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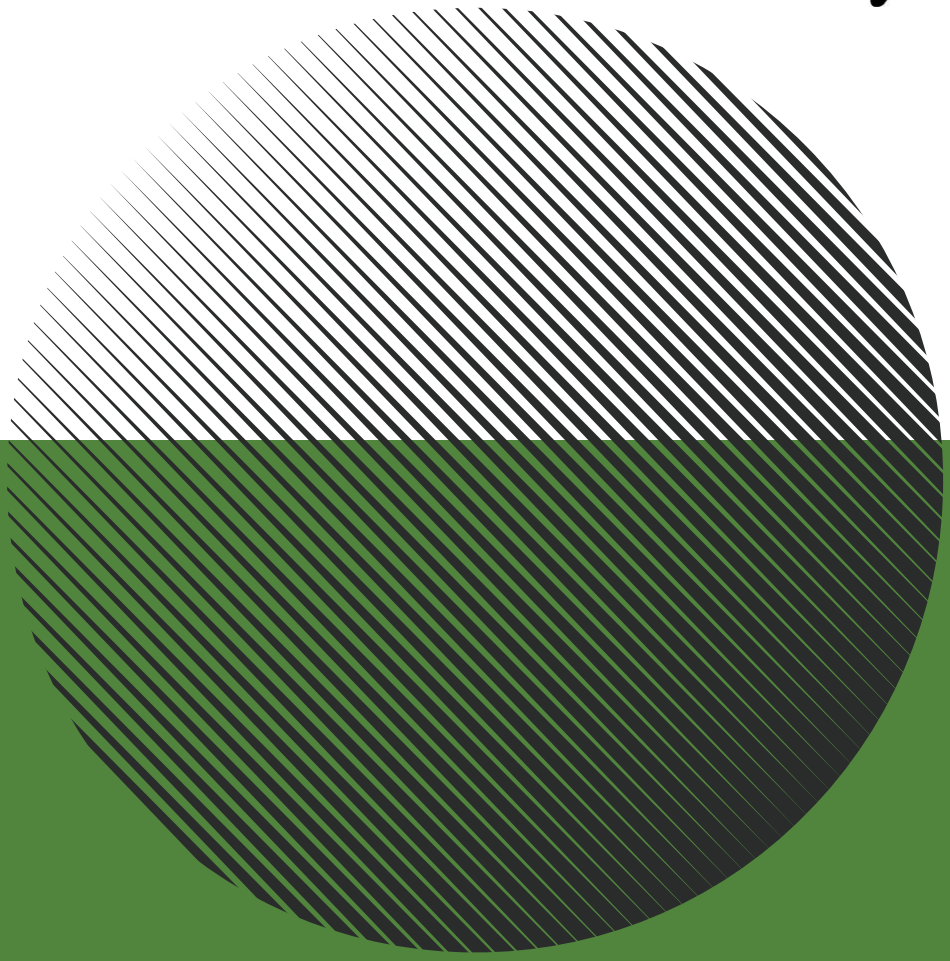

FACT-CHECKING *and* AMPLIFICATION TECHNIQUES FOR JOURNALISTS

CONTENT:

This guide was created in the framework of the project "Boosting the fact-checking community in Bulgaria", implemented by Factcheck.bg, initiative of the AEJ-Bulgaria, with the financial support of the U.S. Department of State and in partnership with Poynter institute.

INTRODUCTION

Following Factcheck.bg's introduction of several crucial concepts and tactics in fact-checking, including distinguishing between misinformation, disinformation and malinformation; finding fact-checkable claims; and applying tools and techniques to check content online, we're now ready to begin the next phase in the process.

Experts from the **Poynter Institute for Media Studies** will guide you through the process of converting your fact-check from data to a thorough story, complete with primary sources, robust analysis and a verdict for your readers. We will then review how all journalists, fact-checkers and traditional reporters, can better integrate principles of media literacy into their work, helping to cultivate a more discerning population. Lastly, we'll explore different audience engagement strategies to help ensure that these fact-checks aren't just produced, but consumed.

This guidebook draws from several units based at the Institute: the International Fact-Checking Network, MediaWise and PolitiFact. Through these brands, we get a scrupulous approach to the methodology needed to execute thorough and engaging fact-checking around the globe.

ABOUT POYNTER

Poynter is a nonprofit media institute and newsroom that provides fact-checking, media literacy and journalism ethics training to citizens and journalists in service to democracy.

Founded in 1975, Poynter is the home of the Craig Newmark Center for Ethics and Leadership, the Pulitzer Prize-winning PolitiFact, the International Fact-Checking Network and MediaWise, a digital information literacy project for young people, first-time voters and senior citizens.

Poynter faculty teach seminars and workshops online, at the Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, and at conferences and organizational sites around the world. Our e-learning division offers one of the world's largest online journalism catalogs, with more than 200 interactive courses. The Institute's website, poynter.org, produces 24-hour coverage of news about media, ethics, technology, the business of news and the trends that define and redefine journalism news reporting. The world's top journalists and media innovators come to Poynter to learn, to teach and to build public awareness about journalism, media and protected discourse that serves the public good.

