



WORKSHOP
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Dependence Falsification in Group Deliberation

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Abstract

With the goal of manipulating beliefs and collective decision-making outcomes, strategic actors often claim that epistemic sources such as scientists or traditional media outlets are problematically dependent, copying falsehoods from each other or a third party. Correspondingly, manipulators present own claims as supported by a number of independent sources to inspire credibility. Both strategies abuse the rational principle that repeated evidence from dependent sources should be rationally discounted, while additional independent evidence can corroborate beliefs.

I provide a formal model to analyse this strategy in the context of group deliberation and collective decision-making. The model assumes that individuals have limited information about the relationships between networked sources of evidence and can misrepresent these relationships to the other deliberators. I show how such misrepresentations can alter individual beliefs and preferences for a collective decision. In particular, I prove that there can always be an opportunity and an incentive for individuals to act in this way strategically for all meaningful collective decision-making set-ups.

As the likelihood that such manipulation is possible is significant, I provide a game-theoretic analysis that suggests that if a rational individual interested in the truth is faced with a potential misrepresentation of source dependencies, she is best off making her decision entirely independent of the available evidence. This can lead to fact-insensitive reasoning and polarisation.

I therefore discuss how to minimise the probability that such manipulation is possible, considering three escape routes that supplement each other. The first one describes how an increase of independent sources while keeping dependent sources fixed can, at the limit, prevent opportunities for misrepresentations. The second discusses how to reduce incentives for manipulation by deliberately homogenising underlying preferences. The third aims at fostering awareness of dependency relationships between sources.