

Press contact: Eric Young, [young-eric@norc.org](mailto:young-eric@norc.org), (301) 634-9536 or 703-217-6814 (cell)

## NEW STUDY EXPLORES HOW AMERICANS DECIDE WHICH NEWS TO TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

*Level of trust is determined less by who creates the news than by who shares it.*

CHICAGO, March 20, 2017—When people get news from social media, the credibility of the person sharing the content tends to be more important in influencing how much people trust it than which organization did the reporting, according to a new experimental study conducted by [The Media Insight Project](#), a collaboration between the [American Press Institute](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). This new research is part of an effort to study the elements of trust in news at a time of turbulence in the media.

“For years the platform by which people got their news and the news brand were the same thing. You went to a newspaper or watched a TV news program. Today, as people increasingly get their news on social media, that is no longer necessarily the case,” said Tom Rosenstiel, executive director of the American Press Institute. “Our research into this new dynamic offers important new insights to publishers whose digital content is increasingly reaching people outside the domain of their own websites and apps.”

The new findings come from an experiment in which 1,489 Americans were presented with a news feed item closely resembling those on Facebook. Everyone saw the same content, but the original reporting source and the person who shared it varied. After reading the post and short story, respondents answered questions about the story and their trust in the content, providing indications as to which variables had the greatest effect on attitudes.

The experimental results show that people who see an article shared by a person they trust but written by an unknown media source have much more trust in the information than people who see the same article from a reputable media source shared by a person they do not trust.

The identity of the sharer even has an impact on how consumers view the news brand. The study demonstrates that when people see a post from a trusted person rather than an untrusted person, they feel more likely to recommend the news source to friends, follow the source on social media, and sign up for news alerts from the source.

The results offer several important implications for today's media landscape:

- **To publishers and journalists:** Your readers and followers are not just consumers to monetize, instead they may be social ambassadors whose own credibility with their friends affects your brand's reputation. It is the sharer's credibility, often more than your own, which determines other people's willingness to believe you and engage with you. This underscores the importance of news organizations creating strong communities of followers who evangelize the organization to others.
- **To news-literacy advocates:** In light of growing concerns about "fake news" spreading on social media, this experiment confirms that people make little distinction between known and unknown (even made-up) sources when it comes to trusting and sharing news. Even 19 percent of people who saw our fictional news source would have been willing to recommend it to a friend.
- **To Facebook and other social networks:** Facebook and other social networks could do more to emphasize and provide information about the original sources for news articles. The fact that only 2 in 10 people in our experiment could recall the news reporting source accurately after seeing a Facebook-style post suggests that basic brand awareness has a long way to go. We found that sharers affect perceptions more than the original news reporting source—but might that change if Facebook made the reporting source label more prominent?

"The bottom line is this: a trusted sharer has more significant effects on beliefs about news than a reputable media source," said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. "Publishers need to take this finding seriously going forward and think about their readers as ambassadors to cultivate. Social media sites should also think seriously about transparency when it comes to emphasizing where news articles originate."

### **About the Survey**

NORC conducted the experimental study from November 9 through December 6, 2016, with funding from the American Press Institute (API). Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press collaborated on all aspects of the study. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 1,489 completed the survey. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey and the qualitative group interviews can be found at the end of the report.

The proper description of the survey's authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [American Press Institute](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

### **About the Media Insight Project**

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration between the American Press Institute and The AP-NORC



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

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Center for Public Affairs Research with the objective of conducting high-quality, innovative research meant to inform the news industry and the public about various important issues facing journalism and the news business. The Media Insight Project brings together the expertise of both organizations and their respective partners, and involves collaborations among key staff at the American Press Institute, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press.

<http://www.mediainsight.org/>

### **About the American Press Institute**

Founded in 1946, the American Press Institute conducts research, training, convenes thought leaders, and creates tools to help chart a path ahead for journalism in the 21st century. The American Press Institute is an educational non-advocacy 501(c)3 nonprofit organization affiliated with the Newspaper Association of America. It aims to help the news media, especially local publishers and newspaper media, advance in the digital age.

<http://www.pressinstitute.org>

### **About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research**

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

[www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org)

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective and non-partisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

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Contacts: For more information, contact Eric Young for NORC at [young-eric@norc.org](mailto:young-eric@norc.org) or (703) 217-6814 (cell); Ray Boyer for NORC at [boyer-ray@norc.org](mailto:boyer-ray@norc.org) or (312) 330-6433; Laurie Beth Harris for API at



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*institute*

[lauriebeth.harris@pressinstitute.org](mailto:lauriebeth.harris@pressinstitute.org) or (571) 366-1044; Tom Rosenstiel for API at [tom.rosenstiel@pressinstitute.org](mailto:tom.rosenstiel@pressinstitute.org) or (571) 366-1044; or Lauren Easton for AP at [leaston@ap.org](mailto:leaston@ap.org).