Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi

Mar 17 • 45 tweets • mtaibbi/status/1636729166631432195

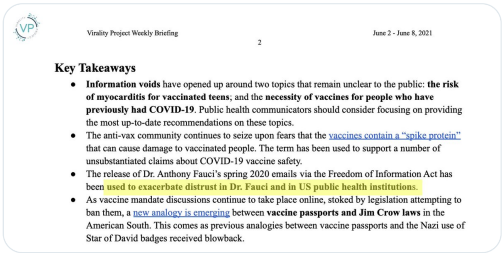
1.TWITTER FILES #19

The Great Covid-19 Lie Machine

Stanford, the Virality Project, and the Censorship of “True Stories”

2.“The release of Dr. Anthony Fauci’s Spring 2020 emails… has been used to exacerbate distrust in Dr. Fauci.”

“Increased distrust in Fauci’s expert guidance.”

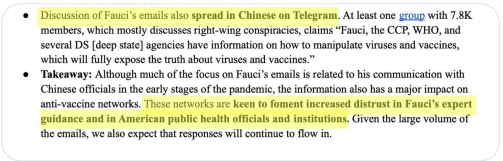


Virality Project Weekly Briefing June 2 - June 8, 2021

2

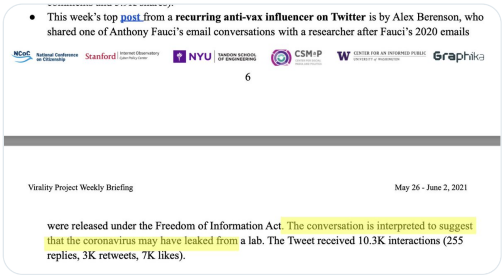
Key Takeaways

- **Information voids** have opened up around two topics that remain unclear to the public: **the risk of myocarditis for vaccinated teens**; and the **necessity of vaccines for people who have previously had COVID-19**. Public health communicators should consider focusing on providing the most up-to-date recommendations on these topics.
- The anti-vax community continues to seize upon fears that the vaccines contain a “spike protein” that can cause damage to vaccinated people. The term has been used to support a number of unsubstantiated claims about COVID-19 vaccine safety.
- The release of Dr. Anthony Fauci’s spring 2020 emails via the Freedom of Information Act has been **used to exacerbate distrust in Dr. Fauci and in US public health institutions**.
- As vaccine mandate discussions continue to take place online, stoked by legislation attempting to ban them, a new analogy is emerging between **vaccine passports and Jim Crow laws** in the American South. This comes as previous analogies between vaccine passports and the Nazi use of Star of David badges received blowback.



- Discussion of Fauci’s emails also **spread in Chinese on Telegram**. At least one group with 7.8K members, which mostly discusses right-wing conspiracies, claims “Fauci, the CCP, WHO, and several DS [deep state] agencies have information on how to manipulate viruses and vaccines, which will fully expose the truth about viruses and vaccines.”
- **Takeaway:** Although much of the focus on Fauci’s emails is related to his communication with Chinese officials in the early stages of the pandemic, the information also has a major impact on anti-vaccine networks. These networks are **keen to foment increased distrust in Fauci’s expert guidance and in American public health officials and institutions**. Given the large volume of the emails, we also expect that responses will continue to flow in.

3.“Reports of vaccinated individuals contracting Covid-19 anyway”; “natural immunity”; suggesting Covid-19 “leaked from a lab”; even “worrisome jokes”:

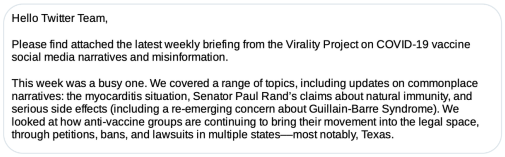


- This week’s top post from a **recurring anti-vax influencer on Twitter** is by Alex Berenson, who shared one of Anthony Fauci’s email conversations with a researcher after Fauci’s 2020 emails

6

Virality Project Weekly Briefing May 26 - June 2, 2021

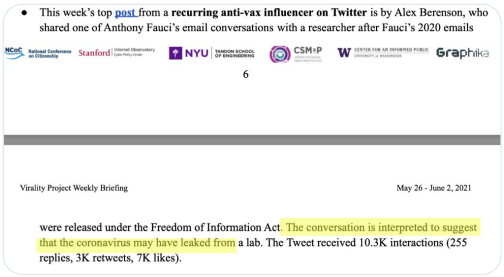
were released under the Freedom of Information Act. The conversation is interpreted to suggest that the coronavirus may have leaked from a lab. The Tweet received 10.3K interactions (255 replies, 3K retweets, 7K likes).



Hello Twitter Team,

Please find attached the latest weekly briefing from the Virality Project on COVID-19 vaccine social media narratives and misinformation.

This week was a busy one. We covered a range of topics, including updates on commonplace narratives: the myocarditis situation, Senator Paul Rand’s claims about natural immunity, and serious side effects (including a re-emerging concern about Guillain-Barre Syndrome). We looked at how anti-vaccine groups are continuing to bring their movement into the legal space, through petitions, bans, and lawsuits in multiple states—most notably, Texas.



