

Information inequality in the UK coronavirus communications crisis | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

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The coronavirus pandemic is a communications crisis in addition to being a public health emergency. Few, if any, citizens are, on their own, equipped to understand the disease itself, the preventive steps they might take, or the actions taken by governments and other authorities, and so have to rely on news media, information from health authorities, and other forms of communication. At the same time, most of us have discussed the pandemic, its impact, and the many issues it raises with friends and family both offline and online, and via social media and other platforms. These sources and these conversations – some of them less-than-authoritative, some misleading – will also influence how we navigate the crisis.

In this Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) at the University of Oxford report, we examine information inequality and other social differences in how people have navigated the coronavirus communications crisis in the UK based on data from a series of surveys fielded fortnightly since mid-April. Our research was conducted as COVID-19 rippled through the UK with hundreds of thousands infected and tens of thousands of fatalities, creating severe and often very unequal social and economic impacts from both the disease and responses to it, and increasingly intense public discussion around the UK government's handling of the crisis.

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