

REVIEW

By MICHAEL LUCA

1 **A**nonymity on the internet has gotten a bad trap lately, and for good reason. The shield of anonymity has contributed to a toxic online ecosystem that is too often marred by cyberbullying, misinformation and other social ills. Removing anonymity has the potential to foster accountability and trust. This is not lost on tech executives, some of whom have enthusiastically advocated the removal of anonymity over the past decade. As early as 2010, Facebook's marketing director argued that "online anonymity has to go away." Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky echoed this sentiment in a 2013 interview, arguing that "When you remove anonymity, it brings out the best in people."

2 But this overlooks an important fact: The internet needs some anonymity. To see why, consider the evolution of online marketplaces. Early marketplaces like eBay enabled arm's-length transactions between buyers and sellers with a platform in the middle. This led to gains not only in economic efficiency but also, in some cases, equity. The relatively anonymous nature of online transactions removed markers of race, gender and other factors that sometimes were used to discriminate against customers in conventional transactions.

3 It isn't that discrimination can't occur on platforms like eBay—it can and, when race is evident, it does. In one 2015 experiment published in the *Rand Journal of Economics*, Yale and Harvard professors Ian Ayres, Mahzarin Banaji and Christine Jolls sold 394 baseball cards on eBay, varying only the color of the hand holding the cards. The researchers found that baseball cards held by darker hands sold for about 20% less than equivalent cards held by lighter hands. Still, it's relatively rare to see such markers of race on eBay because of the way it and many other sites were designed to function. Sellers often use account names such as "shop123," and pictures of sellers are not the norm.

4 On Airbnb, however, hosts were allowed to reject guests based on little more than their name and picture. Airbnb viewed this as a simple way to build trust among guests but failed to take note of the potential harm. As an economist studying the design of markets and platforms, I concentrate on whether companies are creating ecosystems that are both efficient and inclusive. My collaborators Ben Edelman, Dan Svirsky and I set out to understand the implications of Airbnb's design choices. In 2015 we conducted an audit study, building on an approach used to analyze labor markets and offline rental markets. We sent identical booking requests to thousands of hosts, varying only the user's name—using some names that birth records show to be more common among Black Americans and other names that are more common among white Americans. We found that the



DAN PAGE

In Defense of Online Anonymity

Lack of transparency on the internet may help fuel toxic dialogue, but it also encourages honest feedback and protects people against discrimination.



Brian Chesky, CEO and co-founder of Airbnb, in New York in 2017.

Black "guests" were roughly 16% less likely to be accepted, and the discrimination was similar whether hosts had only a single listing or multiple ones.

5 In response to our research, Airbnb commissioned a task force and then gradually reintroduced anonymity at various steps in the process. Since 2018, hosts have been required to make a decision about whether to accept or reject a guest

before seeing their picture. In Oregon, the site has been spurred to go further by a lawsuit from Airbnb customers there who alleged discrimination on the basis of their names. Since January, the names of Oregon-based guests are no longer disclosed before owners accept their bookings.

6 Anonymity has the potential to reduce discrimination more broadly, including in the hiring process. For example, software developed by a firm called Applied allows hiring managers to look at responses to structured questions without seeing the names of applicants. The goal is to help hiring managers focus more on substance and to remove the biases that might otherwise creep into their decisions.

7 A lack of anonymity can discourage honest discussion in online reviews and other contexts. A 2015 working paper by business professors Chris Nosko and Steve Tadelis found that eBay shoppers whose identities were visible were reluc-

tant to leave feedback reflecting a negative experience. Allowing ratings to be anonymous and shown only in aggregate can allow people to be more candid, especially for interactions in which buyers and sellers are working closely together.

8 Job boards like Blind allow people to post questions and to share information anonymously. It's hard to imagine people candidly and publicly sharing their salaries and questions without the ability to remain anonymous. A growing body of behavioral economics research has shown that even though people say they want privacy, they can at times be nudged to volunteer information. But just because companies can get that result, it doesn't mean they should.

9 Of course, anonymity needs to be implemented thoughtfully and comes with its own risks; the same anonymity that can help to protect honest feedback might protect illegitimate feedback as well. My research with Giorgos Zervas, published in the journal *Management Science* in 2016, found evidence of businesses extensively engaging in fake reviews, enabled in part by the shield of anonymity. Work by econ-

omists Dina Mayzlin, Yaniv Dover and Judy Chevalier, published in the *American Economic Review* in 2014, found that fake reviews are more common when there is less verification of reviews. Anonymity can also make us feel more disconnected even while exchanging views.

10 Still, some companies have realized that they missed the mark by underappreciating the value of anonymity. Reflecting on Airbnb's struggles with discrimination, Mr. Chesky acknowledged as much at a 2016 tech conference, saying, "As a founder, I think we were late to this issue." Companies need to be more thoughtful about when to have targeted anonymity and when to encourage more public interactions. Policy makers also need to take note of the unintended conse-

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quences of having too much information on the internet. And for users, it's important to understand when and how we want to be present, and when we'd like to preserve our privacy.

Mr. Luca is an associate professor of business administration at Harvard Business School and the co-author of "The Power of Experiments: Decision-Making in a Data-Driven World."



From Cautionary Proverb to Finance Lingo



WORD ON THE STREET

BEN ZIMMER

ON MONDAY, THE benchmark S&P 500 stock index entered bear-market territory for the first time since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. As traditionally defined, a "bear market" occurs when a major index sinks 20% or more from its recent high. Con-

dustrial Average fell to an 18-month low, and a Wall Street Journal report declared, "It's official. The bear has displaced the bull as Wall Street's resident mascot." As the article explained, "the Dow meets the Street's commonest definition of a bear market—a 20% decline lasting two months or more from its previous high."

