

Truth, Trust, and Democracy

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How truth relativism promotes bullshit receptivity, conspiracy belief, and the distribution of science misinformation

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This talk explores how epistemic beliefs—particularly truth relativism and truth realism—relate to misinformation receptivity. Drawing on findings from a recent study, as well as related research, I examine whether truth relativism is associated with greater receptivity to pseudo-profound bullshit, conspiracy theories, and a higher likelihood of sharing scientifically unfounded claims online. The observed patterns suggest that such associations persist independently of political ideology, pointing to broader epistemic orientations rather than partisan alignment alone. These findings indicate that certain views about the nature of truth may be linked to reduced sensitivity to shared standards of evidence and justification. Addressing contemporary challenges to truth and trust in democratic societies may therefore require attention not only to institutional and technological factors, but also to the epistemic commitments shaping how citizens evaluate and spread information.

CV

Julia Aspernäs is a psychologist and researcher in misinformation receptivity and political psychology at Linköping University, Sweden. Her work examines the role of epistemic beliefs and political orientation in misinformation susceptibility, with a particular focus on belief in (subjectivist) truth relativism. Her research has been published in Royal Society Open Science, Journal of Research in Personality, and Thinking & Reasoning. Aspernäs combines experimental and survey methods to investigate psychological vulnerabilities in contemporary information environments.

