



ADMM Cybersecurity and
Information Centre of Excellence

UPDATE ON THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

Issue 1/21 (September)

ONLINE COVID-19 DISINFORMATION AND VACCINE HESITANCY

Introduction

- 1 With COVID-19 vaccination efforts underway globally, there has been a surge in online disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines. This inadvertently fuelled global vaccine hesitancy. [*Note: Please see [Annex A](#) for the news articles.*]

Key Takeaways

- 2 Facebook Appears to be the Preferred Platform for Hosting, Spreading and Amplifying Disinformation on Vaccines. Although vaccine-related disinformation was present on multiple platforms, several articles mentioned that Facebook appeared to be the platform that contained the most disinformation. Amongst the 128 fact-checking articles to debunk vaccine disinformation that were published by the IFCN CoronaVirusFacts Alliance Database in Dec 2020, more than half (58%) of the disinformation claims were first spread through Facebook. The rest were transmitted through other platforms such as Twitter (9%), instant messaging apps (7%) and Instagram (5%).

- 3 Limited Effectiveness of Moderation Efforts by Social Media Platforms. Although social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter had reaffirmed their commitment to tackling COVID-19 disinformation on their platforms, the articles had assessed that the spread of vaccine disinformation was still pervasive on social media. *Forbes* reported that a research conducted in Jul 2021 found that the number of anti-vaccine groups on Facebook had more than doubled compared to Apr 2021. Notably, the anti-vaccine community appeared to have a clear advantage, in terms of reach, virality and engagement, when spreading their vaccine disinformation.
- 4 Narratives Surrounding COVID-19 Vaccine Disinformation. The most prominent COVID-19 vaccine disinformation narrative was that the vaccine was dangerous. Other narratives were: (a) conspiracy claims about the vaccine; and (b) the vaccine was not effective in curing COVID-19. In Asia, it was noted that these false narratives in English often continued to spread in non-English speaking communities. These narratives that had previously been debunked were often circulated alongside hyper-localised narratives.
- 5 Vaccine Hesitancy Prevalent in Asia. Despite some of the highest case rates in the world, recent surveys showed that vaccine hesitancy was prevalent in Asia. Reasons such as having doubts or being uncertain about the vaccine and being unwilling to take the vaccine were commonly cited in the surveys.

Assessment

- 6 With COVID-19 vaccination efforts underway globally, it is imperative that ASEAN member states guard against vaccine disinformation. Appropriate measures such as the clarification on reliable and trusted information platforms of vaccine disinformation could be undertaken to help combat vaccine hesitancy. This could help increase COVID-19 vaccine take up rates in countries.
- 7 It is also important to continue working together with social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter to help limit the spread of COVID-19 vaccine disinformation on their platforms.

Contact Details

For any queries and/or clarifications, please contact ACICE at ACICE@defence.gov.sg.

Prepared by:

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ANNEX A

News Articles

- 1 COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation and Facebook: The Challenge of Moderating Anti-Vaxx and Vaccine Hesitant Stances
[Link: <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/covid-19-vaccine-misinformation-and-facebook%3A-the-challenge-of-moderating-anti-vaxx-and-vaccine-hesitant-stances/>]
- 2 Anti-Vaxxer Disinformation in Asia Endangers Millions, Jeopardising Fight Against COVID-19
[Link: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/anti-vaxxer-disinformation-in-asia-endangers-millions-jeopardising-fight-against-covid>]
- 3 'They're Killing People': Biden Denounces Social Media for Virus Disinformation
[Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/16/us/politics/biden-facebook-social-media-covid.html>]
- 4 Facebook to Remove More False Claims on COVID-19 Vaccination
[Link: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/10/c_139733985.htm]
- 5 More Than 200 Facebook Groups Have Been Actively Circulating Coronavirus Vaccine Misinformation
[Link: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abrambrown/2021/07/20/facebook-vaccine-misinformation-covid-19-coronavirus/>]
- 6 'A Systemic Failure': Vaccine Misinformation Remains Rampant on Facebook, Experts Say
[Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/jul/21/facebook-misinformation-vaccines>]