While the exact percentage of the drop in an "official" bear market is of relatively recent vintage, the term itself has a history going back centuries, to an old proverb warning against acting prematurely.

"Don't sell the bearskin before you've caught the bear" is a 16th-century saying in the same proverbial family as

"Don't count your chickens before they hatch." The featured animal varied early on—Wil-

liam Shakespeare, in "Henry V," wrote of "the man that once did sell the lion's skin while the beast lived," and who ends up getting killed by the lion.

It was another famous English writer who brought the

"bearskin" proverb to the financial world. Daniel Defoe, author of such novels as "Robinson Crusoe" and "Moll Flanders," spent many years writing satirically about the rush for profits on the London Stock Exchange. (Sometimes Defoe wrote under pen names. As "Anti Bubble," he helped popularize the term "bubble" for an intense or irrational period of market speculation.)

In 1704, in a newspaper he founded called *The Review*, Defoe wrote allusively about "the Society of the Bear-Skin Men" among the sketchy denizens of London's Exchange Alley. These "bearskin men" were counting on prices falling and sold stock to buy back later at a lower price. They might sell

shares they didn't even hold, hoping to buy them cheaply before delivery of the stock was due (what traders would now call "short selling").

"Whenever they call in their money the stockjobbers must sell; the Bear-skin Men must commute, and pay difference money," Defoe wrote in "The Anatomy of Exchange Alley" in 1719.

In the chatter around the London Stock Exchange, "bearskin" got shortened to "bear" to refer to a stock that a trader sells with the expectation of buying it back more cheaply, and such traders were swiftly called "bears" themselves. Optimistic "bulls" soon joined pessimistic "bears," though the origins of the "bull market"

are less obvious, with many competing etymological theories. (The bull may have been seen as a fitting counterpart for the bear because both were involved in blood sports pitting animals against each other.)

By the 19th century, speculators on Wall Street and elsewhere who banked on falling stock prices were routinely called "bearish," a term that also got applied to downward market movements. Bearish types might profit from a "bear raid" (forcing stock prices to fall) or get caught up in a "bear trap" (a price plummet that lures in bears before a sudden upward reversal). And investors who inaccurately predict a market fall may end up in a "bear squeeze" when they are forced to buy at higher prices to avoid further losses.

The ursine metaphor has proved remarkably resilient since Defoe's time, as seen in this week's concerns that "Wall Street is back in the claws of a bear market," as the Associated Press put it. Let's hope those claws don't dig too deeply.

versely, a "bull market" typically means an index has risen 20% from its recent low.

Market-watchers have embraced the 20% benchmark since at least 1990. On Oct. 12 of that year, the Dow Jones In-

JAMES YANG

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anonymity [ænə'niməti] n. 匿名, 匿名者 (anonymous adj.)

fuel n. 燃料; v. 提供燃料; 刺激, 加剧

(Inflation was fueled by high prices.)

(The latest news will only add fuel to the controversy/fire.)

Anonymity on the internet has gotten a bad **rap** lately, and **for good reason**. The **shield** of anonymity has contributed to a toxic online **ecosystem** that is too often **marred** by **cyberbullying**, misinformation and other **social ills**. **Removing** anonymity **has the potential to foster** **accountability** and trust. This is not lost on tech executives, some of whom have enthusiastically **advocated** the removal of anonymity over the past decade. As early as 2010, Facebook's marketing director argued that "online anonymity has to go away." Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky **echoed** this **sentiment** in a 2013 interview, arguing that "When you remove anonymity, it **brings** out the best in people."

rap n. **名声**(a negative and often undeserved reputation or charge, often used with **bad**)

for good reason **有充分理由**

shield n. **盾牌；防护物** (A healthy lifestyle may act as a shield against preventable diseases.)

ecosystem **生态系统**

(With a booming, young user base, TikTok has become a music-promotion ecosystem of extreme importance.)

mar v. **破坏，损坏**

cyberbullying **网络暴力，网络霸凌**

social ills **社会问题** (social problem/issue)

remove v. **移开；去除**(eliminate)

(The new findings will help remove any doubt.)

have the potential to **有可能会** (be likely to)

foster v. **促进，培养；领养**

(encourage/cultivate/promote)

(Such conditions foster the spread of the disease.)

accountability n. **责任**(accountable adj. 负有责任的)

advocate v. **拥护，提倡；** n. **拥护者，支持者**

(opponent n. 反对者)

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sentiment n. 观点，看法，情绪

(a thought, opinion, or idea)

(I don't think she shares my sentiments.)

bring out 生产；使显示

(They're bringing out an album next year.)

(A crisis can bring out the best and the worst in people.)

(Leadership: How to bring out the best in people)

2 But this overlooks an important fact: The internet needs some anonymity. To see why, consider the evolution of online marketplaces. Early marketplaces like eBay enabled arm's-length transactions between buyers and sellers with a platform in the middle. This led to gains not only in economic efficiency but also, in some cases, equity. The relatively anonymous nature of online transactions removed markers of race, gender and other factors that sometimes were used to discriminate against customers in conventional transactions.

overlook v. 忽视；俯瞰

arm's-length transaction 公平交易

nature n. 特质，特性

(the type or main characteristic of sth)

discriminate v. 区别对待，歧视

conventional adj. 传统的 (traditional)

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(Its effects vary greatly depending on the person and the circumstances.)

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(The critical question now is whether this can become the norm, rather than the exception.)

