



3RD VIRTUAL GLOBAL WHO INFODEMIC MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

COVID-19 infodemic response overview for the Philippines

Paoloregel B. Samonte, Dominic Maddumba, Mhay
Fancubit, Julius Sabile
Health Promotion Bureau, Department of Health,
Philippines

DIGITAL POSTER



infodemic
MANAGEMENT

COVID-19 INFODEMIC RESPONSE OVERVIEW IN THE PHILIPPINES

Coordination, resourcing and strategy

The Philippines' **COVID-19 infodemic response task force** is composed of various volunteers and representatives from national government agencies, development partners (such as WHO and UNICEF Philippines), media and public affairs representatives, and the academe, with the Department of Health (DOH) at the helm.

- The task force is in-charge of tracking, addressing, and managing all infodemic related to COVID-19.
- Resources for the management of misinformation and disinformation is lodged in the country's overall RCCE strategy for COVID-19 response.
- The Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill is the foremost policy in the country ensuring people's right to information on matters of public concern, thus supporting public access to health information.

01

Working relationships across society

- Apart from partner agencies both from governmental and non-governmental organizations, the DOH is also in **partnership with various social media companies** such as Facebook and Twitter to help manage the COVID-19 infodemic. These platforms have provided the DOH with online ad credits to help boost content that address mis/disinformation.
- DOH also collaborated with several online influencers—from celebrities to health experts—in helping share fact-checking content.

02

Integrated measurement, research and data analysis

- DOH worked with several PR consultants and partners from civil society organizations (CSOs) on **social media monitoring and community listening**. Such reports supplement the task force's research on rumors that need to be managed.
- Data sources include: online news, citizen posts, newspapers, TV and radio news, and community feedback through the DOH regional offices.
- The life cycle of rumors are closely monitored online in terms of reach, likes, shares, and overall traction until they die off.

03

Evidence-based interventions and implementation research

- The rumors are assessed based on two main criteria: **consequence** (e.g. rumor could cause harm, stop people from accessing services, cause conflict, etc.) and **virality** (e.g. shared at least 500 times and has crossed over from one social media platform to another, gotten the attention of local/national news, etc.) before deciding to release fact-check materials.
- Fact-check messages are sent to relevant technical and operation offices for vetting, before they are pretested among DOH staff of all levels for understandability and impact prior to release.
- Apart from social media, release of fact-checking materials are augmented via SMS, website, and the DOH's very own COVID-19 chatbot, KIRA.

04

Reporting and integration into decision-making

- Social media monitoring and community listening are conducted daily. The results are reported every morning the next day during the Department's editorial meeting with partners and PR experts.
- The reports are used in guiding which rumors to address and selecting what channel to utilize (e.g. social media, pressers, media forums, community interventions, or all).
- The policy, health regulation, and health services teams of the DOH is closely involved in infodemic management discussions so they could swiftly address through policies rumors that need legal interventions.
- The whole process is assisted by international partners such as USAID and WHO.



Department of Health, Philippines

Infodemic management pre-COVID

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the infodemic management system is arbitrary; there are no criteria set in screening which mis/disinformation to address and interagency coordination on health rumor management is quite weak. Content-wise, however, the DOH has always been accurate and materials are thoroughly vetted by concerned offices.
- Community listening and social media monitoring are rarely conducted, hence some rumors fall through the cracks of infodemic management.

Infodemic management during COVID

- Since the COVID-19 situation erupted in the Philippines, infodemic management was paid more attention and regarded with higher importance as it sometimes draw the line between life and death.
- In fact, infodemic management became one of the four pillars of the DOH's foremost COVID-19 communications campaign dubbed as *BIDA Solusyon sa COVID-19* (Be the Solution to COVID-19).
- The Philippine government adopted a more systematic, coordinated, whole-of-government approach in addressing dis/misinformation on COVID-related issues. The DOH is now looking towards upscaling this to cover all health-related concerns.
- National government agencies, development partners, media and public affairs representatives, and the academe synergized and coordinated their efforts towards addressing mis/disinformation.
- As a result, a total of at least 57 fact-check materials on critical, urgent issues related to COVID-19 mis/disinformation were released by the Department as of writing. For more information, audiences are diverted to published policy documents and/or the DOH official website.
- For issues that require elaboration and educational reinforcements, subsequent explainer videos are produced. These typically highlight actionable points for the public to follow.
- All finished communication materials are cascaded to regional offices for localization and distribution on-ground.



Country example of infodemic management: The *tuob* (steam inhalation) experience

- One of the most exceptional rumors that confronted the DOH and needed immediate action was the issue on steam inhalation or “tuob” as a treatment for COVID-19.
- The practice gained traction sometime in July and has stirred controversy nationwide. Many Filipinos, especially those residing in rural areas without immediate access to hospitals, practice the traditional method to relieve themselves of mild COVID-19 symptoms.
- Such practice was deemed harmful, as it may prevent COVID-19 patients from seeking proper medical attention by relying solely on the method for a cure. It may also be a cause for burning accidents.
- To address this, the Department released a series of materials utilizing various platforms denouncing the use of *tuob* as COVID-19 treatment: through the COVID-19 virtual presser, an official release, an “Alamin” (Be in the Know) card, and other social media materials, to name a few.
- Content for these fact-check materials are reviewed by the Professional Medical Societies for accuracy. The materials were also translated to the vernacular for easy comprehension.
- DOH's statement and informational materials on the matter were later on adopted by the World Health Organization (Philippines) in their own online channels, among other notable institutions. It was also picked up by the Philippine media.
- Saturating multiple platforms with the same message was key, and with the Department's efforts to debunk the myth, the issue has since died down.

