Rapid Reviews COVID-19

Review 2: "The Effect of Information Behavior in Media on Perceived and Actual Knowledge about the COVID-19 Pandemic"

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RR:C19 Evidence Scale rating by reviewer:

Not informative. *The flaws in the data and methods in this study are sufficiently serious that they do not substantially justify the claims made. It is not possible to say whether the results and conclusions would match that of the hypothetical ideal study. The study should not be considered as evidence by decision-makers.*

Review:

Understanding how people learn about COVID-19 is a laudable goal. Unfortunately, this study has a number of serious weaknesses. These include:

- 1) information seeking is assessed only by self-report;
- 2) difficult-to-measure concepts (frequency of media use; perceived threat; perceived knowledge) are assessed by only a single question; the internal reliability of the actual knowledge test is not assessed;
- 3) the survey is cross-sectional (not quasi-experimental as the manuscript claims), so cause and effect cannot be determined. No analytical technique can nullify this weakness. At times the authors seem aware of this limitation, but they frequently (more than 25 times) write of "effects," which is a causal assertion;
- 4) the sample is self-selected, so its relevance to any broader population is uncertain;
- 5) the effects of the media are undoubtedly shaped by the media content and its consistency across sources (which were not assessed), so findings cannot be safely generalized to any other country or time period in the pandemic. For example, whether media exposure increases or decreases threat surely depends on the content of the media sources and whether they agree.

The most interesting and convincing finding is the lack of agreement between perceived and actual knowledge. If the knowledge scale is shown to be reliable, I believe that this finding would be worthy of a brief note.