation but there is no additional information to know their motivation in this case	Searches of the uploader's social media activity leading up to the event confirm their reasons for capturing the photo, i.e. holiday-maker, journalist, works locally	The photographer confirmed the circumstances surrounding the photo

Is this worth verifying?

Beware the rabbit hole

Often verification takes minutes. Other times it can lead you down a fruitless path of obsession. Learn to figure out when it makes more sense to give up. Also, be aware that developing too much of an attachment to one hypothesis about where a piece of content came from or whether it is true can not only compromise the integrity of your verification, it can be a big time suck.

We are human and it is easy to have a natural gut reaction to whether a piece of content is true or false. But we have to remain skeptical at all times. Remember the old editor's adage: even if your mom says she loves you, check it out.

The internet is an expansive and cavernous place. If you are looking too intently for a particular piece of evidence, you may miss conflicting evidence along the way.

Understanding spread

Reporting on misinformation is a tricky art. Research shows that even writing ‘debunks’ can, in some circumstances, solidify false rumours in people’s minds. This means that reporting on misinformation, even when well-intentioned, can bring greater exposure to content that might have otherwise faded away.

If you are verifying a piece of misleading content because you want to report on it or write a debunk, consider first what the reach of that content is online.

How many people have seen a false claim already? It is often difficult to quantify with the metrics available, which are usually just shares, likes, retweets, views or comments. But it is important to try. Even small or niche communities can appear more significant online.

If you are looking at a piece of content which has received very low engagement, consider perhaps that it is not worth verifying or writing about.

For more information on this, read *First Draft’s* [Essential Guide to Responsible Reporting in an Age of Information Disorder](#).

Tips for saving time and frustration

Screenshot everything! Content can quickly be deleted or taken down by the host platform. You might be surprised how fast you can lose crucial pieces of information. It is also important for the transparency of your verification.

- You can screenshot on Mac OS by pressing command+shift+5 and then dragging the cursor over the area you want to capture, or by using the snipping tool on Windows.
- It might be helpful to use a screen-grabbing tool like Evernote that allows you to quickly gather bits of evidence.
- [Wayback Machine](#) is a browser extension that allows you to save archived versions of webpages.
- [Hunch.ly](#) is a very powerful tool that allows you to document an entire investigation by automatically pulling in screenshots of your web browser and cataloguing them. It’s a paid tool, so not for everyone, but if you need a reliable system for documenting investigations it might be worth it.

Don’t forget to search

There are a lot of impressive tools out there for verification, and we talk about many of them in this guide. But remember that sometimes a simple Google search will do the trick.

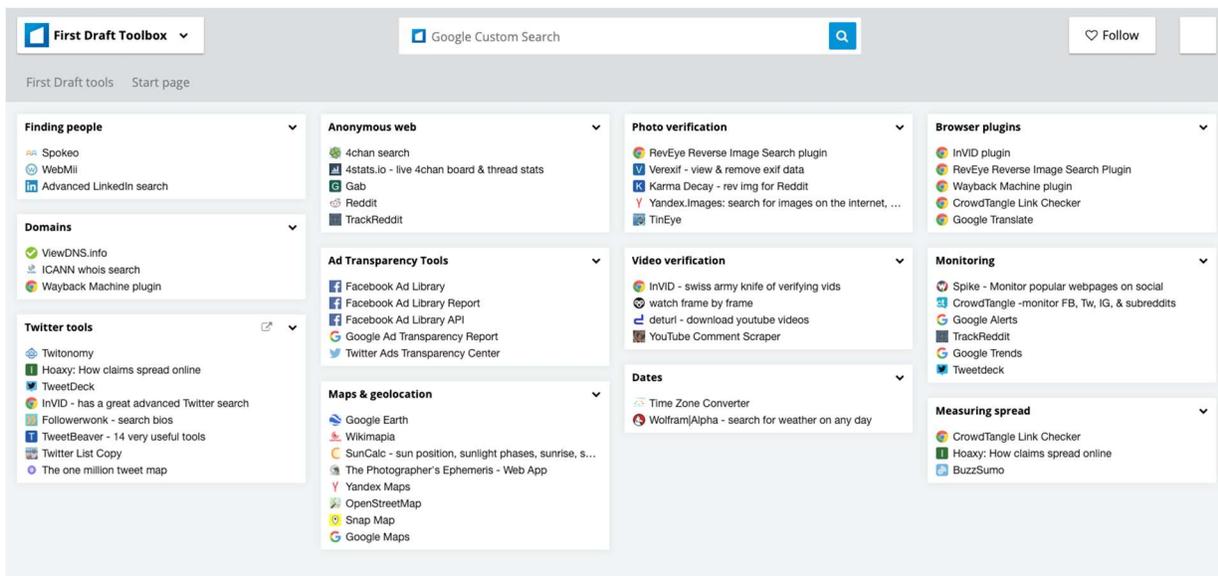
Don't forget to pick up the phone

In many situations, the best-case scenario is that you find a phone number or email address for a source so that you can contact them directly and ask about the content they shared. Even sending a simple direct message can start a conversation in private, where you can find out so much more than you otherwise would.

Set up a toolbox

If you are going to be doing a lot of verification or other kinds of digital research, it is worth setting up a bookmarking system that lays out all of your favourite sites. As mentioned previously, one of the biggest challenges can just be remembering the tools at your disposal.

