

Conspiracy Theories

"information is spread faster than the virus itself"

"Theories afford some psychological ballast, a sense of control, an internal narrative to make sense of a world that seems senseless"

People like having someone/something to blame; a reason for the catastrophes that are occurring



CONSPIRACY 1: One of the most popular conspiracy theory surrounding COVID-19 is that the virus was engineered by the Chinese government.

CONSPIRACY 2: Pharmaceutical companies intentionally spread the virus to win power and earn bigger profits

CONSPIRACY 3: COVID-19 is a liberal scam, created to destroy the reputation of Donald Trump

CONSPIRACY 4: 5G radiation weakens our immune systems/directly transmits the COVID-19 virus

CONSPIRACY 5: We can achieve herd immunity by letting the virus spread through the population

CONSPIRACY 6: Bill Gates created COVID to implant microchips in people through the mass vaccination campaign

An estimated 50% of Americans and Canadians believe in at least one COVID-19 conspiracy theory

Conspiracy theories influence people's political beliefs and decisions --> tactic used by politicians

increase in anti-vaxxers in the US and Europe

less people follow public health regulations

more freedom the US to set prices and distribute vaccines

"Directed at those who have fears of getting sick and dying or infecting someone else, and those fears distract people from judging the accuracy of content they may read online."

conspiracies are likely here to stay

"human nature to want to understand goings-on, especially in a crisis when people feel anxious or powerless"



unsure whether the finding for some companies is going towards covid-19

the government will force Canadians into covid-19 internment camps

Trudeau debunking these theories

Susceptibility to conspiracy theories

people who dedicate a lot of time to social media

"the injustice collector" --> impulsive, cold, overconfident, tries to prove others wrong

"the moody figure" --> lonesome, apprehensive, detached



Millions of Americans

pharmaceutical companies profit off the pandemic stocks going up

in reality, government is investing in self-isolation sites for people who can't afford to quarantine

rumour promoted by Ontario MPP Randy Hillier

Bill Gates conspiracy survey in the US

more Republicans or Trump supporters responded positively to the statement than Democrats or Clinton supporters

30-35% said "not sure"

potential personality disorder, psychoticism: odd or paranoid beliefs

The Influence of Social Media

Lauren,
Tina,
Dhrumil

SM Platforms (Twitter, Facebook) increasingly becoming primary sources of news & misinformation for people

Those that consume social media regularly are less likely to observe social distancing and to perceive COVID-19 as a threat

McGill University: people who get their news from social media are more likely to have misperceptions about COVID-19

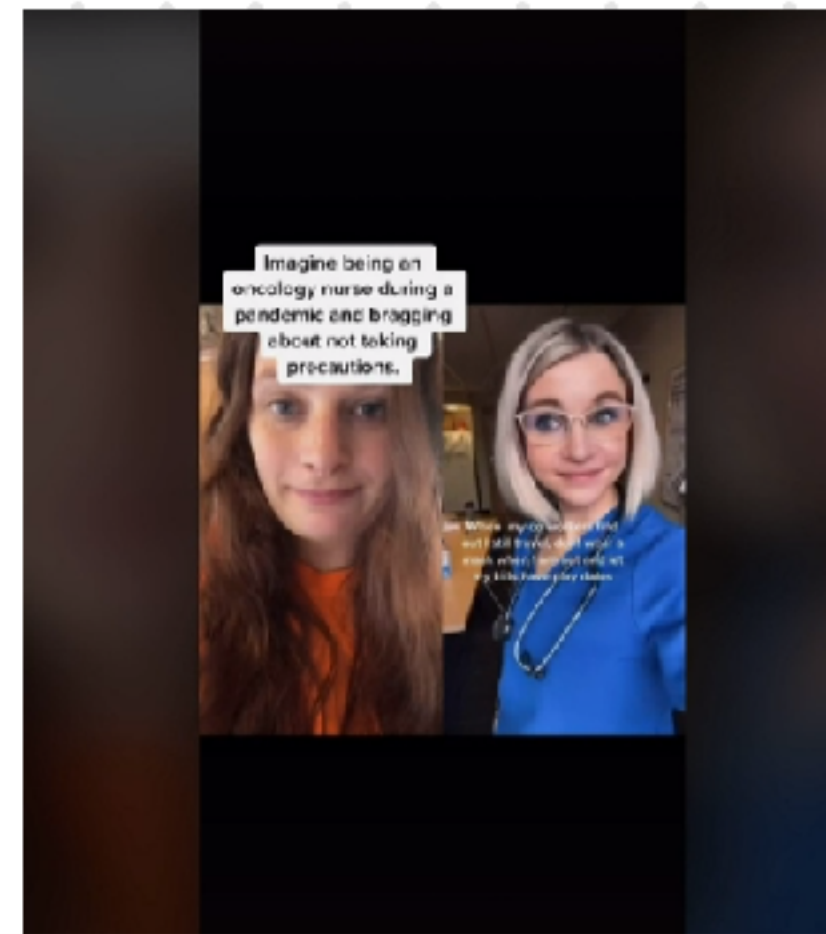
Those that consume traditional news media have fewer misperceptions; more likely to follow public health recommendations

