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WHO SHARED IT?: HOW AMERICANS DECIDE WHAT NEWS TO TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media platforms such as Facebook are becoming increasingly popular sources of news for many people. Social media is a different news source than traditional print or broadcast media as people are exposed to stories from a wide variety of people and news outlets. News on social media is often integrated with other social and entertainment content, and there has been growing concern about the spread of fake news stories across social media platforms. All of this raises a key question: What leads people to trust news on social media? Prior research indicates two potential heuristics that could impact people's opinions of news on social media: (1) the trustworthiness of the person who shares a story; (2) the credibility of the news outlet reporting the story. This study builds upon past studies by testing these two potential factors simultaneously with a recent survey experiment conducted by the Media Insight Project, featuring a nationally representative sample of 1,489 adults. The findings highlight the significant impact the person sharing a story has on views toward an article they see on social media, compared with the effects of the news outlet reporting the story. The analysis also explores whether topic salience and typically using social media to get news moderate these effects. The study has significant implications for researchers, citizens, and publishers alike trying to understand how people evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of news on social media.

The ways people receive news and information are rapidly evolving. One significant shift has been the growing use of social media as a news source. Social media, which features a great deal of user-generated content, is a very different type of source than traditional broadcast or print outlets and it is unclear how people evaluate the vast amount of news and information they come across on social media. And while understanding what factors impact people's trust in news has long been important to scholars and the media, it is especially critical amid growing concerns about fake news stories spreading across the internet, especially via social media.

Social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter are increasingly popular sources of news for the American public. A March 2017 Media Insight Project study found that 75 percent of Americans say they receive news on social media and that social media is a prominent news source across ages, income levels, races, and ethnicities (Media Insight Project 2017).

Scrolling through a Facebook or Twitter feed differs in many ways from subscribing to a newspaper or turning on a television newscast. With social media, people often see news via posts and comments from friends, family, or acquaintances rather than directly from a news organization. As a result, people often are exposed to a wide variety of stories and news sources, and they may be exposed to a mix of familiar and unfamiliar news sources. In addition, there are often not clear divisions distinguishing different kinds of content on social platforms, such as news, political advocacy, entertainment, or even new forms of

advertising described as 'sponsored content.' This new information landscape raises an important research question: What factors impact people's trust and evaluation of news stories on social media?

This question is important for scholars, the media, and the broader American public. Trust in the media has been declining in recent years (Media Insight Project 2016) while social media provides the public easier access to more sources of information. Research shows that how individuals evaluate particular sources or stories impacts how the information in those stories influences their attitudes and behaviors (see Wilson & Sherrell 1993 and Pornpitakpan 2004 for reviews). As a result, understanding what factors lead people to trust news on social media can provide insights into how news on social media can shape public opinion, suggest strategies for reducing the spread of false information, and inform efforts to increase news literacy among the public.

In order to explore this question and build upon past research, this study features a nationally representative survey with an experimental design to test simultaneously how two key aspects of news on social media impact people's perceptions of the information: (1) the person sharing the story, and (2) the media outlet reporting it. At the same time, the research examines if other key factors moderate the effects of the sharer or news source on attitudes toward news on social media. The findings from this study have important implications for understanding how people assess news on social media and how such information can impact public knowledge and opinion.

Literature Review & Hypotheses

Public trust in the media has declined in recent years, and is relatively low when compared to other American institutions such as the military or police (Media Insight Project 2016; Newport 2017). For example, only 17 percent say they trust the media a lot (Media Insight Project 2017b). At the same time, majorities of Americans report reading, hearing, or seeing news multiple times a day across a wide array of news sources and devices/platforms (Media Insight Project 2017).

Trust in news is important because it impacts what people pay attention to in the media landscape and how they engage with news. People tend to rely on stories or sources they trust or view as credible (Chaffee and McLeod 1973; Hawkins et al. 2001; Knobloch 2003; Tsifti and Cappella 2003). Likewise, those who value factors related to trust in news are more likely to pay for news and more likely to engage with the news in ways such as sharing the information with others (Media Insight Project 2016).

Trust in news is a concept often linked to media credibility and encompasses a variety of different factors and elements. It often involves a combination of trust in a set of facts, a journalist, a news organization, or a news medium (Kohring & Matthes 2007; Golan 2010; Williams 2012; Coleman et al. 2012). When assessing trust or credibility in media, scholars have developed multidimensional scales that include factors such as accuracy, completeness, fairness, bias, and trustworthiness (Gaziano & McGrath 1986; Meyer 1988; West 1994; Flanagin & Metzger 2000; Metzger 2007; Media Insight Project 2016). These studies highlight the importance of using multiple concepts to assess people's trust in a particular story or source.

