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HOW TO SPOT CLIMATE DISINFORMATION DIGITAL HANDBOOK



IN CO-CREATION
WITH



CLIMATE FACTS MATTER

Climate disinformation is the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information related to climate change and climate action. It **uses techniques that discredit climate action and claim climate change is not real or human caused**, contrary to the findings of over 99% of climate scientists.

A 2023 study found **unchallenged climate misinformation in the mainstream media reached**

4.4 BILLION people in just six months

AI also multiplies how disinformation spreads.

AI

The resulting confusion risks delaying action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The 2024 UN Global Risk Report ranks climate change inaction, large-scale pollution, and mis- and disinformation as the three most important global risks we now face.

85% 
of Europeans agree tackling climate change should be a priority to improve public health.


Studies show DISINFORMATION spreads faster than facts.

It can be easy and even comforting to believe theories that offer fantastic solutions or suggest we and our governments don't have to act now.

Climate Facts Matter because they allow us to see climate disinformation for what it is: a strategy to block climate action that makes people doubt science. Well-funded, self-interested networks, often with connections to interest groups, foreign actors and opportunists, seeking economic or political gains, often exploit uncertainty, fear, and anger to isolate, divide, discourage and obstruct. Repeated exposure to misleading messages makes people tune out from the conversation and lose trust in the value of democracy. To avoid getting fooled, we all need to know how to spot disinformation. This handbook shows you how.

WORDS TO WATCH



Key climate disinformation terms

Climate disinformation

The intentional dissemination of false or misleading information related to climate change and climate action.

Climate misinformation

Unintentional sharing of false or inaccurate information related to climate change.

Malinformation

Presenting accurate information in a misleading way.

Common climate disinformation tactics

Old denial

Outright claims that climate change is not happening or caused by humans.

New denial

Climate disinformation that makes people doubt climate change science, that attacks climate solutions, and may even suggest climate change will be good for us.

Astroturfing

Creating what looks like a spontaneous grassroots movement that is actually initiated and controlled by another (unmentioned) group or organisation.

Cherry-picking

Carefully selecting information that seems to confirm one idea while deliberately ignoring the information that contradicts it.

Greenwashing

Making something appear more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it is.

Why disinformation works

The continued influence effect

Our memory and thoughts continue to rely on inaccurate information even after receiving a credible correction.

The illusory truth effect

Repeated information is more likely to be interpreted as true than new information because it has become more familiar.

Confirmation bias

We tend to interpret new information as proof (a confirmation) of what we already think or believe.

Infoxication

The information overload we are all exposed to. Because so many things are vying for our attention, information often has to be 'surprising' or shocking to stand out. For example, "The spread of true and false news online" study found false stories were 70% more likely to be re-tweeted than true stories.

CLIMATE DISINFORMATION TRENDS IN EUROPE

Disinformation is designed to stick in your mind. While it's hard to fact-check everything, being aware of the main types of misleading arguments makes disinformation easier to notice. Here are some of the recurring climate disinformation strategies now being used across the EU. You'll notice they often piggyback on genuine concerns and debates, exaggerating understandable worries, difficulties, and doubts to stall action.

1. Sovereignty and elite control

Climate action is framed as undemocratic, foreign, or imposed. This narrative questions the motives behind green initiatives, often implying hidden agendas, corruption, or self-serving interests, and sometimes even spreads conspiracy theories.

2. Responsibility deflection and techno delay

Deflection brings up past progress on reducing emissions or cleaning our energy mix, to shift the blame to other emitters, or argue that we should wait for better technology instead of taking action now.

3. Economic fearmongering

Renewable energy and broader climate policies are often criticised during times of economic strain or geopolitical tension. This alarmist approach frames the shift away from fossil fuels as a risk to national energy security and economic resilience.

4. Culture war

Climate policies are portrayed as an attack on national sovereignty, personal freedoms, and local culture. This kind of disinformation manipulates genuine concerns that policy is disconnected from the realities of (often rural) life.

5. "Climate realism"

This type of argument claims climate change is exaggerated, misrepresented, or politicised, portraying science and action as over the top or unnecessary.

6. Short-term weather used to deny long-term climate change

This form of denial often claims "it was hotter in the past" - using isolated historical temperatures to argue heatwaves are nothing new, or citing cold snaps and flooding to mock suggestions the world is getting warmer. However, climate change is, by definition, a long-term trend.

HOW TO SPOT CLIMATE DISINFORMATION



Climate disinformation often cherry-picks data. Check several trusted sources to see the full picture.

