Noticing Hedging Language

Instructions: Read the following passages from the article "Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media, Both Intentionally and Accidentally" and highlight all hedging expressions that you can find.

Paragraph 5. To avoid getting overwhelmed, the brain uses a number of tricks. These methods are usually effective, but ==may== also ==become== biases when applied in the wrong contexts.

Paragraph 9. In fact, in our research we have found that it is ==possible== to determine the political leanings of a Twitter user by simply looking at the partisan preferences of their friends. Our analysis of the structure of these partisan communication networks found social networks are ==particularly== efficient at disseminating information – accurate or not – when they are closely tied together and disconnected from other parts of society.

Paragraph 10. The tendency to evaluate information more favorably if it comes from within their own social circles creates "echo chambers" that are ripe for manipulation, either consciously or unintentionally. This ==helps explain== why ==so many== online conversations devolve into "us versus them" confrontations.

Paragraph 11. Our analysis of the data collected by Hoaxy during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections shows that Twitter accounts that shared misinformation were ==almost completely== cut off from the corrections made by the fact-checkers.

Paragraph 13. The third group of biases arises directly from the algorithms used to determine what people see online. Both social media platforms and search engines employ them. These personalization technologies are designed to select only the most engaging and relevant content for each individual user. But in doing so, ==it may end up== reinforcing the cognitive and social biases of users, thus making them even more vulnerable to manipulation.

Paragraph 15. Also, if a user ==often== clicks on Facebook links from a particular news source, Facebook ==will tend== to show that person more of that site's content. This so-called "filter bubble" effect ==may isolate== people from diverse perspectives, strengthening confirmation bias.

Paragraph 18. All these algorithmic biases ==can be manipulate==d by social bots, computer programs that interact with humans through social media accounts. ==Most== social bots, like Twitter's Big Ben, are harmless. However, ==some== conceal their real nature and are

used for malicious intents, such as boosting disinformation or falsely creating the appearance of a grassroots movement, also called "astroturfing." We found evidence of this type of manipulation in the run-up to the 2010 U.S. midterm election.

Paragraph 20. Using Botometer in conjunction with Hoaxy, we analyzed the core of the misinformation network during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. We found many bots exploiting both the cognitive, confirmation and popularity biases of their victims and Twitter's algorithmic biases.

Paragraph 21. These bots are able to construct filter bubbles around vulnerable users, feeding them false claims and misinformation. First, they can attract the attention of human users who support a particular candidate by tweeting that candidate's hashtags or by mentioning and retweeting the person. Then the bots can amplify false claims smearing opponents by retweeting articles from low-credibility sources that match certain keywords. This activity also makes the algorithm highlight for other users false stories that are being shared widely.

Paragraph 22. Even as our research, and others', shows how individuals, institutions and even entire societies can be manipulated on social media, there are many questions left to answer. It's especially important to discover how these different biases interact with each other, potentially creating more complex vulnerabilities.

Paragraph 23. Tools like ours offer internet users more information about disinformation, and therefore some degree of protection from its harms. The solutions will not likely be only technological, though there will probably be some technical aspects to them. But they must take into account the cognitive and social aspects of the problem.