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reject v. 拒绝

take note of 注意到

inclusive adj. 包含的, 包容的

collaborator n. 合作者(**collaborate** v.)

set out 出发, 开始

implication n. 含义 ; 可能的结果

(From what she said, the implication was that they were splitting up.)

(What are the implications of the new law?)

audit n.&v. 审计, 审核, 查账

identical adj. 完全相同的, 一模一样的

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before seeing their picture. In Oregon, the site has been **spurred** to go further by a **lawsuit** from Airbnb customers there who **alleged** discrimination on the basis of their names. Since January, the names of Oregon-based guests are no longer **disclosed** before owners accept their bookings.

commission v. 委任

task force 特遣部队, 工作组

spur v. &n. 鼓励, 激励(to encourage an activity or development or make it happen faster)
(stimulate)

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structure v. 计划, 组织, 安排(to plan, organize, or arrange the parts of sth); n. 结构
(a well-structured argument)

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(the most important part of what sb has said or written)
(The substance of their secret conversation appeared in a newspaper article.)

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(I'd better write it down, otherwise I'll forget it.)
(Under the Bill of Rights, a person is presumed innocent until proved otherwise.)

creep into 悄悄进入
(Doubts began to creep into my mind about the likely success of the project.)

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rating n. 评级, 等级, 分级(a measurement of how good or popular sb or sth is)

(The president's approval rating sank to an all-time low.)

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post v. 发表, 公布

a body of 一片, 大量

(There is a growing/huge/substantial body of evidence.)

nudge n. 肘部 v. 轻推; 劝说, 鼓励

9 Of course, anonymity needs to be implemented thoughtfully and comes with its own risks; the same anonymity that can help to protect honest feedback might protect illegitimate feedback as well. My research with Giorgos Zervas, published in the journal Management Science in 2016, found evidence of businesses extensively engaging in fake reviews, enabled in part by the shield of anonymity. Work by economists

Dina Mayzlin, Yaniv Dover and Judy Chevalier, published in the American Economic Review in 2014, found that fake reviews are more common when there is less verification of reviews. Anonymity can also make us feel more disconnected even while exchanging views.

implement v. 执行, 贯彻(to start using a plan or a system)

(Due to high costs, the program was never fully implemented.)

thoughtfully v. 沉思地 ; 体贴地 ; 经过深思熟虑地
(He gazed thoughtfully into the distance.)

(The article is thoughtfully arranged.)

illegitimate [ˌɪləˈdʒɪtəmət] adj. 非法的, 不合理的, 私生的
(**legitimate** adj. 合法的, 合理的)

verification n. 核实, 证明 (**verify** v.)

disconnected adj. 分离的, 无关联的

10 Still, some companies have realized that they **missed the mark** by **underappreciating** the value of anonymity. Reflecting on Airbnb's struggles with discrimination, Mr. Chesky acknowledged as much at a 2016 tech conference, saying, "As a founder, I think we were late to this issue." Companies need to be more thoughtful about when to have targeted anonymity and when to encourage more public interactions. Policy makers also need to take note of the **unintended** consequences of having too much information on the internet. And for users, it's important to understand when and how we want to be **present**, and when we'd like to **preserve** our privacy.

miss the mark 没打中目标，没达到目的
(to fail to achieve the result that was intended)

(Her speech missed the mark and failed to generate the public support.)

underappreciate v. 低估

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unintended adj. 意料之外的，非故意的

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(With a booming, young user base, TikTok has become a music-promotion ecosystem of extreme importance.)

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(I don't think she shares my sentiments.)

