

COVID-19 and science communication: a JCOM special issue. Part 2

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Abstract

As COVID-19 continues its devastating pathway across the world, in this second part of the JCOM special issue on communicating COVID-19 and coronavirus we present further research papers and practice insights from across the world that look at specific national challenges, the issue of “fake news” and the possibilities of satire and humour in communicating the seriousness of the deadly disease.

Keywords

Science and media; COVID-19; Coronavirus

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This second edition of the special issue of JCOM on COVID-19 and science communication presents a further nine research articles and two practice insights continuing our investigation into the challenges of communicating COVID-19. In Part 1 of this issue on COVID-19 and science communication, we reported how a simple word search on 17 August 2020 for ‘COVID-19’ on the Scopus database of scientific papers retrieved 18,799 articles. As we write this on 28th October, the same search on Scopus retrieves 33,750 research articles. On September 10th, the date of publication of Part 1, we reported that 28 million people were affected worldwide with more than 910,000 deaths according to Worldometer.¹ Today, there are over 44 million cases and over 1.1 million deaths. While Asia suffered a “second wave” during the summer months, Europe is now in the middle of a new surge while the Americas are still in the first, South America in particular enduring a continuous wave. While Australia, New Zealand and the surrounding regions appear to have halted a second wave, Africa waits in anticipation for the next onslaught. COVID-19 continues its devastation and with restricted movements and partial and full lockdowns enforced locally and reduced only to be re-instated again, the societal and political impact of these yo-yo effects still dominate news media and policy across the world.

As with Part 1, there is a truly global reach across our selected research papers exploring the localised impact of the crisis, such as Surjit Singh and Gauhar Raza’s

¹Worldometer <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> (accessed 28 October 2020).

survey of the Indian public on their perceptions, hopes and rejection of conspiracies and Fredj Zamit and colleagues's study of fact-checking in Tunisia. Reymund Flores and Xavier Venn Asuncion found increasing trust among Philippine publics in communicating risk across social media. By contrast, the rapid spread of the so-called "infodemic" about hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine in Brazil was analysed by Ana Carolina Monari and colleagues looking at the challenge of fact-checking President Bolsonaro's Facebook "lives" addresses, while Thales Brandi Ramos and co-authors examined these COVID-19 treatments on YouTube. Luisa Massarani and co-authors analysed accuracy and reliability on social media and news media in Brazil.

Humour, satire and COVID-19's embeddedness in popular culture allow close examination of how health science communication might work differently than it has before the pandemic. Marina Joubert and Herman Wasserman look at how newspaper cartoonists portray the coronavirus in South Africa while comic-based risk communication of COVID-19 pandemic is also the subject of the paper from Yasumasa Igarashi and colleagues. Rick Pulos applies Rhetorical Arena Theory to identify crisis memes that use humour, while a prescient "space plague" game developed and reported by Lindsay Keith and Wyn Griffiths was taken on a different pathway as reality exceeded the imagination. Finally, the COVID-19 crisis affords Michelle Riedlinger and co-authors the opportunity to reflect on science-society relationships across 11 countries and cultures since the pandemic began.

Once again, we would like to thank most enthusiastically the more than 200 researchers and practitioners around the world who helped us to review the articles. A special thank you also to Cristiana Prever and the editorial team for all the support in developing this two-part special issue.

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