

What's popular on Facebook? Extreme far right political views and lies, study says

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What's popular on Facebook? Far-right news and information.

What's even more popular? Far-right falsehoods.

Those are the findings of a new study out Wednesday from New York University.

Sources of [news](#) and information on the far-right generate the highest average number of interactions per follower, more than any other partisan group on Facebook, even [extreme views](#) on the political left, NYU's Cybersecurity for Democracy project reported.

"We found that politically extreme sources tend to generate more interactions from users. In particular, content from sources rated as far-right by independent news rating services consistently received the highest engagement per follower of any partisan group," the study said.

Far-right sources of news and information that spread misinformation have even higher engagement than far-right sources overall, generating on average 65% more engagement per follower, according to the study.

Misinformation which appeals to our emotions has been a boon for fraudsters looking to profit off falsehoods or gain a political advantage. But, while sources of information elsewhere on the political spectrum frequently suffer a "misinformation penalty"—a measurable decline in engagement for being unreliable—"being a consistent spreader of far-right misinformation appears to confer a significant advantage," the report found.

Facebook says the NYU study mostly examines how people engage with certain types of content, not how many people actually see it on the platform.

"When you look at the content that gets the most reach across Facebook, it's not at all as partisan as this study suggests," the company said in a statement.

But the report echoes findings from other researchers that far-right content resonates with Facebook users, in large part because it elicits strong reactions.

An analysis of millions of [social media posts](#) by Politico and the nonpartisan think tank Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that right-wing social media influencers, media outlets and other GOP supporters drove the online conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement and voter fraud, two of the most heated election issues.

"There is evidence that content from highly conservative news sites is favored by Facebook algorithms," Steven Johnson, an information technology professor at the University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce told U.S. TODAY in November.

Right-wing personalities have a distinct advantage on the platform, not because the algorithms favor conservatives, but because they connect with people on a visceral level, Facebook said in September.

"Right-wing populism is always more engaging," a Facebook executive told Politico, when asked why conservative commentators Dan Bongino and Ben Shapiro drive such high engagement.

The executive said the content speaks to "an incredibly strong, primitive emotion" by touching on such topics as "nation, protection, the other, anger, fear."

The top 5 far-right news and information sources included in the NYU study were Dan Bongino, Newsmax, Breitbart, TruthFeed, and Trending Politics. NewsGuard and Media Bias/Fact Check determined the partisan nature of the sources.

Engagement with posts from far-right and far-left news sources peaked

around Election Day and again on Jan. 6 when a pro-Trump mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, the study report found.

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