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第一段 网络匿名制的好坏以及作者的观点

第二段 匿名制对网络交易的好处

第三段 研究调查支持第二段的观点

第四段 研究 Airbnb 的结论

第五段 Airbnb 对此做出的回应和行动

第六段 匿名制对招聘者的益处

第七段 匿名制能够让网络购物者发表更加诚实的评价

第八段 匿名制对求职者分享信息的影响

第九段 匿名制的应用要谨慎、避免不良影响

第十段 公司、政策制定者、用户都应该思考匿名制的使用

The columnist
Graham Lawton on biodiversity pitfalls of green diets p28

Aperture
Witness life on the brink becoming a museum piece p30

Letters
At last, Australia has emerged from its climate wars p32

Culture
A history of how we gauge the world measures up well p34

Culture columnist
Intrigue and flaws in Cronenberg's new body horror flick p36

Comment

Healing encounters

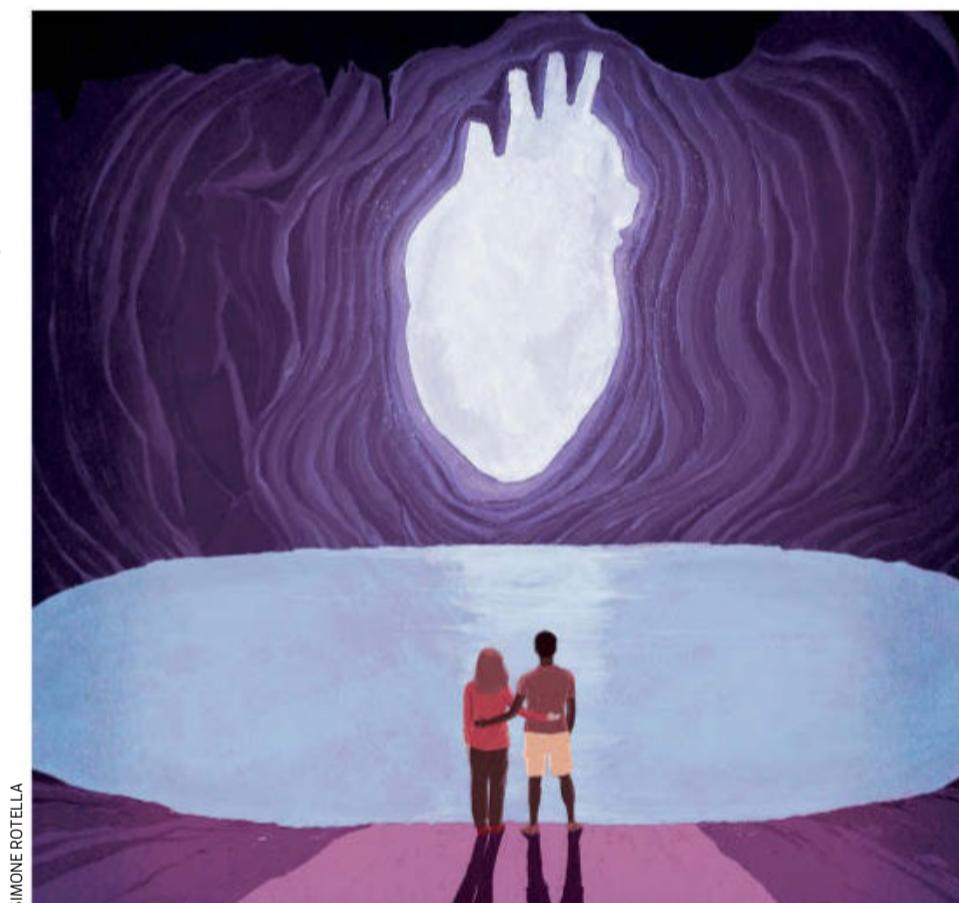
Social media's rise means policies requiring anonymity in organ donation are obsolete, say **Nicholas Murphy** and **Charles Weijer**

IN JUNE 2012, Canadian teen Tyler Schwering died after an accident. Knowing it is what he would have wanted, Tyler's mother, Kim LeBlanc, consented to organ donation on his behalf. That decision saved the life of Dave Allingham, who received Tyler's heart the next day. A year later, after finding one another with the help of social media, LeBlanc and Allingham met. Both say the experience was life-changing.

"Seeing what has come of something horrible has given me peace," says LeBlanc. Allingham, now free of his heart condition, welcomed the chance to express his gratitude. "I cherish the gift I've been given," he says. "Tyler's legacy is alive and well."

Look around Facebook and it isn't hard to find groups dedicated to connecting the families of deceased donors with the recipients of their loved one's organs. Discussion boards feature pleas for information from those involved, desperate to know more about the people on the other side of their donation story.

Groups like these are a reaction to policies mandating anonymity in deceased organ donation. Frustrated by this, people are taking matters into their own hands. By turning to social media, families of the deceased and organ recipients seek to reap the benefits that can arise when the two sides get to know each other. Yet, they are also unwittingly exposing themselves to potential harm should relationships go awry. It



SIMONE ROTELLA

is time for policy-makers to address the realities of the social media age by relaxing restrictions and developing policies that will promote safe encounters for those who want them.

Since its advent in the 1950s, organ transplantation has become the treatment of choice for various diseases that eventually lead to organ failure. Globally, tens of thousands of people who die donate their organs to other people every year. Yet, with few exceptions – such as Israel and some programmes in the US – organ donation organisations can't disclose identities, even when both sides want to meet.

The decades-old regime of mandated anonymity arose in response to concerns about the risks of identity disclosure. For example, it was feared that getting to know an organ recipient could complicate the grieving process for donor families, or lead to feelings of indebtedness in recipients.

Times have changed. These policies should be recognised for what they are: unfair restrictions on the autonomy of competent adults. Although there are risks to direct contact, evidence from places in which it is allowed shows there can be mutual and profound benefits. Getting to

know a recipient can allow donor family members like LeBlanc to find meaning in loss and see the legacy of their loved one's gift. For recipients like Allingham, the ability to express gratitude can be transformative. Denying people these benefits is paternalistic and wrong.

Some places have recognised this – though most have not. As a result, people turn to platforms like Facebook to make contact. This exposes how mandated anonymity isn't just unfair, it is also fast becoming obsolete. The reality is that barriers are increasingly bypassed through the Wild West of social media, but this means there is then no support available for those involved.

Organ donation organisations should face up to the realities of the social media age by developing responsible policy to facilitate direct contact between donor families and organ recipients. A balanced approach will help to protect anonymity for those who want it and allow safe contact when both sides wish it. There is no stopping mutually interested parties from meeting. The question now is, how do we manage it responsibly? ■



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Fake-News Sharers

Highly impulsive people who lean conservative are most likely to pass along false news stories

By Asher Lawson and Hemant Kakkar

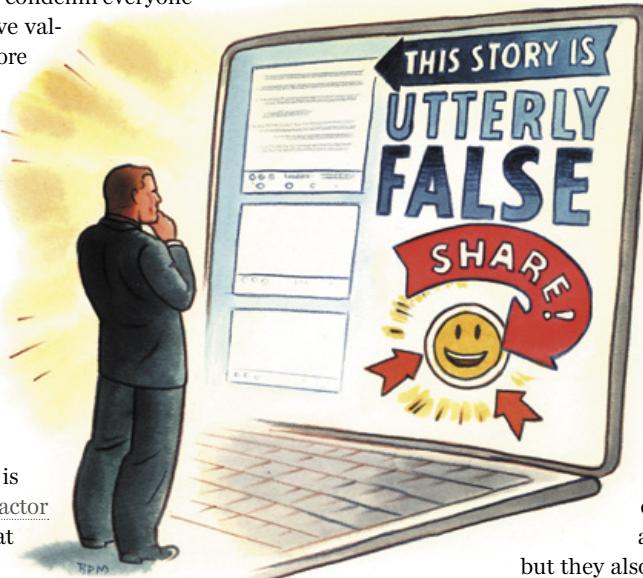
Behavioral and political scientists have pointed fingers at political conservatives, as opposed to liberals, when it comes to spreading fake news stories. But not all conservatives do it, and sweeping generalizations threaten to condemn everyone who subscribes to conservative values. This approach risks even more dangerous polarization.

