

articles that gets attached to every new article as it is published, much like Amazon or eBay seller ratings.

The most useful ratings are those a person can use at the most relevant time—finding out about previous buyers' experiences with a seller when considering making an online purchase, for instance.

When it comes to facts, though, there's another wrinkle. E-commerce ratings are typically done by regular users, people with firsthand knowledge from using the item or service.

Fact-checking, on the other hand, has traditionally been done by experts like [PolitiFact](#) because few people have the firsthand knowledge to rate news. By comparing user-generated ratings and expert-generated ratings, we've found that [different rating mechanisms influence users in different ways](#).

We conducted two online experiments, with a total of 889 participants. Each person was shown a group of headlines, some labeled with accuracy ratings from experts, others labeled with ratings from other users and the remainder with no accuracy ratings at all.

We asked participants the extent to which they believed each headline and whether they would read the article, like it, comment or share it.



A sample headline with a rating from other users, as shown in our experiment. Credit: Kim et al., [CC BY-ND](#)

Expert ratings of news sources had stronger effects on belief than ratings from nonexpert users, and the effects were even stronger when the [rating](#) was low, suggesting the source was likely to be inaccurate. These low-rated inaccurate sources are the usual culprits in spreading disinformation, so our finding suggests that expert ratings are even more powerful when users need them most.

Respondents' belief in a [headline](#) influenced the extent to which they would engage with it: The more they believed an article was true the more likely they were to read, like, comment on or share the article.

Those findings tell us that helping users mistrust inaccurate material at the moment they encounter it can help curb the spread of disinformation.

Spillover effects

We also found that applying source ratings to some headlines [made our respondents more skeptical](#) of other headlines without ratings.

This finding surprised us because other methods of warning readers—such as attaching notices only to questionable headlines—have been found to cause users to be [less skeptical of unlabeled headlines](#). This difference is especially noteworthy since [Facebook's warning flag had little influence on the users and was eventually scrapped](#). Perhaps, source ratings can deliver what Facebook's flag couldn't.

What we learned indicates that expert ratings provided by companies like [NewsGuard](#) are likely more effective at reducing the spread of propaganda and disinformation than [having users rate the reliability and accuracy](#) of news sources themselves. That makes sense, considering that, as we put it on BuzzFeed, "[crowdsourcing 'news' was what got us into this mess in the first place](#)."

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Provided by The Conversation

APA citation: Rating news sources can help limit the spread of misinformation (2019, December 2) retrieved 4 March 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-12-news-sources-limit-misinformation.html>

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