

# Assignment 1

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**Title:**

Addressing mental health issues throughout the covid-19 pandemic: Does misinformation on social media cause stress, depression and anxiety?

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**Conference Stream: Communities and Social Media**

## Introduction

Stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness to name a few are undeniably the growing pains of the 21st century, let alone the covid-19 pandemic which has exacerbated the toll on people's mental health (Qu & Zhang, 2021, p 38). Consequently, internet users regardless of age, culture or status are joining social network platforms to find support to cope with mental health-related issues like suicide as such (Zhu & Zhang, 2021, p 39). Although sharing views on platforms such as Reddit can reassure people in their struggle to resolve their challenges, the web reflects only a socially-constructed form of escapism from the oppressive reality people live in (Zhu & Zhang, 2021, p 39). In short, community members cannot distinguish between authentic and fake relationships online as Wiederhold argues (2021, p 775-776), "social media, Instagram for instance, prompt users to create idealised personas for themselves." As a result, it would be disappointing to learn that such constructions play with values such as trust; unlike Wielder's claim social media causes mental decline and privacy concerns, however (Wiederhold, 2021, p 775-776), it is noteworthy that not everyone is willing to express themselves on social communities on the internet.

The upsurge in social media consumption far outweighs the health risks. In 2021 alone, over 3.5 billion used social media, although misinformation on Covid-19 is still targets viewers, thus causing anxiety (Skalski, onasweski, Bussing, & Surzykiewicz, 2021). On the other hand, criticism of misinformation triggering anxiety does not justify why movements such as #staywithme# on YouTube, have advocated for mental health (Qu & Zhang, 2020, p 40). Movements as such by contrast, show the positive side of social platforms in abating stress or anxiety. Therefore, Although, content on social channels is somehow misleading, studies should rather focus on the solutions to track misinformation on social media (Qu & Zhang, 2020) rather than condemning social media as the main cause of substance abuse and mood (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). The debate could shift to how people voice their thoughts on YouTube or Facebook to raise social awareness about mental decline (Zhu & Zhang, 2020, p 40), despite the implications of consuming misinformation on social media extent. Considering the current discussion, academic findings have not made any conclusions regarding the correlations between mental health and content consumption, nor have the contradictory views about online sharing do not provide sufficient proof to conclude social media strains mental health.

Similarly, people might mistrust content on other sharing communities including blogs and forums besides, Facebook, Twitter, and instagram. The future of psychological aid on the web is uncertain since the pandemic struck as people are oblivious to whether information on the web is reliable or not (Cato, Lida, Ishida, Ito, Katsumata, McElwain, & Shoji, 2021). Given this quandary, the dangers of social media on mental health should not be the main focus of public distrust (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). Instead, the evaluation must revolve around how social media addresses dire issues namely: anxiety, depression and stress (Wiederhold, 2021). Content on such issues is broadly available on the internet, but though much of the controversy targets social media, audiences do not question the credibility of content from other online sources specifically websites or

wikis. (Skalski, onasweski, Bussing, & Surzykiewicz, 2021). Some people, for example, have believed in content saying ‘soybeans’ boost the immune system and prevent infection risks for example (Cato, Lida, Ishida, Ito, Katsumata, McElwain, & Shoji, 2021) without questioning themselves. Strangely, companies are aware of the psychological repercussions online content either on social social media or other websites have on users (Wiederhold, 2021), they still fumble with updating their system to curb misinformation dissemination.

In Facebook’s case, social media could be the stimulus to misinformation spread, thereby leading to psychological distress. Conspiracy theories and fake news, for example, evoke panic among viewers, but also make people kill themselves in the scope of Iran, where 800 died believing that ingesting methanol would eliminate the virus (Rocha, de Moura, Deiderio, de Oliveira, Lourenco & de Figueiredo, 2021). Research, however, reveals that posts on covid-19 to mislead people are quite rare (Broniatowski, Kercher, Farouq, Huang, Jamison, Amelia, Dredze, Quinn. & Ayers, 2022, p 7), thus data on this subject insufficiently proves Facebook posts are detrimental to mental health. Moreover, the purpose of communities on Facebook resonates with sharing common interest (Qu & Zhang, p 39, 2021), rather than posting fake news to estrange people by elevating levels of stress and anxiety (Skalski, Sebastian, Konasweski & Surzykiewicz, 2021). While the blame directs toward the medium (Facebook) inciting people to commit tragic acts, sharing content is a two-pronged perspective. Internet users are unlikely to cease relying on content from social networks, (Broniatowski, Kercher, Farouq, Huang, Jamison, Amelia, Dredze, Quinn. & Ayers, 2022, p 7), notwithstanding misinformation, as communities would work if people not had to consistently verify the content’s credibility on social media.

