

Fact-checking 101

Video transcript

Kobe: Hello there. I'm Kobe, and in this first lesson, we're going to talk about what misinformation is, why it spreads, and cover some fact checking basics.

Misinformation is any piece of false or misleading content that has been shared online. Literally anyone can share misinformation. Your mom, your grandparents, your uncle, your sisters, your brothers, public figures do it all the time. But when people share misinformation, it's because they have a genuine emotional connection to it and are genuinely trying to help. We'll touch on that more in a bit. But disinformation is when people are sharing false information on purpose. And we hate that.

There's tons of reasons why someone may want to create disinformation. To make money, to change your mind, to gain followers or clout, and to disrupt democracy. So how do you even spot these types of posts, pics, or videos? Well, here's a fool-proof method. Whenever you see something online and it makes you go what the @#X\$, chances are you could be looking at misinformation. No, but really, posts that make us feel shocked, angry, sad, surprised really any intense emotional reaction could signal that what you're seeing is false, or at the very least in need of a lot of context.

Another more scientific approach to finding out if something is false is to ask yourself three questions, which were developed by the Stanford History Education Group. Learn more about them in the link in the description. Stanford literally studied how professional fact-checkers debunk claims and they boiled it down to these three questions: Who's behind the information? What's the evidence? and What are other sources even saying? Take a look at this viral TikTok and then we'll put these three questions into practice.

TikTok claim: There is a place in the U.S. where murder is legal. It is literally called “the zone of death.” This all takes place in Yellowstone National Park. Here are the state lines and you can see that the park crosses over into Montana and Idaho, and that is the problem. You see this little 50-mile strip of land in Idaho? That is where murder is legal and here's why: In all criminal proceedings in the U.S. the jury has to live in both the state and the district in which a crime took place. In other words, if there is any crime that happens in this little strip of land, the jury in the trial has to be people that live in this little strip of land. The problem is that no one lives there so the case would just get thrown out.

Kobe: Okay so, question one who's behind the information? Sometimes it is as simple as checking the person's bio to see if they're an expert in the field or the area they're talking about. And here I'm not getting any sense that this person has a law degree or some expertise in any legal field.

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Question two, what's the evidence? Well, there isn't any. They provided some maps but no concrete evidence or sources, like previous cases where this has happened or legal documents that set this as a precedent. Now really you could stop here and choose not to share this based on no evidence alone, but let's move on to question three.

What are the other sources saying? Doing a quick keyboard search with the phrase is murder legal in the zone of death? I was able to find plenty of fact checks including articles from PolitiFact and USA Today that debunked it. Easy, right? These three questions are proven to be a super simple way to keep yourself from sharing false information.