

Google boosts support for checking coronavirus facts

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Google and other internet platforms have been stepping up efforts to combat coronavirus misinformation

Google on Thursday said it is pumping \$6.5 million into fact-checkers and nonprofits as it ramps up its the battle against coronavirus misinformation.

Fact-checking organizations, which often operate on relatively small budgets, are seeing a surge in demand for their work as mistaken or maliciously [false information](#) about the pandemic spreads, according to Alexios Mantzarlis of the Google News Lab.

"Uncertainty and fear make us all more susceptible to inaccurate information, so we're supporting fact-checkers as they address heightened demand for their work," Mantzarlis said.

A Poynter Institute report last year on the state of fact-checking indicated that more than a fifth of fact-checking organizations operated with annual budgets of less than \$20,000.

"We are supporting fact checking projects around the world with a concentration on parts hardest hit by the pandemic," Mantzarlis told AFP.

"This can be a noticeable infusion of additional support at a time of stress."

Google is also looking to use its products and "ecosystem" to bolster the battle against COVID-19 [misinformation](#).

The Google News Initiative is increasing its support for nonprofit First Draft, which provides a resource hub, training and crisis simulations for journalists covering news during times of crisis, according to Mantzarlis.

Google is also supporting the creation of a public health resource database for reporters.

"We also want to do more to surface fact-checks that address potentially harmful health misinformation more prominently to our users," Mantzarlis said.

"We're experimenting with how to best include a dedicated fact-check section in the COVID-19 Google News experience."

Google is conducting a test in India and Africa to explore how to use trends in what people are asking or searching for online to let fact-checkers know where a lack of reliable answers may invite misinformation.

"Unanswered user questions—such as 'what temperature kills coronavirus?'—can provide useful insights to fact-checkers and health authorities about content they may want to produce," Mantzarlis said.

That test compliments an effort to train 1,000 journalists across India and Nigeria to spot health misinformation, according to the California-based internet titan.

"There is definitely an appetite for this stuff," Mantzarlis said.

"We grasp for certainty, a glimmer of something we can do to protect ourselves and those we care about. It makes us more vulnerable to this kind of misinformation."

Facebook has also supported fact-checking operations with AFP and other [media companies](#), including Reuters and the Associated Press, under which content rated false is downgraded in [news](#) feeds so that fewer people see it.

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