



THE ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT

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“RESPECT” AS THE NEW “LIKE”

Research Reveals the Benefits of a “Respect” Button in Online Comment Sections

RESEARCH SUMMARY

- As the popularity of Facebook has skyrocketed, so has the practice of clicking “Like” to engage with online comments. But what do people do when they encounter a worthwhile comment that expresses a point of view with which they disagree?
- A recent study by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin analyzed how people reacted to a comment section depending on whether they were able to “Like,” “Recommend,” or “Respect” other people’s comments. The authors predicted that the “Respect” button would lead people to click on more comments that disagreed with their political beliefs than the “Like” button.
- Data for the online experiment were gathered from over 700 people.
- Study participants saw exactly the same comment section, with one change: some people saw a comment section where they could “Like” other comments, others saw only “Recommend,” and still others saw only “Respect.”
- People clicked more frequently on “Respect” than they did on “Recommend.”
- People were more likely to click on comments expressing different political views when they had a “Respect” button to use, compared to having a “Like” or a “Recommend” button available.

QUOTATIONS FROM PROJECT STAFF

Natalie Stroud, Director of the Engaging News Project:

- “Based on our study findings, newsrooms may consider using a ‘Respect’ button in their comment sections to get people to engage with political views that they may not ‘Like.’”
- “Given the political polarization facing our country, our research shows that there are strategies to help citizens find common ground.”
- “Newsrooms should be thinking carefully about the consequences of how social media buttons are worded.”

Ashley Muddiman, Research Associate, Engaging News Project:

- “Our results are encouraging because they show that small, easy-to-implement wording changes can make a big difference to citizens.”

FAST FACTS

- In a comment section with eight comments, people clicked “Recommend” an average of 1.5 times. When seeing the same comment section, but with a “Respect” button instead, they clicked “Respect” an average of 1.8 times.
- Among some participants, the “Respect” button increased rates of clicking on counter-attitudinal comments by up to 50 percent compared to “Like” and “Recommend.”

RELATED WORK

- Based on this research, the “Respect” button is now [in use](#) (scroll down to “Featured Perspectives”).
- [Tampa Bay Times](#) allows readers to click “important,” “inspiring,” and “sad” at the bottom of articles on the site.
- [Civic Commons](#), although not a news outlet, encourages substantive discussion among community members by allowing them to click on posts they find “persuasive,” “informative,” or “inspiring.”
- [The Huffington Post](#) includes buttons such as “amazing” and “inspiring” that allow readers to react to a story

GRAPHICS



FOR MORE DETAILS

Download the full report at www.engagingnewsproject.org/social-media-buttons/

PROJECT BACKGROUND

These findings are part of the **Engaging News Project**. The Engaging News Project has a single aim: to provide research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially-viable and democratically-beneficial ways. To sign up for our newsletter, visit www.engagingnewsproject.org.