Annex A: Covid-related disinformation

2020: Covid19 Disinformation goes big

The CTI League started in response to Covid19-related infosec attacks on medical and related facilities. This work grew up as Covid19 disinformation did; but just as a lot of Covid disinformation \(and misinformation\) was created and amplified around the world, so too were teams and initiatives to counter that disinformation, and to provide clear sources of information on rapidly changing physical, social and scientific literature environments.

Covid19-related disinformation data feeds

Sites to send covid19 disinformation URLs to

- NewsGuard's [Coronavirus Misinformation Tracking Center](#)

Narratives

- [Wikipedia list of Covid19 rumours](#)
- [WHO Covid19 myths list](#) - narratives
- CMU IDEAS Center [list of Covid19 disinformation narratives](#) (click dates)

Data

- Ryerson University covid19 misinformation portal: https://covid19misinfo.org/
  - Botswatch dashboard https://covid19misinfo.org/botswatch/
- Uni Arkansas COSMOS Covid19 list http://cosmos.ualr.edu/misinformation
- Facebook datafeed: [Enabling study of the public conversation in a time of crisis](#)

Covid19-related counter-disinformation feeds

- Ryerson University covid19 misinformation portal: https://covid19misinfo.org/ and https://covid19misinfo.org/fact-checking/covid-19-fact-checkers/
- WHO COVID-19 site: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus
- WHO information network for epidemics https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication
- Coronavirus Tech Handbook https://coronavirustechhandbook.com/misinformation
- Experts list https://twitter.com/jeffjarvis/status/1254038157244456961
- Maryland Covid19 rumour control https://govstatus.egov.com/md-coronavirus-rumor-control

Reports

- ASPI: https://www.aspi.org.au/report/covid-19-disinformation

Covid19 general data feeds

- https://crisisnlp.qcri.org/covid19 - GeoCov19 dataset of covid19 tweets (up to about 3 weeks ago; still collecting)

Covid19 Narratives

The CTI League concentrated on Covid19-related misinformation, and these are the top-level themes for the 100s of narratives that we saw.

- Covid isn't serious
  - Covid doesn't exist
  - Individual medical targets
- Medical scams
  - MMS prevents
  - Alcohol prevents
  - etc
- Origin myths
  - Escaped bioweapon
  - Country x created Covid
  - US soldiers took Covid to China
- Resolution myths
  - Country y has a Covid cure
- Crossover with conspiracies
  - Covid and 5G
  - Covid and antivax / anti-Gates
  - Helicopters spraying for covid
  - Depopulation conspiracy
- Crossover with 'freedom rights'
  - Anti- stayathome
  - 2nd amendment
  - anti-immigration
  - Usual far-rightwing groups
- Geopolitics
  - China, Iran: covert + overt
  - "Blue check" disinfo

Narratives are useful because there are a lot fewer narratives than messages, making them easier \(especially with text-based machine learning techniques\) to track. In 2020, we saw a lot of crossover narratives, where existing groups like antivaxxers and hardcore rightwingers met and joined forces, and conspiracy theories including black helicopters and 5G were recycled and combined into new Covid narratives. Most of this was worth money.

Covid19 information feeds

- https://explaincovid.org/

Tracking Covid19 Disinformation outside the USA

America and the UK are original masters at disinformation campaigns \(both for their work from second world war onwards, but also for the internal propaganda work so successfully picked up later by e.g.

[China](https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-hollywood-became-the-unofficial-propaganda-arm-of-the-u-s-military-1.5560575)\). Russia, China, Iran are all biggies right now in online disinfo aimed at other countries, but there are also countries whose internal \(aimed at their own population\) disinformation campaigns have been masterful \(Venezuela\) or unsubtle but effective \(Philippines\). There are other countries where the use of disinformation is just kinda background normal politics, but generally internal and local \(e.g. Nigeria\). A very subjective top 10 list would be: USA, China, Russia, Iran, UK, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Venezuela, Philippines.

