

Perceived Versus Actual Ability to Identify Fake News: Evidence From Israel’s 2019–2020 Elections

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A less studied topic about fake news is the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify it. This study examines the topic using a panel survey during Israel’s 2019–2020 election campaigns (Wave 1—N = 1,427; Wave 2—N = 758). Our research, which measured participants’ perceived ability to identify fake news during the April 2019 elections and their actual ability to do so during the September 2019 elections, allowed us to measure the gap between the two. Our analysis reveals that although various political and media variables predict citizens’ perceived ability to identify fake news, most of those indicators are not useful in explaining their actual ability to do so. The gap between the two is explained by political interest and exposure to diverse sources. In addition, we examine the Dunning-Kruger effect, focusing on the overestimation versus the underestimation of fake news identification. The findings indicate that the high political interest and knowledge, alongside high news exposure from diverse sources, leads people to feel complacent and fails people in fake news identification.

Keywords: fake news, election campaigns, misinformation perception, fake news identification, Dunning-Kruger effect

The rise of social media has facilitated the spread of “fake news”—false stories that manipulate the public (Baptista & Gradim, 2022; Gelfert, 2018). This has had serious consequences in various areas, including COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theories (van Der Linden, Roozenbeek, & Compton, 2020), climate change denial (Allen & McAleer, 2018), and election interference (Benaissa Pedriza, 2021; Higdon, 2020). Studies show that many social media users cannot distinguish between fake and true news due to individual characteristics, such as dogmatism, reduced analytical thinking, religious fundamentalism (Bronstein, Pennycook, Bear, Rand, & Cannon, 2019), lower information literacy (Hayat & Hershkovitz, 2018), lower intelligence, and lower news consumption frequency (Sindermann, Cooper, & Montag, 2021). Overestimation of one’s knowledge (Lyons, Montgomery, Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2020) also plays a role in spread of the fake news.

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Research has found that overconfidence in news judgment contributes to the spread of fake news, highlighting a gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify it. This issue has been under-addressed in current studies (Baek, Kang, & Kim, 2019; Cheng & Chen, 2020; Lee, 2019; Lee, Tandoc, & Diehl, 2023). False beliefs about one's ability to detect fake news can lead to behaviors such as supporting fake news regulation (Baek et al., 2019) and government and media policies (Cheng & Chen, 2020).

To address these lacunae, this study examines fake news detection ability using a panel survey (Wave 1—N = 1,427; Wave 2—N = 758) of Israeli citizens during the three rounds of Israeli elections held during 2019–2020. We examine (1) what determines their perceptions of their fake news detection ability, (2) to what extent there is a gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, and (3) which factors promote the ability to identify fake news (with special emphasis on the aspect of overconfidence). The study's design makes several unique contributions to current literature. First, so far, many analyses of the issue have relied on participants' self-reports of their perceived ability to identify fake news (Hayat, Hershkovitz, & Samuel-Azran, 2019; Jang & Kim, 2018), which could be problematic in line with the strong and persistent evidence for self-reporting bias (Maukonen, Männistö, & Tolonen, 2018; Miller, 2011). Our study uniquely examines the issue via analysis of participants' evaluation of the credibility of actual news items distributed in the midst of an ongoing election campaign. The study thus examines fake news detection ability using a natural setting, rather than a lab setting or being based on self-report. In addition, as part of its efforts to identify which factors confuse people and cause them to mistakenly evaluate the ability to identify fake news, this study is unique in examining the gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news with respect to the Dunning-Kruger effect. According to the Dunning-Kruger effect theory, when individuals lack the cognition to realistically assess their knowledge in a field, it causes them to overestimate their abilities (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). We posit that integrating the Dunning-Kruger effect factor may greatly illuminate the role of participants' confidence versus their actual abilities in fake news identification.

Political Fake News Identification

The term "fake news" is contested, with alternatives such as "information disorder" (Wardle & Derakshan, 2018), "post-truth" (McIntyre, 2018), "information pollution" (Meel & Vishwakarma, 2020), and even "bullshit" (Pennycook & Rand, 2020) being used by academics. Despite the lack of consensus, most authors continue to use the term "fake news" (Beauvais, 2022; Lazer et al., 2018; Mishra, Shukla, & Agarwal, 2022; Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018) due to its popularity among the public and mainstream media. Within the various definitions of "fake news," the most cited and accepted definition is Gelfert's (2018), which defines the term as meaning "deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design" (p. 84).

