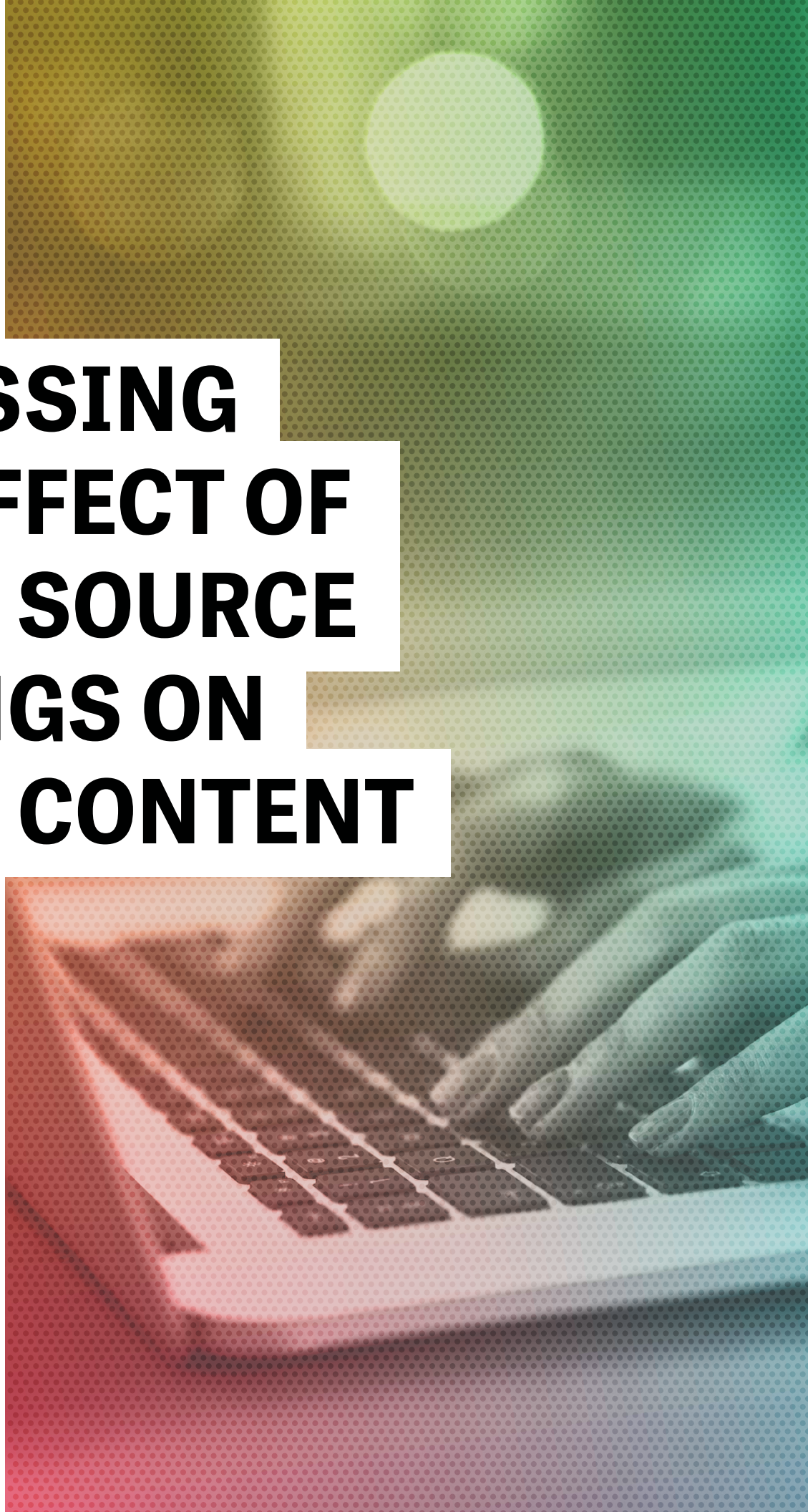


ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF NEWS SOURCE RATINGS ON NEWS CONTENT

A GALLUP/KNIGHT
FOUNDATION SURVEY



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ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF NEWS SOURCE RATINGS ON NEWS CONTENT

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INTRODUCTION

Gallup and Knight Foundation's 2017 Survey on Trust, Media and Democracy¹ found that Americans believe the media landscape is becoming harder to navigate. A majority of Americans say the plethora of information and news sources available makes it harder, rather than easier, to be informed today. The proliferation of online news sources that fail to adhere to the basic journalistic standards of accuracy and accountability contributes to the challenge of determining what is true or important.

An April 4-11, 2018, Gallup/Knight Foundation survey experiment of 2,010 U.S. adults sought to test the effectiveness of a news source rating system designed to bolster online news consumers' ability to identify misinformation, or so-called "fake news," meaning false or misleading content. The system identifies news organizations as reliable (by showing a green cue) or unreliable (using a red source cue) based on expert evaluations of their work, funding and other factors.

Three key findings emerged from this survey experiment:

1. **The news source rating tool worked as intended.** Perceived accuracy increased for news headlines with a green source cue and decreased for headlines with a red source cue. Participants also indicated they were less likely to read, like or share news headlines with a red source cue. The source rating tool was particularly effective for participants who correctly recalled that experienced journalists devised the ratings, compared with those who did not recall that information.
2. **The source rating tool was effective across the political spectrum.** The perceived accuracy of news articles with a red source cue decreased similarly among Republicans and Democrats, with the sharpest decline occurring when the headlines had a clear political orientation that matched the users' political beliefs.
3. **The source rating tool did not produce known, unintended consequences associated with previous efforts to combat online misinformation.** Our experiment did not produce evidence of an "implied truth effect," an increase in perceived accuracy for false stories without a source rating when other false stories have a source rating, or a "backfire effect," a strengthening of one's false beliefs following a factual correction.

¹ <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-trust-media-and-democracy>

**THE SOURCE
RATING TOOL
WAS EFFECTIVE
ACROSS THE
POLITICAL
SPECTRUM,
ESPECIALLY WHEN
THE CONTENT OF
FALSE HEADLINES
MATCHED THE
USERS' POLITICAL
BELIEFS.**

This survey experiment offers compelling evidence that the use of an online tool to indicate news organization reliability increases healthy skepticism when individuals consume news online.

Gallup and Knight Foundation acknowledge support for this research from the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Gallup recruited 2,010 U.S. adults from Survey Sampling, Inc.'s survey panel. The sample is not recruited through probability methods and is not intended to be representative of U.S. adults. Such an approach is adequate for testing the effects of an intervention since experiments commonly do not use representative samples.

Even so, attempts were made to make the sample characteristics conform to those of the U.S. adult population. The total sample fell within 5 percentage points of national population proportions on age, race, gender and education. Party identification — Democrat, Republican and independent — was balanced equally across the three experimental conditions to analyze whether the effects of the experiment differed among partisans. Breakdowns of sample sizes can be found in the supplementary materials near the end of this report.

Participants were asked to rate the accuracy of 12 news headlines on a 5-point scale and to indicate whether they would read, like or share each article. Six real news headlines were selected from reliable news sources with varying degrees of national familiarity. The story content was verified to ensure that none contained factual errors. Six headlines that were verified as false were chosen from unreliable sources known to spread misinformation. The headlines were drawn from Snopes.com, a third-party fact-checking website. They were selected based on partisan appeal, with three pro-Republican/anti-Democratic and three pro-Democratic/anti-Republican. These news headlines are included in the supplementary materials.

Participants were randomly assigned to three conditions.

- **Control:** See headline, image, news source name and one-sentence description of news story.
- **Treatment 1:** Same information as control group, but each article also includes one of three source cue ratings.
 - **Green** (reliable: adheres to basic journalistic standards of accuracy and accountability)
 - **Red** (unreliable: does not adhere to those standards)
 - **Not yet rated**

Respondents were told that the ratings were devised by a team of experienced journalists with varied backgrounds. The source ratings are those assigned by NewsGuard, an online source rating tool.² Two red-rated news headlines — one left-leaning and one right-leaning — were randomly assigned a “not yet rated” label.

- **Treatment 2:** Same information as in treatment 1, but with an additional icon allowing users to click to see more information about why the news source received a red or green rating.

² The Knight Foundation funds NewsGuard: <https://newsguardtechnologies.com>

Examples of Headlines in Each Treatment Condition

CONTROL



Outlook for growth of world economy gets even rosier

The OECD raises its global expansion forecast to 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019, partly crediting the U.S. tax cuts.

PRESSHERALD.COM

TREATMENT 1



Outlook for growth of world economy gets even rosier

The OECD raises its global expansion forecast to 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019, partly crediting the U.S. tax cuts.

