

Call for Papers: Special Issue on

Mis- and Disinformation about COVID-19: Challenges for Health Communication

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Millions of lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). However, scientific knowledge on how to effectively respond to COVID-19 outbreaks has also increased considerably in a very short time (Weiner et al., 2020). For example, several research teams have developed promising COVID-19 vaccines, and, as of April 2021, about 732 million vaccination doses have been administered worldwide (WHO, 2021). Further success in reducing the COVID-19 burden relies on the public's awareness and acceptance of scientific knowledge. Health communication plays an essential role in the complex relationship between scientific knowledge and individuals' beliefs and behaviours. However, attempts by health communicators to inform and educate individuals about the characteristics of the disease and effective prevention measures compete with persuasive mis- and disinformation, especially online (Lewandowsky et al., 2021). Studies reveal that misinformation about COVID-19 undermines trust in institutions (Pummerer et al., 2020), decreases willingness to undertake effective prevention measures such as vaccination (Loomba et al., 2021) and adds to the overabundance of (mis-)information that makes it difficult for individuals to find trustworthy sources – an overabundance known as an *infodemic* (WHO, 2020). That is, mis- and disinformation pose major challenges for health communication around the globe.

To master these challenges and prepare for future public health crises, it is vital to understand mis- and disinformation surrounding COVID-19. What kinds of mis- and disinformation do individuals encounter off- and online? What impact do these have on cognition, emotions, attitudes and behaviours? Which groups are specifically susceptible to mis- and disinformation, and how can theory-based interventions be designed to combat mis- and disinformation surrounding COVID-19?

The special issue therefore calls for papers analysing a) the presentation and dissemination of off- and online mis- and disinformation about COVID-19 in interpersonal communication or mass media channels, b) the effects of mis- and disinformation on individual decision makers with respect to their cultural, political and economic context, as well as the cognitive and social drivers of belief in mis- and disinformation and c) the effectiveness of potential interventions to combat mis- and disinformation in interpersonal communication or mass media channels. Thus, submissions can address, but are not limited to, the following questions and concepts:

Presentation and Dissemination of Mis- and Disinformation about COVID-19

- Which actors, communicator groups and networks, communication strategies and target audiences can be identified in the dissemination of disinformation about COVID-19? How prevalent are they in public discourse, and which people contribute to this reach?
- How do mis- and disinformation about COVID-19 spread on the internet and especially on social media? How do the affordances of online platforms influence this?
- What kinds of taxonomies can be used to categorise mis- and disinformation about COVID-19?

Effects of Mis- and Disinformation about COVID-19

- What are the effects of mis- and disinformation about COVID-19 on cognition, emotions, attitudes and intended future and/or actual behaviour, such as vaccination?
- What different psychological, social, cultural and contextual variables can be identified that influence an individual's susceptibility to misinformation?
- What functions do the content (e.g. conspiracy theories, logical fallacies and fake news), the media or the communication type (e.g. memes, comments or flyers) have regarding the effectiveness of mis- and disinformation?

Debunking and Prebunking of Mis- and Disinformation about COVID-19

- What different debunking strategies can be distinguished in their effectiveness with respect to different target groups?
- What are the influence variables (personal, content or context variables) to consider for successful prebunking and debunking?
- What can be learned from research about unintended effects when combating mis- and disinformation about COVID-19?

The special issue calls for basic research describing and explaining these aspects but also welcomes applied research seeking to solve practical health communication issues. It is interested in theories, methods and empirical work in the study of mis- and disinformation about COVID-19.

Submission Format

We welcome submissions that fit any of the EJHC formats: original research papers, theoretical papers, methodological papers, review articles, brief research reports. For further information on the article types, please see <http://www.ejhc.org/about/submissions>.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the [EJHC author guidelines](#) and be submitted via the [journal website](#).

Deadline for submission is **31 October 2021**.

Review Process

All articles will undergo a rigorous peer review process. Once the paper has been assessed as appropriate by the editorial management team (with regard to form, content, and quality), it will be peer-reviewed by at least two reviewers in a double-blind review process, meaning that reviewers are not disclosed to authors, and authors are not disclosed to reviewers. To ensure short publication processes, EJHC releases articles online on a rolling basis, expected to start in May 2022.

European Journal of Health Communication

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