

Transcript for video/audio-Developing an app to alert health care pros to misinformation on social media

University of Illinois sociology professor Kevin Leicht, PhD

Leicht says he often reminds his team that research and development is usually more difficult than anyone anticipates.

"If this were easy, somebody would have done it already," he says, laughing. "We were both surprised nobody tried to have done it. And then when we got into it ... it's, 'Wow, it's really difficult.'" (: 12)

Leicht and his colleagues are using natural language processing, machine learning, data mining, specific information filters and retrieval methods that expand and automate the effort to identify inaccurate health information trending on social media.

"What our project actually does is take not only the pre-existing fact-checked data and query it all in one place, it brings it forward in a user-friendly fashion. But then it's also trying to come up with a way of adding to this data in a way that's faster than having a human fact checker just scan the web all the time, looking for what the new piece of misinformation is." (:26)

There's no getting away from content moderators.

"Having humans curate that a little bit ... you have content experts that look at that and say, 'Is this dangerous or is it not? Is this trending, is it not?' And then figuring out a way to deliver that to the final customer in a way that requires as little inner interface by them as we can possibly get away with." (:17)

Dr. Mary Stapel, lead physician Community Care OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center and assistant program director for combined Internal Medicine-Pediatrics at University of Illinois College of Medicine, Peoria (UICOMP)

The alerts could allow organizations to stop bad information from going viral.

"If we can even get ahead of that – know what information is circulating and start feeding out more accurate information ahead of time through our community partners; that really could be a game changer when we're thinking about things like pandemics and infectious disease." (:21)

Misinformation can impact anyone.

"There was an interesting turn during the pandemic, where after education – large-scale campaigns and initiatives were put out around vaccination; there actually was sort of a flip to where communities of color, lower socio-economic communities were more vaccinated than upper class, more predominantly white communities so I really think it is across the spectrum." (:31)