

## Peer-review report of

Mang, V., Fennis, B. M., & Epstude, K. (2024). Source credibility effects in misinformation research: A review and primer. *advances.in/psychology*, 2, e443610. <https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00028>

### **Round 1**

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting this informative and significant paper to our special issue. I was fortunate to receive reviews from two esteemed experts in the field, and I extend my gratitude to them for their thorough and constructive feedback. As is standard practice in our journal, I evaluated your work independently before considering their reviews. We all recognize numerous strengths in your current work. It offers a comprehensive approach to clarifying a topic that has previously yielded mixed results. The paper is engagingly written and exceptionally thorough in capturing the existing research and its nuances.

At the same time, there is potential to enhance the current work to further strengthen its impact. I won't reiterate the reviewers' points as they have outlined them clearly, but I ask that you address each of their comments in your revision. Please detail in the revision letter how you have addressed their feedback, including excerpts that demonstrate the changes made. In addition to their comments, please find below my own remarks, some of which overlap with those of the reviewers.

The paper builds on the premise that source credibility findings in general persuasion research are consistent, which contrasts with findings in misinformation research. I would like to push back a bit on this assumption. Most meta-analyses on source credibility, unfortunately, do not report heterogeneity estimates, which is a significant issue by itself. However, some of those that do report such estimates reveal extreme heterogeneity of effects (e.g., <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijcs.12814>). While the prediction intervals for source credibility look better than for many other psychological constructs or effects, introducing more nuance would be beneficial. Citing a few meta-analyses that report these critical estimates and discussing them would help set the stage for your review more effectively.

Related to this, I would like to propose some significant changes to the structure of the manuscript. As Reviewer 2 noted, the inclusion of the three studies detracts from your main message. The brief engagement with these studies does not allow for a full appreciation of their importance, whereas a more detailed presentation would likely render the manuscript too lengthy and complex. Therefore, I suggest removing these studies, which may be better suited for a separate article.

I also encourage you to delve deeper into the review dataset you have gathered. For instance, I found Table 5 and similar presentations of effect sizes to be not very informative. The evidential value of an effect in a study critically depends on several

factors, such as the number of effects tested and sample size. Presenting studies that have one significant effect tells us little without that information. Moreover, the current overview does not provide robust evidence that effects in misinformation research are (statistically) more inconsistent and possibly weaker than those in general persuasion research. Ideally, you would code the effects in these studies and conduct statistical analyses to provide hard data on effect sizes, heterogeneity, and breakdowns by stimulus types and designs. I understand if a meta-analysis was planned for a different study, but if not, I strongly encourage presenting it here. If the meta-analysis is intended for another paper, I would still like to see the systematic review presented in a more detailed and typical manner, with typical sections such as methods and results. Much of this information is currently in the Supplementary Online Material and can be moved to the main paper, which will have more space after the three studies are omitted. This information is vital for understanding, contextualizing, and ultimately weighing the findings of your review.

You are making an important contribution to the field and providing a wealth of detail, which is generally excellent. However, I believe it would be beneficial to emphasize your main message with a figure and a table. In the figure, you could visualize the problems and challenges that may explain the currently inconsistent research findings. In the table, you could summarize your general recommendations, as suggested by Reviewer 1. Additionally, as Reviewer 2 noted, the abstract should be more concrete in terms of its findings and recommendations. This will help readers quickly grasp the key points and the significance of your work. By incorporating these elements, you will strengthen the impact and clarity of your manuscript.

In Table 2, please provide more explanation in the title. It is not clear what the symbol “/” stands for.

In Table 3, “effect reported” is ambiguous. I think you mean “Statistically significant effect observed” and “No statistically significant effect observed”. Same applies for other relevant tables. This comment is nevertheless closely related to the problem of coding studies with one effect (out of x) as positives and is generally not very informative.

