



The psychology of misinformation (and what we can do about it)

Myrto Pantazi

Global Teachers Academy, ENABEL

07 February 2024, Brussels

We send the EU **£350 million** a week

let's fund our **NHS** instead  Vote Leave

#TakeControl

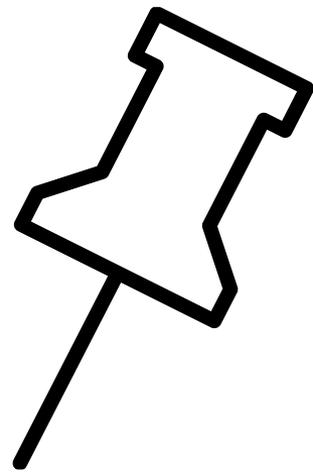
Let's take back control

Belief that Britain was right to vote to leave the EU falls to a new low of 30%

In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the European Union? %



TODAY'S MENU



1. Some Important Definitions

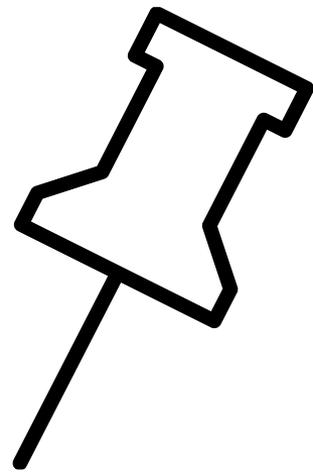
2. Psychology of Misinformation

- Are we affected by misinformation?
- What factors determine whether we are affected by misinformation?

3. What can we do?

4. Some critical points on (the psychology of) misinformation

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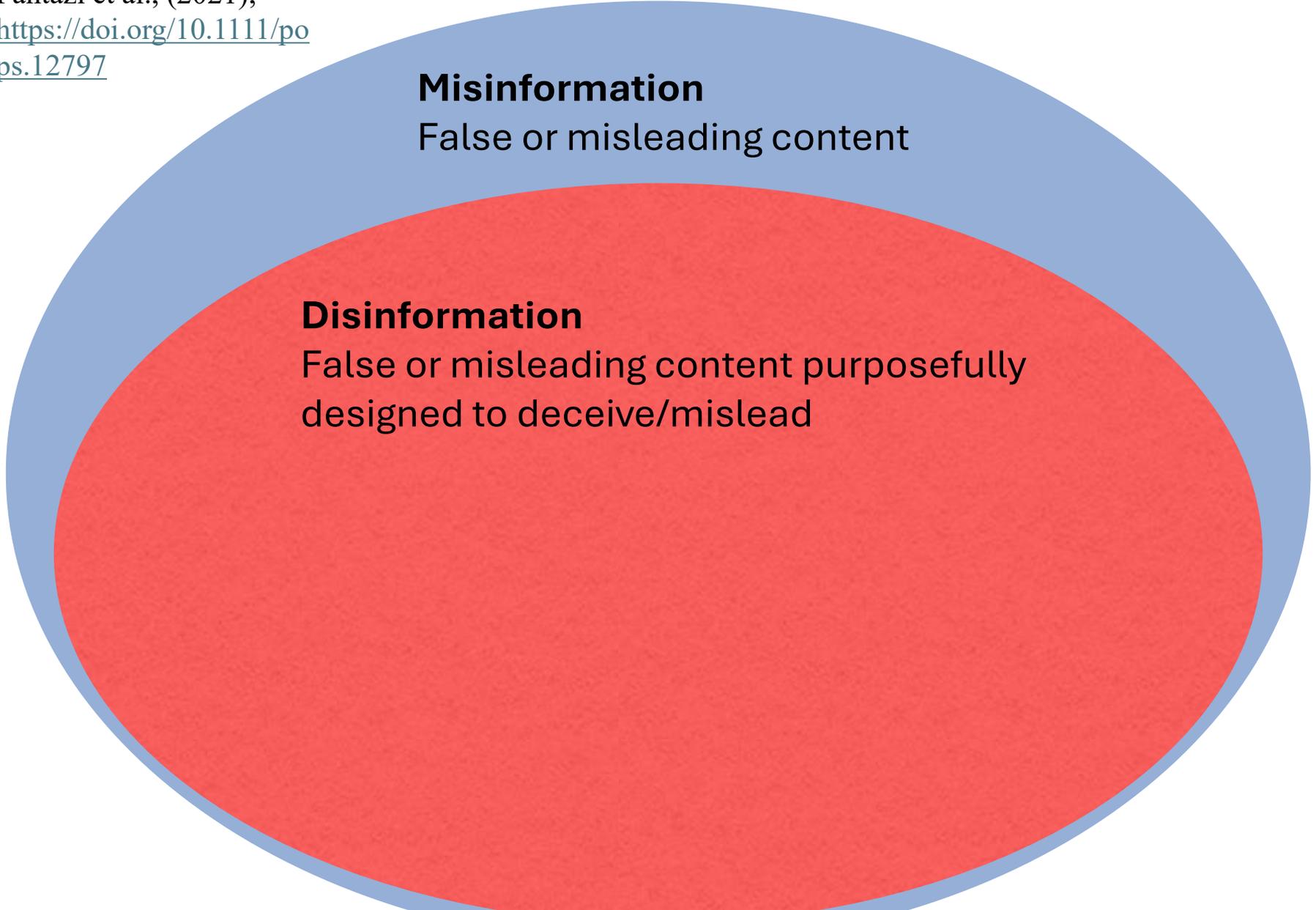
Pantazi et al., (2021);
<https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12797>

