

COVID-19 Misinformation “Fake News” and President Donald Trump

Introduction

An “infodemic”, a wave of misinformation, has developed alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. Viral competing explanations and narratives spread quickly through the echo chambers of social media. Drinking bleach will not destroy the coronavirus and it is not a bioweapon created by the Obama administration. Misinformation is a threat to intellectualism and an even greater threat to the health of the public. Many sources of misinformation are people who have been manipulated themselves or seek to profit from confusion and chaos. According to the Cornell study titled *Coronavirus misinformation: quantifying sources and themes in the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’*, media mentions with US President Donald Trump accounted for the largest share of the infodemic comprising 37.9% of the total misinformation conversation. In this report, the University of Connecticut Social Media Analytics Center will support or challenge the Cornell study.

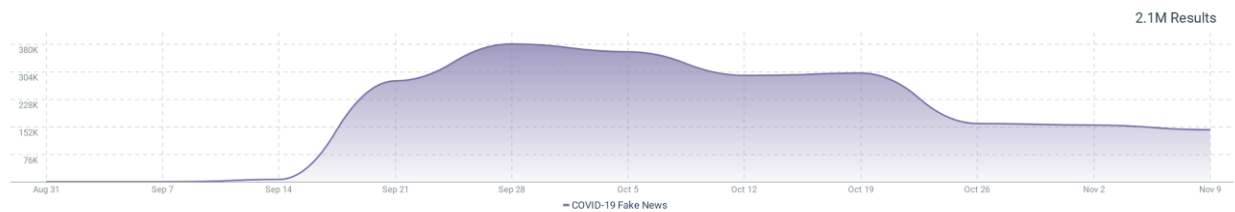
Process

The University of Connecticut Social Media Analytics Center implemented an analysis on President Donald Trump’s spread of fake news mainly through the Talkwalker platform. Talkwalker is a social listening tool that lets users analyze sentiment, engagement, reach, and demographics around online media. We wanted to analyze the data around President Donald Trump’s Twitter posts that mention coronavirus. To do this, our topic query mentions (“coronavirus”, “COVID-19”, “COVID 19”, pandemic, etc). We did not want Talkwalker to confuse corona with the beer so we added this Boolean, “NOT (“beer” OR drink*) **sourcetype**:SOCIALMEDIA_TWITTER”. This filter allows us to pull in data from Twitter that mentions COVID-19 and nothing else. We then added a Donald Trump filter, **authorshort**:realDonaldTrump, to the query as well as a 6 month filter to only retrieve his Twitter posts within the last 6 months. Misinformation statistics were also analyzed holistically and not just from President Donald Trump’s Twitter.

Overview of data

Results

RESULTS OVER TIME




From September 14, 2020 to November 11, 2020, there have been over 2 million conversation exchanges on Twitter regarding COVID-19. There were several sub-categories within the COVID-19 misinformation conversation. Here are the summarized categories:


- **Hydroxychloroquine - “Miracle Cure”**

- Donald Trump has mentioned hydroxychloroquine as a “miracle cure” to COVID-19 as early as March of this year. While there are several other drug and vaccine trials going on, The WHO stated that “there is currently no proof that hydroxychloroquine or any other drug can cure or prevent COVID-19”.

- **President Trump and hydroxychloroquine timeline**

- **March 19** - Trump declares hydroxychloroquine a “game changer”. “The nice part is, it’s been around for a long time, so we know that if it -- if things don’t go as planned, it’s not going to kill anybody”, Trump stated during a task force briefing.
- **March 20** - Trump banks on “a gut feeling” as Dr. Anthony Fauci calls the evidence purely “anecdotal”.
- **March 21** - Trump tweets to his 84 million followers that the drug hydroxychloroquine is “one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine” and “[should] be put in use immediately”, citing a small French study that tested three dozen patients. The publisher of the study issued a notice stating that the study “does not meet the Society’s expected standard...”


