

Americans Trust Local News. That Belief Is Being Exploited. | The New York Times

By Brendan Nyhan

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The nature of the news misinformation problem may be changing. As consumers become more skeptical about the national news they encounter online, impostor local sites that promote ideological agendas are becoming more common. These sites exploit the relatively high trust Americans express in local news outlets — a potential vulnerability in Americans’ defenses against untrustworthy information.

Some misinformation in local news comes from foreign governments seeking to meddle in American domestic politics. Most notably, numerous Twitter accounts operated by the Russian Internet Research Agency were found to have impersonated local news aggregators during the 2016 election campaign.

A recent Senate Intelligence Committee report found that 54 such accounts published more than 500,000 tweets. According to researchers at N.Y.U., the fake local news accounts frequently directed readers to genuine local news articles about polarizing political and cultural topics.

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