

Health Misinformation on Social Media: A Review of Management and Innovation Perspectives

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Abstract

Health misinformation on social media has emerged as a significant challenge for global public health, especially during critical periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid and wide dissemination of false health information can mislead the public, reduce adherence to medical guidelines, and erode trust in health institutions. This review explores the dynamics of health misinformation through management and innovation lenses, drawing on multidisciplinary literature published between 2018 and 2024. Key themes identified include the prevalence and emotional nature of misinformation, user susceptibility shaped by demographic and cognitive factors, and the psychological mechanisms behind belief formation and resistance to correction. The study also highlights healthcare professionals' role in countering misinformation, their motivational and institutional barriers, and the impact of platform-specific dynamics. Effective mitigation strategies involve a mix of interventions, such as theory-based communication, mobile health applications, digital literacy programs, and AI-driven monitoring systems. Furthermore, emotionally attuned, transparent messaging and community engagement are critical to building public trust. This paper concludes that an integrated, multi-sectoral approach—uniting health professionals, policymakers, tech platforms, and the public—is essential to combating misinformation and fostering health resilience in a digitally connected world.

Keywords: Health misinformation; social media; public health management; digital literacy; innovation strategies

INTRODUCTION

Health misinformation on social media has emerged as a significant public health concern, particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid dissemination of false health information through social media platforms can have dire consequences, especially for populations with lower health literacy and older people, who are often more susceptible to misleading claims (Nascimento et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2024). The systematic reviews conducted by Nascimento et al. and Ismail et al. highlight how misinformation spreads quickly through media posts and videos, often circulating within closed online groups, thereby influencing vulnerable individuals (Nascimento et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2024).

The role of social media in the proliferation of health misinformation is multifaceted. Wang et al. emphasize that while social media platforms provide opportunities for beneficial engagement, they also lack effective filtering mechanisms, which allows misinformation to flourish (Wang et al., 2019). This unchecked spread can lead to the formation of communities that propagate conspiracy theories and pseudoscience, as seen in movements like anti-vaccination campaigns, which pose significant risks to public health (Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, the deregulation of misinformation on platforms such as Twitter has been noted to exacerbate the issue, as the absence of federal regulations allows false claims about health to persist unchecked (Sule, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly highlighted the urgency of addressing health misinformation. Studies indicate that a significant portion of the public encounters misinformation primarily through social media, with some surveys reporting that over 63% of respondents identified social media as their main source of COVID-19 misinformation (Al-Zaman, 2021; Al-Zaman, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized this challenge, coining the term "infodemic" to describe the overwhelming amount of misinformation that can hinder effective public health responses (Vraga et al., 2020; Razzano, 2024).

The significance of health misinformation on social media, particularly in the context of innovation management, cannot be overstated. The rapid dissemination of health-related misinformation poses challenges that require innovative solutions from public health authorities and social media platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency of addressing misinformation, as it has been linked to detrimental health behaviors, including vaccine hesitancy and the rejection of public health guidelines (Pierri et al., 2022; Carrieri et al., 2019). This phenomenon highlights the need for innovative strategies to manage misinformation effectively. Research indicates that misinformation can spread rapidly through social media channels, often outpacing accurate information (Nascimento et al., 2022; Suárez-Lledó & Álvarez-Gálvez, 2021).

This targeted approach is essential in managing the overwhelming misinformation that can arise during health crises. The implications of health misinformation extend beyond individual behavior to encompass broader public health outcomes. Studies have shown that misinformation can undermine public trust in health authorities and increase health risks (Pierri et al., 2022; Chong et al., 2022). For example, the spread of false information regarding COVID-19 has been linked to a decline in protective health behaviors, such as social distancing and vaccination uptake (Chong et al., 2022; Kouzy et al., 2020). This underscores the necessity for innovative public health campaigns that correct misinformation and build community trust and resilience (Calleja et al., 2021).