CONTRIBUTORS

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STORYTELLING

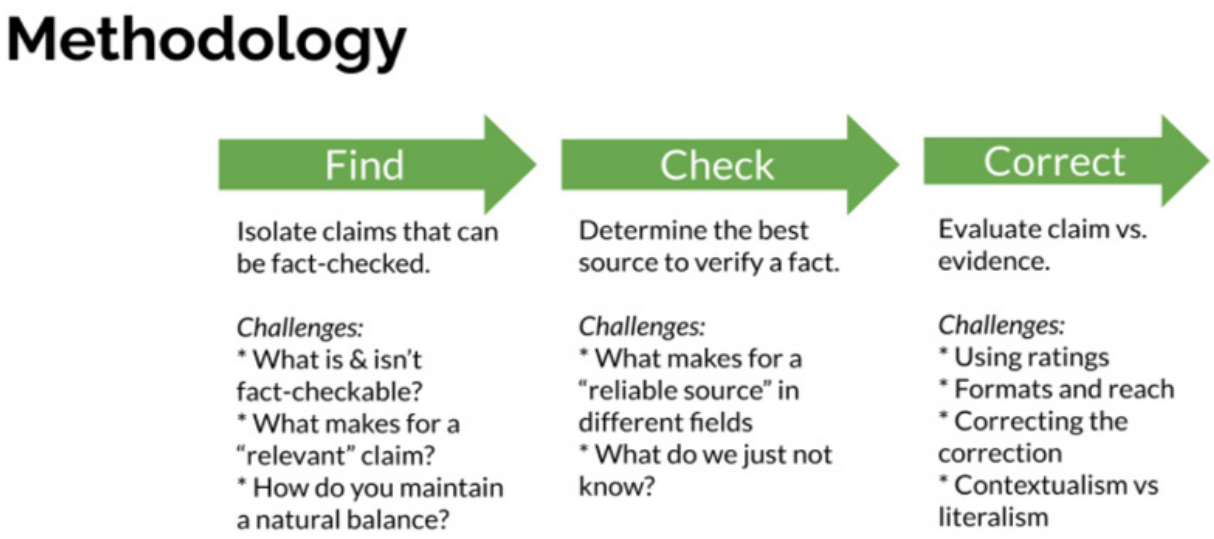
Once a reporter has found a claim to check, researched it, contacted sources and utilized tools, what's left in the process? Delivering the fact-check story! There is no specific format required; you can deliver fact-checks through video, audio or written stories. However, there are certain components that fact-checking stories should contain.

The following section will cover the methodology to approach fact-checking; story structure and components; and the value of rating systems when distributing fact-checks.

FACT-CHECKING METHODOLOGY

Generally speaking, fact-checking is composed of three phases: find, check and correct.

Finding fact-checkable claims by scouring through legislative records, media outlets and social media. This process includes determining which major public claims (a) can be fact-checked and (b) ought to be fact-checked; finding the facts by looking for the best available evidence regarding the claim at hand; correcting the record by evaluating the claim in light of the evidence, usually on a scale of truthfulness.



In order for organizations to become signatories to the International Fact-Checking Network, they must have a methodology published on their website. This methodology serves several purposes: it fosters transparency between the organization and its audience and empowers the audience to exercise fact-checking on their own.

Methodologies usually contain the following elements:

SELECT A CLAIM TO FACT-CHECK

Reporters should monitor both the news and social media to find claims. Your audience can also be a valuable source to find statements to fact-check and can submit via social media, WhatsApp tipline, email and more. When determining whether a statement is worth being fact-checked, consider its newsworthiness, virality and whether or not it could cause harm if circulated.

FIND THE SOURCE OF THE CLAIM

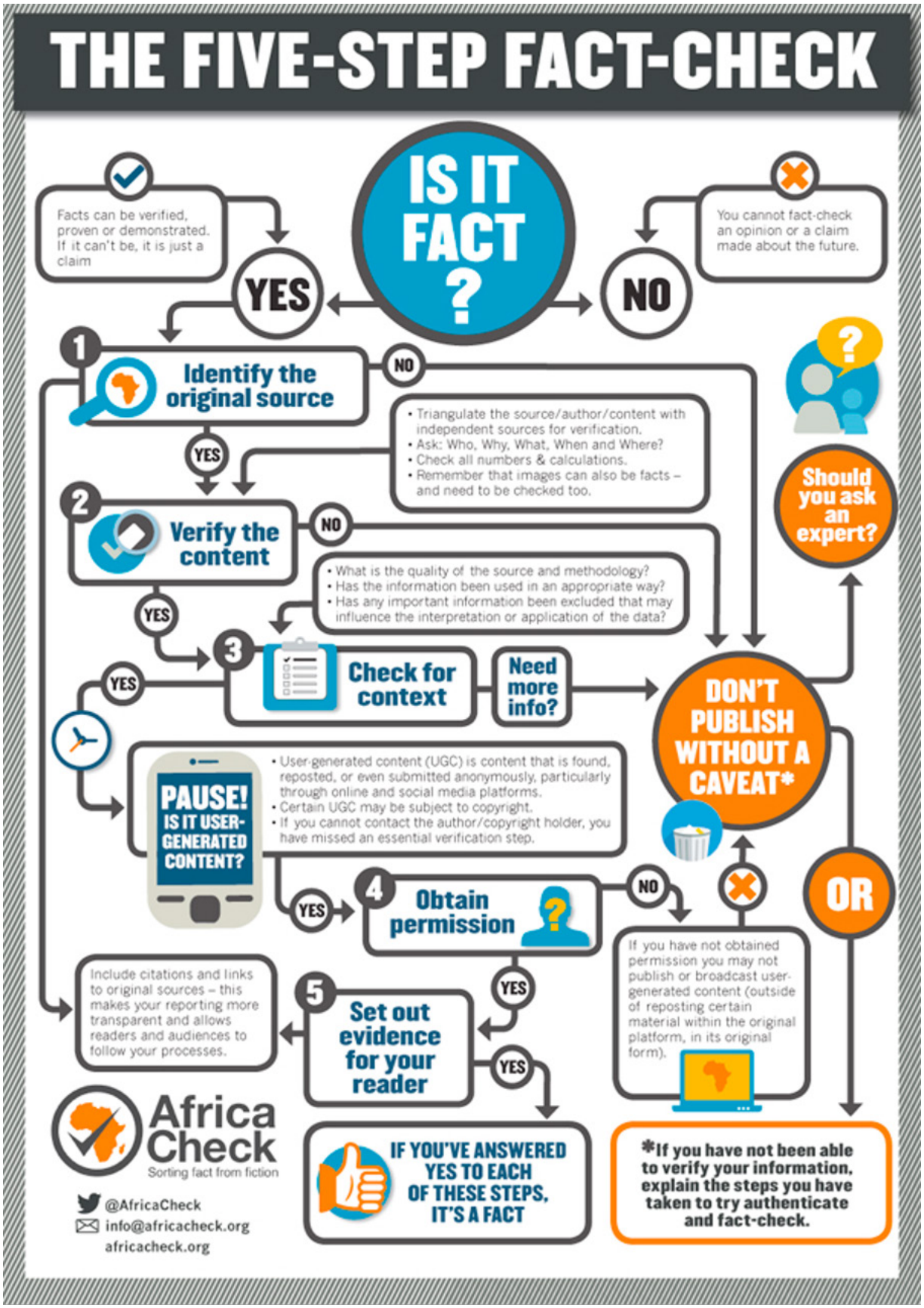
Sometimes this is easier, like if it's a statement made by a politician, as opposed to when it's a viral piece circulating through social media channels. Digital tools can help find the origin of some claims. But finding the source is valuable in helping evaluate the veracity and as a point of contact to get more information. That's right: even if a source is potentially spreading misinformation, fact-checkers are encouraged to reach out to the person or organization for them to explain their claim or explain the context or simply make sure it's accurately conveyed. **Fact-checking is not "gotcha journalism**." Just like investigative journalism, cousin to fact-checking, reporters should engage with the subject. But note that the person might not always reply.

