

# Staying informed during a health crisis

Information practices and dealing with fake news in French-speaking Switzerland during the first wave of COVID-19 (March to April 2020)

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**Information on the project 'Fake news, the public and journalism':**

<https://www.researchfakenews.ch/>



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## Executive summary

- The health crisis has led to intensive information practices, with the news media being hailed as the main source of information on COVID-19 between March and April 2020. More than nine in ten respondents said they often or very often consulted the news media ahead of consulting the authorities and the health authorities.
- Young people (aged 15–25 years) are less likely to use information media than older people, but are more likely to ask people close to them for information about COVID-19. They also frequently use digital platforms (including search engines, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram).
- Official and institutional sources are seen as being highly trustworthy for obtaining COVID-19 information: approximately nine out of ten respondents trust professional health experts and health authorities, while eight out of ten trust political authorities.
- More than half of the respondents consider journalists and the media to be a reliable source of information. However, almost a third of respondents (and more than half of 15–25 year olds) believe that journalists and the media are likely to spread false or fabricated information about COVID-19, far more so than political authorities, health authorities and health professionals.
- The media coverage of the health crisis was rated positively by the respondents: more than eight in ten believe that the news media explained how to deal with the COVID-19 crisis; slightly fewer respondents believe that the news media contributed to understanding the COVID-19 crisis.
- Trust in digital channels for obtaining COVID-19 information is higher among younger people (15–25 year olds): more than half trust search engines to access these channels for information. Online video platforms are also considered more trustworthy for this age range than for older people.
- Discussions on social networks are a frequent activity for almost half of respondents and almost three quarters of 15–25 year olds. In such discussions, young people are more likely than older people to be confronted with opinions that differ from their own. Their relationship to information is impacted by their interaction with different 'communities of opinion'.
- Nearly two thirds of respondents say they have received fake news about COVID-19 via instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.). Among 15–25 year olds, the number is even higher (more than three quarters of respondents).
- Young people respond more actively to receiving fake news than older people, in particular by warning those who have passed it on, but also by ignoring it.
- More than half of respondents acknowledge the media's bias towards limiting the spread of misinformation on COVID-19 (among the 15–25 year olds, less than 40 per cent), nearly three quarters of whom also support fact-checking as the most effective means of combating fake news.
- More than a third of respondents doubt that COVID-19 is of natural origin – a lower percentage of them among the 15–25 year olds than among the over 25 year olds. In general, young people are more likely to reject conspiracy theories about COVID-19 than those over the age of 25.