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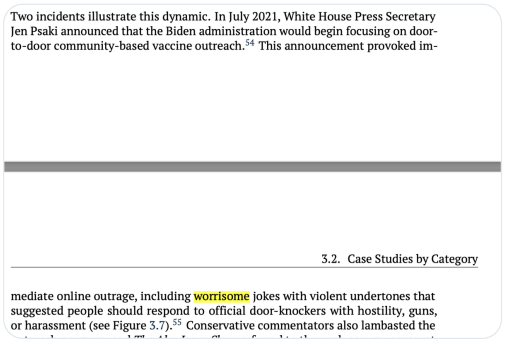


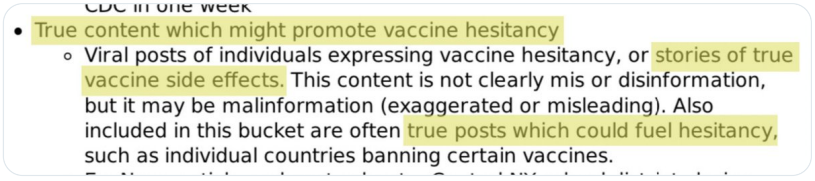
Two incidents illustrate this dynamic. In July 2021, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki announced that the Biden administration would begin focusing on door-to-door community-based vaccine outreach.[54] This announcement provoked im-

3.2. Case Studies by Category

mediate online outrage, including worrisome jokes with violent undertones that suggested people should respond to official door-knockers with hostility, guns, or harassment (see Figure 3.7).[55] Conservative commentators also lambasted the

4.All were characterized as “potential violations” or disinformation “events” by the Virality Project, a sweeping, cross-platform effort to monitor billons of social media posts by Stanford University, federal agencies, and a slew of (often state-funded) NGOs.

5.Just before @ShellenbergerMD and I testified in the House last week, Virality Project emails were found in the #TwitterFiles describing “stories of true vaccine side effects” as actionable content.

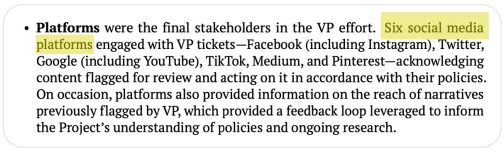


CDC in one week

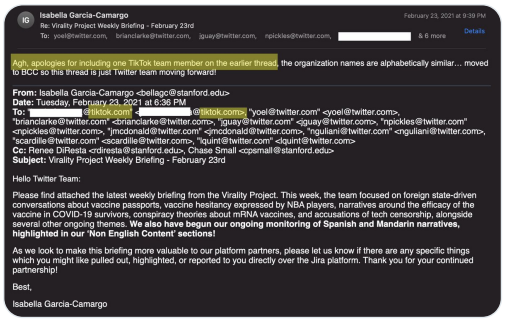
- True content which might promote vaccine hesitancy
  - Viral posts of individuals expressing vaccine hesitancy, or stories of true vaccine side effects. This content is not clearly mis or disinformation, but it may be malinformation (exaggerated or misleading). Also included in this bucket are often true posts which could fuel hesitancy, such as individual countries banning certain vaccines.

6.We’ve since learned the Virality Project in 2021 worked with government to launch a pan-industry monitoring plan for Covid-related content. At least six major Internet platforms were “onboarded” to the same JIRA ticketing system, daily sending millions of items for review.

7.Though the Virality Project reviewed content on a mass scale for Twitter, Google/YouTube, Facebook/Instagram, Medium, TikTok, and Pinterest, it knowingly targeted true material and legitimate political opinion, while often being factually wrong itself.



- **Platforms** were the final stakeholders in the VP effort. Six social media platforms engaged with VP tickets—Facebook (including Instagram), Twitter, Google (including YouTube), TikTok, Medium, and Pinterest—acknowledging content flagged for review and acting on it in accordance with their policies. On occasion, platforms also provided information on the reach of narratives previously flagged by VP, which provided a feedback loop leveraged to inform the Project's understanding of policies and ongoing research.



IG Isabella Garcia-Camargo — February 23, 2021 at 9:39 PM
Re: Virality Project Weekly Briefing - February 23rd
To: yoel@twitter.com, brianclarke@twitter.com, jquay@twitter.com, npickles@twitter.com, [redacted] & 6 more — Details

Ugh, apologies for including one TikTok team member on the earlier thread, the organization names are alphabetically similar... moved to BCC so this thread is just Twitter team moving forward!

