Today, more than ever, many people have instant access to information from millions of sources available in their pockets through smartphones and other internet-connected devices. Unfortunately, people may be easily exposed to fraudulent information that is accidentally spread (misinformation) or deliberately distributed (disinformation). Colloquially, either type of false information may be referred to as “fake news.” However, a growing concern with the widespread use of this term is how to distinguish legitimate information from that which should correctly be rejected as fake (Lazer et al., 2018). In fact, warning signs are emerging that suggest this task may become increasingly more difficult as coordinated disinformation efforts through social media manipulation have now reached an unprecedented global scale. Bradshaw and Howard (2019) reported that the number of countries using organized social media manipulation campaigns more than doubled from 2017 to 2019.

The Nature of “Fake News”
Research has shown that individuals who trust a particular source are more likely to readily accept information provided by that source (Frost et al., 2015; Pena et al., 2017). However, source information related to eyewitness accounts, news reports, or social media posts can also be forgotten or misremembered (de Pereyra et al., 2014; Fragale &...
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Knowledge (Fazio et al., 2015). In the statement, even in the face of contradictory (Polage, 2012). The mere repetition of a simple—demonstrated not only with brief statements similar truth effect (Hasher et al., 1977). This effect has been what has become commonly known as the illusory ency. Fluent information processing promotes the reencountered, and this familiarity promotes flu-

information will appear more familiar when
reencountered, and this familiarity promotes flu-

information consumers more likely to accept all of the information as true (Fisher & Keil, 2018).

Even if one suspects that information is false, reencountering that false information may still be problematic. For instance, Schwarz et al. (2016) have argued that previously encountered false information will appear more familiar when reencountered, and this familiarity promotes fluency. Fluent information processing promotes the understanding and acceptance of ideas, creating what has become commonly known as the illusory truth effect (Hasher et al., 1977). This effect has been demonstrated not only with brief statements similar to news headlines, but with longer narratives as well (Polage, 2012). The mere repetition of a simple-to-understand and plausible idea increases belief in the statement, even in the face of contradictory knowledge (Fazio et al., 2015).

Information Processing Style

If source information cannot always be carefully tracked or accounted for, understanding how individual information processing styles contribute to one’s susceptibility to being influenced by disinformation campaigns may be important for further developing educational tools to help protect people from falling prey to these efforts.

Need for Cognition

One individual differences factor that may play an important role in influencing how people scrutinize news information is one’s level of need for cognition. The characteristic of need for cognition indicates whether an individual enjoys effortful cognitive tasks, and therefore may be helpful in predicting the extent to which someone will choose to seek out mentally demanding situations or engage in challenging problem solving (Cacioppo et al., 1984). With regard to information processing, this factor differentiates between individuals who put a lot of thought into their decisions and individuals who prefer to make decisions with minimal mental effort.

Those who score higher on this scale tend to enjoy engaging in problem-solving activities and intellectual challenges (Meier et al., 2014; Woo et al., 2007), develop more creative problem-solving strategies (Watts et al., 2017), and find more effective solutions to complex problems (Nair & Ramnarayan, 2000). Individuals who score lower on this scale may make equally effective decisions in many contexts, but they seldom exercise more cognitive effort than necessary when solving problems or making decisions (Pillai et al., 2011). Other research with the Need for Cognition Scale has shown that individuals with a higher need for cognition more critically assess the quality of arguments made by others (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992) and more carefully evaluate the validity of their own thoughts (Kuvaas & Kaufman, 2004).

Only a few preliminary studies have examined the association between need for cognition and news consumption behaviors, mainly focusing on impression formation. For example, Tsfati and Cappella (2005) found an association between news exposure and mainstream media skepticism among participants lower in need for cognition. Lee and Jang (2010) found that participants with a higher need for cognition were less influenced by individual reader comments that followed news stories. Similarly, Lee (2014) found that participants higher in need for cognition were less influenced by political opinions posted on social media sites.
such as Facebook. It is unclear how need for cognition may relate to judgments of the truthfulness of individual news stories; however, recent work has shown that individuals who engage in less cognitive reflection perceive fake news headlines as more accurate, regardless of political ideology (Pennycook & Rand, 2019b). Further research examining whether need for cognition predicts the effective sorting of fact from fiction in a news era rife with disinformation may play an important role in designing effective media literacy courses.

