HKS Misinformation Review: Digest 5

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HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

Mis\information Review

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EDITORIAL

A year in review

By Natascha Chtena, Editor-in-Chief, HKS Misinformation Review

Welcome to our eighth issue of the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review. We would like to thank you for supporting the journal in its first volume.

We had an exciting first year! In Volume 1, we published 49 articles, of which 37 were peer-reviewed research articles, 9 were evidence-based commentaries, and 3 were peer-reviewed research notes. Contributions have provided stimulating debate on the diffusion of misinformation worldwide, its social origins, systems of production, and implications for policymakers and society at large. These papers have also covered a wide range of domains including public health, public opinion, education policy, and information technology. Over the past 12 months, our website was visited by over 200,000 unique users and our work picked up by popular media outlets like Last Week Tonight with John Oliver and CNN's Anderson Cooper 360°. We hope to continue to build on the success of Volume 1 and we now look forward to working on Volume 2.

Volume 2 will include greater disciplinary variety, more qualitative perspectives, and at least two special issues on topics of high relevance to the misinformation field. 2021 will also see the launch of our new, open-source manuscript submission and management system, which will make it easier for authors to submit their work and check the status of their manuscripts online. Thank you for being with us on this journey!

Find our full annual report on our website.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conspiracy and debunking narratives about COVID-19 origins on Chinese social media: How it started and who is to blame

By Kaiping Chen, Anfan Chen, Jingwen Zhang, Jingbo Meng and Chihua Shen

This paper examines conspiracy and debunking narratives about the origins of COVID-19 on a major Chinese social media platform, Weibo, from January to April 2020. Popular conspiracies about COVID-19 on Weibo, including that the virus is human-synthesized or a bioweapon, differ substantially from those in the United States. They attribute more responsibility to the United States than to China, especially following Sino-U.S. confrontations. Compared to conspiracy posts, debunking posts are associated with lower user participation but higher mobilization. Debunking narratives can be more engaging when they come from women and influencers and cite scientists. Our findings suggest that conspiracy narratives can carry highly cultural and political orientations. Correction efforts should consider political motives and identify important stakeholders to reconstruct international dialogues toward intercultural understanding. **Continue reading**

COMMENTARY

Tackling misinformation: What

researchers could do with social media data

By Irene Pasquetto, Briony Swire-Thompson, Michelle A. Amazeen et al.

For researchers in the field of misinformation, emphasizing the necessity of establishing better collaborations with social media platforms has become routine. In-lab studies and off-platform investigations can only take us so far. Increased data access would enable researchers to perform studies on a broader scale, allow for improved characterization of misinformation in real-world contexts, and facilitate the testing of interventions to prevent the spread of misinformation. Our paper highlights 15 opinions from researchers detailing these possibilities and describes research that could hypothetically be conducted if social media data were more readily available. As scientists, our findings are only as good as the dataset at our disposal, and with the current misinformation crisis, it is urgent that we have access to real-world data where misinformation is wreaking the most havoc. **Continue reading**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The different forms of COVID-19 misinformation and their consequences

By Adam M. Enders, Joseph E. Uscinksi, Casey Klofstad and Justin Stoler

As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, an understanding of the structure and organization of beliefs in pandemic conspiracy theories and misinformation becomes increasingly critical for addressing the threat posed by these dubious ideas. In polling Americans about beliefs in 11 such ideas, we observed clear groupings of beliefs that correspond with different individual-level characteristics (e.g., support for Trump, distrust of scientists) and behavioral intentions (e.g., to take a vaccine, to engage in social activities). Moreover, we found that conspiracy theories enjoy more support, on average, than misinformation about dangerous health practices. Our findings suggest several paths for policymakers, communicators, and scientists to minimize the spread and impact of COVID-19 misinformation and conspiracy theories. **Continue reading**

RESEARCH NOTE

Does the public support fact-checking social media? It depends who and how you ask

By Timothy S. Rich, Ian Milden and Malory Treece Wagner

We analyze original survey data on support for social media companies' fact-checking of politicians in general and President Trump in particular. We find overwhelming majorities of Democrats support fact-checking in both instances, while a majority of Republicans support fact-checking of politicians in general but not of President Trump. Moreover, we find those concerned about contracting COVID-19 are more likely to support fact-checks. Rather than viewing fact-checks as a cure-all, we argue the importance of acknowledging their limitations and identifying when and on whom efforts may be effective.   **Continue reading**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Breaking Harmony Square: A game that "inoculates" against political misinformation

By Jon Roozenbeek and Sander van der Linden

We present Harmony Square, a short, free-to-play online game in which players learn how political misinformation is produced and spread. We find that the game confers psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation: players from around the world find social media content making use of these techniques significantly less reliable after playing, are more confident in their ability to spot such content, and less likely to report sharing it with others in their network.   **Continue reading**

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