Passage 1

Source: *The Conversation* – Darel Cookson, Nottingham Trent University

The persistence of conspiracy theories in modern society has prompted researchers to examine the cognitive mechanisms that make such beliefs appealing. One prominent explanation centers on intuitive thinking—a fast, automatic, and emotionally driven mode of reasoning. Unlike analytical thinking, which involves deliberate and logical evaluation, intuitive thinking relies on immediate impressions and gut reactions. While useful in everyday decision-making, this cognitive style may predispose individuals to accept simplistic and emotionally resonant explanations for complex phenomena.

Conspiracy theories often present narratives that are internally coherent, emotionally charged, and resistant to falsification. They offer a sense of control and clarity in situations marked by uncertainty or fear. Intuitive thinkers, who tend to prioritize emotional coherence over empirical scrutiny, may find these narratives compelling regardless of their factual accuracy. This does not imply irrationality, but rather a cognitive preference for explanations that align with emotional intuitions and pre-existing beliefs.

Importantly, intuitive thinking is not exclusive to any demographic group. Studies show that even highly educated individuals may rely on intuitive reasoning in contexts where emotional stakes are high or information is ambiguous. This challenges the assumption that conspiracy beliefs are simply a product of ignorance or lack of education. Instead, they may reflect a broader psychological tendency to seek meaning and agency in uncertain environments.

The implications of this research extend beyond individual cognition. In digital spaces, where information is consumed rapidly and often without context, intuitive responses dominate. Algorithms that prioritize engagement tend to amplify emotionally provocative content, reinforcing intuitive biases and creating echo chambers. This dynamic complicates efforts to counter misinformation, as fact-checking and rational rebuttals may fail to resonate with audiences who process information intuitively.

Rather than dismissing intuitive thinkers as irrational, some scholars advocate for interventions that engage emotional reasoning while promoting epistemic responsibility. This includes narrative-based education, emotionally intelligent media literacy, and platform design that encourages reflection over reaction. The goal is not to eliminate intuitive thinking, but to integrate it into a more balanced cognitive framework that supports truth-seeking in a complex world.

1. Which statement best reflects the author's implicit critique of current misinformation strategies?

A. They assume that misinformation is only spread by uneducated individuals.

B. They prioritize emotional engagement over factual correction.

C. They are effective only in highly analytical environments.

D. They rely too heavily on rational rebuttals that fail to engage intuitive reasoning.

2. If a platform redesign encouraged users to pause before sharing emotionally charged content, what effect would this most likely have according to the passage?

A. It would reduce impulsive sharing driven by intuitive responses.

B. It would increase the spread of conspiracy theories.

C. It would eliminate the need for media literacy programs.

D. It would reinforce emotional biases in digital discourse.

3. Which of the following best explains why intuitive thinkers may be drawn to conspiracy theories?

A. They seek emotionally coherent narratives that offer clarity in uncertain situations.

B. They are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction.

C. They are more likely to distrust mainstream media.

D. They lack access to reliable sources of information.

4. Which of the following would most directly challenge the passage's claim about the universality of intuitive thinking?

A. A study showing that intuitive reasoning is rare among highly educated individuals.

B. Evidence that intuitive thinkers are more likely to vote in elections.

C. Data indicating that intuitive thinking is more prevalent in rural populations.

D. Research suggesting that intuitive reasoning is unrelated to belief formation.

5. Which intervention would best align with the author's proposed solution to misinformation?

A. Increasing penalties for sharing false information online.

B. Developing emotionally resonant educational content that promotes critical reflection

C. Replacing intuitive content with purely analytical material.

D. Encouraging users to avoid emotional engagement with news media.

Passage 2

Source: Joe Árvai, University of Southern California – *The Conversation*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems are increasingly being integrated into decision-making processes across sectors—from healthcare and finance to education and criminal justice. These systems promise efficiency, consistency, and data-driven precision. However, as reliance on AI grows, concerns have emerged about its impact on human autonomy and the capacity for thoughtful, defensible decision-making.

One of the central risks is the outsourcing of judgment. When individuals defer to algorithmic outputs without critically engaging with the reasoning behind them, they relinquish agency. This is particularly troubling in contexts where decisions carry moral or ethical weight. For example, if a doctor relies solely on an AI-generated diagnosis without considering patient-specific nuances, the decision may be technically sound but ethically shallow.

Moreover, the opacity of many AI systems—often referred to as "black box" models—compounds the problem. Users may not understand how conclusions are reached, yet they are expected to trust and act upon them. This undermines accountability and reduces the opportunity for learning and reflection. In effect, the user becomes a passive executor rather than an active participant in decision-making.

Another concern is the gradual erosion of critical thinking. As AI systems become more sophisticated and accurate, the incentive to question or verify their outputs diminishes. Over time, this may lead to a decline in analytical skills and a weakening of epistemic responsibility. The danger is not that AI will make mistakes, but that humans will stop noticing when it does.

Proponents argue that AI should be viewed as a tool, not a replacement for human judgment. They advocate for hybrid models where AI supports, but does not supplant, human reasoning. This requires transparency, user education, and institutional safeguards to ensure that decision-making remains a collaborative process.