FIND EVIDENCE

Reporters should look for all available resources to support or refute a claim. This can include what other fact-checkers have previously found reputable databases, think tanks, academic studies, government reports (depending on the government) research firms and consultation with experts. These experts can include academics and researchers, with relevant knowledge in the topic. It's generally recommended to use a variety of sources, emphasizing primary, on-the-record sources. Also, reporters should be able to justify their source choices to audiences: why is this person an expert? Why is the data trustworthy? Try to avoid using unnamed or unattributed sources and if you have to cite another news source with an unnamed or unattributed source, state that said source cannot be independently verified.

WRITE THE STORY

We'll go into more detail later of structurally how a story should look. There's not a set length, but make sure it is a full story, not just a tweet or a Facebook post. And make sure it is comprehensible to the average reader, even if it's about nuanced or political topics.



An example of a published methodology from IFCN signatory Africa Check.

RATING SYSTEMS

Many fact-checking organizations use rating systems in order to present their fact-checks. Some rating systems are delivered on a linear scale; PolitiFact, based in the United States, has the "Truth-O-Meter" and adjudicates claims as true; mostly true; half true; mostly false; false; and pants on fire, meaning the claim is not only inaccurate but makes a ridiculous claim. Polígrafo, based in Portugal, has a similar scale. Claims are rated as true; true but ...; inaccurate; decontextualized; manipulated; false; and pepper on the tongue.

Other organizations elect to use discrete categories as opposed to a linear scale. Fatabyyano, a fact-checking organization from Jordan, categorizes assertions as false; partially false, correct; disqualified, meaning it can't be verified or was correct at the time it was published; satirical; opinion; hoax; or no rating.

Still, some organizations instead choose to provide an analysis without binding themselves to a fixed rating system. Full Fact, for example, an organization based in the United Kingdom, presents its fact checks with a summary and a conclusion. The Norwegian organization Faktisk offers a similar structure, presenting the claim and a conclusion, followed by a robust analysis.

There are several **advantages and disadvantages** to using rating systems.

ADVANTAGES:

- **Using a rating makes the article clearer to readers. Readers are bombarded with information and will appreciate being able to get directly to the point.**
- **Having to assign a rating forces the reporter to reach a conclusion. Sometimes the fact-checker will struggle to adjudicate the veracity of a claim. But that is precisely why readers appreciate this form of journalism.**
- **Using a scale helps build your brand and audience. Usually the most recognizable element of a fact-checking operation is its rating system. The rating also tends to travel well on social media.**
- **A rating offers readers something light and engaging to go with the substantive, often intense, analysis**

DISADVANTAGES:

- **Some fact-checks will not perfectly fit any of the ratings. Two falsehoods may be very different from one another in terms of importance, yet get the same rating.**
- **The difference between what is "almost true" and what is "half-true" isn't science, even if each fact-checker at the organization tries to follow the methodology closely. Fact-checkers might find it hard to maintain consistency over hundreds of fact-checks.**
- **Using a rating adds significant work to the editorial process. It is definitely simpler to publish findings without determining a rating.**
- **Giving ratings is a more confrontational approach and will result in more criticism from readers and fact-checked politicians than simply discussing the facts and figures. The rating may distract critics from the analysis itself.**

If organizations do elect to use a rating system, it's important not to assume the intent of the speaker when assigning a rating. Fact-checking is a niche form of journalism and in journalism, objectivity is important.

THE STORY

Pull out box: Beware the "Liar's Dividend." Every time you repeat a lie, even if it's part of the story, you give the lie a rebirth. You reward the lie when you repeat the lie.

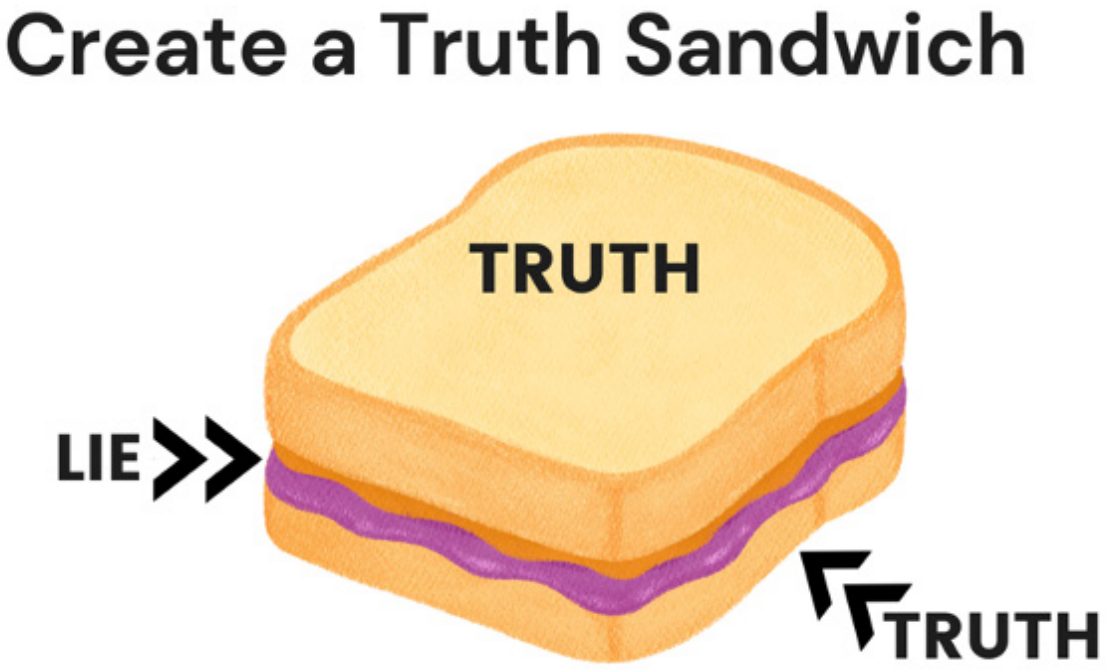
Once all the research is completed, it's now time to compile a story. While there is no set length on how long a story needs to be, it is more than just a social media post and does have a few elements it should contain. This doesn't necessarily have to be exclusively print either; these elements can work in video or audio journalism as well.

