

Judging Question Answerability

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligt försvaras fredagen den 19 januari 2018, kl. 13:00, Sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Rolf Reber, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Norway.

The thesis is based on a summary and the following papers:

- I. Karlsson, B. S. A., Allwood, C.M., & Buratti, S. (2016). Does anyone know the answer to that question? Individual differences in judging answerability. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 2060. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02060.
- II. Allwood, C. M., Karlsson, B. S. A., & Buratti, S. (2016). Does consulting with others affect answerability judgments of difficult questions? *Social Influence*, 11, 40–53.
- III. Buratti, S., Allwood, C. M., Karlsson, B. S. A. (2017). Who knows? Knowledge activation, belief in certainty of knowledge, maximization tendencies and need for cognition in answerability judgments. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 144, 35-58.
- IV. Karlsson, B. S. A., & Allwood, C.M. What is the correct answer about the Dress colors? Investigating the relation between optimism, previous experience and answerability. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1808. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01808.



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Abstract

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This thesis investigates a specific type of judgments, answerability judgments, that is the judgment if anyone can provide a correct answer to a particular question. Answerability judgments are important since they may affect other important decisions regarding e.g., climate change and medical and legal decision making. Four studies were performed. Study I compared participants' ratings of the answerability of three types of general knowledge questions. Both current answerability (whether the question was currently answerable by someone) and future answerability (whether the question could be answered in the future) were measured. Study II compared pairs and individuals on answerability judgments on general knowledge questions. Study III investigated judgments on whether 'I', 'somebody else', or 'nobody' could answer general knowledge questions. In Study IV answerability judgments on the colours of an ambiguous viral photograph, *The Dress*, were investigated. Self-report measures of individual differences were also conducted in Studies I, III, and IV. The results from the studies suggest that social influence is important when judging question answerability. Data suggest that people often judge answerability in line with their beliefs about what most relevant others believe. This is called the consensus effect. However, individual differences also explained variation in answerability judgments especially when consensus about the question's answerability was lacking. People with higher scores on certainty beliefs, mankind's knowledge, mankind's efficacy, and preference for default processing, more often rated general knowledge questions as being more answerable. On the other hand, higher scores on personal optimism and need for cognition was associated with more choices of 'nobody can answer'. Questions that were considered more answerable today were also often judged to be possible to answer in a closer future suggesting that judgments of answerability may include judgments of psychological distance. Furthermore, the result suggests that a feeling of higher answerability can be created, through contextual associations, even when it is unlikely that somebody can come up with an answer. Lack of consensus was associated with lower answerability judgments.

Keywords: answerability, judgment, uncertainty, decision making, ignorance, social influence, social influence, individual differences, epistemic beliefs, need for cognition, maximization tendency, optimism, #The Dress, non-believed perceptions, color.

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