Verification tip sheet

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Verification begins with asking questions about information. [Being a skeptical journalist is a plus.](http://www.rjionline.org/blog/even-new-fact-checking-tools-journalists-still-need-dose-skepticism)

Always ask: How do we know this? Who said this, and how do they know? What is the source of this information?

On social media ask:

1. Who owns the account?
2. How is the message spreading?
3. Is more than one person spreading the message?
4. Are other people questioning the information?

**INFORMATION THAT SHOULD RAISE RED FLAGS**

* Information or visuals that do not ring true. Build and trust your BS detector.
* Numbers — including dollar amounts and rankings.
* Data and polls, especially data that seems to be cherry picked. Look for the science behind a poll and its completeness.
* Inconsistency and repetition.
* Hearsay.
* Out-of-context examples and references.
* Visuals that are meant to distract or misrepresent or seemingly are selected to prove a particular point.
* Innuendo or biased sources.
* Absolutes. Look for “the only,” “the best,” “the number one,” statements.

**CHECKING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**

Advice from Craig Silverman of Regret the Error, Poynter:

* Check when the account was created. (Be suspicious of new brands.)
* Analyze their network: Friends, followers, conversations and retweets.
* Evaluate tweets before and after.
* Use tools like Klout to check out social media use, or geosocialfootprint.com.
* Keep a list of trusted people/organizations on social media.
* Check photos the user posts for time, weather abnormalities; check to make sure the photos weren’t scraped from other places on the Internet.

**RESOURCES**

Some digital sources that can help you track down claims (find more at [verificationhandbook.com](http://verificationhandbook.com/book/chapter10.php)):

* [SearchSystems.net](http://publicrecords.searchsystems.net/Other_Nations/): an international directory of free public records.
* [Snopes.com](http://snopes.com/): a site dedicated to debunking Internet hoaxes, which can be used to crosscheck UGC.
* [Veri.ly platform](http://veri.ly/): allows users to ask specific questions (specifically during a crisis) and provide UCG evidence for and against.
* [MediaBugs](http://mediabugs.org/): Tracks, corrects media errors.
* [MemeTracker:](http://memetracker.org/) Stanford Network Analysis Project
* Verificationjunkie.com: Tracks verification tools.
* Article: Journalist’s Resource: [Tools for verifying and assessing the validity of social media and user-generated content](http://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/reporting/tools-verify-assess-validity-social-media-user-generated-content?utm_source=JR-email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=JR-email&utm_source=Journalist's+Resource&utm_campaign=9b59d8916c-2015_Mar_31_A_B_split3_24_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_12d86b1d6a-9b59d8916c-78886686)

**Helpful online databases and photo search engines:**

* Wolfram Alpha
* Whois.net lookup
* Pipl.com
* Spokeo.com
* Tineye.com
* Google reverse image search
* Fotoforensics.com

**AGGREGATING AND LINKING**

It is not enough simply to link to a source to support a statement in a story. By linking, you are telling your audience that this information backs up the statements or claims. When a credible news source links to data from a questionable source, it gives that data credence. As links build, it can become difficult for readers to find the original source of information to make a judgment call.

That is why aggregation and links need to be treated the same way as original information. Ask yourself:

1. How did this source get this information?
2. What is their source?
3. Is there a possibility that this source is biased and presented the information in a biased way?
4. Is this source fully and fairly using this information?

Be transparent. If there’s a reason to link to something that is questionable, say that the information is questionable and why.

Here’s some [good advice](https://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/linking-and-checklists-could-have-prevented-journalists-from-manti-teo-girlfriend-hoax-embarrassment/) from Steve Buttry of the Buttry Diary and LSU:

* Link to sources that provide verification and context to your stories.
* Use a checklist to verify facts and ensure the accuracy of your content.