



Health Psychology for all:
Equity, Inclusiveness and
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ABSTRACTS**

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'What is old and natural is harmless': Traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine in online media

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Background: When the media does not adhere to reporting guidelines regarding traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine (TM/CAM), this may deceive or mislead consumers about the safety and efficacy of these practices. We analyzed whether Serbian online media adheres to reporting guidelines and described dominant psychological appeals used to promote TM/CAM. **Methods:** We conducted a content analysis of 182 articles from six news and six magazine websites, published July–December 2021. **Findings:** Biologically based treatments – predominantly herbal products – were the most common (205/289 practices). TM/CAM practices were claimed to improve general health (71/386 claims), as well as to alleviate respiratory problems, boost the immunity, and detox the body. The tone was overwhelmingly positive, with most of the positive articles (145/176) neglecting to disclose the potential harms of TM/CAM. Few articles provided a recommendation to speak with a healthcare provider (24/176). Articles tended to appeal to TM/CAM's long tradition of use (115/176), naturalness (80/176), and convenience (72/176). They used vague pseudoscientific jargon (105/176) and failed to cite sources for the claims that TM/CAM use is supported by science (39/176). **Discussion:** Given that TM/CAM use may lead to harmful outcomes (such as adverse events, avoidance of official treatment or interaction with it), Serbian online media reports on TM/CAM are inadequate to assist consumers' decision-making. Our findings highlight issues that need to be addressed towards ensuring more critical health reporting, and, ultimately, better informed TM/CAM consumption choices.