Misinformation

False or misleading content

Some Basic Definitions

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Misinformation

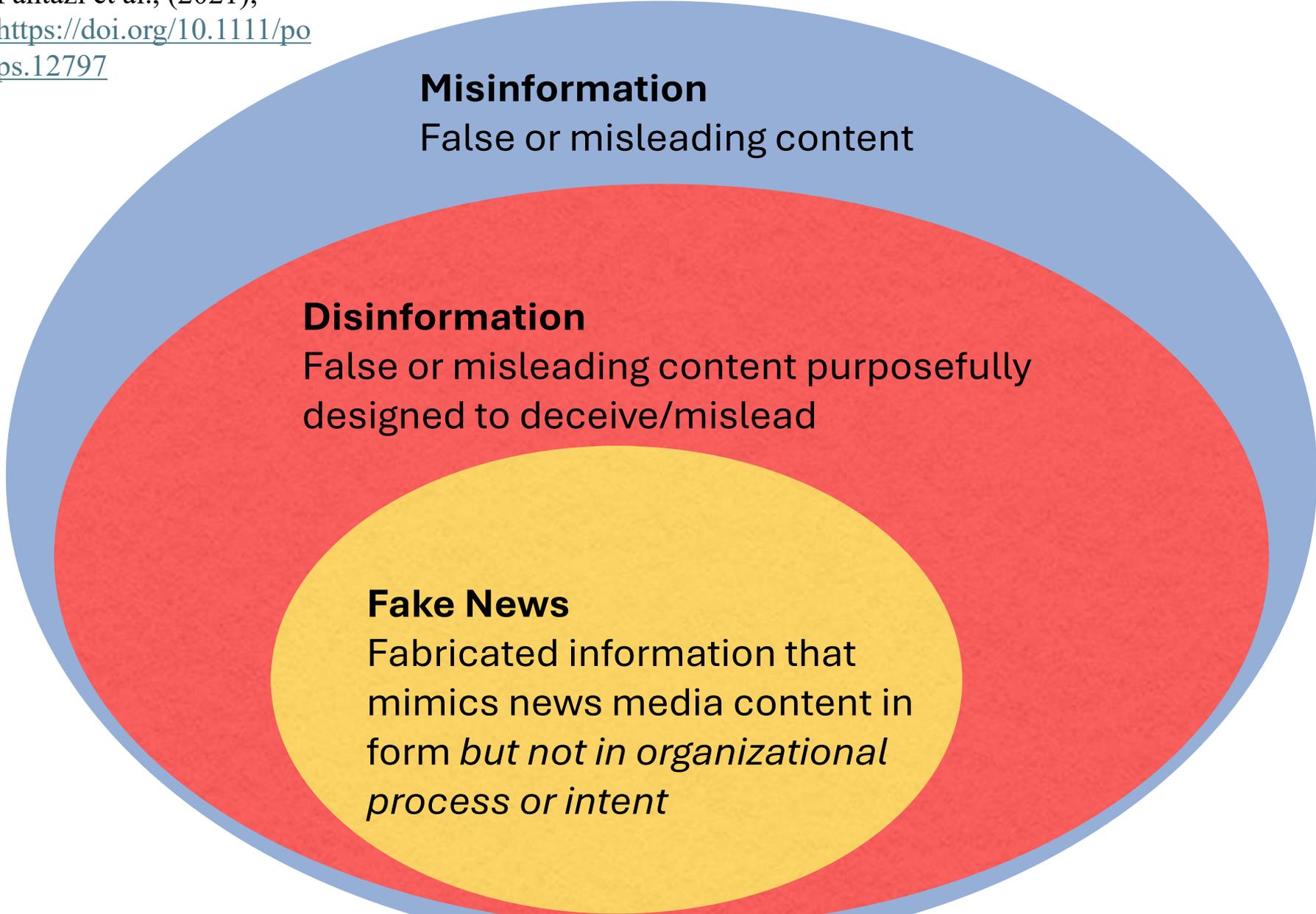
False or misleading content

Disinformation

False or misleading content purposefully
designed to deceive/mislead

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False or misleading content

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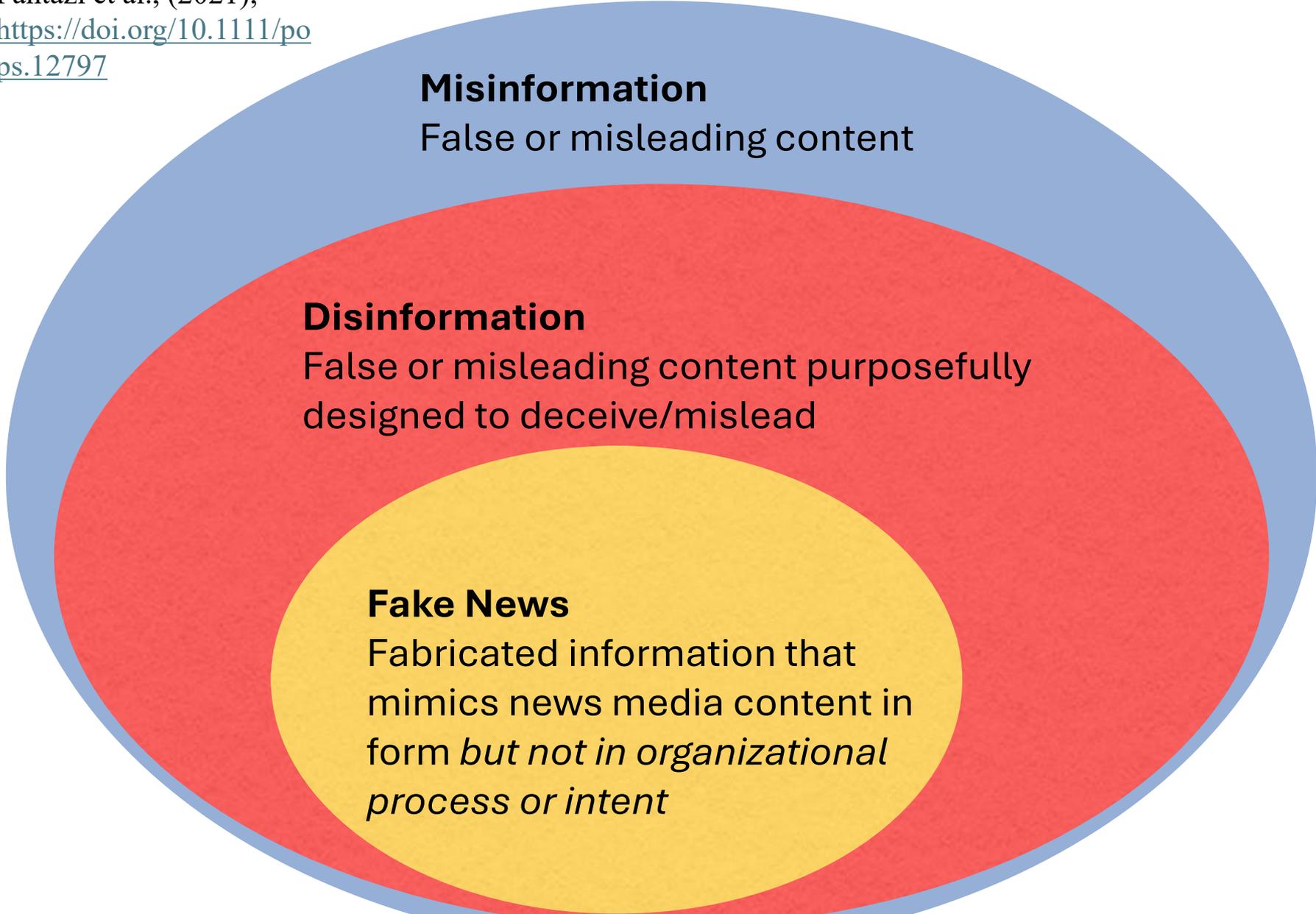
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Fabricated information that mimics news media content in form *but not in organizational process or intent*

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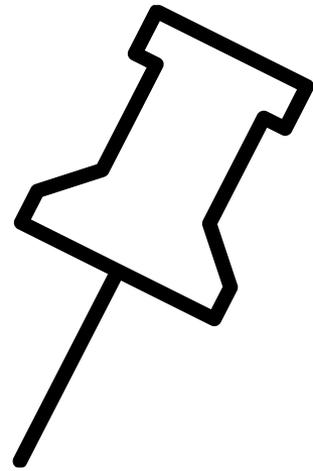
Fake News

Fabricated information that mimics news media content in form *but not in organizational process or intent*

Conspiracy Theories

Event Explanations based on Malevolent intentions of specific (mostly powerful) groups

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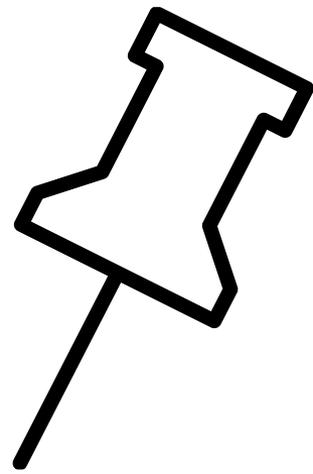
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Are we affected by misinformation?



