Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

Analysing and understanding perceptions of the EU

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Understanding the impact of new technologies and social media on perceptions of Europe abroad

Social Computing experts from Northumbria University are part of a three-year EU-funded project which brings together an inter- and multidisciplinary consortium of 25 partners from twelve European and three non-European countries.

The international PERCEPTIONS project aims to identify the different narratives, images and perceptions of life in Europe and the EU, and to study their role in an individuals' decision to migrate to Europe.

The project will consider migration in the broadest sense, looking at all potential reasons and motivations, to obtain a better picture of where stories about migration to the EU originate, how various types of stories, for example forced versus economic migration, interconnect, and how they transform over time and with experience.

The project also aims to identify the channels in which such narratives and images are spread, including traditional and social media, and the actors who tell these stories – and to whom, with what purpose and with what impact.

The project will focus on the role of social media in this process, and what kind of images and ideas are transported via different channels, to understand how different narratives could lead to problems, false expectations, security threats or even radicalisation.

Northumbria University has been awarded more than £400,000 for its part in the PERCEPTIONS project. Shaun Lawson, Professor of Social Computing and Head of Northumbria's Department of Computer and Information Sciences is leading Northumbria's involvement.

He said: "The rise in the use of social media means it has become much easier to spread specific narratives online, many of which may be inaccurate or misleading.

"There is also a concern that people using social media are subject to an echo-chamber effect, in which the views they come into contact with generally correlate with their own and any factual inaccuracies are left uncorrected.

"The aim of PERCEPTIONS is to understand the perceptions people have about Europe abroad, identify the myths circulating online and assess how this might be impacting on external security and migration.

"This will then allow us to make policy recommendations and develop action plans and toolkits for migrants and civil society organisations to tackle this issue in the future."

PERCEPTIONS will create evidence-based toolkits of creative and innovative measures for policymakers to react or counteract on different perceptions,

considering social, societal and structural aspects.

The project also aims to support first-line practitioners, as well as migrants, and to protect potential migrants by creating trusted communication contents and communication channels and by counter-manding “false” and dangerous narratives that may lead to the exploitation of vulnerable group.

The created materials will be published on the PERCEPTIONS web platform. For more information visit https://project.perceptions.eu/

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