

Erratum: Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election

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October 2018

On p. 219, we describe the data we collected from BuzzSumo as “the total number of times each article was *shared* on Facebook” (emph. added). In fact, the BuzzSumo data are the number of *engagements* with each article, defined as the sum of shares, comments, and other interactions such as “likes.” All references to counts of Facebook shares in the paper and the online appendix based on the BuzzSumo data should be replaced with references to counts of Facebook engagements. None of the tables or figures in either the paper or the online appendix are affected by this change, nor does the change affect the results based on our custom survey. None of the substantive conclusions of the paper are affected with one exception discussed below, where our substantive conclusion is strengthened.

Examples of cases where the text should be changed:

- The text at the bottom of p. 212 should read “...115 pro-Trump fake stories with a total of 30 million Facebook *engagements*, and 41 pro-Clinton fake stories with a total of 7.6 million Facebook *engagements*” rather than “...115 pro-Trump fake stories that were shared on Facebook a total of 30 million times, and 41 pro-Clinton fake stories that were shared a total of 7.6 million times.”
- The text at the top of p. 214 should read “The story had more than one million *engagements*” rather than “The story was shared more than one million times.”
- The text at the bottom of p. 223 should read “the average pro-Trump article had more Facebook *engagements* than the average pro-Clinton article” rather than “the average pro-Trump article was shared more on Facebook than the average pro-Clinton article.”
- The text on p. 227 should read “...0.03 chance of a recalled exposure per million Facebook *engagements*. Given that the Fake articles in our database had 38 million *engagements*...”

rather than “...0.03 chance of a recalled exposure per million Facebook shares. Given that the Fake articles in our database had 38 million shares...” (the remainder of this sentence and the conclusion that the average adult saw and remembered 1.14 fake news articles are unchanged).

- The description of the BuzzSumo data in the online appendix section A.1 should be rewritten in terms of *engagements*.

The one place where the change affects our substantive conclusions is on p. 225 when we describe three methods of estimating exposure to fake news. The first of these, in the paragraph beginning “First, we can use prior evidence...,” is based on prior estimates of the ratio of the number of page visits to the number of shares for typical posts on Facebook and other sites. We took 20 as a conservative estimate of this ratio and concluded that 38 million shares of fake news would translate into 760 million page visits, or about three per US adult. This calculation was incorrect because 38 million is in fact the number of engagements not the number of shares. Since the number of shares is smaller than 38 million, the correct estimate is something smaller than three visits per US adult.¹ Given that we concluded fake news exposure was smaller than some had assumed, and given that our other two estimates of exposure were both smaller than three per adult, the correction strengthens our main conclusion.

¹We can get a rough sense of the correct value using data from the website SharedCount, which reports Facebook shares together with Facebook engagements. Of the 897 URLs associated with the 156 fake stories in our database, we were able to locate 782 on SharedCount. Within that set, the total number of shares was 24 percent of the total number of engagements. This would suggest that the total number of page visits was $38 * 0.24 * 20 = 182.4$ million, or 0.74 per US adult. This is closer to the 0.64 impressions we estimate using our second method, and the 1.14 stories seen and remembered we estimate using our third method.