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HOW NEWS COVERAGE OF MISINFORMATION SHAPES PERCEPTIONS AND TRUST

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Abstract: This Element takes on two related questions: How do the media cover the issue of misinformation, and how does exposure to this coverage affect public perceptions, including trust? A content analysis shows that most media coverage explicitly blames social media for the problem, and two experiments find that while exposure to news coverage of misinformation makes people less trusting of news on social media, it increases trust in print news. This counterintuitive effect occurs because exposure to news about misinformation increases the perceived value of traditional journalistic norms. Finally, exposure to misinformation coverage has no measurable effect on political trust or internal efficacy, and political interest is a strong predictor of interest in news coverage of misinformation across partisan lines. These results suggest that many Americans see legacy media as a bulwark against changes that threaten to distort the information environment.

Keywords: misinformation, fake news, media coverage, agenda-setting, media trust

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