

[First View](#)

# Health-protective behaviour, social media usage and conspiracy belief during the COVID-19 public health emergency

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## Abstract

### Background

Social media platforms have long been recognised as major disseminators of health misinformation. Many previous studies have found a negative association between health-protective behaviours and belief in the specific form of misinformation popularly known as 'conspiracy theory'. Concerns have arisen regarding the spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories on social media.

### Methods

Three questionnaire surveys of social media use, conspiracy beliefs and health-protective behaviours with regard to COVID-19 among UK residents were carried out online, one using a self-selecting sample ( $N = 949$ ) and two using stratified random samples from a recruited panel ( $N = 2250$ ,  $N = 2254$ ).

### Results

All three studies found a negative relationship between COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs and COVID-19 health-protective behaviours, and a positive relationship between COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs and use of social media as a source of information about COVID-19. Studies 2 and 3 also found a negative relationship between COVID-19 health-protective behaviours and use of social media as a source of information, and Study 3 found a positive relationship between health-protective behaviours and use of broadcast media as a source of information.

### Conclusions

When used as an information source, unregulated social media may present a health risk that is partly but not wholly reducible to their role as disseminators of health-related conspiracy beliefs.

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