

Fact checks, not false tags, counter COVID-19 misinformation

February 16 2022



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

New Cornell University research finds journalistic fact checks are a more effective counter to COVID-19 misinformation than the false news tags commonly used by social media outlets.

"We find that more [information](#) may be an antidote to misinformation," conclude political scientists Sarah Kreps and Douglas Kriner.

Kreps and Kriner are co-authors of "The COVID-19 Infodemic and the Efficacy of Interventions Intended to Reduce Misinformation," published Feb. 16 in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Kreps is the John L. Wetherill Professor and interim chair of government and director of the Cornell Tech Policy Lab in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Kriner is the Clinton Rossiter Professor in American Institutions in the Department of Government (A&S) and faculty director of the Institute of Politics and Global Affairs; both are faculty in the Cornell Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy.

The researchers say the pandemic has given rise to a proliferation of misinformation that threatens public health by drowning out factual content and prompting individuals to take measures that are ineffective at best and harmful at worst.

Media outlets have countered the flow of bogus claims with two tools:

- False tags are labels used by social media companies. They often partially obscure a post by saying it is "[false information](#), checked by independent fact-checkers." Scrollers do not have easy access to the details of that check.
- Journalistic fact checks both flag a post as false and provide information rebutting the false claim with links to additional information.

These fact checks have been commonly used to weigh the accuracy of statements made by political candidates. The research by Kreps and Kriner is among the first to test them in the context of COVID-19.

Kriner and Kreps based their findings on a pair of online,

demographically representative surveys of 2,000 Americans that included embedded experiments. They tested examples of fact checks and false tags on false claims that would resonate with an array of viewpoints on the pandemic.

One example was an incorrect claim by former President Donald Trump that the U.S. had tested more for COVID-19 than every country combined. Simply tagging the claim as false had no effect on survey participants' perception of its [accuracy](#) and actually increased their likelihood of sharing it on social media. By contrast, respondents who saw the journalistic fact check were much less likely to believe the fake [claim](#).

Kreps and Kriner say sharing habits and actions offer a useful window into how people process information and misinformation. Previous research has shown that sharing is an important indicator because it can extend the reach of news, and a self-reported willingness to share offers genuine insight into what people will do on social [media](#).

More information: Sarah E Kreps et al, The COVID-19 Infodemic and the Efficacy of Interventions Intended to Reduce Misinformation, *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/poq/nfab075](https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfab075)

Provided by Cornell University

Citation: Fact checks, not false tags, counter COVID-19 misinformation (2022, February 16) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-fact-false-tags-counter-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.