Managing health misinformation on social media is a critical area that intersects with innovation management. As misinformation continues to evolve, so must the strategies employed to combat it. This requires a collaborative effort among health professionals, social media platforms, and policymakers to develop innovative solutions that enhance public health literacy, improve misinformation moderation, and ultimately foster a healthier society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health Misinformation Theory

The theory of health misinformation on social media encompasses various dimensions, including the mechanisms of misinformation spread, the psychological factors influencing user behavior, and the implications for public health. Understanding these elements is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat misinformation, particularly in health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the foundational aspects of health misinformation theory is the recognition that social media platforms facilitate the rapid spread of false information. Wang et al. highlight that these platforms, while offering opportunities for beneficial engagement, also lack effective filtering mechanisms, allowing misinformation to proliferate unchecked. This environment fosters communities that share and reinforce unfounded beliefs, such as those seen in anti-vaccination movements, which can have profound public health consequences Wang et al. (2019).

The systematic review by Ismail et al. further underscores the prevalence of health misinformation, revealing that most health practitioners have encountered misinformation in their practice, emphasizing the widespread nature of the issue (Ismail et al., 2024). Digital health literacy plays a critical role in the consumption and dissemination of misinformation. Warner et al. argue that

an individual's ability to evaluate the quality of health information significantly influences their exposure to misinformation (Warner et al., 2020).

This suggests that enhancing digital health literacy could protect against misinformation, enabling individuals to discern credible sources from unreliable ones. Moreover, Kisa emphasizes the importance of effective public health communication strategies, including promoting health literacy and implementing fact-checking mechanisms to counter misinformation (Kisa, 2024). These strategies are essential for fostering an informed public who can navigate the complexities of health information online. Psychological factors also contribute to the spread of misinformation. Research indicates that cognitive biases and emotional responses can lead individuals to accept and share false information, particularly during times of crisis (Olivares & Myneni, 2022). For instance, Murali and Drake found that well-crafted corrections from trusted sources can positively influence beliefs and behaviors, highlighting the potential for effective communication to mitigate misinformation's impact (Murali & Drake, 2022).

Additionally, Chen and Tang suggest that perceived threats and self-affirmation can motivate health experts to counter misinformation, indicating that understanding the psychological motivations behind misinformation sharing is vital for developing effective interventions (Chen & Tang, 2022).

The implications of health misinformation extend beyond individual behavior to encompass broader public health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how misinformation can undermine public trust in health authorities and lead to adverse health behaviors, such as vaccine hesitancy (Herasimenka et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2022).

As noted by Olivares and Myneni, the linguistic characteristics of misinformation often differ from those of accurate information, which can further complicate the public's ability to discern truth from falsehood (Olivares & Myneni, 2022). This highlights the need for tailored communication strategies considering misinformation's psychological and linguistic dimensions.

The Role of Management in Addressing Health Misinformation

The role of management in addressing health misinformation on social media is critical, particularly in the context of public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Management strategies must encompass a multifaceted approach that includes identifying misinformation, implementing corrective measures, and promoting health literacy among the public. This response synthesizes relevant literature to highlight the essential management practices needed to combat health misinformation effectively. One of the primary responsibilities of management in this context is to develop targeted strategies for correcting misinformation. Walter et al. emphasize that understanding the circumstances under which misinformation is most resistant or susceptible to correction can assist public health organizations in crafting effective interventions (Walter et al., 2020).

Given the vast amount of misinformation circulating on social media, it is impractical for organizations to address every instance individually. Instead, management should focus on identifying key areas where misinformation is prevalent and deploying resources strategically to counteract it (Walter et al., 2020). This targeted approach is essential for maximizing the impact of corrective efforts.

Healthcare professionals, including physicians and nurses, are pivotal in correcting misinformation. Bautista et al. note that while there is no legal mandate for healthcare providers to address misinformation, many feel a professional obligation to do so (Bautista et al., 2021). Management must support these professionals by providing them with the necessary resources and training to engage with misinformation on social media effectively. This includes equipping them with

communication strategies that align with their professional identities and fostering an environment where they feel empowered to correct false information (Bautista et al., 2021).

