

COMSALUD

Pseudoscience, conspiracy theories, fake news, and media literacy in
health communication

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National Health Communication Project

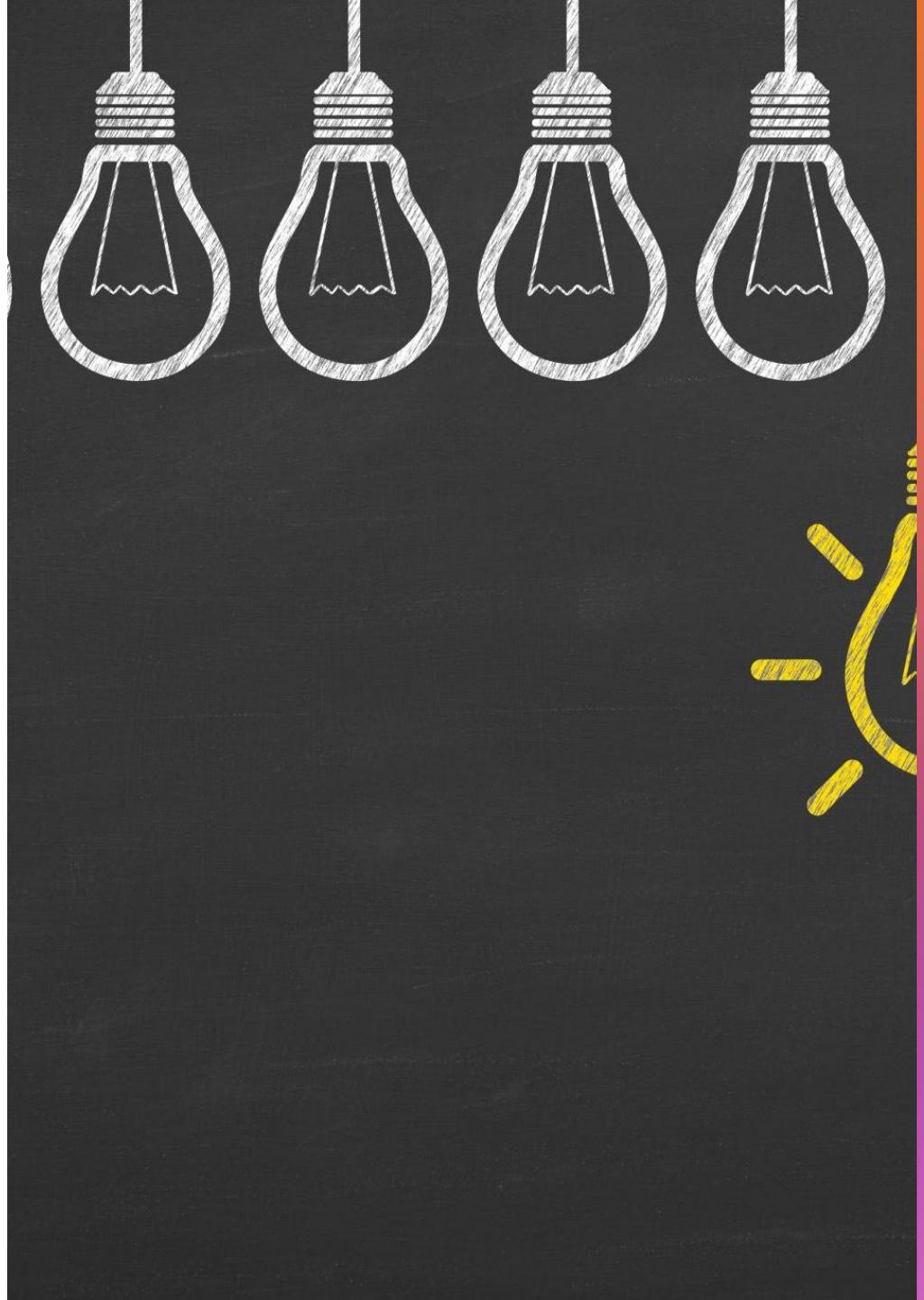
HEALTHCOMM is situated within the field of Health Communication, an interdisciplinary and expanding specialty in Spain and internationally. As part of the Digital Transition work program, the project aims to explore digital health communication through research studies and field interventions. It will leverage new technologies and data management to support educational and cybersecurity policies, and combat misinformation in digital media. Led by Professors Carlos Elias and Daniel Catalan and funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation in Spain, HEALTHCOMM brings together 30 scholars from 20 universities across 7 countries to advance health communication research, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, from 2024 to 2028.