In line 387, “indirect effects of source credibility manipulations via measures of perceived source credibility”. What exactly is meant by this? If no main effect is observed on the dependent variable but only a partial correlation through the measured source credibility (essentially a manipulation check), this constitutes weak evidence and might not even be considered relevant by some. You also revisit this point in your recommendations, where you argue that a higher “structural fit” justifies the inclusion of self-report measures. However, this immediately raises concerns about common method bias, which should weaken causal inferences in such cases rather than strengthen them.

Minor comment

There is one “&” that needs to be replaced with an “and” on l. 624 in accordance with APA7. Thank you for otherwise adhering closely to its formatting standard.

To sum up, we all enjoyed reading your important paper. With some reframing and preferably extending the current analyses, you should be well positioned to maximize the impact of this work. While we typically request the revised manuscript within one month, I understand that these revisions may require more time and effort. Therefore, if you need additional time, please feel free to reach out to me (j.r.kunst@psykologi.uio.no).

Best,

Jonas R. Kunst  
Editor-in-Chief

**Reviewer 1:**

The manuscript titled "Source Credibility Effects in Misinformation Research: A Review and Primer" provides an invaluable contribution to the flourishing field of misinformation studies. It meticulously explores the role that perceived source credibility plays in shaping individuals' responses to misinformation. The primary goal of this comprehensive review is to shed light on the inconsistent findings across the literature and to propose methodological and theoretical advancements to enhance future research in this area. By integrating findings from 83 studies and adding insights from three original experiments, this manuscript not only improves our current understanding of source credibility but also sets a new benchmark for rigor in examining the dynamics of source credibility in misinformation studies. Additionally, I congratulate the authors on the considerable effort they have undertaken to compile and (meta) analyze all previous work on source credibility into a single study. With that, I have a few important concerns that need to be clarified before the decision of publication.

First, the paper ambitiously integrates foundational theories of persuasion, such as the ELM and the HSM, which, while seminal, are not directly applied in the design of new conceptual frameworks (of persuasion) tested in the (meta) literature. So, the authors need to make sure that this connection from an earlier debate truly and properly applies to the recent literature on misinformation.

Second, the manuscript presents a dense and complex argumentation structure that may challenge readers to capture the core arguments effectively. The academic tone could be streamlined to enhance readability and accessibility, ensuring that the main arguments and findings are clear for the audience. To that end, I recommend two things: 1. The paper would benefit significantly from a clear, concise (theoretical) model that articulates how the various studies are integrated and analyzed. This model/figure should explicitly outline the criteria for study selection, variables of interest, and the analytical methods employed, providing a roadmap that guides the reader. 2. The paper currently lacks a detailed description of the methodology for analyzing previous studies. A more explicit outline that details the variable/model used in the analysis of the collected studies. Which variables are included, and why?

Finally, while the manuscript offers several recommendations for future research, these are presented in narrative form. Structuring these recommendations in a clearly defined table or figure would not only improve clarity but also provide a quick reference point that provides key directions from this meta-analysis.

## **Reviewer 2:**

I much enjoyed reading this review of the literature on source credibility effects and misinformation. I believe such a review is much needed and a welcome addition to the literature. To me, the key message is that inconsistent source credibility findings in the misinfo literature can at least partially be explained by not sufficiently engaging with all the relevant facets and subdimensions of credibility judgments, especially trustworthiness but also some failure to disentangle bias from competence and other dimensions. As the authors observe, this literature is of particular applied interest so perhaps most studies just look at global effects of source credibility but the authors' point is well-taken for advancing theoretical insights.

I thought the manuscript was thorough, very well-written and sourced(!), and I appreciated the systematic review and meaningful categorization of studies. It is not that often that systematic reviews truly advance novel insights by breaking out the studies and effects in themes/theoretically meaningful categories that aid understanding so I appreciated this instead of the usual descriptive summary of included studies.

