

READING LIST

DISINFO PACIFIC | Brisbane 11-12 November 2024

Misinformation and Disinformation challenges to Democratic Governance, Climate Action and Public Health | disinfopacific.org

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DEMOCRACY



GOVERNANCE AND MIS/DISINFORMATION

RESOURCES - GENERAL ARTICLES

Johnson, Blake; Fakafanua; Vikilani, Sione. 2024. *As Technology Distorts Information, Pacific Governments & Media Must Cooperate*. Online Publication: The Strategist – Australian Strategic Policy Institute:

Link

With disinformation and manipulative online behaviour appearing more and more as an area of concern amongst Pacific states, ASPI and the Royal Oceania Institute team outline a potential approach for Pacific states seeking to confront the issue of disinformation head on. As Pacific states seek to build up their broadcasting and media outlets through diplomatic efforts with the Australian government, the ASPI and ROI team argue these partnerships and programs can only be effective in creating lasting inroads with a strong strategy for countering the malign influence of disinformation threats which are already impacting the region.

<https://www.aspistrategy.org.au/as-technology-distorts-information-pacific-governments-and-media-must-cooperate/>

Online Misinformation and Disinformation Reform, Australian Government, Sept. 12, 2024

Link

In support of this proposal, the Australian Government notes that “misinformation and disinformation, rapidly disseminated via digital communications platforms, poses a threat to the health, wellbeing, economy, and democracy of Australia. ... Although the spread of misinformation and disinformation is not a new problem, digital communications platforms have enabled seriously harmful content to be distributed further and faster than previously possible, particularly as Australians are increasingly relying on social media as a source of news. ... [The proposal] considers options to place new core obligations on platforms to increase transparency and better empower users, as well as imposing mandatory requirements for online platforms to address seriously harmful misinformation and disinformation on their services.”

<https://oia.pmc.gov.au/published-impact-analyses-and-reports/online-misinformation-and-disinformation-reform>

Article on the proposal: “A new law aims to tackle online lies – but it ignores expert advice and doesn’t go nearly far enough,” Daniel Angus, The Conversation, Sept. 13, 2024:

Link

<https://theconversation.com/a-new-law-aims-to-tackle-online-lies-but-it-ignores-expert-advice-and-doesnt-go-nearly-far-enough-238889>

DEMOCRACY

GOVERNANCE AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - GENERAL ARTICLES

Schwartz, Christopher. 2023. *A Cybersecurity Researcher Explains Situation Deepfakes. The Conversation:*

Link

Democratic processes internationally are growing increasingly vulnerable to subversion through more effective means of disinformation such as 'Deepfakes'. Cybersecurity expert Dr. Christopher Swartz explains the elaborate nature of these tools in detail as well as outlines how they can influence public psychology to effect election outcomes. To counter these threats, Swartz and the DeFake research team based at Rochester Institute of Technology have started developing tools which utilise AI to analyse media content as well as outlines the individual digital literacy requirements voters could aim to develop in order to avoid malign influence.

<https://theconversation.com/events-that-never-happened-could-influence-the-2024-presidential-election-a-cybersecurity-researcher-explains-situation-deepfakes-206034>

Heriot, Geoff. 2024. *Countering Disinformation: Democracy Under Siege.* Online Publication: Australian Institute of International Affairs:

Link

Dr Heriot's analysis for the Australian institute of International Affairs is poignant in highlighting the various aspects of Australia statecraft and coordination with Pacific partners being utilised to counter disinformation in the region. By breaking down the fourteen policy proposals of one of the latest white papers published by the Australia government, the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue, Heriot delivers a strong outline of the strategies being implemented in the region to safeguard from the threat and maintain social resilience.

