

Mis/Disinformation

It is our belief... that democracy, public health, the climate and more are under threat from a pandemic of disinformation and misinformation which is funded by advertising. Advertisers can play a key role in defunding dis/misinformation, and promoting quality journalism from diverse sources to support credible narratives.

The leadership position

Advertising can support the fight against disinformation and misinformation by funding reputable, high-quality and publicly accountable publishers and broadcasters, taking swift action against publishers who peddle inaccuracies for commercial gain, and supporting public education around critical evaluation of media content quality and trustworthiness. Advertisers should also use their influence to ensure quality and trustworthy journalism is supported, and that bad practice that leads to the spread of misinformation is exposed. It also bears mentioning that the suppression of viable and accurate information is a form of misinformation in its own way.

While the media has always had subjective and partisan opinions, strong positions should not automatically be classified as disinformation. This manifesto aims to support pluralistic, quality journalism and content, including partisan views. However, it confronts misinformation/disinformation that either intentionally or unintentionally seeks to deceive. Please also refer to the Hate Speech manifesto which articulates how mis/disinformation that targets particular groups or minority communities.

The commercial imperative

The media has always included an element of the subjective, highly-partisan, misleading, and downright wrong. But the internet has led to the proliferation of inaccurate and misleading content, some of which is driven by the desire to increase advertising revenues. For brands and advertisers, this presents both a commercial risk, and a potential opportunity. If advertisers reward publishers who are more accountable and produce high-quality journalism, this could both drive up quality and reduce inaccurate and misleading content.

Increasingly, consumers choose brands that align with their own values - appearing alongside misleading content now presents a reputational risk, while there is brand value for organisations that take a leading position on this contentious issue. For advertisers, the use of misleading content to increase traffic falsely distorts the market; suppressing the mis/dis information industry has the potential to level the playing field. Funding mis/disinformation also risks advertising effectiveness.

The ASA has a mandate to tackle deceptive advertising, so this manifesto will focus predominantly on deceptive content.

We believe organisations should make the following commitments and include these criteria in all agency briefs:

Develop internal policies

- Create a mis/disinformation policy, which identifies what it is, and what the company's expected behaviours are when dealing with it, based on your brand values and this manifesto. We recommend basing definitions on [The 4A's white paper](#), which defines disinformation as content created or distributed with the intent to deceive, while misinformation is distributed without the intent to deceive.

- Develop special policies to address sensitivities around protected/diverse groups' understanding of health related issues, and related to climate misinformation. Please refer to the [Change the Narrative report](#) on climate, and [Avaaz](#) for health based information.
- Implement an inclusion list on all buys or exclusion list blocking disinformation along with other harmful content.
- Review your key word block list on a monthly basis to ensure you are not defunding high quality journalism covering large scale news events or covering misinformation itself.

Audit suppliers – SSPs, DSPs, social platforms, by assessing:

- Their policies against misinformation, disinformation, harmful content & enforcement.
- 3rd party technology partners they work with.
- 1st party controls to prevent monetisation of mis/disinformation.
- Cross matching their supply with:
 - Known lists of disinformation sites, such as those maintained by [The Global Disinformation Index](#), [NewsGuard](#), [Centre for Countering Digital Hate](#), [Desmog](#), [EU Database](#).
 - IP infringing domains ([PIPCU](#) & [WIPO](#)), known fraudulent domains.

Given that many news organisations take a polarising position to identify themselves with a target user segment, the differentiation between subjective, partisan journalism and fake, irresponsible and low-quality journalism is not clear-cut and subjective decisions will have to be made. Advertisers should:

- Endeavour to avoid advertising any media which commercialise inaccuracies, distort facts, and do not clearly label opinion and conjecture, harass individuals, peddle rumours, hoaxes and conspiracy for commercial gain, or which promote misinformation about climate science or public health. And report to local regulators, the publications or platforms that do.
- Seek to positively support, through advertising, media which display the 18 clauses of quality and trustworthy journalism set out by the Reporters Without Borders Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), and which have been certified by the JTI.

Audit publishers on your inclusion list by:

- Assessing their policies against misinformation, disinformation, harmful content & enforcement.
- Using third parties to inform your vetting ([GDI](#), [NewsGuard](#) sites with a score above 90, [Storyzy](#) etc.)
- Disinformation is often paired with fraud. Use all verification reporting (high fraud, low viewability, blocked for other harmful content etc.) as a proxy to understand the quality of the domain/app. Please refer to the Ad Fraud Manifesto for more details.

Ad placement & transparency

- Publishers and agencies should comply with the AOP Ad Quality Charter around checking their supply chain. Avoiding misplacement of ads through rigorous use of ad-verification tools, whitelists, and manual vetting.