While trust in news is a multidimensional concept, many people rely on cues or heuristics when assessing a news source or story. Scholars have identified that people use different approaches to process information in different contexts and situations. For example, at times people are highly engaged with information and carefully process the information, while at other times they are less attentive and use shortcuts. These dual processing strategies have been outlined by many scholars through the Heuristic-Systematic Model, Elaboration Likelihood Model, and others (Chaiken 1980; Petty & Cacioppo 1986; see Evans 2008 for a review).

When evaluating information online, many people use heuristics and their associated cues (Fogg 2003; Sillence et al. 2007; Sundar 2008; Hilligoss & Rieh 2008; Metzger et al. 2010; Metzger and Flanagin 2013; Go et al. 2014; Metzger and Flanagin 2015). Previous studies suggest that two cues people are likely to use when evaluating news on social media are: (1) who shares the information and (2) the original reporting source of the story. These two potential cues people use to evaluate news on social media are the basis for this study's three main hypotheses, which are tested simultaneously with an experimental design that controls for other possible factors that could impact attitudes toward an article such as the topic or content

First, research has long shown that "opinion leaders" often shape people's attitudes (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Katz 1957; Weimann 1994; see Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009). People often seek out information from those they trust or expect to have similar beliefs as they (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine 1995), and they tend to have more trust in information online when it is shared by an opinion leader or friend (Metzger et al. 2010; Messing & Westwood 2014; Turcotte et al. 2015).

Second, a large body of literature highlights the impact of a source's trustworthiness/credibility on persuasion and information evaluation (see Wilson & Sherrell 1993 and Pornpitakpan 2004 for reviews). Prior studies use several different approaches to demonstrate how people use the news source as a cue for

evaluating a news story online (Greer 2003; Sundar et al. 2007; Go et al. 2014). For example, Metzger et al. 2010 report that “one of the most prevalent heuristics used for evaluating credibility that was mentioned by focus group participants was relying on site or source reputation.” Likewise, an experiment presenting a story as coming from either *The New Yorker* or BuzzFeed illustrates that the source impacts people’s impressions of an article (Funt et al. 2016). Research also shows the news source is a potential cue on social media (Lee & Sundar 2013). Moreover, a 2016 survey shows that people are more likely to say explicitly that the news source has a significant impact on their views toward news on social media than either the person sharing the story or the number of people sharing or liking the story (Media Insight Project 2016).

Although there is little research exploring the combined effects of the source and sharer on trust, previous findings showing the impacts of each factor independently raise the possibility of interaction effects. More specifically, the effects of the sharer should be greatest when paired with a reputable source, and likewise the effects of the source should be strongest when combined with a trusted sharer. Taken together, these prior findings are the basis for *Hypothesis 1 (H1)*, *Hypothesis 2 (H2)*, and *Hypothesis 3 (H3)*.

(H1): People are more likely to trust and engage with a story if it is shared by someone they trust than if it is shared by someone they don’t trust, regardless of the source.

(H2): People are more likely to trust and engage with a story if it comes from a reputable news source than if it comes from an unknown news source, regardless of the sharer.

(H3): The sharer and the source will interact to affect trust and engagement, and the combination of a trusted sharer and reputable news source will result in the most trust and engagement with the story.

Finally, research indicates that the impact of cues or heuristics can vary depending on the context within which the information is presented and processed. In particular, the effects of cues such as the sharer or source could vary depending on people’s interest in the topic and familiarity with social media. For example, the Prominence-Interpretation Theory of how people assess the credibility of websites identifies five factors that impact the likelihood people notice certain elements of a website: (1) topic; (2) user motivation; (3) task of user; (4) experience with web conventions; and (5) user literacy, cognition, and learning style (Fogg 2003). Topic salience can lead to greater interest and engagement with a story and mitigate the impact of cues (Fogg 2003; Ciuk & Yost 2016). Familiarity with any news medium or format, such as getting news on social media, could increase the likelihood people would use cues such as

the sharer or source (Tversky and Kahneman 1975; Johnson & Kaye 2014; Hocevar et al. 2015). These findings provide the basis for *Hypothesis 4 (H4)*:

(H4): The effects of both the sharer (H1) and the source (H2) on trust and engagement are moderated by topic salience and typically getting news on social media.

Data and Methods

The data for this study come from an online survey experiment conducted by the Media Insight Project, a collaboration between the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The survey, funded by the American Press Institute, was conducted from November 9 through December 6, 2016 and featured completed interviews with 1,489 adults, including oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics. Data were collected online using the AmeriSpeak® Panel, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The survey had a completion rate of 34.8 percent and a cumulative AAPOR response rate 3 of 10.8 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

During the survey, all respondents were presented with a news feed item closely resembling what they might see on Facebook (see Appendix A). All participants saw the same news content, but the person who shared the story and the original reporting source were both randomly varied. After reading the post and the story, participants answered a series of questions about the story and their trust in the information.

