

COVID-19 Pandemic: Perception, Confusion, Conspiracy Theories and Outlook

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Short Communication

Mankind has obviously survived a large number of epidemics [1]. However, humans are extremely ill-prepared to deal with invisible dangers. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has four characteristics that arguably overwhelming human analytical capacity: Time lags, externalities, nonlinearities, and complexity. Given the complexity of the COVID-19 problem, rational, slow, and resource-intensive thinking capitulates early and people switch to intuitive and seemingly effortless thinking that works with the help of experience and analogies.

Often people tend to develop views that are consistent with their self-image. If a person perceives himself or herself as a self-determined individual, he or she is more likely to downplay COVID-19-for example, by comparing it to the flu [2]. Non-experts often resort to simplistic arguments taken out of context as long as they support their view [2]. This also leads them to the erroneous conclusion that their own judgment is equal to the experts' views. Conspiracy theories are an extreme form of motivated thinking [2]. Any fact that undermines the beliefs espoused is trumped by the conspiracists' own knowledge of the real reasons and makings of which they believe the general public is ignorant. With its propensity for

supposedly simple explanations, makes government communication policy incredibly difficult. Rational, fact-based arguments from the government - which are equally unlikely to convince Corona sceptics - are expected by the majority of citizens. But if statements are perceived as either too dramatic or too appealing, they often trigger counterproductive behavior [3]. Mainstream media should actively combat bias imputed to them by corona deniers. Skeptics should be given air time, not just with the often all-too-obvious intention of discrediting the protest as a whole. In dealing with this phenomenon, we are subject to significant perceptual distortions that make our individual and societal dealings with COVID-19 so difficult. But insight into these problems

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might lead to somewhat more cautious and less apodictic views [4]. Our evolutionary success is due to the fact that we have become "social creatures," whereby it is precisely our intuitive and often less rational perceptions and behaviors that have enabled us to live together more smoothly. Now it is up to society and its institutions to prevent people from letting their perception problems lead them to turn against society. After a year of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, recent news about vaccine availability has for the first time opened up a realistic prospect of being able to control the pandemic in the near future [5,6]. However, vaccination - and especially concerns about mandatory vaccination - has also been one of the cornerstones of Corona-related conspiracy theories from the beginning, and a central fear of so-called "Corona demonstrates." Our own survey found that one to two-thirds of respondents in different countries wants to be vaccinated. Governments, however, must be prepared for a fierce public debate in which questionable facts (fake news) and conspiracy theories are likely to flourish [1,2]. Ironically, the emerging hope that life can soon return to normal despite the current tightening of

the lockdown may even encourage radical individuals who are convinced that the Corona crisis is largely the result of government propaganda and that the German government's erratic response is catapulting Germany into a kind of apocalyptic state, even incite them further in their protest when they realize that their "concerns" that fueled their resistance and drove them to the streets were ultimately unfounded or at least greatly exaggerated. In conclusion, we have all been challenged to break habits and change everyday patterns. For this reason, crises also offer opportunities for change that we can and must take advantage of. What do we want to keep, what do we want to change sustainably, what do we want to learn? Do we think differently about globalization, economic growth and solidarity after Corona? What new demands can we make on our domestic and urban environments? What does Corona tell us about our education system and how might our working lives be sustainably transformed? Overall, there are many questions that can't be answered completely yet now. The corona pandemic changes everything. Nothing will be as it was before, before corona virus pandemic.

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