Most fact-checking stories, regardless of whether they use a rating system or not, will early on confirm or deny the veracity of the statement being analyzed, usually at the top of the page or the beginning of a broadcast, depending on the medium used. Next, it's critical that reporters explain the context for the statement being checked. Why did the person make this statement? Why is this meme circulating on social media? What topically is the reason why this mis/disinformation is appearing now? For example, a story might say, "To appeal to senior citizens who are afraid of losing their government health benefits …" or "To galvanize support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine…"

Next, provide a complete account of the statement. This is also where you give your ruling statement. But make sure you provide the full quote – several paragraphs if need be – so that people can read it in context. From here, do something we call "pivot and preview." This is a transitional line or paragraph where the author moves from the statement to the actual facts and the analysis. This is also a great spot to provide some key takeaways or the "bottom line." Naturally, this should transition into the facts and analysis. This is where the author explains the facts and examines the claim through the lens of all the sources and data discussed earlier. Conclude the story with a ruling, consisting of a paragraph or two where the verdict on the claim is explained.

This is a broad overview of how to produce a fact-checking story, but isn't necessarily the only way to do so. What is important is including the key ingredients discussed: the statement in context; a ruling of whether the statement is true or false; a thorough analysis with independent sourcing and a final conclusion.

Lastly, there are a couple things to remember when writing a fact-checking story. Avoid repeating falsehoods multiple times in your story. The more you repeat the lie, the more traction it gets, particularly online. Likewise, avoid quoting known mis- and disinformers or linking to notorious sources of mis- and disinformation. Place everything in context: where a claim came from, who said it and why. Include fact-checks immediately next to claims; we refer to this as a **fact-checking sandwich**, where a lie is straddled by the truth on either side. We want veracity to be the first thing audiences see and the last.



Remember to be thorough and independent and to maintain credibility by being as transparent as possible, using on-the-record and primary sources, including links when possible. And, as required by the International Fact-Checking Network's **Code of Principles**, if a mistake is made during a fact-check, publish a correction quickly and prominently. In order for us to get the audience to trust our fact-checks, we need them to trust us as journalists.

INTEGRATING MEDIA LITERACY INTO JOURNALISM

As information and communication technologies continue to transform society, media literacy is often looked upon as the solution to the misinformation problem. Media literacy builds on traditional literacies with the goal of empowering citizens to be active participants in the information discourse by critically evaluating multimedia messages and effectively utilizing means to produce and communicate information to others.

The information space is complex and inundated with both credible and dubious assertions. Media messages are produced for a wide range of topics. Likewise, it takes a wide range of skills to discern them. In part, this makes media literacy an interdisciplinary field that requires a collective effort in order to be effective in the fight against false information.

MEDIA LITERACY FOR EVERYONE

Media messages take on many forms, spanning from print to digital. They may be as simple as written text, a photograph or audiovisual recording, or as complex as AI-generated media. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) **defines media literacy** as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication." Moreover, media literacy is an essential **21st century skill**.

Since 2018, the Poynter Institute's digital media literacy initiative MediaWise has been actively working to equip citizens with the skills they need to discern fact from fiction online. The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) **developed curriculum** for teaching the skills of Civic Online Reasoning while working alongside MediaWise, the Poynter Institute and the Local Media Association in the U.S. SHEG outlines three simple questions that anyone can use to assess the credibility of information:

Who's behind the information?

What's the evidence?

What do other sources say?

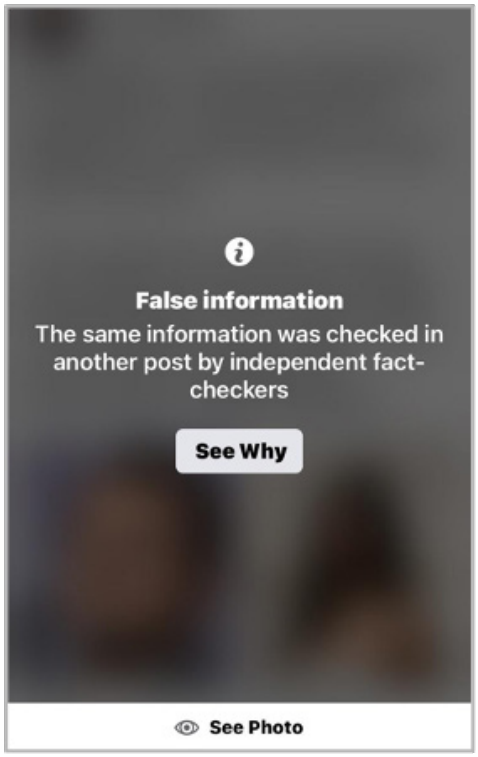
These three simple questions have become the bedrock of MediaWise efforts to combat misinformation worldwide.

PERCEPTIONS OF TRUTH

Some misinformation is based on evidence that's real but factually wrong. It's often the lack of context that sways people away from the truth. But there are some other phenomena that sway the perceptions of truth: the implied truth effect, the illusory truth effect and the half truth effect.

THE IMPLIED TRUTH EFFECT

Fact-checkers strive to set the record straight by debunking false or misleading information and amplifying verified information. On social media, this is evident through warning labels that mark content that has been fact-checked already. Researchers studied the effects of warning labels on headlines that appear on social media. They found that people may perceive headlines without a warning label as truthful, even though they may not always be. Pennycook et al. (2020) describe this as the **implied truth effect**.