PRESSHERALD.COM

News Source Rating: **GREEN**

TREATMENT 2



Outlook for growth of world economy gets even rosier

The OECD raises its global expansion forecast to 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019, partly crediting the U.S. tax cuts.

PRESSHERALD.COM

News Source Rating: **GREEN**

Click [i](#) for more info



Boston police officer kills black man over marijuana cigarette

Malik Edwards, a 36-year old African American, was shot by police officers following a dispute regarding a marijuana cigarette.

BOSTONTRIBUNE.COM



Boston police officer kills black man over marijuana cigarette

Malik Edwards, a 36-year old African American, was shot by police officers following a dispute regarding a marijuana cigarette.

BOSTONTRIBUNE.COM

News Source Rating: **RED**



Boston police officer kills black man over marijuana cigarette

Malik Edwards, a 36-year old African American, was shot by police officers following a dispute regarding a marijuana cigarette.

BOSTONTRIBUNE.COM

News Source Rating: **RED**

Click [i](#) for more info



DACA recipients burn American flag in protest

This is what DACA recipients are doing as they protest, waving Mexican flags and burning old glory.

TRUTHFEED.COM



DACA recipients burn American flag in protest

This is what DACA recipients are doing as they protest, waving Mexican flags and burning old glory.

TRUTHFEED.COM

News Source Rating: **NOT YET RATED**



DACA recipients burn American flag in protest

This is what DACA recipients are doing as they protest, waving Mexican flags and burning old glory.

TRUTHFEED.COM

News Source Rating: **NOT YET RATED**

The full set of instructions, headline and story examples, and details contained in the information link for each news headline are available in the supplementary materials.

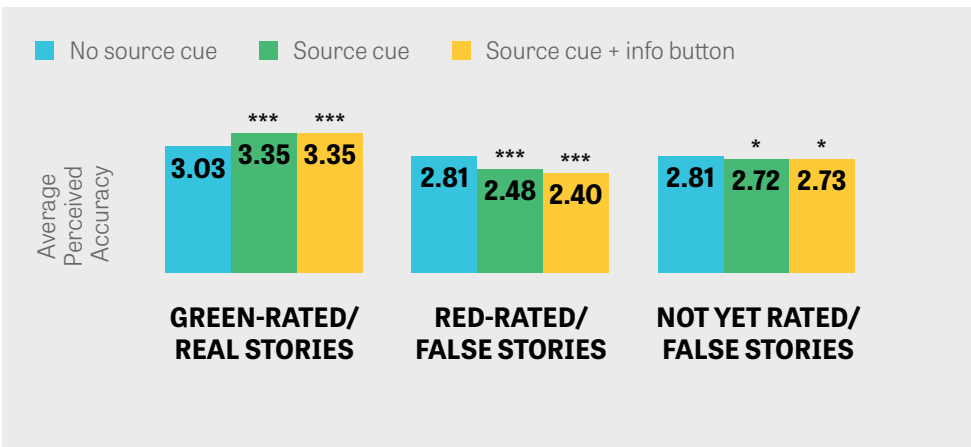
DETAILED FINDINGS

OVERALL EFFECT OF NEWS SOURCE RATINGS ON PERCEIVED ACCURACY

Prior studies suggest that corrections of particular false claims or beliefs largely work as intended.³ A news source rating tool operates under a similar assumption — that a source’s reputation affects the way people perceive the accuracy of news articles from that source. To evaluate this effect, the average accuracy rating, ranging from 5 (very accurate) to 1 (not accurate at all), was calculated for each article type across the three conditions.⁴

Perceived Accuracy of News Headlines

By News Article Type



Dependent variable: average rating of perceived accuracy by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

The source rating tool had a significant impact on how respondents perceived the accuracy of news headlines. A green source cue substantially increased the average perceived accuracy of real news headlines from trustworthy news sources by .32 points, while a red source cue decreased perceived accuracy of false news headlines from untrustworthy sources by .33 points. Perceived accuracy of headlines with a green cue was similar to the perceived accuracy of headlines with the green cue and a link to more information about the rating. However, access to an information link did slightly reduce the perceived accuracy of headlines with a red source cue by .08 points. This result offers modest evidence that supplementary source-specific information has an independent effect on perceived accuracy beyond the presence of a red source cue.

3 doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2819073

4 We use an unpaired t-test to determine whether the average mean differences between the treatment conditions were statistically significant from the control.

When we added a “not yet rated” source cue to two of the six presented false headlines (the other four received red source cues), the perceived accuracy of “not yet rated” items declined slightly by .09 points in treatment 1 and .08 points in treatment 2. This finding differs from a study conducted by Pennycook and Rand (2017) that identifies an “implied truth effect,” where fake news stories without a warning label were perceived as *more accurate* in the treatment group when mixed with other fake news stories that had the warning label, than they were in the no-warning-label group.⁵

Overall, our results corroborate a recent study that demonstrates a similar effect of source ratings on the perceived believability of news stories.⁶

**THE SOURCE
RATING TOOL HAD
A SIGNIFICANT
IMPACT ON HOW
RESPONDENTS
PERCEIVED THE
ACCURACY OF
NEWS HEADLINES.**

5 doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3035384

6 doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2987866

DETAILED FINDINGS

SOURCE RATINGS AND PARTISANSHIP

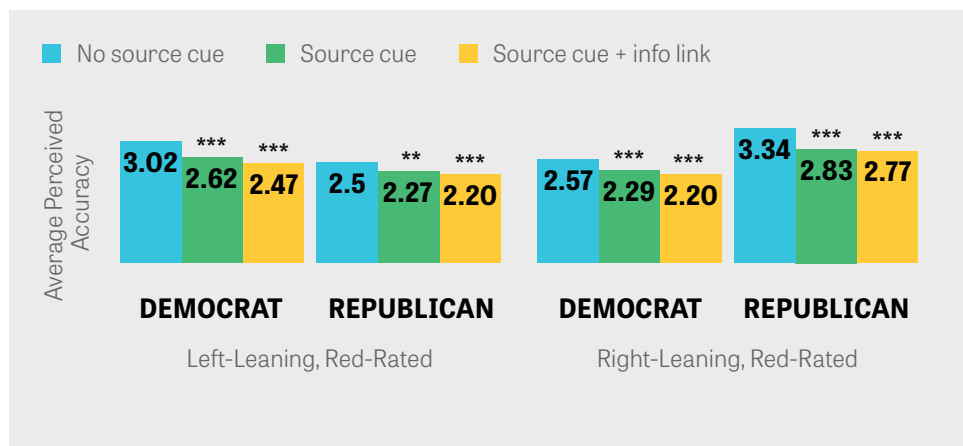
An individual's political affiliation significantly influences general views on the media. A 2017 Gallup/Knight report titled *American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy* shows that 54% of Democrats have a very or somewhat favorable overall opinion of the news media, compared with 25% of independents and 15% of Republicans.⁷ A 2018 Gallup/Knight study on accuracy and bias finds that Democrats estimate lower percentages of inaccurate news — especially in traditional news media but also on social media — than do Republicans and independents.⁸

Political affiliation also affects how individuals view specific news content. Democrats and Republicans are more susceptible to believing misinformation that aligns with their partisan identity.⁹ Previous research also suggests that efforts to correct partisan information that matches a user's political beliefs may produce a “backfire effect,”¹⁰ whereby established false beliefs do not diminish but actually get stronger.

Since political affiliation colors the way individuals perceive news content, pro-Republican/anti-Democratic or pro-Democratic/anti-Republican false headlines were selected for this survey experiment. We determined whether source ratings affect partisan views on different types of misinformation by observing the average rating for perceived accuracy of left-leaning and right-leaning false headlines by party identification.

Perceived Accuracy of News Headlines

By News Article Type and Political Party



Dependent variable: average rating of perceived accuracy, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

⁷ <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-trust-media-and-democracy>

⁸ kf.org/tmdreport3

⁹ doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00214.x

¹⁰ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2?LI%3Dtrue>

Both Democrats and Republicans rated concordant false stories (those that align with their party's typical positions) as more accurate than discordant false stories (those that align with the other party's typical positions) when no source cues were given. These results offer evidence of confirmation bias, which says that individuals are more receptive to information that fits their pre-existing beliefs. The difference in average perceived accuracy between concordant and discordant false stories was .45 points for Democrats and .84 points for Republicans.

Similar to the overall results, respondents, regardless of political party affiliation, who were given red source cues perceived false headlines as less accurate, and the perceived accuracy of the false headlines decreased most when partisans viewed politically concordant false headlines with a red source cue. Compared with those not given a source cue, the average perceived accuracy of left-leaning false headlines decreases .26 percentage points for Republicans and .47 for Democrats, while the perceived accuracy of right-leaning false stories declines .54 for Republicans and .32 for Democrats when the treatment conditions — source cue (treatment 1) and source cue plus additional information (treatment 2) — are combined.¹¹

These results bring us to several conclusions about partisans' responses to the use of red source cues with false headlines:

1. **A partisan backfire effect does not arise with the presence of a red source cue attached to misinformation.** This finding runs counter to expectations of a partisan backfire effect, in which an individual's false belief in misinformation aligning with their partisan identity is strengthened following a factual correction.

