

Coronavirus: A Social Media Pandemic

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Amidst the general anxiety surrounding the spread of Coronavirus, a wealth of misinformation within social media adds to the panic. Conspiracy theories range from claims that the virus is a concoction by pharmaceutical companies to increase sales of a yet-to-be released vaccine to claims that there are many medications already in distribution that can immunize people from the virus. Despite the aggressive effort of social media companies, misinformation continues to escalate.

[Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter](#) all recently stated they are making considerable efforts to promote reliable sources of medical information and maintain direct communication with the World Health Organization (“WHO”) and Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Despite their efforts, private groups are still able to share misinformation regarding the virus, including a Facebook group with over 100,000 members. YouTube, while consistently removing videos depicting medically unsubstantiated methods to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, is still host to videos that erroneously claim the virus has a cure. Even though companies are constantly working against the spread of misinformation, false claims continue to surface and remain a constant issue. Even so, there is likely a ceiling to companies’ abilities to limit bad information, especially during a global crisis. WHO not only declared the virus a pandemic, but noted that the virus has sparked an “[infodemic](#),” with an overwhelming amount of information exchanged through social media, both accurate and false.

Fortunately, social media companies are not the only line of defense against the proliferation of “fake news.” WHO launched a program called [EPI-WIN](#), or WHO Information Network for Pandemics, to ensure that appropriate facts about the virus are communicated to the public. The program is rapidly debunking unjustified medical claims on social media and through the use of large-scale employers. Based on a 2020 study, which reflects the idea that employers are the most trusted institution in society, EPI-WIN contacted Fortune 500 companies and others in a variety of industries to advance accurate information through Q&A forums. This endeavor, in conjunction with social media companies, will hopefully slow the spread of harmful and false information.

While misinformation may just be an inconvenience and point of social contention in some situations, it can become hazardous in others. The fact that fake news spreads much more quickly than real news creates a dynamic in which inaccurate medical information could actually worsen the impact of the outbreak. If large portions of the public turn to false treatments, the disease could travel faster and further than it ordinarily would have.

In this time of upheaval, constant change, and misinformation, individuals can employ the “[SIFT technique](#)” to investigate questionable content. SIFT stands for stop, investigate the source, find better coverage, and trace claims, quotes, and media to the original content. This method can help



readers separate reliable information from faulty sources online and help the public stay accurately informed.