 **Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump · Mar 21
HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE & AZITHROMYCIN, taken together, have a real chance to be one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine. The FDA has moved mountains - Thank You! Hopefully they will BOTH (H works better with A, International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents).....
68.6K 126.7K 364.5K

 **Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump · Mar 21
...be put in use IMMEDIATELY. PEOPLE ARE DYING, MOVE FAST, and GOD BLESS EVERYONE! @US_FDA @SteveFDA @CDCgov @DHSgov
15.3K 30.1K 124.7K

Replies

 **Anthony Cornrod** @TWIT_ANTHONY · Mar 21
Replying to @realDonaldTrump
So nice to finally have adults in charge once more. It's been a long time since we've had someone who truly loves America dominating the oval office. Nobody knew we had this hidden animal, and that He would come in the form of Donald J. Trump. OUR MAGA MAN!
🇺🇸❤️🇺🇸👏👏👏👏🇺🇸❤️🇺🇸
475 239 1.7K

 **Owen Michael** @owenjmichael · Mar 21
Replying to @BrandonBeckham_ @realDonaldTrump and @PeterAlexander
Imagine thinking this makes your guy look good
25 23 1.5K

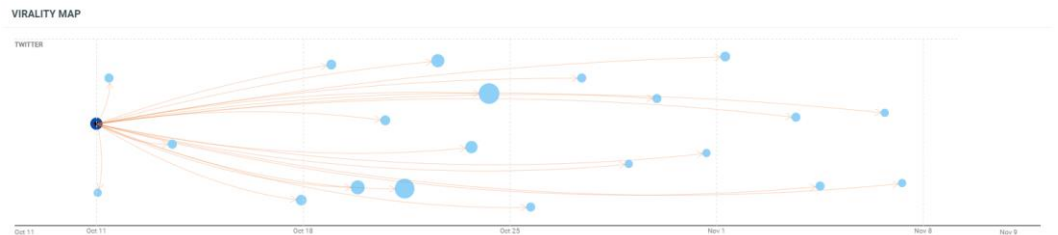
 **Steve Schroeder** @SteveSch_52 · Mar 21
Replying to @BrandonBeckham_ @realDonaldTrump and 3 others
Kung Flu. So if it was true, then big deal. I little humor is in order
108 42 481

- **March 24** - Arizona man dies after ingesting a non-medication chloroquine used in cleaning fish tanks. The wife said “[We] had it in the house... I saw it sitting on the back shelf and thought, ‘Hey, isn’t that the stuff they’re talking about on TV?’”
- **March 28** - FDA approves the use of hydroxychloroquine in case of emergency.
- **April 8** - Medical societies warn the use of the drug in combination with COVID-19 diagnosis stating complications in heart rhythm.
- **April 9** - The National Institutes of Health begins clinical trials of hydroxychloroquine, but the study was later dismantled.
- **April 13** - Brazilian study links fatal heart complications with hydroxychloroquine.
- **April 24** - FDA warns people not to use hydroxychloroquine outside of the monitored hospital setting.



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- **May 11** - A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association shows that hydroxychloroquine is not effective against COVID-19 and instead causes cardiac arrest in patients diagnosed with COVID-19.
- **May 18** - Trump states he's been taking hydroxychloroquine as a "precautionary measure" despite the FDA warning that it should only be administered in an emergency for COVID-19 patients.
- **May 24** - Trump says he "just finished" his two-week hydroxychloroquine regimen and claims it has "tremendous" results.
- **May 28** - Researchers cite a rise in hydroxychloroquine prescriptions due to "off-label prescriptions for COVID-19".
- **June 15** - FDA revokes the emergency use of hydroxychloroquine citing that the drug is "unlikely to be effective in treating COVID-19". During this time, Peter Navarro, a trade adviser to Trump who helped in the distribution of hydroxychloroquine, told The New York Times that the FDA revoked the use of hydroxychloroquine because of "bureaucrats who hate the administration" citing that it is a "Deep State blindside", further spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories.
- **June 20** - NIH abandons hydroxychloroquine trials as FDA revokes the emergency use of the drug, citing "[hydroxychloroquine] was very unlikely to be beneficial to hospitalized patients with COVID-19".
- **July 1** - FDA publishes a report citing "reports of serious heart rhythm problems and other safety issues, including blood and lymph system disorders, kidney injuries, and liver problems and failures" when taking hydroxychloroquine with COVID-19.

