Trust and verification in an age of misinformation Module 3.4

[Music]

Alright so we're continuing on with our week three lessons. I want to give you just some tips around the best practices for debunking online misinformation. So you've gotten some guidance now on how to investigate social media accounts and websites to figure out, you know, who is spreading misinformation. And now maybe you want to write a story about it. So how do you do that in a way that's responsible. Let me give you some tips here. A lot of these are based on research that's been done so it's not just me. These are some good best practices that hopefully a lot of people out there are following.

The first thing this is a saying in the skeptic community you debunk the idea not the person. This is really important in particular when we look at how stuff spreads in social media. There's often a lot of people who are unintentionally spreading stuff that's false or misleading. So you don't want to kind of put them on blast. You don't want to insult them. You don't want to say you know all these dumb people fell for this clearly fake thing. You want to give them an opportunity, of course, to realize that they spread something that way but you need to do it in a more constructive way. So don't attack people. Don't insult people. Don't shame people unless they're the ones who have actually clearly, a hundred percent, been responsible for this and have been doing it knowingly.

The second thing is that this is good news for journalists. If you can put if you can present your debunking as an alternative narrative or you can kind of explain well here's what's actually going on. And here's why people thought this. And here's what happened. That narrative is a really powerful way to get across the true information. So think about telling it as a story. Think about crafting that narrative. The other thing that's really important is choosing your sources. Now this is particularly important when we're dealing with highly polarized topics. So things that are political are the other things. If you can find someone who is aligned with a particular ideology to go out and debunk something and give you some good quotes. People who are aligned with that person politically are more likely to believe them than they are you. And this is really important at a time where you know the media is being labeled as fake news or partisan. If you can find folks that people on a particular point of view or from a variety point of views will all trust that's a good person to have in your story or several people to have in your story. So when you think about for example a piece of misinformation that might appeal to people who are liberals. If you can actually get prominent liberal voices to debunk that piece of misinformation, liberals are more likely to believe it. So choose your sources and get them to align in ways where you can appeal to the communities who might be most affected by that misinformation.

The other thing that's a really important basic rule is you want to reduce the amount of time to repeat the false information. So rather than saying something is not true, you want to emphasize on the thing that is true. Now obviously in order to explain what your debunked you need to put

it in there but just think about only putting it in once or twice. Only mentioning it when you really have to, so you don't accidentally reinforce the false information. Okay? That's a real danger that in the act of debunking you actually spread it more. And one of the ways I think that journalists also go wrong with debunking is that sometimes they try to be a little bit coy with their headlines and put it as a question or in some other form. So what you want to do is be really clear that something is fake and now play around with it in any way.

The the last piece here goes back to if you remember in a previous lesson we talked about a guy who runs bots on Twitter who was spreading misinformation. And he talked about how getting journalists to debunk that. Getting journalists to pay attention to it was great because it wasted their time. But he also believed that it still helped amplify his messages. So you want to think about whether something has really met the threshold of you debunking it and I think there's two areas that you want to focus on. The first is what kind of amplification and traction is it getting online. Is it getting a lot of traffic? Is it getting a huge amount of social engagement? Is it getting engagement from an influential people? Have influential people been fooled? If a lot of those things are happening, then it's probably something that you do need to engage with.

And then the second category is also is there a potential harm or threat from this information if it were to get more traction. So I usually make sure that something really is getting out there before I do bunk it and I also look at the information and if it's something that hasn't spread much but I start to see it get a little more traction I might engage with it earlier on if I think it actually has potential to harm people. So those are a couple of things to keep in mind.

Last thing is you want to as much as possible not link back directly to websites that are spreading misinformation. If they have ads on the site you're actually helping them monetize and earn money. Or if you if you link from a website that is well-respected that actually may help give them better search results. So instead of linking directly you can use the Wayback Machine and in the link of resources that I've given you there's a great browser plug-in to install the Wayback Machine in your browser. And then you can create an archived page there and link to that or there's an easy service called Archive.is. You pop in the URL you want to link to. It will generate an Archive.is link and you can link to that. So do not link back directly to websites that are spreading misinformation. Create an archive of it using one of these services and link to that instead.

Alright last tip that I want to give you is about images. So a lot of the fake stuff that spreads is visual and this is a big problem Claire Wardle talks about it in in the week two guest speaker we had. In this case this is an example from the Atlantic magazine where they were labeling images that were spreading online either real or fake. And this is really important because it puts the context right within the image itself and if people were to take this image and reshare it the the real or fake labeling travels with it. And we do the same thing as a best practice at BuzzFeed. This is a story that I wrote about you know people taking images and giving them an incorrect context about the film Black Panther. We put a little fake badge on things like that. So make

sure that you label images this way so that they can't lose their context as they're spreading out there.

Alright those are the best practices for debunking I wanted to share with you. Thanks very much for watching

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