Inducing Resistance to Conspiracy Theory Propaganda: Testing Inoculation and Metainoculation Strategies

Description

Inoculation theory
“McGuire’s (Papageorgis & McGuire, 1961, 1961a; 1961b) original conceptualization of inoculation theory proposed that individuals can be inoculated against counter-attitudinal attacks in a manner similar to immunization against viral attacks. Just as preemptive immunization shots protect people from future exposure to viruses, McGuire posited that preemptive messages could protect attitudes from subsequent exposure to counterattitudinal persuasive messages. Inoculation treatments contain two essential message features: threat and refutational preemption (Compton & Pfau, 2005; Szabo & Pfau, 2002). Threat is the motivational component of an inoculation. It forewarns of a persuasive attack, highlighting the vulnerability of an individual’s current attitudes, and thereby motivates resistance. The refutational preemption component contains specific content that can be used to bolster attitudes against an impending attack (Pfau et al., 1997). The purpose of the refutational component is twofold: It provides individuals with arguments or evidence that can be used to counter persuasive attacks, and it also allows individuals to practice defending their beliefs through counterarguing (Compton & Pfau, 2005; Insko, 1967; Wyer, 1974). Research reveals inoculation to be an effective strategy for conferring resistance to persuasion. … Conspiracy theories present an interesting challenge for inoculation scholars because they defy the rational, logical, and reasoned approach exemplified by inoculation interventions. Conspiratorial arguments often employ circular reasoning, repetition of unproven premises, nonfalsifiable premises, and a host of other logical flaws (Miller, 2002). Persuasion is not a purely rational process, however, and dual-process theories (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) apply the metaphor of two separate routes to persuasion: A central route, based on careful processing of the evidence; and a peripheral route, based on some mental shortcut instead of careful evaluation of arguments and evidence. These theories propose that both motivation and ability to process persuasive messages are necessary for central route processing to occur. Watching a film is a more passive process than reading, which should reduce the ability to counterargue or process many of the empirical claims presented (Compton & Pfau, 2005).”

Abstract

This investigation examined the boundaries of inoculation theory by examining how inoculation can be applied to conspiracy theory propaganda as well as inoculation itself (called metainoculation). A 3-phase experiment with 312 participants compared 3 main groups: no-treatment control, inoculation, and metainoculation. Research questions explored how inoculation and metainoculation effects differ based on the argument structure of inoculation messages (fact- vs. logic-based). The attack message was a 40-

minute chapter from the 9/11 Truth conspiracy theory film, Loose Change: Final Cut. The results indicated that both the inoculation treatments induced more resistance than the control message, with the fact-based treatment being the most effective. The results also revealed that metainoculation treatments reduced the efficacy of the inoculation treatments.

Image not found or type unknown

Banas, J. A., & Miller, G.. (2013). Inducing Resistance to Conspiracy Theory Propaganda: Testing Inoculation and Metainoculation Strategies. Human Communication Research, 39(2), 184–207.

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/hcre.12000
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“This investigation examined the boundaries of inoculation theory by examining how inoculation can be applied to conspiracy theory propaganda as well as inoculation itself (called metainoculation). a 3-phase experiment with 312 participants compared 3 main groups: no-treatment control, inoculation, and metainoculation. research questions explored how inoculation and metainoculation effects differ based on the argument structure of inoculation messages (fact- vs. logic-based). the attack message was a 40-minute chapter from the 9/11 truth conspiracy theory film, loose change: final cut. the results indicated that both the inoculation treatments induced more resistance than the control message, with the fact-based treatment being the most effective. the results also revealed that metainoculation treatments reduced the efficacy of the inoculation treatments. © 2013 international communication association.”
van der Linden, S., Leiserowitz, A., Rosenthal, S., & Maibach, E.. (2017). Inoculating the Public against Misinformation about Climate Change. Global Challenges, 1(2), 1600008.

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1002/gch2.201600008
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Effectively addressing climate change requires significant changes in individual and collective human behavior and decision-making. yet, in light of the increasing politicization of (climate) science, and the attempts of vested-interest groups to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change through organized ‘disinformation campaigns,’ identifying ways to effectively engage with the public about the issue across the political spectrum has proven difficult. a growing body of research suggests that one promising way to counteract the politicization of science is to convey the high level of normative agreement (‘consensus’) among experts about the reality of human-caused climate change. yet, much prior research examining public opinion dynamics in the context of climate change has done so under conditions with limited external validity. moreover, no research to date has examined how to protect the public from the spread of influential misinformation about climate change. the current research bridges

this divide by exploring how people evaluate and process consensus cues in a polarized information environment. furthermore, evidence is provided that it is possible to pre-emptively protect (‘inoculate’) public attitudes about climate change against real-world misinformation.”
Maertens, R., Anseel, F., & van der Linden, S.. (2020). Combatting climate change misinformation: Evidence for longevity of inoculation and consensus messaging effects. Journal of Environmental Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101455
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Despite the fact that there is a 97% consensus among climate scientists that humans are causing global warming, the spread of misinformation continues to undermine public support for climate action. previous studies have found that resistance to misinformation can be induced by cognitively inoculating individuals against doubt-sowing about climate change. however, the long-term effectiveness of this approach is currently unknown. in a preregistered replication and extension experiment we combined a scientific consensus message with an inoculation treatment, and exposed participants to an influential misinformation message one week later. we explored 1) whether we can replicate the finding that inoculation is able to protect against a misinformation attack, and 2) whether or not the consensus and inoculation effects remain stable over the course of one week. successfully replicating the effects of the original study, we found a strong initial consensus effect that is sensitive to doubt-sowing misinformation. importantly, we also found that the consensus effect can be inoculated against misinformation. extending the replication, we found that the consensus effect shows partial decay over time, while the inoculation effect remains stable for at least one week. we discuss the impact of our findings for inoculation theory, climate change psychology, and public policy.”
Category

1. General

Date Created
2. February 2022
Author
web45