

# Content Confusion: Countering Disinformation in Social Media

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# FTC Mandates the Disclosure of Sponsored Content in Media



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## Lost Amid Misinformation: Real People, Real Science, Real Progress

By Dr. Molra Gilchrist, Vice President, Strategic & Scientific Communications, Philip Morris International  
MAY 25, 2021


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We often think that misinformation and disinformation are online phenomena, with fake news and conspiracy theories only occasionally spilling over into real life. The reality is that these threats to progress are not confined to online peddlers of the unreal; they have real-world consequences that hurt real people.

As a scientist working for Philip Morris International (PMI), I see the spread of misinformation nearly every day—from poorly executed scientific studies and results skewed by bias to misleading headlines. I personally have been subjected to intimidation tactics grounded in misinformation that unfortunately have achieved


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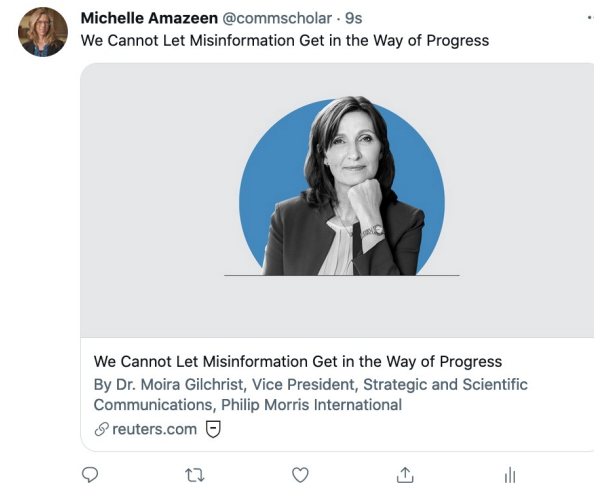
Deciphering fact from fiction to solve today's most pressing issues



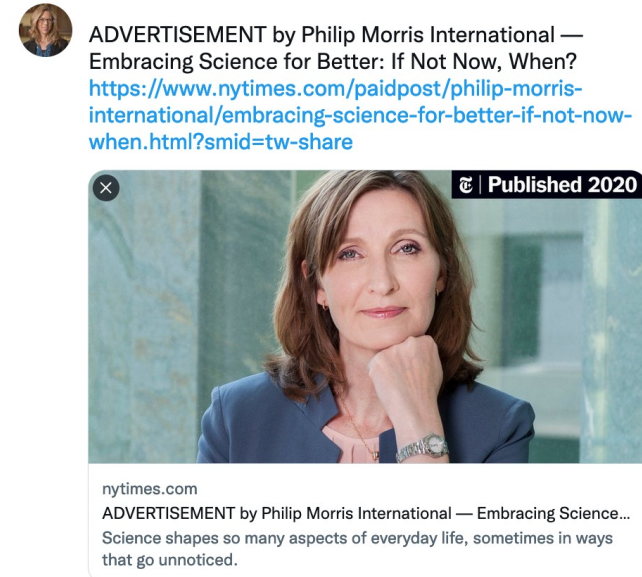
# Disclosures Often Disappear when Content Migrates from News Websites to Social Media (Amazeen & Vargo, 2021)



No Disclosure



No Disclosure



Proper Disclosure

Amazeen, M.A., & Vargo, C.J. (2021). Sharing native advertising on Twitter: Content analyses examining disclosure practices and their inoculating influence. *Journalism Studies*, 22(7), 916-933.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1906298>

## We Must Research the Effects of and Remedies for Content Confusion

- Field research indicates consumers are more likely to resist sponsored content when it is disclosed on social media (Amazeen & Vargo, 2021).
- We are identifying and cataloging a “native advertising observatory”
  - BU has collected thousands of climate-related native ad campaigns.
  - Difficult due to lack of required standardization in disclosure labeling.
  - Requires customized programming for each news site.
  - Amazeen and Vargo (2021) used hyperlinks from social media metadata to identify sponsored content. But not all news outlets identify sponsored content in their URLs.
- Next step: develop a machine-learning approach to detect disclosure labels on social media.
  - Best approach to scrape posts from content studios?

## What Is Best Approach to Implement/Enforce These Content Confusion Remedies?

### Content Production:

- Require standardization of disclosures.
- Require watermarking.
- Require searchable ad library.

### Content Distribution:

- Monitor conduct.
- Monitor/enforce policy compliance.

### Content Consumption:

- Media literacy education/training.