Reviewer's report

Title: Content analysis of press coverage during pandemic influenza H1N1 in Germany 2009/2010

Version: 2 Date: 26 February 2015

Reviewer: Puja Myles

Reviewer's report:

This paper has a lot of promise but needs major revisions before it can be considered for publication.

Major compulsory revisions
1. Abstract: The conclusions are not based on study findings
2. The background is too long- it seems like an extended literature review. Lines 63-69 seem out of place and not required. The section on attitudes towards vaccination could be summarised in a couple of sentences at most. The section on ‘influence of mass media on health behaviour’ should be summarised in the background/introduction and referred to in more detail in the discussion. The detailed theoretical framework on types of health messages in the media should go in the methods if this framework informed the a priori codes for the quantitative content analysis and again referred to in the discussion to place findings in context.
3. Methods: Examples of how the coding was applied for categorising message characteristics e.g. what type of content would qualify as ‘fear appeal’, should be included in the methods.
4. This paper only presents a quantitative content analysis but there is not enough detail or insight provided by simply using this approach. I would like to see some qualitative content analysis of the 140 articles included in the results.
5. Results:
   Lines 231-232: How was it possible that only 17.1% of the articles included information on influenza when you searched for articles using search terms relating to influenza.
   Lines 236-237: This sentence is not clear "No clear increase or decrease regarding the supply of information is obvious"; try rephrasing this.
6. Discussion
   Line 298: On what basis do you claim that the H1N1 pandemic was 'highly visible' in the media. Is this a subjective judgement or did you use any objective criteria to ascertain this. What for e.g. would qualify as 'low coverage'?
   Lines 298-299: Your reported findings do not demonstrate how media awareness is 'highly dependent on single events'. Please provide the evidence for such claims.
Lines 334-336: Your findings do not indicate the effectiveness of health messages respecting the aspect of self-efficacy; this is a hypothesis which you must state as such and reference if possible.

Line 353: What is a 'favourable' course; please clarify.

Line 359: What do you mean by '...were restricted at a late point in time...'. Please clarify and/or rephrase

Lines 370-375: This paragraph seems out of place and does not follow from the preceding paragraph- please remove.

7. Conclusions

The entire conclusions section is not based on the study findings. The conclusions and implications are overstated.

Minor essential revisions

1. Revise subheading 'Time course of the H1N1 pandemic' to 'Time course of the H1N1 pandemic in Germany'
2. Line 332: Replace 'majorly' with 'major'
3. Line 347: Replace 'therefore' with 'the' and rephrase as '...could be a barrier in the perception of health messages'

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests' but I have published research in the area of pandemic influenza though not on this topic.