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Recommendations for countering misinformation

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Specific ways to meet the ongoing risk of misinformation to health, well-being, and civic life

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Although significant questions remain, psychological science yields [important conclusions about the origins and spread of misinformation](#) and how to counter it effectively. Based on these findings, here are eight specific recommendations for scientists, policymakers, media, and the public to meet the ongoing risk of

misinformation to health, well-being, and civic life.

Avoid repeating misinformation without including a correction

The repetition of false claims increases belief in those claims, a phenomenon known as the illusory truth effect. People of all ages are susceptible to illusory truth, even when they already have relevant prior knowledge about the topic. When media sources, political elites, or celebrities repeat misinformation, their influence and repetition can perpetuate false beliefs. Repeating misinformation is necessary only when actively correcting a falsehood. In these cases, the falsehood should be repeated briefly, with the correction featured more prominently than the falsehood itself.

Collaborate with social media companies to understand and reduce the spread of harmful misinformation

Most misinformation on social media is shared by very few users, even during public health emergencies. These “superspreaders” can play an outsized role in distributing misinformation. Social media “echo chambers” bind and isolate communities with similar beliefs, which aids the spread of falsehoods and impedes the spread of factual corrections. On social media, sensational, moral, emotional, and derogatory content about the “other side” can spread faster than neutral or positive content. Scientists, policymakers, and public health professionals should work with online platforms to understand and harness the incentive

structures of social media to reduce the spread of dangerous misinformation.

Use misinformation correction strategies with tools already proven to promote healthy behaviors

Psychological science research shows that the link between knowledge and behavior is imperfect. There is strong evidence that curbing misperceptions can change underlying health-related beliefs and attitudes, but it may not be sufficient to change real-world behavior and decision-making. Correcting misinformation with accurate health guidance is vital, but it must happen in concert with evidence-based strategies that promote healthy behaviors (e.g., counseling, skills training, incentives, social norms).

Leverage trusted sources to counter misinformation and provide accurate health information

People believe and spread misinformation for many reasons: They may find it consistent with their social or political identity, they may fail to consider its accuracy, or they may find it entertaining or rewarding. These motivations are complex and often interrelated. Attempts to [correct misinformation and reduce its spread](#) are most successful when the information comes from trusted sources and representatives, including religious, political, and community leaders.

Debunk misinformation often and repeatedly using

evidence-based methods

Research shows that debunking misinformation is generally effective across ages and cultures. However, debunking doesn't always eliminate misperceptions completely. Corrections should feature prominently with the misinformation so that accurate information is properly stored and retrieved from memory.

Debunking is most effective when it comes from trusted sources, provides sufficient detail about why the claim is false, and offers guidance on what is true instead. Because the effectiveness of debunking fades over time, it should be repeated through trusted channels and evidence-based methods.

Prebunk misinformation to inoculate susceptible audiences by building skills and resilience from an early age

Instead of correcting misinformation after the fact, “prebunking” should be the first line of defense to build public resilience to misinformation in advance. Studies show that psychological inoculation interventions can help people identify individual examples of misinformation or the overarching techniques commonly used in misinformation campaigns. Prebunking can be scaled to reach millions on social media with short videos or messages, or it can be administered in the form of interactive tools involving games or quizzes. However, the effects of prebunking fade over time; regular “boosters” may be necessary to maintain resilience to misinformation, along with media and digital literacy training.

Demand data access and transparency from social media companies for scientific research on misinformation

Efforts to quantify and understand misinformation on social media are hampered by lack of access to user data from social media companies. Misinformation interventions are rarely tested in real-world settings due to a similar lack of industry cooperation.

Publicly available data offer a limited snapshot of exposure, but they cannot explain population and network effects. Researchers need access to the full inventory of social media posts across platforms, along with data revealing how algorithms shape what individual users see. Responsible data sharing could use frameworks currently in use to manage sensitive medical data.

Policymakers and health authorities should encourage research partnerships and demand greater oversight and transparency from social media companies to curb the spread of misinformation.

Fund basic and translational research into the psychology of health misinformation, including effective ways to counter it

Several [interventions have been developed to counter health misinformation](#), but researchers have yet to compare their outcomes, alone or in combination. There is a need to understand which interventions are effective for specific types of information: What works for one issue may not translate to others. Ideally, these questions would be answered by large-scale trials with representative target audiences in real-world settings. Increased funding opportunities for psychological science research are

needed to address these important questions about digital life.

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