2018 Misinformation Solutions Forum Graduate Student Fellows

Amy X. Zhang
MIT

Amy X. Zhang is a 5th year Ph.D. student in computer science at MIT CSAIL, a 2018-19 Fellow at the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard, and a member of the Credibility Coalition. She works on designing and developing end-user tools for improving online discourse that empower users to identify misinformation, combat harassment, and better manage their online social experiences and the information they encounter through online social means. She has completed internships at Microsoft Research and Google Research. Prior to her Ph.D., she completed an M.Phil. in computer science as a Gates Scholar at University of Cambridge. Her work has been profiled in news outlets, such as ABC News, BBC, CBC, The Verge, and Business Insider. Her research is supported by a Google Fellowship and an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship.

Carin Tunney
Michigan State University

Carin Tunney is a second-year Ph.D. student in the School of Journalism at Michigan State University. She studies the relationship between emotion and intentional news avoidance and strategies for overcoming news avoidance. Carin's previous research includes papers on environmental injustice and the inadequacy of the news media in reporting the latent stage of the Flint water crisis. Beyond research, she is currently an environmental news reporter whose stories have been featured online via Great Lakes Echo and in newspapers throughout the Great Lakes region. She has a decade of broadcast newsroom experience and her work has been recognized by the National Academy of Arts and Sciences-Michigan Chapter, the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, the Associated Press, and the National Association of Food Writers.

Fernando Severino Diaz
University of Minnesota

Fernando Severino Diaz is a third-year Ph.D. student in mass communication at the University of Minnesota. Fernando's research explores media discourses and representations of immigrants in the United States and Latin America. Focusing on this marginalized group, he is trying to understand the common patterns that emerge from journalistic practices and labels in covering immigration and the impact of this news content on public opinion. As part of this work, he is exploring the role of rumors and misinformation in immigration trends in border regions. Prior to his doctoral work, Fernando held different communication and journalism roles in Chile and the United States. Before coming to the U.S., Fernando was the International News Editor for CNN Chile. He holds a Master of international and public affairs from Columbia University.

Kilhoe "Miranda" Na
The Ohio State University

Kilhoe "Miranda" Na is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Communication at The Ohio State University. Miranda's current research focuses on the role of emotion in rumor assessment during health-related crises. Specifically, her dissertation is about how the congruence between one's emotional state and the emotions induced by a rumor shapes belief in the rumor. She is also an accomplished journalist with almost a decade of experience in print and broadcast journalism in South Korea. During that time, she witnessed that people relied more heavily on unsubstantiated online rumors than information from the media during a crisis, likely because of a lack of trust in the news media. This experience led her to pursue further study at The Ohio State University.

Kiran Samuel
Columbia University

Kiran Samuel (@donnakiran) is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at Columbia University. She is interested in critical race theory, cultural studies, media studies, and digital sociology. Currently, she is working on a project understanding the impact of police rhetoric on public perceptions of state force against the black community, and a project studying Kindle's "Popular Highlights" among best-sellers in the self-help category. Before coming to Columbia University, Kiran enjoyed a career as a creative strategist in the advertising industry with clients, including Google, YouTube, and other companies-turned-subjects of her research. She received her M.A. in media, culture, and communication from NYU and her B.A. in Philosophy and Journalism from Rutgers University.

Marcus Mann
Duke University

Marcus Mann is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Duke University, working in the general areas of political sociology, social movements, culture, and knowledge. His dissertation research uses computational methods to examine how the organizational ecology of online political news media makes specific audiences more or less likely to accept misleading and highly partisan information. In addition to his dissertation work, Marcus is working on projects examining political conservatives' understandings of science and the scientific community and the role of political echo chambers in political polarization. Marcus earned a master's degree in religious studies and completed a thesis on the formation of atheist communities in the southern United States.

Maria D. Molina
Penn State

Maria D. Molina is a Ph.D. student in the College of Communications at Penn State. The goal of Maria's research is to build upon psychological and communication theory in interface design and user experience. In the past year, Maria has been a research assistant for an NSF-funded project examining fake news detection using machine learning techniques. Among her projects is the development of a fake news concept explication and a taxonomy of online content. Maria is interested in the impact of the various types of online content on users' credibility of health messages and behavioral intentions, with a particular focus on fitness and nutrition. Maria is also investigating technological affordances that play a role in users' decision to click or share an article and their perceived credibility of content.

Mihai Avra
University of Illinois

Mihai Avra is a Ph.D. student studying information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His current research focus consists of misinformation, games with a purpose, machine learning for social good, and impact assessment. He is the creator of Fakey, a mobile app to teach news literacy by training people to discriminate between legitimate and low-credibility articles. Mihai is also currently focusing on uncovering social media misinformation patterns as well as adversarial learning in social networks. In the past, Mihai worked on Hoaxy (a misinformation visualization tool), link prediction on knowledge networks, graph counting, and some IT consulting work.

Paul Mena
University of Florida

Paul Mena is a third-year Ph.D. student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida, with 20 years of working experience as a professional journalist. His research focuses on misinformation and fact-checking, with a focus on the correction of misinformation. His areas of research include journalism, message credibility, media trust, political communication, and data visualization. From 2009 to 2016, Paul reported for BBC News Mundo and has around 10 years working experience as a journalism professor in Ecuador in areas, such as digital journalism, data journalism, media ethics, electoral coverage, and investigative journalism. In 2017, he received an award recognizing him as one of the top international graduate students at the University of Florida.

Reyhaneh Maktoufi
Northwestern University

Reyhaneh (Rey) Maktoufi is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Media, Technology, and Society program at Northwestern University. Her main fields of interest are science communication, curiosity, and public engagement with scientists. She works at the Nonprofit Network and Social Impact Lab where she researches nonprofit mergers and attitudes toward nonprofit-corporation partnerships. Her working background is mainly in audience outreach in nonprofits, mostly in the field of health. Rey currently enjoys working with different nonprofits, such as the Adler Planetarium, as a communication workshop facilitator and at the Communicating Science Conference (ComSciCon-Chicago) as an organizer. She also engages in science outreach through writing blog posts and making science comics.

Shannon Poulsen
The Ohio State University

Shannon Poulsen is a Ph.D. student at The Ohio State University. She explores how information processing influences individuals to endorse inaccurate information as truth. Specifically, she focuses on how psychological characteristics, such as the amount of effortful processing one uses, and message characteristics, such as the format, tone, or schematic consistency of the information, influence the way in which people process information. As an undergraduate at the University of Delaware, Shannon was lead research assistant on a study of the effectiveness of humorous fact-checking site, Flackcheck.org. Shannon's collaborative work has been featured in academic journals and she also wrote a book chapter about the history of fact-checking in U.S. politics and electoral contexts.

Sukrit Venkatagiri
Virginia Tech

Sukrit Venkatagiri is a computer Sscience Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech, where he is a member of the Crowd Intelligence Lab. His research interests lie at the intersection of human-computer interaction, design, and sensemaking. More specifically, he studies and builds real-time crowdsourcing systems to augment and scale-up the expertise of investigators in journalism, human rights, and other fields. In the past, Sukrit worked on developing GroundTruth, a web-based tool that enables journalists to quickly geolocate images by searching satellite imagery with the help of crowd workers. At present, he is conducting a qualitative study of how GroundTruth fits into journalists' real-world practice and how it can better benefit their work.