<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian-outlook/countering-disinformation-democracy-under-seige/>

Johnson, Blake; Albiston, Lucy. 2023. *Pacific Media Needs More Support to Protect The Truth.* Online Publication: The Strategist – Australian Strategic Policy Institute:

Link

Protecting the transparency of government through a strong fourth estate lies at the heart of ensuring true democratic governance. In this piece, ASPI analysts make the case for supporting a strong and independent media base across the Pacific islands, establishing a network of reliable news source which can counter disinformation narratives and maintain information integrity in the region.

<https://www.aspistrategy.org.au/pacific-media-needs-more-support-to-protect-the-truth/>

RESOURCES - GENERAL ARTICLES

Arnott, Christopher. 2024. *In the Year of global elections, how do we stop the spread of misinformation? 'Prebunking' is part of the solution.* Online Publication: The Conversation Australia:

Link

In the penultimate day before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the US and UK made a quite extraordinary move, declassifying intelligence which suggested elements of the Russian armed forces and security services were seeking to conduct disinformation operations to justify their successive invasion; a move now known as "prebunking". "Prebunking" has become a focal part of research into counter measures against disinformation which aim to protect democratic and electoral integrity. Arnott, a doctoral candidate at Griffith University and expert on disinformation, lays out the case for "prebunking" as a means to paralyse the main components of disinformation narratives which seek to capitalise on techniques such as impersonation, emotions, and polarization to influence members of the public.

<https://theconversation.com/in-a-year-of-global-elections-how-do-we-stop-the-spread-of-misinformation-prebunking-is-part-of-the-solution-233115>

[VIDEO] AI's Disinformation Problem. 2023. Bloomberg Originals:

Video Link

The psychological influence of disinformation and generative AI on the populous is one that has become extremely concerning. Bloomberg's AI IRL team interviews two experts over how the theoretical concerns of disinformation are starting to develop in the real world through exploring some harmless and not so harmless examples to extrapolate how these tools can be used to contort reality and damage the public psyche. To counter the spread of these disinformation narratives and generated media, Hany Farid and Rumman Chowdhury detail a number of mechanisms which both government and the private sector must begin exploring as to regulate the spread of disinformation and limit its effectivity all whilst avoiding infringing on elements of freedom of expression.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2023-10-05/ai-s-disinformation-problem-video>

RESOURCES - PUBLICATIONS FROM ORGANISATIONS AND RESEARCH CENTRES

Bateman, Jon; Jackson, Dean. 2024. *Countering Disinformation Effectively: An Evidence-Based Policy Guide*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

Link

Countering disinformation as a field of security is rapidly evolving as the threats posed by disinformation narrative change and come from increasingly varied sources. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has long been at the forefront of holistic security policy and through engaging the media and cyber expertise of Bateman and Jackson, have come up with a number of policy options ranging from the covert to overt, which decision makers may utilise in seeking to defend the public from disinformation threats.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/01/countering-disinformation-effectively-an-evidence-based-policy-guide>

United Nations Development Programme Eurasia. 2022. *Mapping and Analysis of Efforts to Counter Information Pollution*. Online Publication: United Nations Development Programme:

Link

In times of crisis, access to verifiable and reliable information and communications is crucial to ensuring public safety and coordinating effective policy responses. To this end, the UNDP report on information pollution examines the effectiveness of different policy options, initiatives and actors operating to promote information integrity.

<https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/information-pollution>

Hall, Ian. 2023. *Digital Challenges & Political Resilience in the Indo Pacific*. Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute/Griffith University:

Link

Prof. Ian Hall discusses digital threats in the Indo-Pacific region. Whilst analysing disinformation and the policy options to counter it, Dr Hall also looks at means of cyber resilience through a case study of Vanuatu, leading to the development of a number of policy options on various digital threats, with many being mutually beneficial in countering an array of disinformation and cybersecurity threats which may aim to destabilise.

https://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/1708213/trilateral-policy-brief-21-2-23.pdf

RESOURCES - BOOKS

Porter, Lance; Mann, Robert; Flores-Saviaga, Claudia. 2024. The Disinformers: Social Media, Disinformation, & Elections. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Whilst there are many examples of disinformation being used to influence elections and governance globally, few cases have been as provocative as the 2016 US presidential elections. This compilation of seven essays penned by political scientists, media experts, and cybersecurity specialists analyses the evolution of disinformation internationally, lifting the curtain on the shadowy nature of disinformation operations and how they may compromise fundamental bedrocks of a democratic society and the viability of statutory governance.

