



At the onset of an infodemic: Geographic and disciplinary boundaries in researching problematic COVID-19 information

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the literature on problematic COVID-19 information published at the onset of the pandemic in 2020. It explores how scientific research has addressed this issue from a disciplinary, methodological and substantive perspective in different world regions. Three hundred seventy-eight articles were analyzed using content analysis and computational methods, including social network analysis and text mining. The study revealed a multidisciplinary field characterized by substantial contributions from medicine and social sciences and with a certain degree of interdisciplinarity and international collaborations. Research devoted particular attention to infodemic and conspiracy theories and their impact on compliance with health-protective behaviors, and showed a general preference for quantitative methods such as surveys. Most contributions focused on European and Americas regions and were from authors working in the same areas. Attention to various topics was also geographically differentiated. For example, conspiracy theories and informational factors that may influence COVID-compliant behaviors characterize the whole corpus, but Western research did the lion's share. Similarly, the attention paid to different social media platforms differed geographically. Worldwide attention was dedicated to global social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. In contrast, geographically specific platforms (*e.g.*, VKontakte or WeChat) have been studied less and mainly in regions where they are used the most.

Focusing on a crucial period of the COVID-19 infodemic such as the first year of the pandemic, this study contributes to the literature on problematic information by highlighting how misinformation and