The simulated Facebook post featured a health news story about the risk of Type 2 diabetes. Each respondent saw the post from one of eight public figures who are likely to share information about health: Oprah, Jillian Michaels, Lester Holt, Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Dr. Oz, Gwyneth Paltrow, or Kayla Itsines. Earlier in the survey, respondents evaluated the trustworthiness of each of the eight figures on a four-point scale ranging from very untrustworthy to very trustworthy. Respondents also had the option to say they were not familiar with the person. Half of people were randomly assigned to see the post from a public figure they had identified as trustworthy and the other half were assigned to see the post from a person they had said was untrustworthy. The post from the public figure said "Check this out..." and respondents could see the headline of the health care article: "Don't let the scale fool you: Why you could still be at risk for diabetes." We chose an article topic not

associated with strong ideological and political positions because the content of a story can impact people’s trust in an article, especially when it reinforces or contradicts strongly held beliefs. This article was originally written by a University of Florida professor and was distributed on The Associated Press (AP) news service. The article appeared on many news websites including AP's own Big Story site, which was depicted in the simulated post. However, the byline was changed to a fictitious name to avoid the potential that recognition of the author could impact attitudes. Respondents were shown just the first five paragraphs, due to time and space considerations.

After clicking on the post, respondents all saw the same health article. However, half of the people were randomly assigned to see the article labeled as coming from the AP, one of the world’s largest and well-known news agencies, and the other half were assigned to see the article labeled as coming from the DailyNewsReview.com, a fictional news source. In both conditions, the name of the news agency was prominently displayed at the top of the article and visible in the simulated Facebook post.

The experimental design simultaneously tested two manipulations: (1) the sharer of the post (a trusted or untrusted person) and (2) the news source (the AP or a fictional source). Table 1 illustrates the demographic distribution of the sample used in the analysis and the two manipulations.^{12 3}

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for those respondents used in the analysis (percent of each group)

	Sharer		Source		Total
	Trust	Not trust	AP (Trusted)	Fictional	
Age					
18-24	18	20	18	19	18
30-44	28	29	24	31	29
45-59	29	24	27	26	27
60 plus	26	27	31	23	26
Gender					
Female	53	49	53	51	41

¹ ANCOVA analysis confirms that for most demographic characteristics there is little difference between the two manipulation groups for both the sharer variable and the source variable. However, African Americans were more likely to be in the trust group for the sharer variable, and older adults were more likely to be in the AP group for the source variable. These differences are controlled for in the multivariate analysis.

² The analysis excludes 23 respondents due to missing data, and 66 respondents who spent less than 10 seconds looking at the article because it is unlikely they read the story. The analysis was re-run with these 66 cases included, and it did not significantly change the findings or conclusions. The median time people spent reading the page was 63 seconds, and 75 percent of respondents spent at least 30 seconds reviewing the post and article.

³ The analysis also excludes 242 people who received the news from The Associated Press, but reported they were either not familiar with it or did not find it trustworthy. These people are excluded so the source manipulation compares an unknown source to a source that respondents trust.

	Sharer		Source		Total
	Trust	Not trust	AP (Trusted)	Fictional	
Male	47	51	47	49	49
Education					
No HS diploma	6	5	5	6	6
HS grad	30	28	26	31	29
Some college	32	30	31	31	31
BA or above	32	37	38	32	34
Income					
Less than \$35,000	37	30	34	34	34
\$35,000-\$74,999	31	34	33	32	32
\$75,000 or more	33	35	33	34	34
Race and ethnicity					
White	41	54	44	48	47
African American	32	16	26	25	25
Hispanic	24	25	26	23	24
Other race	3	5	4	4	4
Party identification					
Democrat	60	55	64	55	58
Republican	25	31	23	30	28
Other	14	14	13	15	14
N	673	485	446	712	1,158

The use of a combination of an experimental design and a large, nationally representative sample in this study is a significant contribution to the existing literature. The experimental manipulation enhances the internal validity (reliability) of the results as previous research shows people often fail to report their perceptions of news on social media accurately (Metzger 2007; Vraga et al. 2016). In addition, the use of a large, representative sample enhances the external validity (generalizability) of the results and provides further empirical support for concepts explored previously with more qualitative approaches.

Measures

Complete question wordings and descriptive statistics for the measures can be found online at http://mediainsight.org/PDFs/Trust%20Social%20Media%20Experiments%202017/Social_Media_Experiment_Topline_2017.pdf.

Key dependent variables

After reading the story from the social media post, respondents were asked about implicit measures of trust in the story as well as possible engagement with the article.

Trust – Respondents were asked how well five statements described the article in order to assess how much they trusted and valued the information. The statements were: “It got the facts right,” “It provided diverse points of view,” “It was entertaining,” “It was easy to find the important information,” and “The information seemed well reported and trustworthy.” Previous studies have found these concepts are often associated with trust and value in news (Meyer 1988; Flanagin & Metzger 2000; Media Insight Project 2016). For all five questions, the response options were: “Extremely well” (coded 5), “Very well” (coded 4), “Moderately well” (coded 3), “Not very well” (coded 2), and “Not well at all” (coded 1). The five variables were averaged together to create a trust scale that ranges from a minimum value of 1 to a maximum value of 5. The scale has a median of 3.2, a mean of 3.29, and a standard deviation of .83. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale is .89 and the eigenvalue is 3.1.