Political leanings are far from the only determinants of behavior. Personality is a crucial influence, so our research on misinformation sharing has focused on that. One widely used psychological system for identifying personality traits organizes them into five categories: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. (It is called, unsurprisingly, the *five-factor theory*.) We looked specifically at conscientiousness, which captures differences in people's orderliness, impulse control, conventionality and reliability.

In a series of eight studies with a total of 4,642 participants, we examined whether low-conscientiousness conservatives (LCCs) disseminate more misinformation than other conservatives or low-conscientiousness liberals. First we determined people's political ideology and conscientiousness through assessments that asked participants about their values and behaviors. We then showed the same people a series of real and fake news stories relating to COVID and asked them to rate how accurate the stories were. We also asked whether they would consider sharing each story.

Both liberals and conservatives sometimes saw false stories as accurate. This error was likely driven in part by their *wanting* certain stories to be true because they aligned with their beliefs.

But actually sharing false news was markedly higher among LCCs compared with everyone else in the study, although some people of all persuasions did it. There was no difference between liberals and conservatives with high levels of conscientiousness. Low-conscientiousness liberals did not share more misinformation than their high-conscientiousness liberal counterparts.



What explains the exceptional tendency of LCCs to share fake news? To explore this question, we gathered information about participants' politics and personalities and administered questionnaires to assess their *need for chaos*—the desire to disrupt and destroy the existing political and social institutions—as well as their support of conservative issues, support for Donald Trump, trust in mainstream media and time spent on social media. LCCs, we learned, expressed a general desire for chaos, and this need may explain their proclivity to spread misinformation. Other factors, including support for Trump, were not as strongly related.

Unfortunately, our work on this personality trait also suggests that accuracy labels on news stories will not solve the problem of misinformation. We ran a study where we explicitly stated whether each news story in question was false, using a “disputed” tag commonly seen on social media, or true, using a “supported” tag.

We found that the supported tag increased the rate at which real stories were shared among both liberals and conservatives. LCCs, however, continued to share misinformation at a greater rate despite the clear warnings that the stories were false.

We ran another study that involved explicitly telling participants that an article they wanted to share was inaccurate. People then had the chance to change their choice. Not only did LCCs still share fake news at a higher rate than others in the study,

but they also were comparatively insensitive to direct warnings that the stories they wanted to share were false.

The poor effectiveness of warnings among LCCs is worrying because our research suggests these people are primary drivers of fake-news proliferation. Social media networks therefore need to find a different solution than just tagging stories with warning labels. Interventions based on the assumption that truth matters to readers may be inadequate. Another option might involve social media companies monitoring fake news that has the potential to hurt others, such as misinformation related to vaccines and elections, and actively removing such content from their platforms.

Whatever the case, until these companies find an approach that works, this problem will persist. In the interim, our society will pay the cost of spreading misinformation. The long, conspiratorial road that rioters followed to the January 2021 Capitol insurrection shows that this spread can have serious and damaging consequences. ■

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health

Why eggs are the ultimate power breakfast (go on, eat two)

Forget fears about cholesterol and heart disease, new research suggests we should raid the coop more often. By Peta Bee

We were last urged to go to work on an egg in the 1960s and it seems the advice has turned full circle as eggs have fallen back in favour with scientists, who now say they could be a saviour for heart health.

Reporting in the journal *eLife*, researchers from Peking University reached the conclusion that moderate egg consumption increases the amount of heart-healthy metabolites after studying the diets and analysing blood samples of 4,778 people, some of whom had an existing cardiovascular disease. They found that those who ate one egg a day were at a much lower risk of heart disease than those who consumed them less frequently.

It's the latest evidence supporting egg consumption and comes more than a decade since government recommended limits on egg intake were quietly lifted. Until the early 2000s we were advised to restrict eggs to three each per week, out of concern that egg yolks in particular were harmful to the heart because they are

a rich source of dietary cholesterol. A single yolk contains as much as 186mg of dietary cholesterol, more than many other commonly consumed foods. Since too much cholesterol in the bloodstream is known to accumulate on artery walls, raising the risk of heart attacks and strokes, eating too many eggs was considered a risky habit.

However, Rhiannon Lambert, a registered nutritionist and author of *The Science of Nutrition* (£12, DK), says the myths surrounding eating eggs and increased risks for heart disease have since been categorically disproved by scientists.

"It's the amount of saturated fats that we consume from foods such as red meat and full-fat dairy products that has much more of a damaging effect on our blood cholesterol levels than cholesterol-containing foods," she says. "These saturated fats change the way receptors in the liver handle cholesterol so that it builds up in the blood, whereas eating cholesterol-containing foods such as eggs is not harmful in the same way."

Now even the NHS says that a couple of eggs a day is perfectly acceptable unless you have been medically advised to limit



consumption. "Healthy adults should consume less than 300mg per day of dietary cholesterol, which is the amount in about three to four eggs," Lambert says. "So eating eggs every day is perfectly safe."

