How False Beliefs Form and How to Correct Them

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Goals:

- Understand how repeated exposure to misinformation in daily life affects beliefs
- Determine the most effective formats for misinformation debunks by testing theories from memory, language, linguistics, and communications
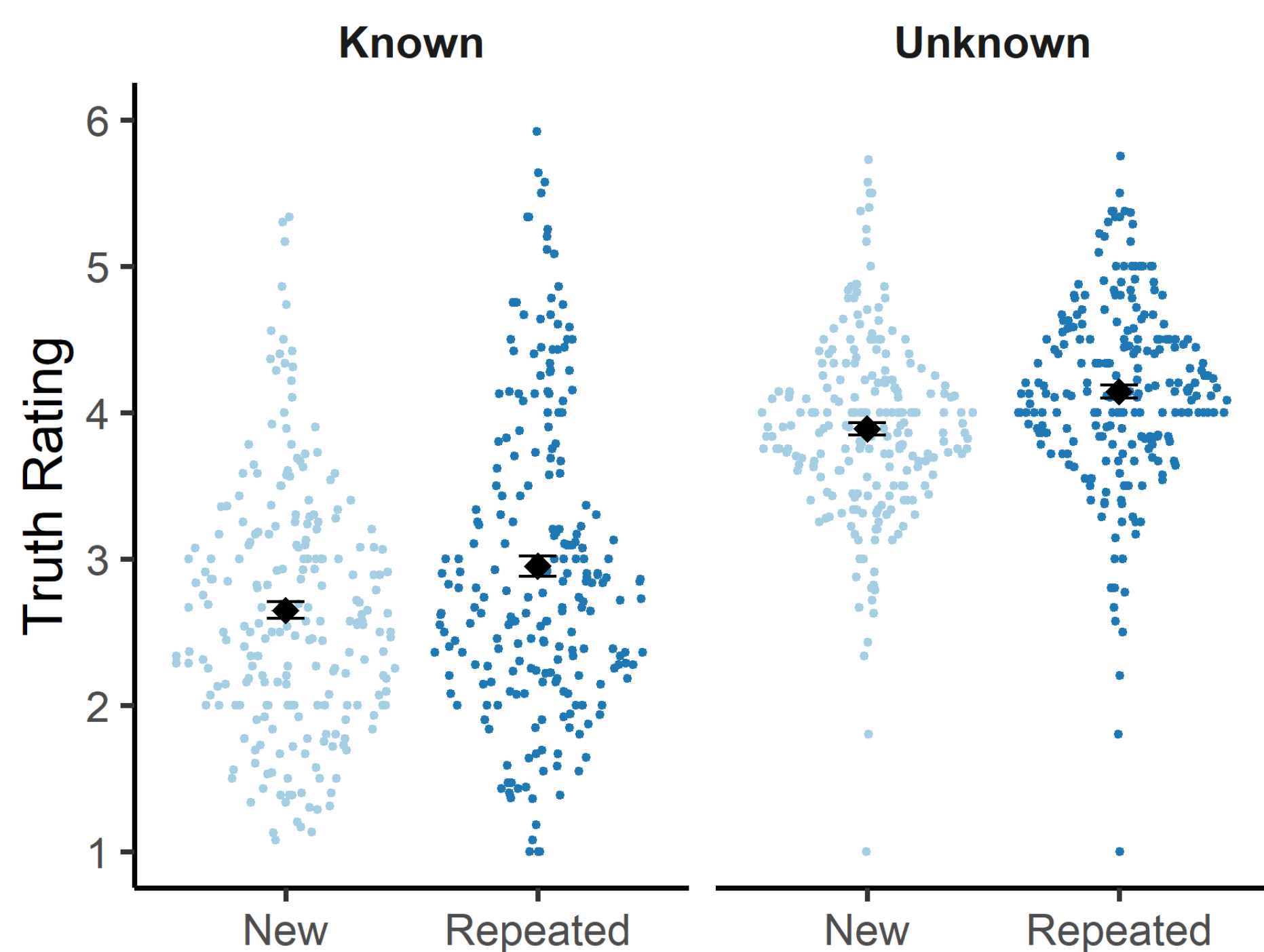
Effects of repeating misinformation

- Repeated statements are given higher truth ratings, even if they contradict existing knowledge

