CLIMATE OF MISINFORMATION:
RANKING BIG TECH

SEPTEMBER 2023

Friends of the Earth
GREENPEACE

SUMMARY

Misinformation around climate change and disinformation fueled by the fossil fuel industry have stalled climate action for decades. Big Tech has become a complicit actor in climate denial's resurgence—so much so that the International Governmental Panel on Climate Change publicly called out the problem in 2022. In addition, the United Nation's Policy Brief for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms in June of 2023 explicitly states that:

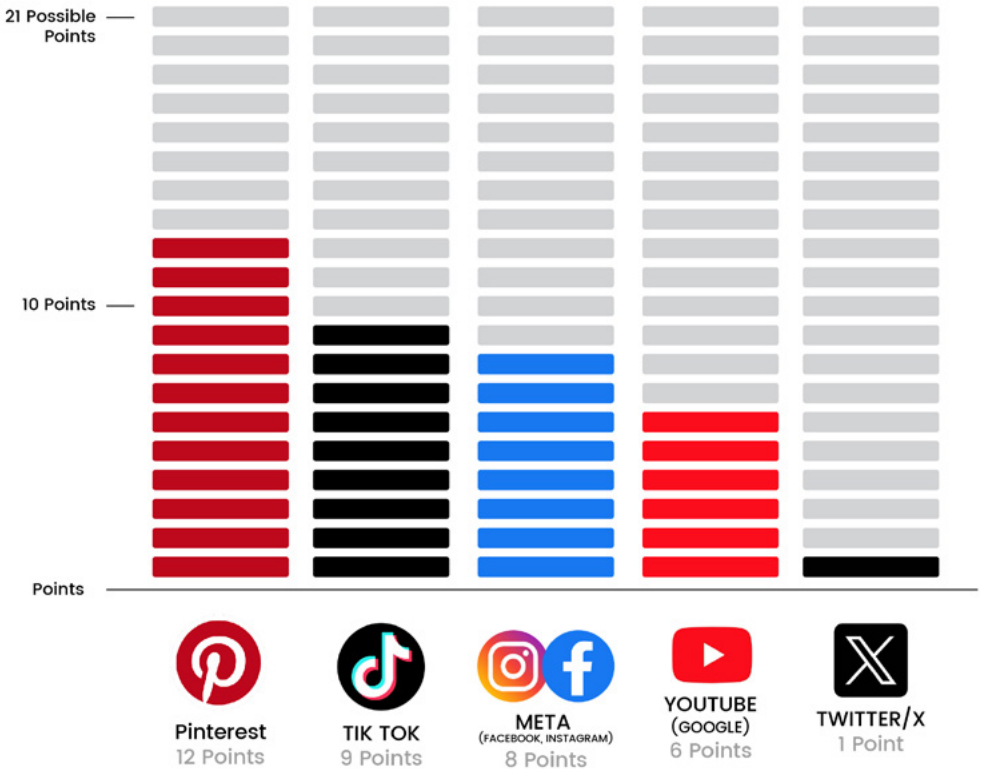
"Mis- and disinformation about the climate emergency are delaying urgently needed action to ensure a liveable future for the planet."

Over the past several years, platforms have announced some policies to stop the spread of false climate content. In 2021, Google pledged to no longer allow the monetization of climate denial content on YouTube. In early 2023, TikTok added climate to its existing mis- and disinformation policies. In 2022, Pinterest took the largest step, banning climate misinformation in both organic content and advertisements. Nevertheless, research from environmental and civil society groups shows that there are serious gaps in the way that policies targeting climate misinformation are written and enforced.

The purpose of this scorecard is to assess the policies of five major platforms that should aim to reduce the spread of climate mis- and disinformation. We've scored and ranked Meta (Instagram and Facebook), TikTok, Twitter/X, YouTube, and Pinterest in accordance with the standards set by the Climate Action Against Disinformation Policy Demands and "In the Dark", our transparency-focused scorecard from 2022. We call on platforms to review our rankings and use them to guide future policymaking around stopping the spread of climate denial, greenwashing, hate speech, and public health misinformation.

