

The rise of the 'Infodemic' – too much information is making solutions impossible

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New research from Trinity Business School has confirmed the existence of the COVID-19 'Infodemic' – making solutions to global issues more difficult to achieve.

New research – undertaken by Cheng (Suwan) Long, a PhD candidate at Trinity Business School, alongside researchers from Bayes Business School, DCU Business School and Nottingham University Business School – has provided the first confirmation of the existence of the 'infodemic', as claimed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), associated with COVID-19.

First coined to characterise the communication surrounding the emergence of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) as a major public health concern, the term 'Infodemic' refers to the rapid spread and overabundance of information – credible and unreliable - making a solution more difficult to achieve.

The term has since been used by the WHO to describe the rapid surge of both factual and false COVID-19 related information.

Undertaking research which involved examining 271,854 news stories that contain explicit reference to risk over the last two decades, Long and her colleagues provide proof of the existence of a COVID-19-related Infodemic.

The study also revealed that risk-related news coverage typically gravitates around seven core topics; health, business, environment, entertainment, domestic affairs, geopolitics, and technology.

Reflecting on the findings, Cheng(Suwan) Long, of Trinity Business School, says: "Our study highlights the vital role of US news media during extreme risk events, communicating and informing its citizens. Allowing them to update their risk perception and behaviours accordingly.

The term 'infodemic' is almost exclusively reserved for social media misinformation. One of the best ways to inoculate against it is to ensure respected and trusted news media outlets are central tenets of risk related information across all online platforms."

The paper, In Search of Infodemics: US Media Amplification of Risk, has been accepted by Society for Risk Analysis – Europe 30th Annual Conference, and is currently under review for publication at Risk Analysis (an ABS 4* Journal, Affiliated with the Society of Risk Analysis).

The paper can be accessed here (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4061767).

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