

The Washington Post develops a new industry-standard taxonomy for video fact checking

The Washington Post is an American newspaper that aims to connect, inform, and enlighten local, national, and global readers with trustworthy reporting, in-depth analysis, and engaging opinions. It combines world-class journalism with the latest technology and tools so readers can interact with the Post anytime, anywhere.

OPPORTUNITY

The Washington Post wanted to create a new standard for video fact checks that would be useful to its audience, the broader fact-checking community, other news organizations, and video platforms like YouTube. It saw an opportunity to create a robust fact-checking taxonomy for online video, and also to highlight the importance of fact checking through a weekly video format.

APPROACH

The Washington Post reshaped its digital video team then built audience awareness of fact checking through a weekly series and a new video fact-checking taxonomy.

Creating longer, higher-quality videos: To raise audience awareness about the importance of fact checking, the team increased investment and strengthened production values for an existing series, “The Fact Checker”. The digital video-first series focuses predominantly on visual topics, especially stories that incorporate both false statements and misleading video.

Creating a taxonomy of video fact checking: Concurrently, the team started working on their video fact-checking taxonomy. They created an initial model of the language used to describe video manipulations and then began actively seeking feedback from internal and external experts. After several iterations, the team demoed the taxonomy at Duke’s Tech and Check conference. They published the taxonomy as [an interactive model](#) on the Washington Post site and also as a [YouTube](#) video titled “How to spot manipulated video” (which included a deepfake Glenn Kessler). The taxonomy guide was written about by Politico, Poynter, NYMag, and others.

Increasing awareness of the taxonomy: To increase the visibility of the new classification system, the Washington Post presented it at the Online News Association Conference in New Orleans. In addition, the team began working with the International Fact-Checking Network of the Poynter Institute and the Duke Reporters’ Lab so the taxonomy could be adapted as a standard by all members through the proposed [MediaReview](#) format. Consultations around [MediaReview](#) are being led by the Duke Reporters’ Lab and aim to expand the functionality of ClaimReview to tagging videos and images.

Sharing the methodology: Finally, in January 2020 the Washington Post, Google, and IFCN co-hosted a fact-checking event, which brought together 40 fact checkers from around the world. The team presented the methodology behind its taxonomy and also highlighted manipulated video concerns related to the 2020 US election.

RESULTS

The Washington Post built up its team and developed a robust fact-checking taxonomy for digital video. Since staffing up and establishing a regular publishing cadence for its “Fact Checker” series, it saw a **309% increase in average views** from 2018 to 2019, despite publishing fewer videos.

LEARNINGS

Launch early, test often: It’s useful to do a ‘soft’ launch of your series and give yourself time to iterate and learn from audience responses. For “The Fact Checker” series, the Washington Post team learned through trial-and-error what resonated best with their audience. For example, they learned that videos performed best when they covered a visual topic — like debunking a misleading video about Ilhan Omar (490K views), investigating what’s really happening in Kashmir using UGC (365K views), and trying to understand what happened during Beto’s DWI by reconstructing the scene (117K views).

Involve the whole organization: For its fact-checking taxonomy project, the Post publicized the project across the whole organization and involved the expertise of as many in-house people as possible. Because more people were invested in the project, it was easier to get buy-in and create sustainable change throughout the organization.

Establish workflows and processes: When launching a series on YouTube it’s important to decide on the project deliverables early, set realistic deadlines, and make sure every team member clearly understands their responsibilities. Doing this helped the Washington Post keep to a fairly consistent publication schedule of several videos each month, which ultimately led to increased loyalty and growth.

“**The GNI YouTube Innovation Funding has allowed us to develop new approaches to storytelling that are difficult to make space for in the context of breaking news and daily journalism. It gave us room for experimentation in how we reach audiences visually.**”