

Appendix 1: Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. “Social media and fake news in the 2016 election.” *Journal of economic perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2017): 211-36.

Appendix 2: Swire, Briony, Adam J. Berinsky, Stephan Lewandowsky, and Ullrich KH Ecker. “Processing political misinformation: Comprehending the Trump phenomenon.” *Royal Society open science* 4, no. 3 (2017): 160802.

Appendix 3: Guess, Andrew M., Michael Lerner, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, Jason Reifler, and Neelanjan Sircar. “A digital media literacy intervention increases discernment between mainstream and false news in the United States and India.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 27 (2020): 15536-15545.

OBS: Only two-person exams should use all three appendices. One-person exams should only use appendices 1 and 2.

Introduction

The Internet age, which at first was associated with a great deal of optimism, in more recent times might be better characterized by pessimism on the part of scholars, policymakers, and the public alike. Of particular concern to many has been the decentralization of information dissemination, which has challenged the role of trained journalists as the primary gatekeeper of news and helped usher in a new era of “fake news”. Understanding the scale of the problem at hand, its drivers, and potential remedies is critical amidst claims of widespread misperceptions among the public and allegations that misinformation has had deleterious consequences for election outcomes and, more generally, for democracy.

In this exam, you will be asked to analyze the following overall question: Which individual- and structural-level factors lead to the dissemination – and the acceptance – of factually inaccurate information?

In answering the overall question, please pay attention to the following issues.

Task 1. In connecting the information from the appendices with course material, please describe how:

- a. Structural-level factors might influence the dissemination and acceptance of factually inaccurate information.
- b. Individual-level factors might influence the dissemination and acceptance of factually inaccurate information.

Task 2. Based on the appendices and the course material only, analyze:

- a. The quality of the samples used in the studies.
- b. The validity and reliability of the measures of belief in news or its veracity across the three studies.

Task 3. Based on the Appendices and the course material only,

- a. Evaluate the empirical evidence presented in the studies for the causes of the dissemination and acceptance of factually inaccurate information, i.e., provide a substantive interpretation of the results in light of the theories.
- b. Assess whether the findings have causal interpretations.
- c. Conclude on what the cumulative evidence tells you about the causes of dissemination of and belief in factually inaccurate information.

Task 4. Drawing on the appendices and the course material, propose **one** change in news media practices and an argument for how it could affect the dissemination of and belief in factually inaccurate information. Your proposed change and argument should be original; that is, you should go beyond simply repeating a change and argument proposed by a scholar and/or recapped in lecture.

Task 5. Based on the appendices and the course material only,

- a. Briefly describe your own proposal for a research design to test the argument above, which could be applied in reality, and including a brief discussion of what analyses you would conduct to evaluate that argument;
- b. Motivate your suggestion by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of your research design.

Task 6. On the basis of the individual tasks and associated material, discuss whether and how beliefs in factually inaccurate information might matter for democratic outcomes? Consider explicitly the studies' methodological limitations.