There are other reasons to start your day with an egg. They provide an array of nutrients to rival a supplement including magnesium, iron, selenium, vitamin D and B vitamins, choline — a vitamin-like compound used to make cell membranes — and phosphorus (about 91mg per medium egg) that is important for healthy bones and teeth. With about 6.4g protein per medium egg, mostly from the white, they provide about 13 per cent of an adult's daily protein requirement, important for muscle maintenance and growth as well as general health. "Protein also slows glucose absorption,

helping to regulate blood sugar," says the nutrition therapist Ian Marber. Three years ago Finnish scientists reported that an egg a day may help to create a blood metabolite profile that could lower the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Low in carbs, fat and therefore calories — there are about 75 in a large egg — they are also good for the waistline. A 2020 study from the University of South Australia showed that people who ate eggs for breakfast consumed fewer calories at an eat-what-you like lunch buffet than those who had started the day with cereals and orange juice.

"Eggs are a fantastic breakfast staple, not least because of the protein and vitamins they contain," Marber says. "Add avocado, spinach or tomato with some wholegrain bread and seeds and you have all the fibre and nutrients you could need."

TIMES Travel Offers

WALKING IN Northern Cyprus

North Cyprus remains a hidden gem of the Mediterranean, with an abundance of archaeological remains from many civilisations that inhabited the island over the centuries.

With superb walking through areas teeming with flowers and wildlife, and the relaxed local Turkish Cypriot culture, this is a walking and sightseeing tour not to be missed. Most days involve some driving and sightseeing in addition to the walks. The walking is seldom too demanding, although some of the terrain is a bit rocky underfoot. Some of the paths are quite narrow and undulating, and there are some sections which involve some scrambling over larger rocks and boulders. There are plenty of opportunities for exploration in

and around some of the area's ruins and castles.

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Why stretching is so vital for your health (it's not just about muscles)

Being flexible helps your fascia, the tissue that could be the key to tackling chronic pain. By Caroline Williams

Vou've got to feel sorry for the early anatomists. There they were, diligently cataloguing the organs of the human body, and they managed to miss one of the biggest ones we have. It's not that they didn't see it, it just didn't look all that important at the time. Fascia, a sticky, slimy, whitish tissue that winds its way through our bodies, was messy and annoying and got in the way of everything else, so they scraped it off and threw it away. And so, for hundreds of years, it was dismissed as nothing more than a natural version of clingfilm, important for nothing more than wrapping our muscles in bags and stopping our vital organs from rattling around as we move.

Now, though, it's becoming clear that it is so much more. Fascia plays a part in everything from chronic pain to mental health and even the progression of cancer. And the way you look after it matters a lot for your overall health and wellbeing.

For a tissue that few people have heard of, our bodies contain an awful lot of the stuff. It is mostly found in two obvious layers, one sheet that lies directly under the skin, and another deeper layer that wraps the muscles and connects muscle groups to each other. If you were to cut anywhere into the body, it would be difficult to point to somewhere it isn't.

The main thing that makes fascia more than just clingfilm is that, as well as containing strong collagen fibres and stretchy elastin fibres, we now know that it is packed with sensory nerves. Robert Schleip, of the Technical University of Munich in Germany, estimates that there are 250 million nerve endings in the fascia, at least as many, if not more, than in the skin. That's why he, and many others are now describing the fascia as a sensory organ — one that specialises in our sense of where our body is in space, and in sensing pain. Not everyone agrees that it should be designated as a new organ, but Schleip insists that it fits the bill. "You can use any definition of an organ that you want, it will apply," he says.

Organ or not, the fascia is becoming understood as an important contributor to pain, particularly the kind that is difficult to pinpoint to a particular part of the body. Studies where people volunteered to have painful substances injected into either their skin or the fascia showed that the fascia specialises in the kind of radiating pain that is often seen in chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia. Some research-



How to keep your fascia happy

1) SIT LESS Lack of movement means the fascia become sticky and stiff. Regular movement breaks are crucial.

2) STRETCH Stretching causes the cells that make up the fascia to change shape and release molecules involved in healing.

3) FOAM ROLLING Self-massage using foam rollers can help to release stiffness, perhaps by helping to unstick the fascia layers.

4) REDUCE STRESS Research suggests that adrenaline causes chemical changes in the fascia which, over time, increases stiffness.

ers have suggested post-exercise soreness can also be traced to inflamed fascia rather than damaged muscles.

The bad news is that if pain in the fascia goes on for too long, the balance of nerve fibres changes in ways that make pain even more difficult to treat. In rat studies, pain-sensing fibres in the fascia of the lower back increased from 4 per cent to 15 per cent after an injury that caused inflammation. This might explain why back pain can be so difficult to get rid of.

The good news is that there are ways to keep your fascia healthy. Studies by Hélène Langevin, at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, have shown that while injury, a lack of movement or both, can cause the fascia to become stiff and sticky, stretching can loosen things up again.

The reason it works comes down to changes in some of the cells that make up the gloopy substance secreted by cells within the fascia. In animal studies, Langevin found that when fascia is stretched, these cells change shape and begin to secrete substances that get the layers of fascia moving, and which begin the process of healing. "Stretching helps the body to resolve the inflammation — it helps the natural process," Langevin says.

This healing process may be significant, not only in terms of treating pain but also to reduce the spread of cancer. In experiments in Langevin's lab, mice that had breast cancer were gently encouraged to hold a mouse version of a "downward dog" stretch for ten minutes, once a day. After four weeks, the mice that stretched had tumours that were 52 per cent smaller than those that didn't. One possibility is that

stretching somehow helped the immune system to tackle the tumour by resolving inflammation. Another is that stretching changes the arrangement of the fibres in the fascia in such a way that it interferes with tumour growth. It's early days and Langevin is reluctant to speculate too much. "The cancer didn't grow as fast when we stretched the animal. We are trying to figure out why," she says.