Interactions and engagement on discussions forums by comparison, override the toll misinformation has on mental health (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021), for individuals can relate their personal experiences by networking with other participants online (Rocha, de Moura, Deiderio, de Oliveira, Lourenco & de Figueiredo, 2021). Reddit, for example, allows users to create an anonymous profile (Wiederhold, 2021), so the utility of discussion forums as such, is not just about seeking counselling and aid from peers or like-minded individuals, but people want to feel accepted and valued in such cases. Participants are less concerned with protecting their identity since they can create anonymous profiles (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021); yet, emotional outbursts attribute to ignoring the participants’ real background, thereby leading to a lack of trust. On a different perspective, (Qu & Zhang, 2021, p 39) Boundaries no longer apply as users can fit into support groups rather than physical spaces (Qu & Zhang, 2021, p 40); although members of a community or a blog, can share their thoughts without worrying about persecution on their race, gender or background. YouTube and Facebook, for instance, enable users to customize their profile, but the main hassle with this system is that people ignore the truth behind the invisible audience watching them.

Inclusivity in the covid-19 pandemic context is however divisive; although arguments point that social media advocates for public health awareness and issues (Sahni & Sharma, 2020), overconsumption of news relating to covid-19 and health updates from networking sites can conspicuously lead to dysfunctional thinking processes (Skalski, Konasweski & Surzykiewicz, J.,2021). So, the downside of community building on Facebook, YouTube or Reddit is that psychological damage equally affects anyone as the need the urge to vociferate personal plights. Misinformation particularly as seen above (Skalski, onasweski, Bussing, & Surzykiewicz, 2021), adversely hoodwinks people into believing that some condiments boost the immune system. Many of the repercussions on one hand could be social as loneliness has been rife since the pandemic (Qu & Zhang, 2021, p 38), and on the other, psychological with some people quit social media for fear of having mood changes; sometimes, result in substance abuse (Meshi & Ellithorpe,2021). Nonetheless, such investigation doubtfully illustrates the accurate nature of social media, because these claims are debatably generalist views that do not analyse specifically a case such as Snapchat, Tik Tok, Instagram and Facebook (Meshi & Ellithorpe,2021) besides, misinformation about covid-19 is even rare (Broniatowski, Kercher, Farouq, Huang, Jamison, Amelia, Dredze, Quinn. & Ayers, 2022, p 7).

Additionally, misinformation on covid-19 is not the sole factor that leads people to look for help on social media. Especially during the pandemic, personal issues such as loneliness have overshadowed the necessity to verify the propensity for fallacies in social media content, needless to say, such social issues involve other health complications including impaired cognitive function, depression and insomnia (Qu & Zhang, 2021, p 38). Consequently, people are left with no choice, but to integrate social groups to relate their challenges. With approximately 97% of the world population living within the mobile network range, and over 4 billion internet users (Qu & Zhang, p 39), ditching the advantages of counselling people on social networking sites from Facebook to Twitter offer is unimaginable, as the public receives news mostly from these sites (Rocha, de Moura, Deiderio, de Oliveira, Lourenco & de Figueiredo, 2021) throughout the pandemic. Social media is hence, instrumental in communicating public health news, particularly in crises such as the covid-19 pandemic, which concerns people on a global scale (Sahni & Sharma, 2020), but whether such information is deleterious to mental health requires a further examination into the subject (Rocha, de Moura, Deiderio, de Oliveira, Lourenco & de Figueiredo, 2021).

That polarization between social media being harmful to mental health or accessible for open community discussions on a similar perspective casts doubt on whether the platforms themselves are troublesome or rather the active engagement occurring with other internet users. Taking Pinterest as an epitome, the developers are aware of the mental strain people are experiencing (Wiederhold, 2021), so the companies devised strategies particularly content moderation to prevent self-harm and suicide. In Pinterest's context, the pins on self-injury dropped by around 88%, thus showing social media does not always adversely affect mental health. Alternately, low credibility could be harmful as Facebook and Twitter gather engagement Broniatowski, D.A., Kercher, D., (Farouq, Huang, Jamison, Amelia, Dredze, Quinn & Ayers, 2022, p 7), so community-building is at stake in a sense. If people cannot trust the content they engage with on social media, so

cannot rely on such tools to display their emotional state. Similarly, the cost of sharing one's personal information on Facebook, for instance, could be far-reaching as privacy is a major concern (Wiederhold, 2021), but some individuals could be disappointed to discover that support groups online (Qu & Zhang, p 40) may be superficial connections, with aims of exploiting information from them.

## Conclusion

The role of social media in abating mental health issues is above all, a two-pronged approach. On one side, it could be beneficial if people can openly relate their stories and personal struggles; otherwise, the efficiency of networking sites from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram to YouTube in addressing anxiety, depression, stress and other similar health issues lies more in how people use it. Social media might a source of misinformation, but ceasing content consumption is inconceivable, not to mention, the internet is likely to keep expanding in a post-pandemic era however critics judge social media. Counselling and mental health support has been transitioning more than ever since the covid-19 outbreak, and online-based communities are integrating into that transition.

## Abstract

The research provides an analysis and overview of the efficacy of social media in resolving mental health issues. The paper also looks at some aspects of online communities in mitigating health risks and the degree to which, they address these issues with people growingly being plagued with them during the covid-19 pandemic.

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