About the Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition (CAAD): CAAD is a group of more than 50 organizations committed to addressing content that perpetuates false narratives on our environment and dilutes productive conversations on the climate. We hold Big Tech accountable for their role in allowing climate mis/disinformation to spread on their platforms and engage decision-makers at the national and international level to enforce accountability and bring political awareness to the problem. CAAD relentlessly pursues accountability and a good-faith dialogue around our environment that leads us toward substantive climate solutions.

RANKINGS



KEY FINDINGS

See Further Explanation and Discussion sections for further detail.

- Pinterest received the most points, proving that they're leading the industry on policies that mitigate the spread of climate misinformation.
- YouTube, Meta, and TikTok have made commitments to address climate misinformation on their platforms, but independent researchers demonstrate that policy enforcement is lacking.
- Twitter/X received only one point—lacking clear policies that address climate misinformation, having no substantive public transparency mechanisms, and offering no evidence of effective policy enforcement.
- 4 out of 5 platforms did not have a content moderation policy that includes a comprehensive, universal definition of climate misinformation.
- Most platforms lack policies that address greenwashing.
- Although TikTok has demonstrated intention to do so, no platform showed proof of equal enforcement of climate misinformation policies across languages.
- 4 out of 5 platforms' privacy policies were either difficult to read, did not explicitly prevent the sale/sharing of personal data, or both.
- There's a lack of algorithmic reporting from all platforms, and 4 out of 5 platforms lack reporting on misinformation trends.
- 2 out of 5 platforms lack effective public education tools on climate change and climate solutions, and public education tools like Facebook's Climate Science Center have been proven to not effectively counter misinformation.

METHODOLOGIES

- Researchers used a 21-point assessment system informed by experts to grade platforms on the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of their policies. Questions were chosen from last year's social media transparency scorecard, crafted from the coalition's policy asks, and in consultation with independent researchers.
- Researchers used the companies' official, public-facing community guidelines, terms of service, and press releases (as of August 24, 2023) as well as relevant news reporting and independent research to answer each question.
- Assessment questions were answered with a "yes" or "no." If the answer was "yes," the platform received one point. If the answer was "no," the platform received no points. A higher score reflects a stronger policy. For some platforms, there was not enough available data to answer certain questions.
- Data that has not been made readily available or easily accessible to the public may alter the answers to some questions.
- In the case of X/Twitter, Elon Musk's acquisition of the company has created uncertainty about which policies are still standing and which are not. While some policy content on Twitter/X's website dated before the acquisition could potentially benefit the fight against climate disinformation, such as its announcement to ban "misleading advertisements on Twitter/X that contradict the scientific consensus on climate change," many policies are no longer being enforced, according to outside sources.
- Researchers didn't include Threads in its assessment of Meta, as the platform is new, and its content moderation policies have not been publically detailed.
- We reached out to representatives of each platform to provide comment or clarity on their policies with respect to climate mis- and disinformation. The coalition received responses from:

Meta, who only directed us to their public-facing resources, including their Community Standards, general misinformation policies, Approach to Climate Content page, and Ad Library.

Pinterest, who detailed their climate misinformation policy, provided insight into their enforcement and transparency tools, and reaffirmed their commitment to sustainability efforts and fighting climate misinformation.

Google, who directed us to their 2021 policy announcement that prohibits the monetization of climate denial content.

TikTok, who directed us to their misinformation guidelines which address climate, educational resources on climate change in advance of Earth Day, and their ongoing efforts to roll out their expanded research API. They also reaffirmed their commitment to continuing conversations with CAAD to effectively address climate misinformation.

