(How) Should We Fight Misinformation on Social Media?

Niam Yaraghi
The Brookings Institution
What are Social Media Platforms?

It depends!

-Socrates
What are Social Media Platforms?

- Distributors of content created by others
  - A figurative blank piece of paper that anyone can write anything on it.
  - Do not bear any responsibility over the content they distribute.

- Publishers of content
  - Have editorial capabilities and privileges.
  - Users rely on them as their main source of news.
  - Sometimes they even convey credibility and prestige
Editorial Responsibility of Social Media Platforms

• Although social media companies are becoming eerily similar to traditional publishers, we cannot hold them to the same standards, yet.

• Sheer volume of content: 183 years of NYT is published in 1 day on Twitter.

• The use of AI is inevitable.
Can Machines Help?

• Not much, unless they are used selectively.
  • Type of content changes
  • Tone of content changes
  • Identifying misinformation, especially those that are crafted thoughtfully, requires human judgment, just like ransomware attacks.
  • Even if they could, they will be expensive, economically and politically.
Recommendation

• We do not want to win the battle and lose the war.
• Use human experts to choose the battles.
• Do not produce martyrs online who will be heroes offline.
• Provide information to fight the misinformation.
Thank you!

Let’s stay in touch:

@niamyraghi
What is the Vaccine Safety Net and what are the goals

Quick facts about the Network

VSN evaluation process and VSN visual identity

VSN contribution against vaccine misinformation on the internet

- VSN portal and VSN on social media
- VSN web analytics
- VSN - Vaccine Safety chatbot
THE VACCINE SAFETY NET

Is a WHO verified worldwide network of websites that provide reliable information on vaccine safety on the web.

VSN BACKGROUND

- Established in 2003 to counterbalance groups using the internet to question the utility of vaccination and websites providing unbalanced, misleading and alarming vaccine safety information.

- Key player: the GACVS defined criteria for good information practices (VSN criteria) against which each website is evaluated.

VSN GOALS

- To facilitate easy access to reliable, understandable, evidence-based information on the safety of vaccines for internet users, regardless of their geographic location and language.

- To collaborate at an international level to increase awareness about vaccines, reduce vaccine hesitancy and strengthen confidence in vaccines by:
  - seeking to better understand internet users’ needs, behaviours and preferences;
  - providing reliable information tailored to users’ needs;
  - communicating vaccine safety information through a diversity of digital channels.
QUICK FACTS

82 websites,
from 36 countries
across 6 WHO regions,
providing information in
26 languages
WEBSITES’ EVALUATION PROCESS

- **PROCESS**: candidate organizations can self-nominate or be nominated

- **PRELIMINARY SCREENING**: inclusion versus exclusion criteria

- **FORMAL SCREENING**: Completed by experimented assessors and monitored by the VSN Secretariat

- Websites are evaluated based on established criteria related to
  - Website’s **credibility** and **content** (mandatory)
  - Website’s **accessibility** and **design** (desired)
The portal serves as the VSN’s hub on the Internet with the following characteristics:

- A portal with a combined public and members-only area of the website.
- Present and promote VSN
- Present, promote and support the VSN members and their work
- Facilitate and encourage exchange and collaboration among VSN members and relevant stakeholders
VSN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- **VSN social media strategy**
  - communicating vaccines' risks and benefits
  - engaging in support of public health campaign to raise awareness
  - increase knowledge and vaccine safety literacy

- **Future plans**
  - expanding reach and diversifying platforms
  - documenting learning and insights gained from interactions
  - Facebook, Twitter, Google and influencers
The objective of this Network based international collaboration is to design data driven vaccine safety digital information and communication strategies based on VSN members’ websites & social media analytics, social media listening and audience analysis.
VSN WEB ANALYTICS PROJECT

Define the audience
Find the audience that engages with a certain topic using keyword or content-based queries

Segment the audience
Break down the audience in communities of taste and affinity profile

Cluster the conversation
Understand how different communities in the same audience talk about the same topic differently

Personalize the message
Tailor copy, creative, targeting and spend to articulate the message across your key audience personas

PULSAR

Spend Phasing Weighting
Targeting Audiences Influencers
Message Attitudes Language Topics Behaviours Occasions Mindsets
Welcome to the vaccine digital assistant! Ask me questions about vaccine safety and I will try to answer them.