Rid, Thomas. 2020. Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation & Political Warfare. London: Profile Books.

Whilst many regard the threat disinformation poses to international security as relatively novel, Thomas Rid's 2020 book, *Active Measures*, provides a thorough, in-depth account as to the roots of disinformation as part of Russia's foreign policy apparatus. Whilst the roots of large-scale disinformation campaigns to influence public opinion can be found in Russian foreign policy tools, similar operations are increasingly being utilised by various global actors. As practitioners seek to confront these campaigns, understanding their origins may prove key to developing effective deterrence measures going forward.

O'Connor, Cailin, and James Owen Weatherall. 2020. The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Philosophers of science Cailin O'Connor and James Weatherall argue that social factors, rather than individual psychology, are what's essential to understanding the spread and persistence of false beliefs. It might seem that there's an obvious reason that true beliefs matter: false beliefs will hurt you. But if that's right, then why is it (apparently) irrelevant to many people whether they believe true things or not? *The Misinformation Age*, written for a political era riven by "fake news," "alternative facts," and disputes over the validity of everything from climate change to the size of inauguration crowds, shows convincingly that what you believe depends on who you know. If social forces explain the persistence of false belief, we must understand how those forces work in order to fight misinformation effectively.

Wassermann, Herman; Morales, Dani Madrid. 2022. Disinformation in the Global South. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Compiling a number of case studies from the global South, Wasserman and Morales's collection provides policy makers and practitioners with numerous scenarios by which disinformation and its interactions with differing cultures, regime, and governance structures can be understood. Additional to the study of individual cases is both a complex analysis of the theoretical context by which modern practitioners understand disinformation and aim to tackle it by breaking down the responses and efficacy of various policy tools utilised in the fight against systemic disinformation.

RESOURCES - ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Monsees, Linda. 2021. Information Disorders, Fake News, & the Future of Democracy. Globalizations: Taylor & Francis Group.

Democratic governance globally relies on certain key pillars which ensures the openness of a democratic regime and the perseverance of the system. One of these pillars is the requirement that citizens be informed so as to form views on different political and societal issues. Threatening this crucial pillar of democratic governance are the emerging information disorders present in most societies, highlighting not only the effect disinformation is having on democratic outcomes, but also the effects of our everchanging news and media consumption on our behaviour and the political ideas we form as engaged citizens. Monsees draws comparisons between democratic theory and the emerging effects of information disorder to attempt to show how online disinformation, increasingly unobjective sources, and fake news have become threats to democratic governance practices.

Arugay, Aries; Baquil, Justin Kieth. 2022. Mobilized and Polarized: Social Media and the Disinformation Narratives in the 2022 Philippine Elections. Pacific Affairs: University of British Columbia Press.

Whilst there is significant focus on the dissemination of disinformation by different foreign actors to influence the governance outcomes of various states, there is growing concern about the domestic political actors turning to disinformation mechanisms to influence the democratic process in their favour. Given the Philippines is home to some of the most active social media users, digital disinformation has become a powerful tool in the domestic political landscape and thus provides an insight into the future of domestic politics across the board. Troll farms, bot networks, and fake users are often terms associated with the work of adversarial foreign disinformation campaigns, however this paper provides evidence of how the growing disinformation for hire networks are being utilised in the Philippines, and perhaps how they may be utilised to affect future domestic political and governance outcomes globally.

Carsons, Andrea, and Andrew Gibbons. What is Misinformation & Disinformation? Understanding Multi-Stakeholders' Perspectives in the Asia Pacific. Australian Journal of Political Science.

