

Intermediary Liability Blog

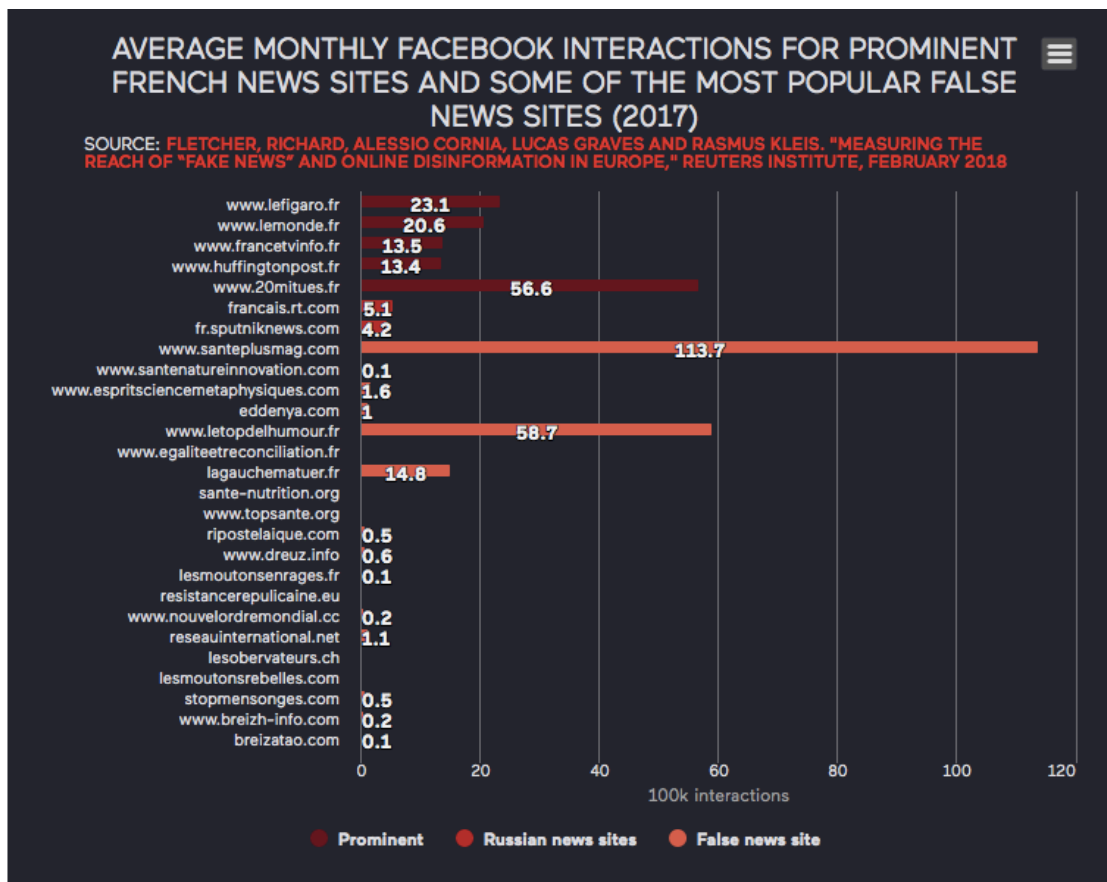
The Evidence Hub for Policymakers

Disinformation: How We Encounter, Recognise and Interact with It

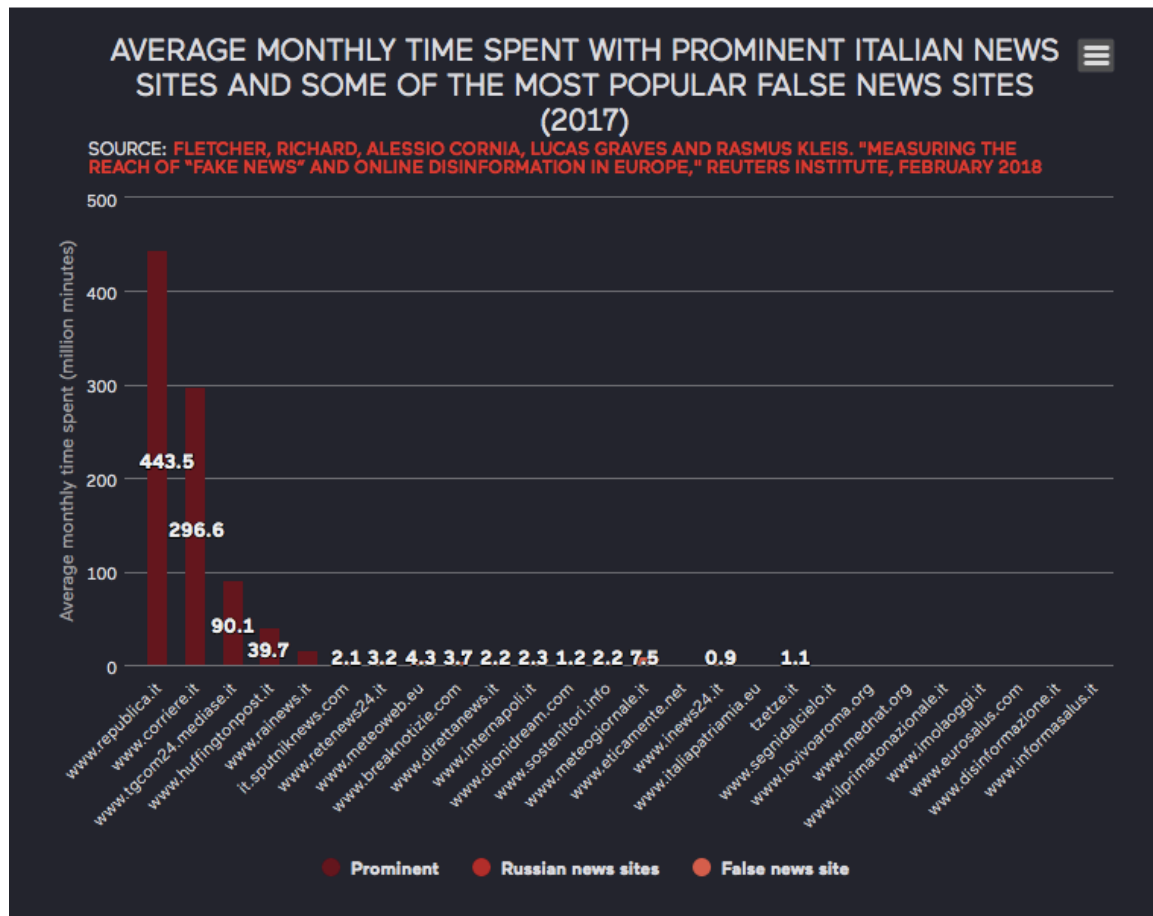
27 February 2020 | Estimated reading time: 2 minutes

Collecting data for the Intermediary Liability Evidence Hub and then testing the Evidence Hub's ["explore"](#) feature, I noticed interesting anomalies in the information we've gathered. One such anomaly converged around how citizens interact with online disinformation.

