Misinformation Campaigns

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How do you trust what you're reading online? This is one of the most significant questions of the modern era. Over the past two decades, the ever-expanding use of the internet, particularly unfiltered and unchecked social media, has created uncertainties about the legitimacy of information viewed online. The unfortunate reality is that we are all susceptible to misinformation. Over the past several weeks, there has been a significant rise in the volume of COVID-19-related news, emails, and messages. As with any disruption in society, bad actors have capitalized on this opportunity to distribute misinformation via social media and private messaging platforms. The misinformation campaigns are intended to create confusion, instill panic, promote nationalist fears, spread false treatments, and exploit shortages of supplies and critical medical equipment.

While many organizations and governments are doing their best to minimize the distribution of misinformation, it continues to spread faster and farther at an unprecedented rate. Each passing day unsuspecting friends, family, and business associates looking to share helpful information end up widely distributing false narratives. While it's an unfortunate analogy, misinformation spreads like a virus. One post evolves into one share, and eventually, a broad population is rapidly exposed to misinformation, which can create actual adverse impacts when accepted and followed. While many people or businesses don't intend to spread misleading articles, blogs, or social media posts, their actions have real-world implications and can contradict legitimate medical recommendations by qualified health professionals.

Journalists, technology companies, and social media websites can only do so much to defend against the threat of misinformation. While their efforts undoubtedly help and are admirable, there is still an opportunity for individual users to ensure that the information they receive, and importantly share, is from a legitimate source. Below are some critical steps that can be taken to make sure you are part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Actions:

- Take time to research before you share.
- Use fact-checking tools to test the veracity of the information you are receiving.
- Be wary of unsolicited messages that contain grammatical errors and request that you share inside information.
- Do not download files or click unknown web links found in unsolicited emails.
- Do not purchase goods, especially health and safety equipment, from unknown third-party vendors.
- Be suspicious of unsolicited emails requesting charitable donations.

While many of you are staying at home and spending more time online, we urge you to be cognizant of what you read and what you share with your community. We are all in this fight together. Fact-checking to find and share accurate information is another opportunity to step up and be a leader.