Bookmark folders in a web browser are good, but our favourite way of saving verification tools is with a [Start.me page](#). It displays all of your bookmarks nicely and is very fast to set up and continuously add new resources. You can use it as your home page or bookmark it somewhere else.



Monitor for related content simultaneously

While you are verifying a piece of content it can be helpful to have a monitoring dashboard and alerts system set up so that you see similar content if it surfaces. You can use keywords and language from the content you are examining to set up a search column in Tweetdeck, for example, or set up a list of accounts that often engage with your source.

Stay updated

Verification is constantly changing. Tech platforms modify their privacy settings, research tools get taken down and new ones are built. If you want to keep up, you should regularly update your toolbox or read up on the latest techniques from the verification and open source intelligence (OSINT) community. There are many public OSINT/verification lists on Twitter that you can follow to do this.

Staying safe

There are many safety precautions you should take when diving into digital investigations, but especially if you will be spending time in more closed and anonymous spaces, like Discord. Here are some basics to consider:

- Make sure you have high levels of personal digital security. Use a password manager whenever possible.
- Examine your own digital footprint and the privacy settings on all your social accounts. How much could someone find out about you, your family and friends via your accounts?
- Consider using a VPN and an anonymous web browser like Tor.
- If you participate or interact with people in closed and anonymous spaces, be careful about the amount of personal information you divulge

Ethics and standards still apply

Digital reporting doesn't mean basic journalistic ethics and standards go out the window. If anything, there may be new ethical considerations you hadn't thought about. Here are a few points and questions to dwell on:

- Just as an email is not as good as an interview you did in person, neither is a quote from a post on the internet. Speak to people directly when you can.
- Some verification tools take advantage of the way social media platforms obscure privacy settings and lead people to share things they didn't realise were public. Avoid needlessly prying into anyone's private life.
- If you are screenshotting and documenting data from social media, understand that real people are implicated in that data. If your systems are not secure and that data falls into other hands, you can inadvertently put people at risk.
- If you are going to post anything in closed or anonymous spaces during your verification, are you going to use your real name?
- Also, are you going to be forthright in your purposes for being in those spaces?

For more on ethics and responsible reporting, see *First Draft's [Essential Guide to Responsible Reporting in an Age of Information Disorder](#)*.

These are the need-to-know concepts that could save you time and potentially embarrassment.

The rest of the book is organised into five basic checks that you should do on any piece of content you wish to verify, whether it is eyewitness media, a manipulated video or a meme.

Of these chapters, ‘Provenance’ is the most important, so pay extra attention to that one. Otherwise, feel free to flip through at your leisure, or go straight to a tip list that’s relevant for you.

Verification is a fluid process of finding new clues and corroborating evidence, and the progress you make on one check might help you with another.

CORONAVIRUS: RESPONSIBLE REPORTING AND ETHICS

Last updated: 11 March 2020

This page provides a selection of guidelines and discussions produced by First Draft on reporting disinformation around coronavirus and other topics ethically and responsibly, as well as a curated list of other resources to help you navigate potential issues covering what the WHO has called an ‘infodemic’.

Tips for reporting on coronavirus and slowing the spread of misinformation

Misinformation loves a vacuum. All around the world, people have been trying to find answers about symptoms, cures, spread, and anything else on how the coronavirus might affect them.

News organisations and journalists have a vital role to play here. First Draft has collected tips and pointers for responsibly reporting the story, based on interviews with health and science reporters, health professionals and journalism professors, our existing training materials, and several excellent coronavirus reporting guides.

You can read an in-depth exploration of the issues [here](#).

TIPS FOR REPORTING RESPONSIBLY ON COVID-19

- Avoid sensationalist language that could cause elevated levels of fear
- Avoid stock images that feed stereotypes or cause more panic
- Avoid speculating about worst-case scenarios
- Provide readers with specific actions they can take
- Direct readers to official sources of information
- Know which questions to ask about new research
- Talk to more than one expert
- Remember that not every rumour deserves coverage
- If you do cover a rumour, foreground the facts in headlines and tweets
- Make complicated information, eg levels of risk, easier to process
- Avoid derogatory language
- Figure out what questions your audience is asking and answer them
- Include data sources, dates, and context in maps and graphs

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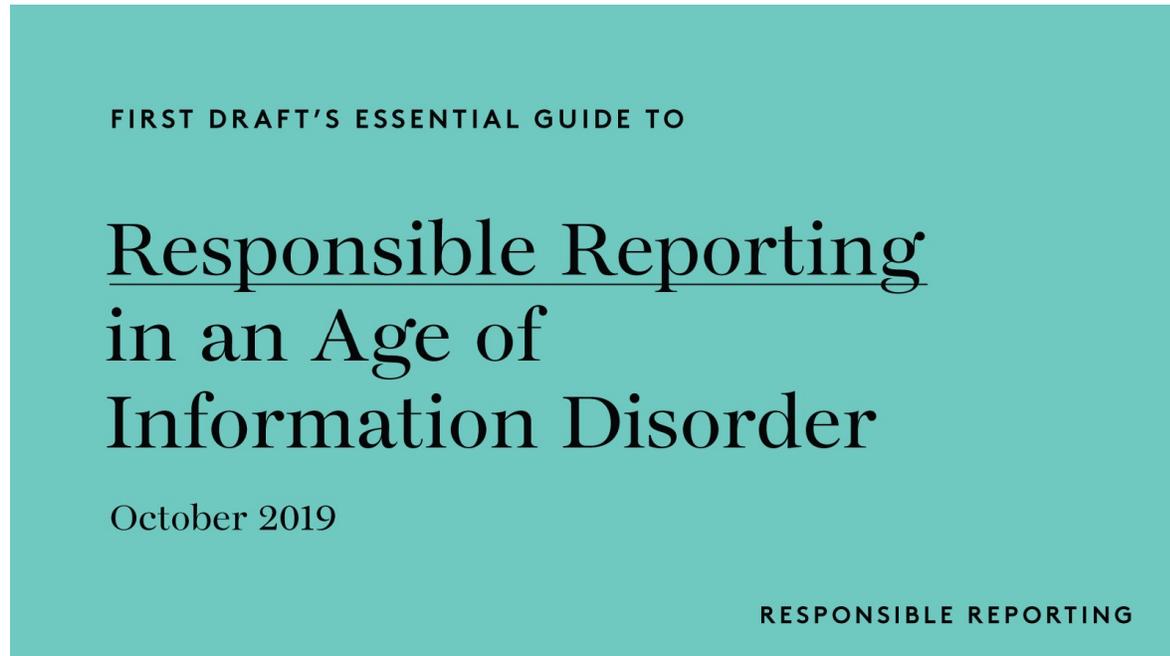
Additional resources for responsible reporting on coronavirus