Moreover, the systematic review by Nascimento et al. highlights the effectiveness of social media interventions designed to correct health misinformation (Nascimento et al., 2022). Management should prioritize developing and implementing such interventions, which can include partnerships with social media platforms to enhance the visibility of accurate health information and reduce the prominence of misinformation. This collaborative approach can leverage the strengths of public health organizations and social media companies to create a more reliable information ecosystem (Nascimento et al., 2022).

Inoculation strategies also represent a promising avenue for management to explore. Ileş et al. found that inoculation messages can effectively build resistance to misinformation by preparing individuals to critically evaluate false claims (Ileş et al., 2021). Management should consider integrating inoculation-based interventions into public health campaigns, thereby equipping the public with the tools to recognize and resist misinformation before it takes hold. This proactive approach can significantly mitigate the impact of misinformation on public health attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, addressing the emotional aspects of misinformation is crucial. Charquero-Ballester et al. emphasize that different types of misinformation elicit varying emotional responses, influencing how widely they are shared (Charquero-Ballester et al., 2021). Management should develop communication strategies that provide factual corrections and address the emotional underpinnings of misinformation. By understanding the emotional valence of misinformation, management can tailor their messaging to resonate more effectively with the audience, enhancing the likelihood of a successful correction.

Finally, fostering health literacy among the public is a vital management responsibility. Gabarrón et al. stress the importance of educating social media users to discern reliable information from misinformation (Gabarrón et al., 2021). Management should prioritize initiatives to improve health literacy, particularly among vulnerable populations that are more susceptible to misinformation. This can involve creating educational campaigns, workshops, and resources that empower individuals to assess the health information they encounter online critically.

METHODS

This research followed a simple review process. The study employed a structured approach to gather and analyze information based on ten simple rules for writing a literature review from Pautasso M. (2013) to identify relevant literature. This approach helped to maintain quality standards while selecting the literature for review from available online sources published from 2018 to 2024. We looked for studies from different fields, such as health communication, media studies, and innovation management, that discussed health misinformation on social media. The selection focused on articles that explained how misinformation spreads, its effects, how people or organizations respond to it, and the creative solutions used to reduce its impact. We included both qualitative and quantitative studies and various methods to gain a complete understanding of the issue. By combining different types of research, we aimed to capture a broad and balanced point of view on the issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The review on health misinformation on social media reveals significant findings from some point of view regarding its prevalence, impact, and management strategies. We identified several issues encapsulating the complexities of health misinformation, its impact on public health, and the

strategies employed to mitigate its effects. We reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing its prevalence, user behavior, and management strategies. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that address the specific characteristics of misinformation, enhance the capabilities of healthcare professionals, and leverage innovative technologies to combat misinformation effectively. By understanding these points of view, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to mitigate the impact of health misinformation on public health.

Prevalence and Nature of Health Misinformation

The first issue is the prevalence and nature of health misinformation on social media platforms. Studies indicate widespread misinformation, particularly during health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Roozenbeek et al. found that while belief in misinformation is not universally held, specific claims are deemed credible by significant portions of the population, posing risks to public health. On the other hand, the study also shows a link between the tendency not to follow public health guidelines or hesitancy towards vaccination and the international community's susceptibility to misinformation (Roozenbeek et al., 2020).

That finding is echoed by Kearney et al., who quantified the prevalence of anti-vaccine misinformation on Instagram, highlighting the platform's role in disseminating misleading health information. Anti-vaccine posts were largely personal narratives shared by non-health individual users, while pro-vaccine content was primarily informational and published by health-related organizations. The findings underscore the potential of narrative-based content in engaging users and the necessity for public health communicators to incorporate storytelling strategies alongside evidence-based information to counter misinformation and promote vaccine uptake on social media effectively (Kearney et al., 2019).

