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UNDERSTANDING FAKE NEWS AND MISINFORMATION TO HELP INFORM AN EFFECTIVE
SOCIAL MEDIA PLANETARY DEFENSE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Abstract

Social media is a part of our lives, and for many it is becoming the main source of information. During the Covid pandemic it became clear that misinformation can put people's lives at risk. Discussions within the planetary defense community are currently revolving around ways to avoid spreading fake news and to debunk any potential inaccuracies, should Earth face a potential asteroid impact.

However we cannot underestimate the general public's intelligence as most people are fully aware of the social media environment with the constant lure of click bait in an attempt to get their engagement. Trust remains a key element when looking for reliable information. When in need of facts and actionable advice, e.g. in case of a predicted asteroid impact, most will turn to an official source for guidance.

The planetary defense community should thus rethink their current approach and use social media to their advantage by focusing on the opportunities rather than spending their energy on worrying about fake news and ways to debunk it. Instead, they should rather build a strong, reliable and trustworthy brand that people will turn to when needed. Then of course it is crucial that the messages come from a well-defined authoritative channel and are clear, correct and transparent, especially when not all information is yet available.

This paper will outline the relation between different participants within the social media system and forms of misinformation, and propose a strategy for effective social media communication for planetary defense.