TIP # 1

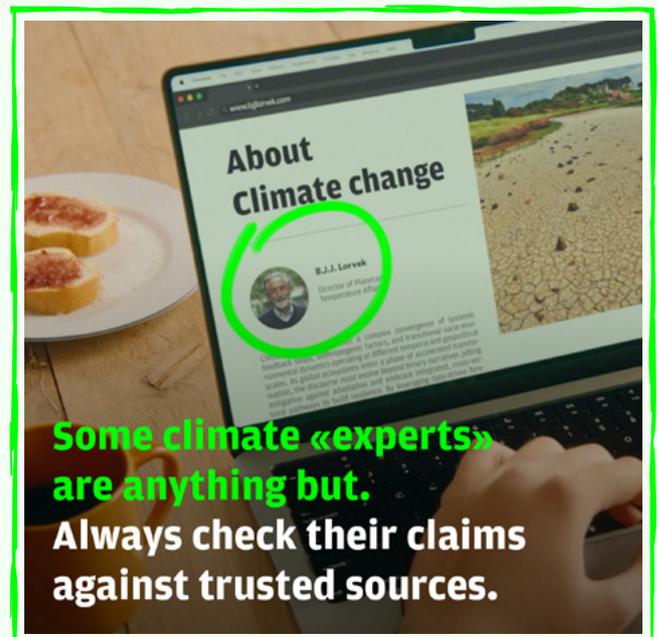
GET THE FULL STORY

Watch out for disinformation surges during extreme weather events, as they are the perfect hook for climate disinformation. These days it is much more common for disinformation to attack the science and the solutions than to deny climate change, as more and more of us feel its impacts. Official sources like meteorological institutes and fact-checking services can be good places to check the facts.

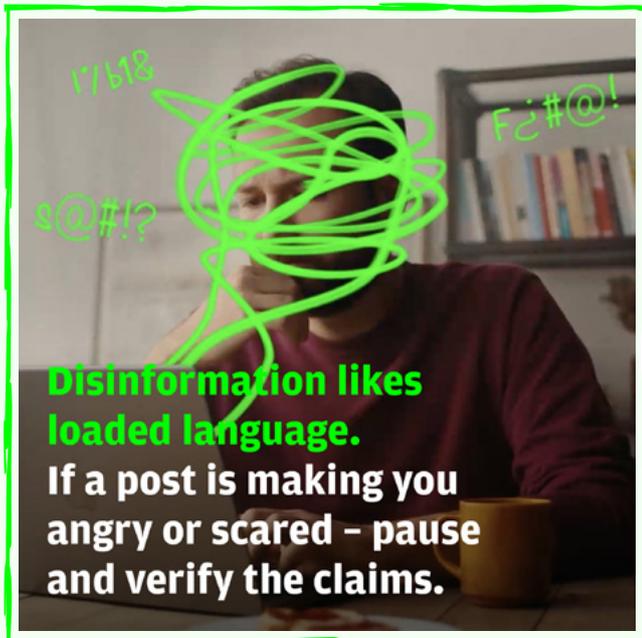
TIP # 2

WATCH OUT FOR FAKE EXPERTS

Sometimes disinformation quotes expert opinions, even though the people concerned specialise in something completely unrelated to climate change. It's a bit like taking a dentist's advice on how to treat skin cancer. Check whether the content in your feeds is sponsored and by whom. Some sources pay more attention to the facts than others.



Some climate «experts» are anything but. Always check their claims against trusted sources.



Disinformation likes loaded language.
If a post is making you angry or scared – pause and verify the claims.

TIP # 3

RESIST EMOTIONAL TRAPS

Bad actors exploit uncertainty, fear and anger to push you to react, as content that gets more responses is shown more often in social media feeds. Some opportunists just want to cash in on your emotions. Be careful about content that could be triggering your confirmation bias.

TIP # 4

NO QUICK FIX FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

The path to net zero emissions is a transition. We have already made significant progress. Between 1990 and 2023, the EU's net emissions went down 37%. Several EU programmes support people and projects across the EU, to enable clean economic growth and ensure a fair and healthy future for us all.



Disinformation often sells «easy» solutions to climate change.
Beware – it's likely too good to be true.



AI manipulated images are common in climate disinformation.
If something looks off, zoom into the details or do a reverse image search.

TIP # 5

WATCH OUT FOR AI FAKES

It's a good idea to verify anything generated by AI, including answers to requests for information. While it's a very quick and convenient resource, it doesn't always come up with the facts.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FIGHT CLIMATE DISINFORMATION?



To beat climate disinformation, we all have to play an active role. You can:

- ➔ Report disinformation when you see it - many social media platforms have a function allowing you to report posts.
- ➔ Avoid engaging with disinformation posts on social media, as this will only amplify the message and give it more attention.
- ➔ Help spread factual information through your channels and networks, online and offline.
- ➔ Be aware of your own biases and get your information from diverse sources for a more balanced perspective.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out the European Commission's webpage on countering climate-related disinformation:



BE AWARE
BE PREPARED
BE INFORMED

#ClimateFactsMatter

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