- **July 28** - Trump retweets video that features a woman who identifies as a doctor promoting hydroxychloroquine as a “miracle cure” for COVID-19. Twitter flagged the video as misinformation and took the video down as a result. Donald Trump Jr.’s Twitter account was “temporarily limited” for also retweeting the video.
 - <https://twitter.com/ABCPolitics/status/1288235273894203398>
 - Dr. Fauci went on *Good Morning America* the same morning stating that hydroxychloroquine is “not effective” against COVID-19.
- **August 2** - Assistant Secretary of Health Adm. Brett Giroir says he “can’t recommend [hydroxychloroquine] as a treatment” for COVID-19.
- **August 3** - Trump states “[hydroxychloroquine] has tremendous support” stating that if he were to have said not to use hydroxychloroquine, the doctors would have told everyone that “[hydroxychloroquine] is a great thing”.
 - The FDA comments that hydroxychloroquine is “unlikely to kill or inhibit the virus that causes COVID-19” and as a result has revoked the emergency use authorization (EUA) of the drug for treatment of COVID-19. FDA also warned that the use of hydroxychloroquine outside of the hospital setting risks heart rhythm problems.
 - “Doctors” claiming hydroxychloroquine is effective and that COVID-19 is a bioweapon made by China:



RESULTS



Dr. Li-Meng YAN @DrLiMengYAN1 tweeted

Please support Dr. Zelenko! He is a great, heroic doctor, who was forced to be silent just because of helping innocent people against COVID-19 with Hydroxychloroquine! Why could Twitter allow certain accounts, like WHO, to cover up the truth of COVID-19 with CCP?

