

Communicating with Patients and the Public: Teaching for Health

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Conflicts of Interest

Industry: None

Research: CDC Cooperative Agreement



1799 Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse learned of Dr. Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccination technique

“As the ordinary mode of communicating even medical discoveries in this country is by newspaper, I drew up the...account of the cow pox, which was printed in the Columbian Centinel March 12, 1799”



For the general public, the media are the major form of continuing education after formal schooling is complete

Lawrence K. Altman, MD

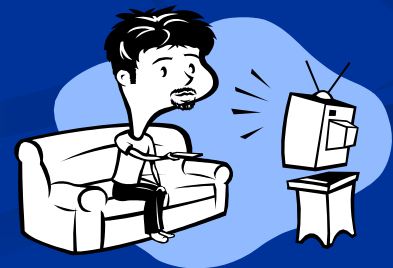
The New York Times

Ann NY Acad Sci 1993;703:200

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Thus, a teaching opportunity...

Often our **ONLY** teaching opportunity.



What is Mis – and Disinformation?

- **Misinformation:** false or misleading information shared without the intent to deceive or cause

Example: “Vaccines are not safe during pregnancy.”

- **Disinformation:** spreading false or misleading information with the intent to deceive or cause harm

Example: “The COVID-19 vaccine is unsafe and ineffective, but buying these supplements is a proven way to protect your family.”

Why Does Mis – and Disinformation Exist?

Misinformation

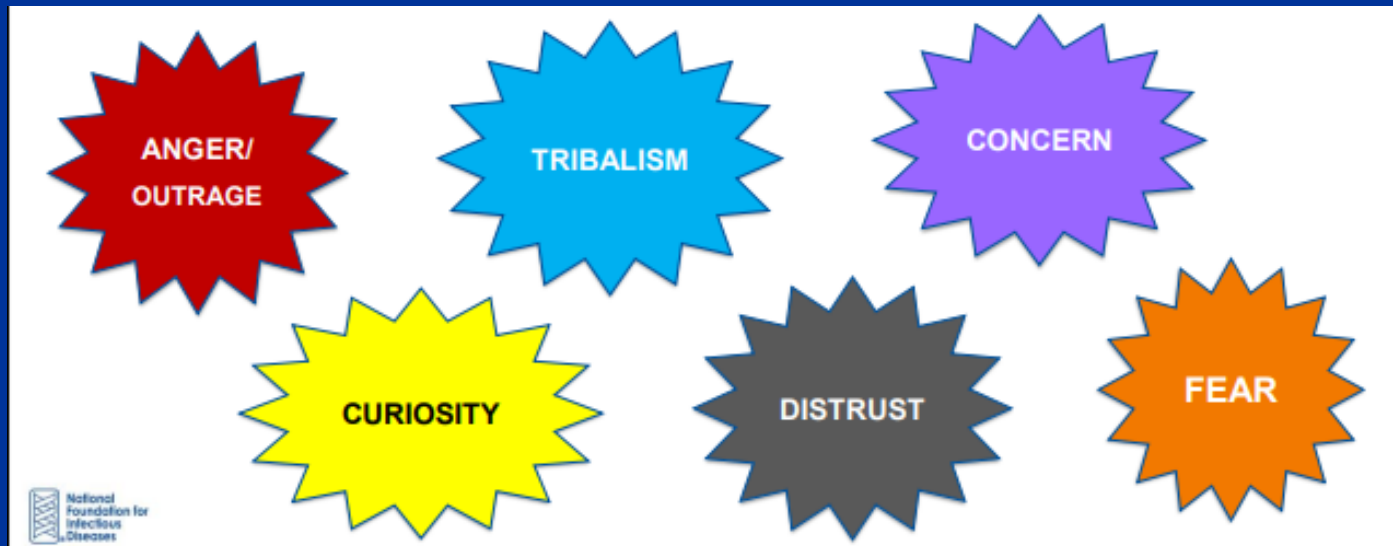
- Innocent falsehoods, misunderstandings
- A desire to share content that aligns with personal identity, reflects cultural norms/values, and/or because you think you are being helpful to those within your “audience”

Disinformation

- There is often a connection to profit (e.g., monetary, political, followers/likes) and/or to erode trust and create division

What Are the Hallmarks of Disinformation?