**Choice Maximization**

In some situations, making decisions can be more difficult than one might expect. With thousands of choices to make daily, abstaining from choice-demanding tasks may in fact provide some people with a more desirable sense of freedom (Schwartz, 2004). For instance, in a field study in California, researchers presented participants with two scenarios: a tasting booth that displayed either a limited selection of 6 samples, or an extensive selection of 24 samples (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). The research revealed that, even though the display of an extensive selection attracted more customers, the essence of having too many choices impeded the customers’ motivation to buy a product more so than the limited sample size. In this sense, information overload may diminish one’s motivation to carefully evaluate the many options presented.

Using similar examples, Schwartz (2000) has challenged the traditional notion that freedom of choice uniformly benefits our well-being, instead arguing that encountering many choice points in our day-to-day lives may feel more burdensome than liberating. Concern over this so-called “tyranny of choice” has become particularly pronounced for information consumers trying to make effective decisions when browsing the internet (Fasolo et al., 2007). How do people develop effective strategies for managing the information overload they may encounter in a contemporary digital age? Schwartz et al. (2002) proposed that people learn to navigate the potentially overwhelming number of choice scenarios they may face on a daily basis by developing their own characteristic information processing style. Individual differences in choice maximization may guide some people toward a tendency to optimize the outcome of their decisions, whereas others may be motivated to reduce the burden of the choice tasks they encounter and merely look for satisfactory results. Schwartz et al. (2002) introduced a scale to assess individual differences across this dimension, indicating one’s tendency toward maximizing versus satisficing, depending on one’s general choice optimization preferences.

Individuals who tend toward maximizing are more likely to pursue the “best outcome” in choice scenarios. Maximizers prefer considering alternatives, hold themselves to high standards, and find it more difficult to arrive at a decision (Schwartz et al., 2002). These individuals are more likely to exhaust all their alternatives in pursuit of optimal results and may only make their decisions when the best outcome has been identified. Alternatively, individuals who tend toward satisficing are more likely to search for a “good enough” option when faced with a choice scenario. Satisficers strive to find a solution that matches their preference, but they do not have a strong urge to exhaust their thought processes to find this match. They often settle upon adequate outcomes without worrying whether there are better alternatives available (Schwartz & Ward, 2004).

Psychological research on choice maximization has shown that maximizers experience more regret related to their choices and show perfectionistic tendencies (Nenkov et al., 2008). However, applied research using the Maximization Scale has largely been focused within the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. Some of this work has examined behavior among maximizers versus satisficers in digital shopping environments, demonstrating that maximizers seek out more product information before making a purchase, feel more time pressure when shopping, and are more likely to change their mind after making a purchase (Chowdhury et al., 2009). Because maximizers tend to more carefully evaluate information prior to making decisions, their information processing style may lead them to be less susceptible to the influence of disinformation in digital environments. However, to our knowledge, this dimension has not yet been utilized in studies examining how information consumers (rather than product consumers) evaluate news stories. This may be a particularly important individual differences characteristic to examine in an age of digital disinformation.

**Current Study**

Previous research has indicated that need for cognition and choice maximization style might influence how someone approaches a variety of tasks that involve making difficult judgments (Appelt et al., 2011). However, to our knowledge, these individual differences variables have not been investigated...
in the context of making judgments about the veracity of news information. The current study was designed to examine whether participants’ ability to evaluate a series of news stories would be related to individual differences in their level of need for cognition and choice maximization style, compared to their general interest in following current news events. We hypothesized that participants who scored higher on measures of need for cognition and choice maximization would more accurately sort fact from fiction among a series of news stories. To test these hypotheses, we presented a news quiz to our participants that included 10 true stories and 10 fake stories. We challenged participants to identify the true versus fake stories without the aid of source information (e.g., the news outlet or website where the story appeared). We predicted that need for cognition and choice maximization would correlate positively with participants’ ability to distinguish fake news from real news, even without source information.

Method

Sample
Participants included 122 undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 20.24, SD = 2.69$) recruited from lower level psychology classes at a small, private liberal arts college in the Northeastern United States in early 2019. Participants were invited to complete an online study in exchange for extra credit. Participants represented all levels of undergraduate study, such that the sample included 27% seniors, 19% juniors, 18% sophomores, and 36% first-year students. Women comprised 78% of the sample. Eighty percent of participants reported their race as White or European American, 7% as Black or African American, 4% as Asian, 3% as Hispanic or Latino/a, 2% as Native American or Native Alaskan, and 5% of participants selected another option or declined to respond.