ASSESSMENT

	META (IG, FB)	YOUTUBE	TIKTOK	PINTEREST	TWITTER/X
POLICY CONTENT					
1. Does the platform have a content moderation policy for user-generated content specifically aimed at reducing climate change misinformation?	✓		✓	✓	
2. Does the platform's policy include a clear and comprehensive definition of climate misinformation (the CAAD definition)?				✓	
3. Do the platform's misinformation policies apply to all paid and organic content?	✓		✓	✓	
4. Does the platform have a clearly articulated process to flag or report misleading and harmful content for the platform's review?	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5. Does the platform provide additional resources with accurate information on climate change, etc.—i.e., through an information center or the like?	✓	✓	✓		

	META (IG, FB)	**YOUTUBE**	**TIKTOK**	**PINTEREST**	**TWITTER/X**
TRANSPARENCY					
6. When content is reported, is the reporting user given updates into the review process, as well as what actions have been taken on content/an account and why?					
7. Do researchers and/or academics have reasonable access to non-personal data related to content and advertising?					
8. Does the platform report annually on climate misinformation trends or concerns related to coordinated disinformation campaigns?				✓	
9. Does the platform release publicly available assessments on how algorithmic changes impact the spread of climate misinformation?					
10. Does the platform provide public explanation for decisions made behind content removal, account removal, and account reinstatement for prominent public figures?	✓	✓			

	META (IG, FB)	YOUTUBE	TIKTOK	PINTEREST	TWITTER/X
ADVERTISING/MONETIZATION					
11. Does the platform prohibit the monetization of climate misinformation, including greenwashing content?				✓	
12. Does the platform prevent the prevalence of climate misinformation, including greenwashing content, through search functions?			✓	✓	
13. Are advertisers who promote climate denial, climate skepticism, and/or greenwashing content restricted from running advertisements on the platform?	✓			✓	
PRIVACY					
14. Is the platform's privacy policy easily accessible and readable for the everyday user?				✓	✓
15. Does the platform explicitly prevent the sale or sharing of personal data to harmful advertisers or data brokers, such as fossil fuel industry groups?		✓		✓	
16. Does the platform exhibit intent to protect personal data from invasive requests, including public-private security efforts that target protestors?				✓	

	META (IG, FB)	**YOUTUBE**	**TIKTOK**	**PINTEREST**	**TWITTER/X**
ENFORCEMENT					
17. Does the platform have a clearly articulated enforcement policy that explains how all posts, including those reported, are fact-checked?	✓		✓		
18. Does the platform have a clearly articulated process for content removal and/or account suspension? Is their downranking/ suspension policy clear? Does it detail the number of violations and time frame necessary to become a "repeat offender"?		✓	✓		
19. According to researchers, does the platform have a demonstrable history of being able to enforce its policies?				**Not enough data** (see Further Explanation)	**Not enough data** (see Further Explanation)
20. Does the platform release annual reports on the enforcement of its misinformation policies?	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21. Have researchers identified a demonstrated intention to enforce its policies equitably across languages?			✓		
TOTALS	**8**	**6**	**9**	**12***	**1***

* with 1 suspended point for lack of data

FURTHER EXPLANATION

1. Does the platform have a content moderation policy for user-generated content specifically aimed at reducing climate change misinformation?

- TikTok, Pinterest, and Meta have policies that specifically prohibit false, user-generated climate content.
- While YouTube (under Google) does have an advertising policy targeting climate denial content, there is no policy that addresses organic, user-generated content.
- Twitter/X does not have any policy that addresses user-generated climate misinformation content.

2. Does the platform's policy include a clear and comprehensive definition of climate misinformation (the CAAD definition)?

Pinterest is the only platform to receive credit, as their community guidelines define climate misinformation explicitly. The definition includes climate denial, misinformation around climate solutions, greenwashing, and misinformation around environmental disasters.

3. Do the platform's misinformation policies apply to all paid and organic content?

YouTube and Twitter/X did not receive credit, as there isn't a clear mention of climate misinformation in policies related to both advertising and user-generated content.

