

Defining the Authority of Online Providers of Health Information

Webinar Summary

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) hosted a webinar on April 5, 2021, to inform its project on [Principles for Defining and Verifying the Authority of Online Providers of Health Information](#)¹.

The Health and Social Consequences of Misinformation

Brendan J. Nyhan, PhD, professor of government at Dartmouth College, noted that social and political problems are reflected on social media platforms, not caused by them, and leaders of these platforms can be “defensive” about being “blamed” for these reflections.

¹ <https://nam.edu/programs/principles-for-defining-and-verifying-the-authority-of-online-providers-of-health-information>.

While a minority of people consume untrustworthy information, social media can nevertheless amplify harmful content, which can then have significant, real-world repercussions—for example, fostering distrust in vaccines. Nyhan noted that more than 50 of the “extremist” channels identified in his research were still up

Discussion

The webinar concluded with a discussion among the Advisory Group members and the presenters. Nyhan noted that Facebook undertook a similar effort to promote access to high-quality information that yielded no easy answers. He said that a goal of “better than” can work, because a perfect solution will not be possible.

Curry followed up with questions about whether increased viewership of untrustworthy videos correlates to stronger and harder-to-change beliefs among viewers. Nyhan responded that people who tend to have more extreme beliefs and information diets often consume the majority of this content.

Nyhan later noted that when it comes to health sources, trust correlates highly with other kinds of objective indicators of quality and recommended against constructing platform policies around only a small percent of extremists.

Tufekci noted that social media platforms have changed information “ecology” so that news organizations and television networks are competing for attention with content that appears on Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms – thereby requiring researchers to broaden their lens to understand the imp (l)0.5 (en)-76 (o)-3.8 (f)-1.4 (l)4.6 (h)r7(l)