The Asia Pacific region has been significantly impacted by the dissemination of disinformation, with populations of the region being some of the most active users of social media. This has led to a confronting reality for some governments in the region, as social media has become almost synonymous with journalism and official sources, placing significant power in the hands of political candidates and foreign powers who may seek to interfere or disrupt. Part of turning the tide on this information crisis involves understanding who the stakeholders are in countering disinformation and how Asia Pacific states can exercise their statecraft and domestic political mechanisms to confront disinformation challenges going forward. Identifying a myriad of means by which Asian Pacific states are compromised by the threat of disinformation, Gibbons and Carsons lay out a clear picture of the regional dynamics when it comes to disinformation and how the various efforts led by different stakeholders working to counter disinformation can be consolidated to achieve greater results.

CLIMATE ACTION

AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - GENERAL ARTICLES

“The Misinformation Virus,” Elitsa Dermendzhiyska, Aeon, 2021:

Link

What’s different today is the speed, scope and scale of misinformation, enabled by technology. Online media has given voice to previously marginalised groups, including peddlers of untruth, and has supercharged the tools of deception at their disposal. The transmission of falsehoods now spans a viral cycle in which AI, professional trolls and our own content-sharing activities help to proliferate and amplify misleading claims. Many of those claims now relate to climate change.

<https://aeon.co/essays/why-humans-find-it-so-hard-to-let-go-of-false-beliefs>

“Can we be inoculated against climate misinformation? Yes – if we prebunk rather than debunk.” Christian Turney and Sander van der Linden, The Conversation, Feb. 15, 2024:

Link

2023 saw the world’s hottest day on record. Temperature average 1.5 degrees Celsius higher than in the preindustrial era. Extreme events and climate change have been linked, but disinformation abounds. Conspiracy theorists create disinformation and misinformation, as do some political figures. This article focuses on means of ‘prebunking,’ or addressing mis- and disinformation before it is spread.

<https://theconversation.com/can-we-be-inoculated-against-climate-misinformation-yes-if-we-prebunk-rather-than-debunk-215815>

“Climate change misinformation fools too many people – but there are ways to combat it.” Mikey Biddlestone and Sander van der Linden, The Conversation, Oct. 28, 2021:

Link

The Conversation and YouGov surveyed more than 1700 adults living in the United Kingdom and found that 44% of respondents could not identify fake news when they encountered it online, and almost half of the people surveyed could not identify 50% of fake news headlines regarding climate change. While some social media platforms are debunking some falsehoods, more needs to be done by social media and politicians alike.

<https://theconversation.com/climate-change-misinformation-fools-too-many-people-but-there-are-ways-to-combat-it-170658>

CLIMATE ACTION

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RESOURCES - GENERAL ARTICLES

“What is ‘new denial?’ An alarming wave of climate misinformation is spreading on YouTube, watchdog says.” Rachel Ramirez, CNN, Jan. 17, 2024:

Link

The youth climate movement, influenced by such leaders as Greta Thunberg, has been recognized as the greatest threat to the status quo of the fossil fuel industry. This article focuses on ‘new denial’ tactics in relation to climate change. ‘Old denial’ narratives consist or consisted of claims that said that ‘global warming is not happening’, whilst ‘new denial’ entails attacks on solutions, climate movement, and science – also known as the spreading of misinformation. Videos promoted across 96 YouTube channels, consisting of 12000 videos posted between 2018 and 2023, promoted climate misinformation and outright denial in line with ‘new denial’ narratives.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/16/climate/climate-denial-misinformation-youtube/index.html>

Meteorologists are the new targets in global social media misinformation, ABC News:

Link

Misinformation and disinformation are on the rise in relation to climate change, and weather bureaus globally have been accused of making up information on social media. Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology has been accused of doctoring temperature records, and meteorologists have been insulted, threatened and slandered online by climate change deniers and conspiracy theorists.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-13/meteorologists-targeted-in-climate-misinformation-surge/102342754>

CLIMATE ACTION

AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - PUBLICATIONS FROM ORGANISATIONS AND RESEARCH CENTRES

“Rampant Disinformation is Delaying Climate Action,” Melissa Fleming, United Nations, May 20, 2022:

Link

Climate disinformation is shared widely online, seeking to sow division and delay climate action. We need to fight back and flood the feeds with reliable, accurate information, writes UN Under-Secretary-General Melissa Fleming.