From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo <bellagc@stanford.edu>
Date: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 at 6:36 PM
To: [redacted]@tiktok.com, [redacted]@tiktok.com>, "yoel@twitter.com" <yoel@twitter.com>, "brianclarke@twitter.com" <brianclarke@twitter.com>, "jquay@twitter.com" <jquay@twitter.com>, "npickles@twitter.com" <npickles@twitter.com>, "jmcdonald@twitter.com" <jmcdonald@twitter.com>, "nguliani@twitter.com" <nguliani@twitter.com>, "scardille@twitter.com" <scardille@twitter.com>, "iquint@twitter.com" <iquint@twitter.com>
Cc: Renee DiResta <rdiresta@stanford.edu>, Chase Small <cpsmall@stanford.edu>
Subject: Virality Project Weekly Briefing - February 23rd

Hello Twitter Team:

Please find attached the latest weekly briefing from the Virality Project. This week, the team focused on foreign state-driven conversations about vaccine passports, vaccine hesitancy expressed by NBA players, narratives around the efficacy of the vaccine in COVID-19 survivors, conspiracy theories about mRNA vaccines, and accusations of tech censorship, alongside several other ongoing themes. **We also have begun our ongoing monitoring of Spanish and Mandarin narratives, highlighted in our 'Non English Content' sections!**

As we look to make this briefing more valuable to our platform partners, please let us know if there are any specific things which you might like pulled out, highlighted, or reported to you directly over the Jira platform. Thank you for your continued partnership!

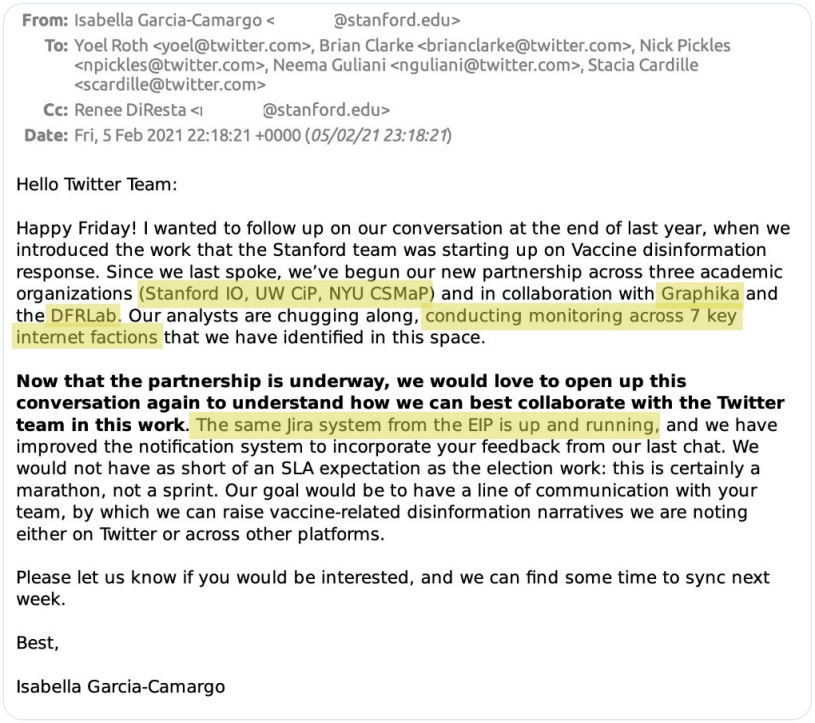
Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

8.This story is important for two reasons. One, as Orwellian proof-of-concept, the Virality Project was a smash success. Government, academia, and an oligopoly of would-be corporate competitors organized quickly behind a secret, unified effort to control political messaging.

9.Two, it accelerated the evolution of digital censorship, moving it from judging truth/untruth to a new, scarier model, openly focused on political narrative at the expense of fact.

10.THE BEGINNING: On February 5, 2021, just after Joe Biden took office, Stanford wrote to Twitter to discuss the Virality Project. By the 17th, Twitter agreed to join and got its first weekly report on "anti-vax disinformation," which contained numerous true stories.



From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo <[redacted]@stanford.edu>
To: Yoel Roth <yoel@twitter.com>, Brian Clarke <brianclarke@twitter.com>, Nick Pickles <npickles@twitter.com>, Neema Guliani <nguliani@twitter.com>, Stacia Cardille <scardille@twitter.com>
Cc: Renee DiResta <[redacted]@stanford.edu>
Date: Fri, 5 Feb 2021 22:18:21 +0000 (*05/02/21 23:18:21*)

Hello Twitter Team:

Happy Friday! I wanted to follow up on our conversation at the end of last year, when we introduced the work that the Stanford team was starting up on Vaccine disinformation response. Since we last spoke, we've begun our new partnership across three academic organizations (Stanford IO, UW CiP, NYU CSMaP) and in collaboration with Graphika and the DFRLab. Our analysts are chugging along, conducting monitoring across 7 key internet factions that we have identified in this space.