Materials

Need for Cognition Scale
To assess preferences regarding effortful cognitive tasks, participants completed an 18-item version of the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo et al., 1984). Validation work with this measure has shown that individuals who demonstrate a higher need for cognition tend to prefer engaging in challenging cognitive tasks that demand more thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were asked to rate their agreement with 18 statements (9 were reverse scored) inquiring about their interest in problem solving (Item 2: “I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking”) and their preferred thinking style (Item 14: “The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me”). The Need for Cognition Scale produces a score from 18 to 90 with higher scores indicating a stronger preference for completing tasks that demand mental effort. The measure demonstrated good internal consistency within the present sample ($\alpha = .85$) and scores were normally distributed ($M = 58.26, SD = 9.93, Skewness = −0.33$).

Maximization Scale
To assess choice optimization, participants completed a shortened, 9-item version of the Maximization Scale (Nenkov et al., 2008). Nenkov et al. (2008) provided evidence supporting the construct validity of this abbreviated version of the Maximization Scale by showing that scores aggregated across multiple independent samples correlated positively with measures of regret and depression, and negatively with measures of optimism and happiness, as proposed by Schwartz et al. (2002).

Using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with nine statements that comprise three dimensions of choice behavior that may influence one’s tendency to maximize: alternative search (Item 1: “When I am watching TV, I often scan through other available options even while attempting to watch one program”); decision difficulties (Item 4: “I often find it difficult to shop for a gift for a friend”); and high standards (Item 7: “No matter what I do, I have the highest standards”). The 9-item Maximization Scale produces a score from 9 to 45 with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to maximize. Scores for the present sample were normally distributed ($M = 30.12, SD = 5.33, Skewness = −0.08$); however, the measure demonstrated questionable internal consistency ($\alpha = .61$).

Item analysis revealed relatively weak inter-item correlations, but did not identify a single item or subscale that was problematic. Although internal consistency varied somewhat across the three subscales—alternative search ($\alpha = .49$), decision difficulties ($\alpha = .59$), and high standards ($\alpha = .60$)—inter-item correlations were in acceptable ranges (.20–.41) within each subscale (cf. Clark & Watson, 1995). By comparison, Nenkov
et al. (2008) reported alphas ranging from .55 to .73 across 12 separate participant samples ($M_o = .63$), with mean subscale alphas at similar levels (.58–.61). Although Cronbach’s alpha exceeding .70 has become a conventionally accepted criterion for establishing acceptable internal consistency, alpha is affected both by the number of items and the dimensionality of a scale (Cortina, 1993). Some authors have argued that a higher alpha is not necessarily desirable for multidimensional instruments (Schmitt, 1996; Taber, 2018), and appropriate interitem correlations among each subscale may indicate adequate performance of a measure (Clark & Watson, 1995).

**News Consumption and Access Questions**

Participants used a 5-point scale to answer three questions about their typical news consumption behaviors. These questions assessed frequency of checking the news (Item 1: “How frequently do you check the news?”), following of stories (Item 2: “How closely do you follow current news events?”), and time spent consuming news information (Item 3: “How much of your free time do you spend following the news?”). These three items showed strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$) and so they were combined into a single news consumption score ranging from 3 to 15 with higher scores indicating that a participant tends to follow the news more closely. However, the distribution of responses revealed a pattern of moderate skewness ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 3.13$, $Skewness = 0.65$, $Mdn = 6.00$) such that 27% of the sample provided the lowest possible score ($Mode = 3.00$) with the remainder of scores ranging from 4 to 15.

Participants were also asked two questions about how they typically access news information. The first question inquired about their preferred medium (Question A: “What is your most commonly used method for accessing the news?”) with five response options: smartphone, computer, TV, radio, and print. The second question inquired about preferred internet sources (Question B: “What is your primary source for accessing news content on the internet?”) with two options: “News Websites/Apps” or “Social Media Posts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)”

**News Quiz**

Participants completed a quiz in which they had to view 20 news headlines, each accompanied by a 150- to 200-word summary of the news event described in the headline. The stories used for the quiz were selected from the *Factitious 2017* and *Factitious 2018* quizzes featured on the website factitious.augamestudio.com (American University Game Lab, 2017). The quiz is freely available to the public and designed for educational use in secondary and higher education settings with the goal of helping students learn to identify common elements in “fake” news stories. All of the stories selected for the quiz appeared somewhere on the internet from 2017–2018.