Engagement – After seeing the social media post and article, respondents were asked if they would engage with the article, source, or sharer in several ways. They were asked to say whether or not they would “Share this article with friends, family, or coworkers,” “Sign up for news alerts from [The Associated Press/DailyNewsReview.com],” “Follow [The Associated Press/DailyNewsReview.com] on social media,” “Recommend [The Associated Press/DailyNewsReview.com] to friends, family or coworkers,” and “Follow [the person who shared the article].” Engagement with news is closely associated to trust as previous research shows people are more likely to engage with news they find trustworthy and likewise trust news sources they frequently use (Media Insight Project 2016). For each item, those who said yes are coded 1 and those who said no are coded 0. The five items were averaged together to create an engagement scale that ranges from a minimum value of 0 to a maximum value of 1. The scale has a median of .20, a mean of .25, and a standard deviation of .32. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale is .79 and the eigenvalue is 2.20.

Experimental independent variables

Sharer – Respondents were shown a list of eight public figures and were asked, “When it comes to talking about news and information about health and well-being, how trustworthy do you find each of the following people? They then rated them on a scale that included responses of “Very trustworthy,” “Somewhat trustworthy,” “Somewhat untrustworthy,” and “Very untrustworthy,” with the option to say “I am not familiar with this person.” Respondents were randomly assigned to see the post from either a person they said was very or somewhat trustworthy or a person they said was very or somewhat untrustworthy. The variable is coded 1 if the respondent saw the post from a person they said they trusted and coded 0 for respondents who saw the post from a person they did not trust.

Source – Respondents were asked to rate how trustworthy they found the AP in a question that read, “When it comes to reporting news and information about health and well-being, how trustworthy do you find The Associated Press... Very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, somewhat untrustworthy, very untrustworthy, or I am not familiar with this source?” Respondents were later randomly assigned to see the story as coming from either The Associated Press, or DailyNewsReview.com, a fictional news outlet. Respondents who received the AP article but said either the AP was untrustworthy or unfamiliar were excluded from the analysis to ensure the source variable is comparing an unknown source to a source that respondents trust. This variable is coded 1 for those who saw the article coming from the AP and trusted it and is coded 0 for those who saw that article coming from the fictional news outlet.

Manipulation checks

After being asked about implicit measures of trust in the story and engagement with the article, respondents were asked explicit questions about how the sharer and source impacted their trust in the story. These questions serve as manipulation checks to confirm that people are more likely to say a trusted sharer (compared to a distrusted sharer) and reputable news source (compared to a fictitious source) increase their trust in the information.

Impact of sharer on trust – Respondents were asked, “When you saw [name of person sharing the article] shared the article, did that make you... Much more likely to trust the information, somewhat more likely to trust the information, neither more nor less likely to trust the information, somewhat less likely to trust the information, or much less likely to trust the information?” The answers were coded from 1 (much less likely to trust the information) to 5 (much more likely to trust the information).

Impact of source on trust – Respondents were asked, “When you saw [The Associated Press/DailyNewsReview.com] published the article, did that make you... Much more likely to trust the information, somewhat more likely to trust the information, neither more nor less likely to trust the information, somewhat less likely to trust the information, or much less likely to trust the information?” The answers were coded from 1 (much less likely to trust the information) to 5 (much more likely to trust the information).

Potential moderating variables

Interest in topic – Respondents were asked to say how interested they were in an array of topics including health and well-being, which was the topic of the article they were shown in the experiment. The responses were “Extremely interested” (coded as 5), “Very interested” (coded as 4), “Moderately interested” (coded as 3), “Only a little interested” (coded as 2), and “Not at all interested” (coded as 1).

Typically get news on social media – Respondents were asked whether they get news on social media in a typical week. Those who said they did get news on social media are coded as 1 and those who said they did not are coded as 0.

Control variables

Age – Coded 1 for those aged 18-29, coded 2 for ages 30-44, coded 3 for ages 45-59, and coded 4 for 60 or older.

Education – Coded 1 for having no high school degree, coded 2 for having a high school degree or equivalent, coded 3 for having some college education, and coded 4 for having at least a bachelor’s degree.

Income – Coded 1 for household income of less than \$35,000 a year, coded 2 for household income of \$35,000 to less than \$75,000 a year, and coded 3 for household income of \$75,000 or more.

Gender – Coded 0 for male and 1 for female.

Race and ethnicity – Respondents were categorized as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, or other. Dummy variables were used for non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and other with non-Hispanic white as the reference group.

Political partisanship – Dummy variables were used for Democrat (including those who lean Democrat), Republican (including those who lean Republican), and independent, with Democrat as the reference group.