Langevin is now taking her stretching studies into human trials. Working with Dennis Muñoz-Vergara at Harvard Medical School, she is conducting a study on human volunteers to see if yoga-based stretches reduce inflammation throughout the body. Chronic inflammation has been linked to everything from stress to pain, to heart disease and depression, so if stretching reduces inflammation in humans too, then it could dramatically improve wellbeing. So far, a pilot study looks promising. But given that yoga, stretching and other activities that focus on mobility are well known to increase range of motion, and given the well-known links between exercise and mental health, it makes sense to keep moving. We'd also do well to cut down on the amount of sitting we do. That the average adult is sedentary 70 per cent of the time is not only bad for our fitness levels, it can also play havoc with our mobility. In one of Langevin's studies, even after an injury to the fascia of the lower back had healed, a lack of movement kept the fascia stiff and even caused different layers to stick to each other, forming adhesions as new collagen fibres sprang up to join them together.

Even when an injury isn't present, research has backed up what we all already

know: that sitting leads to stiffness. In the study, just eight minutes of foam rolling, a form of self-massage, which involves rolling the stiff area on a firm yet pliable foam ball or tube, significantly reduced the stiffness compared with people who spent the same amount of time standing around and chatting. This is easy enough to do at home — you can pick up a foam roller online for about £10, but you can also get a similar effect with a tennis ball.

In this particular study it wasn't possible to tell whether the stiffness came from the muscles, fascia or both, but, says Schleip, there is a very simple take-home message. "In terms of health prevention it would be a sin for an employer not to give people encouragement to have active breaks," he says. This is all the more important for the chronically stressed. Schleip's research suggests that the release of adrenaline as part of the fight-or-flight response triggers chemical changes that prompt the fascia to contract, becoming tighter and stiffer. This doesn't happen instantly, he points out, it happens over months. Interestingly, a group of people with chronic depression, who tend to have higher levels of stress hormones in their blood, were recently found to have significantly stiffer tissues in their neck and upper back than a control group without depression.

It's early days in understanding the full implications of how this long-neglected tissue affects our health. But one thing is becoming abundantly clear. If we want a healthy mind and body, this is no time to be sitting around.

Caroline Williams is the author of *Move! The New Science of Body Over Mind* (Profile Books, £9.99)

LEGISLATION

Balancing act: the law moves in favour of hybrid work

Some companies are steadfastly resisting employees' demands for greater flexibility. Proposed legislation may oblige them to reconsider, but market forces could compel them to do so even before that's enacted

Alison Coleman

It appears that the work-from-anywhere workforce is here to stay in the UK for the foreseeable future, given the ongoing risks of further waves of Covid infection, coupled with skills shortages in many industries. That's only because many employers have chosen to allow some form of remote working to continue after the full relaxation of lockdown restrictions. Not all organisations have done so – and employees have very few legal rights to demand such flexibility.

Although it was introduced in late 2019, the employment bill that's currently before Parliament is unlikely to be enacted any time soon, as it wasn't mentioned in the latest Queen's Speech. But, once the changes proposed within it are finally in the statute book, could this give employees more of a say in where and when they work?

A significant change that has been under consideration during the bill's consultation period is to allow new recruits to request flexible working from the start of their employment. At present, only those with at least 26 weeks' continuous service have the right to ask their employer to provide it.

"One of the aims of the bill is to give employees more confidence and negotiating power to request agile working, enabling them to perform their role flexibly from the outset," says Rhys Wyborn, a partner and employment law specialist at Shakespeare Martineau. "It won't grant employees an automatic right to work flexibly, but they will be entitled to request to do so immediately upon starting their new role."

Once it's enacted, the bill could change the legitimate business reasons for refusing a flexible working request listed in the Employment Rights Act 1996. There are eight of these, including the extra cost

burden that allowing such a request would impose; an inability to reorganise work effectively among the applicant's colleagues and/or recruit more people to do any extra work created; and a detrimental impact on performance and responsiveness to customer demand.

The legislation could also require employers to come up with alternative arrangements wherever it's appropriate, notes Debbie Coyne, senior associate in the employment team at Aaron & Partners.

"This would encourage parties to cooperate to find a compromise, thereby promoting a stronger working relationship," she says. "For example, an employer could look to make a change for eight months if it can't support a permanent switch, or it could suggest an alternative flexible pattern to that proposed by the employee."

What will these proposals mean for hybrid working? Coyne says: "While they are likely to encourage employers to think more openly about flexible working and encourage a two-way conversation, they don't make flexibility the default position or create an entitlement to it."

Ministers have said that the legislation in question will be introduced when parliamentary time allows, so next year is a possibility. But change could be achieved through smaller vehicles, such as government-backed private members' bills.

Labour MP Tulip Siddiq has put forward such a bill, which has progressed to its second reading in the Commons. Her flexible working bill proposes to confer the right to flexible working from day one (except in exceptional circumstances) and require employers to offer flexible arrangements in employment contracts and mention in their job ads the types of flexibility that they could support. Few private members'



An employer that's going to put its foot down about flexible working is more likely to shoot itself in that proverbial foot

existing law on flexible working, which was initially brought in to help workers with childcare responsibilities and later broadened to cover all employees. This would continue the trend of revising the legislation in line with developments in practice."

Once the employment bill does become law, it won't technically transfer power from the employer to the employee. Requests will be subject to the needs of the business and, as such, the employer will retain the final say. But Pieter Manden, head of trust and employer compliance at HR tech provider WorkMotion, argues that the forthcoming act will affect the balance of power.

