

WITNESS

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FILM IT

CHANGE IT

Visual Verification Tips

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The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed the global health landscape, transportation infrastructure, and the economy too. But it has also had a huge impact on the information landscape, creating an overload of false or misleading information that has been called an “infodemic.”

In a crisis, it’s natural to want to help out by sharing tips with friends or family. But remember that inaccurate information can cause panic, and lead to behavior that increases the risk of catching the virus.

Just as we keep a safe distance from one another to slow the spread of infection, now is the time to slow the spread of misinformation too. Here are some tips to help you verify images and videos that you see online – and remember, if in doubt, check before you share.

TIP 1: HIT PAUSE



We know that most visual misinformation is created by simply re-posting old content with a new caption – it’s easy to do, and only takes seconds. So knowing that visual hoaxes can be created so quickly, one of the best things you can do is slow down: Instead of sharing instantly, hit “pause” for a moment, and think carefully. How sure are you that the image or video is real? And if it isn’t, could you be making other people more fearful, or exposing them to harm by sharing it?

Once you’ve taken time to start thinking critically, some of the next tips will help.

TIP 3: MAKE A SEARCH



Journalists are working harder than ever to cover the coronavirus crisis. That means it’s unlikely that a major event would not be reported in any news source. If you see a video suggesting “tanks are blocking the roads out of New York,” for example, search to see if you can find any other evidence online.

Of course, not every story will be reported in the news. But if an image or video claims to show a major event and there is no other record of it, treat it with suspicion.

TIP 2: CHECK THE SOURCE



You might not always know where an image or video comes from, but if you do, investigating the source can be a great help with verifying content.

If your source is social media, check the description in the account bio and look for location tags. Was the account only created recently? If so, this could be a red flag (though not always). Do the other posts from the account seem consistent with the details in the content you saw (e.g. is the person sharing the video really a military official, or a medical doctor)? Do they seem to live in the same city or country where they claim the content is from?

When the details of a user account don’t match the content being posted, you should be wary of sharing.

If your source is a chat app, there may be less information available, but you can still investigate. If the message was forwarded, can you ask the sender where they found it? If it was posted in a group, does the group have a track record as a source of good information, or is it prone to rumors?

TIP 4: SCAN THE BACKGROUND



Though the focus of an image or video is usually the activity happening at the center, details in the background often reveal more details about when and where it was shot, and may prove that the caption is misleading.

For example, if there are shopfronts visible, are they stores that exist in the country the video claims to show? Do road signs use the correct font and icons? Is the style of dress what you’d expect from people in this region?

These organizations are also a great source of verification tips:

- [First Draft News](#)
- [bellngcat](#)
- [Citizen Evidence Lab](#)

TIP 5: USE IMAGE OR VIDEO TOOLS



If you have time to really investigate, using an image or video search can be a great way to see if a piece of visual media has already been posted somewhere else online.

For still images, Google Images is a quick and easy way to find similar pictures online.

For videos, the InVid plugin for Google Chrome provides a powerful video search tool that works with Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Neither of these tools is foolproof, but both of them are a great start for investigating visual media.

For more info, see our list of verification tools & guides: wit.to/lab-verification