

Fake Facebook account reveals how we fall for fake news

June 15 2018, by Lindsay Brooke



Credit: University of Nottingham

A fictitious Facebook account set up by a team of researchers at the University of Nottingham to mirror the sort of news feed users might encounter on their own Facebook pages has highlighted the difficulties in combating the spread of fake news, because of the way we assess news when it is presented via social media.

The study '[Falling for fake news: investigating the consumption of news via social media](#)' was led by Dr. Martin Flintham from the School of Computer Science in collaboration with Dr. Kristian Karmer from the School of Sociology and Social Policy.

They set up a Facebook account in the name of Leo Porter which was populated with a variety of [news](#) posts interspersed with other posts relating to Leo's day to day activities, travel and life plans.

Dr. Flintham said: "We chose a mixture of real and [fake news](#), from the obviously mundane and implausible real news to fake news. As our participants scrolled through Leo's posts they were asked to 'think aloud' by stating their initial thoughts and judgements on the news content. Our results showed an overall weak level of confidence in their ability to detect fake news."

An initial study involving 309 participants was completed in May 2017. Two-thirds of respondents revealed that they regularly consumed news via Facebook, and a third had at some point come across fake news that they initially believed to be true. The study showed perceived plausibility and scepticism around sources and journalistic style was down to snap personal judgements.

Dr. Flintham said: "Social media users are aware of encountering fake news, some of which was taken at face value. Thirty-seven per cent admitted to coming across a news story they initially thought was true only realise it was either exaggerated, inaccurate or blatantly false. They drew on a number of different strategies to decide on the validity of news. These included prior assumptions about the reputation of the source, their own judgement on plausibility, or the headline alone. Only sixty-one per cent took the time to click through to and read the whole article to decide on its validity."

To discover more about our everyday practices when engaging with news via [social media](#) the project team set up their own fake Facebook page. Nine participants were recruited locally via social media. While some participants relied on the perceived authority of the source to make a judgement on whether the story was true or not, others made their own personal assessment of the validity of the story before turning to the source. One participant believed the story based on the headline alone before realising it was a satirical news site.

The findings of this research were presented at CHI 2018 - the Association for Computing Machinery's (ACM) premier international conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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