However, more recently, Baptista and Gradim (2022) made an ambitious attempt to create a more elaborate definition based on additional evidence and scenarios. They define fake news as

a type of online disinformation (1), with (2) misleading and/or false statements that may or may not be associated with real events, (3) intentionally created to mislead and/or manipulate a public (4) specific or imagined, (5) through the appearance of a news format with an opportunistic structure (title, image, content) to attract the reader's attention, in order to obtain more clicks and shares and, therefore, greater advertising revenue and/or ideological gain. (Gradim & Baptista, 2022, para. 5)

In this article, we adopt Baptista and Gradim's (2022) definition because it better describes the fake news items included in this study, which are basically pieces of false, or partially false, information that spread during an election campaign after being designed and distributed by politicians, political advisers, and political activists to sway public opinion against a political candidate in an attempt to influence their vote in the ballots.

Fake news has a powerful impact on its audience, especially during election campaigns, when it can sway voters and influence results, posing a threat to the democratic process (Lee, 2019). Fake news's potency in swaying election results became evident after the 2016 U.S. elections (Horne & Adali, 2017). A study of Twitter news stories during the election found that about 25% of them fell into the fake news category, illustrating the popularity of fake news items during election campaigns (Bovet & Maske, 2019). The engagement with the top 20 fake news stories was even greater than that with the top 20 real news stories in the months before the election (Silverman 2016). Fake news also exacerbates political polarization by preventing both camps from being exposed to alternative perspectives and contributing to extremism (Riedel et al., 2017). Studies conducted in France (Ferrera, 2020) and Portugal (Baptista & Gradim, 2022) similarly highlight that fake news is shared more often than real news during election campaigns in these countries.

Studies show that people's cognitive and analytical thinking abilities play a crucial role in identifying misinformation. Critical thinking is negatively associated with the perceived accuracy of fake news, leading to a lower tendency to share false information (Fadhila et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Analytical thinking is strongly associated with an ability to discern real from fake news, while dogmatism and reduced analytical thinking are associated with lower abilities to identify fake news (Bronstein et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2019, 2020).

Several media psychology studies have shown that overconfidence can hinder individuals' ability to distinguish between true and false news. Pennycook and Rand (2020) found that those who are overconfident and overestimate their knowledge are highly susceptible to believing fake news. Similarly, Barakat, Dabbous, and Tarhini (2021) and Lee, Diehl, and Valenzuela (2022) found that reliance on social networks and trust in social media platforms, respectively, can negatively impact the ability to identify misinformation.

Studies examining political communication have found that partisan views are a salient aspect that affects fake news' identification, with conservative voters showing a higher tendency to distribute misinformation (Kahan, 2017; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). The evidence indicates that this pertains mostly to conservative voters. A study conducted during the U.S. 2016 elections revealed that people are more

likely to believe the news that favors the candidate they support, in the spirit of the confirmation bias theory (Klayman, 1995), and stories favoring Trump were distributed 30 million times on Facebook, whereas those favoring Hillary Clinton were distributed 8 million times, showing the Republicans' general potency and higher tendency to distribute misinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Grinberg, Joseph, Friedland, Swire-Thompson, and Lazer's (2019) study also found that fake news was mostly distributed by conservative voters. A recent study revealed a similar trend in the Philippines (Mendoza et al., 2021). Because political leaning plays an important role when examining fake news's identification, our study analyzes participants' political leaning with respect to fake news's evaluation.

Other analyses of news consumption found that, unsurprisingly, there is a link between higher news consumption and exposure to diverse sources and a higher ability to identify fake news (Chan-Olmsted & Qin, 2022). In the same spirit, Sindermann and colleagues (2020) found a relationship between news consumption from diverse sources and a high level of fake news identification. Barakat and colleagues' (2021) study of social media literacy and fake news detection also illustrates the importance of expertise with online social networks' use with a higher ability to discern fake versus real news.

Further, political communication studies examined the impact of political knowledge on fake news detection with inconclusive results. Whereas Vegetti and Mancosu (2020) revealed that, as might be expected, citizens with higher political knowledge are better at identifying misinformation, Guess and colleagues' (2020) and van Duyn and Collier's (2019) studies found no link between political knowledge and fake news evaluation.

Finally, political communication studies examining the impact of political interest on fake news detection found that, surprisingly, high political interest is associated with a higher tendency to share fake news (Ahmed, 2021; Stefanone, Vollmer, & Covert, 2019) and less ability to identify fake news (Wang & Huang, 2021). One possible explanation behind these unexpected results is that people with higher political interests also often hold partisan views, which were linked (as shown earlier) with a lower tendency to identify fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The Dunning-Kruger Effect and Fake News Identification

The Dunning-Kruger effect was first suggested in a 1999 study by David Dunning and Justin Kruger. Following a study aiming to examine the extent to which students were able to assess their own performance in tests involving grammar, logic, and humor, Dunning and Kruger were surprised to reveal that poor performers overestimated their achievements, blind to their shortcomings. The scholars explained that those participants had a lower ability to adequately assess their own abilities because their lower intellectual abilities meant they could not assess their own performance in fulfilling the task.