published on 10/11/20 at 8:56 PM | Twitter | United States | twitter.com



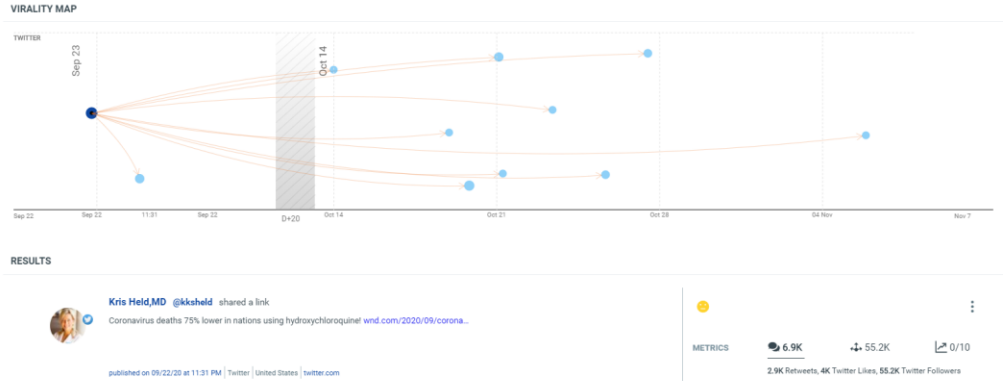
METRICS

7.6K

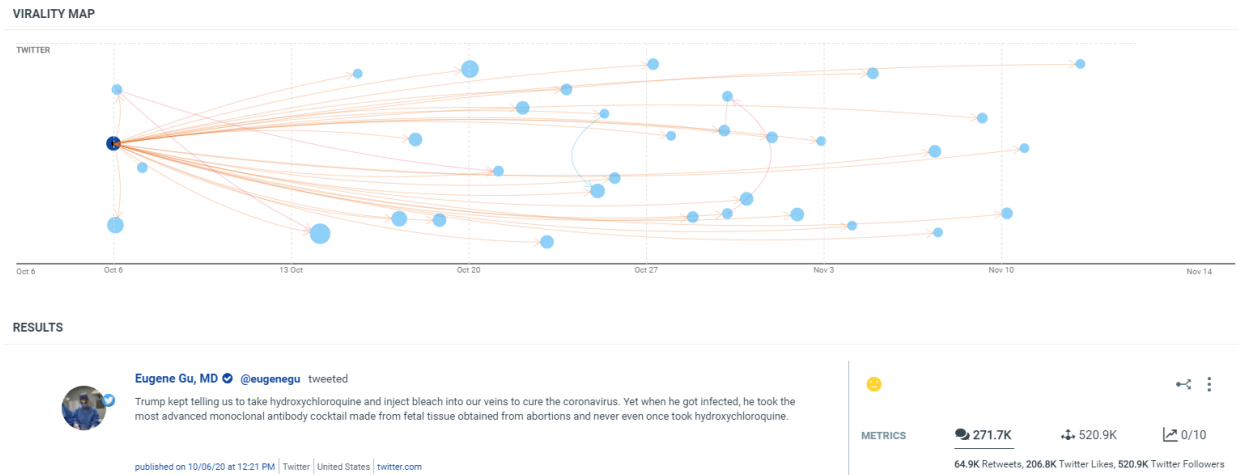
58.9K

0/10

2.9K Retweets, 4.7K Twitter Likes, 58.9K Twitter Followers

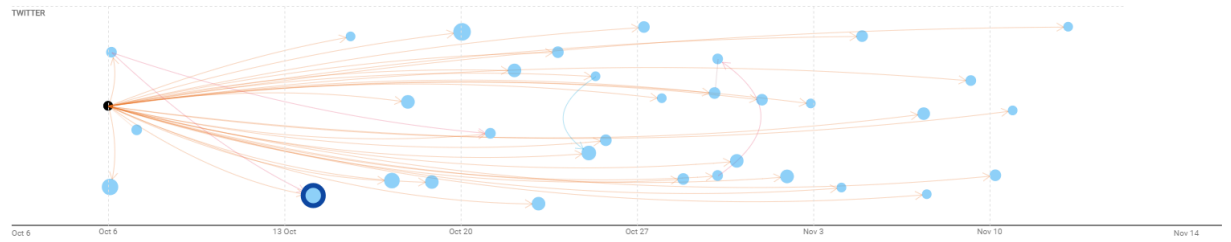


- This graph shows the overall conversation regarding hydroxychloroquine from September 14, 2020 to November 11, 2020. The conversation peaks on September 28th then starts to die down.









- This virality map shows the branches of conversation that stems from a viral tweet from Eugene Gu, MD who calls Donald Trump out on his tweets mentioning hydroxychloroquine.

VIRALITY MAP

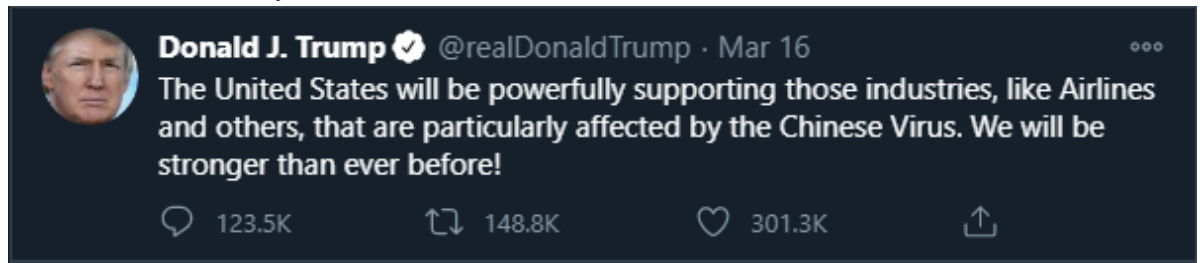


RESULTS

GROUP None - SORT BY Engagement (Most engaging) -

 The Voice Of Reason @portarican_RT tweeted This is 100% TRUTH. I know 3 #Trump supporters that FINALLY saw this as the last straw. There isnt a supporter left that isnt a #Hypocrite now. #GOPHypocrisy #TrumpIsALaughingStock published on 10/14/20 at 6:29 PM Twitter United States twitter.com	 METRICS 🗨️ 27 ↕️ 13.9K 📈 0/10 10 Retweets, 17 Twitter Likes, 13.9K Twitter Followers
 Katherine Pearman @da4ceb607ac34c8 retweeted RT @portarican_RT: This is 100% TRUTH. I know 3 #Trump supporters that FINALLY saw this as the last straw. There isnt a supporter left that isnt a #Hypocrite now. #GOPHypocrisy #TrumpIsALaughingStock published on 10/14/20 at 7:28 PM Twitter United States twitter.com	 METRICS 🗨️ N/A ↕️ 528 📈 N/A 528 Twitter Followers
 cherie @cherie47423630 retweeted RT @portarican_RT: This is 100% TRUTH. I know 3 #Trump supporters that FINALLY saw this as the last straw. There isnt a supporter left that isnt a #Hypocrite now. #GOPHypocrisy #TrumpIsALaughingStock published on 10/14/20 at 6:58 PM Twitter United States twitter.com	 METRICS 🗨️ N/A ↕️ 178 📈 N/A 178 Twitter Followers

- An example of the conversation stemming from Eugene Gu, MD's tweet that calls Trump a hypocrite and liar.
- **The President's Inability to Take COVID-19 Seriously**
 - Since the COVID-19's arrival in March President Donald Trump has neglected treating the virus in a professional manner through his rhetoric on social media. This overall negligence spilled into Americans not taking COVID-19 seriously.