Two possibilities may explain the absence of a partisan backfire effect in this study. First, our source ratings do not present a direct factual contradiction of specific beliefs, which may lead partisans to feel less threatened and be more open to the general reliability cue.¹² Second, the news stories included in this experiment may not have tapped into these respondents' deepest partisan convictions.

2. **Red source cues may help to short-circuit motivated reasoning** — thought processes that cause people's perceptions about information to fit their beliefs or end goals — by encouraging partisans to think critically.

3. **Red source cues may create cognitive dissonance** — a situation in which inconsistencies (like believing what the headline says but being told the reporting organization is untrustworthy) cause discomfort for the individual and a desire to reconcile opposing information. Although left- and right-leaning false headlines often resonated with a partisan's general beliefs, the presence of the red source cue told them something about the headline and story content was not reliable.

In treatment 2, when participants received the source cue and a link to more information, we recorded whether participants clicked on the information link for each news headline. In general, not many respondents clicked on the links, but Republicans clicked more on right-leaning false headlines (13.1%) than left-leaning ones (10.4%), while Democrats clicked more on left-leaning headlines (19.8%) than right-leaning ones (15.5%).

The amount of time spent on each headline provides another interesting indicator for cognitive effort. On average, participants spent 32.1 seconds rating one article. In line with expectations, Republicans given red source cues spent approximately 1.5 seconds longer on right-leaning false headlines than left-leaning ones. However, Democrats given red source cues spent an equal amount of time reading articles regardless of whether the false headline was left- or right-leaning.

These behavioral indicators — clicking the info button and time spent on each headline — offer some evidence that red source cues encourage critical thinking that may help combat confirmation bias of misinformation that results from partisan-motivated reasoning.

¹¹ The smaller effect for politically discordant false headlines with a red source cue may be due to a "floor effect," where strong partisans had relatively less room to rate discordant articles lower.

¹² doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-1461.2007.00097.x

DETAILED FINDINGS

THE EFFECT OF SOURCE RATINGS ON SELF-REPORTED BEHAVIORS

With almost 62% of U.S. adults getting news on social media,¹³ many Americans are directly exposed to potential misinformation online. On average, U.S. adults saw and remembered 1.14 fake stories¹⁴ in the months before the 2016 presidential election, and approximately one in four visited a fake news website from Oct. 7-Nov. 14, 2016.¹⁵

A core objective of a source rating system is to reduce the amount of reading, liking and sharing of misinformation. After rating the perceived accuracy of the news headlines, the participants answered whether they would read, like or share the news stories. For each self-reported behavior, the presence of green and red source cues significantly increased the probability that respondents said they would read, like or share news stories from reliable over unreliable sources. Respondents with no source cue said they would read approximately half of the articles, with no difference in reading intentions for real and false stories. A green source cue increased the probability that respondents would read the real news articles by 5.7 percentage points when a source cue (treatment 1) was provided and 5.3 percentage points when a source cue and additional information link (treatment 2) were provided.

¹³ <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>

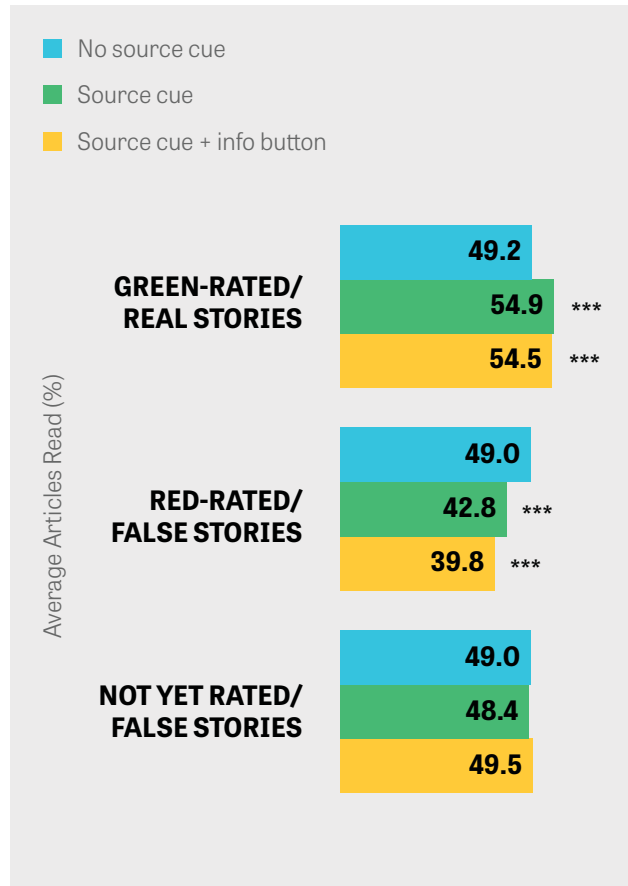
¹⁴ doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

¹⁵ <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf>

A red source cue lowered the probability that respondents would read false stories by 6.2 and 9.2 percentage points in treatments 1 and 2, respectively.

Self-Reported Reading Behavior

By News Article Type



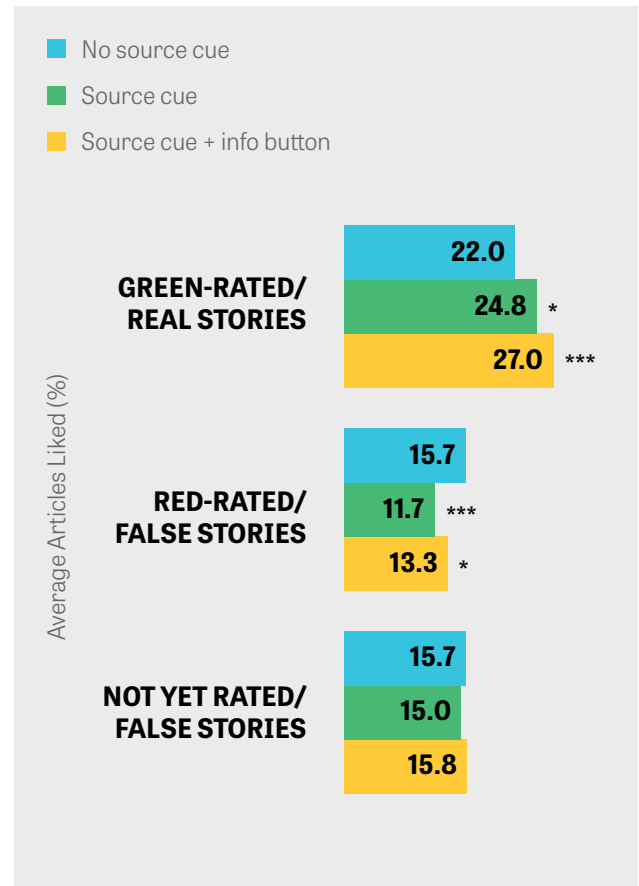
Dependent variable: average self-reported behavior, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

A green source cue increased the probability that respondents would “like” an article by 2.8 percentage points in treatment 1 and 5.0 in treatment 2, while a red source cue declined the probability 4.0 percentage points in treatment 1 and 2.4 in treatment 2.

Self-Reported “Liking” Behavior

By News Article Type



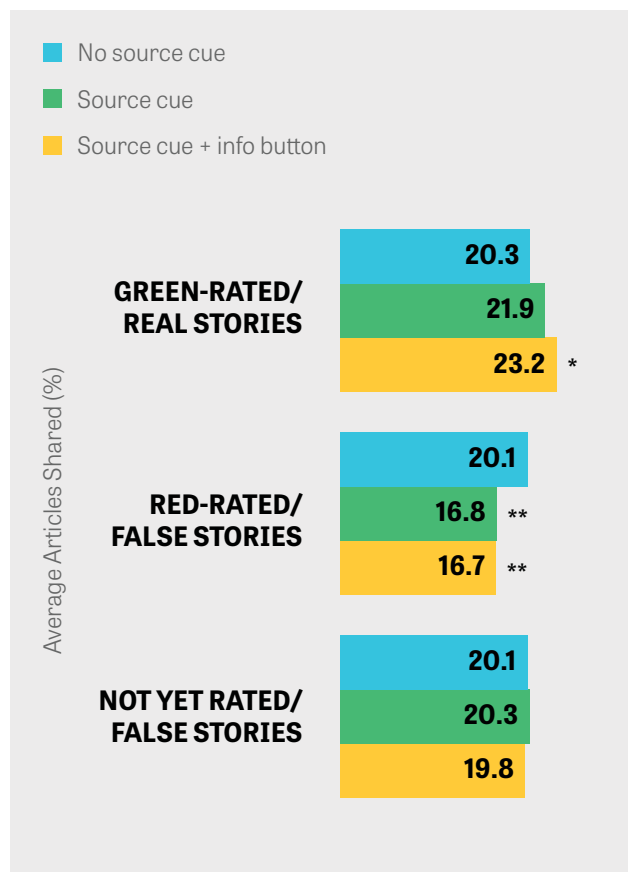
Dependent variable: average self-reported behavior, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

On whether respondents said they would share the article, a green source cue only had an effect (by an increase of 2.9 percentage points) in treatment 2 (source cue plus additional information). A red source cue decreased the probability of sharing false stories by 3.3 percentage points in treatment 1 and 3.4 in treatment 2.

