Why smart people believe coronavirus myths

It is a sad truth that any health crisis will ***spawn*** its own pandemic of misinformation.

spawn　产卵；造成　　exacerbate　使加剧

In the 80s, 90s, and 2000s we saw the spread of dangerous lies about Aids. These claims increased risky behaviour and ***exacerbated*** the crisis.

Now, we are seeing a fresh ***inundation*** of fake news — this time around the coronavirus pandemic. And while you might hope that greater brainpower or education would help us to tell fact from fiction, it is easy to find examples of many educated people falling for false information.

inundation　洪水；泛滥

Part of the problem arises from the nature of the messages themselves. As BBC Future has described in the past, purveyors of fake news can make their message feel "truthy" through a few simple tricks, which discourages us from applying our critical thinking skills.

Eryn Newman at Australian National University, for instance, has shown that the simple presence of an image alongside a statement increases our trust in its accuracy — even if it is only ***tangentially*** related to the claim.

tangentially　无关地

Even the simple repetition of a statement — whether the same text, or over multiple messages — can increase the "truthiness" by increasing feelings of familiarity, which we mistake for ***factual*** accuracy.

factual　事实的；真实的

These tricks have long been known by ***peddlers*** of misinformation, but today's social media may exaggerate our ***gullible*** tendencies. Recent evidence shows that many people ***reflexively*** share content without even thinking about its accuracy. The promise of ***eliciting*** a strong response in their followers distracts people from the obvious question.

peddle　叫卖；散播

gullible　易受骗的；轻信的

reflexive　反射的；本能的

elicit　引起

This question should be, of course: is it true?