Are we affected by misinformation?

Yes...

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- We exhibit a truth-bias (Pantazi et al. 2018; 2020)

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- We are influenced by persuasive messages more easily than we can resist (O'Keefe, 2016)

Are we affected by misinformation?

Yes...

- We exhibit a truth-bias (Pantazi et al. 2018; 2020)
- We are influenced by persuasive messages more easily than we can resist (O'Keefe, 2016)
- We tend to be « gullible » (Levine, 2014)

Are we affected by misinformation?

Yes...

...But can't we also be (hyper)skeptical?

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- Anti-vaxers

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- Anti-vaxers
- Conspiracy Theorists

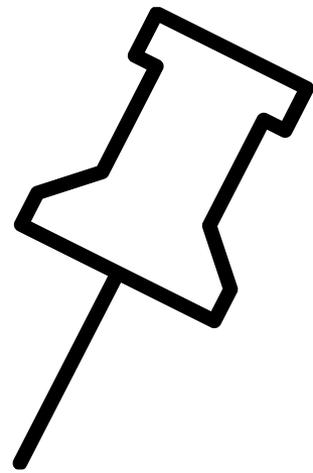
Are we affected by misinformation?

Yes...

...But can't we also be (hyper)skeptical?

- Anti-vaxers
- Conspiracy Theorists
- Socio-political mistrust

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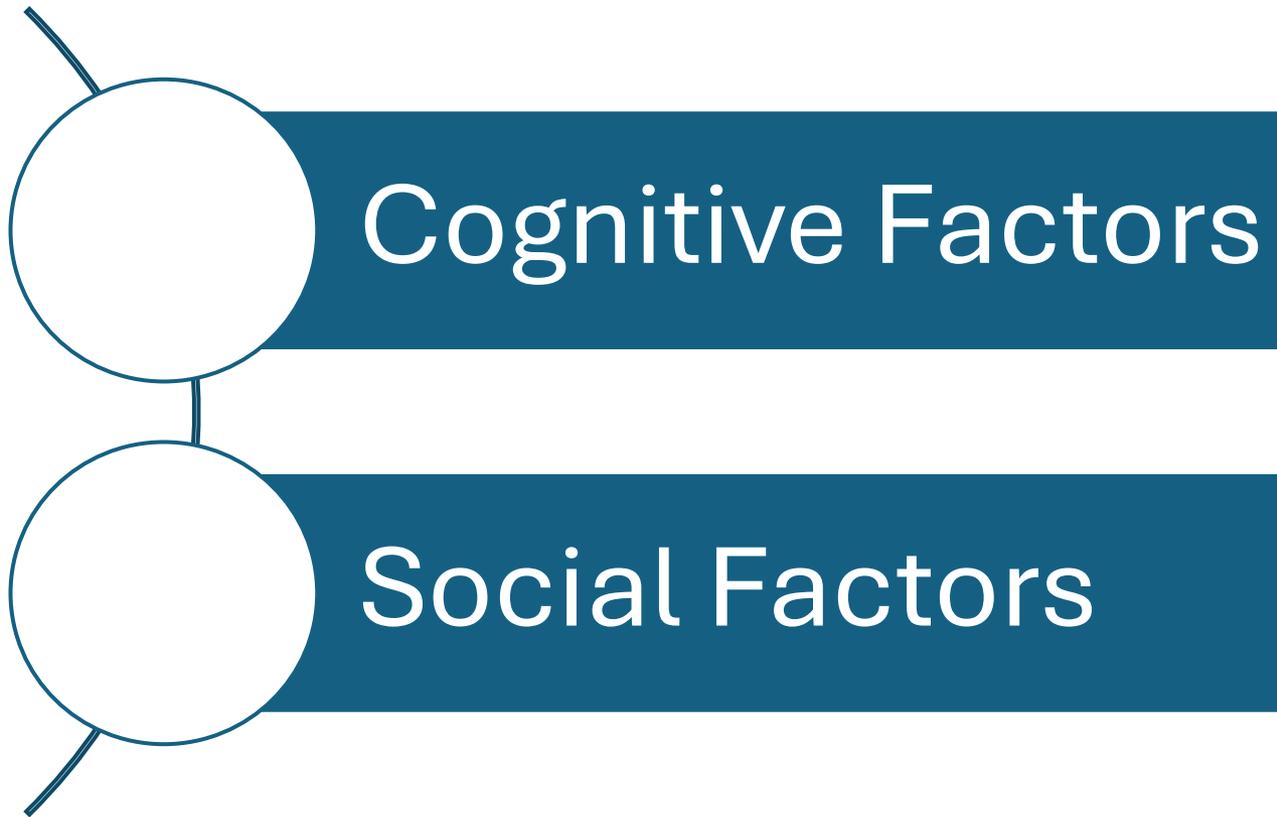
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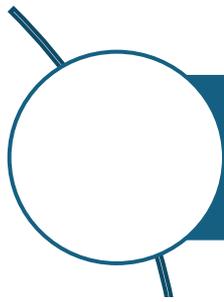
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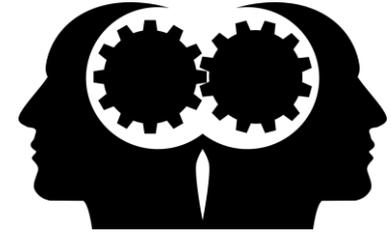
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What factors determine whether we are affected by misinformation?

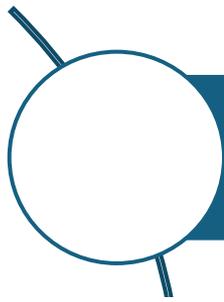




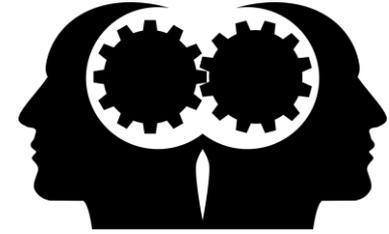
Cognitive Factors



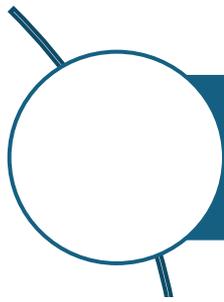
- Truth-bias (Gilbert et al.1993; Pantazi et al., 2018)
We tend to believe informaiton even if it is false



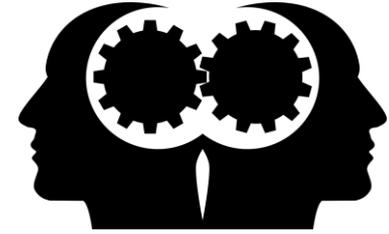
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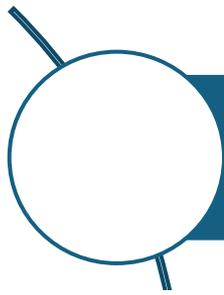
- Meta-cognitive Myopia (Fiedler, 2012)
 - We absorb available information from the environment ignoring relevant “meta-information” (source, accuracy, etc.)
- Truth-bias (Gilbert et al. 1993; Pantazi et al., 2018)
 - We tend to believe information even if it is false



