FAKE NEWS & MISINFORMATION

It is our belief... that verification, improved institutional trust and support for responsible, high-quality journalism are key to resolving the problem of fake news, disinformation and misinformation. Many organisations are looking at classifications to distinguish trusted sources from those which carry a high risk of inaccurate information, but this must be backed with education about quality indicators, and selective ad placement to make it effective. No advertiser wants to inadvertently fund fake news or irresponsible journalism. The distortion of public discourse through fake online identities is an additional concern. Advertisers have a role to play, alongside online publishers and government, to restrict the funding of sites which amplify 'fake news' and misinformation.

The leadership position
Advertising can support the fight against fake news by funding reputable, high-quality and publicly accountable online publishers, taking swift action against publishers who peddle inaccuracies for commercial gain, and supporting public education around critical evaluation of media content quality and trustworthiness.

The commercial imperative
Content, whether online or in print, has always included an element of the subjective, highly-partisan, misleading, and downright wrong. But digital 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 presents a reputational risk. Conversely, there is brand value for organisations that take a leading, responsible position on this contentious issue. For advertisers, the use of misleading content to increase traffic falsely distorts the market; suppressing the fake news industry has the potential to level the playing field.

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

Ad placement & transparency
This subject encompasses fake news, clickbait and intentionally misleading advertising content. The [ASA] has a mandate to tackle deceptive advertising, so this manifesto will focus predominantly on deceptive content:
- 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
- Agencies should reference and implement the [Infringing Website List] (IWL) from the City of London Intellectual Property Crime Unit (PIPCU)

Ad placement strategy
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 with sites 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 the AOP, and regulators, the publications or platforms that do.
- Track the accuracy of content and reporting on online publishers using a fact checking service such as [Factmata], and members of the [International Fact Checking Network.]
- Protect ads from being placed on low-quality sites using tools such as the [Global Disinfomation Index].
- 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.

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