4. Does the platform have a clearly-articulated process to flag or report misleading and harmful content for the platform's review?

Twitter/X is the only platform to not receive credit for this question, as their Terms of Service do not include misinformation in any form, and any guidance on reporting misinformation is seemingly not available in most countries. As a whole, policies on addressing misinformation are unclear.

5. Does the platform provide additional resources with accurate information on climate change—e.g., through an information center or the like?

- TikTok received credit for its Earth Month Content Hub and its proactive education campaign for COP 27.
- Meta received credit for its Facebook Climate Science Center and Sustainability Resource Center.
- While Pinterest does have resources that promote sustainable or "green" living, there's no resource center for information on climate change.
- Although Twitter/X does have a dedicated climate change "topic," it's not easily findable and is not actively promoted by the platform.

6. When content is reported, is the reporting user given updates into the review process, as well as what actions have been taken on content/an account and why?

No platform received credit for this question. While Meta, TikTok, and YouTube all have means to check the status of a post or account reported, there isn't full clarity as to why posts or accounts are and aren't removed.

7. Do researchers and/or academics have reasonable access to non-personal data related to content and advertising?

Researchers defined "reasonable access" as access to non-personal data by both academic and independent researchers through a means that is clear and not cost-prohibitive. No platform received credit for this question.

8. Does the platform report annually on climate misinformation trends or concerns related to coordinated disinformation campaigns?

- Pinterest was the only platform to receive credit for this question, as their Biannual Transparency Reports map trends in misinformation, drawing comparisons on content flagged and removed from previous quarters.
- Other platforms, like Meta and TikTok, have enforcement reports that include misinformation, but these reports are not climate-specific and don't record trends in climate misinformation content.

9. Does the platform release publicly available assessments on how algorithmic changes impact the spread of climate misinformation?

No platform received credit for this question, because they currently do not offer public insight into their algorithms or how algorithm changes affect content creation.

10. Does the platform provide public explanation for decisions made behind content removal, account removal, and account reinstatement for prominent public figures?

- While Pinterest does offer reasoning through when the media inquiries on account or content removal, they don't provide publicly posted announcements.
- Meta received credit for offering public explanation for its reinstatement for Donald Trump and ban for Alex Jones, while YouTube received credit for offering public explanation for removing content from Donald Trump's channel.

11. Does the platform prohibit the monetization of climate misinformation, including greenwashing content?

• Pinterest was the only platform to receive credit for this question, as their advertising policies are the only ones that incorporate greenwashing content.
• While Google did announce it would prohibit ads for and monetization of climate denial content on YouTube, their definition of climate misinformation is not comprehensive and does not include greenwashing.

12. Does the platform prevent the prevalence of climate misinformation, including greenwashing content, through search functions?

• Pinterest received credit for this question because, if a user searches terms related to climate denial or general climate misinformation, they're directed to either positive climate content or provided with a message that says, "Pins about this topic often violate our community guidelines, so we're unable to show search results."
• TikTok received credit because the platform blocks search terms related to climate denial and prompts a message that says, "This phrase may be associated with behavior or content that violates our guidelines. Promoting a safe and positive experience is TikTok's top priority. For more information, we invite you to review our Community Guidelines."
• Meta, YouTube, and Twitter/X don't appear to attempt to redirect searches for climate misinformation.

13. Are advertisers who promote climate denial, climate skepticism, and/or greenwashing content restricted from running advertisements on the platform?

• Meta and Pinterest received credit for their policies that prohibit advertisers from posting content that violates community standards, which do at least include climate denial.
• TikTok's advertising policies say that "Ad creatives must adhere to the Terms of Service and Community Guidelines of TikTok." However, the specific section in the advertising policies related to misinformation does not mention climate and is different from its main misinformation policy.
• Google's ad policy, while preventing monetization of climate denial content, does not address climate denial via advertisements themselves.

