

# Who falls for fake news and scams and why?

Joe Crescente

13 September 2021

So, who fall for scams and fake news  
most of all?



Why do you think they do?



Are older people more susceptible?



If you think so, then why?

# Honestly there is no consensus

- I can point to research that suggests that older people are more likely to fall for scams and fake news
- But I can also find the opposite
- Let's take a look at the opposite because it goes against our expectations

# The New York Times

## The Young Fall for Scams More Than Seniors Do. Time for a Warning.

Stop it with the ageism and delusions of invincibility. Young adults often don't recognize the bad checks coming at them, or fake job offers, either.

# Ron Lieber, financial columnist at the New York Times

- If you're a digital native and consider yourself immune to all scams, the thieves have you right where they want you

# Ron Lieber, financial columnist at the New York Times

- For years now, the Better Business Bureau's survey research has shown that younger adults lose money to swindlers much more often than the older people you may think of as the stereotypical victims
- The Federal Trade Commission that 44% of people ages 20 to 29 losing money to fraud, more than double the 20% of people ages 70 to 79

How are these thieves successful against young people?

- Vary their strategies: No wild schemes involving Nigerian princes
- Instead they focus on debts, shopping, and jobs

How are these thieves successful against young people?

- In other words, thieves don't use a one-size-fits-all strategy
- They approach younger people with things that are important to them

# The main strategies



# Thieves try to look like big ticket retailers like Amazon

- Real Amazon sites have a dot before amazon.com in the URL
- If you get a message saying you need to update your payment method, always go directly to the Amazon site on your own to see if it's true — not through a link in the message
- The company doesn't send links that have strings of jumbled numbers in them

# Employment scams

- Grifters focus on offering bogus jobs that are particularly attractive to young adults
- They often ask for personal information to commit identity fraud
- 32% of those who experienced employment scams encountered them after originally visiting a legitimate job site

# Indeed's Job Search Do's

- **Look for verifiable company email addresses**
- **Watch closely for email addresses with misspelled or “spoofed” company names**
- **Be cautious when pursuing positions with salaries, perks and flexibility that seem too good to be true**
- **Insist on an in-person or video interview**

# What to do?

- Lieber says more awareness of the problem is not enough
- Young adults could stand to slow down a bit: be patient. Thieves prey on your inattention.
- And remember that scammers succeed more often with the stressed and the lonely. If you are either, stay wary.

Is it an issue of overconfidence?



A lot of recent academic research  
seems to think so



# Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

- Published April 2021
- Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA
- A team of researchers from the University of Utah, Princeton University, Washington University, Dartmouth College, and others

# Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

Although Americans believe the confusion caused by false news is extensive, relatively few indicate having seen or shared it—a discrepancy suggesting that members of the public may not only have a hard time identifying false news but fail to recognize their own deficiencies at doing so

# Overconfidence in News Judgments

## Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

If people incorrectly see themselves as highly skilled at identifying false news, they may unwittingly participate in its circulation...not only is overconfidence extensive, but it is also linked to both self-reported and behavioral measures of false news website visits, engagement, and belief...overconfidence may be a crucial factor for explaining how false and low-quality information spreads via social media.

# Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

Three in four Americans overestimate their relative ability to distinguish between legitimate and false news headlines; respondents place themselves 22 percentiles higher than warranted on average. This overconfidence is, in turn, correlated with consequential differences in real-world beliefs and behavior...

# Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

...overconfident individuals are more likely to visit untrustworthy websites in behavioral data; to fail to successfully distinguish between true and false claims about current events in survey questions; and to report greater willingness to like or share false content on social media, especially when it conforms to their beliefs.

# Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility

These results paint a worrying picture: The individuals who are least equipped to identify false news content are also the least aware of their own limitations and, therefore, more susceptible to believing it and spreading it further.

This stems from overconfidence bias

- What do you think that is?

# Overconfidence bias

## Overconfidence Bias

- ▶ Placing too much faith in your knowledge.
- ▶ Believing that your contribution to a decision is more valuable than it actually is.
- ▶ overconfidence pertains to how well people understand their own abilities and the limits of their knowledge<sup>1</sup>.

(Hersh Shefrin, 2007)



# Overconfidence bias examples

- It may lead a person to think they're a better-than-average driver
- Or an expert investor: may lead clients to make risky investments
- Probably a lot of businesses that don't survive had some element of this

Can you think of any other examples of  
overconfidence bias?

