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Belief Echoes: The Persistent Effects of Misinformation and Corrections

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how a piece of false information can affect attitudes even after it is successfully corrected. Exposure to false information creates subconscious associations that can persist in shaping attitudes even after the original information is rejected. I call these effects “belief echoes.” Ultimately, I find that a correction—even when it is fully accepted—only reduces the attitudinal effects of negative information by about half. In addition, I find that corrections themselves can affect attitudes, even if a person is never exposed to the initial misinformation, suggesting that the media’s recent emphasis on correcting misinformation may have serious unintentional consequences on aggregate public opinion.