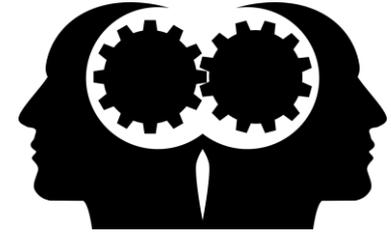
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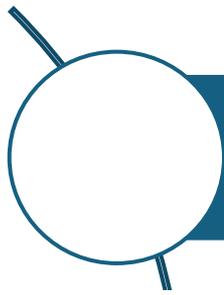
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 - We absorb available information from the environment ignoring relevant “meta-information” (source, accuracy, etc.)
- Truth-bias (Gilbert et al. 1993; Pantazi et al., 2018)
 - We tend to believe information even if it is false
- Illusory truth effect (Dechêne et al., 2010; Pennycook et al., 2018)
 - Repetition increases perceived truthfulness



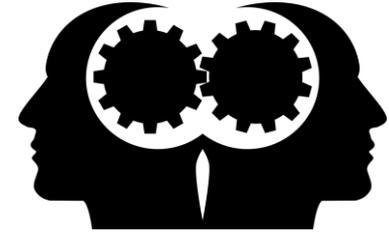
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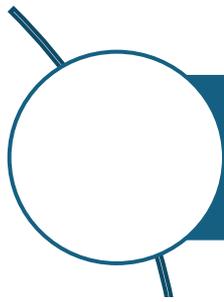
- **Confirmation Bias:** seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998; van Bavel et al., 2024)



Cognitive Factors



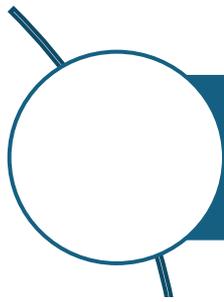
- **Confirmation Bias:** seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998; van Bavel et al., 2024)
- **Analytic Thinking (Cognitive Reflexion Task; Pennycook et al., 2019)**
 - Associated with better misinformation detection



Social Factors



- Motivated reasoning: information processing partial to our desired conclusions (Westen et al. 2006)
Ideologically congruent misinformation more believable than incongruent (Pennycook & Rand, 2019)



Social Factors



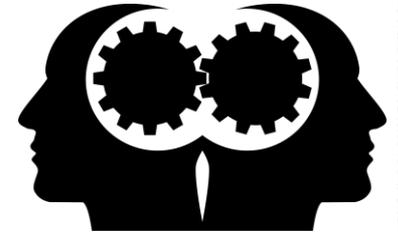
- Motivated reasoning: information processing partial to our desired conclusions (Westen et al. 2006)
Ideologically congruent misinformation more believable than incongruent (Pennycook & Rand, 2019)
- Beliefs part of our Identity (van Bavel et al., 2024)
Social identity motives stronger than accuracy motives

The psychology of misinformation

Social Factors



Cognitive Factors



Scepticism



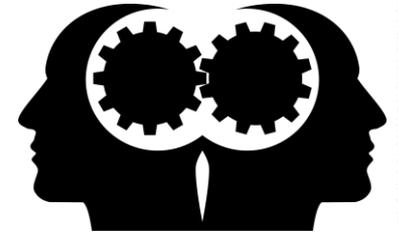
Gullibility

The psychology of misinformation

Social Factors



Cognitive Factors



Scepticism



Gullibility

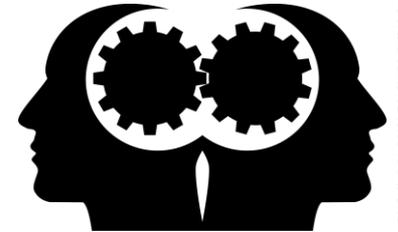


The psychology of misinformation

Social Factors



Cognitive Factors

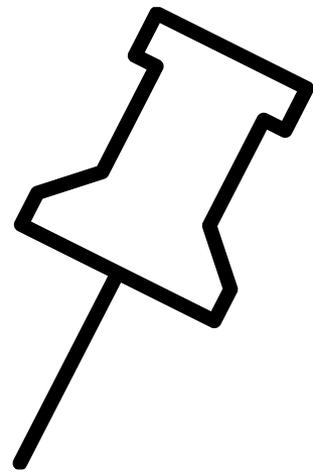


Scepticism



Gullibility

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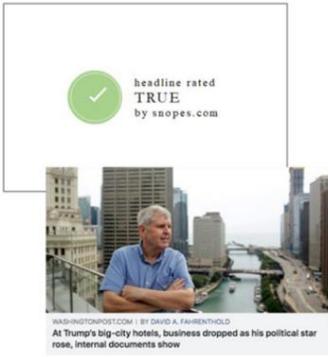
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3 Common Solutions: Correct

Before



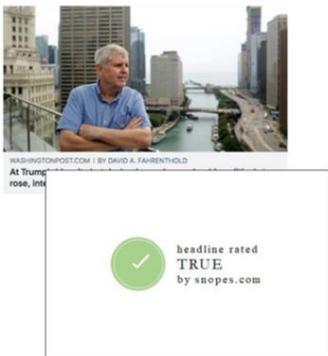
Prebunk

During



Labellisation

After



Debunk

3 Common Solutions: Correct

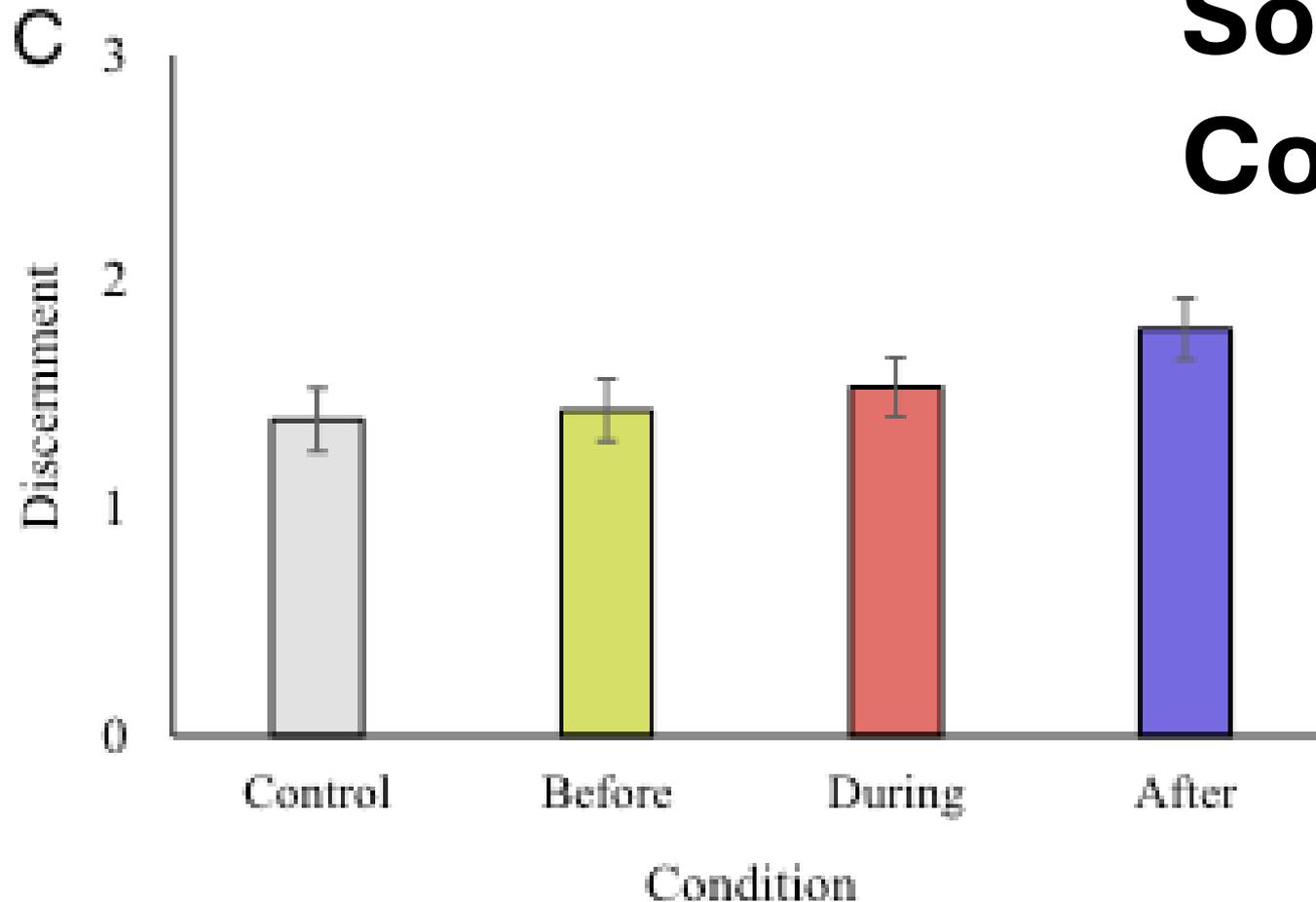
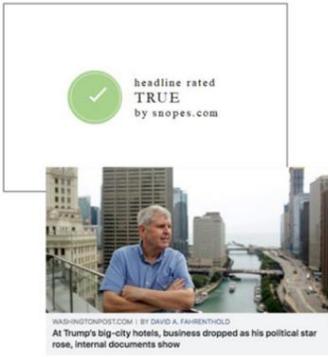