The systematic review by Suárez-Lledó and Álvarez-Gálvez further supports this, noting that various health topics are frequently misrepresented across social media platforms. These studies primarily addressed misinformation on topics such as vaccines (32%), drugs and smoking (22%), non-communicable diseases (19%), pandemics (10%), eating disorders (9%), and medical treatments (7%). Twitter was the most frequently studied platform (43%), followed by YouTube (37%) and Facebook (9%). The review revealed that misinformation was most prevalent in posts related to smoking products (e.g., e-cigarettes), drug use, and vaccines—especially concerning the HPV vaccine. The studies also found that health misinformation often originated from non-professional users and was typically presented through emotional narratives or pseudo-scientific language, making it persuasive to lay audiences. In contrast, scientifically accurate content was more commonly posted by health institutions or official sources. However, major challenges remain, such as restricted data access due to evolving privacy policies and API limitations, which hinder comprehensive analysis. The authors emphasize the urgent need for evidence-based digital policy frameworks to counter health misinformation and promote trustworthy health communication, particularly during public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Suárez-Lledó & Álvarez-Gálvez, 2021).

User Behavior and Susceptibility

The second issue revolves around user behavior and susceptibility to misinformation. Research indicates that individual characteristics, such as age and digital literacy, significantly influence susceptibility to misinformation. For instance, Peng's study revealed that older adults often fall prey to persuasive strategies used in health misinformation, while some can recognize these cues. The study identifies both informational and individual factors contributing to susceptibility. Informationally, misinformation thrives due to abundance, uncertainty, and partial truths, while individually, low media literacy, confirmation bias, and short-term risk aversion heighten

vulnerability. However, many participants demonstrated resilience by engaging in verification practices—cross-referencing sources, consulting trusted people, and using fact-checking tools. They also employed critical thinking and empathetic communication when addressing misinformation shared by friends and family. The findings underscore the importance of integrating persuasive strategy recognition into digital literacy programs, especially for older populations. Rather than relying solely on source checking or superficial cues, effective education should emphasize understanding the rhetorical and psychological mechanisms behind misinformation. Additionally, leveraging social support systems—through family, peers, or community learning—can enhance the uptake and retention of media literacy skills (Peng, 2024).

This duality underscores the need for tailored interventions that consider social media users' demographic and psychological profiles. Additionally, Oluka's work highlights how misinformation can shape taxpayer behavior, suggesting that similar mechanisms may apply to health-related misinformation. The study argues that the consequences of misinformation extend beyond individual errors, threatening the integrity of national fiscal systems. Eroded public trust, reduced tax compliance, and increased administrative burdens on governments are among the broader implications. To mitigate these effects, the author calls for targeted tax literacy initiatives, collaboration with digital platforms to reduce the spread of false information, and the adoption of transparent, responsive public communication to rebuild trust and promote voluntary compliance (Oluka, 2024).

Motivations and Barriers to Correcting Misinformation

The third issue is healthcare professionals' motivations and barriers in correcting misinformation. Bautista et al. emphasize that healthcare providers are motivated by professional identity and a desire to promote health despite the absence of legal mandates to correct misinformation. Participants emphasized their unique role and credibility in combating misinformation, particularly during the COVID-19 infodemic. Nevertheless, they encountered significant challenges across intrapersonal (e.g., lack of time, efficacy, or visible impact), interpersonal (e.g., online harassment, bullying, and ineffective discourse), and institutional (e.g., lack of organizational support or formal training) domains. To address these barriers, participants recommended misinformation and social media training, building a credible online presence, joining professional health communities, and maintaining professionalism when engaging with the public. The study advocates for systematic support from health institutions and the integration of social media communication into health education curricula so that professionals are better equipped to serve as digital front liners against health misinformation. However, time constraints and lack of resources hinder their ability to engage effectively on social media. This theme reflects the broader challenge of mobilizing healthcare professionals to counter misinformation while balancing clinical responsibilities (Bautista et al., 2021).

