SSHRC Explore Final Report

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Project Title: Inspiration or Misinformation? A Mixed Methods Content Analysis of #Fitspo using a Misinformation Framework

1.1 Project Summary

This project examined whether popular fitness inspiration media found on Instagram and TikTok portrayed exercise content that was consistent with the Fake Experts, Logical Fallacies, Impossible Expectations, Cherry Picking, Conspiracy Theoryies (FLICC) misinformation framework.

1.2 Student involvement

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1.3 Dissemination and Knowledge Mobilization

The pilot work for this grant was presented at the Canadian Society for Psychomotor Learning and Sport Psychology 2025 annual conference in Charlottetown, PEI. This grant supported the research work up to this point. We are currently in data analysis for two large sets of data and plan to disseminate the full work in 2026-27 at both international conferences and via scholarly articles.

1.4 Project Outcomes and Impacts

This research found that there were notable differences in the misinformation portrayed on social media. While unsurprising, we have found in our preliminary results, that on both Instagram and TikTok, fitness inspiration media are more likely than not to contain at least one element of misinformation, based on the FLICC misinformation framework. Instagram contained posts that represented Impossible Expectations of exercise most frequently, followed by posts that contained logical fallacies while TikTok posts were most likely to have posts that contained logical fallacies, followed by impossible expectations. Notably, both Instagram and TikTok fitness inspiration posts were shared by fake experts, based on the FLICC framework that is, an individual who presents information as credible despite having not presented any qualifications commensurate with the information. This research highlights not just the breadth of exercise misinformation available on popular social media platforms, but the depth of the mis-represented content. This has community and professional implications as Canadians and Western nations generally, have identified low levels of physical activity as a primary contributing factor to all-cause mortality, disease, and poor mental health. Misinformed exercise content found on social media may perpetuate exercise reluctance as media consumers fail or are unable to recognize the harmful information, which may result in engagement in dangerous exercise activities as seen

online. Additionally, these erroneous media may also instill unrealistic expectations about exercise contributing to all-or-nothing thinking resulting in exercise avoidance. Understanding the types of exercise misinformation that currently exist on social media and particular devices frequently used by popular exercise influencers may help exercise professionals identify rhetoric, developing counter-information to insulate the public from poor outcomes.