14. Is the platform's privacy policy easily accessible and readable for the everyday user?

• VPNOverview ranked Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube's privacy policies as "difficult" or "very difficult" to read.
• Researchers found Pinterest and Twitter/X's privacy policies to be relatively readable, and data privacy compliance software Enzuzo listed both platforms in its piece on the 20 Best Privacy Policy Examples.

15. Does the platform explicitly prevent the sale or sharing of personal data to harmful advertisers or data brokers, such as fossil fuel industry groups?

Pinterest was the only platform to receive credit for this question, as they do allow users to opt out of data sharing with third parties and third-party analytics providers and advertising services. They also include privacy protections in their advertising guidelines.

16. Does the platform exhibit intent to protect personal data from invasive requests, including public-private security efforts that target protestors?

• Pinterest and YouTube/Google received credit, as their Law Enforcement Guidelines offer explicit language that spells out an intent to advocate on behalf of the user.
• Twitter/X and Facebook have recorded instances of complying with invasive law enforcement requests, and TikTok data is reportedly available to law enforcement agencies even after accounts are deleted.

17. Does the platform have a clearly articulated enforcement policy that explains how all posts, including those reported, are fact-checked?

Meta and TikTok received credit for this question, as their policy includes detailed information as to how content is reviewed, as well as information on any third-party fact-checkers.

18. Does the platform have a clearly articulated process for content removal and/or account suspension?

TikTok and YouTube received credit, as each details the number of strikes and time frames surrounding suspensions. Other platforms did not go into this level of necessary detail.

Google Promised to Defund Climate Lies, but the Ads Keep Coming

Google said in 2021 that it would stop running ads alongside videos and other content that denied the existence and causes of climate change.

19. According to researchers, does the platform have a demonstrable history of being able to enforce its policies?

• YouTube, TikTok, and Meta did not receive credit, as independent research has confirmed the lack of consistent enforcement of climate misinformation policies.

- A 2023 BBC investigation confirmed TikTok's inability to effectively remove climate denial content.

- Research conducted in 2022 by the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that Facebook is failing to flag at least half of climate misinformation content.

- Research from CAAD in May 2023 found that Google is unable to enforce its own policy prohibiting the monetization of climate denial content on YouTube.

• While Pinterest does have clear policies against most types of climate misinformation, there is not enough independent research to confirm whether these policies are being effectively enforced.

• Twitter/X also received a "not enough data" rank for this question because they have no clear climate misinformation policies on organic content, so the question in and of itself is moot. Furthermore, while they announced an advertising policy that prohibits climate denial ads in the spring of 2022, there's no data as to whether this policy has been enforced or not.

20. Does the platform release annual reports on the enforcement of its misinformation policies?

Pinterest, TikTok, Meta, and YouTube all release publicly available enforcement reports. Twitter has not released an enforcement report since the summer of 2022, and those reports do not elaborate on misinformation content removed.

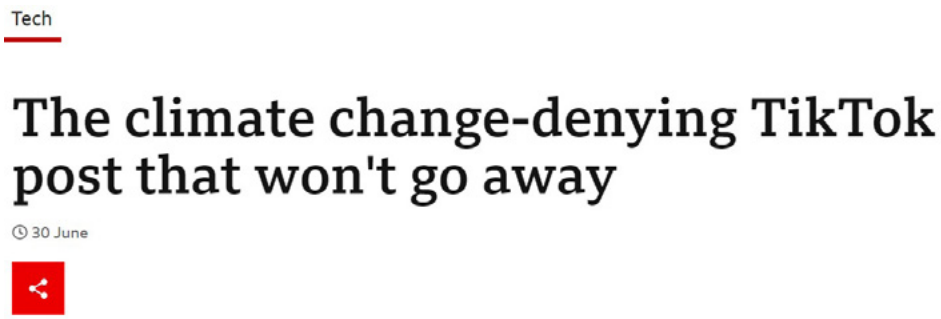
21. Have researchers identified a demonstrated intention to enforce its policies equitably across languages?