- Disinformation is designed to elicit **emotion**

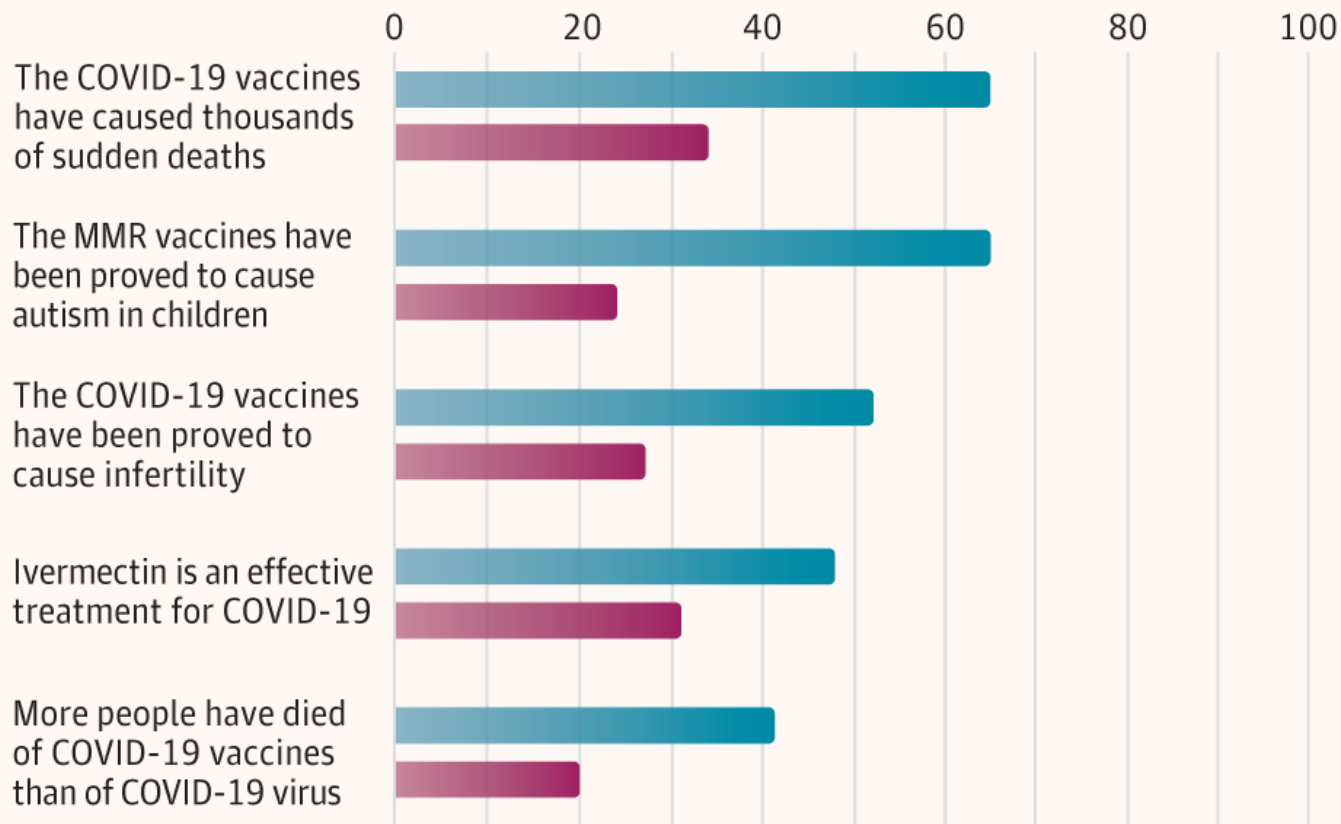


Awareness and belief in health misinformation

Misinformation is pervasive, but trust in health misinformation is less so.

Percent who have **heard or read false claim** (only 5 of 10 claims shown)