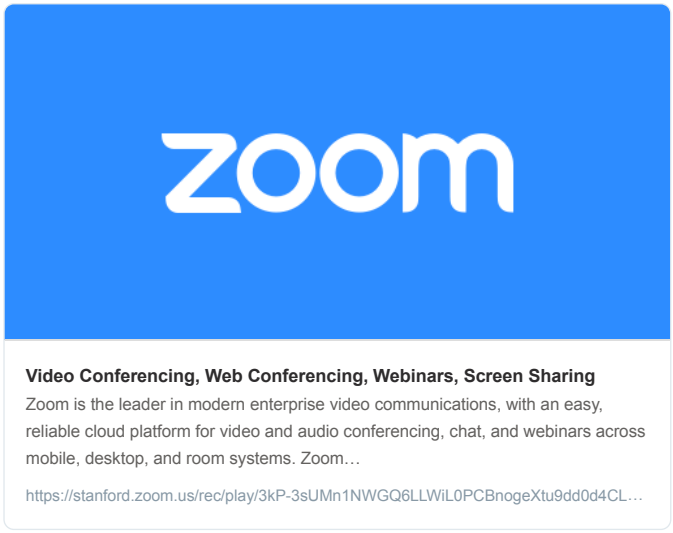
Now that the partnership is underway, we would love to open up this conversation again to understand how we can best collaborate with the Twitter team in this work. The same Jira system from the EIP is up and running, and we have improved the notification system to incorporate your feedback from our last chat. We would not have as short of an SLA expectation as the election work: this is certainly a marathon, not a sprint. Our goal would be to have a line of communication with your team, by which we can raise vaccine-related disinformation narratives we are noting either on Twitter or across other platforms.

Please let us know if you would be interested, and we can find some time to sync next week.

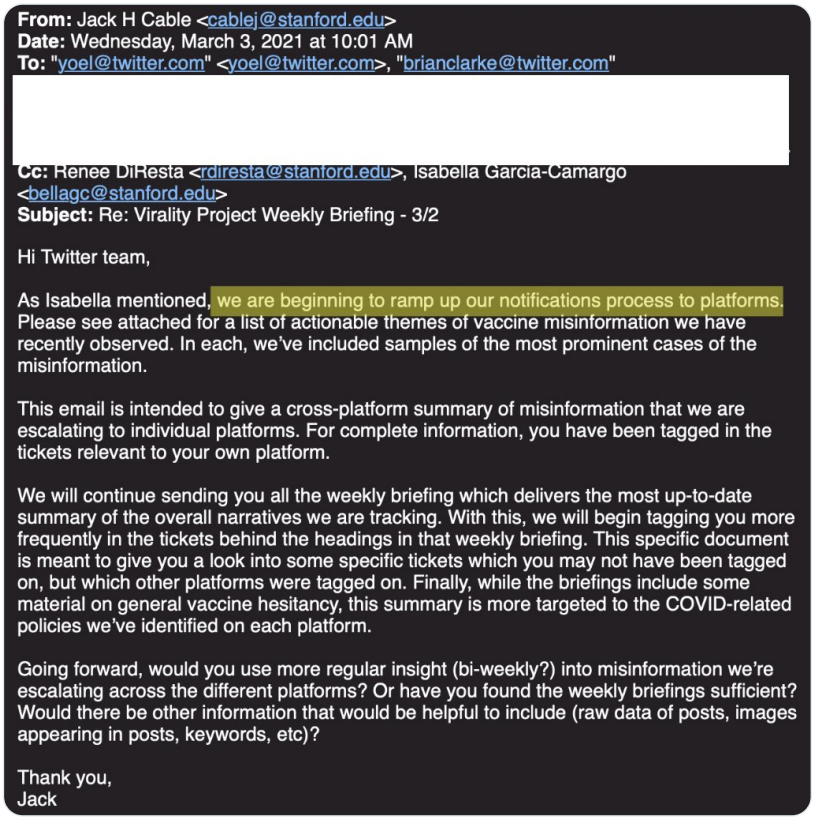
Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

11. February 22, 2021: Stanford welcomed Twitter veterans like Yoel Roth and Brian Clarke, instructing them on how to join the group JIRA system. You can watch the friendly welcome video here:



12. March 2, 2021: "We are beginning to ramp up our notification process to platforms." In addition to the top-7 platforms, VP soon gained "visibility" to "alternative platforms such as Gab, Parler, Telegram, and Gettr" – near-total surveillance of the social media landscape.



From: Jack H Cable <cablej@stanford.edu>
Date: Wednesday, March 3, 2021 at 10:01 AM
To: "yoel@twitter.com" <yoel@twitter.com>, "brianclarke@twitter.com"
[redacted]
Cc: Renee DiResta <rdiresta@stanford.edu>, Isabella Garcia-Camargo <bellagc@stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: Virality Project Weekly Briefing - 3/2

Hi Twitter team,

As Isabella mentioned, we are beginning to ramp up our notifications process to platforms. Please see attached for a list of actionable themes of vaccine misinformation we have recently observed. In each, we've included samples of the most prominent cases of the misinformation.

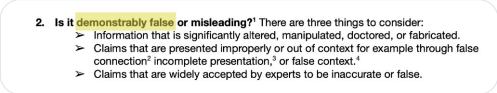
This email is intended to give a cross-platform summary of misinformation that we are escalating to individual platforms. For complete information, you have been tagged in the tickets relevant to your own platform.