The Dunning-Kruger effect has been examined in various scenarios. One of the realms in which it has most been addressed is information literacy. A review of 53 studies concluded that evidence showing that people overestimate their information literacy abilities is substantial (Mahmood, 2016). In the co-political context, Anson's (2018) study confirmed the Dunning-Kruger effect in the political knowledge realms, mostly among those holding partisan views (regardless of the specific view).

Yamamoto and Yang (2022) found that those who consume their political knowledge from social media tended to overestimate their knowledge, whereas those consuming news from traditional media tend to underestimate their political knowledge.

In the context of political fake news, Kartal and Tyran (2022) examined the impact of overestimating one's abilities in relation to political misinformation. The study provides empirical evidence that overconfidence undermines voters' information aggregation skills and negatively affects their behavior (so they vote in a haphazard manner). Lyons and colleagues (2021) examined the relevance of the Dunning-Kruger effect for fake news discernment, and they found that the worst performers were also the most confident, were blind to their inability to discern fake news, and expressed more willingness to share fake news.

Research Questions

Because our study intends to contribute to the scarce literature that aims to identify the gap between perceived versus actual ability to detect fake news (as well as the reasons behind this), we will present exploratory research questions, rather than hypotheses, in an attempt to add to existing knowledge in the field. Our research questions were as follows:

RQ1a: Which indicators explain one's perceived ability to identify fake news?

RQ1b: Do the same indicators explain one's actual ability to identify fake news?

RQ2: What are the indicators that explain the gap between one's perceived and actual ability to identify fake news?

RQ3: Which indicators explain the differences between those who overestimate their ability to identify fake news and those who underestimate it?

Methods

To examine our research questions and get a better understanding of citizens' perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, we conducted surveys examining Israeli society during election campaigns. This study's data were collected as part of a panel survey (using a longitudinal sample) of Israeli society before and after the April 2019, September 2019, and March 2020 Israeli legislative elections. The surveys were conducted by iPanel, an Israeli company specializing in Internet-based research.¹ An e-mail was sent to random members of iPanel's panel, with a link inviting them to participate in the survey. The current

¹ iPanel recruits its large respondent pool in various ways, using both traditional and online methods for recruitment (on social networks and other websites). Respondents are asked to take part in periodic surveys in exchange for incentives (gift cards). The entire pool comprises more than 100,000 participants; the average panelist answers two or three surveys per month, but no minimum is required (John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015).

study's analysis uses data from two of those surveys: the first is before the April 2019 elections, and the second is before the September 2019 elections. This research structure allowed us to collect data on participants' perceived ability to identify fake news (as well as other relevant media, political, and demographic variables) in the first survey and information about the ability to identify the fake news items appearing in the election coverage (both on traditional and social media) in the second. For the April 2019 elections, the first survey's (N = 1,427) response rate (RR) was $RR1 = .194$, according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research RR Scale, and the average response time was 21.43 minutes. For the September 2019 elections, the before survey's (N = 758) response rate was $RR1 = .531$, and the average response time was 14.6 minutes. The surveys included participants from all sectors of Israeli society: 53.3% were women (compared with 51% in Israeli society), 17.7% were Arab Israeli citizens (compared with 21% in Israeli society), and 10.7% were ultra-Orthodox (compared with 12% in Israeli society). The average age was 39.91, the average income was 2.49 on a 5-point scale, and the average educational level was 4.08 on a 7-point scale.

Our analysis is divided into three sections. The first tries to understand the indicators that explain the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news (using multiple regression models), attempting to see whether the same indicators can explain both. Using media variables (news exposure on both traditional and social media, expectation of news accuracy and doubt regarding information accuracy on social media, and source diversity), political variables (political interest, political knowledge, and political leaning), and demographic variables (education, gender, and age), we examine whether the same indicators explain both perceived and actual ability to identify fake news. Next, using a path model, we try to widen our understanding of the gap between participants' perceived and actual ability to identify fake news. The path model analysis examines the gap we examine participants' individual gaps in their perceived using political interest, political knowledge, news exposure on social media, and source diversity. Last, we focus on differences between participants who overestimate their ability to identify fake news and those who underestimate it in the media, using the political and demographic variables mentioned earlier (using T tests). Table 1 describes the variables used in the various analyses and is presented in the results section. It includes the research measures, items, and (where applicable) each measure's reliability.