Now, I do have two major concerns that I suspect the authors might be disappointed by. Personally, (1) I found the inclusion of original empirical studies not only unnecessary but rather distracting. I would want to know much more about each study to really grasp these results. The superficial summary we have now doesn't really tell me much about these (I'm sure) very interesting studies. It's in the supplement but I suspect few readers will engage. These studies could be cited/included in the systematic review and remain part of the discussion that way, but why randomly report three empirical studies in the middle of a systematic review? It just didn't work for me, I found it rather distracting. Also, the paper is already really lengthy so I think removing these studies would help streamline the

paper and its findings. I also didn't think the studies added much to the key message. Why not just publish a regular empirical paper with these three studies? It's up to the editor of course and maybe other reviewers do see the value in it but these were my thoughts.

Second, (2) the whole framing is about inconsistencies, yet, 61 out of 83 studies reported evidence of source credibility effects! That's not inconsistent, a large majority of studies confirm (74%) that source credibility effects matter. Maybe the authors mean inconsistencies in terms of what these effects actually represent/possibility of confounders but the whole message could be more nuanced and make it clearer that actually, global source credibility effects seem to matter for judgments of misinformation, which perhaps should be a key take-away from this paper?

Some more minor notes;

(3) The abstract doesn't say much about the actual findings, could the abstract perhaps be more informative if you added some key take-away(s) from the review?

(4) The authors mention "misinformation research" a lot as a separate field. But isn't this just persuasion research? Instead of doing a study on the persuasive effects of an ad or message, the message here is simply false or misleading. I think the authors elude to this too somewhere. I wasn't sure whether we should really think of this as a separate field or just a new (interdisciplinary?) area of persuasion research which has neglected some of the field's older findings. More could be said about this distinction.

At any rate, I do think it is an important review and well-written paper!

## **Round 2**

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting this rigorously revised manuscript. We are pleased with the changes you have made. The review is now more focused, and the figures and tables effectively convey the main points. I believe this manuscript requires only a few additional minor changes before publication:

1. As suggested by Reviewer 1, please move Table 2 to the Supplementary Online Material (SOM).
2. I have made some minor stylistic changes, which I will send in a separate document for your reference.
3. Please review the citation report and make the necessary changes to address missing references and other issues. You can access the report here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s0cp7kgZn4yY2g78qU6ooZX0M2EUJ2Qp/view?usp=sharing>

4. Figures 2 through 6 are well-designed, but please ensure that you provide them as SVG files (inserted into the Word file) to guarantee high resolution. Additionally, in the figure notes, please define the cutoff used to determine statistical significance.
5. Please also provide the remaining figures (Figure 1 and Figure 7) as SVG files. Figure 1 may already be in this format, but Figure 7 needs to be saved in this format.
6. Please minimize the use of footnotes. Much of the information currently in footnotes would be better placed within the main text.
7. Please add also the total N of participants to the abstract.

I believe these changes should not take too much of your time. To expedite the publication of your work, I would appreciate receiving the revised version within two weeks (i.e., by Oct. 9). If you require additional time, please let me know. Once I receive your revised manuscript, I will make my decision without further consultation with the reviewers.

Best regards,

Jonas R. Kunst

Editor-in-Chief

#### **Reviewer 1:**

I really enjoyed reading the revised manuscript. It is quite comprehensive, including the broad array of studies on source credibility manipulation in misinformation research. I am equally satisfied with the revisions performed by the authors. I commend them for providing a very nice meta-study in this domain of research. My only minor comment would be to carry Table 2 over to the Appendix, as it appears to provide peripheral information to the main analyses, as far as I can tell. Other than that, I support the publication of this interesting work. I sure will use it in my own research and teaching.

#### **Reviewer 2:**

I applaud the authors' for doing a thorough revision and taking the reviewers' recommendations on board. I now think that this is a much more coherent and insightful review paper that makes a very helpful contribution to the field. The findings are nuanced but well-articulated, I like the graphs and Tables and coding of all the different study aspects. Overall, I think the recommendations put forth make sense and are helpful to scholars in this field.

One last comment from me, why were conspiracy theory studies excluded from the systematic review (if I understand correctly)? Aren't conspiracies just a form of misinformation? This move could be supported better.