TikTok is the only platform to receive credit for this question, as they release public comments and resources related to their efforts to track misinformation in non-English languages. However, as research from Media Matters confirms, enforcement is seriously lacking.

DISCUSSION

• **Pinterest** is the industry leader: Pinterest received the top score from our assessment for its incorporation of climate misinformation into its policies with a clear definition and an acknowledgement of greenwashing and misleading content that extends beyond outright climate denial. That being said, there is a lack of independent research confirming the enforcement of Pinterest's climate-related policies.

• **Meta, TikTok, and YouTube say they're making steps but are lagging behind:** While these platforms received points for basic steps to address climate misinformation—such as incorporating climate into their general misinformation policies and supposedly prohibiting climate denial content via advertising—independent research has demonstrated that their policies are far from being sufficiently enforced.


Tech

The climate change-denying TikTok post that won't go away

30 June

• **Twitter/X is heading in the wrong direction:** Not only does Twitter/X lack clear current policies that acknowledge climate misinformation or climate denial, the platform lacks proper public transparency. Since Elon Musk's acquisition, content moderation has been deconstructed, and climate denial and hate speech have spiked. Meanwhile, while Musk talks about free speech, he instead targets those who try to hold Twitter/X accountable for letting false and harmful content run amok on the platform.

• **There is a need for a comprehensive and universal definition of climate misinformation:** Pinterest is the only platform that includes a comprehensive definition of climate misinformation, according to standards set forth by the Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition. Without an all-encompassing definition to address the problem, a considerable amount of content is slipping through the cracks. The coalition's 2023 research regarding YouTube's advertising policies, for instance, demonstrates that platforms' narrow definitions of climate misinformation allow for the proliferation of greenwashing content and content that attacks climate solutions.

• **Policies are in place, but problems remain:** Many platforms have installed measures meant to curtail false and misleading climate content. Yet, research from members of our coalition and beyond has consistently shown that enforcement is seriously lacking.

- A CAAD study on climate misinformation at COP27 found that $3 to $4 million was spent on greenwashing ad content via Meta during the conference, and climate denial content is surging on Twitter/X.

- A 2023 BBC investigation found that TikTok is failing to enforce its policy banning climate denial content.

- CAAD partner Stop Funding Heat found a startling rise in investments from the fossil fuel industry and fossil-fuel-backed groups in greenwashing advertisements across most major platforms.

- In addition to previously mentioned research on Google's inability to enforce its advertising policies on YouTube, Ekō (formally Sum of Us) found that extremist influencers and conspiracy theorists are pushing misinformation on YouTube that violates Google's policies.

• **Lack of non-English language enforcement:** TikTok was the only analyzed platform that demonstrated intent to equitably enforce its policies in non-English languages, and all of the analyzed platforms have significant room for improvement. Research from Media Matters uncovered Spanish-language disinformation about climate change spreading rapidly on TikTok. Research from Graphika, Friends of the Earth, and GreenLatinos identified a growing network of climate disinformation growing across Spanish-speaking communities, who bear the brunt of the climate crisis as well.

• **The greenwashing elephant in the room:** Greenwashing is a PR tactic long used by the fossil fuel industry to make themselves appear more environmentally conscious than they actually are. Yet, platforms aren't including greenwashing in their content moderation or advertising policies. Just like Big Tobacco, the fossil fuel industry is weaving a narrative that it is on the side of the public, when its products (and the emissions caused by said products) result in massive harm to people and the planet. This is a form of misinformation and should be addressed by platforms' misinformation policies.