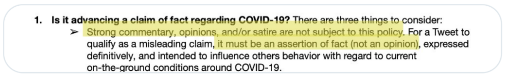
We will continue sending you all the weekly briefing which delivers the most up-to-date summary of the overall narratives we are tracking. With this, we will begin tagging you more frequently in the tickets behind the headings in that weekly briefing. This specific document is meant to give you a look into some specific tickets which you may not have been tagged on, but which other platforms were tagged on. Finally, while the briefings include some material on general vaccine hesitancy, this summary is more targeted to the COVID-related policies we've identified on each platform.

Going forward, would you use more regular insight (bi-weekly?) into misinformation we're escalating across the different platforms? Or have you found the weekly briefings sufficient? Would there be other information that would be helpful to include (raw data of posts, images appearing in posts, keywords, etc)?

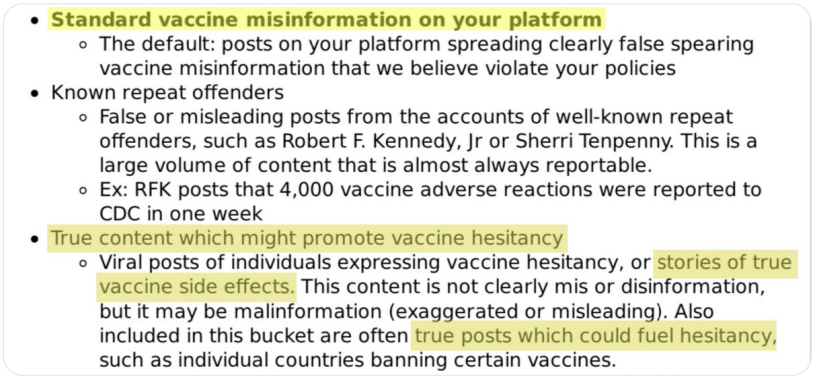
Thank you,
Jack

13.Through July of 2020, Twitter's internal guidance on Covid-19 required a story be "demonstrably false" or contain an "assertion of fact" to be actioned. But the Virality Project, in partnership with the CDC, pushed different standards.

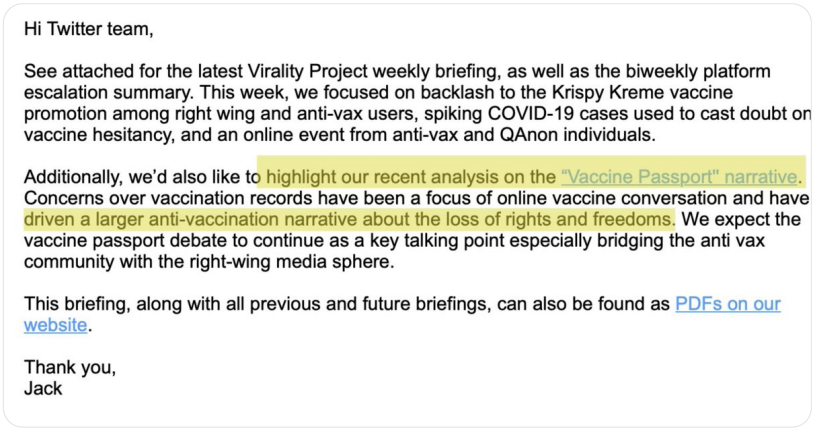

2. **Is it demonstrably false or misleading?**[1] There are three things to consider:
   - ➢ Information that is significantly altered, manipulated, doctored, or fabricated.
   - ➢ Claims that are presented improperly or out of context for example through false connection[2] incomplete presentation,[3] or false context.[4]
   - ➢ Claims that are widely accepted by experts to be inaccurate or false.


1. **Is it advancing a claim of fact regarding COVID-19?** There are three things to consider:
   - ➢ Strong commentary, opinions, and/or satire are not subject to this policy. For a Tweet to qualify as a misleading claim, it must be an assertion of fact (not an opinion), expressed definitively, and intended to influence others behavior with regard to current on-the-ground conditions around COVID-19.

14.VP told Twitter that "true stories that could fuel hesitancy," including things like "celebrity deaths after vaccine" or the closure of a central NY school due to reports of post-vaccine illness, should be considered "Standard Vaccine Misinformation on Your Platform."


- **Standard vaccine misinformation on your platform**
  - The default: posts on your platform spreading clearly false spearing vaccine misinformation that we believe violate your policies
- Known repeat offenders
  - False or misleading posts from the accounts of well-known repeat offenders, such as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr or Sherri Tenpenny. This is a large volume of content that is almost always reportable.
  - Ex: RFK posts that 4,000 vaccine adverse reactions were reported to CDC in one week
- True content which might promote vaccine hesitancy
  - Viral posts of individuals expressing vaccine hesitancy, or stories of true vaccine side effects. This content is not clearly mis or disinformation, but it may be malinformation (exaggerated or misleading). Also included in this bucket are often true posts which could fuel hesitancy, such as individual countries banning certain vaccines.

