

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants**

Consent Form Version Date: ___ 8/19/21 ___

IRB Study # 21-2213

Title of Study: Understanding Ideological Asymmetry and Information Credibility in Personalized Information Environments

Principal Investigator: Deen Freelon

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Funding Source and/or Sponsor: John S and James L Knight Foundation

The purpose of this research study is to understand the ideological (left/right) and information quality content of participants' Twitter feeds. This will help us understand how much low-quality content (such as misinformation and false news) exists on Twitter, how it spreads, and who is most at risk of consuming it.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask about your demographic background, political views, and media consumption habits. You will then be asked to grant our Twitter app permission to access your Twitter feed. Our app will extract hyperlinks from tweets posted by users you follow. No personally identifying information (full name, Twitter username, birthdate, etc.) will be extracted. We will offer you the opportunity to complete additional followup surveys in the coming months, which are optional.

The risks involved in this study are minimal. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue reading below.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may choose not to participate, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information

so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to understand the ideological (left/right) and information quality content of participants' Twitter feeds.

Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?

You should not be in this study if you do not possess an active Twitter account, are younger than 18 years old, or are not a US citizen.

How many people will take part in this study?

Approximately 1,000 people will take part in this study.

How long will your part in this study last?

It will take about 15 minutes to complete the survey and grant our app access privileges to your Twitter feed. Over the next year, completing all followup surveys should take no more than 30 minutes total. Thus, your entire time commitment will be less than 45 minutes over the course of a year.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

Your part in this study will last approximately 45 minutes. During this study, you will complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask about your demographic background, political views, and media consumption habits. You will then be asked to grant our Twitter app permission to access your Twitter feed. Our app will extract hyperlinks from tweets posted by users you follow. No personally identifying information (full name, Twitter username, birthdate, etc.) will be extracted. We will offer you the opportunity to complete additional followup surveys in the coming months, which are optional.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. The benefits to you from being in this study may be: after granting feed access permissions to our app, you will have the option of viewing your own personalized chart that displays the web domains found in your feed. The domains are arrayed along two axes, with the horizontal representing left/right political alignment; and the vertical representing information quality. Each domain is represented by a bubble, whose size indicates its prevalence in your feed. Your chart will be updated on a regular basis and will change if you return later to view it. We hope your chart will give you insight into the political and information quality balance of your feed, and perhaps even inspire you to reduce the amount of low-quality hyperlinks within it.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

We anticipate few risks in this study. However, at a quantitative level, it is likely that the

information quality metric will not be evenly distributed across the ideology metric. For example, it may turn out that conservatives are exposed to more mis/disinformation than liberals (previous research has suggested as much, see Grinberg et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2019). The opposite is also possible. We feel such results are critically important to know from a mis/disinformation mitigation standpoint and do not plan on taking any specific measures to mitigate any potential consequences that may emanate from them. We believe the potential for such harm is drastically outweighed by the harm of the mis/disinformation itself.

We are relying on a third-party research firm, Dynata, to recruit and compensate all subjects. As a result, the UNC research team will not come into contact with any personally identifiable information (real names, social media screen names, etc.). As the firm we work with has extensive experience handling such confidential data, we expect the breach risk to be minimal.

References

Grinberg, N., Joseph, K., Friedland, L., Swire-Thompson, B., & Lazer, D. (2019). Fake news on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Science*, 363(6425), 374–378.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aau2706>

Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1), eaau4586.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>

What if we learn about new findings or information during the study?

You will be given any new information gained during the course of the study that might affect your willingness to continue your participation.

How will information about you be protected?

The UNC research team will not store any of your personally identifiable information. We will store your survey and web domain information using a unique, anonymous string of characters. Dynata, our research partner, will maintain your name and contact information for compensation purposes and will not share this information with the UNC research team.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. We may use de-identified data and/or specimens from this study in future research without additional consent.

Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or

government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety.

What will happen if you are injured by this research?

All research involves a chance that something bad might happen to you. If you are hurt, become sick, or develop a reaction from something that was done as part of this study, the researcher will help you get medical care, but the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has not set aside funds to pay you for any such injuries, illnesses or reactions, or for the related medical care. Any costs for medical expenses will be billed to you or your insurance company. You may be responsible for any co-payments and your insurance may not cover the costs of study related injuries.

If you think you have been injured from taking part in this study, call the Principal Investigator at the phone number provided on this consent form. They will let you know what you should do.

By signing this form, you do not give up your right to seek payment or other rights if you are harmed as a result of being in this study.

What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete?

You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped. Instructions on how to revoke our app's access to your Twitter feed are available here.

If you withdraw or are withdrawn from this study all data collected up until the point of withdrawal will be retained, however no additional information will be collected unless you provide additional written permission for further data collection at the time of your withdrawal.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will receive \$1 for starting this study, and an additional \$4 upon completing it. Compensation may take a variety of forms, including cash, depending upon how you were recruited to participate in this study. Any payment provided for participation in this study may be subject to applicable tax withholding obligations

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

Who is sponsoring this study?

This research is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. This means that the research team is being paid by the sponsor for doing the study. The researchers do not, however, have a direct financial interest with the sponsor or in the final results of the study.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions about the study (including payments), complaints, concerns, or if a research-related injury occurs, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Signature of Witness if applicable; e.g. literacy issues,
visually impaired, physically unable to sign, witness/interpreter for
non-English speaking participants using the short form)

Date

Printed Name of Witness