Things to think about: who

- How is a country involved?
  - Disinformation customer / originator
  - Disinformation target
  - Disinformation producer / factory
- What type of disinformation?
  - Geopolitics / Nation State propaganda: country A to country B/C/etc
  - Politics / propaganda: country A to own population
  - Grifting: individuals to population (usually for money)
  - Power: groups to population (recruiting, actions etc)

Things to think about: what

- Localisation:
  - Local tech use (including social media)
  - Local power structures
  - Local concerns
  - Languages
  - Communication style
  - Local idioms (e.g. "cockroaches")
- Globalisation
  - Common themes: politics, grifters, 5g, antivax etc

Places to look for non-USA disinformation

- Disinformation repositories
  - https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/ - Russia disinfo on EU
  - https://medium.com/dfrlab - world disinfo
  - https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/ - nationstate actors
    - Specifically The Global Disinformation Order and case studies
- https://www.newsguardtech.com/covid-19-resources/ - c19 domains for several countries
- Hive cases, MISP events etc
  - E.g. reopen starting in Australia, moving to Canada etc

Non-Covid19 disinformation and where to send it

It's almost certain that in the course of looking for Covid-19 related disinformation, we're going to find disinformation on other topics. While our mandate is specifically Covid-19 related, there are other, area-specific organizations to which we can report disinformation.

- Right-wing extremism/hate speech: [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- Voter suppression attempts:
  - On social media, report the post to the platform using their reporting mechanisms
  - You can also report the issue to the [U.S. Department of Justice](#)
- Anti-GLBTQ+: [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#)

Covid19 disinformation references

Disinformation

- https://tomnikkola.com/prime/
- ["The Dark Arts of Disinformation Through a Historical Lens"](#)
- ["The Kremlin's Disinformation Playbook goes to Beijing/](#)
- ["Anti-Lockdown Protests Originated With Tight-Knit Group Who Share Bigger Goal: Trump 2020"](#)
- ["NATO STRATCOMCOE considers 'Disinformation in Asia'"](#)
- ["Activists fight COVID-19 disinformation in the Caucasus"](#)
- ["Anatomy of a disinformation campaign: The coup that never was"](#)
- ["Recognizing Disinformation during the Covid-19 Pandemic"](#)
- ["Disarming Disinformation"](#)
- ["Tech giants recalled by MPs over lack of 'adequate answers' on disinformation"](#)
- ["'The country is in a state of trauma': COVID-19 has made the US a breeding ground for propaganda and a goldmine for foreign spies"](#)
- ["House Democrats' coronavirus bill earmarks $1 million to study 'disinformation'"](#)
- ["Disinformation 'whack-a-mole' doesn't work on social media"](#)
- ["Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine: COVID-19 disinformation in Eastern Europe"](#)
- ["How TikTok could be a player in election disinformation"](#)
- ["EU tackles coronavirus disinformation, seeks regulatory framework for Facebook, other social-media companies"](#)
- ["EU demands tech giants hand over data on virus disinformation"](#)
- ["Wexton seeks study of COVID-19 disinformation, misinformation"](#)
- ["Uncovering A Pro-Chinese Government Information Operation On Twitter and Facebook: Analysis Of The #MilesGuo Bot Network"](#) Also briefly about Covid19 disinformation network

Covid19 Narratives

- "[COVID: Top 10 current conspiracy theories](#)"

Covid19 disinformation around the world

India:

- ["India & COVID-19: Misinformation and the Downside of Social Media"](#) - whatsapp, fake cures, SM responsible for curation, strong messaging from Modi
- ["How 300 Indian scientists are fighting fake news about COVID-19"](#)

Italy:

- ["Italian MP amplifies debunked COVID-19 conspiracy theories on the floor of Parliament"](#)

China:

- ["China in coronavirus propaganda push as US ties worsen"](#) - hero story

Africa:

- ["Coronavirus: What misinformation has spread in Africa?"](#)
- ["The other COVID-19 pandemic: Fake news"](#)
- [Nigeria Centre for Disease Control](#) - countering

Venezuela:

- ["The coronavirus infodemic in Latin America will cost lives"](#)

Ecuador:

- ["Another virus is causing major damage in Ecuador. It's called fake news"](#) - targetted by bot farms from neibouring countries
- [Información chequeada sobre el Coronavirus](#) - Latam countering (case lists, in Spanish)