ILLUSORY TRUTH EFFECT

Repetition also has a role in people's perceptions of truth. Repeated information can be perceived as more truthful, or what is known as the **illusory truth effect**. Simply put, familiar claims start to seem true over time. In part, this helps explain why message saturation (or propaganda) is so powerful and why even seemingly ineffective ads or ridiculous claims can actually be potent.

HALF TRUTH EFFECT

Message structure can also affect belief in misinformation, particularly when the message starts with something truthful followed by something false. This **half truth** effect blurs the line between fact and fiction, which can be dangerous when citizens make decisions in everyday life based on misleading information.

EMPOWER YOUR AUDIENCE WITH MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

It can be challenging for audiences to navigate the current information space. Journalists strive to serve these audiences with the verified information they need to navigate everyday life, sustain communities and hold the powerful accountable. On the other hand, bad actors continue to undermine these efforts by stirring up confusion and filling the information space with false and misleading assertions.

This brings us to another important function of journalism — to untangle complexities and make them easy for audiences to understand. The proliferation of false and misleading information is a complex issue so it's essential to equip audiences with strategies for curtailing its spread. This is where media literacy comes into play — when you report on falsehoods, you can also educate your audiences about your methods. When audiences see more ways they can use to verify information, they may be better prepared when they come across fakes.

FACT-CHECKING AND DEBUNKING

Journalism focused on fact-checking and debunking has an important function in the media ecosystem. But fact-checking is a reactive approach to misinformation. That's because it's a way of setting the record straight after misinformation has gone viral.

Fact checks are also a point of reference so people don't have to go through all the steps in verifying content; they can simply look up if the claim has already been debunked. Some media literacy tips involve exactly that — looking up whether a fact-checking organization has looked into the claim.

INOCULATION THEORY AND PREBUNKING

A more preemptive approach to counteracting misinformation is prebunking, which is rooted in inoculation theory. This approach uses inoculation theory in the context of misinformation to inoculate people against viral psychological attacks. The approach goes back to the 1960s and the work of **William J. McGuire**. Psychological inoculation has two components: a potential threat and ways to counteract it. That way, when people are exposed to misinformation, they're able to identify and debunk it.

CRITICAL THINKING AND CRITICAL IGNORING

Critical thinking is a process weaved into media literacy. It involves keeping an open mind and carefully analyzing evidence when interacting with information. As people get inundated with multimedia, it's important to not only think critically but also take things a step further and decide when to invest time in posts that aim to hijack attention. This competence is known as **critical ignoring**, or being empowered to resist low quality and misleading information.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

Objective reporting sometimes fails to explain itself. Media organizations have varying reporting processes that audiences need to better understand to be more empowered to make decisions about the content they consume. One approach to verifying information involves audiences working through three key questions, developed by the Stanford History Education Group. Keep these three questions in mind when you craft your content.

1. WHO'S BEHIND THE INFORMATION?

Answering this question involves looking into the person or organization that provides the reporting, using the "lateral reading" technique from The Stanford History Education Group. Lateral reading entails leaving the web page you're on, opening new browser tabs to look into details, and reading across all of them to get a fuller picture. Instead of reading an article in-depth, audiences are encouraged to employ this foundational fact-checking technique to scan through multiple tabs and gain better understanding about the author and the media organization.

When audiences read laterally, they can find out more about the reporting process and any potential biases the author or their media organization may hold. As part of that, audiences should consider looking for "about" pages, author biographies and editorial, advertising and funding policies.

2. WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

A well-reported piece provides evidence with attribution. In the digital space, linking is an essential part of attribution because it allows audiences to trace the reporter's steps and make their way to the original source of information. This technique is known as "reading upstream," or following links within articles and judging their credibility and relevance. Disinformation circulating online often lacks evidence and links and sometimes, when links do exist, they may be cited out of context.

Evidence in articles may come from primary sources, such as firsthand accounts from people, original documents, data or raw multimedia. It may also come from secondary sources that provide a layer of analysis and interpretation, such as news articles, books and scholarly work. Sometimes, media organizations use anonymous sources. In that case, it's essential to explain to audiences why and how anonymous sources are being used in the reporting.

Reading upstream empowers audiences to assess whether the evidence provided in the article supports the reporting. Therefore, it's important to provide context upfront and link to evidence.

3. WHAT DO OTHER SOURCES SAY?

Pullout box: "Pink slime" journalism is low quality writing posing as local news, often running in networks of sites.

A quick keyword search may reveal whether other media organizations are reporting on the same topic. Using **advanced search operators** may help narrow results down. Audiences may be looking into whether there's consensus between the various reports. If other credible media outlets are not reporting on the matter, that's a warning sign. However, it's important to keep in mind that disinformers often employ techniques, such as **"pink slime" networks** of sites that build false buzz about a source or claim to make it appear credible.

DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY

Some disinformation is based on evidence that's real but factually wrong. Journalists and fact-checkers strive to provide accurate information in context. In disinformation campaigns, context and sources are often either missing or misleading. Audiences need to have context not only about the story but also about the person or organization behind the story to get a fuller picture. This is where transparency comes in.

WHY DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY?

Providing transparency about your process and motivations helps build your audiences' trust. In the U.S., **Trusting News** works with journalists to empower them to demonstrate credibility and actively earn the trust of their audiences. One of the trust building strategies that Trusting News recommends is to incorporate "trust elements" online. These are snippets of information sprinkled in your coverage and on social media that provide insight about your mission, motivation, funding and reporting process. The trust elements are an integral part of media literacy because they educate audiences about who is behind the information so that they can make informed decisions.

IF YOUR JOURNALISM HAD A NUTRITION LABEL, WHAT WOULD IT SAY?

Most packaged foods include a nutrition label so that consumers can make an informed decision about a product. Similarly, information consumers need to know what your journalism and fact-checking is made of. Think of this in terms of the who, what, when, where, why and how:

- **Who** are you?
- **What** are your motivations?
- **When** did the story gain significance?
- **Where** can people find related stories or more information?
- **Why** did you decide to report on this story?
- **How** did you source your story?

Creating a nutrition label for your work — **especially in stories about hot topics** — provides transparency about your practices and helps build trust.

