

論文の内容の要旨

論文題目 User-generated Comments Following COVID-19 Debunking News on
Chinese Social Media: Content, Drivers, and Effects

中国のソーシャルメディアにおけるCOVID-19誤報訂正ニュースに付
けられたユーザーコメント：そのコンテンツ、ドライバー、効果

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During the COVID-19 outbreak, social media has been widely used by Chinese governments and institutions to communicate for misinformation correction. When people read debunking messages on social media, they are exposed to online comments from anonymous strangers as well. The presence and prevalence of user-generated comments raise an important question for communication scholars and professionals—is the comment exposure helpful or detrimental to COVID-19 debunking practice? The answer to this question not only gives researchers a better insight into how debunking persuasion works, but also equips them with more effective communication strategies to combat misinformation in the digital world.

The primary motivation of this thesis, therefore, is to provide scholars and professionals with evidential models to elaborate whether and how exposure to user-generated comments can predict, or at least be associated with, the effectiveness of misinformation correction taking place in social media settings. With this concern, three empirical studies were conducted between June 2020 and May 2021, examining the content, drivers, and effects, respectively, of user-generated comments attached to COVID-19 debunking news shared on Sina Weibo—a leading social media platform in Mainland China.

As exposure is necessary for influence to occur, an exploratory content analysis was conducted in Study 1 to describe the presence and content patterns of user-generated comments that people are actually exposed to when they read COVID-19 debunking posts on

Sina Weibo. A sample of 20,619 online comments present under 1,109 debunking posts published between January 21 and June 3 of 2020 were collected and analyzed. Results show that user-generated comments arise in more than half ($n = 614$, 55.37%) of the COVID-19 debunking posts, serving as a vital part of social media context in which the public gain access to corrective messages. These comments are found to be neither homogeneous nor monolithic in nature. While most are supportive in valence ($n = 12,220$, 59.27%), subjective in argument quality ($n = 19,068$, 92.48%), and civil in communication tone ($n = 17,607$, 85.39%), negative ($n = 1,032$, 5.01%), argumentative ($n = 1,551$, 7.52%), and uncivil expressions ($n = 3,012$, 14.61%) are also detected in the sample. Negative commenters are more likely than supportive commenters to use argumentative statements and civil expressions ($p < .05$).

However, the distribution of user-generated comments cannot be comprehensively understood without considering the debunking activities they address, as the value of commented items often determines the commenting performance. Hence, Study 2 carried out a further content analysis to identify what unique features of COVID-19 misinformation correction can motivate the existing characteristics of user-generated comments detected in Study 1 (RQ2). By integrating the textual data of 20,619 user-generated comments and 1,109 debunking news from which the comments derived, I analyzed and compared the presence and content patterns of online comments on COVID-19 debunking news of different topics, with different sources, and in different epidemic trends. The results generally indicate a topical ($p < .05$) and temporal ($p < .05$) sensitivity of online commenting patterns. Debunking sources' contribution is also detected, but limited to certain levels.

Finally, whether the multiple commenting patterns detected in Study 1 and Study 2 are corrosive or constructive to the debunking practice is yet to be rigorously reported. Given that, Study 3 examined the direct effects of comment exposure on COVID-19 debunking

effectiveness (RQ3). With a randomized online experiment based on a sample of 551 Chinese citizens, I find that the comment exposure generally undermines debunking message processing, at least in the paradigm of the present study ($p < .05$). But this effect appears to be conditional, depending on the valence, argument quality, and communication tone of user comments that people are exposed to. Negative, argumentative, and civil expressions in comments have been evidenced to trigger undesirable debunking consequences separately and interactively ($p < .05$).

Extending the scope of literature on misinformation correction, this thesis not only documents the first set of experimental evidence confirming the social influence of user-generated comments attached to debunking messages, but also further identifies the directions, magnitude, and conditions of this influence in the case of health crisis situations like COVID-19. As online debunking effectiveness is vulnerable to media exposure variables, more academic attention should be given to such contextual factors to advance our understanding of misinformation correction in online settings. These findings also signify the importance for communication professionals to always be aware of the challenge from comment sections when devising and promoting debunking strategies on social media.