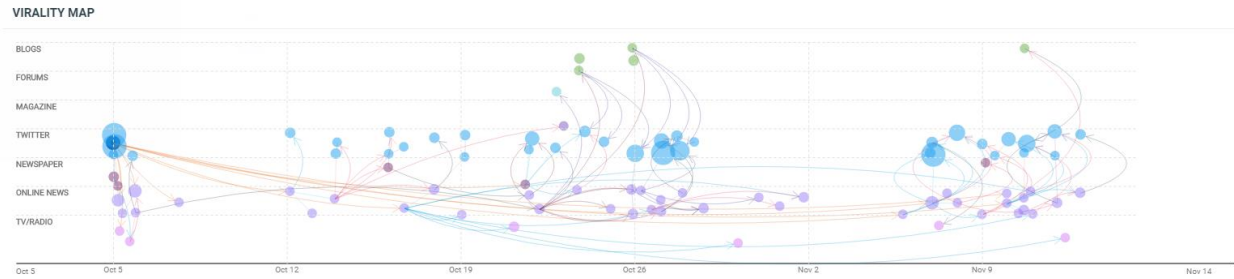
- One early example of Donald Trump's lack of respect for Americans is in one of his first tweets regarding the closure of industries across America due to the pandemic. His tone of businesses in need starkly contrasted his use of the words "Chinese Virus" to refer to COVID-19, validating and perpetuating the harsh racism and xenophobia inflicted on Asian-Americans during the pandemic.



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- Trump's retweet of Lee Smith describing masks as a form of social control is another strong example of Trump's spread of misinformation. And his decision to retweet a tweet that states that masks endorses culture of silence, slavery, and social death is alarming. This behavior on social media is purposefully instigating rejection of masks during a global pandemic.



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- Scott W. Atlas, American Neuroradiologist and Health Care Policy Advisor explained in this now deleted tweet that masks don't work. This tweet was removed by Twitter for being misleading. It's interesting to see how this rhetoric isn't isolated to just the President but some of his advisors as well.



RESULTS


Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump tweeted
 I will be leaving the great Walter Reed Medical Center today at 6:30 PM. Feeling really good! Don't be afraid of Covid. Don't let it dominate your life. We have developed, under the Trump Administration, some really great drugs & knowledge. I feel better than I did 20 years ago!

published on 10/05/20 at 2:37 PM | Twitter | United States | twitter.com

METRICS **722.3K** **87.7M** **0/10**
 131.5K Retweets, 590.8K Twitter Likes, 87.7M Twitter Followers

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- This virality map accompanies one of Trump’s latest tweets in regard to COVID-19. Explaining his departure from the Walter Reed Medical Center after his stay due to being infected by COVID-19. Trump describes COVID-19 as something to not be afraid of. This rhetoric perpetuates Trump's dismissal of COVID-19 as nothing more than the common cold.

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- This tweet made by Donald Trump a week before the election describes his outrage towards the media in continuing to discuss his poor handling of the global pandemic this year.

Implications

Misinformation can lead to devastating results. The BBC reported in August that at least 800 people have died globally due to coronavirus misinformation. Our study has found that Donald Trump plays a very large part in spreading misinformation. We are not saying he is directly responsible for any deaths.

As President of the United States, Donald Trump’s words have major influence on what people think and do. It appears that Trump is not listening to Dr. Fauci and instead wants to move on from talking about COVID-19. Trump recently said at a Florida rally

that he will fire Fauci for reasons including Fauci's criticism of the government's response to the crisis. According to CNN, many people believe Fauci more than Trump and fortunately Trump cannot directly fire Fauci. With President Elect Joe Biden soon to be in office, the world shall see if misinformation will spread as much as with President Trump.

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