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3-22-2019

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ABSTRACT

Social media networks (SMNs) have the potential to be weaponized for individual and societal harm. One recent instance of this is the findings of the United States Intelligence Community (USIC), which released a joint statement with the Department of Homeland Security implicating the Russian government in using popular SMN outlets to influence the 2016 Presidential election with "information Warfare" (Clark, 2018). This incident echoes patterns in history where the rapid expansion of the public's ability to share ideas, false or not, lead to the fall of empires (i.e., Martin Luther using the printing press to start the Protestant Reformation against the Catholic Church) and even genocides (i.e., killing of the Rohingya minority group by government forces spurred by false social media posts) (Goolsby, 2013; Hempel, 2016; Roose & Mozur, 2018).

The urgency of this study stems from the risk of US citizens becoming disenchanted from democratic norms such as voting or deciding whether to support a candidate for public office with false information (Fuchs, Kenney, Perina, & VanDoorn, 2017). There is also a risk of violence being sparked by false information on SMNs like it has in the country of Myanmar (Miles, 2018). To effectively mitigate these potential conflicts, major SMN platforms like Twitter and Facebook should more thoroughly use tools that reduce the spread of misinformation.

One possible solution is to "swamp" SMN users with factual sources of information while being exposed to potential misinformation (Alemanno, 2018; Bode & Vraga, 2015). Studies have shown that providing more contextual information about a controversial topic can mitigate misinformation and have a positive influence on the perceptions of SMN users. We have also found studies that suggest the presence of social engagement in the form of "likes" and comments on SMNs can influence the preferences of SMN users when it comes to selecting news sources (Messing & Westwood, 2014). However, these prior studies do not examine the influence of input from other SMN users working in tandem with the related articles feature to correct misperceptions on the same platform. This study addresses this gap by examining SMN user behavior regarding misinformation in the presence of interactions from other SMN users and the related articles feature which shows accurate information related to a popularly misinformed topic.

Our research question is, *"Can the misperceptions of social media users on controversial topics be corrected by providing related articles to objective news sources and the influence of social pressure in the form of 'likes' and comments?"* To answer this, we integrate Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to test and understand the process of changing the perceptions and behaviors of SMN. Using an experimental survey, we will test the efficacy of related articles.

This paper is organized as followed. We discuss existing research related to mitigating misinformation on social media whiling integrating relevant theories with the use of techniques and hypothesis development. Then, we discuss the experimental survey methodology and conclude with the implications of our study.

Keywords

Social media, misinformation, mitigating, related articles, social engagements, cybersecurity