Examples of COVID-19 misperceptions

Social media creates echo chambers for misinformation to grow and spread

A nurse who bragged about breaking Covid-19 rules on TikTok lost her job

In this stressful time, what is personal vs. private when it comes to social media? Who decides whether a joke is too far outside what is considered "ok"?



Samantha Yammine, PhD (aka Science Sam) · 69 · · 13m 18, 2020 · 8 frequently asked questions about vaccines, ANSWERED.
A collaborative post co-authored by some of your fave of COVID science communicators on Instagram. 44

Doctors on social media spreading FACTS about the CORONAVIRUS

8 frequently asked questions about vaccines, ANSWERED

Fewer adults now say the worst of the coronavirus outbreak is yet to come

On social media, Donald Trump was named as a source for 30 + false articles such as the claim that chloroquine is an effective therapy for COVID

Creates splintered groups who each get their news from different sources. Each source provides a different account/perspective of the news.

There are claims about false cures, social distancing measures not working, and 5G causing COVID

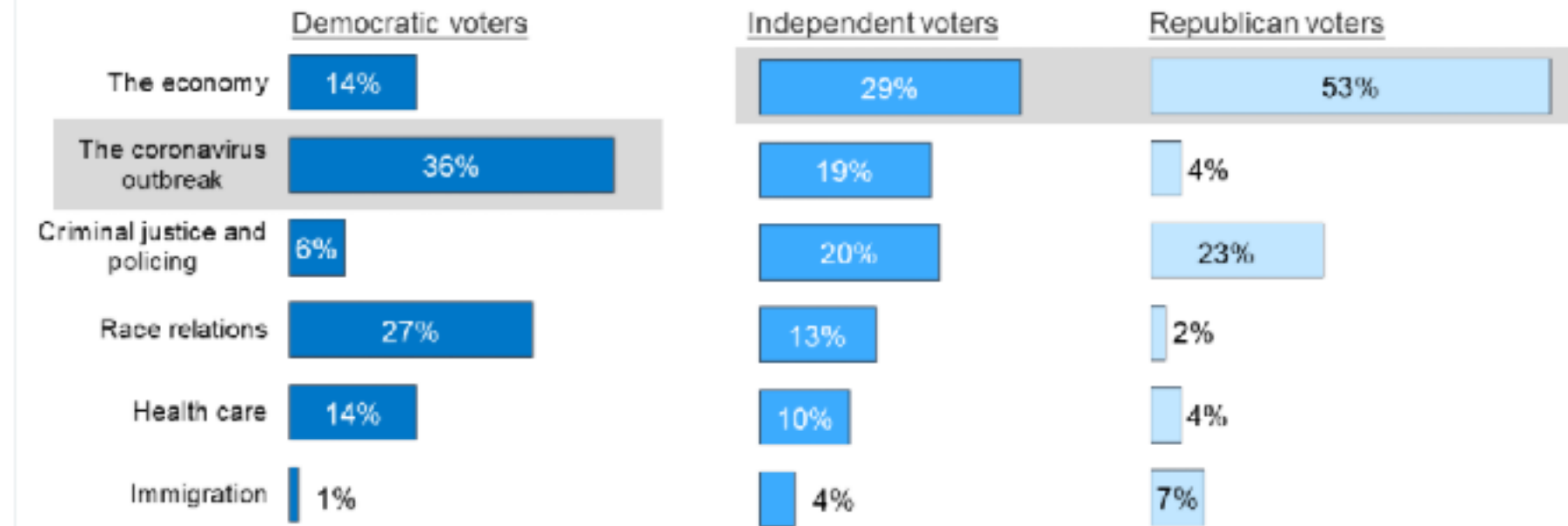
Certain influencers say their opinions as facts which leads to believable misinformation

