



FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**HOW TO DEAL WITH MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION
DURING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES**

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CRITICAL THINKING AND TRUST ARE KEY

- **Reestablish trust in the institutions, in facts and in rational discourse**
 - When people trust, they follow the recommendations
- **Promote critical (media) literacy** (= skeptical disposition and a critical attitude toward information, its production and distribution)
 - Enhances resilience to disinformation (using critical thinking instead of intuition)

(Lewandosky & Cook 2020; Craft et al. 2017)

1. BUILD TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

If people see you as a trusted and credible source, they'll listen to you and possibly apply your recommendations

But you do not build trust and credibility overnight...

- **How to:** Through routine communication in normal times and constant updates during the crisis
- **Why:** People have to think that when it comes to health, you are the expert and they can rely on you + seeing you regularly

2. “LISTEN TO” PEOPLE

- To know what **topics** are trendy, which stories (including conspiracy theories) are circulating, what are people's **concerns**
 - To understand what are the **reasons behind** (beliefs, emotions, ...) inappropriate behaviors and adopt the best strategy to change them
 - Is risk perception low because people are tired of restrictions or is it low because people in a certain region haven't seen the consequences of covid-19?
- **How to:** monitor social media platforms

3. TALK TO PEOPLE - NORMAL TIMES

- Do not limit communication to public health emergency
→ Structure a routine communication

→ **How to:**

- Address topics that are of interest for your audience and in which you have expertise
- Differentiate types of content (e.g. more entertaining; knowledge dissemination; of general interest vs for specific patient groups)
- Have different channels to reach out to people (e.g. social media, newsletters, journals)

TALK TO PEOPLE - EXAMPLE MAYO CLINIC

Mayo Clinic @MayoClinic · 15 Std.
A small spoonful of this citrus remoulade adds big flavor to grilled fish or shrimp. Add fresh dill if you have some in your herb garden.

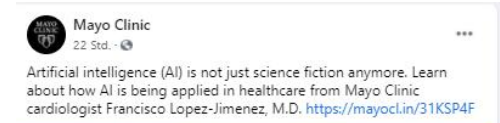
For more healthy recipes, download the Mayo Clinic App. mayoclinic.com/app



Video – Topic of general interest, entertaining (nutrition)



Written post – Topic of general interest, knowledge dissemination (mental health)



Interview – Technology implementation at Mayo Clinic



Written post – Topic of general interest, presenting the staff



Mayo Clinic @MayoClinic · 13 Std.
Certain #cancer treatments can cause mouth sores that can be painful and distressing. They also can make it difficult for your mouth to heal, ingest and fend off germs, leading to infections. Learn more about preventing and coping with mouth sores. mayoclinic.org/mouth-sores



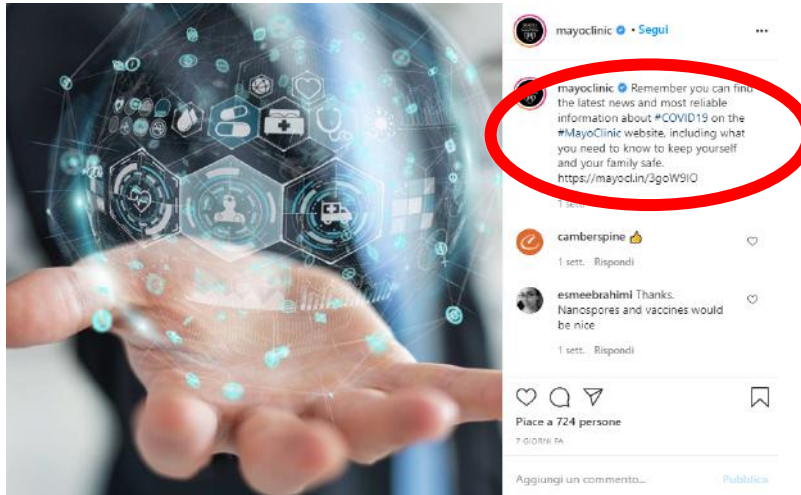
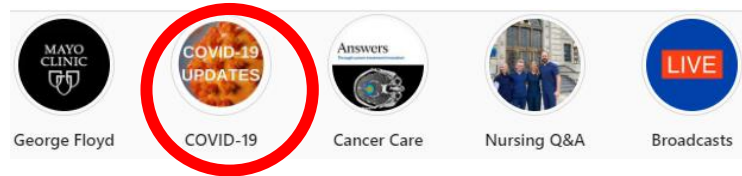
Written post – Topic of interest for specific group

4. TALK TO PEOPLE - DURING THE CRISIS

→ **How to:**

- Choose a high-credibility source (→ more persuasive)
- Create a link with your audience (i.e. avoid shaming, be empathetic)
- Don't keep secrets and acknowledge uncertainty or current problems
- Repeat the main message (e.g. which precautions they can take) and provide regular updates, using different formats through different channels
 - e.g. WHO weekly media briefing on Facebook and WHO posts on Instagram to remind the recommendations and correct misinformation
- Contribute to debunking (see below)

TALK TO PEOPLE - DURING THE CRISIS



**Prepare, prevent
and don't panic.**



Simple ways to protect yourself from coronavirus

-  **Keep your hands clean.** Wash them with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
-  **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**
-  **Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces routinely.**
-  **Practice 'respiratory etiquette' by coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a tissue, and then wash your hands again.**
-  **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
-  **Stay home if you are sick.**

**Swipe up for more of
what you need to know.**

5. BUILD A SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORK

Many institutions are perceived as far away from the public and when they “appear” in the public discourse during a crisis, they have only few followers = they reach out to few people

- **How to:** Establish stable collaborations with opinion leaders and influencers (e.g. soccer players, singers, YouTubers, TV moderators) who endorse your messages
- **Why:** It will be easier to reach out to different audiences in case of a public health emergency (but also of a health promotion campaign...)

