Funding Proposal

Tackling Social Media's COVID-19 Misinformation Pandemic

To: Australian Communities Foundation
From: Responsible Technology Australia

Overview

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, a new and arguably more infectious pandemic has emerged - misinformation. From conspiracy theories linking 5g towers with disease spread, to posts promoting hot water or bleach as remedies, misinformation has quickly and dramatically reached every corner of the world by capitalising on the fear and confusion of communities in these uncertain times.

Whilst it might be easy to blame a malicious actor or an ignorant end-user, responsibility for the immense scale and spread of this content lies with the social media platforms, namely Facebook (Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp), Google (Youtube) and Twitter.

These platforms make their money through advertising, and so are designed to serve you the most engaging content - which tends to be sensational, outrageous and conspiratorial - to keep you on their websites, regardless of factual accuracy or harm caused. With capturing user attention in mind, they have amassed the world's largest collection of personal data, which their algorithms use to curate tailored news feeds of content calculated to have the greatest potential to keep you engaged. All for their bottom line.

This model causes significant harm to individuals and communities, especially during crises and elections when reliable and truthful information is most critical.

About RTA
RTA is an independent organisation committed to countering the exploitative data practices of digital platforms, and the harms they cause to our democracy. We seek to ensure the safety of Australian citizens online whilst advocating for an ethical business ecosystem that values innovation and competition. Find out more.

Opportunity

There is an opportunity to leverage the unprecedented proliferation of misinformation through the COVID crisis to engage Australian audiences on the impact of misinformation, to provide individuals with the knowledge and awareness to better spot misinformation, and to mobilise support for holding the social media platforms responsible.

Approach

The experience of RTA's campaigns team lies in going beyond the surface of an issue and testing new approaches to meet audiences where they are and engage them on complex issues through fun and interactive ways.

We have developed a campaign called **The Misinformation Medic,** which is an interactive online quiz that takes people on a journey engaging and informing them on the threats of misinformation. The quiz gauges how well the user can spot real COVID misinformation and gives them a 'diagnosis' score with matching tools to help them better spot it in the future. The campaign aims to empower individuals, but is very explicit that while we are all susceptible to misinformation, the responsibility for it lies with the social media platforms.

The asks of the campaign to the social media platforms are:
1. **Live List -** To maintain a public list of the most viral COVID-19 content to allow health officials, journalists and the public understand what misinformation is spreading and in which online communities, in order to create effective responses.
2. **Circuit Breaker -** To institute a function that identifies COVID-19 content that is starting to go viral and pauses the algorithm from amplifying it until it has been fact-checked.

Objectives:
1. Raise awareness amongst the Australian public about the serious and tangible harms misinformation causes in times of crisis.
2. Mobilise public audiences to demand social media platforms take responsibility for the way their design and business model enables and amplifies false content.
3. Alignment with key politicians on the ask so that there is a coordinated insider ask to the platforms from government
4. Engagement of key influencers both to mobilise audiences, but also to increase pressure on the platforms

Through our government relations strategy, RTA has fostered strong relationships

with key government representatives to ensure that the public pressure our campaigns build is coordinated with asks from government. A key strategy for RTA is to provide the political cover of public support for parliamentarians to take progressive action to tackle misinformation.

See the annex for more information on the campaign specifics, including the tools we provide for audiences and mockups of the campaign site design.

Theory of Change

If we are able to get social media users to care that social media platforms are amplifying COVID-19 misinformation, then we can build a public constituency to signal to the government that there is public support (and political cover) for progressive policies that lead to better public oversight and regulation of the exploitative data practices of digital platforms.

Audience

The campaign will attempt to reach a broad Australian audience, engaging individuals who have experienced COVID-19 misinformation, or who are concerned about where to access reliable information and advice. Our target audience is fits the following profile:

Demographics	- Facebook user 25-35 year olds most concerned about fake news[1] - Target groups who are less versed on social media/misinformation (e.g. 50+)
Attitudes	- Anxiety from overload of COVID-19 information - Not sure where to find reliable information - Considers themselves news savy
Behaviours	- Consumers news through Facebook - Accidental consumer of misinformation - Has received misinformation from friends or family

Timeline

The campaign execution phase is an iterative exercise where we continue to unlock new opportunities and tailor the campaign to maximise impact. For that reason, this timeline is illustrative, with our expectation being that The Misinformation Medic is likely to continue to evolve into the future.

