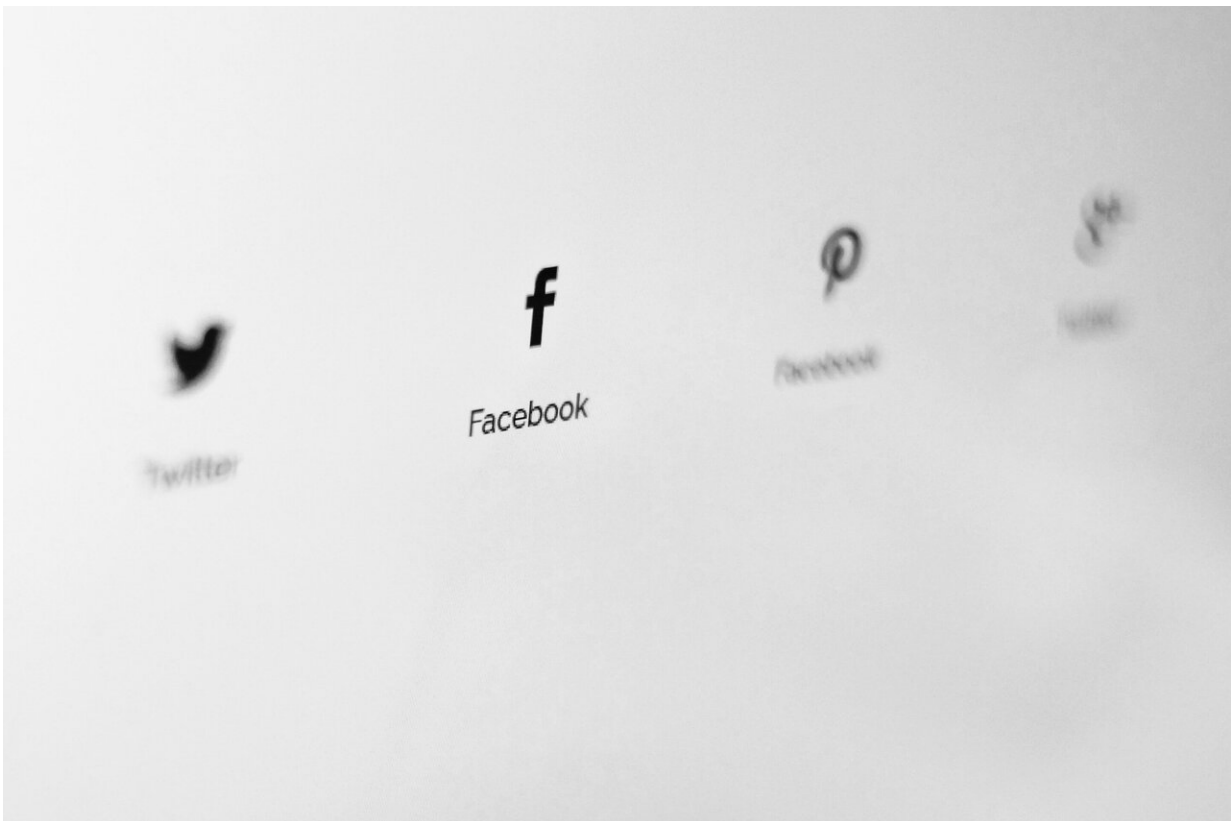


How your behaviour on social media could be limiting the quality of your news feeds

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An international team of researchers including The University of Western Australia has examined how people's online behaviour and preferences on social media could be limiting the quality and balance of

information they receive through their news feed.

Professor Stephan Lewandowsky, a researcher at The University of Western Australia and the University of Bristol, said more than half the world's population used social media to keep up with the latest news and find a source of truth.

"However a lot of people may be unaware of the extent their [news feed](#) is altered by the click of a button when they dislike a post, or opt to see less of something on their news feed," Professor Lewandowsky said.

"Throughout social media, a series of complex algorithms are in place to keep users engaged and visiting [social media](#) sites as long as possible. They want the user to have the feeling of 'you're right' so content is tailored to that person.

"This creates an environment of like-minded users who reinforce that person's opinions rather than providing balanced information."

Professor Lewandowsky said the research team, which included the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, the University of Bristol and Harvard Law School, had developed specific recommendations to empower individuals online, drawing on two approaches from behavioural sciences: nudging and boosting.

"Nudging aims to steer people's behavior by highlighting important information without imposing rules or bans. Nudging could be used, for example, to indicate whether content meets certain quality criteria—such as whether it stems from trustworthy sources," he said.

"Twitter recently took a step in this direction and started flagging some tweets with a fact-check warning—including a tweet by Donald Trump on the subject of postal voting."

The researchers say another possibility would be to make it more difficult for users to share information when an article fails to cite external references. For example, users might be required to click past a pop-up window.

"Another option is what is called boosting, to enhance user competence in the long-term. This could, for instance, mean teaching people to determine the quality of a [news](#) item by looking at a set of variables, such as the sources being cited, that determine its likely quality," he said.

Professor Lewandowsky said it was important to strengthen the Internet's potential to inform decision-making processes in democratic societies, bolstering them rather than undermining them.

'It's important for people to have autonomy to be able to control the content they receive, but at the same time be aware of the trustworthiness of their feeds and have more control over what [information](#) is provided.'

Provided by University of Western Australia

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