FAKE NEWS AND MISINFORMATION IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA (HSS 404 107 *)

Instructor
Andres Crespo

Email
acrespo@njit.edu

Meeting Location
CKB 206

Class Time
Wednesdays
6:00 – 8:50 PM

COURSE OVERVIEW

How do we know whether something is true or not? By examining real-life events, this seminar will explore the psychological underpinnings behind fake news and misinformation in the "post-truth" era. To do that, we will first look briefly at the historical developments of these phenomena, define them, and understand their unprecedented proliferation within the contemporary media landscape. Our seminar will also consider different cutting-edge approaches to combat misperception. This will help you develop the necessary tools to successfully identify, measure, diagnose, and respond to false information.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ♦ Define key concepts such as "fake news," "synthetic media," and "disinformation."
- ♦ Identify the psychological factors behind false or misleading information
- ♦ Evaluate and apply different approaches to combat misinformation
- ♦ Demonstrate media and information literacy
- ♦ Develop effective collaborative habits by working closely with others.

*"Prerequisites: ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite. Restrictions: Registration requires senior standing."

COURSE MATERIALS

This course does not require books. Each article from the course outline includes a hyperlink for access. (You need your UCID and password to access materials linked to the NJIT databases; otherwise, find them with a search engine.)

ASSIGNMENT & ASSESSMENT

Attendance and Participation (of any kind)	20%
Fake News or Bias Exercise	10%
Exams	20%
First Draft Case Study	10%
Group Presentation	15%
Final Draft Case Study	25%

NOTE: All exams are open-book and centrally focus on the overarching parts of the readings in question (e.g., their hypotheses, concepts, and approaches), along with how the materials may or may not connect with one another, to test your understanding and knowledge of them. This can come in a range of ways, from a brief one-page response to multiple-choice questions or a combination of both. Any make-up exam (i.e., for Dean-approved excuses) takes place during office hours.

GRADES

A = 94 – 100   B+ = 87 – 93   B = 81 – 86   C+ = 76 – 80   C = 70 – 75

D = 65 – 69   F = 0 – 64

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

I do not accept emailed assignments. Late assignments receive a 10% late penalty for each day they are late; after 3 days, I do not accept the assignment. However, documented emergencies, accommodations, and unprecedented personal circumstances are exceptions to this rule once the Dean of Students (https://www.njit.edu/dos/contact.php) approves them.

The threshold for plagiarism is 20%; anything beyond that will not be accepted unless it comes from citations.

ENGAGEMENT

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are Mondays and Thursdays from 12:55 to 2:25 pm in Cullimore 419. If you prefer to meet remotely, please let me know.

ATTENDANCE

Unexcused Absences: You may have up to 4 unexcused absences. Anything beyond that would be grounds for failure. This will impact on the overall grade.

Excused Absences: If you are absent at any point in the semester for a legitimate reason, you need to first contact the Dean of Students. If they approve the absence, I will receive an official response from them.

PARTICIPATION

This course hinges on the exchange of ideas. Thus, I expect you to read the materials thoughtfully and carefully, so that you can draw connections among them and/or apply their ideas to new contexts.

AI CHATBOTS

When using AI chatbots for assistance (e.g., research, brainstorming, etc.), you must quote any borrowed material and include a disclaimer at the end, documenting how the tool aided you in the writing process. Remember that prompting the tool to simply generate content for submission counts as plagiarism.

NJIT CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

"Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu"

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors both onsite and online. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. To make an appointment, please visit https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following course outline is tentative and subject to change.

Week 1
Sep. 3

INTRODUCTION

Syllabus, Ice breakers

Week 2

PART 1: DEFINING AND CONTEXTUALIZING MISPERCEPTION BELIEF

Sep. 10

Humbugs, Hoaxes, Fake News, and More

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 9/9</mark>

- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., Cook, J., van der Linden, S., Roozenbeek, J., Oreskes, N., & McIntyre, L. C. (2024). Liars know they are lying: differentiating disinformation from disagreement. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1), 986. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6

- Baptista, J. P., & Gradim, A. (2022). A Working Definition of Fake News. *Encyclopedia*, *2*(1), 632–645. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2010043

- Thompson, S. A. (2024, August 7). What Do Conspiracy Theorists Do When Proved Wrong? Double Down or Move On. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/07/technology/biden-conspiracy-theories-misinformation.html

Week 3
Sep. 17

Historical Perspectives

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 9/16</mark>

- Gorbach, J. (2018). Not Your Grandpa's Hoax: A Comparative History of Fake News. *American Journalism*, *35*(2), 236–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2018.1457915

- Burkhardt, Joanna M. "Chapter 1. History of Fake News." *Library Technology Reports* 53, no. 8 (November 16, 2017): 5–9. https://journals.ala.org/index.php/ltr/article/view/6497.

- Video media – **during class**

Week 4
Sep. 24

The 1950s "blueprint for science denial"

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 9/23</mark>

- Brandt, Allan M. "Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics." *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 1 (January 2012): 63–71. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300292.

- Fake News. "Fake News: Conspiring to Fight Science." Accessed January 4, 2023. https://dsp.domains.trincoll.edu/fake-news/fake-news/conspiring-to-fight-science.

