

I Shared Fake News About a Fake-News Study | The Atlantic

By Daniel Engber

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Okay this is embarrassing: The news I shared the other day, about the sharing of fake news, was fake.

That news—which, again, let’s be clear, was fake—concerned a well-known MIT study from 2018 that analyzed the spread of news stories on Twitter. Using data drawn from 3 million Twitter users from 2006 to 2017, the research team, led by Soroush Vosoughi, a computer scientist who is now at Dartmouth, found that fact-checked news stories moved differently through social networks depending on whether they were true or false. “Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth,” they wrote in their paper for the journal *Science*.

“False Stories Travel Way Faster Than the Truth,” read the English-language headlines (and also the ones in French, German, and Portuguese) when the paper first appeared online. In the four years since, that viral paper on virality has been cited about 5,000 times by other academic papers and mentioned in more than 500 news outlets. According to Altmetric, which computes an “attention score” for published scientific papers, the MIT study has also earned a mention in 13 Wikipedia articles and one U.S. patent.

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