Self-Reported Sharing Behavior

By News Article Type



Dependent variable: average self-reported behavior, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

"Not yet rated" source cues had no impact on reported reading, liking or sharing intentions, compared with the control group.

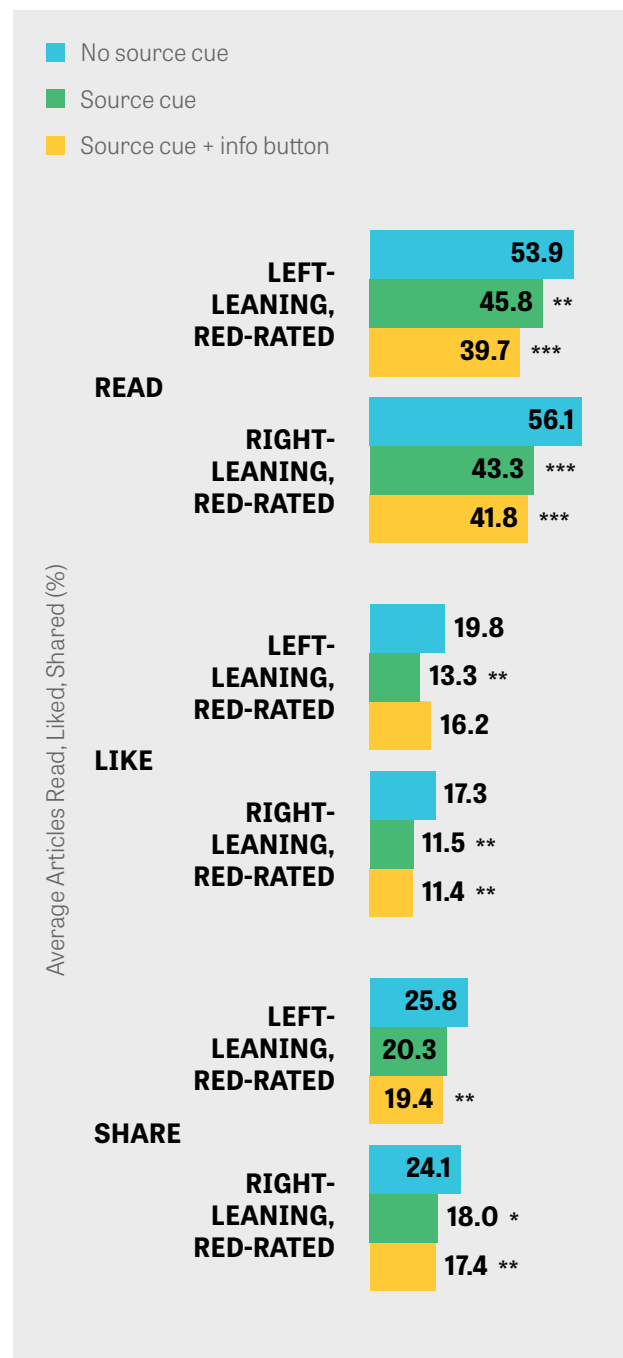
Regarding the way partisans said they would interact with false headlines, the effect of source cues differed significantly depending on whether the respondent was a Democrat or Republican.

Democrats were less likely to say they would read left-leaning and right-leaning false headlines when red source cues were present (with and without a link for additional information on the source). Democrats indicated they were less inclined

to share both left- and right-leaning news headlines with red source cues when the additional information link was provided. They were also less inclined to like left- and right-leaning false headlines, but the effect was not statistically significant when rating left-leaning articles with a red source cue and information link.

Self-Reported Behaviors Among Democrats

By News Article Type



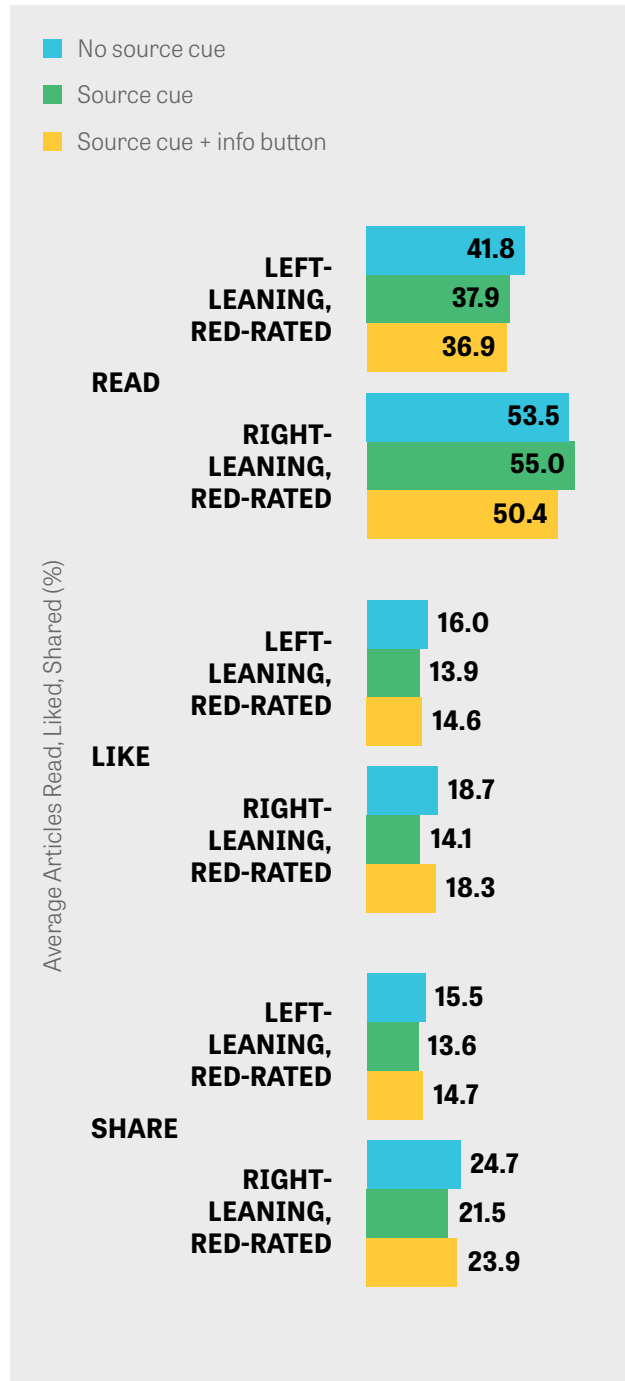
Dependent variable: average self-reported behavior, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

In contrast, Republicans reported an equal willingness to read, like and share articles, regardless of whether a red source cue was present or absent.

Self-Reported Behaviors Among Republicans

By News Article Type



Dependent variable: average self-reported behavior, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

As shown earlier in the report, Republicans view a story as less accurate when a red source cue is present, yet there is no significant difference in their self-reported reading, liking and sharing behaviors when the red source cue is present versus when it is not.

DETAILED FINDINGS

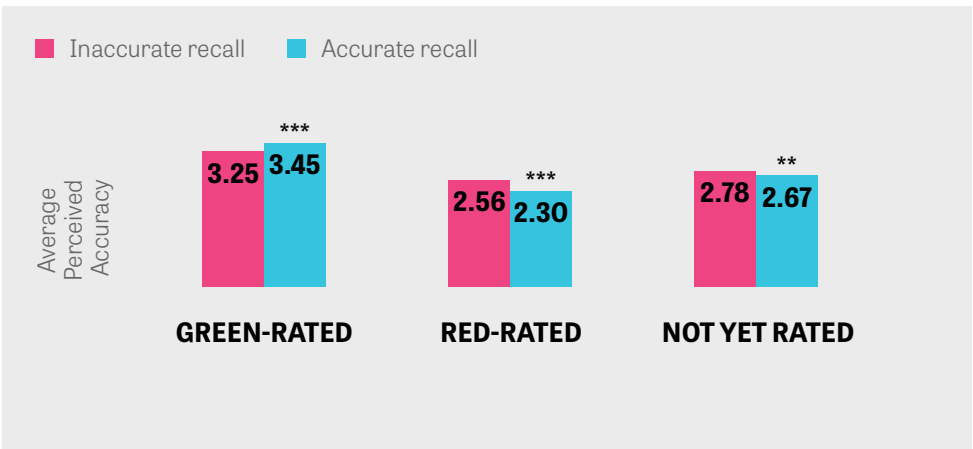
CORRECT RECALL OF JOURNALISTS AS RATERS

Following the headline experiment, participants who received red or green source cues were asked to recall who or what created the news source rating tool — information they were given before rating the headlines. About half, 48%, of participants correctly recalled that experienced journalists created the source ratings. Meanwhile, 7% incorrectly attributed the ratings to a survey of user ratings, and 5% attributed them to a machine learning algorithm. The remaining 40% said they did not recall.