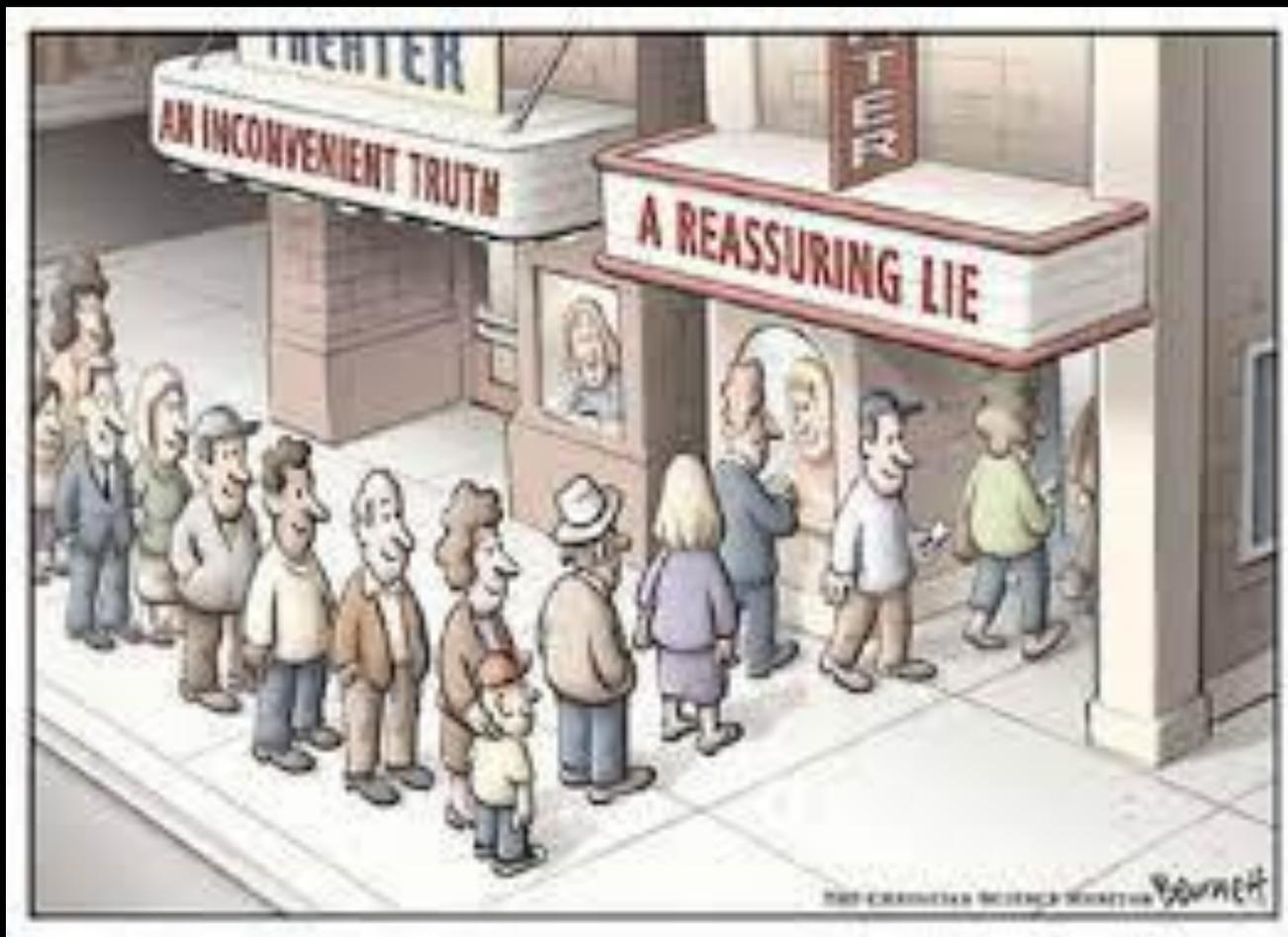
# Overconfidence bias examples: Time management

- People overestimate how quickly they can do work and underestimate how long it takes them to get things done
- Especially for complicated tasks, people constantly underestimate how long a project will take to complete

Can you think of an instance in which you have placed too much faith in your own knowledge or abilities?

- If not you, then perhaps someone else?
- What were the consequences?

# Overconfidence bias is related to confirmation bias



# What is confirmation bias?

- the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses
- occurs from the direct influence of desire on beliefs

We have a tendency to form our views first and then look for information that makes us look right, to listen to people who agree with us, and to search for information that is comfortable or convenient

Can you think of any examples of confirmation bias?

# Confirmation bias examples



Not seeking out  
objective facts



Interpreting information to  
support your existing belief

# Confirmation bias examples



Only remembering details  
that uphold your belief



Ignoring information that  
challenges your belief

# What can we do?

- Look for ways to challenge what you think you see: be skeptical
- Fact-check
- Seek out information from a range of sources
- Discuss your thoughts with others

# What can we do?

- Pay attention to how you feel: if a piece of information makes you laugh, makes you angry, or makes you emotional, ask yourself, is this news?
- Become aware of your own biases: be aware of your choices and activities when seeking information

# What can we do?

- Be conscious of what you are doing online: thieves and fake news spammers are successful when you're not paying attention
- Be patient and slow down

Thanks for your attention!

Any questions or comments?