<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/rampant-disinformation-delaying-climate-action>

“Don’t stop me now: the growing disinformation threat against climate change.” Ana Romero-Vicente, EU DisinfoLab:

Link

A group of non-scientific outlets dedicated exclusively to questioning and disseminating false and misleading content about the climate change crisis exists online. We have found 29 websites specialised in climate disinformation. A recurrent position is not to “stop now” with pollution, but to delay environmental protection policies. These alleged climate “realists” (as opposed to climate “alarmists”) share several characteristics that turn them into serial disseminators of false content. From the identified case studies and available publications, this report offers a short guide to climate-centred disinformative discourse, focusing on its evolution and adaptation over time as a strategy to reach more people.

<https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/dont-stop-me-now-the-growing-disinformation-threat-against-climate-change/>

“What are climate misinformation and disinformation and what is their impact?” Pallavi Sethi, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics, April 22, 2024:

Link

Climate change misinformation and disinformation are pervasive. Misinformation involves the spread of inaccurate information regarding climate change vis a vis human error, whereas climate change disinformation involves the deliberate spreading of knowingly false information. This is pertinent as extreme weather events are listed as the top long-term risks to humanity, whilst misinformation and disinformation are rated as the biggest short-term risk to human society. Climate denialism is still quite prevalent today, however the most insidious form of climate change disinformation for the present moment is ‘climate delayism’, wherein climate change is not denied, but rather misconstrued via employing rhetorical tactics to discredit and diminish the evidence and delay climate action.

<https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/explainers/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation/>

Tackling the Spread of Disinformation, Friends of the Earth, December 7, 2023:

Link

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27) saw a rise in climate disinformation via social media ads. Friends of the Earth established an ‘intelligence unit’ to monitor climate disinformation narratives, wherein we found a proliferation of false information surrounding fossil fuels. Our reports and research urged Big Tech to crack down and restrict these kinds of ads on their platforms. But we also work to stop the spread of climate lies spreading through ‘organic’ unpaid content.

<https://foe.org/impact-stories/spread-of-disinformation/>

CLIMATE ACTION

AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - BOOKS

***The New Climate War*, Michael Mann, Scribe Publications, 2021.**

We are told to eat less meat, recycle and fly less, in order to slow down climate change. Michael Mann argues that placing emphasis on the behavior of individuals negates the responsibility of the real polluters, the fossil fuel industry. He discusses disinformation from fossil fuel companies, from blocking actions to price or regulating carbon emission. He outlines an alternative path that would include creating a playing field where renewable energy can fairly compete against fossil fuels, combating misinformation and disinformation in climate change debate, and rejecting 'climate despair.'

***The Language of Climate Politics Fossil-Fuel Propaganda and How to Fight It*. Genevieve Geunther, Oxford University Press, 2024.**

In this groundbreaking investigation into propaganda justifying the fossil-fuel economy, Geunther aims to offer powerful new ways to talk about the climate crisis that will help create transformative change. She works to show that the climate debate is not, in fact, neatly polarized. Rather, partisans on the right and the left often repeat the same fossil-fuel talking points, and this repetition produces a centrist consensus upholding the status quo, even as global heating accelerates. Geunther argues that fossil-fuel interests weaponize the discourses of science, economics, and activism, co-opting and twisting climate language to help greenwash their plans for ongoing extraction. But all too often climate scientists, economists, and even advocates will unwittingly echo the false and dangerous assumptions of their supposed political opponents. This apparent agreement between foes, filtered through the news media, not only influences our common-sense yet mistaken views about the climate crisis but also enables powerful decisionmakers to justify the corporate and policy actions that threaten us all. Revealing this dynamic, Guenther seeks to show how to transform it.