Analysis

The analysis tests the impact of the two experimental treatments on attitudes toward the news story and explores several potential factors that could moderate these effects.⁴ First, we run one-way ANCOVAs to assess the source and sharer manipulation checks. Then, we run two-way ANCOVAs for our two dependent variables: trust and engagement. Each model features the two key experimental variables: trust/no trust in the sharer and the AP/fictitious news outlet as the source. The models also include the variables related to respondents' interest in health news and whether respondents typically get news on social media, as well as controls for age, gender, income, education, race and ethnicity, and political partisanship. After examining the direct effects of the sharer and source, we explore the potential interaction between sharer and source. Lastly, we explore whether interest in health news or typically getting news on social media moderate the effects of either the sharer or source by running separate models for each of the following four interactions: interest in topic x sharer, interest in topic x source, typically get news on social media x sharer, and typically get news on social media x source. All of the analysis is conducted in STATA.

Results

The findings illustrate that the sharer has a strong impact on attitudes toward a story (*H1*) while the original reporting source has more limited effects (*H2*). There is no evidence that the sharer and source interact (*H3*) while topic salience and familiarity with getting news on social media can both moderate the effects of the sharer or source (*H4*).

⁴ Since research shows people can struggle to recall details such as the source when getting news (Funt et al. 2016; Kalogeropoulos & Newman 2017) and people can retain a sense of where the story came from even if they cannot recall it exactly (Graber 1984), the analysis includes both people who could recall the sharer or the source and those who could not recall the sharer or source. The analysis was re-run excluding those who did not later recall the sharer or source, and it did not change the key findings. Moreover, those who could not explicitly recall the name of the sharer had earlier reported either a favorable or unfavorable impression of that person (the sharer was selected based on the respondent having a negative or positive opinion of that person). Likewise, all those included in the analysis who received the AP source had reported a favorable impression of it earlier in the survey. The only characteristic predictive of recalling both the source and sharer is education, as those with more education are more likely to correctly recall both the sharer and the source.

The manipulation checks confirm the efficacy of both experimental treatments. In a one-way ANCOVA, the effect of the person sharing the story on trust in the article is highly significant $F(1, 1073)=329.59$, $p<.001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .23$ and illustrates that a trusted sharer increases the likelihood people will trust the story’s information. Likewise, the effect of the source reporting the story on trust in the article $F(1, 956)=146.76$, $p<.001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .13$ is significant in the one-way ANCOVA and shows a reputable source increases the chance people will trust the information in the article.

The results strongly confirm (*H1*) that people will be more likely to trust a story and engage with it if it is shared by someone they trust than if it is shared by someone they don’t trust. The trust in sharer variable has a significant main effect on trust $F(1, 1100)=44.59$, $p<.001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$, and the effect is greater than any of the other variables in the model (see Table 2). Trust in the sharer also has a large direct effect on engagement with the article $F(1, 1100)=33.19$, $p<.001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$, when controlling for other variables in the model (see Table 2).

Table 2. ANCOVA Results on Trust and Engagement

Variable	Trust		Engagement	
	Partial η^2	F	Partial η^2	F
Sharer	.04	44.59***	.03	33.19***
Source	<.01	3.82+	.01	9.45**
Get news on social	<.01	2.98+	.02	25.29***
Interest in topic	.03	7.90***	.02	6.73***
Age	.02	9.13***	<.01	1.18
Female	<.01	0.89	.01	10.98**
Education	.02	7.27***	.02	8.03***
Income	<.01	1.91	<.01	0.31
African American	.03	31.73***	.01	47.45***
Hispanic	.01	13.82***	.01	14.77***
Other race	<.01	3.20+	<.01	4.22*
Republican	<.01	1.21	<.01	2.97+
Independent	.01	14.22***	<.01	1.52
N	1,122		1,122	
Adjusted R ²	0.18		0.22	

***= $P<.001$; **= $P<.01$; *= $P<.05$; += $P<.10$

The findings offer more mixed evidence of (*H2*) that people will be more likely to trust and engage with a story if it comes from a reputable news source than if it comes from an unknown news source. The effect

of the source on trust in the story is marginally significant $F(1, 1100)=3.82, p<.10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, and the effect is smaller than the source and several of the control variables (see Table 2). The source has a significant main effect on engagement with the article $F(1, 1110)=9.45, p<.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$, but the effect is again much less than the sharer or other control variables.

Interest in the topic also has direct effects on both trust $F(4, 1100)=7.90, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, and engagement $F(4, 1100)=6.73, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$ (see Table 2). Likewise, typically getting news on social media has a direct effect on engagement, $F(4, 1100)=25.29, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. In terms of magnitude, the effects of interest in topic and typically getting news on social media are smaller than the effects of trust in the sharer but larger than the effects of the news source (see Table 2).

There is no evidence for (*H3*) that the sharer and the source interact to affect either trust or engagement with the story (see Table 3). The combination of receiving the post from a trusted sharer and reputable news source does not significantly increase trust $F(1, 1099)=.07, ns$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, or engagement $F(1, 1099)=.24, ns$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$ with the story beyond the direct effects of each variable (see Figures 1 and 2).