We selected 20 stories from the 2017 and 2018 versions of the *Factitious* quiz exactly as they appeared in the quiz (i.e., headlines and accompanying text), but we removed source information (i.e., the primary news website where the story appeared). For each story, participants had to select *True* or *Fake*, and then provide a confidence rating for their response using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very unsure*) to 5 (*very confident*). Half of the stories described true events; half described events that did not actually occur. Among these true versus fake stories, half were political and half were unrelated to politics (see Table 1).

Participants were not provided with feedback throughout the quiz, but they were provided with the correct answers upon completion of the quiz. To avoid reinforcing any possible belief in false information through re-exposure (Schwarz et al., 2016), participants were only provided with a list of the 10 headlines previously encountered that were in fact based on true events. The headlines on this “true” list were accompanied by source information in order to further reinforce participants’ belief that these stories were in fact based on real events and had appeared online through legitimate news sources.

**Procedure**

The study protocol was approved by the Elmira College Human Research Review Board during the 2018–2019 academic year prior to beginning data collection. The study involved completion

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**TABLE 1**

| Sample Headlines From the News Quiz | True Story | Fake Story |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| **Political Content**               | Trump says he made up trade claim in meeting with Justin Trudeau | Trump to limit intelligence briefings to 140 characters |
| **General Content**                 | More people have died from selfies than shark attacks this year | Majority of American teens think the G7 is Google’s new smartphone |

Note. Participants read 20 headlines, each accompanied by a brief news story. For each story, participants had to guess true or false, and then provide a confidence rating for their answer.
of an online survey and quiz programmed using Google Forms. Prospective participants were recruited by advertising the study in lower level psychology classes where the professor had agreed to offer extra credit in exchange for participation. Prospective participants were provided with a link to the survey through email. The survey included a written informed consent statement that required acknowledgment before beginning the survey. Participants were asked for their name and institutional email address for the purpose of assigning extra credit in a designated psychology course. All other responses were separated from the participant’s name and email address prior to data analysis in order to protect confidentiality. Participants proceeded through the study materials in the following order: (a) Maximization Scale, (b) Need for Cognition Scale, (c) news consumption and access questions, (d) news quiz, (e) demographic questions, and (f) review of true news stories. The entire study was designed to be completed in approximately 30 minutes.

Results

Patterns of News Access
Seventy-four percent of participants reported that their most commonly used method for accessing the news is a smartphone. Twelve percent of participants reported using a computer most often. Together, these internet-based methods of accessing news account for 86% of the present college-student sample. The remaining 14% of the sample reported accessing the news most commonly via television (7%), radio (5%), or print (2%) sources, respectively. Participants were also asked about their primary internet-based source of news. Seventy-five percent of participants identified “social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)” as their primary source for internet-based news, compared to 25% of participants who indicated that their primary internet source was “news websites or news apps” as their primary internet source for news (M = 0.51, SD = 0.09) did not perform significantly better on the news quiz, t(120) = 0.06, p = .95, than participants who identified “social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)” as their primary source for internet-based news (M = 0.51, SD = 0.12).

Overall, participants were moderately confident in their responses (M = 2.92, SD = 0.77), and in fact, the only variable that significantly predicted news quiz scores was a participant’s mean confidence estimate generated from the confidence ratings provided for each of the 20 news items, r(121) = .18, p = .04. We also hypothesized that maximization, need for cognition, news consumption, and completion time would be positively correlated with performance on the news quiz; however, these hypotheses were not supported (see Table 2). A simultaneous multiple regression analysis including these predictors as independent variables failed to account for a significant portion of variance in news quiz scores, F(5, 116) = 1.36, p = .25, R² = .06.

News Followers vs. News Avoiders

Because the hypothesized variables reflecting differences in decision-making style failed to predict performance on the news quiz, we separated the sample into subgroups to examine whether participants who follow the news more closely might have approached the task differently than participants who show substantially less interest in the news. Participants with news consumption scores greater than one standard deviation above the mean (M = 6.50, SD = 3.13) were classified as news followers. This subgroup included 20% of the original sample (n = 24) with news consumption scores ranging from 10–15. Participants with news consumption scores greater than one standard deviation below the mean were classified as news avoiders. Twenty-seven percent of the sample (n = 33) met this criterion by obtaining a 3, which is the lowest score possible across the three news consumption items.

