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HKS Misinformation Review Digest, October 2020

HKS Misinformation Review [misinfo@hks.harvard.edu]

Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 4:44 PM

To: [Steve Johnston](#)

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Editorial. [All disinformation is local: A reflection on the need and possibility of measuring impact](#)

By Irene Pasquetto

Since 2019, I have been breathing the fast successes, and great anxieties, of the emerging field of mis- and disinformation studies. While the successes are obvious and quite visible (very few other academic fields receive a similar amount of public attention and media coverage), the anxieties are more subtle and generally emerge as new fundings needs to be allocated. I would like to use this last editorial to reflect on one such anxiety that plagues the field of mis- and disinformation studies. A recurring, exhausting concern among commentators of the field has been the urge to measure the impact of online disinformation on opinion and behavior changes. Journalists and funders ask this question all the time: *What is the actual impact of online disinformation?* [Read this article online.](#)

Volume 1, Issue 6

Research Article. [Overcoming resistance to COVID-19 vaccine adoption: How affective dispositions shape views of science and medicine](#)

By John E. Newhagen and Erik P. Bucy

Health experts worry that a COVID-19 vaccine boycott could inhibit reaching “herd immunity,” and their concerns have only grown as the pandemic has spread. Concern has largely focused on anti-vaccine protestors, who captured headlines as they stood side by side with Tea Party activists and armed militia groups demonstrating against the quarantine in April and May of this year. But anti-vax extremists make up only about a third of respondents in surveys who said they would not vaccinate. Health officials must also take into account a swelling group who may understand the importance of a vaccine but are hesitant and confused because they feel the vaccine’s development is being rushed and may not be safe or effective. [Read](#)

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Research Note. [The scale of Facebook's problem depends upon how 'fake news' is classified](#)

By Richard Rogers

Ushering in the contemporary 'fake news' crisis, Craig Silverman of BuzzFeed News reported that it outperformed mainstream news on Facebook in the three months prior to the 2016 US presidential elections. Here the report's methods and findings are revisited for 2020. Examining Facebook user engagement of election-related stories, and applying Silverman's classification of fake news, it was found that the problem has worsened, implying that the measures undertaken to date have not remedied the issue. If, however, one were to classify 'fake news' in a stricter fashion, as Facebook as well as certain media organizations do with the notion of 'false news', the scale of the problem shrinks. [Read this article online](#). [Download this article](#).

Call for Papers: Disinformation and the 2020 US Elections

[Submit Now](#) to our Special Issue

Guest Editors: Ann Crigler and Marion Just

The 2020 presidential election, amid a global pandemic and a wave of social justice protests, is often called one of the most important in our lifetimes. Understanding how misinformation—and intentionally propagated *disinformation*—spreads before, during, and after elections has thus become a major goal for many social science researchers. Using a variety of approaches, including ethnographic research and quantitative analyses of internet-based social networks, they seek to investigate where election disinformation originates, who spreads it, how many people see it and -- importantly -- how it may be combated. If you are working on a study regarding sources, detection, processes, platforms, behaviors etc., around electoral misinformation, please consider submitting a paper to our special issue. [Find our submission guidelines here](#).

Special Issue: COVID-19 & Misinformation (Part III)

Research Article. [The weaponization of web archives: Data craft and COVID-19 publics](#)

By Amelia Acker and Mitch Chalet

An unprecedented volume of harmful health misinformation linked to the coronavirus pandemic has led to the appearance of misinformation tactics that leverage web archives in order to evade content moderation on social media platforms. Here we present newly identified manipulation techniques designed to maximize the value, longevity, and spread of harmful and non-factual content across social media using provenance information from web archives and social media analytics. After identifying conspiracy content that has been archived by human actors with the Wayback Machine, we report on user patterns of "screensampling," where images of archived misinformation are spread via social platforms. [Read this article online](#). [Download this article](#).

Research Article. [The Twitter origins and evolution of the COVID-19 "plandemic" conspiracy theory](#)

By Matthew D. Kearney, Shawn C. Chiang and Philip M. Massey

Tweets about “plandemic” (e.g., #plandemic) – the notion that the COVID-19 pandemic was planned or fraudulent – helped to spread several distinct conspiracy theories related to COVID-19. But the term’s catchy nature attracted attention from anti-vaccine activist filmmakers who ultimately created Plandemic the 26-minute documentary. Plandemic falsely attacks NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, among others, and an eventual coronavirus vaccine. The film, which has since been widely discredited, appeared to at least temporarily shift Twitter communications to different topics and organizations, fueling the flow of conspiracy theories and misinformation itself with specific public figures to demonize. [Read this article online.](#) [Download this article.](#)

Research Article. [Anger contributes to the spread of COVID-19 misinformation](#)

By Jiyoung Han, Meeyoung Cha and Wonjae Lee

A survey conducted over South Korean adults (N=513) reveals that emotions, specifically anger, contribute to the broader spread of misinformation on COVID-19 by leading angry individuals to consider false claims to be “scientifically credible.” This pattern is more evident among conservatives than liberals. Our finding sheds light on new measures and journalistic interventions that could alleviate the public’s anger and foster science-based conversations during a public health crisis. [Read this article online.](#) [Download this article.](#)

Research Article. [Not just conspiracy theories: Vaccine opponents and proponents add to the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’ on Twitter](#)

By Amelia M. Jamison, David A. Broniatowski, Mark Dredze, Anu Sangraula, Michael C. Smith and Sandra C. Quinn

In February 2020, the World Health Organization announced an ‘infodemic’ -- a deluge of both accurate and inaccurate health information -- that accompanied the global pandemic of COVID-19 as a major challenge to effective health communication. We assessed content from the most active vaccine accounts on Twitter to understand how existing online communities contributed to the ‘infodemic’ during the early stages of the pandemic. While we expected vaccine opponents to share misleading information about COVID-19, we also found vaccine proponents were not immune to spreading less reliable claims. In both groups, the single largest topic of discussion consisted of narratives comparing COVID-19 to other diseases like seasonal influenza, often downplaying the severity of the novel coronavirus. [Read this article online.](#) [Download this article.](#)

Research Article. [Misinformation more likely to use non-specific authority references: Twitter analysis of two COVID-19 myths](#)

By Joseph McGlynn, Maxim Baryshevsev and Zane A. Dayton

This research examines the content, timing, and spread of COVID-19 misinformation and subsequent debunking efforts for two COVID-19 myths. COVID-19 misinformation tweets included more non-specific authority references (e.g., “Taiwanese experts”, “a doctor friend”), while debunking tweets included more specific and verifiable authority references (e.g., the CDC, the World Health

Organization, Snopes). Findings illustrate a delayed debunking response to COVID-19 misinformation, as it took seven days for debunking tweets to match the quantity of misinformation tweets. The use of non-specific authority references in tweets was associated with decreased tweet engagement, suggesting the importance of citing specific sources when refuting health misinformation. [Read this article online.](#) [Download this article.](#)

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