

Positive behaviour changes in a digital age 2022/2023

(FSWP-minor-8B)

Reporting Health Misinformation on Instagram Among Students *Focusing on Health Students at Erasmus University Aged 18-25*

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RELEVANCE OF THE INTERVENTION

With the increasing use of social media among students there also comes an increased amount of misinformation, especially on health topics. You might recognise recent topics like; vaccines, weight loss programs, drugs, smoking, pandemics, etc (Alvarez-Galvez, 2021). Even though there is a broad agreement among researchers, health professionals and policy makers on the need to reduce misinformation, most commonly we let it slide. This could be dangerous for people that are more susceptible or don't have a critical mindset, creating potential health risks (Shehata et al., 2021). That's why in this research there will be a focus on changing the current behavior from "letting it slide" to creating the habit to fact check and report once misinformation is identified. Creating a safer Instagram platform for all users.

We will be looking at the most active users of the platform in the age group of 18-25 year olds (Barnhart, 2022). This age group is most exposed to and affected by misinformation because they spend 7-10 hours per day on social media (Ahmed, 2020). However we will target health science and medicine bachelor students of the Erasmus University in the Rotterdam area. Because higher education students with a health background are more likely to review a post critically and recognise credible sources of information than lower education students (Tseng, 2018; Popken, 2019). Creating the habit of fact checking and reporting once identified as misinformation will contribute to a safer Instagram. Once a post is reported by several users, Instagram removes it, reducing the exposure of health misinformation.

Our target group faces several barriers that prevent them from performing the desired behavior. Based on the COM-B model there are two components; motivation and capability. At first psychological capability; "When young people are asked to rate 6 (fake) news articles as true or false, barely 3% get it right" (Mediawij, 2021). "Young people indicate that they do not know how to fact check for themselves and do not think it is their job" (Deprez et al., 2018). These sources indicate that the target group doesn't recognise the fake articles, as they "have no reason to". With the right education on how to evaluate the information/post, this could increase the amount of recognised misinformation-health-posts or moreover making a habit out of it. Apart from abolishing a barrier, education could also make the target group aware about the importance and impact that reporting health misinformation can have. This brings us back to the COM-B component - motivation. At a focus group that we conducted for this minor with the end users they answered "I didn't think of that yet" when being asked about the consequences of misinformation spreading.

Providing a motivational reason to perform the behavior would create an incentive to report more. This could also be modeled by an influencer, posting about the effects of reporting. It will lead to the reflective and automatic motivation of the COM-B components. Using education and modeling as intervention functions will spark the motivation, psychological capability and knowledge in the target group. Our intervention will target the educational and motivational components which should lead to an increase in reporting health misinformation posts on Instagram.

EXECUTION OF THE INTERVENTION

The proposed solution is an attention-grabbing post saying “YOU are 3 clicks away from REPORTING misinformation TODAY” with an educational caption, see appendix A and B. The caption will include reasons why reporting is important, how to spot health misinformation, fact-check and report. It will be posted on Instagram via health influencers, such as Diederik gommers, Djanifa_versolmoeder, Marilines koers, Dubbelzen which were mentioned by the end users at our focus group. The influencers would be briefed about the importance of reporting health misinformation and asked to share the post on their Instagram. Another insight from our focus group was that the target group prefers this type of mediated communication (post + caption) over any other content format. The stakeholder representative, Esther Rozendaal, also preferred a single post due to its simplicity yet strong call for action (“only 3 clicks away”).

It is expected the solution will lead to behavioral change via the techniques of modeling and education. Modeling occurs via health influencers promoting the post which instructs how to report health-misinformation. The feasibility and low effort it takes, was recognised by the focus group. Furthermore, research shows that people perceive misinformation as a problem only when seeing the potentially negative consequences it might have (Tully et al, 2021). Now education comes to place. Our caption provides compelling arguments about health consequences “WHY it is important to report health misinformation”. Moreover, the information post is presented by a credible source – a health influencer. Our focus group members perceived modeling by a credible source as the key component to accepting and later acting on the desired behavior.