Should I vaccinate my child?

It's very important to vaccinate and benefit from the best protection against infectious diseases. Everyone has the right to be protected from severe diseases.

Why are vaccines important?

Vaccines interact with the immune system to protect the person from the disease and its potential complications.

What are the risks otherwise?

The price paid for natural infections can be very high. In some cases, consequences include cognitive damage, birth defects, or even death.

Type your message...
Hello and welcome to the Vaccine Safety Network personal assistant!

CHATBOT NEXT STEPS

- Sharing the chatbot
- Document users’ information needs
- Grow the chatbot knowledge base
- Continuously improve the delivery of tailored response
- Broaden the audience outreach

Say ‘hello’ and I will tell you what you can do!
THE VACCINE SAFETY NET

• International health partnership

• Digital vaccine safety information and communication strategies

• Global good
Thank you!
#ThereIsHelp
Vaccines
#ThereIsHelp

**Know the facts**

To make sure you get the best information on vaccinations, resources are available from the US Department of Health & Human Services.

Visit vaccines.gov

@HHSGlobal

Sarah G-H @GHSaysRockChalk · 1m

@EH_4_ALL Does the APHA have lessons or resources for teachers? I am interested in adding an environmental health unit (climate change, health equity, vaccines, gun violence, etc) to my high school health education curriculum. Thanks!

Ben Eisenhart @BEisenhart · 1m
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Prompts
33 Countries
Official Sources of Information
#WorldImmunizationWeek

April 2020
Vaccine Misinformation: The Role of Social Media

Ana Santos Rutschman
Saint Louis University School of Law
Center for Health Law Studies
Vaccine Misinformation

- Definitional Questions
  - Vaccines per se
  - Vaccination laws/policies
  - Ownership of vaccine technology
Vaccines

Lancet Renounces Study Linking Autism And Vaccines

Source: NPR
National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

New York ends religious exemption to vaccine mandates

By DAVID KLEPPER  June 14, 2019

Source: AP
# United States Patent

**Bickerton et al.**

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<td>(72)</td>
<td>Inventors: Erica Bickerton, Woking (GB); Sarah Keep, Woking (GB); Paul Britton, Woking (GB)</td>
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<td>(73)</td>
<td>Assignee: THE PIRBRIGHT INSTITUTE, Pirbright (GB)</td>
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<td>Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.</td>
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<td>(86)</td>
<td>PCT No.: PCT/GB2015/052124</td>
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<td>§ 371(c)(1), (2) Date:</td>
<td>Jan. 23, 2017</td>
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## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

The role of social media

- Social media as vehicles for misinformation
- Social media as catalysts for cultural change
Amplification

- Social media as amplifiers of misinformation
- Disproportionality in message outreach
- Additional layer
  - content automatization
  - Broniatowski 2018 study
Response

- Social media as venues for curbing vaccine misinformation
Types of responses

- Suppression approach
- Downgrading/reorganizing approach
- Other approaches
- Technical component
Suppression

- Removal of content qualifying as vaccine misinformation
- May be paired with interventive steps
  - e.g. showing content from WHO, Vaccine Safety Net
Downgrading

- Flag pre-defined search terms
- Contract with independent 3rd-party fact checkers
- Downgrade misinformation
- May also be paired with interventive steps
Other

- Free ad credits for online information campaigns (e.g. Facebook)
- Broader informational campaigns
  - containing different types of health info
  - using apps
  - incentives initiatives
Target bots/malware

- potentially also targeting accounts known for spreading misinformation
- may entail targeting accurate vaccine content available online
Legal issues

- Public health law perspective
- Freedom of speech perspective
- Interaction with vaccine mandates
Policy issues

- Defining misinformation
- Avoiding exacerbating the divide
- Bringing all voices to the table
Next steps

- Combined approaches
  - broad range (stretching into topics like patents, etc.)

- Social media campaigns addressing vaccine hesitancy

- Proactive “counter-misinformation” campaigns beyond outbreak du jour (e.g. flu)
Vaccine Misinformation: The Role of Social Media

Ana Santos Rutschman
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NVAC Feb. 14, 2020 Meeting