Table 1. The Variables Used in the Analysis.

	Items	Survey	N	Number of Items (a)	Range	M (SD)
News Exposure, Social Media (SM)	How often are you exposed to political messages on social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) in the current election campaign?	1	1,427	1	1–5	3.17 (1.46)
News Exposure, Traditional Media (TM)	How many times a week do you: (1) Watch the news on one of the Israeli television channels? (2) Read the news of at least one of the newspapers or news sites? (3) Watch political talk shows on TV?	1	1,427	3 (0.693)	1–5	2.72 (0.96)
Expect News Accuracy SM	I estimate that the political information to which I am exposed on social media will be: not accurate at all (1) to very accurate (10)	1	1,427	1	1–10	5.23 (2.39)
Doubt Information Accuracy SM	I have doubts regarding the veracity of the information I am exposed to on social media because a lot of the information presented is fake news	1	1,427	1	1–10	5.93 (2.38)
Perceived Ability of Identify Fake News SM ²	I believe I'm able to identify political fake news on social media when I'm exposed to them.	1	1,427	1	1–10	5.53 (2.38)
Actual Ability to Identify Fake News	To what extent did you perceive the information of this news items as true? The participants were asked about two fake news items: one dealing with former Prime Minister Netanyahu (the head of the Likud party, the largest right-wing party), and the other dealing with former Prime Minister Barak (who was a candidate in the Labor party's list, the largest left-wing party). We used a reverse scale in the analysis.	3	755	2 news items	1–10	2.87 (2.28); and 4.67 (2.98)

² Based on Samuel-Azran, Yarchi, and Hayat (2022).

Source Diversity Scale	When you consume political information and news: (1) How often do you read something you disagree with? (2) How often do you review content from news sources that are different from the sources you usually read? (3) How often are you exposed to diverse sources of information? (4) How often do you reconsider your position on the subject?	1	1,427	4 (0.742)	1-5	2.74 (0.94)
Political Interest	(1) To what extent are you interested in politics? (2) To what extent are you following occurrences in the current elections? (3) To what extent are you interested in occurrences in other countries?	1	1,427	3 (0.872)	1-10	4.86 (2.31)
Political Knowledge	We exposed the participants to pictures of four political figures and one political event, and we asked them to identify them. Two were pictures of Israeli politicians: Eitan Cabel and Gilad Erdan. Two are international figures: Hilary Clinton and Angela Merkel. The fifth picture was a famous picture taken during the voting on the Israeli national law (during the summer of 2018).	1	1,427	5 (0.769)	0-5	2.26 (1.74) ³
Political Leaning	How do you define your political views on a scale of very right-wing (1) to very left-wing (10)?	1	1,427	1	1-10	4.75 (2.43)
Education	The highest institution or degree you had graduated (from elementary school to PhD).	1	1,415	1	1-7	4.08 (1.25)
Gender	What is your gender? (male = 1)	1	1,427	1		53.3% Women
Age	Calculated based on the participant's year of birth.	1	1,427	1	18-79	37.09 (13.54)

³ The relatively low mean of knowledge suggests that the participants acted according to our instructions and did not use an online search to find the right answers to the pictures presented.

Gap between Perceived and Actual Ability to Identify Fake News	Based on our data, we created a variable measuring the gap between participants' perceived and actual ability (for each of the two news items) to identify fake news (reducing the former from the latter, and presenting the results in absolute values), allowing us to understand the distance between the two (while smaller values exhibit a good fit and higher numbers—incompatibility between the two).	754	2	0–9	3.42 (2.37); 3.31 (2.38)
Overestimate vs. Underestimate Their Ability to Identify Fake News	Based on our data regarding participants' perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, we created a variable measuring the participants who overestimate their ability to identify fake news (high perception and low actual ability in at least one of the items), versus those who underestimate their ability (low perception and high actual ability).	498			65.5% underestimate

The data for this study was collected in two waves of our panel survey, due to the unique circumstances of Israel's politics in 2019–2020.

Results

As mentioned earlier, to widen our understanding of the perceived and actual abilities to identify fake news, our result section will be divided into three parts. The first tries to understand the indicators that explain the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, attempting to see whether the same indicators can explain both. Next, we try to widen our understanding of the gap between participants' perceived and actual abilities to identify fake news. And lastly, we focus on differences between participants who overestimate their abilities to identify fake news and those who underestimate it.