Awareness that journalists created the source ratings substantially increased the average perceived accuracy .20 points for green-rated headlines and decreased the perceived accuracy .26 and .11 points for headlines with a red source cue or not yet rated label, respectively.

Perceived Accuracy of News Headlines

By News Article Type and Accurate Recall of Journalists as Raters



Dependent variable: average rating of perceived accuracy, by news article type

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

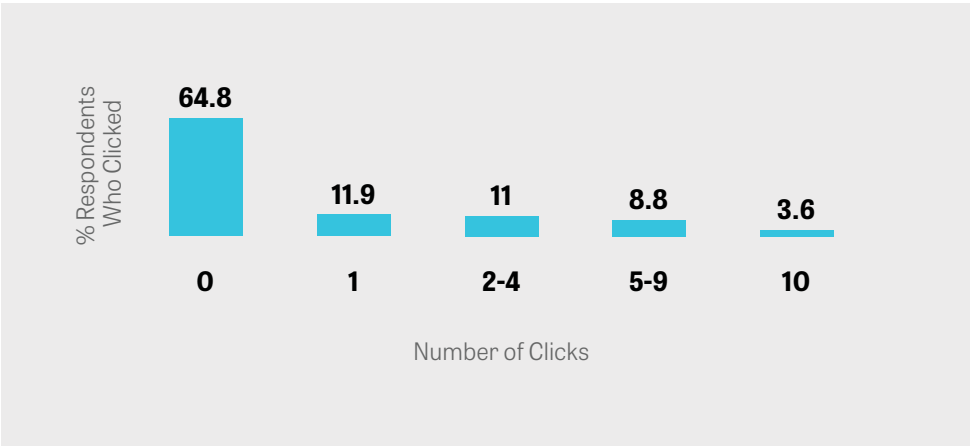
The source rating tool appears more effective in delegitimizing false stories when users remember that journalists created the ratings. The results point to the need to clearly attribute the source ratings to experienced journalists.

DETAILED FINDINGS

CLICKING ON THE MORE INFORMATION LINK

Thirty-five percent of all respondents in treatment 2 exercised the option to click on the information link for additional details about the news source's history, practices and financing. Of those, 34% clicked one time, 31% two to four times, 25% five to nine times and 10% every time.

Frequency of Clicks on the More Information Link



On average, users clicked on red-rated sources (15%) more often than green-rated sources (13.4%), which suggests a slightly greater curiosity about locating more information for news sources determined to be unreliable.

DETAILED FINDINGS

WHO SHARED FALSE STORIES, AND WHY?

A recent study on the spreading of true and false news stories on Twitter suggests that humans are more responsible than bots or trolls in turning fake news viral.¹⁶ Moreover, an endorsement of misinformation from a close contact may increase the likelihood that the recipient accepts the false content as true. Understanding who shares misinformation and for what reasons may offer insight into ways to reduce the human-to-human spread of false news.

Slightly less than half of the participants (44%) in the control group said they would share at least one of the false stories. This proportion is significantly higher than in previous survey results,¹⁷ which showed that 23% of U.S. adults said that they have shared a made-up news story (either knowingly or not). Our results may suggest that the behavior of sharing misinformation is more widespread than previously reported.

Key factors contributing to the spread of misinformation include the inability to distinguish real news from fake, the information-rich online environment and limited user attention.¹⁸ Given these challenges, a cognitive cue in the form of a source rating may have a positive effect in reducing the sharing of misinformation. The proportion of respondents who indicated they would share misinformation dropped by 10 percentage points when comparing the control group with those who received a red source cue — but a substantial minority (34%) still said they would share at least one false story with a red source cue.¹⁹

To understand the motivation behind sharing misinformation marked with a red source cue, participants were randomly shown one headline that they said they would share and were asked to select the reason they would share that headline. Nearly half the respondents (49%) wanted to spread the message of the story to a wider audience, 30% to ask the recipient's opinion about the story, 14% to call attention to the story being inaccurate, and 4% to annoy or upset the recipient.

¹⁶ doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559

¹⁷ http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/12/14154753/PJ_2016.12.15_fake-news_FINAL.pdf

¹⁸ doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0132

¹⁹ Two of the six false headlines randomly received a “not yet rated” label in treatments 1 and 2. As a result, part of the difference may be due to reducing the number of articles that could resonate with the participant. When sharing behavior of red-rated and “not yet rated” headlines are collapsed, the drop in participants who said they would share was only three percentage points, from 44% to 41%.

Reasons for Sharing Stories With Red Source Cue

You mentioned you would share the following articles. For each, could you select the reason that comes closest for why you would share the story?

	SHARED FOR THIS REASON
	%
You wanted to spread the message of the story to a wider audience	49
You wanted to ask the person's opinion about the story	30
You wanted to call attention to the story being inaccurate	14
You wanted to annoy or upset the recipient	4
Other	4

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

These results differ from a recent Gallup Panel™ survey that asked the same question to respondents who admitted to sharing news articles that were misinformation. In that study, the socially desirable choices — call attention to the story being inaccurate and ask the person's opinion about the story — were cited more often than other reasons.²⁰

A couple of explanations may account for this difference in results. First, the question format was slightly different. Survey respondents who said they shared stories they suspected to be false were asked whether these reasons were ever a motivation: “As best as you can recall, have you ever shared news articles that were misinformation, other than those that were comedy or satire, for each of the following reasons?” In this experiment, participants chose one reason they said they would share a specific article. Second, respondents in the survey were asked to explain a previous action, whereas the experiment asked them to explain an immediate behavior.

A SUBSTANTIAL MINORITY SAID THEY WOULD SHARE AT LEAST ONE FALSE STORY WITH A RED SOURCE CUE.

²⁰ kf.org/tmdreport2

DETAILED FINDINGS

CONFIDENCE IN THE SOURCE RATING TOOL

After rating every news headline, participants who got red and green source cues were asked how much confidence they had in the news source rating tool. Half of the participants (50%) expressed “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence in the source rating tool when they recalled that a panel of journalists created the red-green news source rating tool, and 38% expressed the same level of confidence when they did not recall that journalists created the tool. In contrast, 63% of Americans said they would trust news organization trustworthiness ratings from a panel of journalists “a great deal” or “a fair amount,” according to a 2018 Gallup/Knight Foundation study on misinformation.²¹

THE SOURCE RATING TOOL APPEARS MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN USERS REMEMBER THAT JOURNALISTS CREATED THE RATINGS.

In this study, the majority of Democrats (59%) expressed “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence in the source rating tool when they recalled that a panel of journalists created the tool, while a minority of Republicans (44%) and independents (44%) had the same level of confidence when they recalled. In the previously mentioned Gallup/Knight Foundation misinformation study, most Democrats (89%) expressed “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of trust in news organization trustworthiness ratings from journalists, but independents (65%) were more than twice as likely as Republicans (31%) to share that perspective.

Whether the information link conferred greater legitimacy to the source rating tool was an important hypothesis to test in this experiment. The difference in the degree of confidence among respondents who saw the source cue was not statistically different from those who saw a source cue and information link.²² This suggests that the decrease in the average perceived accuracy of red-rated articles discussed above was not the result of respondents having greater confidence in the source rating tool.

²¹ kf.org/tmdreport2

²² We use a chi-2 test to determine how likely the difference between the categorical responses arose by chance.

DETAILED FINDINGS

EFFECT OF SOURCE RATING TOOL ON PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND NEWS AGGREGATORS

Several social media platforms and news aggregators have received increased scrutiny since the 2016 elections, in part due to their role as facilitators in the spread of misinformation. After rating the news headlines, participants assigned to the treatment groups were asked whether their trust in social media platforms and news aggregators would change if these services used the source rating tool. The majority (61%) said their trust would stay the same. Of the remaining respondents, twice as many said trust would increase (26%) as decrease (13%).