This list of external resources and guides from will be regularly updated

- **The Open Notebook:** [Tipsheet – Covering the Coronavirus Epidemic Effectively Without Spreading Misinformation](#)
- **Esri ArcGSI blog:** [Mapping coronavirus, responsibly](#)
- **Journalist’s Resource:** [Covering Covid-19 and the coronavirus: 5 tips from a Harvard epidemiology professor](#)
- **Scientific American [op-ed]:** [How to Report on the Covid-19 Outbreak Responsibly](#)
- **Asian American Journalists Association:** [Guidance on Coronavirus Coverage](#)
- **Poynter:** [How newsrooms can tone down their coronavirus coverage while still reporting responsibly](#)

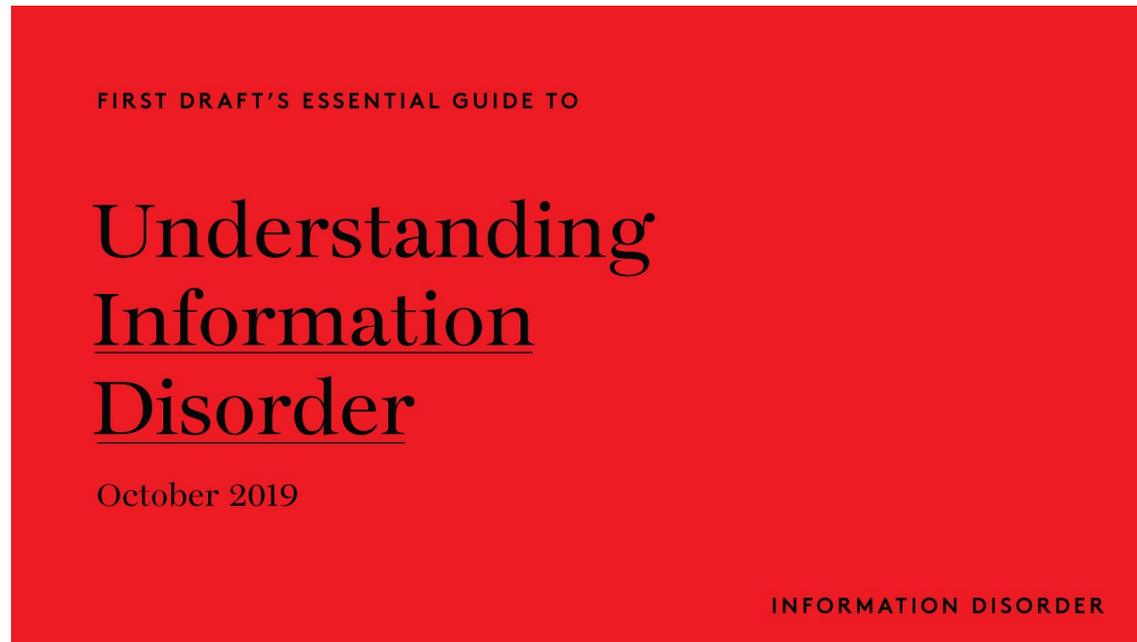
- **Association of Health Care Journalists:** [Use caution when reporting on pandemic potential of coronavirus](#)
- **National Press Club:** [Covering Coronavirus: Expert Tips for Journalists and Communicators](#)
- **OneZero:** [The Simplest Way to Spot Coronavirus Misinformation on Social Media](#)

First Draft's essential guide to responsible reporting in an age of information disorder



The online world has fundamentally changed how everyone gets their information, and with it thrown. Crucial to how news organisations cover the issue of disinformation is the issue of amplification: not spreading a hoax or lie to a wider audience in the act of debunking it. This Essential Guide from First Draft, first published in October 2019, looks at some of the latest thinking around covering extremism, conspiracy theories, manipulated pictures and videos, as well as best practice for headlines, SEO and social media.

First Draft's essential guide to understanding information disorder



The issues affecting how people get information online go further than just “fake news”, taking in a range of different motivations, forms and sources. Claire Wardle first worked through these concepts of information disorder for a Council of Europe report in 2017 and revisited them in this Essential Guide.

