

Superfund for the Internet

Most policy proposals to combat the spread of misinformation in the United States are focused on the content moderation practices of digital platforms. However, effectively managing misinformation and the harms it can cause entails both reducing misinformation *and* elevating authoritative information. Policies *exclusively* focused on controlling speech on platforms likely run afoul of First Amendment protections and will do little to actively promote a healthy and robust civic discourse. We offer a creative policy proposal that alleviates the twin problems of our information ecosystem: the virulent spread of misinformation on digital platforms, and the crisis in local journalism.

Misinformation on digital platforms has been compared to toxic chemicals dumped by industrial companies into fresh water, so our proposal is inspired by the Environmental Protection Agency's 1980 Superfund that cleaned up 400 toxic waste sites. Our "Superfund for the Internet" uses public policy tools to create a market mechanism that can clean up information pollution on platforms and create a new funding source for local news organizations. Our proposal:

- Requires major digital platforms, given their role in facilitating civic discourse, to conduct content moderation in the public interest.
- Creates demand and payment for fact-checking from the major digital platforms, and incentivizes development and supply of these services among local news organizations.
- Establishes a federal "trust fund" administered by an independent government body that would be funded by large digital platforms that meet certain standards. Contributions would be calculated based on each platform's number of monthly active users.
- Allocates payments from the trust fund among qualified news organizations based on the actual amount of fact checking services exchanged with the platforms.
- Establishes a framework for transparency, reporting, best practices, and stakeholder engagement about platforms' content moderation efforts.
- Scales fact-checking by providing an incentive for more organizations to develop the service. Local news organizations are particularly well suited since they are trusted by citizens and their skill set already includes fact-checking principles such as fairness, sourcing, transparency, methodology, and corrections.
- Passes First Amendment scrutiny, in part because the Superfund's independent administrator does not participate in identifying, reviewing, analyzing or acting on content.

The "Superfund for the Internet" compels platforms to include a fact-checking process in their content moderation, while providing a new source of revenue for local journalism.