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Impact of Online Misinformation on Public Attitudes and Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Online misinformation has emerged as a powerful force shaping public attitudes and behaviors in the digital age. With the widespread use of social media platforms, false or misleading information spreads rapidly, often reaching large audiences before it can be verified or corrected. Such misinformation influences how individuals perceive social, political, and health-related issues, frequently leading to the formation of biased or misinformed opinions. Psychological factors such as confirmation bias, emotional appeal, and trust in familiar online sources make people more susceptible to accepting and sharing inaccurate content. As a result, misinformation can reinforce existing beliefs, intensify social polarization, and reduce openness to factual evidence. In practical terms, its impact is visible in behaviors such as resistance to public health guidelines, participation in rumor-driven movements, and mistrust toward institutions, experts, and the media. Moreover, repeated exposure to false narratives can normalize misinformation, making it difficult for individuals to distinguish between credible and unreliable sources. This erosion of critical thinking and informed decision-making poses serious challenges to democratic processes and social harmony. Therefore, addressing the impact of online misinformation requires not only technological interventions but also the promotion of media literacy, critical awareness, and responsible digital behavior among the public.