"There will be a limited number of justifiable reasons why an employer can deny a request," he says. "Clearly, wanting people to work in the office so that their managers can watch over their shoulders at any time is not among them. In my view, an employer that's going to put its foot down about flexible working is more likely to shoot itself in that

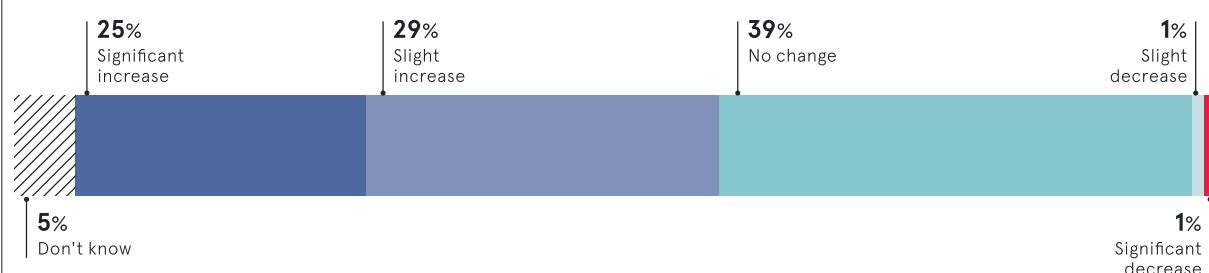
proverbial foot. At some point, its employees will vote with their feet and join organisations that have adapted to the new reality."

Given that hybrid working is becoming well established and the tight recruitment market is weighed in their favour, jobseekers should feel more confident about negotiating how and where they want to work before they join an employer. They would be better off doing this than accepting an arrangement that doesn't suit them and then asking to change it on day one in the job.

According to a survey published last year by recruitment website Reed.co.uk, the ability to work flexible hours has become the second-biggest factor after a pay increase motivating people to stay with their employer. Regardless of any legislative reform, it's clear that hybrid working is no longer considered a mere perk by jobseekers, so employers that fail to accommodate their preferences will struggle to recruit and retain the talent they need. ●

MORE THAN HALF OF EMPLOYERS ARE EXPECTING FURTHER DEMANDS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

Extent to which employers expect change in employee demands for more flexible working





We've all lost friendships. Can they be revived?

Claire Cohen



During the first lockdown, I had a call with the same group of three female friends every Wednesday evening. We would spend an hour or two chatting over video, and however doomful the day had been, the evening would be brighter and sillier. It's no exaggeration to say that those conversations kept me going - a lifeline when it felt that so many of our personal relationships were drifting - and I didn't skip a single one. We four are now closer than ever. Yet, there are other friends I haven't seen and have hardly spoken to since March 2020.

Perhaps you had a similar experience during a time when many of us felt forced to examine the shape of

our friendships: whom you could face speaking to, and who inspired little more than a sense of duty to keep in touch, if you did at all. We got used to prioritising our pals, first virtually and later seeing a small number in person when the rules allowed. Many of our friendships were simply "parked" - not ended, but not maintained. We pressed pause, assuming those friends would be equally happy to pick things back up when the pandemic storm had passed.

Now, though? We're supposed to be almost back to "normal". Mask-wearing has dropped off and large gatherings have returned. Fewer commuters on trains and empty offices are our only significant daily reminder that all is not what it was.

Well, that and our friendships. Because even now - months after the last restrictions were lifted - some of us are still finding it tough to get them back on track. When speaking to women for my new book on female friendship, I encountered a groundswell of lingering resentment and hurt. It looks as if some of those friends we put on the backburner are destined to never come off.

One woman in her 50s tells me that the post-pandemic fallout in her friend group has worsened over the past few weeks. "There's a lot of bitterness," she says. "Friends of mine are having blow-up arguments and accusing one another of not having been there when it mattered. Friendships of 20 or 30 years are ending." A poll by LifeSearch found that almost one in three of surveyed UK adults have fallen out with friends due to pandemic pressures, losing an average of four friends since Covid began.

In March, Google published a list of our most-searched-for subjects over the past 12 months. At an all-time high were questions such as: "How can I meet new friends?" and "Is it normal to ... be jealous of your friends/argue with friends/not to have any friends?"

"Some people are upset that their friends weren't there for them in the way they hoped during the lockdowns. But some are upset that their friends aren't there for them *now*, during a time of need that few of us thought we would experience," clinical psychologist Dr Sophie Mort tells me. "What I'm seeing in my clinic, and my social circles, suggests that the ongoing struggles in our friendships link to the fact that many people still feel at their limit."

It's the pandemic friendship paradox - we were going through perhaps the ultimate communal experience, yet we became overwhelmed and disconnected from each other. It tested our core beliefs and shared values, as well as sapping our time and energy. And we're not out of the woods yet.

Women in their 30s and 40s have particularly struggled, as the demands of home schooling, childcare and domestic chores left little time for friendships. This is the same cohort who, according to new research, are struggling to return to their careers post-Covid and going missing from the workforce.

"When your friendships usually feel deep and connected, disconnection or distance can feel like a rejection, which often leads to resentment, anger, sadness and confusion," says Mort.

I haven't lost any friends yet ... but there are some relationships that are slowly coming apart at the seams. So is it too late? Mort believes not, and says it's time we started to speak honestly with our friends.

"It's a case of working out what could be done to improve a friendship. Many of us think that an argument or a period of silence equals the end, when actually - if dealt with effectively - it can strengthen the friendship. A key part is the ability to apologise. Being able to say 'I'm sorry' is extremely powerful. There are always ways to improve your friendships. The first question is whether you want to."

*
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