Visual Verification Tips

The growing spread of mis/disinformation presents a real threat to democracies, digital safety and the enjoyment of human rights. Also, the advancement of technology developed to mislead makes it increasingly difficult to verify content. Furthermore, the emergence of new technology that enables easier manipulation of audio and video content has had dangerous impact on the society– particularly grassroots communities. It has become imperative for WITNESS to prioritise efforts to combat this threat by building resilience in communities to effectively push back against mis/disinformation.

SLOW DOWN

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. Knowing this, one of the best things you can do is slow down. Don't accept everything you see to be true.

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, then the next tips will help.

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?

ORGANIZATIONS WITH TIPS

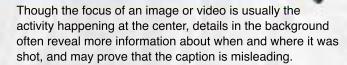DUBAWA I AFRICA CHECK I FIRST DRAFT NEWS

DIG DEEPER

Look for organizations that are trusted leaders in the topic that you are looking for information on. Ensure to find a credible website with research-based information.

When you come across an article, image or a video, ask yourself, who published it? This is because credible information will have a qualified writer and the organization's name attributed as well as other details necessary for others to verify.

Research about the publishers and try to find out if they have political or religious affiliations or interests that might propel them to publicize a particular point of view. If an image or video that claims to show a major event has no other records, it might be because journalists or researchers are unable to confirm it.

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 information about when and where it was shot, and may prove that the caption is misleading.

For example, if a video reveals a group of people, is the style of dress what you'd expect from people in this region? If you can make out a distinct language, is the language consistent with the location? Do the number plates and other key landmarks also align?

USE IMAGE AND 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.