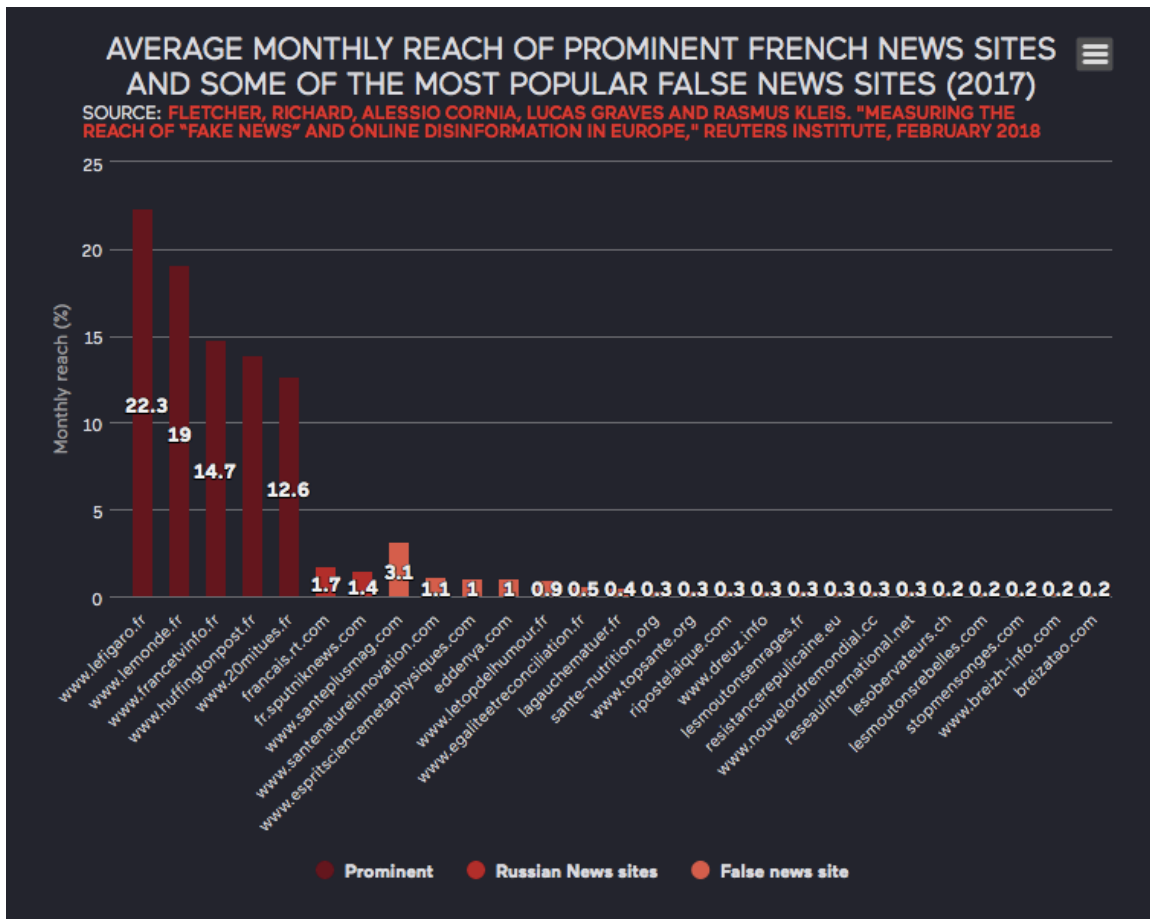
At the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, Richard Fletcher, Alessio Cornia, Lucas Graves and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen have published a fascinating [factsheet](#) about disinformation online. The authors looked at the most popular legitimate news sites and false news sites in France and Italy. They found that **false news sites sometimes had broader social media impacts than legitimate news sites**.



This was true even though **users spent less time viewing false news sites and were less likely to interact with false news sites**. The authors found that the average monthly time spent with false news sites was significantly lower than the average monthly time spent with legitimate sites.

