

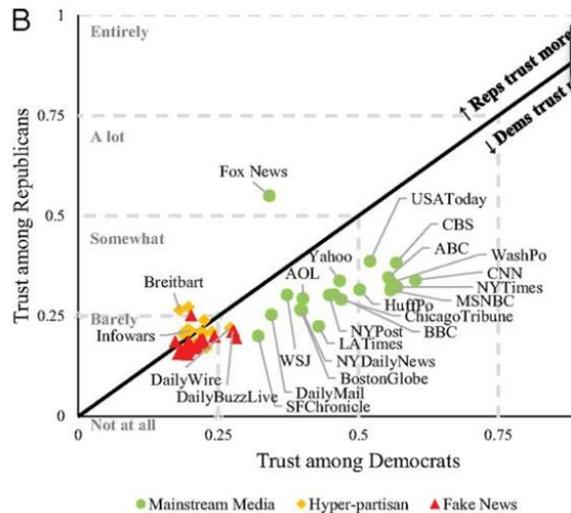
WISDOM OF CROWD AS SOLUTION TO FAKE NEWS?

Perhaps surprisingly, laypeople on average are quite good at distinguishing between lower- and higher-quality sources. These results indicate that incorporating the trust ratings of laypeople into social media ranking algorithms may prove an effective intervention against misinformation, fake news, and news content with heavy political bias.

People across the (US) political spectrum rate mainstream news sources as more trustworthy than hyperpartisan and fake news sites. Moreover, “politically balanced layperson ratings were strongly correlated with ratings provided by professional fact-checkers”, according to a US study.

Herein lies a possible solution for social media companies trying to decide which news content to up-rank: Maybe they could try trusting the crowd.

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One issue arises from the observation that familiarity appears to be necessary (although not sufficient) for trust, which leads unfamiliar sites to be distrusted. As a result, highly rigorous news sources that are less well-known (or that are new) are likely to receive low trust ratings—and thus to have difficulty gaining prominence on social media if trust ratings are used to inform ranking algorithms. This issue could potentially be dealt with by showing users a set of recent stories from outlets with which they are unfamiliar before assessing trust. User ratings of trustworthiness also have the potential to be “gamed,” for example by purveyors of misinformation using domain names that sound credible. Finally, which users are selected to be surveyed will influence the resulting ratings. Such issues must be kept in mind when implementing crowdsourcing approaches.

Figure 1 - Political partisanship and Trust in Media News Sources

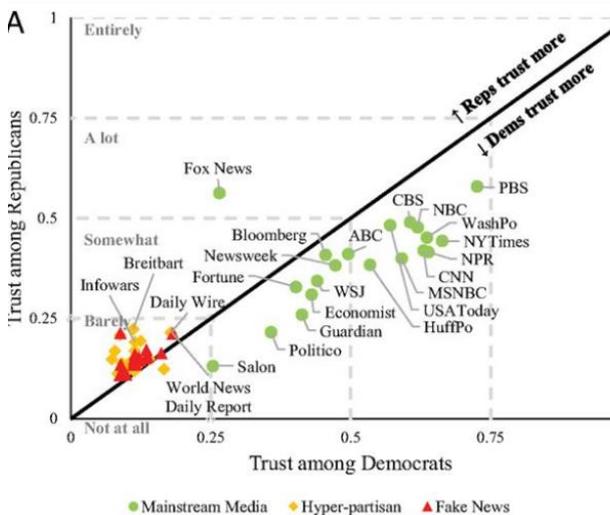
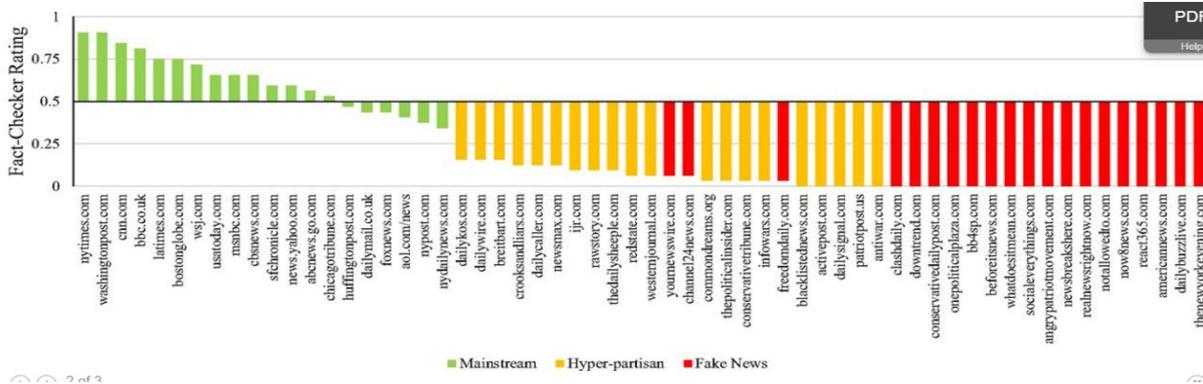


Figure 2 - Fact-Checkers Ratings



The results indicate that using crowdsourced trust ratings to gain information about media outlet reliability information that can help inform ranking algorithms shows promise as one such approach. At the level of individual headlines, people who were more reflective were better (not worse) at discerning between mainstream and fake/hyperpartisan sources. Despite substantial partisan differences and lack of familiarity with many outlets, the participants' trust ratings were, in the aggregate, quite successful at differentiating mainstream media outlets from hyperpartisan and fake news websites. Furthermore, the ratings given by the participants were very strongly correlated with ratings provided by professional fact-checkers. Thus, incorporating the trust ratings of laypeople into social media ranking algorithms may effectively identify low-quality news outlets and could well reduce the amount of misinformation circulating online.

The data show that the trust ratings of laypeople were not particularly effective at differentiating quality within the mainstream media category, as reflected by substantially lower correlations with fact-checker ratings. As a result, it may be most effective to have ranking algorithms treat users' trust ratings in a nonlinear concave fashion, whereby outlets with very low trust ratings are down-ranked substantially, while trust ratings have little impact on rankings once they are sufficiently high. It was also found that crowdsourced trust ratings are much less effective when excluding

ratings from participants who are unfamiliar with the source they are rating, which suggests that requiring raters to be familiar with each outlet would be problematic.

Compiled by SCM (2019) from

Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand Fighting misinformation on social media using crowdsourced judgments of news source quality, PNAS published ahead of print January 28, 2019

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1806781116>

Laura Hazard Owen (Feb. 1, 2019). Individually, people aren't great at judging news sources. En masse, they're almost the same as professional fact-checkers, <http://www.niemanlab.org>