Ultimately, the challenge is not technological but philosophical: how to preserve human autonomy in an age of intelligent machines. If decisions are to remain defensible, they must be made by agents who understand, reflect, and take responsibility—not merely follow instructions generated by code.

1. What is the author's primary concern regarding the use of AI in decision-making?

A. AI systems are too expensive to implement widely.

B. AI may lead to a decline in human autonomy and critical engagement.

C. AI will eventually replace all human jobs.

D. AI lacks the technical capacity to make accurate decisions.

2. If a hospital implements an AI system that provides treatment recommendations but requires doctors to justify any deviation from it, what does this scenario illustrate?

A. A reinforcement of human autonomy through structured accountability.

B. A complete outsourcing of ethical responsibility.

C. A failure of AI integration in healthcare.

D. An example of algorithmic bias in practice.

3. Which of the following best explains the concept of "black box" models as discussed in the passage?

A. AI systems that are designed to be transparent and explainable.

B. Algorithms whose internal logic is inaccessible or incomprehensible to users.

C. Decision-making frameworks used exclusively in criminal justice.

D. AI systems that are programmed to mimic human emotions.

4. Which of the following, if true, would most support the author's argument about the erosion of critical thinking?

A. Studies show that users of AI systems are less likely to question outputs over time.

B. AI systems are more accurate than human experts in most domains.

C. Most users prefer manual decision-making over automated systems.

D. AI systems are frequently updated to reflect ethical considerations.

5. Which intervention would best align with the author's proposed solution to the risks of AI decision-making?

A. Mandating user training in AI literacy and ethical reasoning.

B. Replacing all human decision-makers with AI systems.

C. Limiting AI use to entertainment and consumer applications.

D. Designing AI systems that operate independently of human input.

ANSWER KEY

Passage 1

1. D

A. Incorrect - This is directly contradicted by the text, which asserts that intuitive thinking is not exclusive to any demographic and that "even highly educated individuals may rely on intuitive reasoning." The author's critique is about cognitive style, not educational level.

B Incorrect - The passage argues the opposite: current strategies fail precisely because they do not sufficiently engage with emotional reasoning. The problem identified is an over-reliance on rationality, not a prioritization of emotional engagement over facts.

C. Incorrect - The author's focus is on digital spaces where intuitive responses dominate, which are characterized as rapid and context-poor. The critique is that current strategies are ineffective in these prevalent environments, not that they are only effective in niche analytical ones.

D. Correct - The passage explicitly critiques current strategies by stating that "fact-checking and rational rebuttals may fail to resonate with audiences who process information intuitively." This highlights a fundamental mismatch between the logical nature of the rebuttals and the emotional, intuitive processing style of the target audience.

2. A

A. Correct - Encouraging a pause directly counters the "fast, automatic, and emotionally driven" nature of intuitive thinking described in the passage. This intervention would promote a shift towards more deliberate, analytical evaluation, thereby reducing impulsive sharing driven by immediate gut reactions.

B. Incorrect - The passage links the appeal of conspiracy theories to rapid, intuitive responses. A mechanism that encourages reflection and deliberate thought would logically decrease, not increase, their spread by allowing for more critical evaluation.

C. Incorrect - A platform redesign is a structural intervention, but it does not replace the need for individual cognitive skills. Media literacy programs would still be necessary to equip users with the critical thinking frameworks needed to effectively use the reflection time provided.

D. Incorrect - The purpose of such a feature is to mitigate or counteract emotional biases by introducing a moment for analytical thought. Therefore, it would work against the reinforcement of these biases, not in favor of it.

3. A.

A. Correct - The passage states that conspiracy theories offer "a sense of control and clarity in situations marked by uncertainty or fear" and are "emotionally charged." This directly supports the idea that intuitive thinkers are drawn to their emotionally coherent and satisfying narratives.

B. Incorrect - The passage does not claim that intuitive thinkers are incapable of distinguishing fact from fiction. Rather, it suggests they have a "cognitive preference for explanations that align with emotional intuitions" over those that require empirical scrutiny.

C. Incorrect - While distrust of mainstream media can be a feature of conspiracy belief, it is not the central mechanism described in this passage. The author's explanation is rooted in cognitive psychology, focusing on thinking styles rather than specific attitudes towards media.

D. Incorrect - The issue presented is not a lack of access to information but the cognitive framework used to process it. The passage notes that these dynamics occur in digital spaces where information is abundant but rapidly consumed.

4. A

A. Correct - The passage's claim is that intuitive thinking is a "broader psychological tendency" and is not exclusive to any demographic, citing that "even highly educated individuals may rely on intuitive reasoning." A study showing that this type of reasoning is rare among this specific group would directly challenge this assertion of universality.

B. Incorrect - Voting behavior is a civic action that is not discussed in the passage. The text's focus

is on the cognitive mechanisms of belief formation, making this evidence irrelevant to the central claim.

