

MAY 19, 2022

The Health Risks of Misinformation

Katrine Wallace, PhD

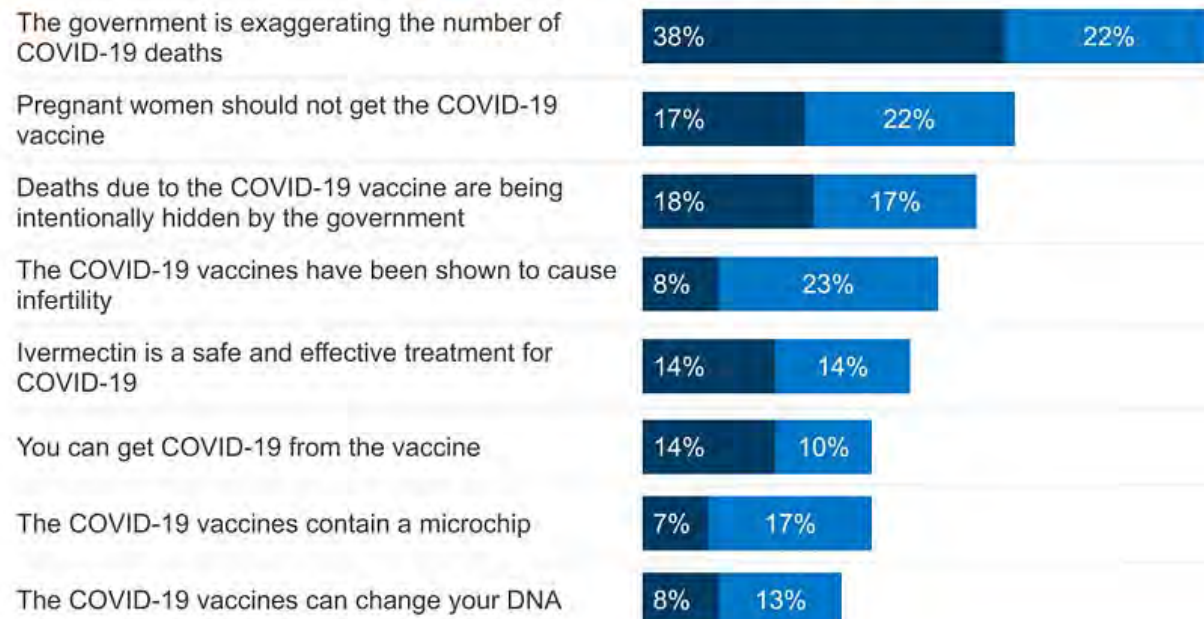


Belief in COVID-19 Misinformation is more common than we think!

Nearly Eight In Ten Believe Or Are Unsure About At Least One Common Falsehood About COVID-19 Or The Vaccine

Have you heard anyone say or have you read anywhere that...? IF YES: To the best of your knowledge is that true or false, or do you not know whether it is true or false?

■ Have heard, believe to be true ■ Have heard, don't know if true ■ NET



- 78% of people surveyed believe at least one common falsehood about COVID-19

Source: KFF Vaccine Monitor October 14-21, 2021

PROBLEM #1– Social media algorithms



- Engagement drives how often you see specific content
 - Someone with anti-science engagement will be shown more anti-science content
- Algorithm driven platforms are designed to keep people on the app
 - Favors sensational viral content
 - Misinformation very often wins over evidence and data

PROBLEM #2 – Poor Risk Assessment

- Humans are inherently bad at assessing risk!

- Risk of COVID-19 is perceived as low (“99.999% survival rate”)

- Risk from vaccine is perceived as high (“they are hiding all the deaths!”)