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[1] Sourced from our own national survey (n=1500) conducted by Roy Morgan

Week Commencing										
27 April	4 May	11 May	18 May	25 May	1 June	8 June	15 June	21 June	28 June

Gantt chart:
- **Soft Launch + Testing**: 27 April – 4 May
- **Campaign Execution**: 11 May – 21 June
- **Reporting**: 28 June

Budget

We have developed the campaign to this point leveraging our core funding from Luminate Group. Based on the current budget shortfall, they have offered to match further commitments from local donors, as represented in the budget below.

Item	Budget
Microsite	$8,500
Animation Video Production	$18,500
Creative development & Copywriting	$34,000
Tool Development (chatbot, ad experiment etc)	$8,000
Paid Media + Influencer Strategy	$79,000
Earned Media Strategy + Execution	$4,000
Ongoing Campaign & Strategy Team Staff Costs	$88,000
Total	**$240,000**
Already committed by Luminate	**-$140,000**
Funding Request	**$50,000**
Matched Funding by Lumunate	**$50,000**

For more information please contact:

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Annex

Live website: https://misinformationmedic.com.au/
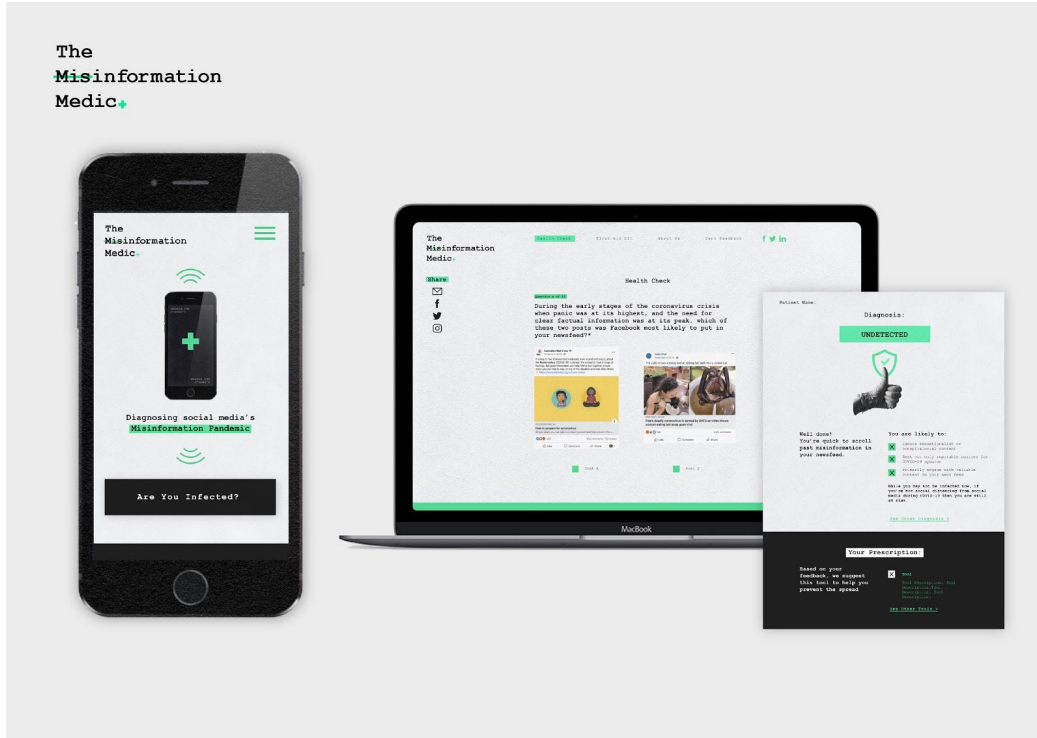
Annex 1: MOCKUPS

First Aid Kit Page

The Misinformation Medic.

Health Check | First Aid Kit | About Us | Demand Action

Share

First Aid Kit

Social media's Misinformation Pandemic is causing **division, anxiety, and fear.**

While we need social media to **make big changes**, in the meantime, we've put together some **handy tools to help** you protect yourself from the Misinformation Pandemic.

Checklist

Use this handy step by step guide to discern fact from fiction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

See List

Ask The Medic

Decoding the Misinformation Pandemic isn't easy. We've put our medic to work answering the tough FAQs.

