

The Union College Psychology Department Speaker Series and Honors Colloquium welcome

Gordon Pennycook, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Hill/Levine Schools of Business, University of Regina

for a public lecture entitled

Simple Accuracy Nudges Can Reduce Misinformation Sharing

Thursday, October 15, 2020

1:10 - 2:25 via Zoom (ID: 832 634 7213)

Why do people share false and misleading news content on social media, and what can be done about it? Even though true headlines are rated as much more accurate than false headlines, headline veracity has little impact on sharing. Although this may seem to indicate that people share inaccurate content because, for example, they care more about furthering their political agenda than they care about truth, we propose an alternative attentional account: Most people do not want to spread misinformation, but the social media context focuses their attention on factors other than truth and accuracy. Indeed, when directly asked, most participants say it is important to only share news that is accurate. Accordingly, we find that subtly inducing people to think about accuracy increases the quality of the news they subsequently share. These results, together with recent data on why people fall for fake news, challenge the narrative that people no longer care about accuracy. Instead, the findings support an inattention-based account wherein people fail to implement their preference for accuracy due to attentional constraints – particularly on social media. Furthermore, our research provides evidence for scalable anti-misinformation interventions that are easily implementable by social media platforms.



Dr. Gordon Pennycook is an Assistant Professor at University of Regina's Hill/Levene Schools of Business. His research focus is on reasoning and decision-making, broadly defined, and he investigates the distinction between intuitive processes (“gut feelings”) and more deliberative (“analytic”) reasoning processes. His research has spanned numerous topics, including religious belief, sleep paralysis, morality, creativity, smartphone use, health beliefs, science communication, pseudo-profound bullshit, delusional ideation, fake news, misinformation, political ideology, and science beliefs. His research sits at the intersection of cognitive and social psychology and most recently he has gotten interested in the use of social media data for social science (both correlational and experimental). He obtained his B.A. in Psychology in 2009 from the University of Saskatchewan and his PhD in Cognitive Psychology in 2016 at the University of Waterloo. Prior to starting at the University Regina in 2018, he held a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship at Yale University. Gordon received the University of Waterloo Arts Alumni Gold Medal and the Governor General’s Gold Medal. He was named Poynter Institute’s International Fact-Checking Network “Researcher of the Year” (along with David Rand) in 2017 and was awarded the Vincent Di Lollo Early Career Achievement Award from the Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour, and Cognitive Science in 2020. He was also recently elected to the Royal Society of Canada’s College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists. He has published over 65 peer-reviewed articles, including in journals such as Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, Nature Human Behavior, Psychological Science, Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, Management Science, Cognitive Psychology, and Cognition.