HOW TO INCORPORATE MEDIA LITERACY INTO YOUR FACT CHECKING

It's important to find more avenues for spreading facts. Audiences are no longer passive but active consumers of information. They utilize information and communication technologies to participate in the public discourse and amplify messages they deem important. Unfortunately, narratives online are not always factual. And sometimes they're a result of targeted disinformation efforts. Academic researchers have previously looked into disinformation tactics. **Some of the tactics** include:

- **Cultivating fake or misleading personas and websites**
- **Creating deepfakes and synthetic media**
- **Devising or amplifying conspiracy theories**
- **Astroturfing and flooding the information environment**
- **Abusing alternative platforms**
- **Exploiting information gaps**
- **Manipulating unsuspecting actors**
- **Spreading targeted content**

Audiences may happen to fall victims of these tactics, which underlines the need for media literacy education. Embedding media literacy tips into articles and fact-checks can inform audiences about what's wrong and teach them how to avoid being fooled by bad actors. Here are some ways you may incorporate media literacy into your journalism and fact-checking:

- **Invite your audience to trace your steps**
  - Explain your reporting and verification process (see newsroom examples, compiled by Trusting News)
  - Include links to credible sources and evidence
- **Add media literacy tip boxes highlighting verification techniques or tools**

Keep in mind that tools often change. Instead of putting a great focus on education about a tool, place your efforts in developing your audiences' fact-seeking mindset. Be transparent about your efforts and motivation, not only on dedicated "About" pages but also with content snippets with media literacy tips within your coverage.

Media literacy can evolve audiences to be more responsible consumers and producers of information. That's both for their own benefit as participants in a democratic process, as well as the benefit of society as a whole.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION TO AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

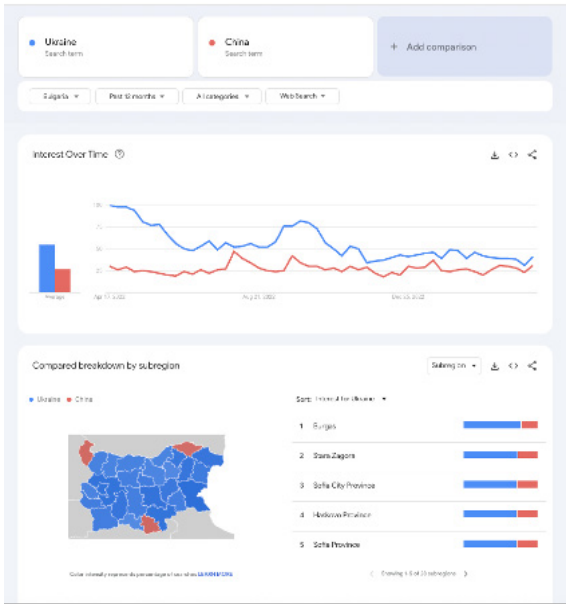
Reaching audiences with fact-checks is intrinsically connected to the fact checking process and constant transparency and knowledge of how your organization does fact-checking. The average person does not know what fact-checking is and is wary of your intentions as a fact-checker. Use that as an opportunity to talk about what your fact-checking accomplishes and how it differs from other media. Effectively communicated, fact-checking appeals to a wide range of ideologies. Its tenets hold truth to power, expose mistruths and empowers readers to better understand their media landscape. It is up to you to demonstrate why you are doing what you are doing and how you go about it and also what you do that is different from partisan media or even straight news. Before you can convey the ratings of fact-checks or debunks, you must have your process or methodology, written up — this is key. Publish your methodology or process on your website and use it as a reference throughout your fact-check on social media, on newsletters, and any other content your organization is producing.

AUDIENCE BUILDING & ENGAGEMENT

A solid way to approach building an audience is to grow your follower list and page views. You grow your newsletter list, potentially convert those subscribers to donors potentially and then you continue to serve those donors and increase that dollar amount month by month, year by year to sustain your fact-checking monetarily. This is the nonprofit news model that PolitiFact follows. In the sections below, you will learn more about audience building and engagement.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) FRAMING

Use tools like trends.google.com to see terminology that is frequently searched and let that help craft headlines. Simple framing around popular search terms drives huge traffic boosts and readership. Look for topic-related, specific Google searches, and serve your team with those keywords for their work. You will reach more readers with popular queried and phrase-specific headlines — THEN serve them with in-depth fact-checking and in-depth context once they click. You do not have to compromise the caliber of your fact-checks with questionable clickbait headlines but you can help surface your informative content to readers.



READER ENGAGEMENT

Engage with your audience by offering the opportunity for reader-suggested fact-checks. With this simple exercise in audience interaction, you will see an increase in credibility and engagement. There are so many good reasons to listen to the audience. If anything, do it for the clicks! Your engaged readers are just as likely to know what might resonate with their community than a small group of fact-checkers or reporters, who are often so entrenched in their topic area, they do not often see the bigger scope.

VISUAL ELEMENTS DEBUNKS

When writing a story, or fact-check, also create video or imagery to accompany the digital article. Audiovisual content and debunks tend to get more engagement and more shares. Social media posts are inherently visual and they get screenshotted and posted between various platforms. Create simple social media posts that don't obfuscate the misinformation. Viewers still want to see what you are debunking to see if they recognize it from their social media feeds, but you also want to have clear rating, logo and branding all over the visual item. This style of visual debunking mimics misinformation, and much like misinformation, is very shareable. One such example is PolitiFact debunking a TikTok claiming airpods cause a multiple of health problems due to radiation. The debunk was written as a **digital article**, but the team also created a **video** summarizing the debunk.

POLITIFACT
The Poynter Institute

There's no evidence that radiation emitted from Apple AirPods will cook your brain

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

- Apple's AirPods and similar wireless devices emit radiofrequency radiation, a kind of low-level electromagnetic field referred to as EMF, that most scientists say is harmless.
- The government sets limits for how much radiofrequency radiation products can emit, based on how much exposure is safe. Tests show AirPods fall well below that limit.
- Wireless earpieces emit far less radiation than the cellphones they're often used with, experts say. And there's no evidence that cellphone use can cause cancer in humans.