The unique characteristics of our population is that they are highly educated in the field of health. Therefore, they are capable of noticing potential misinformation, but might lack motivation to report it. The context in which the behavior should occur is while scrolling on Instagram where their attention span is within a couple of seconds. Therefore,

our post was tailored not only to be informative, but also to function as a reminder. Hence, it will be shared by several health influencers several times across the Dutch Media Literacy Week (November 4-11, 2022). Furthermore, we strive to create a habit. According to Lally and Gardener (2013) people must firstly decide to act. The decision is targeted by the title of the post (“only 3 clicks”) and our caption (why to report). Secondly, one must act on the decision repeatedly. Being constantly reminded in the Instagram environment and being exposed to the post several times within a week increases the odds of internalizing the behavior (Michie et al., 2013). With time, the association between health misinformation posts and report buttons should be established creating a habit.

THE EXPECTED EFFECTS OF THE INTERVENTION

The main effect of the informative post is to increase reporting of health misinformation on instagram among health bachelor students. By doing so multiple times they will create a habit for themselves and this behavior will become automatic in their daily life. If a number of people report a misinformative post, it will be removed from the platform; creating a safer instagram environment for all of its users. This intervention will equip students with skills on how to detect and deal with misinformation when they encounter it. Being aware of the possibility that they may face misinformation, our target group will engage in more critical thinking while using Instagram. Furthermore, it will ensure that students are capable of performing a proper fact check.

To continue, we aim to increase student’s motivation by including various reasons why reporting is important. The caption informs about consequences of misinformation and the positive societal effect that reporting has. Lastly the intervention will stimulate habit formation of our target behavior thanks to the influencer’s sharing the message repeatedly. This will serve as a reminder and rehearsal of the desired behavior, thus it will nudge the students to perform it more often (Michie et al., 2013).

The expected impact of the intervention is a safer instagram environment for all of its users. As the target group is most active on instagram, their change in behavior will reduce potential health risks for people that are not as conscious of health misinformation.

Looking at the feasibility, the intervention takes place on the most commonly used platform by our target group where they spend a considerable amount of time. The collaboration with influencers who are followed by and seen as credible sources among the target group will ensure that our post is on their feed. As the influencers are interested in health, it will be easier to convince them to participate in this campaign for the sake of

contributing to a safer instagram platform and by that reducing health risks. However, understanding that every influencer has their personal motivations, some could refuse to collaborate for various reasons. All in all, the intervention we propose is relatively feasible and easy to implement.

The method of using influencers to post a message is not innovative by itself, however the message that it carries definitely is. As encountered in the literature research, the act of reporting has not been studied or used and can be seen as a new way of creating a positive impact on instagram.

In conclusion, based on the research conducted and the insights gained from our stakeholders we confide that the intervention will be effective in increasing the number of reports of health misinformation posts on instagram.

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APPENDIX

A - Visualization of the post



B - Caption of the post

CAPTION

- ? Why is it important to report health misinformation?**
- The faulty information may lead people to unhealthy or even harmful practices
 - Reporting helps clean up the social network environment
 - The more exposure to misinformation the more one believes it
- 📄 How to spot health misinformation?**
- Information is unverifiable
 - Written by nonexperts
 - Information cannot be found on other sites
 - Information comes from a fake site
 - Stories that appeal to emotions and desires instead of stating facts
- 🧐 Quick Fact-check**
1. Check the source - is it trustworthy?
 2. Check other reliable sources - what do they say?
 3. Find an author and information about them - are they an expert?
 4. Read more than a headline
 5. Is it a joke? Is it sponsored?
 6. Look at fact-checking sites (e.g. BBC reality check, Factcheck.org)
- ⚠️ Report**
- 3 dots in the right corner of a post
 - Report
 - Click "False information"

C - Brainstorm