• **Inaccessible and ineffective privacy policies:** Using research from VPNOverview and Common Sense's Privacy Program, we assessed the degree to which privacy policies are both readable and protect users' data. Coherent, effective privacy policies are essential to the safety of users from exploitative advertisers, like the fossil fuel industry, and algorithms that amplify misinformation. Additionally, oil companies have been known to pay law enforcement agencies to target environmental protestors, and the use of personal data via social media is one way to do it. Therefore, it's crucial that platforms step up to protect their users' data.

• **Gaps in transparent reporting:** While Twitter/X was the only platform that did not release regular reports on the enforcement of its misinformation policies, no platform received credit for reporting on how algorithmic changes impact misinformation on their platforms, and Pinterest was the only platform to receive credit for tracking climate misinformation trends in their reporting. In many industries, when a product or service causes harm, the company is required to disclose information that gives the public an opportunity to understand the risks of their exposure and how companies and regulators have responded (or not). Social media platforms, which cause harm by profiting from hate speech and misinformation, owe it to the public to open up their algorithmic black boxes.

• **There is a lack of public education on climate change and climate action that effectively counters disinformation.** While mitigating misinformation, it's also important to uplift content that educates users on climate change and climate solutions. Some platforms have been proactive in creating content that educates users, such as Facebook's Climate Science Center and TikTok's Earth Month content hub. However, platforms also need to ensure the existing tools they have are comprehensive and effective. Research from CAAD partners on climate skepticism on Facebook during COP26 found that climate skeptics' posts generated 12 times more engagement than content promoted by their Climate Science Center.

A note to researchers:
As stated in the methods section, there are multiple gaps in research as it pertains to content moderation, transparency, and the spread of climate mis- and disinformation on social media platforms. We encourage researchers to continue to explore trends in the spread of climate denial, greenwashing, misleading information on climate solutions, and other forms of climate misinformation. More specifically, there is potential to further investigate the following:

- The spread of climate misinformation content in non-English-speaking communities.
- The prevalence of climate misinformation within advertisements.
- The importance of data privacy as it pertains to environmental activism, as well as the ways in which shared data is used by bad actors to target specific demographics with misinformation.

The efficacy of third-party fact-checking programs, like Twitter's Community Notes and Youtube's Priority Flagger Program.

CONCLUSION

We encourage platforms to review the assessment above and use it as a means to improve their policies in a way that slows the spread of climate misinformation, as well as improves overall product quality and safety.

Platforms not included in this scorecard—from LinkedIn to Blue Sky—should also use the questions posed and subsequent rankings as guidance for a comprehensive anti-disinformation policy as they continue to grow their user reach.

In short: Climate change is a multifaceted, complicated problem to address. The spread of climate disinformation doesn't have to be.

The Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition calls on Big Tech to take these steps:

- Produce and publicize a transparent company plan to stop the spread of climate disinformation, greenwashing, hate speech, and content that jeopardizes public health and security on their platforms that includes:
  - Community content standards.
  - An enforcement mechanism for violation of the standards.
  - A greater allocation of resources to monitor content in all languages and local dialects.
  - An explanation of any fact-checking processes.
  - A robust public input mechanism for content flagging.
- Release publicly available assessments of how product or design changes affect the spread of climate disinformation and hate speech before they are implemented.
- Allow public interest researchers and academics to access non-personal data related to content, including user-generated content, promoted content, and paid advertising.
- Adopt a universal definition of climate disinformation.
- Prevent the monetization of climate disinformation aligned with the definition through advertisements and search, including "greenwashing."
- Report annually on the prevalence of foreign interference and coordinated climate disinformation influence operations, as well as fossil fuel industry-sponsored disinformation efforts on their services.
- Engage in public communications to educate users on detecting and limiting the spread of disinformation.

Furthermore, the coalition calls on lawmakers to mandate that Big Tech align their policies with the demands above. The European Union's Digital Services Act, for example, is a positive first step in holding social media companies accountable, and enforcement of this legislation is critical. There are clear measures that social media platforms and governments can take to prevent the spread of lies that impede climate action. We just need the political will to act on those measures.