TIPS FOR REPORTING ON COVID-19 AND SLOWING THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION

by: First Draft

Date: March 10, 2020

As the world looks for timely, accurate news about the novel coronavirus, how can journalists best provide their audiences the information they need?



by Victoria Kwan, Claire Wardle and Madelyn Webb.

This article is part of a series on health misinformation.

Reporting on Covid-19 presents multiple challenges for journalists. Reporters have the responsibility of providing readers with up-to-date information — no easy task amidst the ongoing uncertainty around the virus — in a tone that neither terrifies people nor downplays the severity of the situation. Amplifying misinformation is a concern, but so is amplifying fear.

Here are First Draft's tips for responsible reporting on Covid-19. They are informed by our interviews with health and science reporters, health professionals and journalism professors, our existing training materials, and several excellent coronavirus reporting guides listed at the end of this article.

TIPS FOR REPORTING RESPONSIBLY ON COVID-19

- Avoid sensationalist language that could cause elevated levels of fear
- Avoid stock images that feed stereotypes or cause more panic
- Avoid speculating about worst-case scenarios
- Provide readers with specific actions they can take
- Direct readers to official sources of information
- Know which questions to ask about new research
- Talk to more than one expert
- Remember that not every rumour deserves coverage
- If you do cover a rumour, foreground the facts in headlines and tweets
- Make complicated information, eg levels of risk, easier to process
- Avoid derogatory language
- Figure out what questions your audience is asking and answer them
- Include data sources, dates, and context in maps and graphs

FIRSTDRAFT

Avoid using sensationalist language

Emotional phrases such as “no end in sight”, “turmoil”, “killer” and “catastrophe” might draw clicks, but they can also contribute to a sense of growing panic, which health officials, epidemiologists and virologists warn is exactly the opposite of the calm that is needed.

Journalists have to recognise “both the nature of the threat and their responsibility to manage the emotions of the audiences, and not unduly spread fear,” says Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen of Cardiff University, who studies the use of emotions in journalism and has been tracking coverage of the novel coronavirus in major English-language newspapers.

Be mindful about imagery

Think carefully about any photos or images and provide context. Try to steer clear of stock images that feed stereotypes. Before using a photo of an Asian person wearing a face mask, for example, ask how this image is relevant to your story. Are the subjects of your story Asian? Is your story about the efficacy of face masks in preventing the spread of the virus? The Asian American Journalists Association has issued [helpful guidance](#) on avoiding fuelling xenophobia and racism in Covid-19 reporting.

The same goes for images that could cause undue panic. Would your use of an image of people wearing hazmat suits cause readers alarm? Are you using an image of an ambulance with an empty trolley waiting to enter a house? Think about the impact of header images when concerns are rising about the impact of the virus.

Avoid speculating or asking experts to speculate about worst-case scenarios

Similarly, encouraging experts or sources to give speculative or sensational quotes does not always help readers. “We should focus on what we do know,” Wahl-Jorgensen advises. Newsrooms should also be upfront about what they don’t know.

Provide readers with specific actions they can take

University of Minnesota journalism professor [Emily Vraga](#) notes that uncertainty makes us uncomfortable, which in turn makes us more vulnerable to confident-sounding misinformation. She recommends highlighting expert-approved actions to prevent the spread of the virus. “Concrete steps related to coronavirus specifically can be quite helpful because it gives people a sense of control.”

Direct readers to official sources of information

Expert sources like the [World Health Organisation](#) will have the best information for audiences. Build up reader confidence in health organisations and health professionals (after you have [verified](#) their trustworthiness), so your audience knows who to turn to for future recommendations.

Be cautious about the research used to inform your reporting

As science journalist [Roxanne Khamsi](#) pointed out to First Draft (and Reuters highlighted in a [recent article](#)), there has been a proliferation of pre-prints on Covid-19 since the outbreak began — pre-prints being scientific papers that have not yet been peer reviewed. While some pre-prints can provide useful information on the latest research, some promote spurious claims that should not be amplified.

If using pre-prints to inform your reporting, Khamsi recommends asking an independent scientist before publication: does this paper check out? “You can’t replicate the journal review process, but it is a safeguard to have an independent expert check it.”

Talk to more than one expert

Base your reporting on more than what one official says, Khamsi advises. “Look to the landscape. Different virologists have different pieces of the puzzle. Be wary of anyone who claims they have the whole picture.”

Think about the tipping point when deciding which rumours to address

Avoid drawing attention to rumours if they are circulating only in niche communities or have received little engagement. Here are five questions for determining whether a rumour has reached the tipping point:

- How much engagement has the rumour received, and how do these numbers compare to similar content on the platform?
- Is the discussion around the rumour limited to one community online?
- Has the rumour jumped platforms?
- Did an influencer or verified account share the rumour?
- Have large media outlets covered the rumour?

SHOULD I COVER THIS RUMOUR? 5 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How much engagement has the rumour received, and how do these numbers compare to similar content on the platform?
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4. Did an influencer or verified account share the rumour?
5. Have large media outlets covered the rumour?

FIRSTDRAFT

If you do decide to debunk a rumour, focus on the facts, particularly in headlines and tweets

Our [earlier training materials](#) advised that journalists can slow down amplification of rumours by not using language from the rumour in their headlines. We're now refining these ideas — newsrooms should tailor their headlines for different platforms, drawing a distinction between headlines that audiences see on social media and headlines that appear when audiences look for information on search engines.

