



Just as vaccines expose the body to weakened viruses in order to trigger resistance, exposing people to diluted versions of deceptive arguments can help them recognize and reject subsequent stronger ones. It trains our mental immune system by previewing tactics that might be used to influence or deceive.

This approach has proven effective. Ahead of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US and UK governments anticipated attempts to justify aggression through fabricated evidence. Rather than waiting to respond, they declassified intelligence and explained what fabricated evidence might look like, including staged footage and actors posing as corpses. The aim was simple: Inoculate audiences by making visible the mechanics of misinformation. It worked—prebunking blunted the impact of subsequent Russian propaganda.

The same strategy can work for companies. By anticipating likely narratives and preparing communications in advance, organizations can strengthen audience resilience and preserve trust before misinformation spreads.

This approach underpins an exercise that Brunswick calls "Red Teaming" (see page 11)—essentially structured simulations that reveal which false narratives might emerge and where defenses are weak.

Prebunking can also take the form of reputation-building campaigns. Take Patagonia, which has long been transparent about both its environmental progress and its limitations. By owning its story before others can distort it, the brand has built resilience against accusations of greenwashing, establishing trust through openness rather than perfection.

Building trust before a crisis is easier than restoring it afterwards. Strong reputations act like long-term immunity: They don't prevent exposure, but they do reduce the likelihood of infection. ♦

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MisINFORMATION Inoculation

FALSE AND DAMAGING INFORMATION can reach global audiences in seconds, eroding trust, damaging reputations and destroying market value.

Yet, rebutting falsehoods inside a tight window can be difficult. Brunswick research suggests that that window can be as narrow as an hour, rendering traditional responses such as clarifications, fact-checks and content labeling ineffective. And once a false narrative takes hold, the psychological pull of repetition and

confirmation bias makes it stubbornly resistant to change.

What's needed is an ounce of prevention. Ahead of debunking, we recommend prebunking—training audiences to recognize manipulation. Instead of firefighting, it builds cognitive immunity before misinformation spreads.

Organizations can vaccinate themselves against false narratives by prebunking.
By **Eilis Murphy** and **Bénédicte Earl**