'Super-sharers responsible for a disproportionate amount of COVID-19 disinformation on social media

October 1 2020

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A small number of social media users could be responsible for amplifying and boosting a disproportionate amount of COVID-19

disinformation, a report says.

Academics at Cardiff University's Crime and Security Research Institute investigated people's activities on social media in five countries—the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—via a survey conducted between 18 March and 30 April.

The team has identified a group they label as "super-sharers", who amount to 6% of social media users and were much more likely to have shared COVID-19 disinformation. These individuals possess a number of common traits: They have admitted to sharing any form of disinformation in the past month, either knowingly or unknowingly; they share political news on social media at least once a day and have checked social media every day across three or more platforms. They also use social media to stay up-to-date with the news.

People who didn't fall into the super-sharer category were statistically much less likely to have shared COVID-19 disinformation.

When examining the data from all respondents across the five countries, those who had seen COVID-19 disinformation were more likely to believe that it affects trust in scientists, experts and health policies "to a great extent."

Professor Kate Daunt, who led the analysis, said: "Our research provides insights into the factors that make a person more likely to share disinformation about COVID-19, as well as the central role social media plays in people's lives."

The research also shows a third (31%) of those from the UK who had shared COVID-19 disinformation and fake news in the past admitted to having "unknowingly" shared "news" on social media that seemed accurate at the time of posting but they later discovered was

"exaggerated." Italy had the lowest percentage at 20%.

By contrast, the largest percentage of sharers of coronavirus disinformation and fake news who had "knowingly" shared "exaggerated" content was in Spain (31%) compared to the smallest group (11%) in Italy.

UK citizens were most likely to "never" fact check news before sharing it with others (28%). Italian citizens were most likely to "always" fact check (47%).

The UK also had the lowest percentage of people who said they had seen fake news relating to COVID-19—at 51%. Spain had the highest at 87%, with Italy at 84%, France at 72% and Germany at 58%.

Professor Daunt added: "There are distinct differences in terms of how people in these five European countries identify and understand fake news. There was a significant relationship in all countries between people who had not seen COVID-19 disinformation and those who "never" fact check. It's therefore highly likely that while the UK had the lowest percentage of people who said they had seen fake news online, a much higher number may have been exposed to disinformation without realizing it."

The study involved 3,696 citizens from France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK (700+ people per country), who were surveyed about disinformation and fake news between 18 March—30 April 2020.

More information: Survey of Public Attitudes to Coronavirus Disinformation and Fake News in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK: crimeandsecurity.org/s/Survey- … many-Italy-Spain.pdf

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: 'Super-sharers responsible for a disproportionate amount of COVID-19 disinformation on social media (2020, October 1) retrieved 6 May 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2020-10-super-sharers-responsible-disproportionate-amount-covid-.html

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