- Bero, Lisa A. "Tobacco Industry Manipulation of Research." *Public Health Reports* 120, no. 2 (2005): 200–208. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1497700/.

Week 5
Oct. 1

Algorithms, Artificial Intelligence, and Social Media

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 9/30</mark>

- Chapter 6: "The New Members: How Computers Are Different from Printing Presses" from *Nexus* by Yuval Noah Harari (See Canvas)

Week 6
Oct. 8

PART 2: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FALSE BELIEFS

The Role of "Repetition" in Misperception Belief

Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/7

- Fazio, Lisa K., this link will open in a new window Link to external site, Raunak M. Pillai, and Deep Patel. "The Effects of Repetition on Belief in Naturalistic Settings." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 151, no. 10 (October 2022): 2604–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001211.

- Lyons, Benjamin A., Jacob M. Montgomery, Andrew M. Guess, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 23 (June 8, 2021): e2019527118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019527118.

- *28 myths of modern life exposed*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 27, 2024, from https://www.sciencefocus.com/science/28-myths-of-modern-life-exposed

Week 7
Oct. 15

Who misperceives? Who is misperceived?

Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/14

- Ecker, Ullrich K. H., Stephan Lewandowsky, John Cook, Philipp Schmid, Lisa K. Fazio, Nadia Brashier, Panayiota Kendeou, Emily K. Vraga, and Michelle A. Amazeen. "The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction." *Nature Reviews Psychology* 1, no. 1 (January 2022): 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y.

- Rudloff, J. P., & Appel, M. (2023). When truthiness trumps truth: Epistemic beliefs predict the accurate discernment of fake news. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, *12*(3), 344–351. https://doi.org/10.1037/mac0000070

- *Source -- missing*

Week 8
Oct. 22

Bias in information exposure and processing

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/21</mark>

<mark>Fake News or Bias Exercise due 10/22</mark>

- Fazio, Lisa K., Nadia M. Brashier, B. Keith Payne, and Elizabeth J. Marsh. "Knowledge Does Not Protect against Illusory Truth." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 144, no. 5 (October 2015): 993–1002. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000098.

- Derreumaux, Yrian, this link will open in a new window Link to external site, Robin Bergh, this link will open in a new window Link to external site, and Brent L. Hughes. "Partisan-Motivated Sampling: Re-Examining Politically Motivated Reasoning across the Information Processing Stream." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 123, no. 2 (August 2022): 316–36. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000375.

- BBC News. (2022, January 6). *What QAnon followers believe now - BBC News*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzsiDRP5gXc

Week 9
Oct. 29

Exam Week (No readings/postings this week)

<mark>Midterm Exam due 10/29</mark>

Week 10
Nov. 5

PART 3: HOW TO COMBAT MISPERCEPTION BELIEF

Applying the "Inoculation Theory" to Misinformation

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 11/4</mark>

- Inoculation Science. "Inoculation Science - Video Resources - Truth Labs for Education." Accessed January 9, 2023. https://inoculation.science/inoculation-videos/.

- MediaWise. *Media Literacy Masterclass with MediaWise Campus Correspondents*, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cdx5zz5Dtr8.

- https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/tactics-of-disinformation_508.pdf

Week 11
Nov. 12

Experiments and Approaches

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 11/11</mark>

- Roozenbeek, Jon, and Sander van der Linden. "How to Combat Health Misinformation: A Psychological Approach." *American Journal of Health Promotion* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2022): 569–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/08901171211070958.

- Chan, Man-pui Sally, Christopher R. Jones, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Dolores Albarracín. "Debunking: A Meta-Analysis of the Psychological Efficacy of Messages Countering Misinformation." *Psychological Science* 28, no. 11 (2017): 1531–46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26957332.

- Grant, Nico, and Tiffany Hsu. "Google Finds 'Inoculating' People Against Misinformation Helps Blunt Its Power." *The New York Times*, August 24, 2022, sec. Technology. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/technology/google-search-misinformation.html.

Week 12
Nov. 19

Application: QAnon

<mark>Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 11/18</mark>

<mark>Group Presentations begin 11/19</mark>

- Marwick, A. E., & Partin, W. C. (2024). Constructing alternative facts: Populist expertise and the QAnon conspiracy. *New Media & Society*, *26*(5), 2535–2555. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221090201

- Holoyda, Brian J. "QAnon: A Modern Conspiracy Theory and the Assessment of Its Believers." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, January 25, 2022. https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.210053-21.

- Reuters. "Fact Check: No Evidence to Support QAnon Claims of Mass Arrests, Military Takeover, Illegitimacy of Biden's Presidency or Trump's Return to Power," January 22, 2021, sec. 2020 Candidate Slideshows. https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-qanon-military-theories-idUSKBN29R1ZA.

Week 13
Nov. 26

Friday Classes Meet

Week 14
Dec. 3

Application: "the Ukraine and Iraq War"

Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 12/2

First Draft Case Study Due 11/30

- Opsal. (2022). Comparative analysis of western and Russian news framing of the Ukraine and Iraq war. uis.

- Uluşan, O., & Özejder, İ. (2024). Faking the war: fake posts on Turkish social media during the Russia–Ukraine war. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03409-3

Week 15
Dec. 10

Application: TBD

Post a question & comment for in-class discussion due 12/9

Final Project (Final Draft) Due 12/10

Final Exam due 12/10