

Short corrective comments can help social media users to spot false information, study shows

February 13 2024



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Research shows reading corrections from others online can reduce the perceived accuracy of and engagement with incorrect content. Experts

found the format and strength of corrective comments do not matter much. Social media users do not need to write long and detailed comments to flag false content.

While the study shows the general effectiveness of social correction, it also finds that miscorrections affect [social media users](#) as well: when user comments flag correct news as false, readers can perceive real news as less accurate. User comments may also cause further confusion on social media platforms.

The team carried out [research](#) with more than 6,600 people in the UK, Germany, and Italy (1,944 people in the UK, 2,467 in Italy and 2,210 in Germany). Respondents completed a task to assess false and true news posts on various topics such as health, [climate change](#), and technology. The study used material that was posted on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook.

Researchers did not find evidence that more sophisticated corrective cues, such as corrective comments with links to fact-checking websites, were consistently and in a statistically significant way more effective than weak corrective cues, such as just a few words that flag a post as inaccurate.

The study, [published](#) in the journal *Communications Psychology*, was carried out by Florian Stoeckel, Chiara Ricchi and Jason Reifler from the University of Exeter, Sabrina Stöckli from the University of Zurich, Besir Ceka from Davidson College and Ben Lyons from the University of Utah.

Professor Stoeckel said, "Social corrections reduced perceived accuracy of and engagement with false news posts. We found people don't need to write long corrective comments online when they want to flag a post as inaccurate. However, by consulting a fact-checking website before

flagging a post as inaccurate, people can ensure that their correction is not in fact a miscorrection."

"The simplicity of creating effective corrections can be a double-edged sword. Social media environments also include users that flag true news as false. While social corrections can be effective for false news, they may also undermine belief in true [news](#). The findings that users can easily be affected by miscorrections emphasize just how important digital media literacy is."

More information: Social corrections act as a double-edged sword by reducing the perceived accuracy of false and real news in the UK, Germany, and Italy', *Communications Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s44271-024-00057-w](#)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Short corrective comments can help social media users to spot false information, study shows (2024, February 13) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-short-comments-social-media-users.html>

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