***Reaching Net Zero : what it takes to solve the global climate crisis*, William D. Fletcher and Craig B. Smith. Elsevier, 2020.**

This book discusses misinformation and complacency about global warming and how it does and will affect us as a global community. The authors state that educating the public about the dangers of global warming is the biggest challenge the world faces. It discusses the science behind global warming and the impact of not acting. It highlights the need for alternative sources of electricity such as wind and solar, among other steps for effectively combating climate change.

RESOURCES - ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Lewandowsky, Stephan. "Climate change disinformation and how to combat it." *Annual Review of Public Health* 42, no. 1 (2021): 1-21.

Climate change presents a challenge at multiple levels: It challenges our cognitive abilities because the effect of the accumulation of emissions is difficult to understand. Climate change also challenges many people's worldview because any climate mitigation regime will have economic and political implications that are incompatible with libertarian ideals of unregulated free markets. These political implications have created an environment of rhetorical adversity in which disinformation abounds, thus compounding the challenges for climate communicators. The existing literature on how to communicate climate change and dispel misinformation converges on several conclusions: First, providing information about climate change, in particular explanations of why it occurs, can enhance people's acceptance of science. Second, highlighting the scientific consensus can be an effective means to counter misinformation and raise public acceptance. Third, culturally aligned messages and messengers are more likely to be successful. Finally, climate misinformation is best defanged, through a process known as inoculation, before it is encountered, although debunking techniques can also be successful.

Van der Linden, Sander, Anthony Leiserowitz, Seth Rosenthal, and Edward Maibach. "Inoculating the public against misinformation about climate change." *Global challenges* 1, no. 2 (2017):

A growing body of research suggests that one promising way to counteract the politicization of science is to convey the high level of normative agreement ("consensus") among experts about the reality of human-caused climate change. Yet, much prior research examining public opinion dynamics in the context of climate change has done so under conditions with limited external validity. Moreover, no research to date has examined how to protect the public from the spread of influential misinformation about climate change. The current research bridges this divide by exploring how people evaluate and process consensus cues in a polarized information environment. Furthermore, evidence is provided that it is possible to pre-emptively protect ("inoculate") public attitudes about climate change against real-world misinformation.

Hassan, Isyaku, Rabiu Muazu Musa, Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, Mohamad Razali Abdullah, and Siti Zanariah Yusoff. "Analysis of climate change disinformation across types, agents and media platforms." *Information Development* 40, no. 3 (2024): 504-516.

This article begins by defining disinformation: meaning that it is a fabricated or misleading form of information that is knowingly spread to create harm, for financial benefit or for political or ideological objectives. The authors find that disinformation about climate change is more likely to be spread by politicians, organizations, and anonymous agencies compared with business tycoons, celebrities, and academics. Also, misleading and fabricated contents represent the most common types of disinformation spread by politicians. The findings suggest that politics and social media represent the most critical factors influencing climate change. The authors, thus call for the joint efforts of activists, media practitioners, and governments to mitigate disinformation about climate change.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - ORGANISATIONS AND GENERAL ARTICLES

Disinformation and Public Health, World Health Organization, Feb. 6, 2024:

Link

In this online explainer, the WHO draws distinctions between misinformation and disinformation on public health and discusses the types and sources of both, along with some ways to counter them.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/disinformation-and-public-health>

“The Pacific Covid-19 Infodemic: Challenges and Opportunities in the Pacific’s Response to an Online Information Crisis,” Benjamin Lokshin, The Asia Foundation, 2020:

