

## **University of Strathclyde – written evidence (DAD0036)**

### **Title of our Research:**

An Experimental Exploration of Network Dynamics on Social Media: Accounting for Who Spots Fake News and Who Shares It

### **Research Team:**

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Our research is of interest concerning the points below:

### **Democratic debate**

8. To what extent does social media negatively shape public debate, either through encouraging polarisation or through abuse deterring individuals from engaging in public life?

9. To what extent do you think that there are those who are using social media to attempt to undermine trust in the democratic process and in democratic institutions; and what might be the best ways to combat this and strengthen faith in democracy?

### **Misinformation**

10. What might be the best ways of reducing the effects of misinformation on social media platforms?

### **Education**

3. What role should every stage of education play in helping to create a healthy, active, digitally literate democracy?

## Our research:

1. We asked a cohort of 82 university politics students which news they would **share** on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp. Our 72 news headlines (36 true and 36 fake) were taken from fact-checking sites <https://fullfact.org/> and from government websites. After the sharing questions, we then asked them how true or fake the headlines were.
2. Some examples of the headlines:
  - One in four girls or women are in period poverty and are unable to afford sanitary products.
  - Four square metres of rainforest are destroyed for each gram of cocaine produced.
  - Student 'loans' don't actually work like loans.
  - 1 million people marched for a People's Vote on Brexit on Saturday 23rd March.
3. We set ourselves a tough test (politics students and news stories that were fairly pedestrian).
4. Results for **news sharing**:
  - **everybody in our research shares fake news**
  - **fake news is shared significantly more than true news**
  - **females share significantly more news than males**
  - **those who discuss politics share significantly more news**
  - **those with higher internet usage are significantly less likely to share news**
5. Results for **error explaining** (predictors of how wrong people were in their judgements about how true or fake a news headline was):
  - **We make significantly more errors with fake news than true stories**
  - **When we share we are significantly more likely to have got it wrong**
  - **The less you discuss politics the significantly more likely you are to have got it wrong**
6. Results for **social networks** (how do people who are connected to each other on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp behave?):
  - **Party proximity significantly explains news sharing similarity** (the closer you are to another person in the study in terms of party support/proximity across all party dimensions the more likely you are to share stories with them)
  - **Female pairs are significantly less likely to share the same stories than male-female pairs**
  - **Being connected on Instagram is significantly more likely to explain sharing similarity.**

## 7. **We are currently working on:**

- Differences between image and text
- Impact of education on sharing and fake news detection (experimental design incorporating and testing the usefulness of some of the educational resources listed in 8. below)

## 8. Dr. Mark Shephard has produced a series of publications and Tedx talks on social media issues designed to assist with citizenship education:

- Mark Shephard, Stephen Quinlan, Stephen Tagg, and Lindsay Paterson (2014) 'Engaging the Brain as Well as the Heart: Political Literacy and Social Media Platforms', in Andrew Mycock and Jonathan Tongue et al. *Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission Report: Young People and Politics* (Political Studies Association), 38-41, [http://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/PSA%20Beyond%20the%20YCC%20FINAL\\_0.pdf](http://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/PSA%20Beyond%20the%20YCC%20FINAL_0.pdf) (date accessed: 20 September 2019)
- TedX talk 1 (2014) (5 F's to avoid online) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-YUVP7G524> (date accessed: 20 September 2019) which was turned into an Education Scotland classroom learning resource by employee Athole McLauchlan for responsible online communication via: <http://ed.ted.com/on/EMKPkQQ1> (date accessed: 20 September 2019)
- Mark Shephard (2016) 'Improving Online Political Literacy for Effective Public Engagement', University of Strathclyde, International Public Policy Institute, November 2015, [https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/55652/1/Shephard\\_IPPI\\_2016\\_improving\\_online\\_political\\_literacy\\_for\\_effective\\_public\\_engagement.pdf](https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/55652/1/Shephard_IPPI_2016_improving_online_political_literacy_for_effective_public_engagement.pdf) (date accessed: 20 September 2019)
- TedXtalk 2 (2017) 'Social Media Savvy' – builds on the first Ted talk (5 F's to avoid online and 5 F's to look out for) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ric\\_sKxoqxg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ric_sKxoqxg) (date accessed: 20 September 2019)
- A version of Tedx 2 that I did for an Applied Quantitative Methods Network (January 2018) academic business outreach event 'Big Social Science and the New Industrial Revolution' in Edinburgh is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09APkft2E5w> (date accessed: 20 September 2019)