Ask Medic

Faces of Misinformation Page

The Misinformation Medic.

Health Check | First Aid Kit | About Us | Demand Action

Share

Faces of Misinformation

Social media platforms amplify content that is engaging, regardless of its factual basis, potential for harm or intention behind its creator. This means that the platforms are serving misinformation to you, your friends and family – without taking responsibility for it. But who does it originate from?

Often misinformation is shared with the best intentions, but other times it becomes disinformation when malicious actors are intentionally trying to deceive, manipulate or scare you. We've broken down the different "characters" behind mis- and dis-information on social media.

The Sneaky Scammer

Motto:
"If you can't make a buck out of a crisis then you're doing something wrong"

M.O.:
The sneaky scammer tries anything to profit from a crisis and may present themselves as an entrepreneur or health professional. Their go-to M.O. is to tap into your fear to sell you solutions – such as miracle remedies or equipment like special face masks. They might use ad platforms to drive you to their products or can also be found posting in community groups.

Motive:
Parting you from your hard earned money

How they want you to feel:
Prepared and reassured in an uncertain world

How to spot them:
Using lines like "you won't find this in stores" or "the secret remedy the the government / doctors / the media aren't telling you about" with numbers to call or website links

COVID CURE-ALL OIL

Only $99.99!

Annex 2: TOOLS LIST

Misinformation Checklist Use this handy step by step guide to discern fact from fiction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.	**The many faces of misinformation** While social platforms are entirely responsible for amplifying misinformation, the question remains - who's peddling the posts?
Misinformation Medibot Install our Facebook chatbot to receive viral misinformation alerts. It will also identify the misinformation that you personally may have seen!	**Ask the Medic** Decoding the Misinformation Pandemic isn't easy. We've put our medic to work answering the tough FAQs.
CoronaCheck When misinformation goes viral, the RMIT & ABC fact check team is a reliable source for accurate COVID-19 reporting.	**Poynter Covid-19 misinformation database** Gathers misinformation, detected by fact-checkers in more than 70 countries.
Ad observer A browser plugin that copies the Facebook ads you see to a public database, monitoring them and holding advertisers accountable.	**BotSlayer** A more technical tool, BotSlater is designed to monitor bot activity around a particular topic revealing tweets and accounts related to suspicious campaigns.
Infotagion An independent COVID-19 fact-checking service, using WHO and worldwide government directives as its source of truth.	**NewsGuard** A browser plug-in to do the hard work for you, it lets you know if a site is reliable as you browse online news.

Annex 3: MEDIA ACQUISITION & OUTREACH STRATEGY

The primary way we intend to drive traffic to the 'Misinformation Medic' campaign is through online advertising, influencers, and through EDMs to member lists of partner organisations (including Sum of Us).

The primary goal of the media budget will be to drive high quality leads to the campaign site. The metrics which will be tracked to indicate this will be set up as goals on google analytics, and will be:

- Quiz completions (primary conversion metric)
- Email Sign up
- Sign the 'Demand action' petition

The metric we will initially use to optimise media spend will be quiz completions as this is the first indication someone is engaged. (CPA = cost per quiz completion)

Media Plan Phases
The intention is that acquisition media will be rolled out in three phases. The following table outlines the phases with expected timelines and budgets, however the intention is that this is a flexible process and

	Outline	**Length**
Phase 1	<u>Testing</u> This is the initial testing phase where we will experiment with: ● Channel ● Audience targeting ● Creative We will create a number of ads which tap into our assumptions around what would motivate audiences to engage.	1 week
Phase 2	<u>Optimising</u> In this phase we will cut down the number of channels based on quiz conversions and only top performing ads will continue to run. Based on phase 1 learnings on the top performing ads and audiences we will: ● We will develop 1-3 more new concepts to test ● We will create variations of the winning ads e.g. targeting new audiences or align copy / design tweaks	2 weeks

Phase 3	Ramping up This phase will be the bulk of our media spending which will focus on pushing the top performing ads only. It is likely we will only be running ads primarily on one channel at this point.	3-4 weeks

Channels

The channels we are intending to use are:
- Facebook - ads
- Instagram - stories
- Linkedin
- Twitter
- Youtube - pre-roll
- Ad words
- Social retargeting e.g. Adroll (Phase 3 only)