

Mainstream news more reliable than social, alternative media for accurate health information

13 January 2022



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People may find it difficult to discern the facts about vaccines with the extensive amount of health misinformation disseminated on websites and social media.

Accuracy and truth, according to a new study involving three countries, including the United States, has been found by individuals who rely more on mainstream [news](#). Meanwhile, people who depend on [social media](#) or less-established forms of "alternative" health media are more likely to subscribe to false beliefs about health.

In a study published in *Health Communication*, experts from the University of Michigan, National University of Singapore and Koc University in Turkey said the findings shed light on the conditions under which digital media use can help or hinder the tendency to believe in health misinformation.

"These findings also show that extensive reliance on social media and alternative health media for news mostly overwhelms the individual differences

in predicting misinformation belief," said Scott Campbell, the Constance F. and Arnold C. Pohs Professor of Telecommunications in the U-M Department of Communication and Media.

Campbell and colleagues also investigated how different thinking styles can support and suppress the links between media use and health misinformation belief.

The findings show that in addition to social and alternative media use for health information, those most susceptible also tend to place a high degree of trust in their own intuition when encountering new information ("faith in [intuition](#)") and prefer to make sense of new information in elaborate and structured ways ("need for cognition").

These personal styles interact with media use to predict whether people are likely to believe false information about health and [health care](#), the researchers say.

More than 3,600 participants in Singapore, Turkey and the U.S. disclosed their beliefs about vaccines, genetically modified foods and alternative medicine. The information sources involved mainstream (or "legacy") media, social media and alternative health outlets, which advocate homeopathic remedies over conventional medicine.

"This emergent pattern underscores the possibility that institutional news [sources](#) could better protect from the spread of misinformation than social media, perhaps because of editorial gatekeeping differences across news, social and alternative media," Campbell said.

Study co-authors include Yuanyuan Wu and Ozan Kuru of National University and Lemi Baruh of Koc University.

More information: Yuanyuan Wu et al, Explaining Health Misinformation Belief through News, Social, and Alternative Health Media Use: The Moderating Roles of Need for Cognition and Faith in Intuition, *Health Communication* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2021.2010891](https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2021.2010891)

Provided by University of Michigan

APA citation: Mainstream news more reliable than social, alternative media for accurate health information (2022, January 13) retrieved 21 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-mainstream-news-reliable-social-alternative.html>

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