For headlines that audiences will likely stumble upon in an algorithmic feed, like on Twitter or Facebook, consider that they may not have seen or heard about the rumour already. The goal is to avoid amplifying the rumour. Reporters don't want to accidentally misinform these readers if they only read the headline, so avoid repeating a rumour unnecessarily while correcting it.

However, for headlines found via search engine, such as Google, Bing or even YouTube, the fact that readers searched specific keywords means they have already heard of the rumour. Amplification is less of a concern in this case. Rather, the goal is reaching the readers who are searching for the rumour before misinformation purveyors and fear-mongers. Including keywords from the rumour in your headline may help these readers quickly locate your content, making them less likely to fall into a data void of misinformation (see our section on data voids below).

Headlines are key because even if the body of the text includes a careful explanation of why the rumour is false, many people don't read further than the headline or tweet.

If you have space in the body of your debunk, consider linguist George Lakoff's "[truth sandwich](#)" technique: Start with the truth, indicate the lie (without using the specific language of the lie), and then return to the truth. As Briony Swire-Thompson and Ullrich Ecker from the University of Western Australia's School of Psychology [write](#), stating the lie before noting its falsity "can boost familiarity of the misconception, potentially increasing the risk that misconceptions are later mistakenly remembered as being true."

Make your content easy to process

Keep it simple and short. Use graphics to illustrate your points, and make sure that the truth is easier to read (by putting it in a bigger or bolder font, for example) than the rumour. Avoid listing all the myths. Our brains struggle to make sense of what is true and false, particularly when we're scrolling at speed. Find engaging, simple ways to focus on the facts and to give concrete advice about steps people can take.

Avoid ridicule or derogatory language

People's fears about the virus are genuine, even if some of the theories are misguided. A false cure may seem irrational, but calling it "bizarre" or "outlandish" might alienate readers or cause them to double down on their beliefs. Anxiety is a very normal reaction in uncertain situations, which journalists can better address with empathy rather than judgment.

Figure out what Covid-19 questions readers are asking, and fill data voids with service journalism

Michael Golebiewski of Microsoft devised the term “data void” to describe search queries where “the available relevant data is limited, non-existent, or deeply problematic.”

In breaking news situations, write Golebiewski and danah boyd (of Microsoft Research and Data & Society), readers run into data voids when “a wave of new searches that have not been previously conducted appears, as people use names, hashtags, or other pieces of information” to find answers. Newsrooms should think about Covid-19 questions or keywords readers are likely searching for, look to see who is creating content around these questions, and fill data voids with quality content.

For example, below is a screenshot of the Google results page for the query “can I catch coronavirus from packages”. Readers searching for the answer will find some news stories about the US Senate’s coronavirus emergency spending, which is presumably not what they are looking for.

But Harvard University and The Washington Post are helping fill the void around this rumour (and successfully using search engine optimisation) with explainers which includes the keywords “coronavirus”, “package” and “China”. These words are directly in the headline for the Post. This is an example where mentioning the rumour in the headline helps audiences find quality content that addresses their question.

CORONAVIRUS: INFORMATION SOURCES

Last updated: 18 March 2020

First Draft is maintaining a database of expert sources on coronavirus for journalists to contact for up-to-date information on the outbreak. This includes governmental departments and agencies for some of the worst affected countries, as well as regional and global health organisations.

The World Health Organisation has characterised the outbreak as being accompanied by an ‘infodemic’, defined as “an over-abundance of information — some accurate and some not — that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it”. Consulting the right organisations and experts is vital.

Government departments and agencies

The below government departments provide updates on number of coronavirus cases, government activities, public health advice and media contacts.

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

- Agency aimed at strengthening Europe’s defences against infectious diseases aiding the union’s response.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Part of the US Department of Health and Human Services operating the country's response.

National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China

- The lead agency on China's response to the coronavirus.

Italian Department of Health

- Government department overseeing response.

South Korea's Ministry of Health & Welfare

- Government department overseeing response.

INGOs and NGOs

The below non-governmental organisations provide global and regional data and guidance on coronavirus.

Communications contacts in WHO headquarters (Geneva)

- A list of WHO press officers at its headquarters.

Communications officers in the WHO regions

- A list of WHO press officers in each region.

World Bank media contacts

- A list of World Bank contacts across different regions as well as at its headquarters and on specific topics.

International Society for Infectious Diseases

- ISID supports health professionals, non-government organisations, and governments globally to prevent, investigate, and manage infectious disease outbreaks.

Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation

- A global partnership between public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organisations.

American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

- A community of researchers, clinicians and professionals aiming to advance global health.

Academic institutions

The below organisations and institutions provide research and data on coronavirus, as well as expert commentary.

Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)

- Department aiming to improve societal, health, and technological systems. Has created the Covid-19 cases world map.

Royal College of Physicians

- British professional body representing and accrediting thousands of doctors around the world.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

- Research institution working to improve health worldwide. Resources include tracking the outbreak and evaluating the success of the Diamond Princess Cruise ship quarantine.

School of Public Health, University of Michigan

- Medical school carrying out research to promote public health and equality. Resources include how to quantify the intensity of pandemics.

London School of Economics – guide to reading scientific papers

- A post from the LSE on how to non-experts can decode scientific papers.

Other sources

Coronavirus Weekly

The weekly roundup of Coronavirus analysis from The Conversation, a network of academic experts.

CORONAVIRUS: JOURNALIST FAQs

Last updated: 11 March 2020

Where can I find the latest global figures about cases?

