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Designing Effective Misinformation Warning Labels: A Word-of-Mouth Perspective

Jing Wang
University of New Hampshire, jing.wang@unh.edu

Khole Gwebu
University of New Hampshire, khole.gwebu@unh.edu

Lin Guo
Old Dominion University, lguo@odu.edu

Chuanyi Tang
Old Dominion University, ctang@odu.edu

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Designing Effective Misinformation Warning Labels: A Word-of-Mouth Perspective

TREO Talk Paper

Jing Wang

University of New Hampshire
jing.wang@unh.edu

Lin Guo

Old Dominion University
lin.guo@odu.edu

Kholekile Gwebu

University of New Hampshire
khole.gwebu@unh.edu

Chuanyi Tang

Old Dominion University
chuanyi.tang@odu.edu

Abstract

The prevalence of misinformation online has motivated social media firms to implement various interventions, including the removal of such news or, alternatively, fact-checking and warning social media users about the credibility of the misinformation. Both approaches have their merits and pitfalls. Despite completely preventing individuals from being exposed to and consequently being impacted by the misinformation, the former approach risks jeopardizing core First Amendment tenants in terms of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. While the latter approach has the advantage of preserving First Amendment principles, much remains unknown regarding the efficacy of warning labels (Lazer et al., 2018).

Currently, Information Systems (IS) research adopting the second approach focuses on the warning labels' efficacy in improving individuals' false news detection and in deterring their engagement with misinformation. While these studies have advanced knowledge, they have largely ignored the fact that people are socially embedded. They have the potential to exert powerful influences in the effort to curb the spread of misinformation by sharing the warning messages with their social ties (i.e., word of mouth (WOM)).

To this end, this research focuses on WOM and examines how misinformation warning labels can be effectively designed to increase the likelihood of people sharing the warning. Currently, the search for an effective misinformation warning label has yielded a wide range of designs. Content wise, current designs largely fall into two categories: a simple warning label debunking the misinformation (e.g., False Information) versus a more detailed warning combining the simple label with specific justifications for the warning. Persuasive communications and linguistics literature shows that other message attributes beyond the content can also influence persuasion outcome (Miller, Lane, Deatrck, Young, & Potts, 2007). Nevertheless, the misinformation warnings literature has not yet examined the persuasive outcome of the other attributes, such as the assertiveness of a warning, nor has it examined the possible interplay between such attributes and content. Currently, social media and fact-check platforms have used both assertive (e.g., False Information) and subdued (e.g., Missing Context) tones in their warnings. Thus, this research seeks to extend the literature by examining how the assertiveness of the warning intervenes in the influence of content on individuals' warning evaluation and WOM intention. The results reveal that effects of the detailed justifications in producing favorable persuasiveness perception or in motivating WOM are a function of the assertiveness of the warning.

References

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