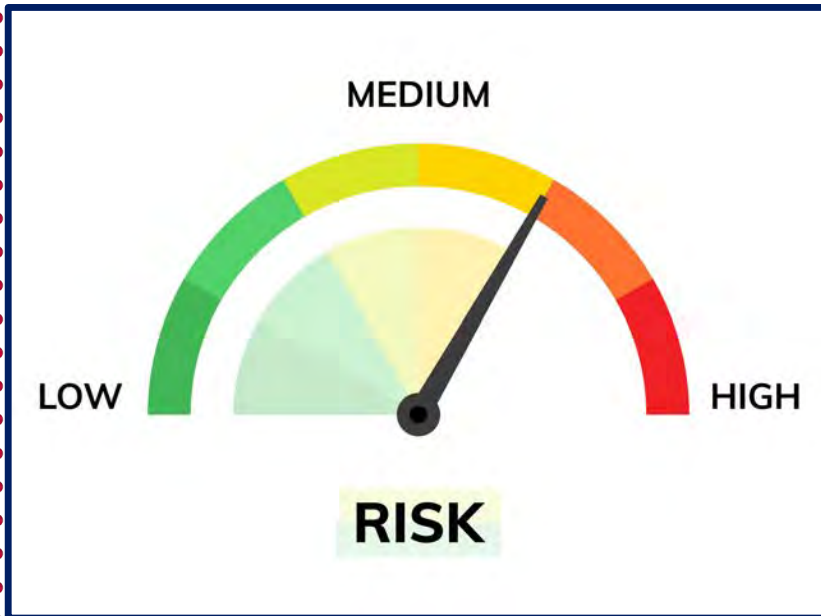
- Nature bias

- Man made risks perceived worse than natural risks

- Optimistic bias

- people think that their own risk is less than that of other people’s risk

- “I am young and healthy”



PROBLEM #3: The Illusory Truth Effect

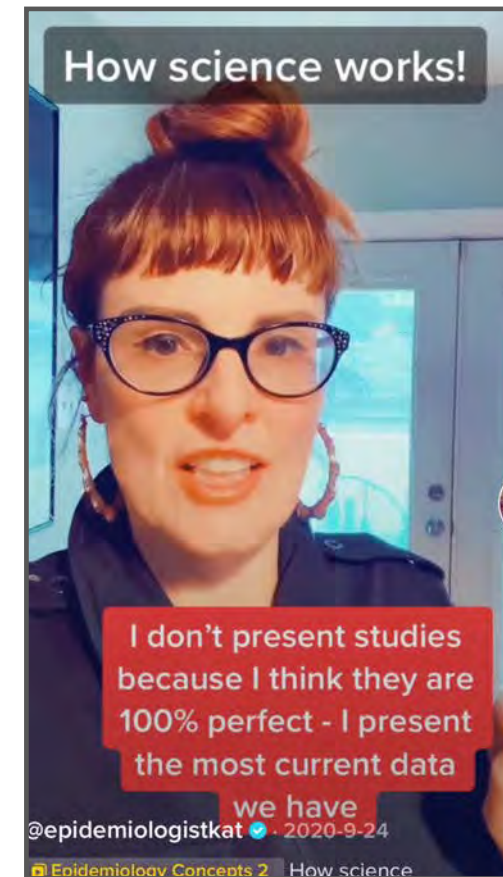
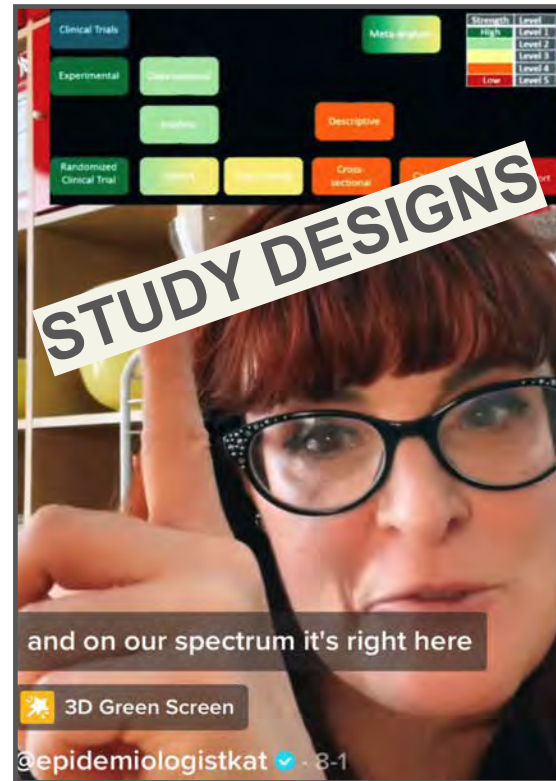
[@BarackObama](#): "It's not necessary for people to believe disinformation in order to weaken democratic institutions. You just have to flood a country's public square with enough raw sewage, you just have to raise enough questions[...] that citizens no longer know what to believe."