The below organisations collate statistics and other information about disease.

- [The World Health Organization’s Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Situation dashboard](#)
- [The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control worldwide situation update](#)
- [Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering \(CSSE\) at Johns Hopkins University \(JHU\)](#)
- [CDC global confirmed COVID-19 cases map](#)

Where can I find the best advice for readers?

Below are a selection of guides providing vital information detailing how the public should respond to the coronavirus. These will change over time as governments and organisations adapt their responses to the spread of the virus.

- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public \(WHO\)](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: Myth busters \(WHO\)](#)
- [Coronavirus COVID-19 \(NHS UK\)](#)
- [How to protect yourself against coronavirus \(Guardian\)](#)

How should I write headlines?

- Lead with the truth rather than a piece of misinformation.
- Tailor your headline for different platforms, drawing a distinction between headlines found via social media and headlines found via search.
- For headlines found via stumbling on an algorithmic feed (for example, Twitter and Facebook), consider that this audience may not have already heard of the rumour you are debunking. Avoid amplifying the rumour by steering clear of keywords and not repeating the myth.
- For headlines found via search engine (for example, Google, Bing or even YouTube), the fact that specific keywords were searched means this audience has already heard of the rumour. Amplification is less of a concern here — rather, your concern should be reaching the readers who are searching for the rumour before misinformation purveyors and scaremongers do. Including keywords or even repeating the myth in the headline (for example, “No, you cannot catch coronavirus from packages”) may be beneficial for getting quality content in front of these readers.

Further reading: [First Draft ethics and responsible reporting guidance](#).

How do I report on infectiousness (R0)?

- Pronounced “R naught”, the R0 (reproduction number) of a disease represents its infectiousness – specifically the number of cases an infected person is likely to cause during their infectious period.

- The R0 of the novel coronavirus is difficult to assess and is likely to change because: many cases are likely going undetected; the infectious period is yet unknown; it's unclear how the changing immunity of the population after infection will affect future infectiousness.
- Early in the outbreak, the World Health Organisation determined an R0 of 2-2.5 for COVID-19 in Wuhan. Other sources put it between 1.4 and 4.08.

Further reading on R0:

- [The Deceptively Simple Number Sparking Coronavirus Fears](#) (The Atlantic)
- [R0: How scientists quantify the intensity of an outbreak like coronavirus and its pandemic potential](#) (The Conversation)
- [Estimation of the reproductive number of novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and the probable outbreak size on the Diamond Princess cruise ship: A data-driven analysis](#) (International Journal of Infectious Diseases)

Should I compare coronavirus to other viruses, and if so, how?

There are advantages and pitfalls to using comparisons with other viruses to help explain coronavirus. Below are some pieces that provide examples of good practice, and arguments for avoiding comparisons that may be unhelpful.

- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 vs. the Flu](#) (Johns Hopkins Medicine)
- [Why we should stop comparing the Covid-19 coronavirus outbreak to the 1918 Spanish flu](#) (Vox)
- [How Does the Coronavirus Compare With the Flu?](#) (New York Times)

How do I report death rates?

- When reporting on deaths from COVID-19, it can be useful to also provide information on the proportion of deaths to recoveries, total infections or the current death rate to help readers contextualise and understand the level of threat.
- It is important to ensure that when reporting death rates you convey any uncertainty around the figures. For instance, the number of unreported cases may make the death rate among confirmed cases appear higher than the viruses' actual lethality.

Further reading on death rates:

- [Did the coronavirus get more deadly? The death rate, explained](#) (Vox)

How can I prevent or deal with vicarious trauma and other reporting-related mental health issues?

- Avoiding excessive conversations about coronavirus outside of work (eg with family and friends).
- Simple self care techniques such as creating a Twitter account dedicated to animal videos may help individuals. Similar techniques could also be used by newsrooms on channels such as slack.

CORONAVIRUS: HOW ARE THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS RESPONDING TO THE 'INFODEMIC'?

by: Clea Skopeliti and Bethan John

Date: March 19, 2020

As rumours and hoaxes about Covid-19 spread, here's how the biggest platforms are working to tackle misinformation.



Image: Reuters/ Aly Song

This article is part of First Draft's coronavirus resource hub and a series on health misinformation.

Social media platforms have come under increasing pressure to regulate misinformation hosted by their sites and the coronavirus pandemic seems to be spurring the type of action critics have long called for.

On March 16, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Reddit, Twitter and YouTube issued a statement saying they had joined forces to combat “fraud and misinformation about the virus”.

Facebook, Giphy, Microsoft, Pinterest, Slack, TikTok, Twitter and WeChat are participating in a WHO hackathon where developers are invited to build software solutions to address the crisis. Projects selected for public promotion will be announced on 3 April.

So what are various platforms actually doing? This article will be updated regularly with the latest news about the different measures.

Latest update: April 8 2020

Facebook

The world's largest social media platform has come under fire for its refusal to ban lies in political ads, but is taking a harder line when it comes to the coronavirus.

The emerging consensus, no matter the platform, is to provide as much quality information as possible while trying to limit the falsehoods. As of March 18, Facebook is running a 'Coronavirus Information Center', an initiative they hope will help people find information and tips, on top of existing measures introduced to knock back scams, ads and other sources of disinformation.

Ads which attempt to exploit the outbreak by selling 'miracle cures' or medical face masks at grossly inflated prices are banned, and when users search for 'coronavirus', Facebook shows a banner directing them to the WHO or their national health organisation.

