

## **Beliefs in Misinformation About COVID-19 And the War in Ukraine Are Linked: The Role of Political Attitudes and Media Use**

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### **Abstract**

The proliferation of digital disinformation has become one of the most serious problems of our time. Its negative impact has been observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it contributed to vaccine hesitancy, refusal of vaccination, and radicalization of some individuals. Currently, as Russia continues its military aggression in Ukraine, pro-Russian disinformation narratives and propaganda are spreading on the internet. Using a survey on a nationally representative sample (n = 1,717) for the Czech Republic, we examined the connection between disinformation narratives about these two societal issues (COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine). We discovered the following: First, beliefs in disinformation narratives about these two issues were widespread (19%, 11%) and were moderately correlated ( $\rho = 0.471$ ). Second, our multiple regression models showed positive relationships between using several digital media channels (e.g. "political chain e-mails", online communities with an echo chamber effect, discussions under web news articles), or other media use factors (less frequent use of public service media, sharing news, etc.), and beliefs in disinformation narratives. Third, we found an association between attitude factors (trust in Russia, distrust in the government and public media, distrust in the U.S. and EU, vaccine hesitancy) and the two sets of disinformation beliefs. In conclusion, our findings provide evidence for the existence of a consistent politicized "epistemic bubble". This group of individuals shares beliefs in two distinct sets of disinformation narratives and exhibits problematic media behavior.

**Keywords:** Media, Disinformation, Covid-19, War