

From “Issues in Counter Deception,” Sami Saydjari, January 2020:

DEFINITIONS

- **Misinformation:** unintentionally incorrect information
- **Disinformation:** intentionally incorrect information as part of deception
- **Deception:** actions (including spreading disinformation) taken to intentionally mislead
- **Information warfare:** use of information and information technology to gain an advantage (includes deception)
- **Psychological Operations (PsyOps):** action by psychological methods to cause a planned psychological reaction
- **Influence operations:** coordinated effort to alter target’s attitudes, decisions and behaviors toward influencers interests

NOTE: Uncertainty and antipathy are two favored tools in the disruption warrior’s toolbox.

STRATEGIES TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION:

- Repeating an idea, even to debunk it, is a bad idea
- Inoculation may work, but it must come from a trusted source:
 - ⇒ Must provide alternative to non-factual information
 - ⇒ Repeat correction
- It may be better to target the credibility of the source of misinformation
 - ⇒ Plant basis of skepticism of source (e.g. conflict of interest)
- Filter small number of bad players [See David Lazer, et al:
<https://www.davidlazer.com/publication/science-fake-news>]
 - ⇒ Filter bots and “cyborgs”
- Easier fact-checking may help, but distrust in news media is a problem
 - ⇒ News media needs to actively campaign to regain trust

From *The Debunking Handbook*, by John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky:

“First, the refutation must focus on core facts rather than the myth to avoid the misinformation becoming more familiar. Second, any mention of a myth should be preceded by explicit warnings to notify the reader that the upcoming information is false. Finally, the refutation should include an alternative explanation that accounts for important qualities in the original misinformation.

“Bringing all the different threads together, an effective debunking requires:

- **CORE FACTS:** A refutation should emphasize the facts, not the myth. Present only key facts to avoid an Overkill Backfire Effect.
- **EXPLICIT WARNINGS:** Before any mention of a myth, text or visual cues should warn that the upcoming information is false.
- **ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION:** Any gaps left by the debunking need to be filled. This may be achieved by providing an alternative causal explanation for why the myth is wrong and, optionally, why the misinformers promoted the myth in the first place.
- **GRAPHICS:** Core facts should be displayed graphically if possible (see next page).

GUIDELINES FOR COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

Download the Debunking Guide here:

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:e7ce8403-7db7-4a83-8c67-1da340725cf4>

97 out of 100 climate experts agree humans are causing global warming.

Several independent surveys find 97% of climate scientists who are actively publishing peer-reviewed climate research agree that humans are causing global warming.

On top of this overwhelming consensus, National Academies of Science from all over the world also endorse the consensus view of human caused global warming, as expressed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

However, movements that deny a scientific consensus have always sought to cast doubt on the fact that a consensus exists. One technique is the use of fake experts, citing scientists who have little to no expertise in the particular field of science.

For example, the OISM Petition Project claims 31,000 scientists disagree with the scientific consensus on global warming.

However, around 99.9% of the scientists listed in the Petition Project are not climate scientists. The petition is open to anyone with a Bachelor of Science or higher and includes medical doctors, mechanical engineers and computer scientists.

Core fact communicated in headline

Core fact reinforced in opening paragraph, fished out with additional details.

Core fact reinforced with infographic

Explicit warning cueing reader that misinformation is coming and indicating the nature of the misinformation.

The myth

The gap created by this debunking is how can there be a consensus if 31,000 scientists dissent? This gap is filled by explaining that almost all the 31,000 scientists are not climate scientists.

See also:

- *Washington Post* article from 10-28-2020, “**Harvard Teaches How to Detect Misinformation Campaigns**”: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/10/28/new-media-manipulation-casebook-harvard-teaches-how-detect-misinformation-campaigns/>
- **Center for Human Technology’s Ledger of Harms**: <https://ledger.humanetech.com>
- **Warped Reality**, a TED Radio Hour program on disinformation and the technology: <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/29/929115189/warped-reality>