See the sources for this fact-check

POLITIFACT
The Poynter Institute

What are EMFs?

Electromagnetic fields, or EMFs, are a combination of electric and magnetic fields of energy, or radiation, which are produced by electricity, according to the National Cancer Institute.

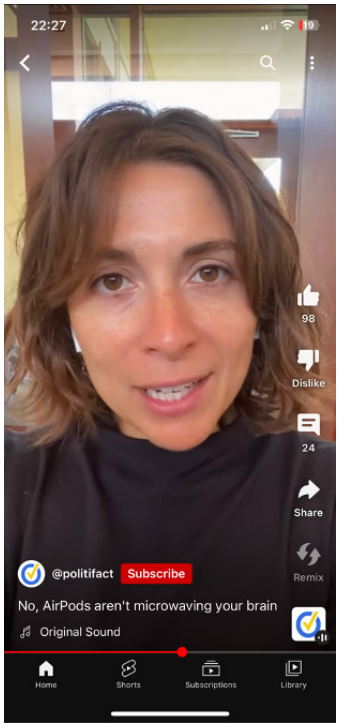
This radiation is categorized as high-frequency EMFs, or ionizing, which is produced by things like X-rays and gamma rays, and low-to-mid frequency EMFs, or nonionizing.

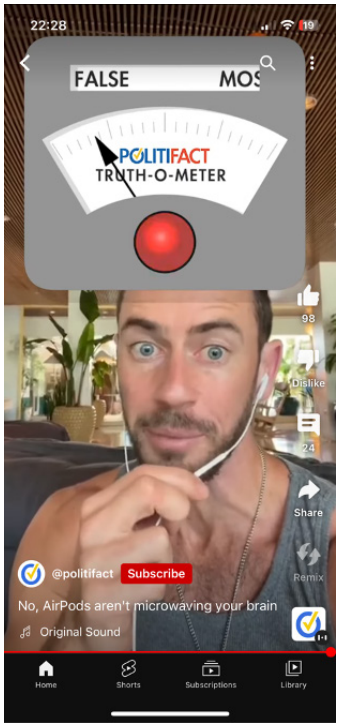
Wireless devices such as Bluetooth devices, wireless headphones, laptops and cellphones emit nonionizing EMFs as radiofrequency radiation, or RFs.

Is exposure to this radiation dangerous?

Although prolonged exposure to ionizing EMFs could harm humans, low-level EMFs are thought to be harmless, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Services.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said that "scientific consensus shows that nonionizing radiation is not a carcinogen and,





COMMUNITY BUILDING

You have grown your audience. Now, how do you make that mean something bigger, something more community-minded? Where the people reading your fact-checking support you and would recommend your work to their friends and family. Or how would your readers interact with one another or with you in a way that's helpful to your brand and your fact-checking work.

Talk with your readers.
There are multiple ways to talk with your readers. Set up a Facebook group for certain donation levels, do community-minded events that engage readers on topics that you cover, and interact with readers by answering their questions and doing reader suggested fact checks.

Context.
It is crucial to also provide a lot of context and build a community around debunking misinformation - despite all the regional and ethnic barriers, and to consider illiteracy levels in rural areas. In areas of low literacy, audiovisual content will play a crucial role in serving illiterate and underserved communities.

Outreach.
Utilizing messaging tools like WhatsApp, Instagram direct messages and Facebook Messenger is another wonderful way to build community and allow reporters to embed with readers or viewers seeing misinformation. It allows the fact-checkers to interact directly with their audience by thanking that person for flagging misinformation. Then the fact-checker can either share the debunk, if the claim has already been checked, or the fact-checker can then pursue. Also, due to the intimate nature of WhatsApp, it tends to be group chats with close friends and family. Therefore, average citizens armed with fact checks have more authority and trust when they are returning to a chat with a debunk.

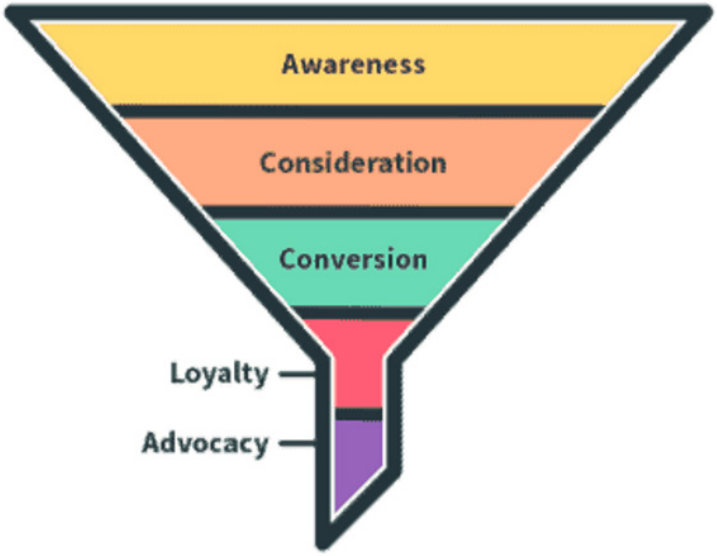
Brand Ambassadors.
Ultimately, the audience that engages with your content becomes your fact-finders and brand ambassadors. Foster those fact-finders, those people that come back to your fact-checking community. Emphasize that those folks are the ambassadors of truth in their community, in person, online in the family text message exchange and beyond.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media means a lot of different things to fact-checkers. For one, it is where you are debunking misinformation and uncovering disinformers who want to manipulate the story to benefit themself either monetarily or ideologically. Social media is a scary place where the person with the boldest and sometimes the wrongest message gets the stage, and fact-checkers are looking to change that narrative. You are looking to flip the script and promote the truth both in your fact checks and also in what you publish on social media.

GOALS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Present your organization as taking on all sides. Fact-check anyone and everyone in pursuit of the truth. Drive down the partisan barriers to your work through tone and language. When telling the story, be sure to emphasize the informative, in-depth, and process nature of your work. On social media, use threads and follow-up comments, as well as video explainers that talk about your work and how you do it. Provide the most context as possible so you are also listening to your readers and answering their questions. Follow up with suggested fact-checks in order to move the conversation deeper and move readers down the funnel.

