

Everyday Misinformation and Correction on Private Social Media

Relationality, Affordances, and Emergent Norms

ICA 2022 Interdivisional Panel (Organiser: Andrew Chadwick)

Amphitheatre Bleu, Level 2, Palais des Congrès, Paris, and Live-streamed, May 29, at 5pm CET.

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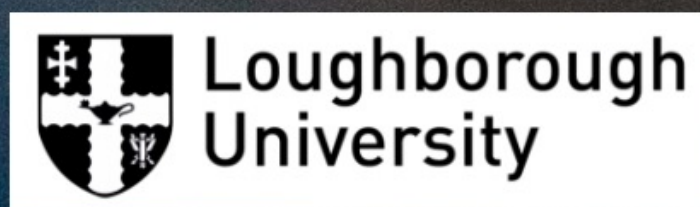
What People Talk About When They Talk About Misinformation on Private Social Media

Andrew Chadwick, Cristian Vaccari & Natalie-Anne Hall

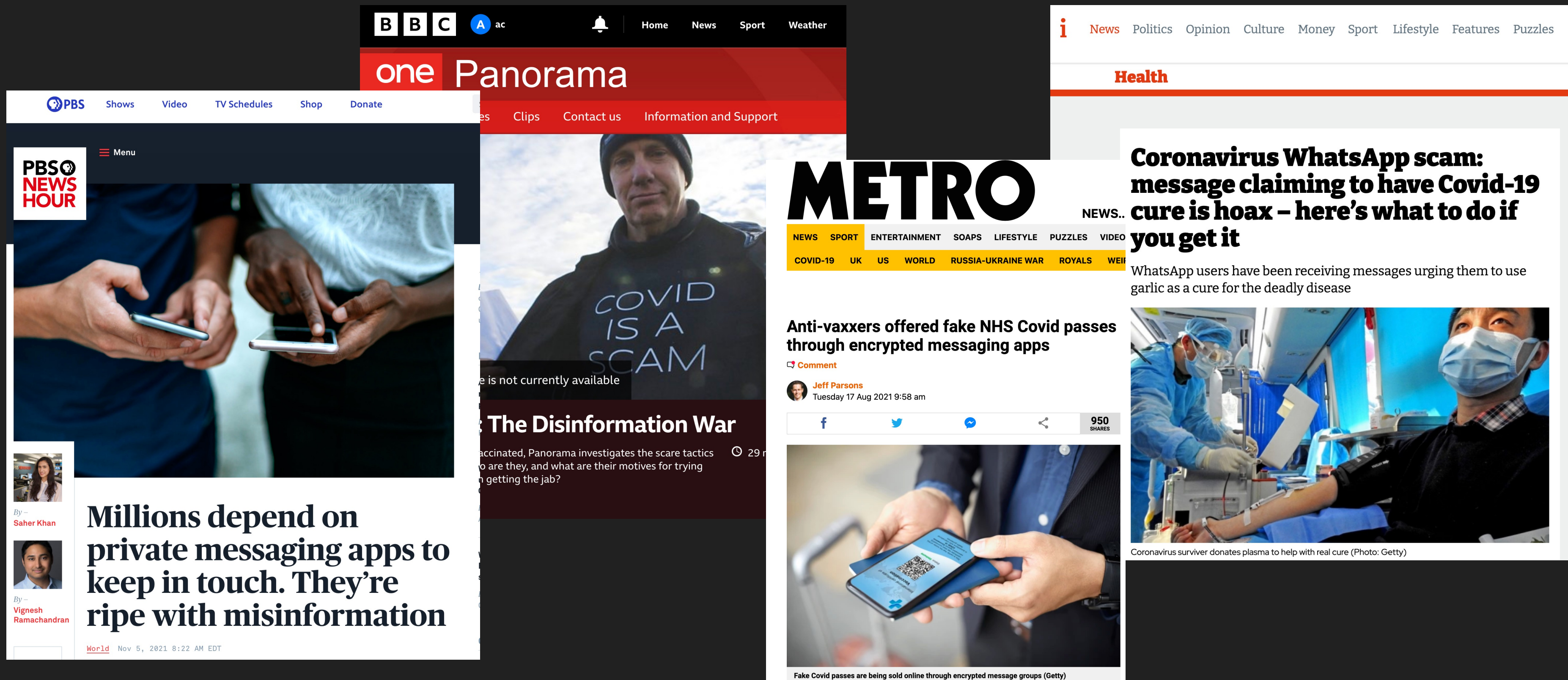
Online Civic Culture Centre (O3C)
+ Centre for Research in Communication and Culture
+ Department of Communication and Media
Loughborough University

Everyday Sharing of Misinformation on Private Social Media

A Leverhulme Trust funded research project based at Loughborough University



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- Online personal messaging is a hard misinformation problem.
- Limited research, but a new wave (Chadwick, Vaccari & Hall, 2022; Kligler-Vilenchik, 2022; Malhotra & Pearce, 2022; Pearce & Malhotra, 2022; Rossini et al., 2021).