Fig. 2. Distribution of accuracy ratings for false (*A*) and true (*B*) headlines and discernment (*C*) 1 wk after exposure, by treatment. Error bars indicate 95% CIs.

3 Common Solutions: Correct

Before



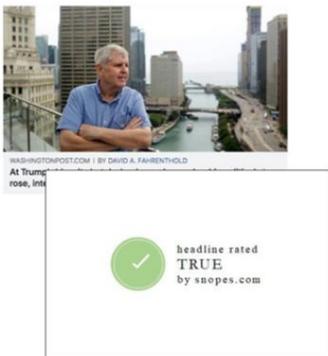
Prebunk

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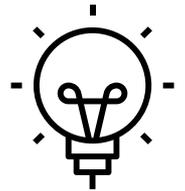
Labellisation

After



Debunk

More creative approaches



Psychological Base

Analytic thinking
increases
discernment
(Pennycook & Rand, 2018)



Solution

Accuracy Nudge

Accuracy nudge

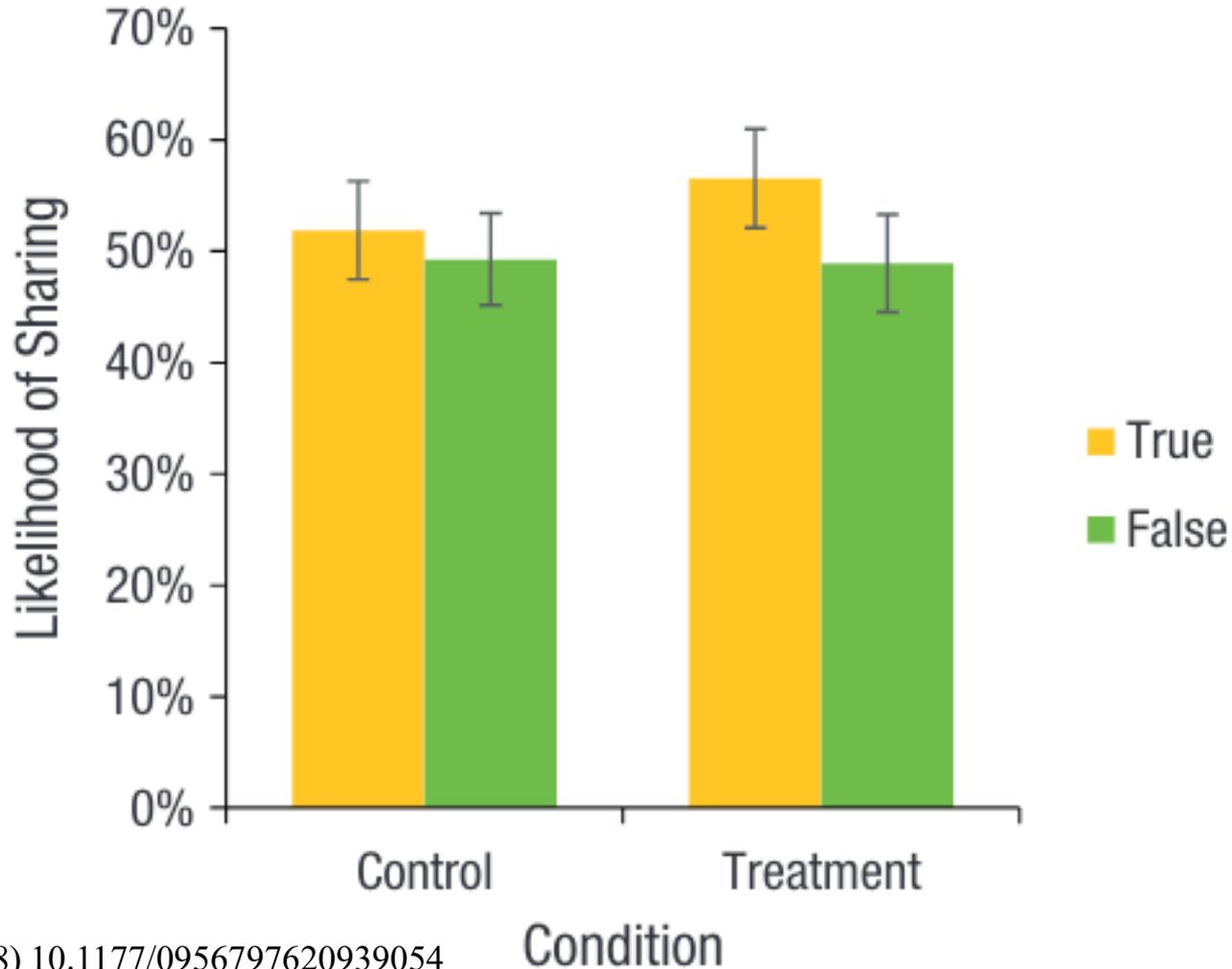
“To the best of your knowledge, is the claim in the above headline accurate?” (yes/no) **X 1**