Knowledge Check ➡ Exposure Phase ➡ Truth Phase

Truth ratings for false statements

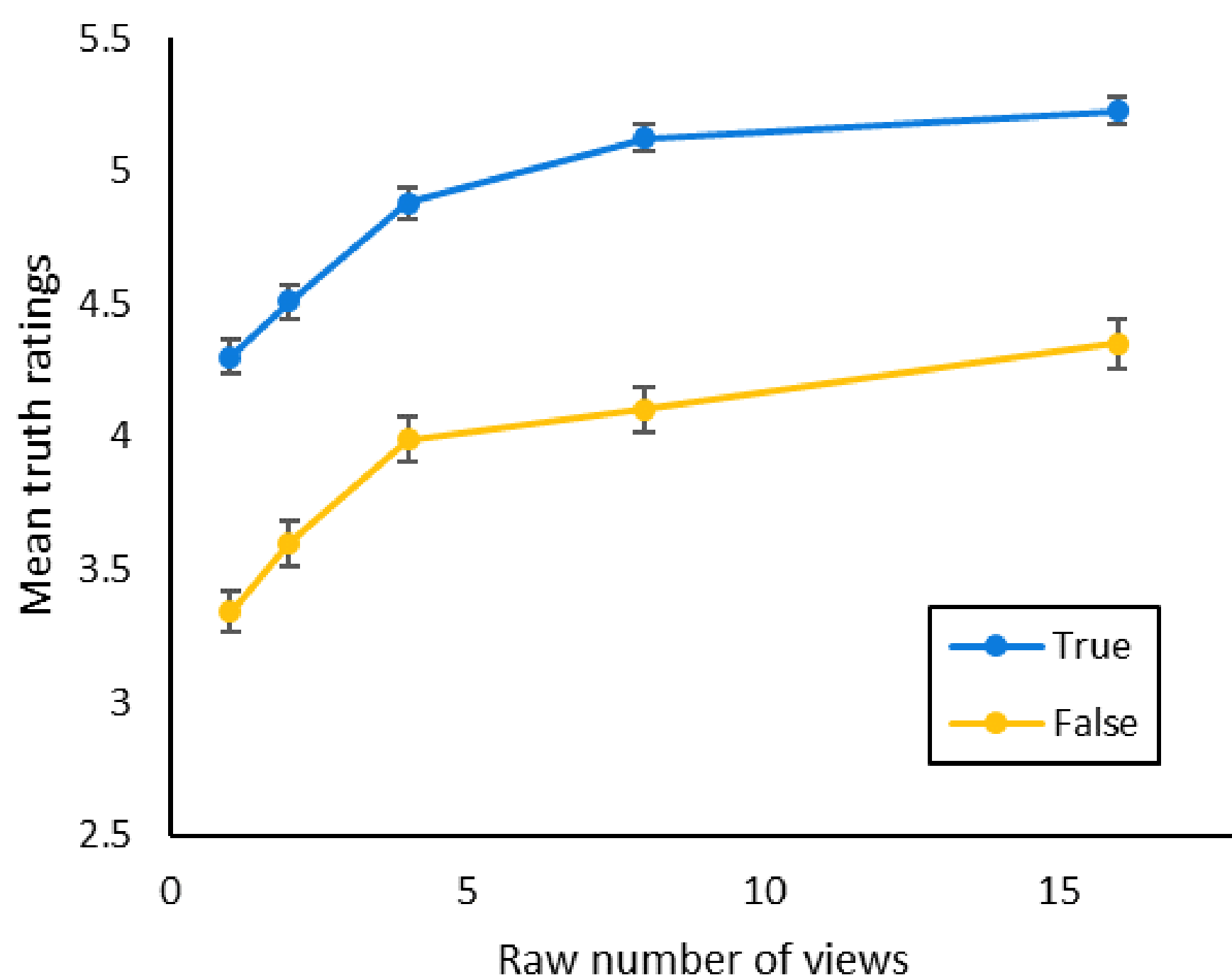e.g., The Cyclops is the legendary one-eyed giant in Greek Mythology

Effect in daily life

- Receive 5 texts per day for 15 days (Exposure phase)

> Bullet was the name of Roy Roger's dog. How interested are you? 1 low, 6 high

- Day 16 – Final survey (Truth phase)
    - Rate truth (1 = definitely false - 6 = definitely true)
    - Viewed 1, 2, 4, 8, or 16 times

Effective short-form misinformation debunks

- How should fact-checkers phrase debunking tweets to be most effective?
- Is providing the evaluation before the claim (e.g., "No, X did not do Y, as A claims") more effective than after the claim (e.g., ""A claims X did Y. No, this is false")

Before

PolitiFact
@PolitiFact
No, the UN is not planning to implant the world with biometric IDs, as one online blog claims.
10:20 AM - 2 Feb 2020

PolitiFact
@PolitiFact
Yes, Reagan did support an assault-weapons ban, as Barack Obama said.
9:45 AM - 14 Jun 2016

After

PolitiFact
@PolitiFact
A viral social media post claims that Nancy Pelosi vowed to impeach Trump again. She didn't.
4:00 PM - 8 Feb 2020

PolitiFact
@PolitiFact
Trump says the US has the lowest food stamp rolls in years. That's right.
7:34 PM - 17 Jul 2019

Both formats were equally effective both immediately and 3 weeks later

Experiment 1

Experiment 2