The first analysis focuses on both the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news (using two fake items that were published during the election campaign) and uses various media, political, and demographic variables to understand the indicators, which explains both the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news. The regression model predicting the perceived ability to identify fake news uses exposure to news on both traditional and social media, the expectation level for news's accuracy on social media, the level of doubt regarding information accuracy on social media, source diversity, political interest, political knowledge, political leaning, education, gender, and age as the model's indicators. The model predicting the perceived ability to identify fake news is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression Model Predicting Perceived Ability to Identify Fake News on Social Media.

Fake News Identification Perception—Social Media (SM)		
	β	SE B
News Exposure SM	0.050	0.046
News Exposure TM	-0.028	0.076
Expect News Accuracy SM	0.173***	0.025
Doubt Information Accuracy SM	0.156***	0.024
Source Diversity	0.229***	0.073
Political Interest	0.096**	0.033
Political Knowledge	0.135***	0.041
Political Leaning (Right to Left)	0.004	0.024
Education	-0.020	0.047
Gender (Male = 1)	0.012	0.113
Age	-0.046	0.005
<i>Intersect</i>		1.536
<i>Adjusted R²</i>		0.232
<i>N</i>		1415

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

As the findings in Table 2 indicate, higher expectations of news's accuracy on social media, higher doubt regarding information accuracy on social media, higher source diversity, and higher political interest and political knowledge all predict a higher perceived ability to identify fake news on social media. News exposure on both traditional and social media, political leaning, education, gender, and age were not significant in the model. If this is so, people who believe that they can identify fake news on social media platforms tend to consume news from diverse sources; on the one hand, they expect accuracy, but on the other hand, they tend to doubt information. They are also more interested and knowledgeable in politics. Next, we intend to see whether the same indicators can explain the actual ability to identify fake news. As well as the variables used in the perceived ability analysis, we add the perceived ability to identify fake news on social media to our analysis of the actual ability to identify fake news. The examination of political leaning is important in this analysis because we focus on two different news items, each dealing with a different political camp, and the participants' political leaning may have an impact on the way they perceive the information as in Kahan (2017) and Van Bavel and Pereira (2018). Table 3 presents the regression model predicting the actual ability to identify fake news.

Table 3. Regression Model Predicting Actual Ability to Identify Fake News—Two News Items.

	Fake News Identification— Netanyahu		Fake News Identification— Barak	
	β	SE B	β	SE B
News Exposure SM	0.048	0.066	-0.029	0.086
News Exposure TM	-0.124*	0.116	-0.041	0.153
Expect News Accuracy SM	-0.071	0.036	-0.007	0.047
Doubt Information Accuracy SM	0.055	0.035	0.044	0.046
Source Diversity	0.041	0.110	-0.032	0.145
Fake News Identification Perception SM	-0.070	0.039	-0.010	0.051
Political Interest	-0.150**	0.050	-0.117*	0.065
Political Knowledge	0.196***	0.061	-0.113*	0.080
Political Leaning (Right to Left)	-0.106**	0.036	0.120***	0.048
Education	0.004	0.070	0.032	0.092
Gender (Male = 1)	-0.006	0.163	0.004	0.214
Age	-0.011	0.007	0.084*	0.09
Intersect		9.477		6.971
Adjusted R^2		0.060		0.050
N		751		751

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The findings in Table 3 indicate that only political interest, political knowledge, political leaning, news exposure (only in relation to one of the examined items), and age (only in relation to one of the examined items) predict the actual ability to identify fake news. The remaining variables in the model were not significant. It appears that lower political interest explains the ability to identify fake news, alongside political leaning—a right-wing leaning helps to identify fake news dealing with the right-wing leader, and a

left-wing leaning helps to identify fake news dealing with the left-wing leader. As for political knowledge, the models of the two different items examined show mixed results—positive for Netanyahu, negative for Barak. Although the indicator was significant in only one of the two items examined, older people were more able to identify fake news, and lower news exposure to traditional media was found to have a significant impact on participants' ability to identify fake news.

The evidence in Tables 2 and 3 suggests that different indicators explain the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news—suggesting a gap between the two. Although many of the factors that are expected to have an impact on people's ability to identify fake news were found to be significant in the examining their perceived ability (e.g., their expectations regarding news accuracy, doubt regarding information accuracy, source diversity, political interest, and political knowledge), most of those factors were not significant in the examination of their actual ability to identify fake news, and only political interest (in a different direction than our expectation) and political knowledge (with mixed results) are significant in the model that predicts the actual ability to identify fake news. Those differences led us to our next analysis, which looks at the gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news.

