

College Startup Takes on \$2.6 Billion Misinformation Industry

UMass startup builds AI platform to cut advertising revenue to misinformation sites before content goes viral

BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, January 31, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Misinformation has



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become one of the defining challenges of the digital age. False claims about elections spread faster than corrections can reach voters. Health misinformation circulates for months before fact-checkers catch up. Generative AI is accelerating the problem, enabling bad actors to produce convincing fake content at scale.

The economics fuel the cycle. Misinformation is estimated

to be a \$2.6 billion industry, funded largely by advertising. Programmatic ad systems, the automated technology that places ads across millions of websites, don't distinguish between legitimate journalism and fabricated clickbait. The money flows automatically, and most advertisers don't realize their budgets are reaching these sites.

[ClearContext](#), a startup founded at UMass Amherst, is trying a different approach.

The company launched in early 2024 with a browser extension designed to help readers identify unreliable sources. Co-founder Gagan Deep Gutta, a mathematics major, said the team quickly saw the limits of that model.

"By the time something gets flagged, millions of people have already seen it," Gutta said. "We needed to go upstream, follow the money."

ClearContext has since pivoted to an AI platform that identifies unreliable sources before ads are placed on them, aiming to cut off revenue at the point of transaction. Rather than flagging individual articles after they spread, the system targets the financial infrastructure that makes misinformation profitable.

The team's philosophy is simple. "We're not chasing bad articles," Gutta said. "We're trying to kill the business model that creates them."

The startup is developing partnerships with advertising networks and brand safety platforms. Its

approach has drawn support from the chair of the UMass Amherst Journalism Department, who has endorsed the company's algorithmic methodology.

Gutta sees the work as part of a larger mission. "Misinformation is a systemic problem," he said. "It affects elections, public health, and how people understand the world. Someone has to fix the system, not just the symptoms."

ClearContext is seeking collaborations with researchers, news organizations, and advertising technology companies.

About ClearContext: ClearContext is an AI platform that combats misinformation by cutting advertising revenue to unreliable sources. Founded in 2024 by students at UMass Amherst, the company works with ad networks and brand safety platforms to address the financial incentives behind online misinformation.

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