Percent who say **false claim is definitely or probably true**

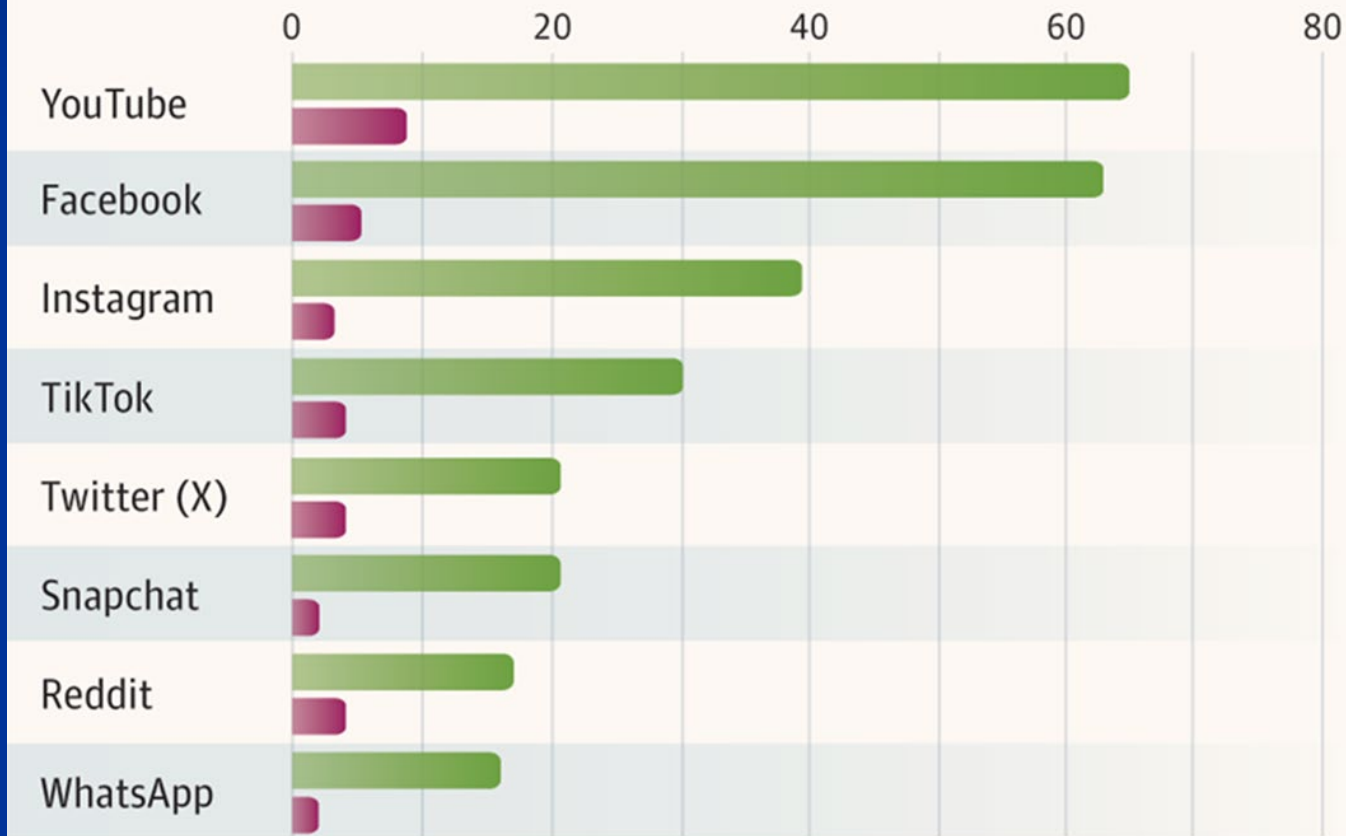


Social media use and trust in health information

Most people use social media regularly but regardless of their usage, few trust information published on the platforms.

Percent who **use the social media platform at least once a week**

Percent who **have a lot of trust in health information on the platform**



Clinical Medicine and Public Health
are in the “business” of
influencing behavior

Knowledge + Attitude → Behavior

Knowledge

The facts

What we know

What we think

Numerical

Analytical

Inner-directed

The brain

Important (essential?)

but

NOT sufficient

Attitude

What we feel

Social norms

Is it “in”, “cool”, “with it”

Other – directed

The “heart” or “gut”

Essential

Dominant

Most important

Build Trust

Make patients/public comfortable
reassured

Patient - 1

Charlie: 63 y.o. diabetic
overweight
mild hypertension
past history of pneumonia

Doctor: “It’s that time of year – you’re due for
your flu shot today.”

Charlie: “Well...I’m not so sure...”

Patient - 2

Yellow light: pause – this will take a little extra time

Never: Act surprised or disdainful

Validate: You have concern, so do many of my patients

Ask: How can I help you; what would you like to know

Charlie: I've heard about X...

Affirm: Ah, I get that question a lot...

Patient 3

Answer succinctly and generally emphasize the benefits (easy on the stats – “Knowledge”)

Bridge to comfort, social norm (“Affect”)

“My wife and I always get vaccinated” – everyone in our family (“Comfort”).

All docs in practice recommend to all patients (“Social norm”).

Never argue

Case Study: Disease Severity

Patient: I don't need the flu vaccine because I never get the flu.

HCP: So, because you never get flu, you wonder if you really need the vaccine?

Patient: Yes.

HCP: Are there other things that concern you about the flu vaccine?

Patient: Well, I really don't want to have any side effects.

HCP: You're not all that committed to receiving the flu vaccine because you never get the flu and you don't want to experience any side effects?

Patient: Yes.

HCP: Would it be okay if I tell you what concerns me if you do get the flu?

Patient: Yes.

HCP: With your chronic lung disease, it could be very serious if you were to get flu and since you will be spending more time with your grandchildren, there is a high possibility you may get exposed this year.

Public Health and Clinical Communication

Science-based

Simple Messages

Expressed clearly and explained

Acknowledge Limitations

Positive focus

Repeat

“People will forget what
you said, people will forget
what you did, but people
will never forget how you
made them feel.”

Maya Angelou



Scientist

Latin, scientia – knowledge

One who creates knowledge

Physician

Greek, (physic) – medicinal herb

One who treats disease

Scientist

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One who creates knowledge

Physician

Greek, (physic) – medicinal herb

One who treats disease

Doctor

Latin, docere, to teach

One who teaches