Link

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed dangerous vulnerabilities in the Pacific’s digital information ecosystems, as well as great opportunities to use the internet to deliver access to information. Despite noteworthy initiatives by the region’s governments and civil societies to communicate with citizens through the internet and social media, a spate of false and harmful information online has led to public confusion around how the virus spreads, who has been infected, and what is being done to maintain public safety. Moving forward, local, regional, and international stakeholders can learn from the experience of the Covid-19 information crisis in the Pacific to build resilience into the Pacific’s online information ecosystems in order to protect them during the current “infodemic” and against future online threats.

https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Pacific-COVID-19-Infodemic_Jan4.2021.pdf

“How to reverse the alarming trend of health misinformation: Experts are studying how false information spreads, who is most vulnerable, and how to end the “infodemic.” Zara Abrams, American Psychological Association, July 1, 2024:

Link

Health misinformation took center stage during the Covid-19 pandemic and continues to run rampant online. Falsehoods about evidence-based cancer treatments, birth control, and other forms of medical care have caused confusion, conflict, and premature death. Despite the growing threat to global health, social media companies have backtracked on promises to police misinformation on their platforms. That has left users vulnerable to being deceived. But as researchers work to address what some are calling an “infodemic” of health misinformation, they too face roadblocks—often politically motivated. Despite the barriers, psychologists and other scientists are forging ahead with efforts to learn more about the threat of health misinformation and to put what’s already known into practice.

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/07/ending-health-misinformation>

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - ORGANISATIONS AND GENERAL ARTICLES

“How can we improve public health communication for the next pandemic? Tackling distrust and misinformation is key,” Shauna Hurley and Rebecca Ryan, The Conversation, Oct. 3, 2024:

Link

From the black death in the 14th century to COVID in the 21st, public health authorities have put emergency measures such as isolation and quarantine in place to stop infectious diseases spreading. As we know from COVID, these measures upend lives in an effort to save them. In both the recent and distant past they’ve also given rise to collective unrest, confusion and resistance. So after all this time, what do we know about the role public health communication plays in helping people understand and adhere to protective measures in a crisis? And more importantly, in an age of misinformation and distrust, how can we improve public health messaging for any future pandemics?

<https://theconversation.com/how-can-we-improve-public-health-communication-for-the-next-pandemic-tackling-distrust-and-misinformation-is-key-226718>

“Health misinformation is rampant on social media – here’s what it does, why it spreads and what people can do about it,” Monica Wang, The Conversation, Dec. 14, 2023:

Link

The global anti-vaccine movement and vaccine hesitancy that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic show no signs of abating. As vaccine confidence falls, health misinformation continues to spread like wildfire on social media and in real life. In my view, we cannot underestimate the dangers of health misinformation and the need to understand why it spreads and what we can do about it. We scientists and research entities can also do better in communicating our science and rebuilding trust,

<https://theconversation.com/health-misinformation-is-rampant-on-social-media-here-s-what-it-does-why-it-spreads-and-what-people-can-do-about-it-217059>

Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Misinformation, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, July 2024:

Link

Misleading rumors, misinformation, and disinformation can make health events more complicated, reduce trust in public health efforts, and lead to negative health impacts. The Practical playbook for addressing health misinformation provides guidance on ways public health and medical professionals can set themselves up for success, make decisions on when they need to act to address misinformation, choose which actions and approaches might be useful to their audiences and information needs, and evaluate how their efforts are working. It also provides tools, templates, and examples to help in these efforts. Although there is no “silver bullet” to solve the problem of public health misinformation, this playbook helps to lay the groundwork for health communicators to address the issue.

<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/24-07-cdc-misinfo-playbook-v2.pdf>

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Jessica Kirk, Infodemic, Ignorance, or Imagination? The Problem of Misinformation in Health Emergencies, *International Political Sociology*, Volume 18, Issue 4, December 2024, olae036,