- The illusory truth effect describes how, when people hear the same false information repeated again and again, they often come to believe it is true.
 - even happens when people initially know that the misinformation is false!
- Social media is the perfect breeding ground for the illusory truth effect

PROBLEM #4– Science Literacy

- Science communication in 2020 with non-scientists had its own host of challenges
- Public was vulnerable to a co-epidemic of misinformation



COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation

- “Co-epidemic of misinformation” led to distrust of public health recommendations & vaccine hesitancy



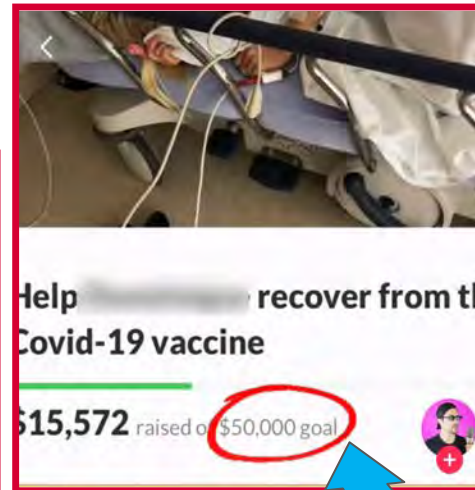
- Misinformation about vaccines is causing people to question, delay vaccination, costs lives, and is slowing recovery from the pandemic
- Good science communication builds trust and listens and respond to vaccine hesitant people

Appeals to Fear: “Vaccines are dangerous”

- Algorithm driven platforms
- “Siloing” / echo chambers
- Viral Misinformation

Misinformation
is dangerous

Take care
before you share



False Balance

- When a scientific issue is settled, presenting sources from “both sides” as if the scientific community were split on the issue, is misleading to the public.

Create your website with WordPress.com →

An Open Letter to Spotify: A call from the global scientific and medical communities to implement a misinformation policy

On Dec. 31, 2021, the *Joe Rogan Experience* (JRE), a Spotify-exclusive podcast, uploaded a highly controversial episode featuring guest Dr. Robert Malone (#1757). The episode has been criticized for promoting baseless conspiracy theories and the JRE has a concerning history of broadcasting misinformation, particularly regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. By allowing the propagation of false and societally harmful assertions, Spotify is enabling its hosted media to damage public trust in scientific research and sow doubt in the credibility of data-driven guidance offered by medical professionals. JRE #1757 is not the only transgression to occur on the Spotify platform, but a relevant example of the platform's failure to mitigate the damage it is causing.

RollingStone Subscribe

HOME > CULTURE > CULTURE NEWS

JANUARY 12, 2022 12:56PM ET

'A Menace to Public Health': Doctors Demand Spotify Puts an End to Covid Lies on 'Joe Rogan Experience'

Unlike many platforms, Spotify doesn't have a clear policy prohibiting misinformation. 270 physicians and scientists are hoping to change that

By **EJ DICKSON**

HEALTH

Chicago Epidemiologist 'Dr. Kat' Calls Out Joe Rogan for COVID-19 Misinformation

Paul Caine | January 31, 2022 8:12 AM CT



UIC

Conclusion



- misinformation / disinformation is very prevalent on social media
- There is a need to counter bad information with good evidence
- social media algorithms provide fertile ground for viral misinformation to spread
- “co-epidemic” of misinformation during the pandemic on social media
- Social media has been used to weaponize health information during the pandemic for nefarious intent, profit and agenda setting