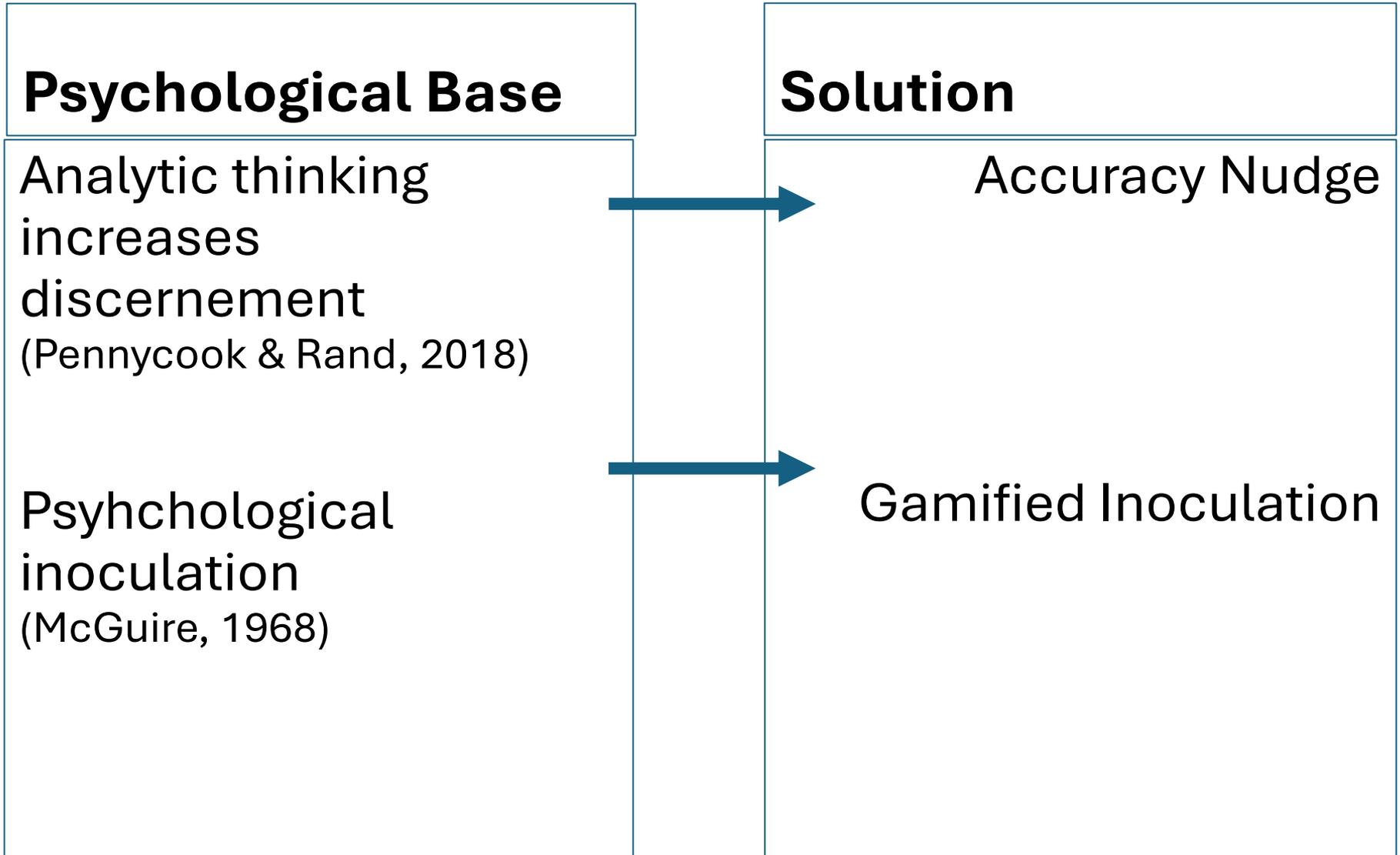
News Sharing behaviour

Accuracy nudge

“To the best of your knowledge, is the claim in the above headline accurate?” (yes/no) X 1



More creative approaches



Inoculation Game



- Bad News:
 - Adopt role of Fake News creator
 - Attract great numbers of followers
 - Maintain a maximum credibility
 - Win 6 Badges -> Misinformation strategies
 - Impersonation
 - Emotionally Provocative Content
 - Group Polarisation
 - Own Conspiracy Theory
 - Discredit Oponents
 - Trolling

Long-Term Effectiveness of Inoculation Against Misinformation: Three Longitudinal Experiments

Rakoen Maertens, Jon Roozenbeek, Melisa Basol, and Sander van der Linden
University of Cambridge

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Good News about Bad News: Gamified Inoculation Boosts Confidence and Cognitive Immunity Against Fake News

Melisa Basol, Jon Roozenbeek and Sander van der Linden

Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, UK

Corresponding author: Sander van der Linden (sander.vanderlinden@psychol.cam.ac.uk)

ARTICLE

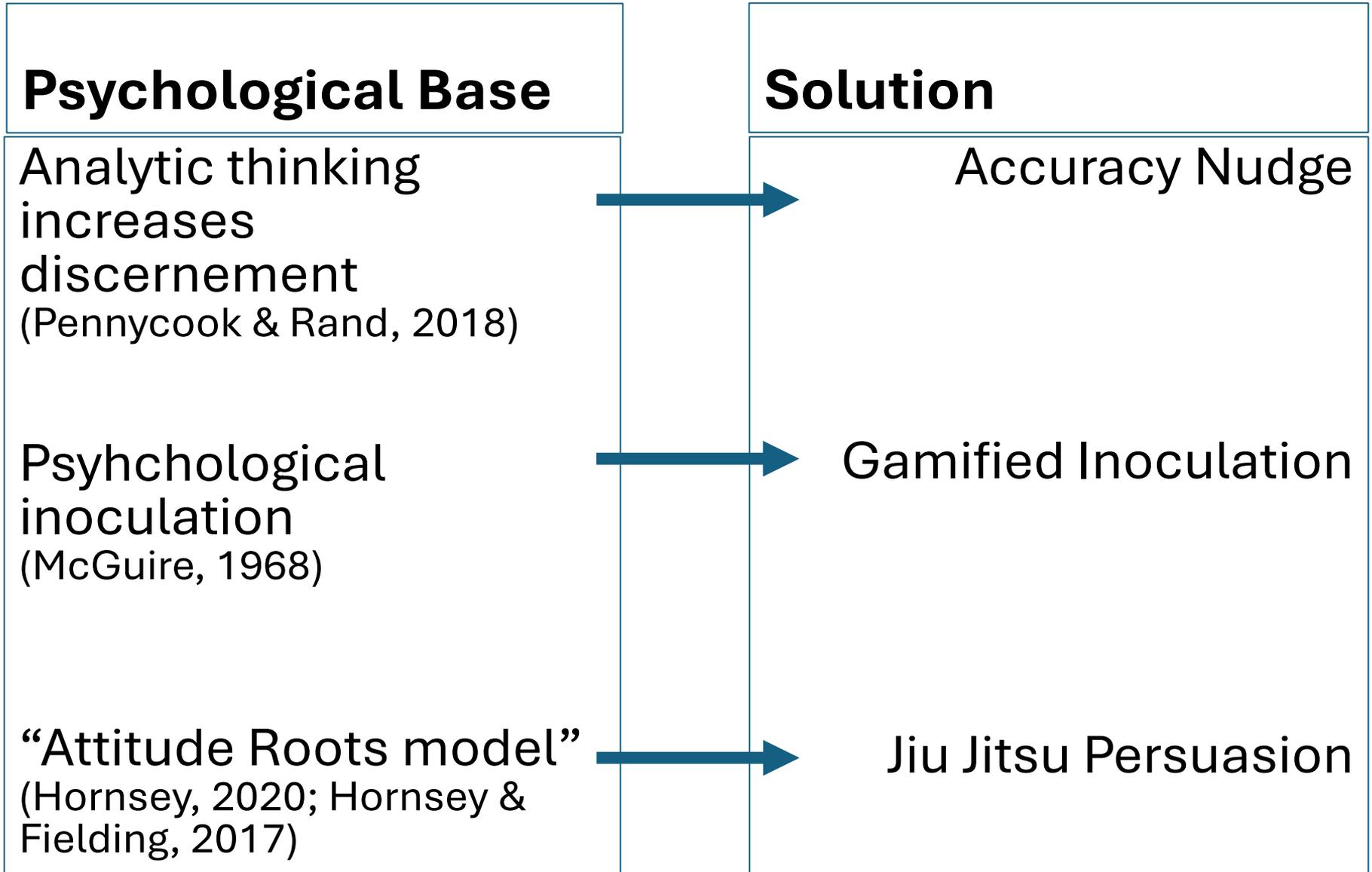
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0279-9>