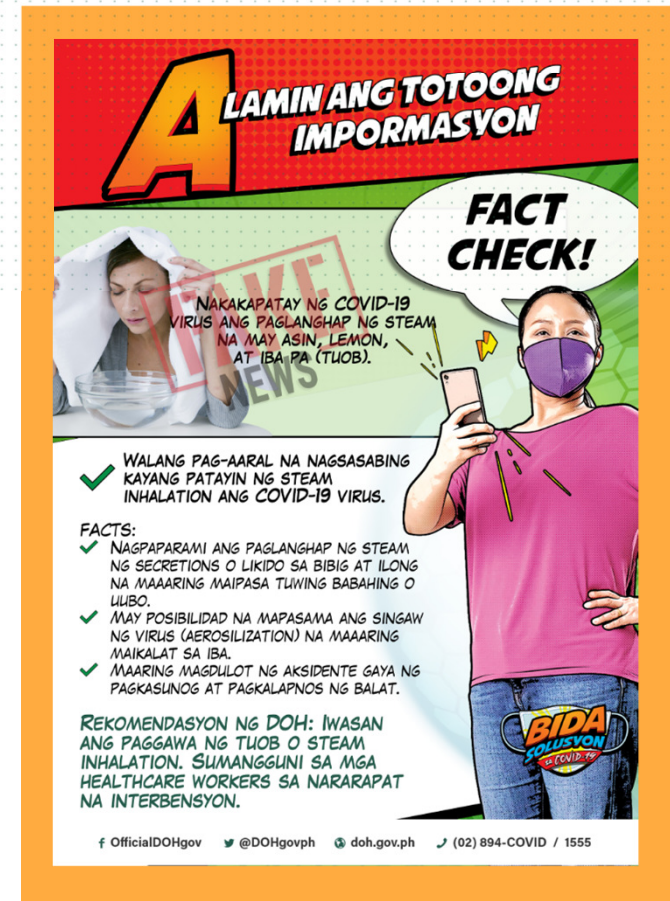


Figure 1. DOH's fact-check material on the use of *tuob*.



Lessons Learned

- **Prioritize rumors to address.** Rumors that are harmless or are not viral by any standards need not be tackled immediately or at all. Addressing rumors always carries the risk of repeating the message and thereby giving it more traction and publicity.
- **Plant eyes in the community.** This is important in analyzing information gaps and developing responsive content tailored to local needs. It is also imperative for messages to be delivered in languages community members would understand.
- **Saturate.** The publication of fact-check materials should be constant and consistent until the rumor dies off. These informational materials should be augmented with health infosystems and databases that people could go to for cross-referencing.
- **Collaborate.** Fostering partnerships not only expands reach but also enables quicker action. Through utilizing multiple platforms by multiple partners, the correct messages are amplified and reinforced in people's minds.
- **Keep in mind the vulnerable.** Those vulnerable to mis/disinformation tend to be the uneducated. Hence, keep the materials you publish simple, clear, and in the vernacular.
- **Shift thinking from the reactive to the preemptive.** Do not wait idly for rumors to spring out before addressing them. Foresight, planning, and taking early measures are crucial in ensuring that mis/disinformation are not only managed, but prevented.



Ways Forward

- **Foster stronger infodemic management and coordination for all health issues of national concern.** Institutionalize a more solid framework and approach to health infodemic management in the country, not only limited to COVID-19 but including other health concerns as well. In here, the same whole-of-government approach used for COVID-19 infodemic management should be applied.
- **Pilot a rumor log for communities:** Communities are potent sources of mis/disinformation. Utilizing DOH's regional offices, a rumor tracking system in the form of rumor logs may be implemented in communities. The rumor log shall be filled out by a designated local health worker. A sample of the proposed rumor log may be found in Figure 2.
- **Improve mis/disinformation evaluation and knowledge management:** Implement a more solid and methodological evaluation mechanism for the selection of mis/disinformation to be addressed, as well as systematic approaches to filing and record-keeping. A simple algorithm for rumor tracking can be seen in Figure 3.

Tracking number: (e.g. CHD8-012) _____	
Date rumor was submitted: _____	
City/Province: _____	District: _____
How was the message or rumor received?	
Key informant/community cadre Name (optional): _____ Contact (optional): _____	Radio show Station: _____
Hotline Name (optional): _____ Contact (optional): _____	Social media Link to material (if available): _____
Other (specify) _____	
Message received: _____	

Figure 2. Sample rumor log

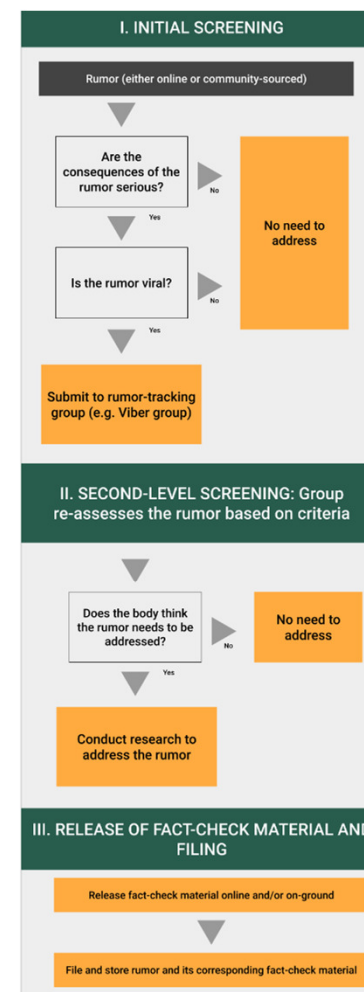


Figure 3. Proposed algorithm on rumor tracking and management.