15. In one email to Twitter, VP addressed what it called the "vaccine passport narrative," saying "concerns" over such programs "have driven a larger anti-vaccination narrative about the loss of rights and freedoms."
This was framed as a "misinformation" event.


Hi Twitter team,

See attached for the latest Virality Project weekly briefing, as well as the biweekly platform escalation summary. This week, we focused on backlash to the Krispy Kreme vaccine promotion among right wing and anti-vax users, spiking COVID-19 cases used to cast doubt on vaccine hesitancy, and an online event from anti-vax and QAnon individuals.

Additionally, we'd also like to highlight our recent analysis on the "Vaccine Passport" narrative. Concerns over vaccination records have been a focus of online vaccine conversation and have driven a larger anti-vaccination narrative about the loss of rights and freedoms. We expect the vaccine passport debate to continue as a key talking point especially bridging the anti vax community with the right-wing media sphere.

This briefing, along with all previous and future briefings, can also be found as PDFs on our website.

Thank you,
Jack

16.VP routinely framed real testimonials about side effects as misinformation, from “true stories” of blood clots from AstraZeneca vaccines to a New York Times story about vaccine recipients who contracted the blood disorder thrombocytopenia.

Safety concerns about AstraZeneca vaccine as countries suspend batches of the vaccine after some recipients experienced blood clots

- True stories of people experiencing blood clots after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine have prompted multiple governments to temporarily suspend vaccinations. This has drawn global attention, including among vaccine-hesitant and anti-vaccine communities.
- Austrian authorities have suspended inoculations with a batch of AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine as a precaution while investigating the death of one person and the illness of another after the shots, neither of which are confirmed to have been caused by vaccination. An Instagram post by prominent conservative British media personality Katie Hopkins, who regularly questions the Pfizer vaccine’s safety, saw 5000 likes. Public Facebook posts mentioning “Austria, AstraZeneca” saw over 500K interactions last week.
- Some countries have only banned a specific batch, such as ABV5300. These countries include Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Austria, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Thailand.
- A tweet from Naomi Wolf, author and conspiracy theorist, was picked up by an Australian anti-lockdown page and was reposted to a Spanish language alternative news channel on Telegram (5,000+ members) that reaches Latinos in the U.S. The tweet reads “updated AGAIN” and lists countries that have suspended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- This event received attention within numerous anti-vax Facebook Groups. The suspensions also received widespread global news coverage and therefore saw spread beyond anti-vaccine communities.
- Foreign state media from Russian and Chinese has also covered these suspensions.
- **Takeaways:** The suspensions of AstraZeneca vaccines in European countries are getting significant international coverage. **Increased doubts in one manufacturer’s vaccine may lead to hesitancy about vaccination overall.** We will continue to monitor discussions of these suspensions.

17.By March of 2021, Twitter personnel were aping VP language, describing "campaigns against vaccine passports," "fear of mandatory immunizations," and "misuse of official reporting tools" as "potential violations."

Re: Virality Project Weekly Briefing - 3/16

From: Joseph Guay <jguay@twitter.com>
Date: Thu, 18 Mar 2021 18:08:02 -0700 (*19/03/21 02:08:02*)
To: Jack H Cable <cablej@stanford.edu>
Cc: yoel@twitter.com <yoel@twitter.com>, brianclarke@twitter.com
j
l , Renee DiResta <[redacted]@stanford.edu>, Isabella Garcia-Camargo <[redacted]@stanford.edu>

Hi Jack and team,

Overall, the weekly reports and real-time escalations provide us with situational awareness regarding emerging trends (even as they implicate other platforms), and with actionable information regarding potential violations on our platform. With regards to Jira reports, in addition to the default escalations you're already providing us, two categories stand out to us as particularly relevant:

- Known repeat offenders on the platform
- Notable content that is not on the Twitter platform

With regard to the weekly reports, the breakdown of the incidents is very helpful in providing context as well as authoritative information to make our assessments. Of the themes and patterns observed by our teams, the following are most interesting for us to continue to track and address:

- Unsubstantiated reports of pregnancy-related injury or death
- Concerns that COVID-19 vaccines are “experimental” or not officially approved
- Misuse of official reporting tools and statistical data to draw false population-level inferences about the safety of vaccines
- Purported links between mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and cancer
- False associations that mRNA vaccines are “gene therapy”
- Potentially misleading theories regarding escape variants
- Campaigns against vaccine passports, inciting fear about mandatory immunizations, and promotion of “vaccine-exemption” cards

Thanks for all your work on this!
Joe

18. This echoed a report to Twitter by the Global Engagement Center re “Russia-linked” accounts: “While this account posts legitimate and accurate COVID-19 updates… it posts content that attacks Italian politicians, the EU, and the United States.” https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u2412d1uWlBr4w5wEEWv6H8Cl8PKyIW0/view