Trust of Social Media Providers and News Aggregators Due to Use of Red-Green Source Rating Tool

Suppose a social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or news aggregator (e.g., Google News, Apple News, etc.) that shows news stories from different sources used this red-green source rating tool. How would that affect your trust in that social media platform or news aggregator?

U.S. ADULTS	
	%
Would trust the social media platform or news aggregator more	26
Would not affect trust	61
Would trust the social media platform or news aggregator less	13

General trust in experts and degree of online news consumption were the strongest predictors of whether people indicated that a source rating tool would increase their trust in social media platforms and news aggregators. Correct recall of journalists as raters was also positively correlated.²³

23 The ordinal logistic regression model results are in the appendix.

CONCLUSION

Access to more diverse perspectives on important issues can enrich the national conversation; however, the spread of misinformation can distort objectivity, exacerbate political polarization and undermine trust in core political institutions.

Several studies investigate the effect of targeted correctives on misperceptions, such as “third-party dispute” flags²⁴ for specific news articles or fact checks of statements made by politicians. Less attention is paid to the effect that source ratings have on the perceived accuracy of real and false news stories, even though versions of this scalable solution — such as Facebook’s crowdsourced ratings approach — are now emerging.

This survey experiment evaluated the effect of a specific source rating tool — cues about news organization trustworthiness based on evaluations from experienced journalists. The findings suggest that using this approach may help combat online misinformation and restore confidence in obtaining quality news from social media platforms and news aggregators without introducing unintended consequences, like an implied truth effect or backfire effect. Nevertheless, there are some reasons to proceed with caution given certain limitations of this survey experiment.

First, all false stories were assigned a red source cue to increase experimental control. In practice, the majority of news stories published or disseminated by certain untrustworthy news sources may be legitimate content. Whether respondents would perceive the accuracy of news headlines with a red source cue as low when this designation includes legitimate news stories is unclear.

Second, this experiment tested a specific source rating tool design with a dichotomous coding scheme, though it also included a “not yet rated” option. Additional research is required to understand how users would respond to additional categories, such as a yellow (caution) rating, and whether this type of rating would alter the effect of green and red source cues.²⁵ Similarly, source ratings attributed to a machine learning algorithm or a survey of user ratings may yield different results.

Third, the extent to which these results will hold in the real world cannot be fully known because any tool that rates information risks politicization. Once a source rating tool is perceived as biased, the likelihood that the tool remains effective across the political spectrum is low.

²⁴ doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2987866

²⁵ Real-world news source rating tools have adopted these different designs. For instance, [NewsGuard](#) uses the dichotomous approach, whereas [Le Décodeur](#) assigns news stories a green, yellow or red label.

METHODOLOGY

Results are based on web-based surveys conducted April 4-11, 2018, with a random sample of 2,010 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, who are members of Survey Sampling International's (SSI) Consumer Online Panel.²⁶ SSI recruits panelists from online communities, social networks and the web. The panel is designed to match the demographic characteristics of the U.S. population.

For this study, SSI implemented quotas on important demographics including gender, age, race and education so that the final sample would approximate the total U.S. adult population. In each sample condition, roughly one-third of respondents identified with the Republican Party, one-third of respondents identified with the Democratic Party and one-third were independents. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions: control group (no source cue), source cue given or source cue plus link to more information about the source. Gallup did not weight the final sample because the analysis was concentrated on differences between the experimental groups, and random assignment was utilized.

Respondents were removed from the final data set if their time stamps indicated they rushed through the survey (they took one-third less time than the median time to complete the survey) or answered the questions associated with the headlines too quickly (spent 10 seconds or less on every headline). Evidence of straight-lining and admission of answering randomly at some point during the survey also constituted grounds for exclusion.

The full questionnaire and raw data may be obtained upon request. For questions about how the survey was conducted, please contact galluphelp@gallup.com.

²⁶ <https://www.surveysampling.com/audiences/consumer-online/>

ABOUT THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

The Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy.

For more information, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than 80 years it has worked with courageous people on the front lines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. www.fordfoundation.org

ABOUT THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people — especially those with the fewest resources — have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

ABOUT THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

The **Open Society Foundations** work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people. In the United States, the Open Society Foundations aim to nurture the development of a society that allows all people to participate equitably in political, economic and cultural life; encourages diverse opinions and critical debate; protects human rights; and promotes broadly shared prosperity and security.

ABOUT GALLUP

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

For more information, visit www.gallup.com or education.gallup.com.

APPENDIX

REGRESSION RESULTS

Model 1. Effect of Source Rating Tool on Trust in Social Media Platforms and News Aggregators

VARIABLE	CODING	ODDS RATIO	STD. ERROR
Party			
Republican	0=not Republican, 1=Republican	.83	.12
Democrat	0=not Democrat, 1=Democrat	1.00	.14
Ideology			
Very conservative	0=not very conservative, 1=very conservative	.56**	.12
Conservative	0=not conservative, 1=conservative	.75*	.12
Liberal	0=not liberal, 1=liberal	1.04	.17
Very liberal	0=not very liberal, 1=very liberal	1.14	.24
Other Demographics			
Treatment 2	0=treatment 1, 1=treatment 2	1.09	.12
Gender	0=female, 1=male	.95	.11
Race	0=nonwhite, 1=white	1.41**	.19
Age	18-94 years old	.99***	.00
Education	0=some college or less, 1=college degree or higher	1.02	.12
Live in urban area	0=no, 1=yes	1.07	.14
Recall journalists as raters	0=no, 1=yes	1.36***	.15
Trust in experts	0=no, 1=yes	1.57***	.12
Online news consumers	Index on 0-1 scale for extent of online news activity	2.55***	.59

Dependent variable: likelihood of ordinal category for trust in social media providers with rating tool

*Significant at $p < .1$, **Significant at $p < .05$, ***Significant at $p < .01$

Pseudo $R^2 = .06$

APPENDIX

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF SAMPLE SIZES

	CONTROL GROUP		TREATMENT 1		TREATMENT 2		TOTAL	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Gender								
Male	306	51%	283	47%	401	50%	990	49%
Female	297	49%	324	53%	399	50%	1,020	51%
Age								
18-24	54	9%	56	9%	76	10%	186	9%
25-34	95	16%	75	12%	133	17%	303	15%
35-44	75	12%	89	15%	125	16%	289	14%
45-54	109	18%	128	21%	135	17%	372	19%
55-64	119	20%	119	20%	154	19%	392	20%
65+	151	25%	140	23%	177	22%	468	23%
Education Level								
Some high school	48	8%	45	7%	60	8%	153	8%
High school graduate	190	32%	174	29%	229	29%	593	30%
Some college	164	27%	194	32%	244	31%	602	30%
Undergraduate degree	127	21%	125	21%	154	19%	406	20%
Graduate/ Advanced degree	74	12%	69	11%	113	14%	256	13%

The data presented in this table are unweighted.

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF SAMPLE SIZES *Cont'd.*

	CONTROL GROUP		TREATMENT 1		TREATMENT 2		TOTAL	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Race								
White	443	73%	481	79%	540	68%	1,464	73%
Latino	60	10%	60	10%	105	13%	225	11%
Black	57	9%	39	6%	78	10%	174	9%
Asian	36	6%	18	3%	56	7%	110	5%
Other	7	1%	9	1%	21	3%	37	2%
Rural/Urban								
Rural	170	28%	193	32%	174	22%	537	27%
Urban	433	72%	414	68%	626	78%	1,473	73%
Party								
Republican	198	33%	202	33%	268	34%	668	33%
Democrat	199	33%	200	33%	268	34%	667	33%
Independent	206	34%	205	34%	264	33%	675	34%
Ideology								
Very conservative	66	11%	58	10%	82	10%	206	10%
Conservative	132	22%	146	24%	168	21%	446	22%
Moderate	247	41%	251	41%	336	42%	834	41%
Liberal	102	17%	98	16%	131	16%	331	16%
Very liberal	56	9%	54	9%	83	10%	193	10%
Total	603	30%	607	30%	800	40%	2,010	100%

The data presented in this table are unweighted.

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

GREEN-RATED SOURCES



Broken windows (immigration) policing

One thing stands in the way of successfully restoring order to the immigration system – local and state sanctuary policies.

NATIONALREVIEW.COM



Outlook for growth of world economy gets even rosier

The OECD raises its global expansion forecast to 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019, partly crediting the U.S. tax cuts.

PRESSHERALD.COM



Do you want to cut carbon with that? McDonald's sets climate target

McDonald's is announcing today its first-ever target addressing climate change, seeking to cut greenhouse gas emissions of its restaurants and offices by 36% in the next 12 years.

AXIOS.COM



General Assembly weighs bill to require Marylanders to buy health insurance

The General Assembly will hold hearings this week on whether to require Marylanders to buy health insurance after federal officials repealed such an individual mandate at the federal level.