Table 3. ANCOVA Interaction Results on Trust and Engagement

Variable	Trust		Engagement	
	Partial η^2	F	Partial η^2	F
Sharer x Source	<.01	.07	<.01	.24
Interest in topic x Sharer	<.01	.24	.01	2.06+
Interest in topic x Source	.01	2.24+	<.01	1.05
Typically get news on social media x Sharer	<.01	.09	<.01	3.38+
Typically get news on social media x Source	<.01	.01	<.01	.39

***=P<.001; **=P<.01; *=P<.05; +=P<.10

Figure 1. Effect of sharer/source on trust.

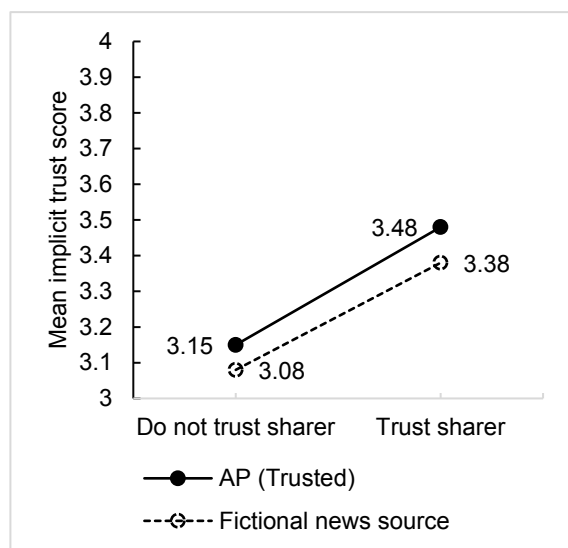
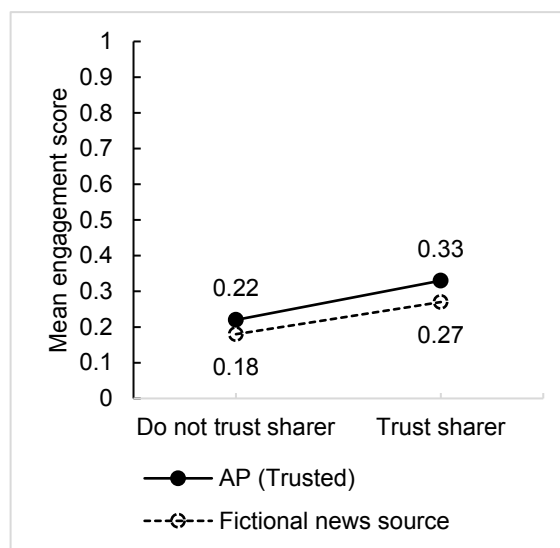


Figure 2. Effect of sharer/source on engagement.



Lastly, we find some evidence for (H4) that topic salience and typically getting news on social media moderate the effects of the sharer or the source on trust and engagement with the article (see Table 3).

Interest in the topic moderates the effects of the sharer when it comes to engagement with the article $F(4, 1096)=2.06, p<.10, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$. Interest in the topic has a greater effect on engagement with those who saw the article from a trusted sharer than those who saw it from an untrusted sharer (see Figure 3). At the same time, interest does not moderate the effects of the sharer on trust in the article. Interest in the topic also moderates the source’s effects on trust $F(4, 1096)=2.24, p<.10, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$. Interest in the topic has a stronger effect on trust for those who saw the article from the AP compared to the fictional news source (see Figure 4). But there are no interaction effects between interest in the topic and source for willingness to engage with the article.

Getting news on social media also moderates the sharer’s effects on engagement $F(1, 1099)=3.38, p<.10, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .01$. The effects from getting news on social media on engagement are stronger among those who saw the article from a trusted sharer than an untrusted sharer (see Figure 5). However, typically getting news on social media does not moderate the effect of the sharer on trust in the article. Typically getting news on social media also does not moderate the effects of the source on either trust or engagement.

Figure 3. Interaction effect of sharer/interest on engagement.