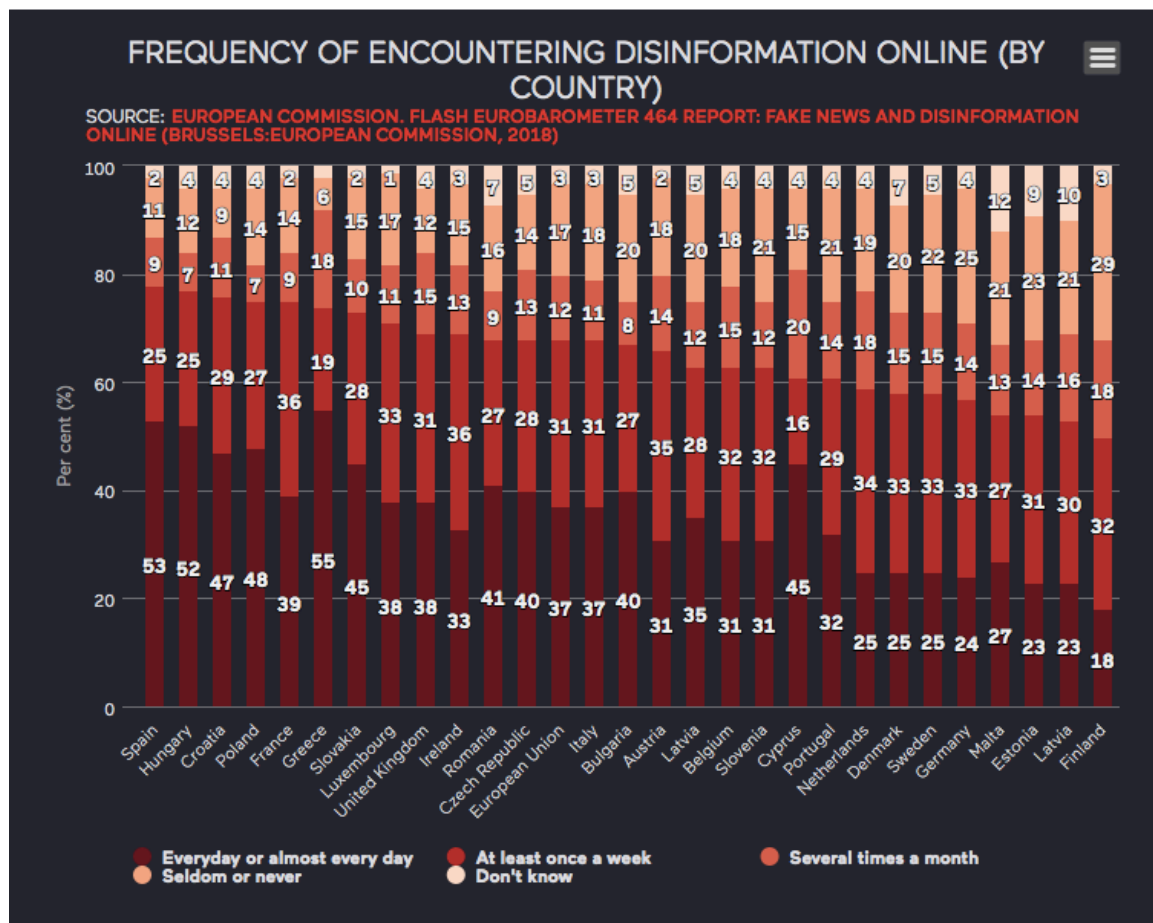


It is difficult to explain this disconnect. There may be a small number of super-fans, who may or may not realize that they are promoting disinformation and driving social media engagement for false news sites. Or false news sites may be employing dubious practices, such as buying fake “bot” accounts, to artificially inflate their social media impact. Or users may be sharing and interacting with content from false news sites on social media but not choosing to visit the sites themselves.



But it's also difficult to know whether the users interacting with these false news sites realize that they are viewing disinformation. **The European Union's Flash Eurobarometer 464 survey found that 75% of French people report encountering disinformation online once or more per week. The same survey found that 68% of Italian people reported the same.**

If these users are encountering disinformation on social media, their experiences seem to match with the Reuters Institute's data. Unfortunately, though, we do not yet know where these people believe they are encountering disinformation. We also don't know whether they are accurately judging content as disinformation or legitimate news. Disinformation is, after all, effective because users do not recognize it as false or misleading.



Clearly, there is more work to be done and more information to be gathered before judgments are formed. **More surveys are needed to determine more specifically where users are encountering what they perceive to be disinformation and how they decide what content is disinformation.** More research is also needed to understand how false news sites are able to garner more social media interactions despite having less trustworthy content. This research would allow policymakers to better understand how to educate users about disinformation and combat its spread.

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This blog post appeared on the Intermediary Liability Evidence Hub, an interactive website managed by [The Lisbon Council](https://evidencehub.net/), a Brussels-based think tank, to gather available evidence and data points on the issue of intermediary liability. Its website is <https://evidencehub.net/>.