As part of its third party fact-checking initiative, Facebook is labelling coronavirus misinformation with "fact check" labels. Mark Zuckerberg announced that the platform was also removing conspiracy theories related to Covid-19 that have been flagged by global health organisations, as well as providing the WHO with free ads.

As of March 23, Facebook has been connecting government health organizations and UN health agencies with its developer partners to guide them in using Messenger in their response to the pandemic. This could include developing automated responses to commonly asked questions.

Facebook has created a Messenger Coronavirus Community Hub with tips and resources to help users recognise scams and misinformation and prevent their spread. The platform also launched its digital literacy program, Get Digital, to help young people develop the necessary skills to safely navigate the internet, as people spend more time online due to social distancing measures.

On March 30, Facebook pledged \$100-million to support journalists, in addition to the previous grants made to local news and fact-checkers. \$25 million is in the form of an emergency grant for local news through the Facebook Journalism Project, and \$75 million will go towards marketing to help make up publishers make up the shortfall caused by a decline in advertising revenue.

The following day, Facebook announced its Community Help feature to allow users to request or offer help to their neighbours, such as delivering groceries. The feature will initially be rolled out in the US, the UK, France, Australia and Canada, with other countries to follow in the coming weeks.

Facebook is keeping a running blog of updates here.

Google

Google searches related to coronavirus show an "SOS Alert" banner, followed by news from mainstream outlets and information from recognised health organisations and governments. It is also promoting the WHO's 'do the five' coronavirus-prevention campaign.

Like Facebook and Instagram, Google is blocking ads that capitalise on the pandemic, in line with its sensitive events policy. It has instituted a temporary ban on all ads for medical masks and respirators. The tech giant has also disabled app searches for ‘coronavirus’ on the Google Play Store.

On April 2, a leaked memo stated that Google would begin to allow some advertisers to run coronavirus-related ads across its platforms.

The company outlined its plan to start introducing political advertisers working directly on the topic. This includes “government entities, hospitals, medical providers, and NGOs who want to get relevant information out to the public,” according to the memo.

Google is removing misleading information and fake reviews about healthcare locations from Google Maps, using a combination of automated and manual review systems.

The company has a fact-check explorer (a crucial element of First Draft’s coronavirus debunk database) which lets anyone search for articles tagged as fact checks.

Google has launched a website, developed in partnership with the US government, to provide information and resources about the pandemic. It covers prevention tips, a map of areas affected by the outbreak and links to local health agencies, and is being made available in different languages.

On March 27, Google announced a \$800+ million fund to support small- and medium-sized businesses, health organizations and governments, and health workers on the frontline of the pandemic.

Google is collecting all its updates about coronavirus here.

YouTube



As of March 19, YouTube has promised to promote verified, informative videos of coronavirus information on its homepage.

Similarly to Facebook, the Google-owned video sharing platform has introduced info panels from the WHO or to their national health organisations which appear when you search for coronavirus. It is also providing governments and NGOs with free ad space and removing harmful medical misinformation videos.

At the beginning of March, the platform began shutting down ads on videos about the coronavirus, in line with its advertising policy which sometimes demonitises videos discussing ‘sensitive events’ such as global health crises. YouTube has since slowly begun to allow ads on such videos following a backlash from creators, and will allow ads on videos by some creators, as well as on news partners’ channels.

On April 7, the platform announced that it would tighten its rules to ban conspiracy videos linking coronavirus to 5G. This was in response to a live-streamed interview with conspiracy theorist David Icke, in which he falsely linked the technology to the current health crisis.

WhatsApp

Rumours and hoaxes are reportedly running wild in WhatsApp group chats, including through the medium of voice notes. However, due to the Facebook-owned messaging platform’s heavily encrypted structure, these communications can’t be monitored or moderated.

Facebook has said that it is trying to shut down spam accounts on the messaging app, using AI to identify accounts that send out automated messages.

The messaging platform, which has 1.6 billion users worldwide, has offered help to set up dedicated tip lines on the service for accurate health information.

On March 18, the messaging service launched the WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Hub, working with the WHO, UNICEF and UNDP to to keep its global users informed about the pandemic and, therefore, limit the spread of rumours.

And on March 20 the WHO launched a chat bot on WhatsApp to help users get accurate information. The service will be available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish within weeks.

As well as launching a WHO chatbot, WhatsApp has expanded its collaboration with governments to provide information services on the coronavirus, with the UK and India teaming up with the messaging app to provide information services. The governments join the Singapore government, the Israel Ministry of Health, the South Africa Department of Health, and KOMINFO Indonesia in running WhatsApp information services.

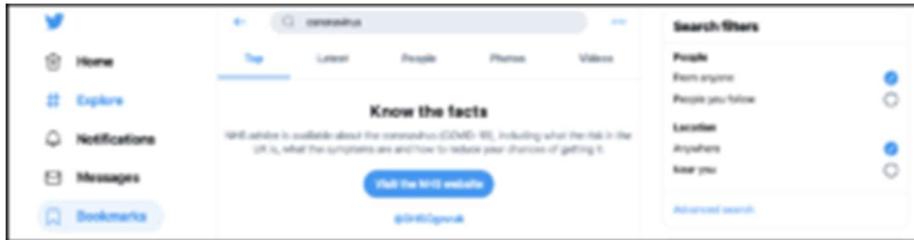
The firm has also donated \$1 million to the Poynter Institute’s International Fact-Checking Network for their coronavirus project.