Objectives of the project

Generally, the project is aimed at providing implementable recommendations, based on clear new multi-source knowledge and understanding of the role that health communication plays in digital settings, with a special focus on

General objective

- To provide applicable recommendations, based on new knowledge from multiple sources and an understanding of the role of health communication in digital environments, with special attention to misinformation, conspiracy theories and education to improve media literacy and combat misleading health communication.



Project objectives

- OBJ1. To determine and analyze the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding health information in the media, as well as the perceived quality of the information.
- OBJ2. To identify common patterns of influence that are unknown or overlooked and differences among the public regarding the use and consumption of health information in the media, including the influence of cultural and socio-cognitive factors on the persuasion of online misinformation.
- OBJ3. To explore common journalistic patterns in media coverage of health and examine the association between media coverage and knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- OBJ4. To analyze public discourse on health and examine misinformation (fake news), conspiracy theories, and deceptive posts on social media.
- OBJ5. To explore national regulations and policies on cybersecurity against fake news and their impact on risk perception and belief in fake health information in digital media.
- OBJ6. Evaluate the impact of educational initiatives aimed at journalists, other media professionals, and secondary school students to improve media literacy and media coverage of health.
- OBJ7. Gain advanced knowledge of media and health information to develop textbooks for secondary school students and recommendations that identify best practices in health communication.
- OBJ8. Establish the Spanish Health Communication Network

Activity 1. Revision, interviews and focal groups



Activity 2. National survey

Representative national survey

Target: general public (n = 2000)

Themes:

- Public comprehension of health themes
- Behavior towards mass media and social media in the consumption of health-related information
- Other interests identified in the interviews and focal groups

Items

Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Participants' trust in and acceptance of specific health measures

Consumption of traditional media and social media

Perceived frequency of dissemination of fake news through social and online digital media

Participants' belief in online fake news about health issues

Cultural factors, religious beliefs, values or pre-existing beliefs

Socio-cognitive factors, such as ideology

Trust in the government, healthcare professionals, journalists, friends, and family

Personal experience

Other factors (search of health-related information, exposition to disinformation, beliefs in conspiracy theories)

Activity 3. Media content analysis

- Content analysis
 - Press
 - Websites
 - Social media





Activity 4. National and international regulation

- Analysis of national regulatory policies in the field of health-related publications in the media, as well as policy recommendations/guidelines from international organizations such as the UN and the European Commission.

Activity 5. Guides and capacity building intervention

- To improve media literacy:
 1. Manual for secondary school teachers
 2. Guide for journalists

Intervention – capacity building program for:

Secondary education students (n = 4)

Journalists (n = 2)



Activity 7

Public and scientific communication of the project

Spanish Network of Health Communications

Organization of the 4th International Congress of Health Communication (in collaboration with AECS, technical secretary)

Schedule

Tasks	Task name	Start	End	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
				S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
Task 1	Systematic reviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups	M1	M18								
Task 2	National survey	M7	M24								
Task 3	Content analysis in journalistic and social media	M7	M30								
Task 4	Analysis of legal and regulatory policies	M19	M36								
Task 5	Guidelines and educational intervention	M25	M42								
Task 6	Public communication and scientific dissemination	M7	M48								
Milestones						MT1	MT2	MT3	MT4	MT5	MT6

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