Different groups have different facts and so can't have a discussion

Figure 2

Democratic Voters Prioritize Coronavirus In Presidential Voting Decision, Republicans Prioritize The Economy

Percent who say each of the following is the **most important issue** in making their decision about who to vote for president:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted August 20-September 3, 2020). See topline for full question wording.

KFF

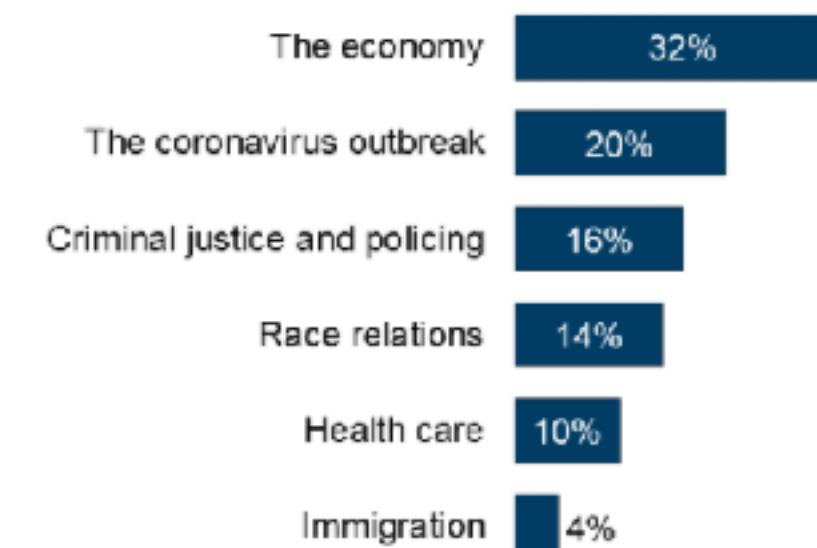
Figure 2: Democratic Voters Prioritize Coronavirus In Presidential Voting Decision, Republicans Prioritize The Economy

Contradicting news: 3 in 4 Republicans have at least 1 misconception, 46% of independents and 1 in 4 Democrats. Steep drop in Republicans' trust of Dr. Anthony Fauci and the CDC.

Figure 1

Voters Say The Economy Is Top Issue For The 2020 Presidential Election

AMONG REGISTERED VOTERS: Percent who say each of the following issues will be the most important in deciding their vote for president:



Discussion: Should social media giants be held responsible for moderating and censoring fake news?

Impact of Pop Culture: Celebrities

Conner,
Andrew P,
Ben, Eric

How celebrities became the biggest peddlers of 5G coronavirus conspiracy theories

Covid-19 is not a secret plot by China, or any other government, and it is spread through human contact, and can only be prevented through self-isolation and social distancing.

Celebrities are trying to convince the public that wireless networks are causing Corona virus.

There are many basic facts about Covid-19, but as always conspiracy theorists have taken the opportunity to spread lies, and false information about its causes.

The largest amount of false information on Covid-19 comes from celebrities.

Celebrities such as actor Woody Harrelson, boxer Amir Khan, Dancing On Ice judge Jason Gardiner, and actress Lucy Watson all believe that Covid-19 was man made, and directly relates to "5G"

People were attacking literal cell phone towers, and harassing tower workers all because of what celebrities are saying, and it also makes it worse that the mainstream media is amplifying their voices by talking about it too much

Celebrities haven't exactly been helpful. Complaining about the struggles of Covid from their million dollar mansions while everyone else is trapped in their houses, and some are now jobless.

Overall celebrities are just being irresponsible with their platforms. Mostly because they are trying to stay relevant and exciting in a tough and surreal time.

Celebrities Are Spreading a Wacky Coronavirus 5G Conspiracy

Scientists have debunked the connection between the virus and 5G networks.

On Twitter Woody Harrelson had posted a link to the installation of 5G networks in Wuhan, China.