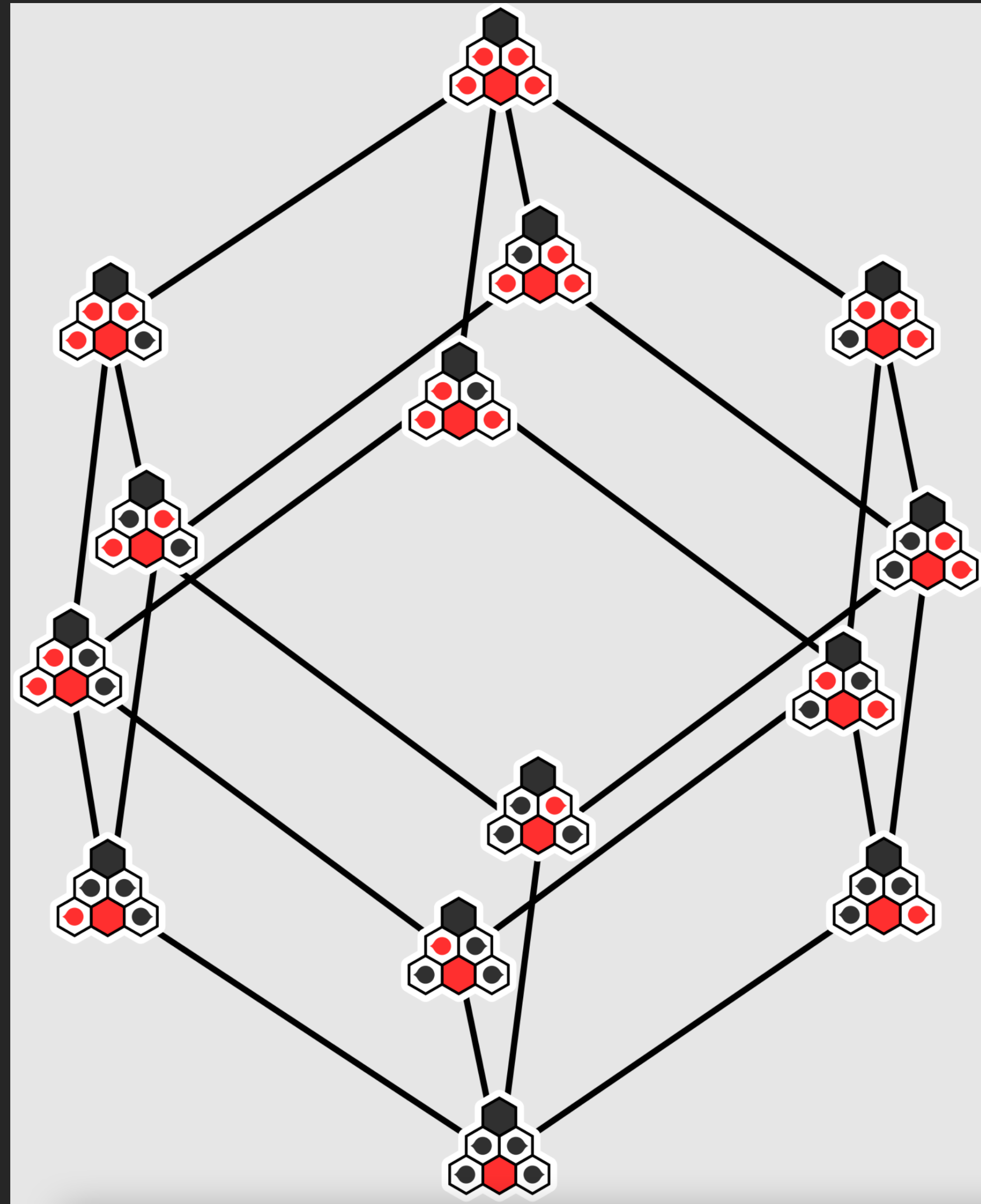
- WhatsApp has 2 billion users globally.
- In the UK, WhatsApp has 31.4 million users aged 18 and over—about 60% of the adult population.
- And it is now more widely and frequently used than any of the public social media platforms.