Despite reporting that they follow the news much more closely, news followers (M = 10.83, SD = 1.66) did not score significantly higher on the news quiz than news avoiders (M = 10.18, SD = 2.39), t(55) = 1.15, p = .26. News followers were also similar to news avoiders with regard to the amount of time spent on the quiz, t(55) = 0.27, p = .79, and their preference for maximizing, t(55) = 0.95, p = .35. However, news followers reported a significantly greater need for cognition, t(55) = 2.73, p = .01, and reported greater confidence in their responses throughout the news quiz.
quiz, \(t(55) = 2.33, p = .02\) (see Table 3). To more carefully assess this apparent overconfidence effect among news followers, we conducted an analysis of covariance, comparing mean confidence scores between news followers and news avoiders while controlling for actual news quiz performance. The effect of news consumption status was significant, \(R(1, 54) = 4.54, p = .04\), such that news followers reported greater confidence in their responses (\(M_{adj} = 3.16, SE = 0.17\)) compared to news avoiders (\(M_{adj} = 2.69, SE = 0.14\)) even after controlling for news quiz scores (see Figure 2).

**Discussion**

Participants completed a quiz designed to assess their ability to distinguish between true versus fake news stories that appeared on the internet throughout 2017–2018. Without the aid of source information that would normally accompany each story (e.g., the news agency or website responsible for publishing the story), participants failed to perform better than chance when asked to judge whether each story referred to real or fabricated events. This finding suggests that assessing the veracity of news stories may become difficult in the present age of disinformation, possibly amounting to a 50–50 guess if one loses track of a story’s source. We also hypothesized that several variables identifying individual differences in one’s information processing style, including need for cognition and choice maximization, would predict performance on the news quiz, possibly by motivating more careful scrutiny of the information provided. However, we failed to find support for these hypotheses. Need for cognition and choice maximization were not associated with performance on the news quiz. Participants’ mean confidence ratings were weakly correlated with their performance on the news quiz (\(r = .18, p = .04\)), but no other variables were, including the amount of time participants spent on the quiz or their regular news-following habits.

Interestingly, participants varied widely with regard to their self-reported level of news consumption. More than a quarter of the sample (27%) provided the lowest possible score on a brief survey assessing the extent to which they follow current events in the news. These participants were labeled *news avoiders*. We hypothesized that this subgroup might have struggled even more with the difficulty of the news quiz compared to participants who reported high levels of news consumption, a subgroup we labeled *news followers*. Still, the news quiz proved incredibly difficult for both subgroups of participants, such that like the news avoiders, even the news followers failed to perform better than chance. However, news followers reported significantly higher confidence in their performance compared to news avoiders, despite performing similarly to news avoiders on the actual quiz. In fact,
this discrepancy in confidence levels between news followers and news avoiders was still present even after controlling for individual performance on the news quiz. This suggests that, as a group, news followers perceived themselves as more accurately discerning fact from fiction, despite failing to perform better than chance on the quiz.

This finding may provide a cautionary tale for those who take greater interest in current events and follow the news more closely. The news followers among the present college-student sample might have developed a degree of false confidence in their ability to sort fact from fiction when browsing news headlines. This could be due, in part, to participants perceiving themselves as being well-informed of current events based on their news consumption habits. Although the source of this confidence bias in the present study is not exactly clear, one clue may come from the fact that news followers scored significantly higher than news avoiders on the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo et al., 1984). This scale assesses an individual’s preference for engaging in challenging cognitive tasks that demand more thought and mental effort. Given the greater need for cognition among news followers, they might have perceived themselves as being more capable problem solvers than was actually possible when faced with making judgments about news stories that lacked important source information.

In particular, the present findings may have implications for the general public, but especially those who rely on getting news from internet sources. All of the “fake” stories included in the news quiz appeared on the internet at some point during 2017 or 2018, and all appear to have been deliberately crafted in the hope of being mistaken as veridical reports of real news events. To minimize the risk of falling prey to fabricated news stories, the present study demonstrates the potential importance of carefully scrutinizing source information, and possibly rejecting information outright if a verifiable source is absent. However, among the present college-student sample, the patterns of news access suggest that sources of news information may easily be overlooked or, if noticed, quickly forgotten. Eighty-six percent of participants reported that their most common method for accessing the news is the internet, by either using a smartphone (74%) or computer (12%). When accessing news via the web, 75% of participants reported getting that information through social media posts; only the remaining quarter of the sample indicated that they usually obtain news information directly through news websites or apps. Within the young-adult, college-student sample represented in this study, this suggests a pattern of news access that may make this otherwise well-educated and technologically sophisticated generational cohort particularly susceptible to encountering disinformation campaigns, designed to deliberately spread false information by triggering its dissemination throughout social media networks (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

**Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions**

This study represents a unique examination of young adults’ ability to sort fact from fiction when given a plausible news story without its supporting source information. This novel investigation showed that participants failed to perform better than chance on a news quiz when source information was omitted. Although the study context did not perfectly mimic the ways in which individuals normally browse headlines from internet-based news sources, the ecological validity of the content and formatting of the material included in the study serves as a particular strength for generalizing these results to real-world behaviors. All of the stories included in the news quiz—true or fake—appeared on the internet during 2017–2018, and participants were provided with a broad variety of political and nonpolitical content.