Singer M.I.A tweeted, "I don't think 5G causes Covid-19." But she replied, "I think it can confuse or slow the body down in the healing process as the body is learning to cope with new signal wavelengths frequency etc."

Also she said, "The last pandemic came with radio waves," and so she replied with, "Now 5G. The shift is not easy."

As well she said, "WHY ARE THEY STILL WORKING. ??". After that, she wrote, "I'm not feeling well and my symptoms match the 5G symptoms. If they don't stop we are not staying at home!"



Paranoia is being stirred as people are afraid of the hypothetical health effects.

Plandemic

26-minute video which overshadowed Taylor Swift concert and The Office.

Features Judy Mikovits (discredited anti-vax scientist). Hoax about how vaccines caused people to be susceptible to COVID-19.

8 million views on Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Dr. Christiane Northrup shared Plandemic with half a million Facebook followers.

Shared by Reopen America's Move, Nick Catone and Melissa Ackison.

Shared by QAnon.

People are thinking that because all these social media pages are taking the video down because "they have something to hide".

"Fact-checking is censorship"

Perhaps a better solution would be to keep the video up but label it as blatant misinformation so that people would not get the wrong idea, but this shouldn't need to be the case.



The Human Cost of Misinformation

Misinformation can be very dangerous and occurs all over the world. E.g. causing mob attacks in India, mass poisonings in Iran, and telecom engineers being attacked around the world

However, it becomes more dangerous when misinformation is spread in social circles since people are more likely to believe their friends and family than a random person on the internet -> Affinity Bias

Misinformation also causes division among people. For example, hate crime against Asians due to COVID misinformation, COVID deniers vs everyone else, etc



A resident of Phoenix, Arizona in the US died after consuming what they thought was hydroxychloroquine, but was actually a different chemical. His wife said: "Trump kept saying it was pretty much a cure."

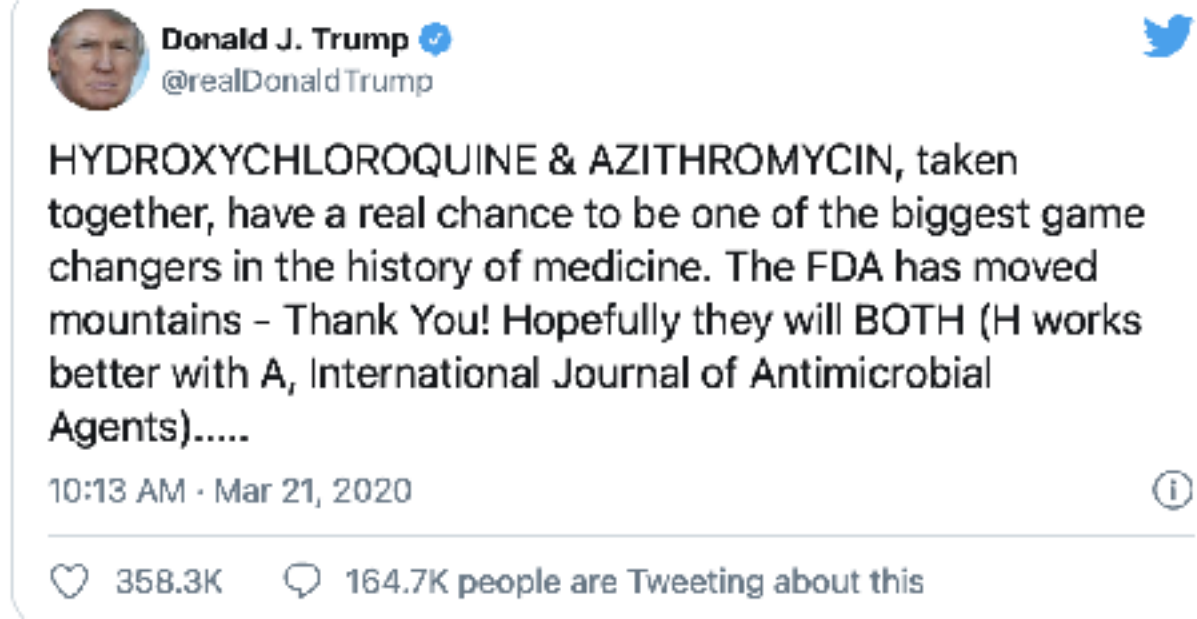
In Iran, 796 people were reported to have died from alcohol poisoning after rumours circulated online about its curative properties. In one case, parents gave illegal booze to their son, causing him to go blind.