The second stage of the analysis, focusing on the gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, is based on a path model, using SPSS AMOS (v. 25), with the full information maximum-likelihood procedure. Selecting a path model for the current study was based on several commonly perceived advantages of structural equations over multiple regressions, including the ability to create more flexible research assumptions, the reduction of measurement error by using confirmatory factor analysis, and a better ability to model mediating variables (Bentler & Chou, 1988; Diamantopoulos, 1994; Mueller, 1997). In addition to the research models outlined in Figure 1, various other models were tested to ensure that models exhibited the optimal configuration.⁴

Figure 1 presents two path models portraying the paths between different variables and the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news. The predicting variables are political interest, political knowledge, news exposure on social media, and source diversity. As such, this model accounts for both direct and indirect paths between the variables and the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, using two news items (the measurement was calculated by reducing participants' perceived ability assessment from the actual ability score and presenting the results in absolute values).⁵ The models (for the first item dealing with Netanyahu: chi-square [2, $N = 1,427$] = 25.153, $p = 0.000$; NFI = 0.979; RFI = 0.843; IFI = 0.981; TLI = 0.854; CFI = 0.980; RMSEA = 0.090; for the first item dealing

⁴ We tested for alternative models, including placing political interest as the mediator, using political knowledge to explain the media variables, and using the media variables to explain political knowledge. The model in Figure 1 presented the best statistical fit.

⁵ In line with the study's goals, we measured the gap between participants' perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, allowing us to understand the subjects' distance between the two. Similarly, to Yamamoto, Kushin, and Dalisay's (2018) measurement of a political knowledge gap, we examined our analysis based on an additional measurement, using standardized values. The analysis exhibited similar findings, with similar trends for political interest and source diversity being significant, whereas for the news item about Barak, both news exposure on social media and political knowledge were significant and negative.

with Barak: chi-square [2, $N = 1,427$] = 25.153, $p = 0.000$; NFI = 0.979; RFI = 0.839; IFI = 0.980; TLI = 0.850; CFI = 0.980; RMSEA = 0.090) were a good fit with the data and showed 7.1% variance for the Netanyahu item and 2.9 for the Barak item, in the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news.⁶ The model is presented in Figure 1, whereas the paths to the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news are marked by the letter *N* for the item dealing with Netanyahu and by the letter *B* for the item dealing with Barak.

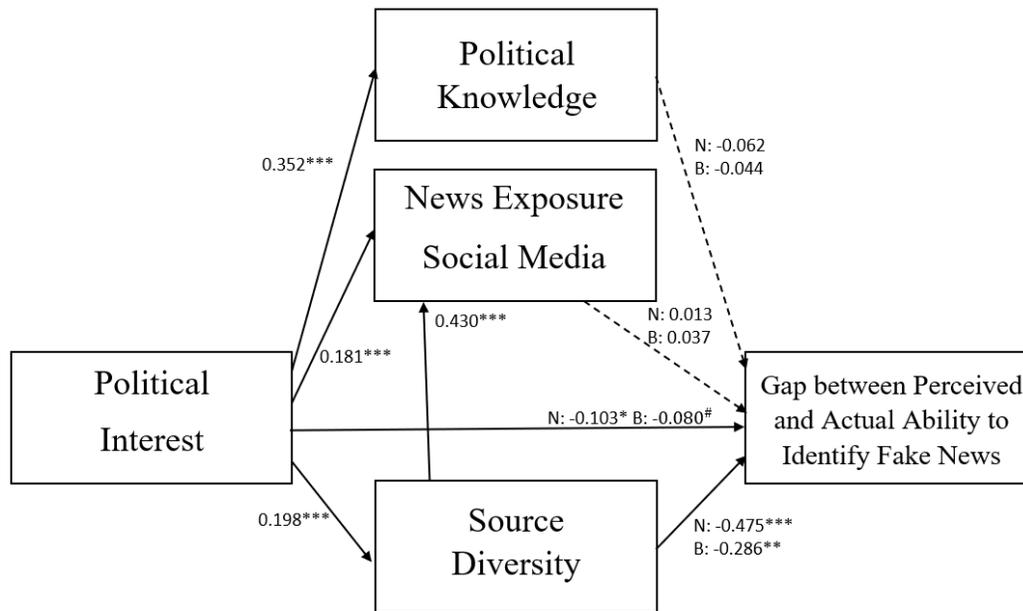


Figure 1: The Gap Between Perceived and Actual Ability to Identify Fake News—Using Two Fake News Items (Netanyahu: *N*; Barak: *B*)

Note. # $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Dashed lines are used to mark insignificant paths.