Another strength of this study involves the inclusion of measures of individual differences in information processing style—need for cognition and choice maximization—which, to our knowledge, have not yet been examined in the context of evaluating the veracity of news information. Given the widespread increase in disinformation campaigns throughout social media platforms, understanding individual differences in how people
access and process news information may be important for improving educational initiatives to train adolescents and young adults to be more cautious and savvy consumers of digital information.

Although novel in its approach, the present study was still characterized by several methodological limitations, as well as sampling constraints that should motivate future research. First, the study was limited to a college-student sample. To generalize findings to the broader American public, future research should seek out more diverse participant samples to better understand how people may access and evaluate news information. A majority of participants in the present sample reported relying on social media posts for news information, and they reported accessing news by using a smartphone more than any other device. Individuals with other media habits may present a different information processing profile when it comes to evaluating the veracity of news information. In particular, the literature would benefit from a future study comparing participants with different media preferences, such as those who exclusively access information directly from reputable news sources versus those whose primary contact with news information is through a social media feed.

Second, we deliberately removed source information from the stories presented to participants to examine how participants would handle the information in isolation. Of course, teaching adolescents and young adults how to carefully evaluate news information—as is the educational goal of the Factitious program from which we selected news stories (American University Game Lab, 2017)—involves educating students about the importance of reviewing and scrutinizing sources in order to reduce one’s susceptibility to believing fake news. Future research incorporating sources into the information presented to participants may tell a more complete story about how individuals go about questioning information they encounter on the internet, and certainly should be incorporated into interventions designed to develop more cautious consumers of information.

Of particular importance may be future studies that examine individuals’ preexisting preferences and biases with regard to news sources. Although we controlled for the potential influence of these biases in the present study by eliminating source information, partisan political views may have a dramatic influence on the trustworthiness that an individual assigns to a particular news source (e.g., CNN vs. Fox News). Additional research is needed to identify individual differences that may influence one’s judgments about whether a particular news source in considered trustworthy. Future research may also benefit from exploring differences in how individuals evaluate news stories related to political versus nonpolitical content.

Lastly, the present study provided a preliminary exploration of only several of many individual differences variables that might influence how people go about evaluating news information. Results should be cautiously interpreted with regard to choice maximization due to the fact that the 9-item Maximization Scale demonstrated questionable internal consistency with the present sample ($\alpha = .61$). However, an interesting finding emerged with regard to need for cognition, such that news followers scored higher on this measure, even though they failed to perform better on a news quiz than those classified as news avoiders. Therefore, future research may benefit from more closely examining the role of need for cognition in influencing one’s information processing style. It is possible that, given the ability to access and scrutinize source information, those with a higher level of need for cognition might show a tendency to evaluate this source information more carefully. Future research could explore whether source evaluation serves as a mediating variable between one’s need for cognition and one’s ability to correctly sort fact from fiction.

Conclusion

In a globally connected age of digital information exchange, many daily decisions now involve evaluating information, shared through various media and provided by a myriad of sources. Judging the legitimacy of news information has become a task of critical importance, but one that must compete for one’s time and mental effort in the context of all the other attention-demanding tasks we encounter on a daily basis. Today, there is growing concern that individuals are not just at risk of accidentally encountering misinformation, but disinformation, deliberately and carefully crafted to deceive, often through well-organized campaigns (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Without carefully reviewing source information, well-intentioned individuals may fall prey to misjudgments about the veracity of news information, especially that encountered through internet sources and social media feeds. Future research is needed to determine more effective methods for educating the public about how to scrutinize questionable news information. However, for those presently in the role of trying to correct known misinformation, Schwarz et al.
(2019) provided apt advice: “Overall, behavioral research shows that often the best strategy in the fight against misinformation is to paint a vivid and easily understood summation of the truthful message one wishes to impart instead of drawing further attention to false information” (p. 86).

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