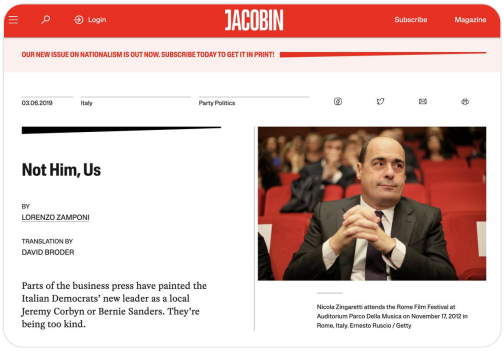
Valeria S. (@valy_s)[11]

- *Bio Line:* Io sono una selva e una notte di alberi scuri,ma chi non ha paura delle mie tenebre troverà anche declivi di rose sotto i miei cipressi.
- *Statistics:* 344K Tweets, 7.1K Following, 32k Followers, Joined January 2012
- *Description:* This account is more subtle than the previous two, but also highly suspicious. At least 12 of the suspected Russian-linked accounts retweeted @valy_s in March, four of which retweeted the account at least 20 times (@Clarembaldo, @gabrillasarti2, @moschettopres, and @frank9you). While this account posts legitimate and accurate COVID-19 updates and news stories, it also posts content that attacks Italian politicians, the EU, and the United States. The account frequently shares divisive news stories and tweets without commentary and has posted an average of 114 tweets per day over the past 8 years.

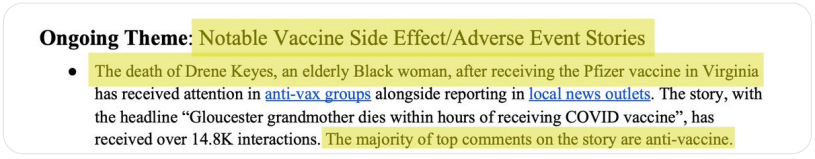
Other Highly Connective Accounts in the Network

User	Tweets	Followers	Following	Acc_ Created	Description	User_Identified_ Location
@borghi_claudio[12]	171,342	81,566	1,219	2011-07	Deputato della Repubblica Italiana eletto in Toscana per la Lega. Consigliere Comunale di Como	Italia
@luigimariano66[13]	26,309	2,276	2,043	2011-12	Il segreto della felicità è la libertà e il segreto della libertà è il coraggio (Pericle) -	- Lecce - Avvocato -
@Musso__[14]	160,715	6,103	2,672	2017-08	"analfabeta funzionale" e "di classe subalterna". ≠ Δ . RT is no endorsement. Il faut saisir les opportunités. Non c'è Turati senza prima Cavour.	
@BotPutins	3,6341	2,291	2,418	2019-07	The Voice of One Crying in The Wilderness. Semi-Automated.	Kremlin's basement
@vicktop55	104,026	9,206	4,682	2010-11		
@GiuseppeConteIT[15]	961	494,013	95	2018-05	Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri della Repubblica Italiana πτ	
@DottAngeloC[16]	25,298	449	483	2018-04	رحمتي تسود على غضبي	
@francescatotolo[17]	48,682	24,802	707	2015-01	Collaboratrice de #IlPrimatoNazionale. Fieramente italiana e patriota,allergica al neo femminismo. #InfernoSpa https://t.co/G6l5rFDCoh	
@RadioSavana[18]	87,748	16,456	2,007	2019-02	#AspettandoPrometeo	Genova, Liguria
@Tizzy44196287[19]	106,149	7,859	7,294	2018-07	Si vive una volta sola....ma se lo fai bene, una volta è abbastanza!!!! DI DESTRA FINO ALLA MORTE!! Membro del #PAFI	Roma, Lazio
@nzingaretti[20]	16,373	505,498	1,806	2011-11	Segretario nazionale del @Pdnetwork e presidente della @regionelazio	

19.That same GEC report found in the #TwitterFiles identified former Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, and former Italian Democratic Party Secretary Nicola Zingaretti (who's been compared to Bernie Sanders) as "highly connective" accounts in a "Russia-linked" network.



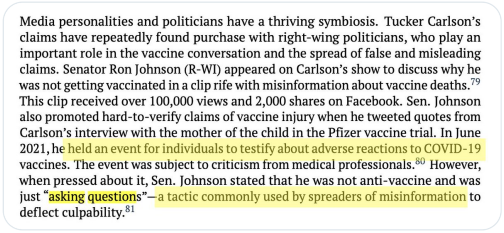
20.The Virality Project helped pioneer the gauging of "disinformation" by audience response. If the post-vaccine death of a black woman named Drene Keyes in Virginia went unnoticed inspired mostly "anti-vaccine" comments on local media, it became a "disinformation" event.