Strategies for Mitigating Misinformation

The fourth issue focuses on strategies for mitigating misinformation. Effective management of health misinformation requires innovative approaches, including technology and community engagement. Gesser-Edelsburg et al. conducted experiments demonstrating that health organizations can effectively correct misinformation through strategic communication. The study concludes that how health organizations correct misinformation on social media significantly influences public perception and trust. Specifically, corrections that are theory-based—i.e., transparent, empathetic, and scientifically detailed—are more effective in fostering trust, satisfaction, and a sense of self-efficacy among both pro-vaccination and vaccine-hesitant individuals.

In contrast, common corrections that are more authoritative, dismissive, or one-dimensional tend to be less effective and may even lead to lower satisfaction and credibility among audiences. This indicates that the communication strategy must be dynamic and responsive, acknowledging the public's active role in health decision-making in the digital age (Gesser-Edelsburg et al., 2018).

Additionally, the development of mobile applications, as discussed by Salari, can facilitate the dissemination of accurate health information and combat misinformation. The study also highlights the users' motivations for engaging with the app, including knowledge seeking, anxiety reduction, informed decision-making, and the desire to protect themselves and others. User feedback affirmed the app's clarity, accuracy, and trustworthiness and emphasized its effectiveness in correcting misinformation. Although limitations such as small sample sizes and restricted participant diversity exist, the research concludes that mobile health applications like COVID-19 hold significant potential for improving public health education and building resilience against future infodemics (Salari, 2024).

The four I Framework proposed by Sundelson also offers a structured approach for advancing communication and trust in public health messaging. The study emphasizes that no single strategy is sufficient to address the complexity of the infodemic. Cognitive biases, trust deficits, and the architecture of social media all contribute to the persistence of false information. Therefore, the authors advocate for a multi-level and integrated approach to infodemic management. They also caution that certain interventions, such as content flagging or regulation, may have unintended consequences, such as the "implied truth effect" or reinforcement of conspiratorial beliefs. The study concludes by underscoring the need for continued adaptation and collaboration across sectors and disciplines to safeguard public health communication in the digital age (Sundelson, 2023).

Emotional and Psychological Factors

The final issue pertains to the emotional and psychological factors that influence the spread of misinformation. The studies revealed that misinformation often elicits strong emotional responses, which can drive sharing behavior. Ünlü et al. highlighted the public's interest in understanding the health implications of misinformation, indicating a gap in effective communication strategies that address these emotional dimensions. The study found that mistrust fluctuated significantly over time and was more prevalent on Twitter than on Facebook, partly due to platform dynamics and bot activity (Ünlü et al., 2023). This suggests that future interventions should focus on factual corrections and consider the emotional context in which misinformation is shared.

CONCLUSION

The review reaffirms that health misinformation on social media is a deeply rooted and multifaceted challenge that demands an equally complex response. The review reveals that misinformation thrives on emotional appeal, cognitive bias, and platform dynamics, often overwhelming users and undermining trust in health authorities. While numerous interventions—from strategic messaging and digital health literacy to mobile apps and AI tools—have shown promise, the key to sustainable impact lies in cross-sector collaboration. Health professionals must be empowered with the resources and institutional support to serve as credible voices online, while digital platforms should invest in transparent moderation systems and amplify authoritative sources. Equally important is the role of public education in building resilience against misleading content. As misinformation continues to evolve in form and reach, future strategies must adapt accordingly—combining empathy, innovation, and evidence-based practice to safeguard public health in the digital age.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, REPN, and JS; Methodology, REPN, ABDXP, and HJS; Resources, RFLR; Data Curation, REPN, and JS; writing—original draft preparation, REPN, HJS, and RFLR; Writing-review and editing, REPN, ABDX, JS, and AH; Supervision, AH. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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The data is available by request to the author.

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