Similarly to previous studies, we posit that political interest is the starting point because it is the most important variable in explaining political media choices and interest in politics begins at a relatively young age, although other influences can become important throughout life (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Wolfsfeld, Yarchi, & Samuel-Azran, 2016). In line with our expectations, the findings (Figure 1) show that political interest positively explains political knowledge, exposure to news on social media platforms, and source diversity.⁷ Simultaneously, source diversity increases exposure to news on social media platforms. As for the gap between perceived and actual ability in identifying fake news, it appears that the

⁶ The model shows 22% of variance in political knowledge, 23.6% of variance in exposure to news on social media, and 23.9% of variance in source diversity.

⁷ It appears that people with higher political interests tend to consume their information from various and diverse sources. This finding correlates with the understanding that people with higher political interests tend to consume more news (Yarchi, Wolfsfeld, & Samuel-Azran, 2021).

paths between both political interest⁸ and source diversity are decreasing the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, suggesting that people with higher political interest, and those who tend to consume their news from diverse sources, had a better ability to assess their identification of fake news (whether they are able or unable to identify fake news). Political knowledge and exposure to news on social media did not have a significant impact on the gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news.

The last part of our analysis is devoted to an examination of the differences between participants who overestimate their ability to identify fake news (who believe they are able to identify fake news but actually are not able to do so) and those who underestimate it (believe they are not able to identify fake news but actually are able to do so), in line with the Dunning-Kruger effect. To examine differences between citizens who overestimate their ability to identify fake news and those who underestimate it, we conducted T tests, measuring the differences in exposure to news on traditional and social media, the level of expectation for news accuracy on social media, the level of doubt regarding information accuracy on social media, source diversity, political interest, political knowledge, education, gender, age, and political leaning. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Differences Between People Who Overestimate Their Ability to Identify Fake News and Those Who Underestimate It.

Variables		N	M	SD	T
News Exposure, SM	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	3.73	1.24	6.091***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	2.96	1.48	
News Exposure, TM	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	3.12	0.88	5.964***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	2.60	0.95	
Expect News Accuracy, SM	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	5.98	2.52	4.690***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	4.90	2.28	
Doubt Information Accuracy, SM	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	6.38	2.38	2.941**
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	5.72	2.41	
Source Diversity	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	3.06	0.80	6.363***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	2.56	0.91	
Political Interest	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	5.92	1.99	6.971***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	4.55	2.22	
Political Knowledge	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	3.04	1.59	5.647***
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	2.17	1.65	
Political Leaning (Right to Left)	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	4.63	2.30	0.732
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	4.47	2.22	
Education	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	4.23	1.19	0.861
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	4.13	1.27	
Gender	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	0.52	0.50	1.801
	<i>Underestimating their ability</i>	326	0.44	0.49	
Age	<i>Overestimating their ability</i>	172	39.82	13.53	0.785

⁸ Marginally significant for the item dealing with Barak.

Underestimating their ability 326 38.79 14.04

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The findings in Table 4 indicate that people who overestimate their ability to identify fake news tend to consume more political news on both traditional and social media platforms, have higher expectations of information accuracy on social media, and tend to have more doubt regarding the information to which they are exposed. They tend to consume their information from diverse sources and have higher political interest and knowledge compared with those who underestimate their ability to identify fake news. No significant differences were found in education, gender, age, and political leaning. It appears that high political interest and knowledge, alongside high exposure to news from diverse sources, lead people to feel empowered with regard to politics and make them believe in their ability to identify fake news—more than their actual ability to do so.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our article investigates citizens' perceptions of their ability to identify fake news items distributed on social media during Israel's 2019–2020 elections and their actual ability to do so, focusing on the gap between the two. Our analysis reveals that various political and media consumption and perceptions variables, most of them unsurprising, predict citizens' perceived ability to identify fake news. These are: citizens who are more critical of the media, consume news from diverse sources, express more political interest and have higher political knowledge, and believe that they can identify fake news better than others. Simultaneously, the analysis revealed that most of those indicators are not useful in explaining citizens' actual ability to identify fake news. The study thus strengthens the existing notion that a large part of the potency of fake news is that citizens—even informed citizens—are not immune to fake news, and that in fact, many fail to assess their ability to identify fake news, dramatically adding to its potency. Although many of the studies in the area were conducted via self-reports or experiments (e.g., Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2018; Pennycook & Rand, 2019), our study adds important evidence in relation to the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news in a natural environment, focusing on actual fake news items distributed during the election campaigns. It thus adds to the scarce literature (e.g., Lee, 2019) examining the issue under real-life conditions.

