Raoul Bell

Heinrich-Heine-Universität
Düsseldorf, Germany

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Distinguishing between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources in the age of the internet: The role of source-monitoring processes

Abstract:
In modern-day digital environments, people are exposed to information from a wide variety of different sources, some of which are biased and inaccurate. Having to deal with a large proportion of information from untrustworthy sources poses challenges for human information processing. Specifically, people have to keep track of the sources which is challenging for source memory. Advertising can be viewed as an untrustworthy source because advertisers have a clear economic self-interest in presenting the advertised products in a biased way. It is thus important to remember whether a statement such as “The Calwell printer has low ink consumption” came from a trustworthy source or from an advertisement. The exposure to a large amount of information from untrustworthy sources may stimulate increased source monitoring which may come at the cost of an impoverished processing of the content of the messages. Exposure to untrustworthy information may also lead to a skeptical guessing bias. Having to deal with untrustworthy sources thus may change how information is encoded and remembered in a potentially costly way. Current advertising regulations do not take memory processes into account and may thus be ineffective in helping customers to separate trustworthy from untrustworthy information when making memory-based decisions.