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CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE: DIGITAL ACCURACY

INFORMATION, IMAGES AND VIDEO flow fast and freely in today's networked world. This offers an abundance of interesting and relevant content for your publication—provided, of course, you can separate the real from the fake.

In a world of information abundance, one way to project your quality and expertise is to help be a trusted filter, by separating signal from noise for readers. Sharing, citing or otherwise publishing false information will damage the brand you've worked hard to establish and maintain.

Here's a guide to checking whether that tweet, image, video or other piece of digital content found online is the real deal.

FUNDAMENTALS: VERIFY THE SOURCE AND THE CONTENT

The starting point for verifying any piece of information is to examine the source *and* the content. If it's an image, you want to track it back to find the original source and verify how they obtained it. Are they credible? Does what they tell you align with other facts?

At the same, time, but separately, you need to interrogate the content and verify it on its own. If both the source and the content stand up to scrutiny, then you have something you can use. Here's more detail on verifying the source and content.

VERIFYING THE SOURCE

It's easier than ever to find out who's behind that Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or other account. This is an important, early step in the verification process. You want to determine the original source of a piece of information or content, and then get in touch. This enables you to ask questions about how they obtained the information, and also to gather other details that make for a better story.

Some tips for verifying the source online:

- There are lots of fake and parody accounts online. Often, fake accounts are recently created. On Twitter, you can use Whendidyoujointwitter.com to see how long they've been active.
- Twitter and Facebook label some accounts as “verified”

by placing a blue check mark on the profile page. Remember that this doesn't mean everything these people/organizations post is true! It's also possible to fake a blue check, so hover over the icon with your mouse and look for the words “verified account” to pop up.

- Search their name/handle online to see if you can locate other accounts and profiles. Compare to see if they're consistent in terms of who they say they are, and in what they do/share online.
- Use people search tools such as Spokeo, White Pages, Pipl.com, and WebMii to find their contact information and other details.
- Analyse their online network by looking at their friends, followers, conversations, retweets etc. Does this support or refute who they say they are?

VERIFYING THE CONTENT

Many digital images and videos are not what they seem, or have been altered. There are also people who regularly grab content and present it as their own; this is called scraping.

The starting point with a piece of information/content found on social media is to assume it's not the original and may have been scraped, altered or otherwise manipulated before making its way to you.

To begin investigating a digital image, see if it appears elsewhere online by performing a reverse image search. Google Image search enables you to search by image by uploading or pointing to the web address of an image. Just click the camera icon in the search bar of Google Image search. There is also a service called TinEye that does the same thing.

Reverse image search will show you where else online an image appears—and if indeed it's what someone claims it is. This helps you verify where it came from, and it's been presented in the proper context. (An image might be real, but it's possible it doesn't show what you think it does.) This also works for videos if you take the thumbnail shown on YouTube.

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To get a sense of who's behind the website where you found the content or that is listed in a source bio, you can go to who.is to see when and by whom the domain was registered. As with social media accounts, if the site is very new, you may have reason to be suspicious.

What you see and hear in the image or video provides a wealth of material to help determine its validity. The key is to know what to look for, and how to compare it. Some tips:

- Reference locations against Google Maps, Wikimapia and existing images from the area. This helps you determine if it really took place where it's claimed. Pay close attention to landmarks, buildings and other structures in the frame. Does it match Google Maps or Google StreetView?
- Look at the clothes, license plates, vehicles, etc. in the content. Does it conform to the location and type of event?
- Is the weather consistent with the forecast for the date and location?
- If you have a photo editor on staff, or someone with video expertise, have them take a look and see if they can spot examples of Photoshopping or suspicious edits.

RESOURCES

- VerificationHandbook.com
- Snopes.com
- [Google Image Search/TinEye.com](http://GoogleImageSearch/TinEye.com).
- [Google Maps/WikiMapia](http://GoogleMaps/WikiMapia)
- Spokeo.com, WhitePages.com, Pipl.com, WebMii.com
- who.is
- Whendidyoujointwitter.com