Link

In understanding and responding to the problem of misinformation during global health emergencies, health experts and organizations such as the WHO have relied on the concept of the “infodemic,” or the idea that there is such an overabundance of information that ascertaining trustworthy sources and reliable guidance is difficult. Is this the best way to understand the problem of misinformation, however? A large and multidisciplinary literature has argued that such an approach misses the important role of individual psychological factors and societal “mega-trends” such as hyperpolarization, structural shifts in the media, and public mistrust in elites. This article argues that such contributions are important in understanding the multifaceted problem of misinformation but may miss another, equally important component: the politics of emergency. Specifically, the prominent role of speculation during moments of emergency—the need to respond to “what ifs” rather than just “what is”—provides a conducive context for misinformation, facilitating its production and spread while also problematizing efforts to correct it. The article illuminates this relationship through a discourse analysis of prominent misinformation claims during the US responses to Ebola in 2014 and COVID-19 in 2020.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olae036>

Kant, Romitesh, and Rufino Varea. "Spreading (dis) trust in Fiji?: Exploring COVID-19 misinformation on Facebook forums." *Pacific Journalism Review* 27, no. 1/2 (2021): 63-84.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant challenges for the health system across the globe and fueled the surge of numerous rumours, hoaxes, and misinformation regarding outcomes, prevention and cure of the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had severe political, economic and societal effects and affected media and communication systems in unprecedented ways. While traditional journalism has tried to adapt to the rapidly evolving situation, alternative news media on the internet have given the events an ideological spin. This article provides data-driven qualitative insights into Fijian Facebook posts related to infectious disease outbreaks. It aims to advance understandings of public views and opinions on Fijian social media during the height of the pandemic in 2020 and to outline potential implications for health information.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MIS/DISINFORMATION



RESOURCES - ACADEMIC ARTICLES

White, Becky, Lynette Phuong, Jeremy Roach, Nikki Teggelove, and Hazel Wallace. "Pandemics, infodemics and health promotion." *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* 34, no. 1 (2023): 169-172.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying infodemic are significant public health issues. The COVID-19 infodemic has been prolific from early in the pandemic response, and has continued to escalate during vaccine rollout. COVID-19 is the first pandemic in the social media era, expediting the need for effective measures to manage the high volume of information and misinformation. To address the infodemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) and others have commenced a comprehensive program of work, building capacity, raising awareness and developing new tools and methods. As part of the WHO capacity building effort, they have developed a comprehensive infodemic manager training program. The authors of this paper are Australian alumni from the first two training courses, all authors have health promotion backgrounds. Health Promotion Practitioners are uniquely positioned to build on existing skills, knowledge and reach to develop preventative strategies to help mitigate infodemics. This paper offers our combined perspectives on why the infodemic is a significant health promotion concern and the role we believe Health Promotion Practitioners can play in managing and mitigating the infodemic.

Riedlinger, Michelle, Silvia Montaña-Niño, Ned Watt, Víctor García-Perdomo, and Marina Joubert. "Fact-Checking Role Performances and Problematic Covid-19 Vaccine Content in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa." *Media and Communication* 12 (2024).

Building on findings from studies focused on journalistic role performance, we investigated how professional fact-checkers in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa conceived of and performed their professional roles when addressing Covid-19 vaccination topics. Interviews indicated that fact-checkers recognized the diversification of tasks and new roles associated with addressing problematic content from social media users. However, fact-checkers expressed unanimous commitment to prioritizing political and media watchdog activities in response to problematic Covid-19 vaccine information spreading from elite sources. To compare these role conceptions with role performance, we conducted a content analysis of Covid-19 vaccine content posted in 2021 to these fact-checkers' Facebook accounts. We found that content was mostly associated with explainers or debunking content (addressing hoaxes or rumors about Covid-19 vaccines from non-elite social media users). In particular, the abundance of explainers, compared with other genres of fact-checking content, aligns fact-checkers with professional roles as civic service providers, educators, and "interpreters" of health information. Only a small proportion of the Covid-19 vaccine-related posts from each fact-checker contained verifications of claims from authoritative (elite "top-down") sources (i.e., politicians, media, and health/science professionals). This study offers insights into a particularly tumultuous time of political activity in these regions and considers implications for practice innovation.