European Science-Media Hub

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

Analysis Overview:
Time range: 01/03/2021 - 31/03/2021
Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Websites, Blogs
Number of false claims: 97
Number of fact-checks: 43
**Content Analysis - Main findings**

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

- In **Australia**, 80% of the inoculated **Army** personnel suffered severe **side-effects**.
- An **Australian** government Minister suffered **infection** due to the vaccine.
- The UK government is said to be fiddling with **statistics** to cover up for vaccine-related **deaths**.
- The **Astra Zeneca** vaccine was **banned** in 17 countries and SE Asia.
- Boxing legend **Marvin Hagler died** from the vaccine.
- Astra Zeneca means ‘**Weapon that Kills**’.
- The **mRNA** vaccine promotes **cancer**.
- A **WHO yellow vaccine passport** is required for international **travel**.
- The COVID-19 vaccine was made **mandatory** in the Republic of **Congo**.
Content Analysis - Main findings

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

Lockdown-related claims (4):
- Prolonged **lockdowns** are used to push **vaccination**.
- New **variants** are used as a pretext to continue lockdowns.
- People claim that lockdowns are a **psychological attack**.
- Others claim lockdowns are a “**crime**”.

Mask related claims (15):
- People claim that face masks **do not work**.
- Even the **CDC** admits they do not help against COVID-19.
- Masks are **harmful**, especially as the individual inhales plastic particles.
- They are only used to “**suppress the people**”.
- **Double masks** are double **stupid**.
Content Analysis - Main findings

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

- Covid-19 is a major health scam, pushed by the media
- Pineapple extract can dissolve the spike proteins of the virus.
- The US democrats are using the relief package to benefit themselves with bonus money.
- Anthony Fauci funded the Chinese lab in Wuhan, which allegedly leaked the virus, thus sponsoring the pandemic.
- The famous actor Tom Hanks died from COVID-19.
- Images of huge crowds from Montreal and Bucharest supposedly depict freedom protests against the pandemic.
- A woman is captured touching a special forces policeman in a protest.
- PCR tests are a scam.
- More testing means more cases.

Other claims:
Content Analysis - False claims

Total items: 97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>False claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaccine</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masks</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mortality</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccine passport</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy / No pandemic</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lockdowns</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

March 2021
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- Vaccines (18) - 32%
- Masks (7) - 12%
- Mortality (7) - 12%
- Medication/Remedies (5) - 9%
- Statistics (5) - 9%
- Lockdowns (2) - 3%
- Other (13) - 23%

Total items: 43
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- Fact-checks during March focused mostly on vaccine related mis- and disinformation, debunking claims that the COVID-19 vaccine program is a medical experiment.
- An Australian Minister’s skin infection was unrelated to the vaccines.
- The death of famous boxer Marvin Hagler was falsely attributed to vaccine side effects.
- The Astra Zeneca vaccine was not banned in 17 countries.
- A study did not link mRNA vaccines with cancer.
- The Australian military denies severe side-effects to a substantial proportion of vaccinated army personnel.
- A WHO vaccine certificate is not required for international travel.
- The ‘real’ meaning of Astra Zeneca’s name is misleading.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is not obligatory in Congo.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- **Pineapple extract** is not a proven COVID-19 remedy.
- A touching photo depicting a **special unit police officer** and a **woman** is in reality taken from a **2013 rally in Bulgaria**.
- The **Romanian rally** picture is also mis-attributed and has circulated before.
- A picture of a huge crowd in a **Montreal rally** is in fact taken from a **US anti-gun violence** rally.
- The **US Democrats** did not sneak money from the **COVID relief** plan.
- Famous actor **Tom Hanks** did not die from COVID-19 or from any other cause, as he is still alive.
- The medical journal **Lancet** did not admit the ‘**uselessness of PCR test**’ for COVID-19
- **Anthony Fauci** did not fund the **WUHAN lab** in China, thus being responsible for the spread of the pandemic, as reports claim.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

• The US COVID relief plan does not cost 5.750 per capita as is falsely claimed.

• A study did not state, as claimed by Italian media, that the COVID-19 virus needs to freely circulate, thus social distancing should be eliminated.

• As regards to mask-related claims, a CDC study rejecting the effectiveness of face masks is not accurately reported.

• Contrary to some claims, the WHO does support mask-wearing as a protection from COVID-19.
Content Curation – Data/Sources

- Time range of selected content: 1-31 March
- Out of the initial bulk, 140 results have been singled out
- Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Websites
- Main keywords: covid19, lockdown, covid-19, coronavirus, nomask, masks, vaccine, pandemic, plandemic