OPEN

Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation

Jon Roozenbeek¹ & Sander van der Linden²

More creative approaches



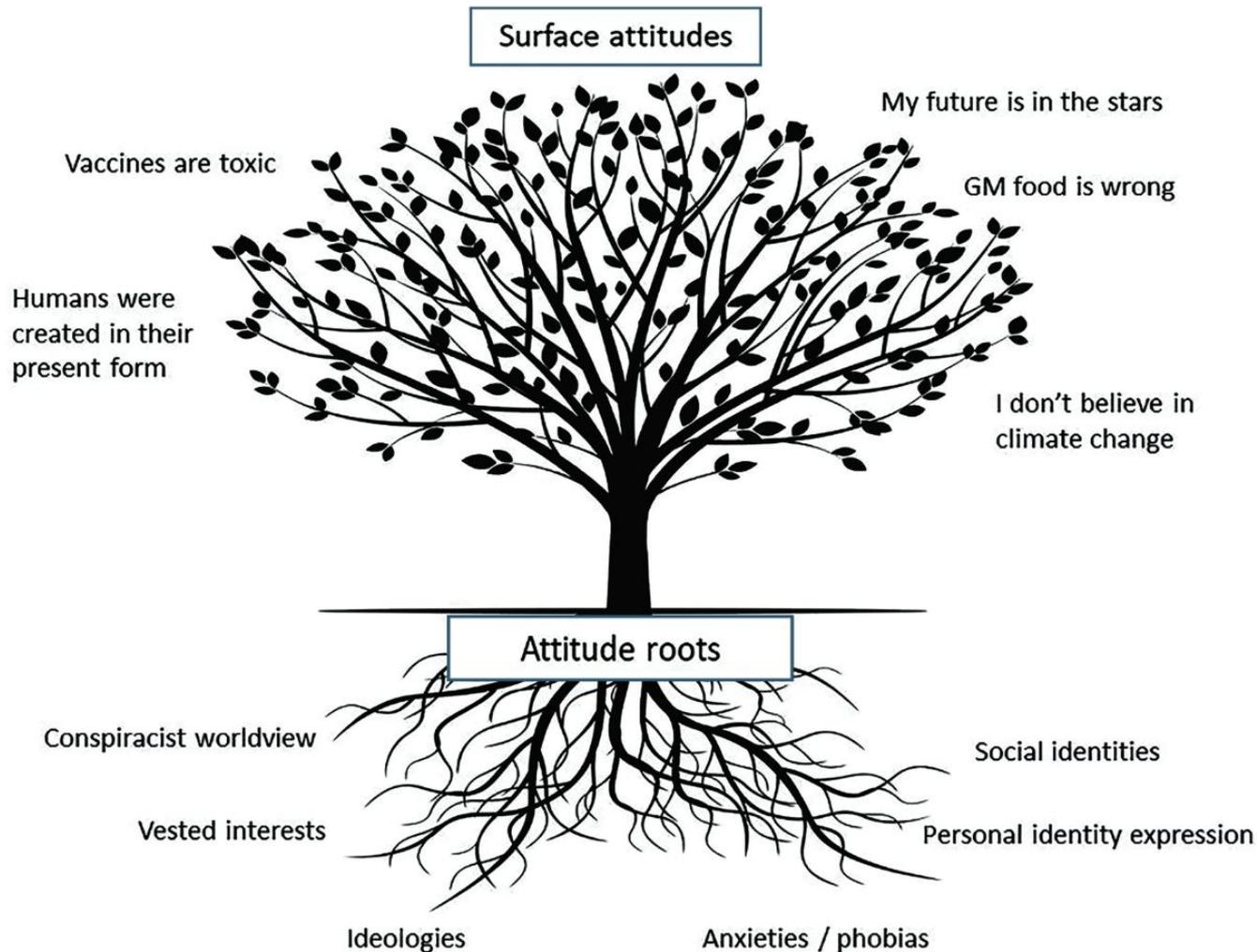
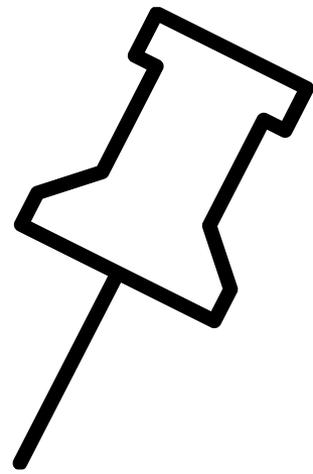


Fig. 2. A model of attitude roots applied to the motivated rejection of science. Everything that lies above the ground is a “surface attitude,” representing the science-skeptical attitude that people articulate. Underground are “attitude roots,” the worldviews, ideologies, identities, and fears that motivate surface attitudes and make them resilient in the face of contradictory evidence. GM = genetically modified.

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REPLICATION

Fighting the Spread of COVID-19 Misinformation in Kyrgyzstan, India, and the United States: How Replicable Are Accuracy Nudge Interventions?

Lyndsay Gavin¹, Jenna McChesney^{1, 2}, Anson Tong^{1, 3}, Joseph Sherlock¹,
Lori Foster^{1, 2, 4}, and Sergiu Tomsa⁵

¹ The Center for Advanced Hindsight, Duke University

² Department of Psychology, North Carolina State University

³ Department of Psychological & Behavioural Science, London School of Economics and Political Science

⁴ School of Management Studies, University of Cape Town

⁵ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia), Geneva, Switzerland



Gamified Inoculation Against Misinformation in India: A Randomized Control Trial

Trisha Harjani ¹, Melisa-Sinem Basol ¹, Jon Roozenbeek ¹, Sander

DNW KORT



Ministry
of Truth



**‘Vaccineren’ tegen
desinformatie?!**

Some Critical Issues...

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Ursula von der Leyen: misinformation is world's gravest problem

BY LAUREL DUGGAN



DAVOS

EUROPEAN UNION

MISINFORMATION

URSULA VON DER LEYEN

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Newsroom JANUARY 16, 2024 - 5:10PM

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen today declared that “misinformation and disinformation” are greater threats to the global business community than war and climate change.

“For the global business community, the top concern for the next two years is not conflict or climate,” she said in her speech at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos. “It is disinformation and misinformation, followed closely by polarisation within our societies.”



