Challenging Bad Literature for the Good of Public Health

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TRUTH DECAY
An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life

Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich
RAND
Truth Decay
Set of Four Related Trends

increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data
Impact of Truth Decay

Stigma

Alienation of stakeholders

Erosion of Civil Discourse**

Ineffective Policy

“The non-vaping public sees vaping the same way they see fedoras.”

“AND SO IT BEGINS...”

He looks so natural...

No he doesn’t.
Truth Decay

Causes

Cognitive Processing and Biases
weight experiences more than data
serves to confirm preexisting ideas
exacerbated by increases in social media
exploited by trusted sources of information
-researchers, government, international community
Truth Decay

Causes

Competing demands on the educational system
- lack of social and media literacy
- lack of critical thinking skills
Truth Decay
Increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data

Relative Risk

Metal and Silicate Particles Including Nanoparticles Are Present in Electronic Cigarette Cartomizer Fluid and

Mentholated Cigarette Smoking

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Truth Decay

*Increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data*

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**Renormalization**

Published in final edited form as:


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**E-cigarette Marketing and Older Smokers: Road to Renormalization**


Commentary

Assessing notions of denormalization and renormalization of smoking in light of e-cigarette regulation

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Truth Decay

*Increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data*

**Gateway**

Graph showing a trend over time with percentages decreasing from 40% to 0% from 1976 to 2024.
Blurring of the line between opinion and fact

Increasing relative volume, and resulting influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact

Declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information
Manipulation of Data

- eg., failure to set temporal precedence in gateway “studies”

Increased fact-based dialogue

Confusion and Disparate Messages

- eg., totally harmless vs less harm, nicotine is addictive, what is addiction?

People within our field have completely different messages

Focus on a singular message

Increased Discord Among Stakeholders

- eg., World Conference on Tobacco or Health

Increased transparency and accountability

Respectful dialogue
Truth Decay

Research Questions

Historical and International Comparisons

Are there similarities between the present and other Era’s of Truth Decay?

Can we identify the relationship between drivers of truth decay and consequences? (eg., how cognitive bias affects polarization and how political paralysis affects uncertainty)

Solutions and Responses

Interventions – Educational, Institutional, Social