C. Incorrect - Evidence showing a higher prevalence in one population (e.g., rural) does not challenge the claim of universality. Universality implies it exists across groups, not that it exists in equal measure everywhere.

D. Incorrect - This would fundamentally contradict the entire premise of the passage. The author's argument is built on the direct causal link between intuitive reasoning and the formation of certain beliefs, such as the endorsement of conspiracy theories.

5. B

A. Incorrect - Increasing penalties is a behavioral, punitive approach that does not address the underlying cognitive mechanisms the author identifies. The passage focuses on changing how people think, not on punishing what they share.

B. Correct - The author advocates for interventions that "engage emotional reasoning while promoting epistemic responsibility," such as "narrative-based education." This option, which combines emotionally resonant content with critical reflection, perfectly aligns with the proposed solution of integrating, rather than eliminating, intuitive thinking.

C. Incorrect - This contradicts the author's stated goal, which "is not to eliminate intuitive thinking, but to integrate it into a more balanced cognitive framework." Replacing intuitive content with purely analytical material would repeat the mistake of ignoring emotional reasoning.
D. Incorrect - The author proposes engaging with emotional reasoning, not avoiding it. Avoiding emotional engagement would preclude the possibility of using narrative and other emotionally resonant tools to foster media literacy and critical thought.

Passage 2

1. B

A. Incorrect - The passage does not mention the cost of AI systems. Its concerns are philosophical and cognitive, focusing on the impact on human judgment and autonomy rather than economic or implementation barriers.

B. Correct - The author's primary concern is clearly stated through phrases like "outsourcing of

judgment," "relinquish agency," and the "gradual erosion of critical thinking." These points collectively argue that over-reliance on AI diminishes essential human cognitive capacities.

C. Incorrect - While job replacement is a common concern associated with AI, this specific passage does not emphasize it. The focus is on the degradation of decision-making quality and human agency in roles that persist, not the elimination of those roles.

D Incorrect - The passage posits that the problem arises precisely because AI systems are becoming "more sophisticated and accurate." The author's concern is not about AI's technical failures but about the consequences of its success on human critical engagement.

2. A

A. Correct - This scenario represents the "hybrid model" advocated by the author. By requiring doctors to consciously justify any deviation, the system ensures they remain active participants who must critically engage with the AI's output, thus reinforcing their autonomy and accountability.

B. Incorrect - This is the opposite of what the scenario illustrates. Ethical responsibility is explicitly retained by the human doctor, who must provide a justification for their final decision, thereby preventing a complete outsourcing of judgment.

C. Incorrect - This scenario depicts a thoughtful and well-designed integration of AI into a professional workflow, not a failure. It includes the "institutional safeguards" the author recommends to ensure human judgment remains central to the process.

D. Incorrect - The scenario is about the decision-making process and accountability, not the content of the AI's recommendations. There is no information provided to suggest that the AI's outputs are biased.

3. B

A. Incorrect - This describes the opposite of a "black box" model. The passage highlights the opacity and lack of transparency of these models as a key problem that undermines accountability and understanding.

B. Correct - The passage defines the problem of "black box" models by stating, "Users may not understand how conclusions are reached." This directly corresponds to the definition of an algorithm whose internal logic is inaccessible or incomprehensible.

C. Incorrect - While AI is used in criminal justice, the term "black box" is a general descriptor for a type of AI model and is not exclusive to any single field. The passage uses healthcare as its primary example.

D. Incorrect - The passage is concerned with the logical and reasoning processes of AI, not its ability to simulate human emotions. The "black box" nature refers to its decision-making pathway, not its affective capabilities.

4. A

A. Correct - The author's argument is that as AI becomes more reliable, "the incentive to question or verify their outputs diminishes," leading to an "erosion of critical thinking." A study showing that users become less likely to question AI over time would provide direct empirical evidence for this claim.

B. Incorrect - The author's argument uses AI's high accuracy as a premise—it is the very reason humans become complacent. Therefore, this fact supports the conditions for the author's argument but is not the evidence of the erosion itself.

C. Incorrect - The preferences of the general population are not directly relevant to the cognitive effects on those who actively use AI systems. The argument is about what happens to users, regardless of how many non-users there are.

D. Incorrect - Updates to an AI system, even for ethical reasons, do not address the core issue of the human user's declining tendency to critically engage with the system's outputs. The problem lies with the user's cognitive habits, not the AI's programming.

5. A

A. Correct - The author advocates for a "collaborative process" that requires "user education, and

institutional safeguards." Mandating training in AI literacy and ethical reasoning directly addresses this call for educating users to ensure they can engage with AI responsibly and maintain their autonomy.

B. Incorrect - This represents the worst-case scenario the author is warning against: the complete supplanting of human judgment. The author's proposed solution is a hybrid model, not full automation.

C. Incorrect - The passage is explicitly concerned with the use of AI in high-stakes sectors like "healthcare and finance to education and criminal justice." Limiting its use to entertainment would ignore the central problem the author is addressing.

D. Incorrect - The author argues for a collaborative model where AI supports human reasoning. Designing AI to operate independently of human input would undermine this goal and exacerbate the risk of outsourcing judgment.