

# Citizens' Response to Disinformation

The Debunking Handbook 2020<sup>1</sup> and the Rules of engagement for handling disinformation<sup>2</sup> and 7 ways to protect yourself against misinformation (Arizona State University)<sup>3</sup> contain useful practical tips of how to tackle disinformation.

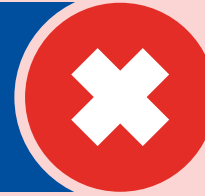
#### References:

<sup>1</sup> *The Debunking Handbook 2020*  
<https://skepticalscience.com/docs/DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Rules of Engagement for Handling Disinformation - 2022 edition*  
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/14279253/KS-GQ-22-003-EN-N.pdf/d0017a54-e394-3887-d4ce-875aea0606fe?t=1643963795410>

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.asu.edu/20200407-solutions-7-ways-protect-yourself-against-misinformation>

## DON'Ts



### Engage directly with the spreaders of disinformation, e.g. on social media

This makes you vulnerable to counterattacks like accusations of 'fake news' and provokes even more attacks.

### Repeat the disinformation content ('the myth') and name it as such, before providing the right information and correct data

This might be deliberately misused as a confirmation of the disinformation provided, reduce the power of objective facts and the effectiveness of argumentation and positions.

### Rush in to distance yourself openly from the narrative of the accuser, in the event of a barrage of negative attacks

carefully plan the next steps instead by designing credible, well-documented responses.

### Mention directly the disinformation message/name of the spreader when it is not necessary.

### Be afraid to debunk disinformation

There is no evidence that debunking will cause a backfire effect, except in limited circumstances when people's worldviews are being challenged.

## DOs



### Pay attention to where your news is coming from

If it is coming from social media (Facebook, Instagram or X), be aware that it may not be true. Ask yourself, 'Who is this coming from and what is the background?' If the article you read makes accusations, ask yourself, 'Who does this benefit? What is the underlying source material?'

### If you get information from social media, check the original source

Check the account to see if it is a verified media source or not. People who have credibility generally put information in their bios to bolster their credibility. Engage only on 'safe platforms' with verified accounts and trusted accounts.

### Within news articles, examine the sources and how they are treated and referenced

Journalists that work for traditional news outlets have a set of professional ethics guidelines and will assert their sources. It is appropriate to be skeptical of articles that depend solely on un-attributed sources without any kind of corroboration.

### Read beyond the headline

It is important to read the story fully, very often, headlines are misleading and are not there to inform you. The purpose of the headline is to get you to click on the link or to buy the newspaper.

### Get your news from a variety of sources

People should check with additional news sources to confirm the information they read.

## DOs



### **Observe your emotional responses**

If after you read something your reaction is an extreme emotion - outrage or unmitigated joy, this is a clear indicator that you should check other sources to confirm the validity of what you read. Many of the disinformation examples are designed not to inform but rather to activate a strong anger or fear response.

### **When you see disinformation being shared by members of your communities, correct it in a kind way, without insulting the intelligence of the people who post it**

People can respond with resistance or attack you if they feel insulted, and can get entrenched in the false narrative out of principle.

### **If you decide to respond to disinformation, keep it simple and use plain language**

Keep in mind that there might be people who do not have a high degree of understanding of the specific field, or who might not spend too much time reading your message.

### **Use proactive, positive communication, be straightforward and succinct**

Avoid emphasising disinformation when countering false claims. Explaining why disinformation is incorrect is more effective than simply labelling it as false.

### **Encourage the members of your online communities to respond to disinformation**

Corrections from users, and algorithms (e.g., recommending related articles that contain a correction) can be effective in reducing community misperceptions when responding to disinformation.

### **Support the members of your communities to develop critical assessment of the content they see online**

Share these tips onwards and remind people that disinformation exists all over social media.

### **Use alert verification / fact-checking platforms**

### **Use disinformation detection tools (a full list is available in the Annex to the Rules of engagement for handling disinformation) to track mentions of any given term or topic**

These tools can also help identify supporters who have influence in their online communities.

### **Expect the same disinformation narrative to appear again**

Disinformation is often persistent and needs to be debunked over and over again.

