

People share misinformation because of social media's incentives — but those can be changed | Nieman Journalism Lab

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“After a few tweaks to the reward structure of social media platforms, users begin to share information that is accurate and fact-based.” (Though the tweaks involved paying people to do so.)

Is social media designed to [reward people for acting badly](#)?

The answer is clearly yes, given that the reward structure on social media platforms relies on popularity, as indicated by the number of responses — likes and comments — a post receives from other users. [Black-box algorithms](#) then further amplify the spread of posts that have attracted attention.

Sharing widely read content, by itself, isn't a problem. But it becomes a problem when attention-getting, controversial content is prioritized by design. Given the design of social media sites, users form habits to [automatically share](#) the most [engaging information](#) regardless of its accuracy and potential harm. [Offensive statements](#), [attacks on out groups](#) and [false news](#) are amplified, and misinformation often spreads [further and faster than the truth](#).

We are two [social psychologists](#) and a [marketing scholar](#). Our [research](#), presented at the [2023 Nobel Prize Summit](#), shows that social media actually has the ability to create user habits to share high-quality content. After a few tweaks to the reward structure of social media platforms, users begin to share information that is accurate and fact-based.

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