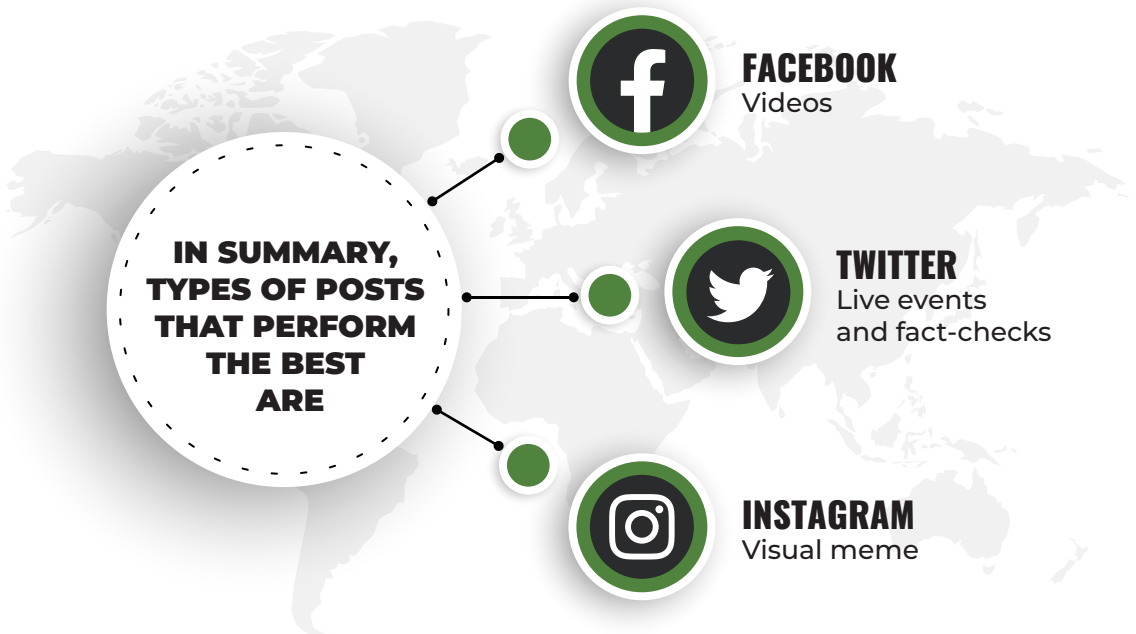


{Pull out text: Borrowed from marketing, the audience engagement funnel is the journey outlets want users to take from becoming aware of an outlet to "converting" to consistent subscribers. Outlets must deploy various strategies to move the audience to different stages of the funnel. }

STEPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

In your pitch, come up with your own way to frame a story or fact check. Ask yourself: why would your sort of political family member click on this story? How will this be informative if you are socializing a piece of misinformation? You do not actually want to promote misinformation. It is okay to post different kinds of content on Facebook and Twitter, and even different content on Instagram and TikTok.

For example, Facebook and Twitter primarily consist of link posts directed to fact-checks or stories. On Instagram and TikTok, focus on covering live events and getting reader responses, as well as debunking visual misinformation. Instagram tends to provide a huge follower growth and engagement in debunking utilizing visual misinformation.



AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters are such a helpful audience engagement strategy, and they have been proven to capture readers and turn them from once-in-a-while readers to engaged, returning readers and even into fact-checking champions and donors.

WHY HAVE A NEWSLETTER?

A newsletter is a straightforward and easy way to communicate directly with readers, provide context and build trust. A newsletter is a good reminder to readers that as a fact-checking organization you are not only providing the facts, but you are providing timely context to the current events of the day. Newsletter readers tend to have more than one subscription. Fact-checking newsletters are niche, and that's good. You are not breaking all the news of the day to your readers, but you are highlighting the need to know aspects of misinformation or a lack of truth that it is impacting current events.

WHAT SHOULD GO INTO A NEWSLETTER?

Stick to your fact checking principles and content. Provide context for the news of the day in a way that only a fact-checking newsroom can do. However, newsletters can be much more than just another medium to share your fact checking; they can also be an excellent tool to include calls to action that promote community building. Prioritizing your call to action in the newsletter is crucial to encourage engagement - this can range from taking a survey or joining an anti-online bullying campaign. Call to actions in newsletters make your readers feel like they are a part of something bigger.

Newsletters can help fact checking organizations promote their content and build community, but they can do something even more. They can teach your readers really what it is your organization does and why they should support your fact checking. And newsletters don't just have to be an email blast. At its core, a newsletter is your best content curated and delivered directly to your audience. It can be an email, but also a WhatsApp or SMS update, a podcast or a variety of other formats.

VIDEOS

Creating a video takes time, but it plays well on nearly all social media platforms and it humanizes your work — and explains your work as fact-checkers. You can walk viewers through research processes, providing some media literacy tips for your audience. **Poynter's playbook** is really helpful in delineating the advantages, goals and challenges of videos. PolitiFact has seen success from various video formats, all with strong hosts and narrators that walk viewers through a fact-check, not only explaining whether information is true or not, but also teaching media literacy tools.

VIDEO CREATION STRATEGY

Fact-checking organizations have been experimenting and perfecting their video strategy for years. Make sure you plan your line of attack on video then take at least six months to try producing videos instantly.

IGTV. As a result of posting videos to IGTV, videos appear in more searches on the explore page, and shares tend to increase across the board on Instagram. In one test, an organization went from posting no IGTVs, to once or twice weekly - which contributed to tripled followers and 25 times more video views this year than the same time last year. The organization had almost 200,000 Instagram video views overall. On Facebook, as a result of the organization's concerted video efforts, they tripled their video viewership. The watch page on Facebook was serving election debunking outside of their usual audience. A video editor was able to cut one minute long vertical versions of videos for TikTok, which performed some of the best for them on that platform.

EXPANDING REACH WITH OTHER PLATFORMS

Another thing to keep in mind when creating videos is it is not just to disseminate on social media platforms with traditional feeds like Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. They expand your fact-checking reach on YouTube, a search and SEO-based social media platforms. By publishing videos consistently, organizations have been able to increase new YouTube subscribers by the thousands and earn $3,000 in advertising revenue.