Conceptual Framework

- Dialectical: inductive, informed by fieldwork, not entirely deducible from prior research.
- Relational-constructivist ontology: political talk and everyday online communication (e.g., Bird, 2003; Cefai & Couldry, 2017; Eliasoph, 1998; 2000; Pink & Mackley, 2013).
- Sharing and correcting misinformation (e.g., Bode & Vraga, 2021; Chadwick et al., 2018; Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2020).
- Social norms are signaled and diffused, then mediate if people perceive they have the capacities and social license to challenge misinformation.
- Hybrid public-interpersonal communication.
- Trust, homophily, and conflict avoidance.

Online personal messaging as hybrid public-interpersonal communication

- Intimacy, everyday connection. Strong-tie interpersonal networks.
- Rapid, subtle shifts between private, interpersonal, and semi-public settings; one-to-one vs small group vs larger group.
- Misinformation in public world burrows into one-to-one and small group settings.
- People share sources to bolster reassurances and warnings against misinformation.
- Opinions *without* sources: personal experience, emotional bonds, kinship, friendship. These opinions also relay into different, semi-public settings.
- Norms of challenging misinformation (and the skills required) differ across contexts. Can boost or limit people's capacities to correct.



Trust , Homophily, and Conflict Avoidance

- High interpersonal trust, low “social trust” (Uslaner, 2002): misinformation goes unchallenged.
- Implicit acceptance. Credibility cues perceived as less important.
- Homophily: messaging affords *curating out* conflict.
- Avoiding conflict to reconcile contradictions between the intimacy of interpersonal relationships and the “rationality” of public debate (Eliasoph, 2000).
- Misinformation arrives in ongoing personal relationships people want to prevent being contaminated by politics.



Research Design, Data, and Method

- Longitudinal qualitative and interpretive method.
- Participants from Opinium Research's panel of 40,000 people.
- Two-wave, in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=102) with the public in three regions: London, the East Midlands, and the North East of England.
- Participants roughly reflect diversity of UK on age, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, and a basic indicator of digital literacy.
- Thematic coding, then Nvivo matrix coding query tool.
- [+ Data donations via smartphone app. + Multi-wave national panel surveys and experiments]

Key Findings (I)

- Norm of conflict avoidance means misinformation can go unchallenged.
- Conflict avoidance is “easier” to perform on personal messaging than in-person.
- Fear of being perceived as undermining group cohesion or lacking capacity.
- People perceive risks to be greater in the more “public” or “semi-public” context of larger messaging groups.
- Boundary-drawing between world of public and political communication, where it is legitimate to challenge, and the interpersonal world of personal messaging.

Key Findings (II)

- Affordances of disengagement: scrolling down, muting notifications, deeming subjects off-limits, and silence.
 - Signals tacit acceptance in groups and can inadvertently enhance the legitimacy of misinformation.
- Routes around conflict avoidance:
 - Criticizing misinformation in less “risky” encounters—but with trusted and like-minded ties.
- *Scaling* up and down between different groups, large and small, for solidarity—again with trusted and like-minded ties.
- One-to-one messaging and multiple groups to *gauge* others’ experiences and opinions.
- Confrontation can backfire and deem topics off limits.

Next Steps

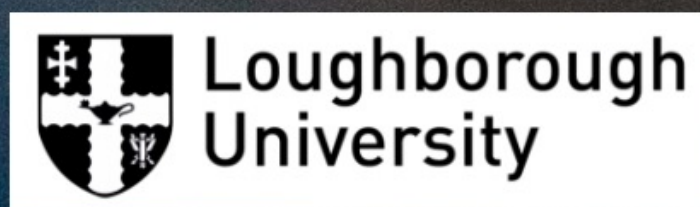
- Other interpretive themes:
 - A role for journalism.
 - Epistemic norms and social distinction that means people devalues anti-misinformation work as irrelevant.
 - Groups and “rules.”
 - Provenance and indeterminacy.
- Analysis of 400+ smartphone app data donations.
- Multi-wave national panel surveys and experiments.



Image: Edvard Munch - Building the Winter Studio. Ekely (1929)

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