Trending mis- and disinformation topics around COVID-19 on social media – January 2021

Analysis Overview:
Time range: 01/01/2021 - 31/01/2021
Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Websites, Blogs
Number of false claims: 100
Number of fact-checks: 51
Content Analysis - Main findings

Featured false claims related to COVID-19 in January 2021:

The vast majority of false claims (42) have been targeting the COVID-19 vaccine:

- It is deemed dangerous, even poisonous.
- People attribute deaths and serious side effects to the vaccines and some go as far as to claim that Pfizer halted its vaccine production due to these deaths.
- The Moderna mRNA vaccine is an operating system.
- The vaccine is radioactive, or a biological warfare weapon.
- It has 50 times more adverse symptoms than the flu vaccine, even after only the first dose.
- Merck pharmaceutical allegedly scrapped its vaccine efforts because natural immunity was preferable to a vaccine.
- Religious fanatics claim it is a sin to take the vaccine, while others, like a Jewish rabbi, claim that the vaccine will “make you gay”.
- There is no real need for the vaccine; it does not work, thus natural immunity should be the only way out of this predicament.
Content Analysis - Main findings

Featured **false claims** related to COVID-19 in January 2021:

**Test-related claims (14):**

- **PCR tests** produce too many **false positives** and are used by the governments to inflate COVID-19 case numbers.
- The **WHO** arguably admitted that the high number of **PCR test cycles** is to be blamed for the false results.
- **PCR tests** are **weapons** for crooked governments who want to **control** the population.

**Mask related claims (13):**

- Many people are still not convinced that the mask is an **effective method of COVID-19 prevention**.
- Masks either do not work or cause harm to people wearing them, especially children.
- The **WHO** allegedly advised against the use of masks.
- **Fauci’s paper** claimed that masks inflicted bacterial **pneumonia** to people during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic.
Featured false claims related to COVID-19 in January 2021:

- The rise of COVID-19 cases proves that lockdowns don’t work.
- COVID-19 cases and deaths are fraudulently inflated by governments to support continuous lockdowns.
- Several medications proven not to work against COVID-19, like hydroxychloroquine, have been approved for use.
- Mortality numbers are highly exaggerated (like in the case of Britain). Statistics are used to impose a state of fear and force people to be vaccinated, wear masks, and stay in confinement.
- Fake pandemic: The COVID-19 crisis serves as part of a global conspiracy to control the population.

Other claims:
Content Analysis - False claims

Total items: 100

COVID-19: Main mis- and disinformation themes

- Vaccine: 42
- Masks: 13
- Mortality: 9
- Medications: 4
- Conspiracy / No pandemic: 9
- Tests: 14
- Lockdowns: 13
- Various: 7
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- Vaccines: 31%
- Fatalities: 15%
- Tests: 17%
- Pandemic exists: 6%
- Other: 13%
- Lockdowns: 7%
- Masks: 11%

Total items: 51
Fact-checks during January focused mostly on vaccine related mis- and disinformation, debunking claims about the death of several people following their inoculation, as these deaths are not proved to be related with the vaccine.

Vaccine production was not stopped due to deaths.

The vaccine’s ingredients are not radioactive and there are no traces of meat inside.

Vaccine immunity is preferable to natural immunity and Merck was misquoted as saying this when it abandoned its new vaccine project.

The virus has indeed been isolated and hence the vaccine has been made possible.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

• Many claims against PCR tests are also debunked (cycles, false positives, sequencing, antibodies etc.).
• There is no evidence that a papaya would test positive in a PCR test.
• As for mortality rates, the deaths from COVID in UK exceed all deaths from the great plague, AIDS, and terrorism combined since 1945. More people are dying now in the UK than in previous years.
• Many false claims regarding suitable medication are also being challenged. For instance, a concoction including ginger, garlic, and onions has not proven to be effective without the use of proper medicines.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- As regards to mask-related claims, a German study does not prove that masks harm children.
- The WHO did not advise against the use of masks.
- There are several studies concluding that masks are a useful weapon against the spread of COVID-19.
- Last but not least, Fauci’s paper did not claim that masks caused bacterial pneumonia during the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918.
Content Curation – Data/Sources

- Time range of selected content: 1-31 January
- Out of the initial bulk, 151 results have been singled out
- Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Websites
- Main keywords: covid19, lockdown, covid-19, coronavirus, nomask, masks, vaccine, 5G, pandemic, plandemic