

Policy for Misinformation - Climate Change Denial?

I'm writing to find out if we have a policy regarding Climate Change denial, specifically human involvement towards climate change. Is this covered in our misinformation enforcement of inform treatments and downranking? I'm wondering because this is science-based we think differently about how this is treated to opinion-based fact checking.

This particular example is someone who is sharing an article denying climate change as man made and is due to solar orbiting. He posted as free form text rather than the article link to get around our inform treatments?

Example:

<https://m.facebook.com/story.php...>

Article source: <https://haltturnerradioshow.com/.../nasa-climate-change...>

[Redacted]

Thanks for the question, [REDACTED] We don't remove misinformation except in very narrow cases in which we have strong evidence that the content may lead to imminent offline harm against people. However, we do apply different treatments to content containing claims rated as false by third-party fact checkers, including down-ranking. [REDACTED] on the Content Distribution Policy team should be able to offer some more info how these policies would apply to this particular piece of content.



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We don't have a specific policy for climate change denial. If a fact-checker rates a particular piece of content related to climate change as false, then we'll downrank and show UI on that content with a link to the debunking article. The use case of copy-pasting the text of a link to get around URL enforcement is an interesting one - we haven't seen that too much before.



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What is the level of granularity at which we evaluate false claims relating to climate change? The pasted article says:

Not only is climate change not man made, but the larger trend is actually that the Earth's climate is going through a cooling period.

Was this article flagged as false by our fact checkers because it says climate change is not man-made, or because it says the Earth's climate is going through a cooling period? Or did our fact checkers debunk the specific (unfounded) hypothesis of solar orbiting?

I'm curious what standards of proof are necessary for our fact checkers to evaluate climate denial as false. Do they need to specifically debunk the mechanisms proposed, or does all climate denial already meet the standards of "false", considering the existing scientific consensus? (As [REDACTED] points out, this is a rare 'political' issue that has an already evident science-based truth to it. We don't need to re-evaluate decades of climate science every time someone claims it is wrong).

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The fact checkers are third-party organizations, so presumably they each have their own standards.

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Was this article flagged as false by our fact checkers because it says **climate change is not man-made**, or because it says **the Earth's climate is going through a cooling period**? Or did our fact checkers debunk the specific (unfounded) hypothesis of **solar orbiting**?

I'm curious what standards of proof are necessary for our fact checkers to evaluate **climate** denial as false. Do they need to specifically debunk the mechanisms proposed, or does all **climate** denial already meet the standards of "false", considering the existing scientific consensus? (As [REDACTED] points out, this is a rare 'political' issue that has an already evident science-based truth to it. We don't need to re-evaluate decades of **climate** science every time someone claims it is wrong).

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The fact checkers are third-party organizations, so presumably they each have their own standards.

As [REDACTED] points out, this is a rare 'political' issue that has an already evident science-based truth to it.

It seems problematic to treat scientific consensus as the definitive truth for the purpose of suppressing content that disagrees with it.

Scientific consensus is occasionally overturned. It wasn't too long ago that everyone *knew* stomach ulcers were caused by stress and excess stomach acid. The idea that they were caused by microbes was **debunked in 1954**.

If Facebook had been around at the time, we might have faced pressure to stop **crackpots** from spreading their debunked claims. After all, encouraging people to take antibiotics instead of managing their stress could put them at risk of stomach cancer, and such frivolous antibiotic use endangers everyone else by breeding resistant bacteria. They'd already been rejected by medical journals and fined for treating patients with their debunked remedies.

Today, however, we *know* **most stomach ulcers are caused by bacteria**. Multiple studies of ulcer patients had missed the presence of *H. pylori*, or misclassified it, or dismissed it as coincidental. The Nobel Prize came after many years of pushing back against scientific consensus.

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Of course, most crackpots really are crackpots. Probably. As far as we know. But a few of them aren't, and we won't know which ones until much later. It's a mistake to assume any scientific question has been answered "once and for all", and it'd be a mistake to adopt a policy that would've prevented the people who were right about *H. pylori* all along from trying to win people over to their side.

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[REDACTED] We do not need to declare the question has been answered "once and for all" in order to refer to the currently understood state of the question and use that when making decisions. As the scientific understanding of **climate change** evolves, it is reasonable that the fact checkers will update their standards of disbelief when evaluating claims. However, so long as the current consensus holds, I would hope that our fact checkers are aware of it.

What I am asking is whether the current non-crackpot scientific viewpoint is considered by the third-party fact checkers when evaluating the truthfulness of claims that **climate change** is fake. If the fact checkers do not weigh the existing evidence against new claims, then I think that it is reasonable to say these fact checkers are not qualified to fact-check assertions about scientific understanding, and we should assign **climate-related** fact checking to a different organization that is prepared to evaluate claims in context of the preponderance of evidence that supports the scientific consensus.

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[REDACTED] If the research that led to widespread acceptance of the idea that *H. pylori* causes ulcers were being done today, instead of in the 1980s, and the people involved were discussing it with other researchers on Facebook, do you believe labeling their posts as "**misinformation**" and downranking them would be the right choice?

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[REDACTED] of the research that led to widespread acceptance of the idea that *H. pylori* causes ulcers were being done today, instead of in the 1980s, and the people involved were discussing it with other researchers on Facebook, do you believe labeling their posts as "misinformation" and downranking them would be the right choice?

I think, since we understand that scientific consensus can change over time, we have the responsibility to be a little more humble than that.

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[REDACTED] facebook is not a scientific journal. The researchers' work would still be reviewed by other scientists and discounted or accepted based on its merits. When the scientific understanding of ulcers changes, our fact checkers can update the information they use when evaluating claims about the science.

You say we should be humble. I think that in this case humility means referring back to the mountains of corroborative evidence prepared by climate scientists, rather than evaluating incredible new claims in a vacuum.

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[REDACTED] However, we're currently arguing without data. Rather than debating the dynamics of scientific opinion, I'm curious to hear what [REDACTED] or someone who works on Misinformation, has to say about our fact checkers and their policies.

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[REDACTED] "when the scientific evidence changes..." sorry, just where is this scientific evidence? all the hard science journals do not show strong support for the current political movement, and citing climate models instead of data does not make truth. This sounds more like an attempt to beat down opposing opinions under the guise of "fact checking..

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[REDACTED] facebook is not a scientific journal.

Indeed. Doesn't that mean we should be less willing to enforce our understanding of scientific consensus as dogma, though?

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The researchers' work would still be reviewed by other scientists and discounted or accepted based on its merits.

Eventually, sure. Barry Marshall wasn't taken seriously at all until a stunt in which he deliberately infected himself, and the evidence continued to be rejected by gastroenterologists for decades.

When the scientific understanding of ulcers changes, our fact checkers can update the information they use when evaluating claims about the science.

Under that policy, we would've downranked posts about *H. pylori* and labeled them "misinformation" for twenty years, even though they were correct. In other words, that policy would have caused us to spread misinformation of our own and falsely accuse the people who were trying to spread correct information.

At the very least, I think a policy like this would need to include a plan for compensating the people who we falsely accused, because I don't think unflagging a post or reversing a ban twenty years after the fact would come close to undoing the harm.

I think that in this case humility means referring back to the mountains of corroborative evidence prepared by climate scientists, rather than evaluating incredible new claims in a vacuum.

If we acknowledge that scientific consensus isn't set in stone, then punishing users for dissenting from it means we're saying it's more important to agree with us, or our chosen experts, than to speak the truth. I think that's the opposite of humility.



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