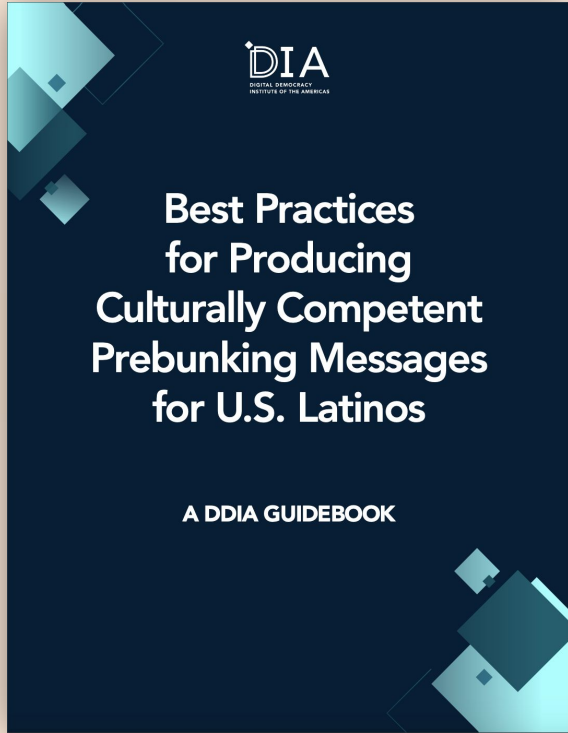DIA
DIGITAL DEMOCRACY
INSTITUTE OF THE AMERICAS

Best Practices for Prebunking Misinformation

Best practices are based on findings from focus groups, polling and experiments conducted by DDIA in 2024

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Content List

This guide provides [evidence-based](#) recommendations to help you to create effective prebunking content.

What is Prebunking?

- "Prebunking," also known as "Inoculation," is **a counter-disinformation intervention** that aims to build people's resistance to illicit influence or persuasion by **exposing them to weakened or diluted forms of narratives, arguments or tactics of manipulation** before people come across them online.

- This is akin to the way that vaccines work in the body, where exposure to a weakened form of a virus can help to protect against the disease when one encounters it in the real world later.

Why Use Prebunking?

- **Prebunking works:** On average, Latino audiences who watch inoculation content are better at detecting manipulative narratives and tactics and less likely to share misleading posts.

- **Cultural competence is important:** Interventions that incorporate pop culture, humor and Latino trusted messengers resonate more effectively.

- **Effectiveness by subgroups:** Prebunking is not a catch-all solution to misinformation. Targeting prebunking content is important. In initial experiments, women, younger generations, and English-dominant Latinos responded most positively to prebunking, but this intervention should be targeted to most groups in English AND Spanish that have not yet fully bought into disinformation.

Putting this Guide into Practice

For Journalists:
- Integrate prebunking strategies into news coverage and social media storytelling.
- Educate audiences on manipulative tactics and meta-narratives in an engaging, neutral way.

For Organizations:
- Share prebunking content to build awareness and resilience against misinformation.
- Train local leaders and stakeholders on identifying tactics and narratives.

For Content Creators:
- Apply best practices in tone, format, to develop impactful prebunking content and credibility.
- Use relevant pop culture examples that resonate with Latino audiences.

How Should Prebunking be Structured?
A Three-Step Recipe

1. Forewarning

Warn people they may encounter certain narratives or tactics online.

Example: *"Accounts online trying to influence how you react to something may present issues as 'black and white' to limit your thinking when reality is more complex."*

2. Microdosing

Briefly introduce a mild version of the manipulation tactic.

Example: A video explaining false dichotomies by showing how social media posts frame issues as "either/or" choices.

3. Refuting

Provide clear reasoning or fact-based counterarguments to debunk the tactic.

Example: "In reality, there are multiple perspectives on this issue (list them out), and reducing it to two extremes is a manipulation strategy."

Practical Checklist for Implementation

Before You Create Prebunking Content

❏ **Clarify your goal:** What specific misinformation narrative or tactic are you addressing?

❏ **Know your audience:** Which Latino subgroups are you targeting?

❏ **Choose a format:** Will your content be a short video, an article, a social media post, or a public service announcement?

During Content Production

- ❏ Respect the intelligence of your audience - people are skeptical, not dumb.

- ❏ Use subtle, non-preachy language.

- ❏ Use neutral messengers and label their credentials clearly.

- ❏ Incorporate culture and current events, avoid very aggressive political references (let people connect examples to reality on their own).

- ❏ Back up your arguments and claims with evidence.

During Content Production

❏ Produce content in English & Spanish: if producing for a U.S. Latino audience, avoid Spanglish or exaggerated accents.

❏ Incorporate visuals that help break down complex ideas or illustrate key points that reinforce the message.

❏ Include closed captions for video content, and also ensure that sufficient color contrast and readable fonts exist in visual materials.

Evaluating Effectiveness

❏ **Monitor engagement:** Track shares, comments, and audience feedback.

❏ **Test different formats:** Compare performance across different styles and messengers.

❏ **Be open to adjust messaging** based on audience response.

Sample Implementation 1:
DDIA created prebunking to address the following manipulation tactics used by disinformers

- **False Dichotomies:** black-and-white choices, leaving no room for nuance.
Example: "You either support this policy, or you don't care about your community."

- **Emotional Language:** Manipulative content exaggerates fear, anger, or outrage to provoke strong emotional reactions and reduce critical thinking.
Example: "They are coming to take everything from us!"

- **Ad Hominem Attacks:** Instead of engaging with ideas, misinformation often attacks individuals or groups personally to discredit them.
Example: "Don't trust this source—they are just puppets of the elites."

Sample Implementation 2:
DDIA created prebunking to address the following issues with an explainer approach

Election Security

Non-Citizens Voting

More Prebunking Videos from DDIA's Research

Prebunking Videos (Focused on Tactics)

Approach 1 (MediaPlus):

- Emotional language (English, Spanish)
- Ad-hominem attacks (English, Spanish)
- False dichotomies (English, Spanish)

Approach 2 (Cabezahueca Films):

- Emotional language
- Ad-hominem attacks
- False dichotomies

Approach 3 (Factchequeado)

- Emotional language
- Ad-hominem attacks
- False dichotomies

Original Approach (University of Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab)

- Emotional language
- Ad-hominem attacks
- False dichotomies

Prebunking Videos (Focused on Narratives)

¿Los que no son ciudadanos pueden votar? (Non-Citizens Voting)

- Full Video (Spanish)
- YouTube Short 1
- YouTube Short 2

¿Son seguras las elecciones en EE.UU.? (Election Security)

- Full Video (Spanish):
- YouTube Short 1:
- YouTube Short 2:

DDIA content was tested in a randomized controlled trial among U.S. Latinos, showing that inoculation interventions were effective, but with varying degrees of success.

Addressing false dichotomies and emotional language were more effective than countering ad hominem attacks, which proved more resistant to change.

Final Takeaways: What to Keep in Mind

1. **Prebunking is proactive, not reactive.** Equip audiences with the tools to recognize manipulation before it happens.

2. **Subtlety works best.** Use questions, relatable narratives, and humor to guide audiences toward critical thinking.

3. **Who delivers the message matters.** Use neutral messengers and introduce them properly to establish credibility and trust.

4. **Cultural relevance enhances impact.** References to culture and values make prebunking more relatable.

5. **Test, iterate, and improve**. Small tweaks in tone, visuals, or platform can significantly impact engagement and effectiveness.

Want support in implementing these strategies?

Reach out to DDIA for collaboration, additional resources, or training opportunities.

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