Prominent misinformation interventions reduce misperceptions but increase scepticism

Received: 26 May 2023

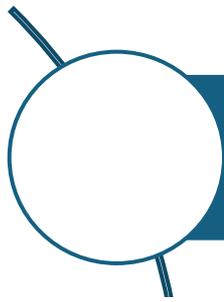
Accepted: 10 April 2024

Published online: 10 June 2024

 Check for updates

Emma Hoes¹ , Brian Aitken², Jingwen Zhang³, Tomasz Gackowski⁴ & Magdalena Wojcieszak³

Current interventions to combat misinformation, including fact-checking, media literacy tips and media coverage of misinformation, may have unintended consequences for democracy. We propose that these interventions may increase scepticism towards all information, including accurate information. Across three online survey experiments in three diverse countries (the United States, Poland and Hong Kong; total $n = 6,127$), we tested the negative spillover effects of existing strategies and compared them with three alternative interventions against misinformation. We examined how exposure to fact-checking, media literacy tips and media



Contextual Factors

- Algorithms & Echo-Chambers (Sunstein, 2001)
- Filter Bubbles (Pariser, 2011)
- Absence of Information Safe-guards (Mair et al., 2019)
- Incentives for emotional content → Emotional content tends to be false (Paschen, 2019)

Autopsy of a metaphor: The origins, use and blind spots of the ‘infodemic’

new media & society

1–22

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Felix M Simon 

University of Oxford, UK

Chico Q Camargo 

University of Oxford, UK; University of Exeter, UK

Abstract

In 2020, the term ‘infodemic’ rose from relative obscurity to becoming a popular catch-all metaphor, representing the perils of fast, wide-spreading (false) information about the coronavirus pandemic. It featured in thousands of academic publications and received widespread attention from policymakers and the media. In this article, we trace the origins and use of the ‘infodemic’ metaphor and examine the blind spots inherent in this seemingly intuitive term. Drawing from literature in the cognitive sciences and communication studies, we show why information does not spread like a virus and point out how the ‘infodemic’ metaphor can be misleading, as it conflates multiple forms of social behaviour, oversimplifies a complex situation and helps constitute a

Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges

Social Media + Society
January-March 2023: 1–13
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DOI: 10.1177/20563051221150412
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Sacha Altay^{1*}, Manon Berriche^{2*} , and Alberto Acerbi³

Abstract

Alarmist narratives about online misinformation continue to gain traction despite evidence that its prevalence and impact are overstated. Drawing on research examining the use of big data in social science and reception studies, we identify six misconceptions about misinformation and highlight the conceptual and methodological challenges they raise. The first set of misconceptions concerns the prevalence and circulation of misinformation. First, scientists focus on social media because it is methodologically convenient, but misinformation is not just a social media problem. Second, the internet is not rife with misinformation or news, but with memes and entertaining content. Third, falsehoods do not spread faster than the truth; how we define (mis)information influences our results and their practical implications. The second set of misconceptions concerns the impact and the reception of misinformation. Fourth, people do not believe everything they see on the internet: the sheer volume of engagement should not be conflated with belief. Fifth, people are more likely to be uninformed than misinformed; surveys overestimate misperceptions and say little about the causal influence of misinformation. Sixth, the influence of misinformation on people's behavior is overblown as misinformation often "preaches to the choir." To appropriately understand and fight misinformation, future research needs to address these challenges.

Misunderstanding the harms of online misinformation

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07417-w>

Received: 13 October 2021

Accepted: 11 April 2024

Published online: 5 June 2024



Check for updates

Ceren Budak¹, Brendan Nyhan², David M. Rothschild^{3✉}, Emily Thorson⁴ & Duncan J. Watts⁵

The controversy over online misinformation and social media has opened a gap between public discourse and scientific research. Public intellectuals and journalists frequently make sweeping claims about the effects of exposure to false content online that are inconsistent with much of the current empirical evidence. Here we identify three common misperceptions: that average exposure to problematic content is high, that algorithms are largely responsible for this exposure and that social media is a primary cause of broader social problems such as polarization. In our review of behavioural science research on online misinformation, we document a pattern of low exposure to false and inflammatory content that is concentrated among a narrow fringe with strong motivations to seek out such information. In response, we recommend holding platforms accountable for facilitating exposure to false and extreme content in the tails of the distribution, where consumption is highest and the risk of real-world harm is greatest. We also call for increased platform transparency, including collaborations with outside researchers, to better evaluate the effects of online misinformation and the most effective responses to it. Taking these steps is especially important outside the USA and Western Europe, where research and data are scant and harms may be more severe.

Take-home

Misinformation can affect us but...

...(Dis)believing determined by several cognitive and social factors

Contemporary psychologically informed approaches –like gamified inoculation or Jiu-Jitsu persuasion– can help but...

..misinformation not sole problem of individuals— systemic issue

We have to remain critical –but not distrustful

Thank you!



m.pantazi@uva.nl

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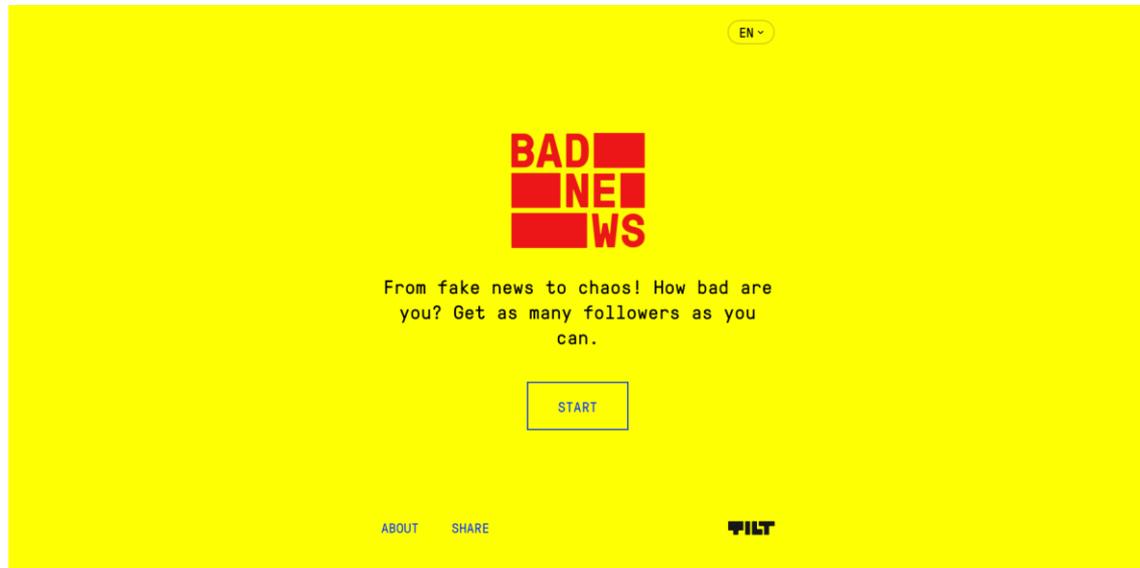
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Discussion

- How confident do you feel concerning your ability to spot and resist misinformation?
- What strategies (if any) do you employ?
- What (if any) new tools have you learnt today that you could use to help yourself or others?

Shall we play?



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