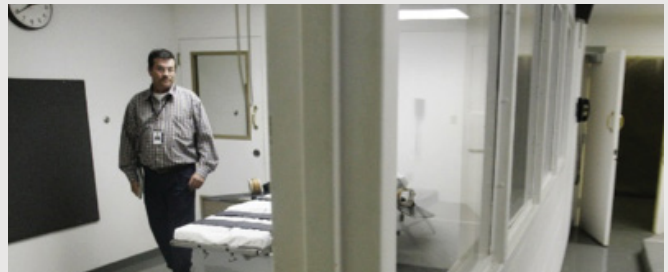
BALTIMORESUN.COM



Trump's and Kushner's companies are doing business together.

Government ethics experts are alarmed that it's adding yet another dimension to the Trump administration's conflict of interest problems.

VOX.COM



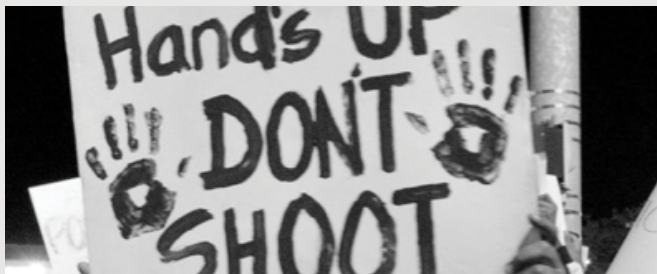
Why Oklahoma Plans to Execute People With Nitrogen

Oklahoma has always been the nation's laboratory for capital punishment, but it knows shockingly little about how this would work.

THEMARSHALLPROJECT.COM

RED-RATED SOURCES

PRO-DEMOCRAT/ANTI-REPUBLICAN HEADLINES



Boston police officer kills black man over marijuana cigarette

Malik Edwards, a 36-year old African American, was shot by police officers following a dispute regarding a marijuana cigarette.

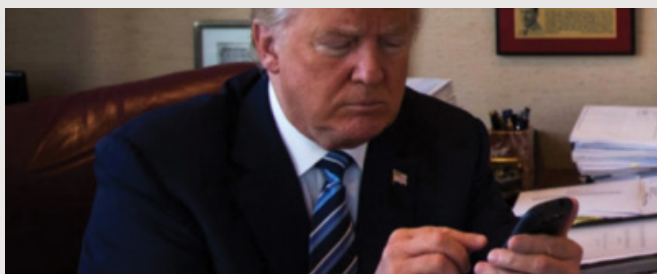
BOSTONTRIBUNE.COM



Pence softens stance on Porter abuse scandal

Pence has softened his comments about Porter saying his actions if true were "in accordance with Biblical principles."

TDALLIANCE.COM



Trump's unsecured Android device source of recent White House leaks

According to several private intelligence reports, the source of the multiple recent leaks within the White House is President Trump's unsecured Android device.

THESEATTLETRIBUNE.COM

PRO-REPUBLICAN/ANTI-DEMOCRAT HEADLINES



Black Lives Matter leader kept 'virtually all' donations

A new class action lawsuit claims Marquisha Johnson, a prominent Black Lives Matter leader, used donations to purchase \$1.2 million home for herself.

MEDIACONSERVATIVE.COM



DACA Recipients burn American flag in protest

This is what DACA recipients are doing as they protest, waving Mexican flags and burning old glory.

TRUTHFEED.COM



Muslim bakery refuses to make cake for war veteran

A Muslim bakery located in South Bend Indiana refuses to make an American flag sheet cake for a returning Afghanistan war veteran's welcome home party.

NATIONALREPORT.NET

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EACH EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION

Control

Next we will show you 12 news story headlines. Please read and rate the accuracy of each headline to the best of your ability. Please also indicate whether you would read, like, or share these news stories.

Treatment 1

Next we will show you 12 news story headlines. Please read and rate the accuracy of each headline to the best of your ability. Please also indicate whether you would read, like, or share these news stories.

You will notice a rating tool below the news source outlet. A team of experienced journalists with varied backgrounds rated over 7,500 news and information websites. For each source, two experienced journalists independently assessed the content and production process, with any disagreements resolved by the executive editors.

A news source is rated **GREEN** if its content is produced by people who are trying to communicate news, information, and opinion that they believe is accurate, and who adhere to practices aimed at assuring basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

A news source is rated **RED** if it fails to meet these minimum standards.

Some news sources are **NOT YET RATED**, which means experienced journalists have not yet gathered enough information to rate the news source responsibly. No positive or negative inference should be made from the fact that a news source has not yet been rated.

Treatment 2

Next we will show you 12 news story headlines. Please read and rate the accuracy of each headline to the best of your ability. Please also indicate whether you would read, like, or share these news stories.

You will notice a rating tool below the news source outlet. A team of experienced journalists with varied backgrounds rated over 7,500 news and information websites. For each source, two experienced journalists independently assessed the content and production process, with any disagreements resolved by the executive editors.

A news source is rated **GREEN** if its content is produced by people who are trying to communicate news, information, and opinion that they believe is accurate, and who adhere to practices aimed at assuring basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

A news source is rated **RED** if it fails to meet these minimum standards.

Some news sources are **NOT YET RATED**, which means experienced journalists have not yet gathered enough information to rate the news source responsibly. No positive or negative inference should be made from the fact that a news source has not yet been rated.

You may click on the **INFORMATION BUTTON** ⓘ next to the **GREEN** or **RED** rating to view information written by experienced journalists that describes the news source's history, practices, and financing.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

For each news headline, participants answered four questions:

1. As best as you can tell, how accurate do you find this news story? (Response options: Very accurate, Accurate, Somewhat accurate, Not very accurate, Not accurate at all)
2. Would you read this article? (Response options: Yes, No)
3. As you may know, many websites or apps allow users to click on an icon to indicate they "like" or give a "thumbs up" to a story they see. Would you "like" this article? (Response options: Yes, No)
4. As you may know, many websites or apps allow users to share articles with friends and family online. Would you "share" this article? (Response options: Yes, No)

Questions following the news headline exercise:

1. You mentioned you would share the following articles. For each, could you select the reason that comes closest for why you would share the story? (Response options: You wanted to annoy or upset the recipient, You wanted to call attention to the story being inaccurate, You wanted to spread the message of the story to a wider audience, You wanted to ask a person's opinion about the story, Other)

2. Do you recall who or what created the red-green news source rating tool? (Response options: A panel of expert journalists, A survey of user ratings, A machine learning algorithm, Do not recall)
3. How much confidence did you have in this red-green news source rating tool? (Response options: A great deal, A fair amount, Only a little, None at all)
4. Suppose a social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or news aggregator (e.g., Google News, Apple News, etc.) that shows news stories from different sources used this red-green source rating tool. How would that affect your trust in that social media platform or news aggregator? (Response options: Would trust the social media platform or news aggregator more, Would not affect trust, Would trust the social media platform or news aggregator less)

INFORMATION LINKS FOR EACH HEADLINE

NOTE: Any information pop-outs containing external links were not active hyperlinks.²⁷

National Review

An advocacy journalism website associated with the semi-monthly National Review magazine, founded in 1955 by conservative intellectual William F. Buckley, Jr., that produces serious, provocative reporting and commentary with an unabashed, consistent conservative point of view.

The National Review and NationalReview.com receive financial support from the non-profit National Review Institute, which received contributions of \$9.4 million in 2016, the latest year for which its IRS report is on file. The Institute's mission statement says its goal is to "Expand the understanding of conservative principles and philosophy in society and culture."

With the arrival of Donald Trump on the scene, the National Review demonstrated anew that its mission was conservative advocacy, not support for one political party regardless of the party nominee's principals or positions.

Its writers sharply criticized Trump, even as he became the Republican nominee and then the party's president.

Over the years, the National Review has featured reporting and commentary from primarily conservative thinkers and writers, including Allan Bloom, Robert Bork, L. Brent Bozell, Jr., Whitaker Chambers, Ann Coulter, Milton Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, Paul Gigot, Irving Kristol, Christopher Hitchens, Ezra Pound, Charles Murray, Thomas Sowell, Mona Charen and Gary Wills.

Vox

A general interest news and politics site featuring sophisticated reporting that seeks to use visual displays and layered content to explain issues, often from a progressive point of view.

Vox was founded in 2014 by Ezra Klein, a reporter for the Washington Post, who oversaw the paper's "Wonkblog," which created explainers on major policy issues. It is a part of Vox Media, a collection of specialized websites and blogs that cover a variety of subjects. All feature serious, professional reporting. Vox Media is run by founder Jim Bankoff, who had been an early senior executive at America Online. In addition to venture capital firms, NBC Universal and its parent, Comcast, are investors in Vox Media.

