

College of Business Academic Research Seminar



Dr. Welf H. Weiger

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Title:

**Deflected by the tin foil hat?
Word-of-mouth, conspiracy beliefs, and the
adoption of innovative public health apps**

BIO

Welf H. Weiger (wweiger@alfaisal.edu) is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Alfaisal University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Assistant Professor of Digital Marketing at the University of Goettingen (currently on leave). He earned his Ph.D at the

University of Goettingen, Germany. His research interests lie primarily in social media marketing, customer engagement, and gamification. Among others, his work has been published in outlets such as Journal of Business Research, Information Systems Research, the European Journal of Information Systems, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, and International Journal of Research in Marketing.

ABSTRACT

With the rise of smart devices, public health apps (e.g., contact tracing, data donation, e-health apps) are becoming central to public health management. However, adoption rates remain low, often hindered by conspiracy theories. This study investigates how conspiracy beliefs influence app adoption and how policymakers can mitigate these effects. Drawing on theories of social influence and conspiracy beliefs, a multi-wave field study and controlled experiment reveal three key findings: (1) word of mouth (WOM) about public health apps influences conspiracy beliefs; (2) the

impact of WOM depends on the sender (peer vs. expert) and the receiver's initial beliefs; and (3) increased conspiracy beliefs reduce app adoption and fuel negative WOM. For consumers with low initial conspiracy beliefs, expert WOM effectively promotes app adoption and prevents conspiracy theories. Firm conspiracy believers, however, respond better to peer WOM emphasizing app benefits and countering misinformation. These insights guide strategies for promoting public health apps.



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