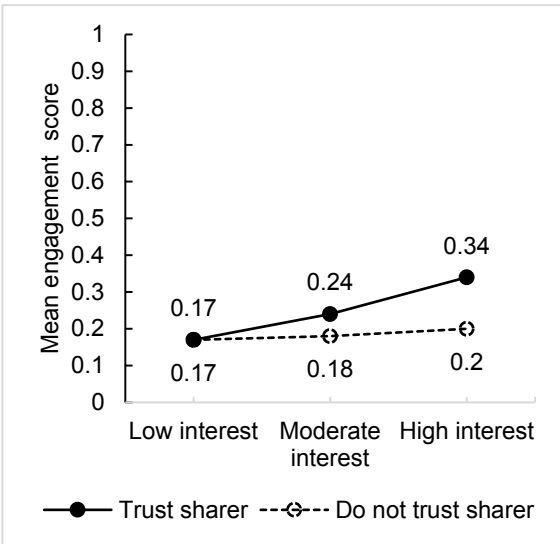


Figure 4. Interaction effect of source/interest on trust

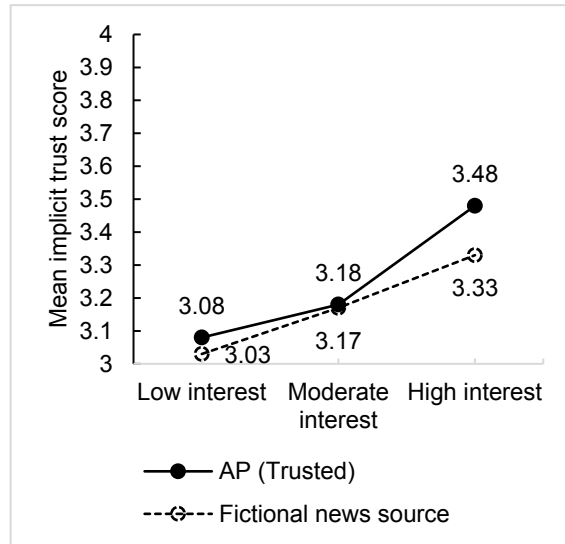
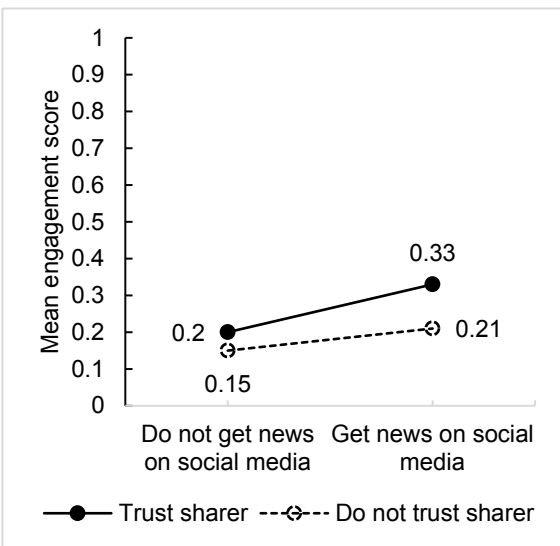


Figure 5. Interaction effect of typically getting news on social media/sharer on engagement.



Discussion

When getting news through traditional media platforms, news consumers usually go directly to the reporting source, either through a newspaper, television, radio, or magazine. But social media alters that relationship, as oftentimes people see news filtered through others who share the content. This has led to concerns about misinformation and fake news infiltrating these networks and spreading across the public sphere. Given this less structured and more participatory information environment, what can we say about people's trust in news and engagement with news on social media?

The results of this study strongly confirm our first hypothesis: people are more likely to trust an article if it is shared by someone they trust than if it is shared by someone they do not trust. They are also more likely to say they would engage with the article in ways like sharing it, following the sharer on social media, or recommending the source to friends or family.

The reporting source of the article, however, has much less of an effect on trust, with little difference in trust in an article coming from a fictional news source and trustworthy news source. This finding is unexpected in light of past research showing the significant impact of source cues and people's self-reports that the source is a key driver of their trust in news on social media (Media Insight Project 2016). Furthermore, this indicates that if people do not know a source, they approach its information similarly to how they would a source they know and trust. Trust in a source has a significant effect on willingness to engage with the article, but the effect is smaller than other factors like trust in the sharer, interest in the topic of the article, or typically getting news on social media.

Surprisingly, there is also no evidence that the sharer and the source interact to affect trust or engagement with an article. However, there is some evidence that interest in the topic of the article (salience) and typically getting news on social media (news medium familiarity) moderate the effects of the sharer and the source on engagement with the article. Interest in the topic enhances the effects of the sharer on engagement. As a result, a person interested in the topic of an article on social media shared by someone they trust is more likely than someone not interested in the topic to share that article or recommend the source to a friend. Additionally, typically seeking news on social media boosts the effects of the sharer on engagement, meaning those who more regularly use social media to get news are especially likely to pass along information just because they trust the person who shared it. Unfortunately, both of these interaction effects could further increase the spread of misinformation that comes from a trusted sharer.

On the other hand, interest in the topic enhances the effects of the reporting source on trust in the article. As a result, those interested in the topic are more discerning when it comes to the source and are more likely to trust a story if it comes from a reputable media outlet than a fictitious outlet. This effect could help reduce the spread of misinformation by those interested in the topic.

These findings benefit from the study's experimental design and the large, nationally representative sample. The experimental manipulation boosts the reliability (internal validity) of comparisons between trusted/distrusted sharers as well as a trusted source/fictional news source because all groups were shown identical stories and questions, with only the specific experimental conditions varying. The sample enhances generalizability (external validity), as the group of participants reflects the U.S. population of adults, and the large sample size allows for quantitative analysis that previous qualitative research on this topic lacks.