On April 7, WhatsApp announced it would impose a strict new limit on message forwarding, in a bid to slow the spread of misinformation on the app.

If a message has already been forwarded many times, users will only be able to send it to one chat at a time rather than five.

In a blog post, the company said it had recorded a spike in the amount of forwarding on the app, noting that it can feel “overwhelming”, as well as helping the spread of misinformation.

Twitter



Similar to Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, Twitter directs users to national health organisations when they search for coronavirus-related terms. It has also pledged to ban ads that exploit the outbreak, as Facebook and Instagram have done.

On March 18, Twitter updated its safety policy to say it would ban tweets that “could place people at a higher risk of transmitting COVID-19”. The new policy bans tweets denying official guidance, including encouraging “fake or ineffective treatments, preventions and diagnostic techniques” and misleading posts that pretend to be from authorities or experts. However, Twitter has said it won’t be able to take down every tweet containing misleading coronavirus information.

Twitter has promised to provide NGOs with advertising credits to support public health campaigns. The company is donating \$1 million split equally between the Committee to Protect Journalists and the International Women’s Media Foundation, to support their reporting on the coronavirus.

The microblogging site has been working with recognised health authorities to verify accounts that are sharing credible coronavirus updates. The platform said it is identifying expert accounts through email addresses associated with “authoritative institutions”.

On April 3, Twitter said it would lift its advertising ban on coronavirus-related content in certain cases, according to a note sent to clients.

Advertising containing implicit or explicit reference to coronavirus will now be allowed in ad campaigns about changes to business practices and models, as well as ad campaigns about support for customers and employees related to the virus.

Twitter has been regularly updating a blog post of measures here.

Instagram



Similarly to Facebook, Instagram is blocking and restricting coronavirus hashtags by rerouting users to public health organisations. A search for #coronavirus shows a pop-up redirecting users to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

Facebook has also said it will carry out “proactive sweeps” to remove other hashtags spreading misinformation on Instagram.

The platform is also sending possibly misleading posts to its fact-checking partners for review and, like Facebook, banning ads that exploit the crisis.

Instagram has also banned users from searching for filters with Covid-19 themes unless they were made in partnership with recognised health organisations. Alongside this, the platform has added educational resources in Instagram Search, as well as stickers promoting accurate information.

The Facebook-owned site has removed coronavirus content and accounts that are not from recognised health organisations from recommendations. Instagram has also expanded its donation sticker to more countries to help connect users with nonprofits, and created a “Stay Home” shared story encouraging those practicing social distancing to virtually connect.

WeChat

In a more extreme case of Covid-19 interventionism, the Chinese social media and messaging app has been widely censoring coronavirus-related content, including critical and neutral information. With broad censorship rules that block messaging containing hundreds of coronavirus keywords and keyword combinations, a report by Citizen Lab found that the rules may limit “vital communication related to disease information and prevention”.

The censorship rules reflect a political dimension as much as a misinformation angle. Alongside speculative information, content criticising the government’s handling of the crisis was also banned.

TikTok

Like on most platforms, when users search for ‘coronavirus’ they are presented with a WHO banner.

TikTok told the Guardian it has partnered with the organisation to “provide trusted information to our community”. The pop-up directs users to a page with questions and answers about Covid-19, guidance on protecting yourself, and virus-related debunks.

On March 23, TikTok announced that it is donating \$10 million to the WHO’s Solidarity Response Fund, which provides essential supplies to frontline healthcare workers.

Reddit



Reddit has faced considerable criticism for its lax approach to fighting coronavirus misinformation, especially considering the platform’s propensity for hosting conspiracy communities. Like almost every platform, it brings up a banner from a trusted global organisation (the CDC) when you search for ‘coronavirus’. Beyond this, its strategy has been limited, appearing to leave the power in the hands of unpaid moderators. The platform does not have any explicit policy against health misinformation.

Reddit says that many of the moderators on the coronavirus subreddits have scientific backgrounds. Subreddits on the virus have different focuses, with r/COVID19 focusing on peer-reviewed research.

However, the platform quarantined one of the communities — r/Wuhan_flu — due to the proliferation of misinformation in the forum. This means people cannot view the community without creating an account and accepting a warning message about the page’s content, somewhat limiting its scope.

Snapchat

Snapchat’s structure — a closed messaging platform without a newsfeed, where messages are temporary — has allowed it to avoid some of the worst criticisms of the infodemic. Beyond existing structural strengths, the company is also using its Discover function to highlight health information from recognised news partners.

The app has also partnered with the WHO and the CDC to provide users with the latest information, publishing updates from verified accounts as well as working with the organisations to develop custom answers about to questions about the virus from Snapchat users.

Alongside guidance and updates, the WHO collaborated with Snapchat to create a filter promoting their tips and guidelines.

Additionally, Snapchat has created a coronavirus-specific section in its mental health tool, Here For You, to help users who are anxious about the pandemic. The company says it will include resources from the WHO, the CDC, Crisis Text Line and the NHS.

Pinterest

Pinterest has employed the most hardline approach to coronavirus misinformation, save for WeChat. Building on its policy on countering vaccine misinformation, searching for key coronavirus keywords exclusively brings up results from internationally recognised health organisations. The platform also advises users who are looking for medical advice to contact a healthcare provider.

Pinterest is using AI to fight Covid-19 misinformation by finding keywords associated with misinformation and blocking related pins. It also identifies images associated with medical misinformation.

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