

Media literacy: exploring the key to social media influences for wise parental decision-making on vaccines

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Dear Editor,

I read with interest the recent article published in this journal regarding the influences of social media on vaccine decision-making in parents. The authors' study indicated the presence of strong anti-vaccination sentiment combined with an "infodemic" of conspiracy theories, misinformation, and vitriol with the potential to negatively impact parents seeking immunization information. They concluded that social media and the easy access to misinformation online can adversely impact parental decision-making on vaccines.¹ While the claim is valid, social media can however serve as a powerful tool for policymakers and healthcare providers to promote vaccination benefits and programs. Given the positive and negative influences, the concern now is how parents can ensure the "absorption" of reliable information to address vaccine hesitancy. This is where media literacy comes into play.

During the height of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, most parents relied on social media for information regarding the available vaccines for their families, especially their children. Various social media platforms (SMPs) like Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, TikTok, and YouTube were among the most visited sites for reference. Some studies pointed out the negative effects of SMPs, which were associated with increased fear among caregivers in Asian countries, as well as a 3–4 times higher likelihood of delayed immunization. SMPs also negatively impact vaccine intent in Asia due to misinformation and anti-vaccination campaigns during the pandemic.² On the contrary, some studies highlighted that social media campaigns are a promising approach to increasing vaccination at scale in low- and middle-income

countries, and social norms are an important factor in promoting vaccination.³ To address the dilemma, parents must be selective in choosing which health information is reliable and beneficial, and this can be attained by enhancing their media literacy.

Media literacy refers to an intelligent engagement, as both a user and a creator, with media and technology. A media-literate person can decode, evaluate, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media.⁴ In reference to parents, they can critically evaluate the information obtained from the various SMPs. To enhance their media literacy, it is important for them to ask these five key questions and explore their findings⁵:

1. Who created this message and why are they sending it?
2. What techniques are being used to attract my attention?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in the message?
4. How might different people understand this message differently from me?
5. What is possibly omitted from this message?

Asking these questions by parents to themselves and discovering the answers will help them to analyze critically and understand clearly the information that is presented in various SMPs. The next step is to discuss the information with one's healthcare provider since they are expected to know best. It is expected that parents will do everything to protect their children's health and enhancing their media literacy is another effort that they delve into, given the fast-paced digital world.

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Declarations

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Author contribution

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