To better understand which variables explain the gap between perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, a follow-up path model analysis was conducted. The analysis identified that the usage of diverse news sources and political interest both explain the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news. The findings relating to source diversity fit the existing literature (e.g., Sindermann et al., 2020) that reveals a link between exposure to diverse sources and the ability to discern between fake and real news. In contrast, in the realm of political interest, the findings contradict studies that found the link to be associated with a higher tendency to share fake news (Ahmed, 2021; Stefanone et al., 2019) and less ability to identify fake news (Wang & Huang, 2021). A possible explanation of this contradiction may be the differences in political environments and systems. The Israeli public is highly engaged in politics, and Israel has a multiparty system that is less polarized than the American two-party system (which is the focus of most studies in the field). The two parties' political division may fail Americans in their information accuracy assessments, because their partisans adhere to either the Republican or Democratic camp (Allcott

& Gentzkow, 2017). Future studies should conduct a comparative analysis between political systems to better interpret this contradiction.

The last stage of our analysis focused on differences between those citizens who overestimate their ability to identify fake news, in line with the Dunning-Kruger effect theory (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Our findings indicate that those who overestimate their abilities tend to consume more political news on both traditional and social media platforms, have higher expectations regarding information accuracy on social media, and tend to have more doubt regarding the information to which they are exposed; they tend to consume their information from diverse sources and have greater political interest and knowledge. The commonality between these factors is participants' perception of being media savvy and having strong political involvement. A likely explanation of our results may be the role of (over)confidence among those with a high media profile and strong political engagement, which has been identified by past studies as a factor that reduces individuals' ability to discern between fake and true news. Specifically, Littrell and Fugelsang (2023; see also Littrell, Fugelsang, & Risko, 2020) identified that overconfidence in decision-making and cognitive abilities can drive people to demonstrate decreased attention when fulfilling tasks that require analytical thinking. Pennycook, Ross, Koehler, and Fugelsang's (2017) analysis of people's ability to assess their thinking skills on the cognitive reflection test further suggested that overconfidence may diminish one's ability to engage in thinking processes (see also Kartal & Tyran, 2022; Lyons et al., 2021). In the same spirit, our study links participants' feeling of high political and media engagement with an inability to identify fake news, providing further indication of the negative impact of (over)confidence in citizens' realistic judgment of their actual ability to identify fake news.

To conclude, the study makes several important contributions to the current literature. First, it strengthens the notion that there is a gap between their perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, highlighting a major reason behind the potency of fake news and its ability to manipulate extensive audiences. Whereas former studies (e.g., Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Pennycook et al., 2018) were conducted using self-reports (which are somewhat controversial in this context) or experiments, our analysis was conducted using real fake news items distributed during an election campaign, illustrating in a natural environment how fake news can outsmart the public. In fact, the findings strongly indicate that the fake news items played an important part in the Israeli ballots in the three elections examined. Future studies should thus aim to examine, via methods such as interviews and focus groups, the extent to which the believability of fake news items actually leads people to vote for specific parties, thus better mapping the damage to the democratic system in light of fake news.

Second, the study highlights the importance of source diversity in explaining the gap between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, which illuminates, for both academic and professional intervention programs, the importance of promoting source diversity and political interest in fake news identification. Whereas the ability of source diversity to promote fake news identification is unsurprising (e.g., Sindermann et al., 2020), the fact that fake news aggravates the already problematic issue of political polarization (Riedel et al., 2017) makes intervention plans highly challenging. Furthermore, the challenge becomes even stronger considering that studies show that a reliance on social networks promotes the feeling of being informed, but in reality it does not contribute to their actual knowledge (Lee et al., 2022). This

highlights the need for intervention plans to encourage not only the use of different sources but also those from mainstream sources, both on- and offline.

Finally, the integration of the Dunning-Kruger effect theory into our study indicates the potentially negative impact of overconfidence, in our case with regard to participants' media consumption and political involvement variables and on the tendency to overestimate one's ability to identify fake news. This adds to growing evidence relating to the damage caused by the overestimation of one's knowledge (Lyons et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2020) to their ability to identify fake news. We thus suggest that intervention plans aiming to promote fake news' immunity will pay special attention to "overconfident" participants, with the aim of delivering to them the message that their complacency actually puts them into a high-risk group in relation to fake news' susceptibility.

The current study was created in the unique circumstances of repeat elections (because only following three rounds of elections was Prime Minister Netanyahu able to form the necessary coalition and establish a government). Those circumstances allowed us to examine the differences between the perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, using a panel survey. Due to those circumstances, our variables were tested in only two of the surveys, and some of our measurements are based on single items. Although our examination of the ability to identify fake news is based on only a few items, we feel that the research design provides scholars with important insights into those differences in the natural environment, and that the study's findings contribute to our understanding of fake news identification. Future studies could extend the examination, adding measurements of both perceived and actual ability to identify fake news, and examine the issue in other circumstances and beyond election campaigns.

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