Media 8B Secondary Source Analysis

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5/23/2020

The Source:

I choose to analyze a particularly unreputable and volatile source that I had ended up seeing a few months ago to mix it up a little bit. It's a newspaper article titled, "*Chloroquine Known as Effective Against Coronavirus since 2005*" written by James Delingpole from the conservative online news publication *Breitbart* published this year on March 19th. Here's the website URL if you want to see the article yourself:

→ https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/03/19/chloroquine-known-as-effective-against-coronavirus-since-2005/.

Quality of Information:

The article in question relates to the current strain of Coronavirus which has caused the world-wide pandemic. The article in question references a variety of scientific reports, which Delingpole alleges point to Chloroquine, an antiviral medication intended for Malaria being an adequate treatment for coronavirus. Here's my rating for the source for each of the five criteria.

- Complex concepts are simplified while maintaining usable information

This article does a relatively poor job of simplifying information. For instance, the article is relatively short and mostly just directly quotes the conclusions of a few reports which effectively restate the claim.

The only provided explanation for why Chloroquine would operate as a effective treatment for Coronavirus is the one-liner, "*Chloroquine works by enabling the body's cells better to absorb zinc, which is key in preventing viral RNA transcription – and disrupting the often fatal cytokine storm*", which regardless of validity, comes across indecipherably to a layman reader like myself.

Additionally the author seems to cite sources which either come across as irrelevant or insufficient. For instance, they cited a French study which showed that patients given Chloroquine recovered at a seemingly faster rate. However, this study had 42 participants, and given that Coronavirus has a fatality rate of ~2% (as according to the same French report) meaning it is entirely possible that every patient would have recovered regardless of any alleged effect of the treatment.

- Source is reliable with no apparent agenda that would undermine credibility

While Breitbart has a very obvious political bent to most of its news coverage, this article in particular suggests some sort of corrupt corporate-government-conspiracy regarding Chloroquine.

In the latter half of the article Delingpole argues that the reason why Chloroquine hasn't been widely distributed is because pharmaceutical companies wouldn't be able to profit from its distribution and, "*That's why Big Pharma's lobbyists have worked hard to persuade governments that there can be no acceptable solution till a patented vaccine is brought on to the market*" (Delingpole, 2020).

Delingpole's hyperbolic and charged claim of pharmaceutical companies not providing a coronavirus cure in the name of profit clearly denotes a very negative view of the pharmaceutical companies and the government, and brings into question whether or not Delingpole is cherry-picking data in the name of strengthening their political position.

- Writing and illustration styles are interesting and engaging

While this source does contain an obvious bias and some inflammatory rhetoric it is undoubtedly a compelling style. The graphical layout of the page pops out, spliced in with block quotes from scientific reports makes the article an easy read. However, I'd argue when discussing scientific data concerning a pandemic, content matters more than appearance.

- Source is current and includes recent science and technology breakthroughs.

While this is about 2 months old by now, it's worth mentioning that even at the time its claims about Hydroxychloroquine being an effective treatment for Coronavirus were a bit suspect.

Not long after this article was published the CDC published an advisory warning against consuming unproven medication to combat Coronavirus, specifically stating, "Currently, these medications [Hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine] are being studied and evaluated as treatment for COVID-19; however, their efficacy to either prevent or treat this infection are unknown." (CDC, 2020)

Furthermore, it didn't take very long for research with a much larger sample size to contradict the cited surveys included in the article. According to a New York Times article published yesterday, "*The malaria drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine did not help coronavirus patients and may have done harm, according to a new study based on the*

records of nearly 15,000 patients who received the drugs and 81,000 who did not." (Grady, 2020).

Which effectively demonstrates the danger of being overly-enthusiastic about conclusions for unproven applications of medical treatments. While even the cited report in the New York Times is not definitive (the study was conducted by parsing patient data from hospitals across the globe) it demonstrates there's a lot of unknowns regarding Chloroquine and its interaction with the current strain of Coronavirus. The last thing reporters should be doing is throwing caution to the wind and stirring up bad will against the medical industry based on shaky data.

- Editorial opinions, if included, are identified and distinguished from research-based data.

The line between editorial opinion and research based data seems thin at best. The entire article is based around the premise that a currently effective treatment against coronavirus is being withheld from public access due to greed with scientific reports used as evidence to further that line of thinking.

Implication:

This article met only one criteria for being a quality science news source, being interesting and engaging. This is troublesome considering it was peddling medical claims which at the time were largely unproven and given recent data may be outright false.

When attempting to report new information on medical research it's critical that people are forthcoming about the potential limitations of studies they draw upon and attempt to convey information as accurately as possible.

Works Cited:

Delingpole, James. "Delingpole: Studies Claim Malaria Drug Chloroquine Effective Against Coronavirus." *Breitbart*, 21 Mar. 2020, www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/03/18/malarial-drug-chloroquine-effective-against-coronavirus/.

Grady, Denise. "Malaria Drug Taken by Trump Is Tied to Increased Risk of Heart Problems and Death in New Study." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 May 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/05/22/health/malaria-drug-trump-coronavirus.html?searchResultPosition=1.

"HAN Archive - 00431." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Mar. 2020, emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00431.asp.