Alex, Bill, Cameron



The WHO calls it an "infodemic"

Researchers found over 2,300 reports of COVID-19-related rumours, stigma, and conspiracy theories, in over 25 languages from 87 countries.



Stems from lack of education—some people will believe anything told to them because they can't make their own educated decisions

There are also authorities who enable the harm done by misinformation. For example, government officials who say COVID is "just a flu", and give misleading advice.

A susceptibility to misinformation (and low intent to vaccinate) are correlated to socio-econo-demographic, political, and trust factors. Older age groups in the US are more susceptible.

Local vaccine rejection can have consequences on herd immunity, since the clustering of non-vaccinators can increase the needed number of vaccinations in a single geographic region.

Trump has made remarks about the efficacy of disinfectants, and speculated if they would be useful when consumed or injected. He later said his comments were sarcastic but many others took it literally.

People have gotten sick after ingesting disinfectants. Dr Duncan Maru from Elmhurst Hospital says they "also can have long-term consequences, like cancers and gastrointestinal bleeding."

When misinformation is catered towards very specific groups, people are also likely to believe it and act out.

For example, Muslim citizens in Bangalore attacked doctors after misleading videos spread online of Muslim residents being taken out of hospitals and injected with the virus.

In the end, the dangers of misinformation can be solved through quality education. When people are educated, fewer people will start or spread misinformation online and in their social groups.

This is also very similar to The Danger of a Single Story—People are often reluctant to read about anything that doesn't fit their own narratives. As a result, this may backfire and harm them.

Social media also plays a big role in the spread of misinformation. Sites will often show what people want to see on their feed, which reinforces their confirmation bias.

Woman from Florida died after her and her husband refused to follow covid guidelines. The couple read online that the virus was fabricated and linked to 5G. Her husband continued to work as a taxi driver and didn't wear

a mask or follow social distancing rules.

Mental health problems during COVID-19 outbreak

**Pandemics
can be
stressful :.)**

A study done by PLOS ONE indicated that there have been a significantly high prevalence of mental health problems during the pandemic

**Worrying
about job
security and
support
services**

In a survey done by Reuters Healthcare and Pharma on Chinese citizens, 42.6% of respondents said they experienced anxiety related to the coronavirus outbreak

**Fear and
worry about
health of you
and loved
ones**



**Andy,
Andrew L,
David**

**gang
gang
number 5**



People's opinions on what is happening with Covid-19 is spreading as fast as the virus itself

Accounts owned by official healthcare organizations were responsible for about 10% of the misinformation

Stress impairing cognition often results in the spreading of misinformation

Social media influence caused public panic regarding bulk buying before lockdown

**Twitter is
a nono
zone**



**Ways to
manage stress
and cope with
the pandemic**

Avoid screen burnout - when you don't need to be on a screen try finding other things to do

**Exercise often
and make
time for
relaxation**

**Develop
regular sleep
and eating
patterns**

Stay connected but try to remain indoors (don't try to invade the capitol building)





The Hoaxes of Covid-19

Coronavirus
Meteorite and
extraterrestrial life

A meteorite exploded above North China Last Autumn. Some say that the meteor could have dropped viral DNA that later came into contact with bats and subsequently humans

Extraterrestrial objects could hold viruses. In fact, some scientists believe that the original viruses could have come from meteorites in the past dispersing across the world.

**And it goes from martian to human That's how the virus attacks -
eminem**

<https://time.com/5793520/coronavirus-alien-life/>

**British
believe its
fake news**

The British population was surveyed on their curiosity concerning the virus. statistics showed that 3 out of 5 people strongly believe that the government is misleading them about the cause of the virus.

Due to the new 5th generation cell towers being implemented more frequently throughout the lockdown, many are concerned that the towers are exposing the virus to the general public

Also 1 out of 10 people believed that the chinese government produced this virus to destroy the west.

"I'm absolutely outraged that people would be taking action against the very infrastructure that we need to respond to this health emergency," said by national medical director for England, Stephen Powis.

**Neil,
Vishnu,
& Ivy L**

