SAMPLE ESSAY APA STYLE
Assignment 4 – COVID-19: WHO SAID THAT?

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According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Chinese authorities identified a new type of coronavirus on 7 January 2020 (WHO, 2020). By April 4, 2020, there were 1,007,977 cases and 52,771 deaths confirmed globally (Johns Hopkins Center for Systems Science and Engineering, 2020). Questions about COVID-19 on Google return about 9,250,000,000 search results from diverse types of sources, including: peer reviewed publications, health agency reports, Government documents, news media stories, and social media content. One of the search results examined in this paper is from the World Health Organisation, who aim to broadcast information of the highest quality about COVID-19. Google search results also include publications of deliberately misleading information that incorporate dangerous myths and rumours. Three types of sources examined here are peer reviewed publications, news outlet reporting, and social media content. The outcome is an assessment of types of online sources based upon specific criteria that evaluates credibility and reliability. This essay argues that evaluating types of sources of information on COVID-19 for credibility is not only the responsibility of publishers, but also, the onus of consumers. When seeking information online about the risk level and protection required for COVID-19, we individuals must take responsibility for evaluating which types of sources are better.

In academia, works authored by experts in their field and reviewed by other field experts are the most credible and reliable type of source. We must also take responsibility for evaluating sources by applying criteria (Metzger, 2007) to determine the credibility and reliability of publications. For example, checking if the author is a field expert, if the information is up-to-date, and for facts rather than opinions. Nature (2020) is a scientific journal, which recently published one of the first peer reviewed articles on COVID-19. The article (Zhou, et al. 2020) concludes,
“Most importantly, strict regulations against the wildlife domestication and consuming should be implemented”. This is good advice; however, a watermark on each page of the article clearly shows the paper is an Accelerated Article Preview, without subediting of text, figures, or tables. A casual observer commented on the publication, questioning the quality of the article (madmaxNY 2020). This Accelerated Article Preview demonstrates that there is an urgent need to quickly share information about the spread of the virus within the scientific community, which accounts for this fast-tracked publication. Nature offers Advance Online Publication and these AAP papers are clearly identified by a watermark on each page of the PDF. Nevertheless, read it with caution, even though experts credit the data as meeting standard requirements. When it comes to communicating high quality, trusted health information to the public the World Health Organisation (WHO) is the peak body. WHO not only publishes peer reviewed scientific articles, but also, a range of data for the media and public that includes fact sheets and situation reports. The WHO ‘Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report’ (WHO, 2020), published daily by experts, checks out as a credible source. The report includes total and new cases in the last twenty-four hours, strategic objectives, and recommendations and advice for the public. In addition, surveillance is clear and concise, presented in tables with a summary of ‘strategic objectives’. The frequency of publication can be both beneficial and problematic as new information is quickly disseminated; however, quality assurance may be affected. While individuals from a non-academic background may stumble upon peer-reviewed publications like these, it is far more likely the public will glean their information from news outlets and social media content.
Public information about the risk level and protection required for COVID-19 is widely available; however, this paper examined three distinct types of sources for their credibility. The findings support the contention that individual consumers must also accept responsibility for evaluating sources. Peer reviewed sources are the most dependable, trustworthy, and authoritative, as experts review the research prior to publication. The examples of the Nature article (Zhou, et al. 2020) and the WHO situation report (2020) support this claim. Nevertheless, peer reviewed sources also have their limitations, such as, the speed of publication. The two sources cited here were both published in haste, so consider the reported data in this light. Another limitation is access, as experts and professionals read peer reviewed sources through paid subscriptions; although, the WHO offers publications free of charge. The most important point here is that there are better types of sources than social media content for health information on COVID-19; however, individuals must be active researchers, applying rigorous criteria to check their sources for credibility and reliability before acting.
References


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