6. EDUCATE

→ **How to:**

- Provide consumers with guidelines for fact checking
- Inform about accreditation systems which have transparent criteria
- Direct people to fact-checking websites (e.g. factcheck.org; FirstDraftNews.com, Snopes.com)
- Direct people to “whitelists” of news sources
- Suggest the use of a browser extension that provides a green–red signal to indicate whether a website adheres to basic standards of credibility and transparency (e.g. NewsGuard)

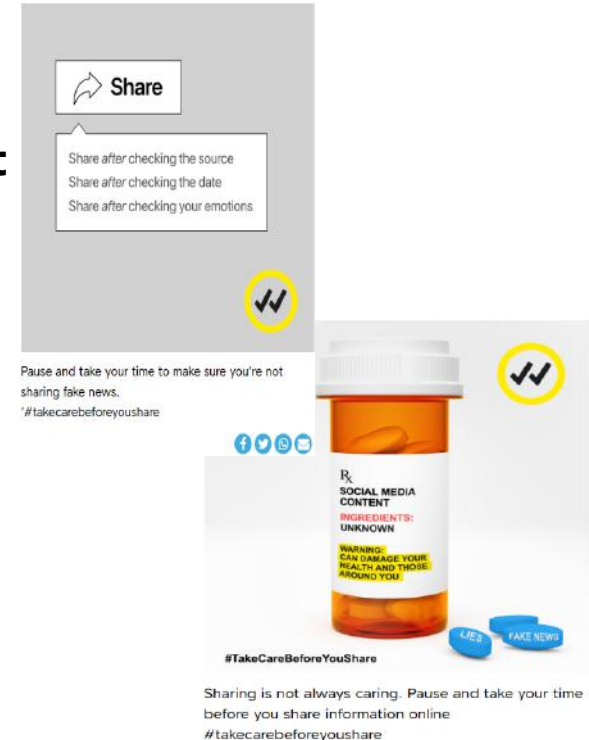
7. INVEST IN PRE-BUNKING

Inoculation or prebunking = a **"vaccination" against misinformation**

If people are told that they might be misled and are made aware of the logical fallacies in conspiracy theories, they may become less vulnerable to such theories

→ **How to:** campaigns to raise awareness about misinformation and promote virtuous behavior

(Lewandosky & Cook 2020)



8. CONTRIBUTE TO DEBUNKING

→ **How to:**

- Provide accurate information; link to fact checkers; explain the misleading techniques or flawed reasoning; reduce the credibility of conspiracy theorists
- Provide an alternative narrative to "replace" the wrong one and to explain why it is wrong
- Minimize unnecessary repetition of misinformation
- Consider the "tipping point" – When is it time to speak about a rumor (trying to avoid the effect of amplifying it)?

(Swire, Ecker 2018; Lewandosky & Cook 2020; Wardle 2020)

INSTITUTIONS: THREE LEVELS, DIFFERENT TASKS

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Take the pulse of the situation **worldwide**
- Become the reference and **provide support for national and local institutions**
 - e.g. create factsheets, guidelines, gather the scientific evidence and identify areas on which there is the agreement of the scientific community
- **Promote basics recommendations** and fight widely spread myths
 - e.g. covid-19 pandemic: wash or sanitize hands; avoid touching mouth, nose and eyes; keep distance
 - e.g. covid-19 pandemic: drinking bleach does not prevent it
- **Limitation:** difficult to target your communication because your audience is international: no everyone speaks English; beliefs and worries are often very local, influenced by culture, national politics, events and celebrities; etc.



NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Take the pulse of the situation **in your country**
 - e.g. conspiracies theories that circulate most in your country, fears and beliefs that put in danger the compliance to recommendations, the presence of opinion leaders who spread misinformation
- Adapt the communication to your country, in terms of **language, content** and **culture**
- Establish a **national network of mutual support**: which institutions can help spread your message?
 - e.g. the Federal Office of Public Health partners with Health Promotion Switzerland and the Swiss Medical Association to spread a common message



LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

- Take the pulse of the situation in your **region/audience** (e.g. diabetes community, school teachers)
- **Connect/collaborate with and refer to other regional/national/international institutions**
 - e.g. share their posts, translate their posts
- **Tailor the communication** to your audience
 - e.g. diabetes patients want to know if they are at risk of complications for covid-19 and what they have to do to protect themselves
 - e.g. school teachers want to know if children are particularly at risk, if they have to adapt the teaching method to keep distance, if parents should be allowed into the buildings or not



HOW TO IMPLEMENT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

Institutions have the duty to show **if** and **why** some information is suboptimal and to **correct** it.

A 3-step approach:

- **MONITOR:** to identify knowledge, beliefs, facilitators and barriers to behavior change, as well as overall reasons for current behavior
- **MESSAGE DESIGN and DELIVERY:** to develop (if possible, with pre-testing) tailored messages that can be perceived by individuals as relevant, clear and procedural (i.e., orient people on how to behave and why)
- **EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF MESSAGES:** to identify facilitators and barriers to the dissemination and uptake of messages

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

Health institutions should have communication offices, with **experts in persuasive communication** that can adopt a health marketing approach

This includes knowledge and skills in the following fields:

- Persuasion
- Social marketing
- Social media monitoring
- Advertising
- Community engagement
- Scientific journalism
- Knowledge translation and dissemination
- Mass-media communication
- Story-telling
- Risk communication
- Health campaigns
- Rhetoric and argumentation theory
- Critical thinking