

Confronting Media Misrepresentation and Misunderstanding in Digital Health Communication: A Review of Shanghai Jiao Tong University Doctoral Research

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Abstract: On July 10, 2025, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University session of the 8th International Conference on “Medicine, Humanity, and Media” (MHM2025) was held at Peking University’s School of Journalism and Communication. The session, themed “Exploring Authenticity and Truth: Confronting Media Misrepresentation and Misunderstanding in Digital Health Communication,” featured presentations from several research teams, leading by Professor Yungeng Li. The team’s work focused on the intersection of media representation, health risks, and digital trust, addressing how misrepresentation and misunderstanding in health communication can distort public perceptions and influence behavioural outcomes. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from communication studies, psychology, and data science, their studies highlighted the mechanisms through which media narratives amplify or mitigate risk perceptions, and examined strategies for reconstructing audience trust in digital health environments. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, the team provided novel insights into the challenges of ensuring authenticity in health communication and proposed innovative approaches for fostering transparent and effective engagement in the digital age.

Keywords: Health communication, Digital trust, Media representation, Audience perception, Risk communication

On the afternoon of July 10, 2025, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) session of the 8th International Conference and PhD Symposium on “Medicine, Humanity, and Media” (MHM2025) was held at Room 113, School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University. The session, themed “Exploring Authenticity and Truth: Confronting Media Misrepresentation and Misunderstanding in Digital Health Communication,” brought together four scholars who examined the complex dimensions of health communication in the digital era.

Professor Yuchen Wang and his team presented pioneering research that integrated the Dunning–Kruger effect with the Risk Information Seeking and Processing (RISP) model to explore intervention strategies for HPV-related cognitive bias. Using a 2×2 experimental design with 360 participants, the study demonstrated that metacognitive interventions—encouraging individuals to reflect on the limits of their own judgment—were more effective than traditional corrective information in stimulating information-seeking behaviour. Interestingly, simple refutational corrections proved more effective than elaborate explanations in highlighting knowledge gaps, offering an important insight for efficient health communication.

Doctor Xinyue Zhao advanced an innovative study applying identity narrative strategies to the correction of health-related rumors. Based on an experiment with 635 adult participants in China, the research found that first-person narratives from scientists enhanced audience immersion, but the inclusion of group identity cues sometimes increased cognitive load. The findings revealed platform-specific dynamics: narrative forms were most effective on elite platforms such as Guokr,

whereas factual statements worked better on mass platforms like WeChat. This study provided fresh solutions to the persistent challenge of corrective communication—what is often termed the problem of “You may be right, but I don’t believe you.”

Doctor Chenwei Yang focused on the source effects of health information on social media. Through an online experiment with 800 participants, he systematically compared messages delivered by governmental authorities with those from expert sources in the dissemination of preventive health information. Results showed that, within China’s high power-distance cultural context, government sources generated greater public trust and stronger behavioural intentions than expert voices—challenging the conventional assumption in Western scholarship of expert superiority. Moreover, the study revealed a significant interaction between message format (text–image vs. plain text) and source type, offering valuable guidance for public health agencies in designing precise communication strategies.

Doctor Min Zhang presented a multimodal analysis of self-presentation among hearing-impaired creators on the Douyin platform. Examining 96 creators, the study highlighted how short-video technologies provided opportunities to break away from the stereotypical “tragic–inspirational” binary narrative. Through visual strategies (sign language, facial expressions, gestures) and cross-modal coordination (subtitles, background music), these creators constructed diverse identities. The findings shed light on how digital platforms empower marginalized groups to move from being “represented by others” to engaging in authentic “self-expression,” thereby opening

new avenues for disability communication research.

The session concluded with a lively discussion between the presenters and the audience. Participants debated issues such as the cultural specificity of authoritative sources, the boundary conditions of narrative-based correction, the long-term effects of metacognitive interventions, and the digital inclusion of hearing-impaired groups. Overall, the SJTU session not only expanded the theoretical horizons of health communication but also offered creative and practical solutions to the pressing challenges of digital-era communication.

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