However, there are limitations with any experimental design because it is impossible to perfectly reflect how people encounter news on social media. In this survey, respondents saw an isolated post from a person they may or may not have much of a connection to other than rating them earlier in the survey as either trustworthy or untrustworthy. In reality, people encounter news on social media within a feed filled with other news, comments by their friends, and pictures of their family. It often comes from people or news outlets they have chosen to follow on that platform. This could affect the amount and type of attention they are paying to who shared the article and the article itself. On the one hand, each individual post may blend in more on a typical news feed since there are more posts. But on the other hand, people may go to their social media feeds specifically looking for news, and maybe even from a specific poster or source, or on a specific topic, and that could lead to greater attention in a real-life condition compared to the survey design.

Additionally, this survey looked at a simulated Facebook post, and results could differ slightly with other social media platforms where people get news. Perhaps the formats of different platforms lend themselves to focusing more or less on the sharer or the original source. These are just some of the possible limiting factors with this research, all of which would be worthy of further study.

Despite these limitations, this study provides evidence as to how fake news can spread across social media. People's trust in the news they see on social media is strongly related to who shares it, and even if it comes from a fake outlet, they are willing to pass it along to others if it comes from a person they trust. These effects are even stronger when a person is interested in the topic or regularly gets news on social media. This study only looks at public figures who share information, and one could imagine the effect

being stronger still for sharers a person knows personally. People recognize that they should trust a known source more than an unknown one; after all, with the manipulation check, they were more likely to explicitly say that The AP made them more likely to trust the information in the article compared to the fictional source. Most previous studies showing the importance of the source have relied on similar explicit measures of trust that directly ask people about how the source impacts their trust. In contrast, this study's finding that the source had little effect on people's trust relative to the sharer is likely due to the use of multidimensional implicit measures of trust that examine people's attitudes toward a variety of aspects of a story as well their potential engagement with it.

The lack of difference between the effects of a credible source and an unknown source on trust in news has significant implications when it comes to trying to reduce the impact of fake news stories and the results present a variety of challenges for the public, social media platforms, news organizations, and scholars. For citizens trying to stay informed on the issues of the day, these findings suggest they are vulnerable to fake news to an extent they themselves may not even realize. They may consciously think to check the source that reports the news, but they may implicitly accept or reject that information based on other factors entirely, such as the person who shared it. Such factors may not be at all predictive of the accuracy of the information. Additionally, even the best-intentioned users may be prone to passing along fake news to the rest of their network, especially if they are interested in the topic of the article or are used to news on social media and it is shared by a person they trust. Social media platforms may need to consider how they can design their platforms to discourage sharing fake news and help their users distinguish between good and bad information. Efforts so far are still a work in progress (Chowdhry 2017; Levin 2017). For news organizations who often rely on the strength of their brands to maintain trust in their audience, this study suggests that how people perceive their reporting on social media may have little to do with that brand. And for scholars, this research emphasizes the importance of simultaneously studying factors like who shares the story, the source, trust, and engagement. Implicit measures of trust are especially important, as people may explicitly report that the source is what drives their trust while their actual evaluations of the article suggest otherwise.

As more people rely on social media for their news, understanding how users interpret and share news and information from these sources will become increasingly important. This study points to the sharer of the article rather than the source as the key factor to understanding that dynamic. How news organizations, social media users, and social media networks respond to a news environment where the users themselves determine the credibility of the information in the network will determine how well the public is able to avoid the pitfalls of misinformation in the future.

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Appendix A

Full experimental screens
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Don't let the scale fool you: Why you could still be at risk for diabetes

BY KYLE BRYANT Aug. 3, 2016 9:28 PM EDT

Type 2 diabetes has reached epidemic proportions, with an estimated 29 million people in the U.S. having the disease and another 86 million considered prediabetic. With an estimated cost of US\$245 billion, prevention becomes critically important to stem the tide of increasing diabetes prevalence.

Diabetes is a chronic, treatable disease, but there are no cures. Weight loss surgery has been shown to help in some individuals, and medication can help. Identifying individuals at high risk for development of diabetes, adults with prediabetes, and then providing treatment to them is an effective strategy to slow or eliminate its progression.

The prevailing wisdom and screening and treatment recommendations begin with the starting point that adults who are overweight or obese are the ones who are likely to have prediabetes. Weight loss for those individuals is the primary recommended lifestyle intervention. Exercise and eating healthy foods are part of that.

As someone who has studied diabetes, I have discovered recently with colleagues that we may be missing millions of adults with prediabetes. Our screening systems in the U.S. are focusing only on these individuals who are overweight or obese.

Our studies suggest it may not be as simple as classifying people as overweight or obese versus healthy. Our thinking of risk and screening should also consider body composition.

PREVIOUS CONTINUE

Full article, AP condition:

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AP THE BIG STORY

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