The Vox staff's "Explainers" are articles intended to provide background and both sides of the debate on current issues, though Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry in *The Week* magazine wrote that Vox published "partisan commentary in question-and-answer disguise" and criticized the site for having a "starting lineup [that] was mostly made up of ideological liberals." [i] Klein explained the positioning of Vox in 2017: "Overall our audience leans a bit left, but it doesn't lean overwhelmingly so." [ii]

[i] <http://theweek.com/articles/445880/vox-derp-intellectual-stagnation-left>

[ii] <http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/01/ezra-klein-hopes-vox-can-change-the-fact-that-people-who-are-more-into-the-news-read-the-news-more/>

²⁷ The green-rated sources and the red-rated National Report articles were abridged versions of those provided by NewsGuard, an online source rating tool. All other red-rated sources were drafted to mirror the NewsGuard style and used language found on Snopes.com.

Press Herald

The website of the daily Portland Press Herald and Maine Sunday Telegram, collectively known as the Portland Newspapers.

Founded in 1862, the news publisher serves Maine's largest municipality and commercial center, providing the community and the state with a steady diet of professionally reported news and information on subjects ranging from local and state politics to the city's minor league baseball team. The papers have won numerous awards over the years, including, most recently, for local business and education reporting.

Following a decade of ownership by the Washington State-based Seattle Times Company, beginning in 1998, PressHerald.com and the newspaper were purchased by a Maine-based newspaper company in 2008. In 2015, it was resold to another Maine-based company owned by Reade Brower, who owns 18 Maine weeklies and four of Maine's seven daily newspapers. Brower, who made his fortune in the printing and coupon business, described himself to the New York Times as "an independent moderate who leans a little to the left on social issues and a little to the right on fiscal matters." However, one of his editors told the New York Times that his boss's political views did not matter because he is "ridiculously hands off," and rarely even visits his newspapers. [i]

[i] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/26/business/media/reade-brower-maine-newspapers.html?_r=0

Baltimore Sun

The website of a highly regarded news organization with a rich history, founded in 1837 as a newspaper serving the metropolitan area in and around Baltimore, Maryland.

In 1986, the Baltimore Sun was purchased by the Times Mirror Company (owner of the Los Angeles Times, among other dailies). Times Mirror then became part of the Tribune Company (owner of the Chicago Tribune) in 2000. Fierce litigation and internal battles over corporate control and strategy forced a series of cutbacks in the Baltimore Sun's staff, including the end of its once-flourishing regional and foreign bureaus. However, the paper and its website still produce a steady diet of professionally written and reported political, cultural, sports, and entertainment coverage that is highly influential in Baltimore and statewide.

Among the celebrated journalists who have worked at the Baltimore Sun are H.L. Mencken, Richard Ben Cramer, Russell Baker, Gwinn Ifill, Murray Kempton, William Manchester, Drew Pearson, Jules Witcover, and David Simon, who created the hit HBO series, *The Wire*. [i] The Sun has won 15 Pulitzer Prizes, journalism's highest award—the most recent of which was for healthcare reporting in 2003. The current editor in chief is Triffon Alatzas, a veteran Sun reporter and editor who is also the paper's publisher.

[i] <https://www.hbo.com/the-wire>

Axios

A new digital media company that delivers concise, easily digestible coverage of politics, technology, business, health care, energy and media.

Axios, which launched in 2017, was founded by Politico co-founder Jim VandeHei, Politico former Chief White House correspondent Mike Allen and former Politico Chief Revenue Officer Roy Schwartz with the mission: "Deliver the cleanest, smartest, most efficient and trust-worthy experience for readers and advertisers alike."

While Axios has been lauded for its memo-style stories and relatively nonpartisan coverage, critics have pointed out that its untraditional model of bite-sized scoops leaves little room for context — particularly in political coverage — and delivers talking points that are not situated in cohesive narratives. [1] Axios means "worthy" in Greek, and, for better or worse, it strives to deliver only the news that fits that label.

The Marshall Project

A nonprofit online-only news organization whose stated mission is to "create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system" through investigative reporting and commentary that is generally critical of the status quo.

The single-subject newspaper explains its purpose by saying: "We are not here to promote any particular agenda or ideology. But we have a sense of mission. We want to move the discussion of our institutions of justice—law enforcement, courts, prisons, probation—to a more central place in our national dialogue." Regarding its political leanings, *The Marshall Project* is nonpartisan but not "neutral" by approaching criminal justice "with the view—shared by a growing number of conservatives and liberals—that our system needs serious rethinking."

In November 2014, *The Marshall Project* launched with Bill Keller, former editor-in-chief of *The New York Times*, at the helm. Founder Neil Barsky, a former hedge fund manager, began the venture with his own money. A number of left-leaning foundations and individuals have since donated, including The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Open Society Foundations, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, and the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation.

In the past four years, *The Marshall Project* has won accolades often reserved for more well-established media players, including a Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting (shared with ProPublica) for an exposé of an improperly handled rape report and a National Magazine Award for general excellence.

Mediaconservative

A site that seems like a traditional newspaper site, but is not actually associated with any newspaper or other newsgathering organization. It republishes content found on other conservative websites known for spreading fabricated stories.

The site is known to spread fabricated stories from other websites like ConservativeStand.com, which publishes sensationalist right-wing content with a disclaimer making no “warranties about the completeness, reliability and accuracy of this information.” MediaConservative.com also posts content from ReaganWasRight.com, which is run by Christopher Blair, a well-known creator of websites that propagate misinformation, including Last Line of Defense, Freedom Junkshun and As American As Apple Pie.

Boston Tribune

A site that sounds like a major city newspaper’s digital counterpart, but is not. The objective of the site is to leverage the apparent local news angle to rack up shares and ad revenue.

The independent fact-checking organization Snopes found that the site is “actually a front for known hoax purveyor Associated Media Coverage, a far older fake news site that usually spreads fabrications about laws or statutes that solely affect a specific subset of the population.” While some of the stories on their website are real, many are not. Unlike many “satire” news sites, the Boston Tribune does not feature disclaimers informing readers that some of their articles are fabricated.

Truthfeed

A site with hidden financial backers that seems like a traditional newspaper site, but is not. Truthfeed went online in April 2016 and its content ranges from extremely conservative to fabricated stories.

The website appears to have only two writers, Eren and Amy Moreno. Amy Moreno believes that the media is not telling the whole truth about radical Islam, open borders and amnesty. She frequently expresses support for Ricky Vaughn, who “would like to introduce the ideas of racial consciousness into the mix so that patriotic American conservatives don’t feel bad about creating all-White communities and shunning mixed marriages.” The website also includes an IP address with the personal website of Katrina Pierson, a Texas Tea Party activist who became a national spokeswoman for President Trump’s campaign in November 2015. [i]

[i] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-29/truthfeed-spreads-pro-trump-propaganda>

TD Alliance

A site that directly forwards viewers to the satirical Facebook page “Fox News the FB page.”

The motto for the Fox News the FB Page is “Really Really Fair and Balanced.” In the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, there is only one question. “Is this page real?” The answer: “Well, YEAH! You are looking at it right now aren’t you? You stupid ****.” Unsurprisingly, the content on the page consists of equally provocative, fabricated stories covering current events.

National Report

A site that seems like a traditional newspaper site, but is not actually associated with any newspaper or other newsgathering organization. It has published a number of fictional stories attacking leading Democratic politicians. Its founder, Justin Coler, has been quoted as saying he launched the site and others like it to show how easy it is to create widely shared fake news.

National Public Radio interviewed the person who registered the website, Justin Coler, who lives near Los Angeles. He explained he operates some two dozen other fake news web sites under parent company Disinfomedia. "The whole idea from the start was to build a site that could kind of infiltrate the echo chambers of the alt-right, publish blatantly or fictional stories and then be able to publicly denounce those stories and point out the fact that they were fiction," he said. Mr. Coler, a registered Democrat, said he earned between \$10,000 and \$30,000 a month from advertisements on his websites. [i]

[i] <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/11/23/503146770/npr-finds-the-head-of-a-covert-fake-news-operation-in-the-suburbs>

Seattle Tribune

A site that mainly consists of information about the benefits of sleeping, pictures of animals snoozing, and an advertisement for memory foam. It is a newer platform for the fake news purveyor Associated Media Coverage.

The Seattle Tribune site admits its true nature as a distributor of fabricated information in a disclaimer: "Please regard our articles and news as within the realm of satire—while some names in the Seattle Tribune are real, most of the news written aren't and are meant to be taken with a grain of salt. We are here to entertain and we are also committed to make our readers think, analyze, and discuss the issues found within these pages among themselves. If we seem to mirror the truth of an event or a person, that is just the result of a coincidence. If we dispense advice, please consider it as entertainment; nothing more."

APPENDIX

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