

# Social media 'trust' or 'distrust' buttons could reduce spread of misinformation

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The addition of "trust" and "distrust" buttons on social media, alongside standard "like" buttons, could help to reduce the spread of misinformation, finds a new experimental study led by University

College London (UCL) researchers.

Incentivizing accuracy cut in half the reach of false posts, according to the findings published in *eLife*.

Co-lead author, Professor Tali Sharot (UCL Psychology & Language Sciences, Max Planck UCL Center for Computational Psychiatry and Aging Research, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said, "Over the past few years, the spread of [misinformation](#), or '[fake news](#),' has skyrocketed, contributing to the polarization of the political sphere and affecting people's beliefs on anything from vaccine safety to climate change to tolerance of diversity. Existing ways to combat this, such as flagging inaccurate posts, have had limited impact."

"Part of why misinformation spreads so readily is that users are rewarded with 'likes' and 'shares' for popular posts, but without much incentive to share only what's true."

"Here, we have designed a simple way to incentivize trustworthiness, which we found led to a large reduction in the amount of misinformation being shared."

In another recent paper, published in *Cognition*, Professor Sharot and colleagues found that people were more likely to share statements on social media that they had previously been exposed to, as people saw repeated information as more likely to be accurate, demonstrating the power of repetition of misinformation.

For the latest study, they sought to test out a potential solution, using a simulated social media platform used by 951 study participants across six experiments. The platforms involved users sharing news articles, half of which were inaccurate, and other users could react not only with "like" or "dislike" reactions, and repost stories, but in some versions of

the experiment users could also react with "trust" or "distrust" reactions.

The researchers found that the incentive structure was popular, as people used the trust/distrust buttons more than like/dislike buttons, and it was also effective, as users started posting more true than [false information](#) in order to gain "trust" reactions. Further analysis using computational modeling revealed that after the introduction of trust/distrust reactions, participants were also paying more attention to how reliable a news story appeared to be when deciding whether to repost it.

Additionally, the researchers found that after using the platform, those who had been using the versions with trust/distrust buttons ended up with more accurate beliefs.

Co-lead author, Ph.D. student Laura Globig (UCL Psychology & Language Sciences, Max Planck UCL Center for Computational Psychiatry and Aging Research, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said, "Buttons indicating the trustworthiness of information could easily be incorporated into existing [social media](#) platforms, and our findings suggest they could be worthwhile to reduce the [spread of misinformation](#) without reducing user engagement."

"While it's difficult to predict how this would play out in the real world with a wider range of influences, given the grave risks of online misinformation, this could be a valuable addition to ongoing efforts to combat misinformation."

**More information:** Laura K Globig et al, Changing the incentive structure of social media platforms to halt the spread of misinformation, *eLife* (2023). [DOI: 10.7554/eLife.85767](https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.85767)

Valentina Vellani et al, The illusory truth effect leads to the spread of misinformation, *Cognition* (2023). [DOI:](#)

[10.1016/j.cognition.2023.105421](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2023.105421)

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