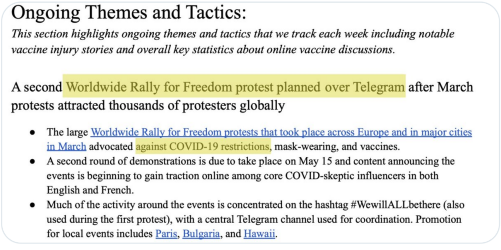
Ongoing Theme: Notable Vaccine Side Effect/Adverse Event Stories

- The death of Drene Keyes, an elderly Black woman, after receiving the Pfizer vaccine in Virginia has received attention in anti-vax groups alongside reporting in local news outlets. The story, with the headline "Gloucester grandmother dies within hours of receiving COVID vaccine", has received over 14.8K interactions. The majority of top comments on the story are anti-vaccine.

21.VP warned against people "just asking questions," implying it was a tactic "commonly used by spreaders of misinformation." It also described a "Worldwide Rally for Freedom planned over Telegram" as a disinformation event.



Media personalities and politicians have a thriving symbiosis. Tucker Carlson's claims have repeatedly found purchase with right-wing politicians, who play an important role in the vaccine conversation and the spread of false and misleading claims. Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) appeared on Carlson's show to discuss why he was not getting vaccinated in a clip rife with misinformation about vaccine deaths.[79] This clip received over 100,000 views and 2,000 shares on Facebook. Sen. Johnson also promoted hard-to-verify claims of vaccine injury when he tweeted quotes from Carlson's interview with the mother of the child in the Pfizer vaccine trial. In June 2021, he held an event for individuals to testify about adverse reactions to COVID-19 vaccines. The event was subject to criticism from medical professionals.[80] However, when pressed about it, Sen. Johnson stated that he was not anti-vaccine and was just "asking questions"—a tactic commonly used by spreaders of misinformation to deflect culpability.[81]



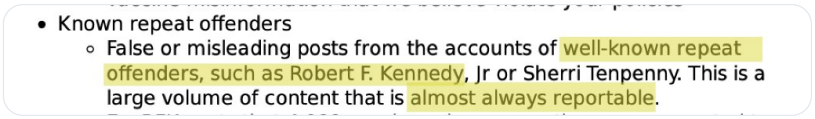
Ongoing Themes and Tactics:

This section highlights ongoing themes and tactics that we track each week including notable vaccine injury stories and overall key statistics about online vaccine discussions.

A second Worldwide Rally for Freedom protest planned over Telegram after March protests attracted thousands of protesters globally

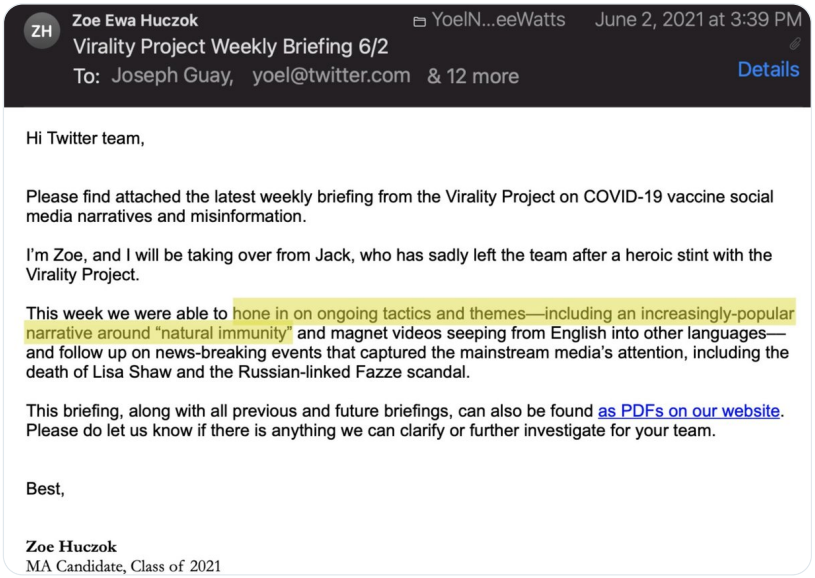
- The large Worldwide Rally for Freedom protests that took place across Europe and in major cities in March advocated against COVID-19 restrictions, mask-wearing, and vaccines.
- A second round of demonstrations is due to take place on May 15 and content announcing the events is beginning to gain traction online among core COVID-skeptic influencers in both English and French.
- Much of the activity around the events is concentrated on the hashtag #WewillALLbethere (also used during the first protest), with a central Telegram channel used for coordination. Promotion for local events includes Paris, Bulgaria, and Hawaii.

22."ALMOST ALWAYS REPORTABLE" It encouraged platforms to target people, not posts, using Minority Report-style “pre-crime” logic. Describing “repeat offenders” like Robert Kennedy, Jr., it spoke of a “large volume of content that is almost always reportable.”



- Known repeat offenders
  - False or misleading posts from the accounts of well-known repeat offenders, such as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr or Sherri Tenpenny. This is a large volume of content that is almost always reportable.

23.VP was repeatedly, extravagantly wrong. In one email to Twitter on “misinformation,” it spoke of wanting to “hone in” on an “increasingly popular narrative about natural immunity.”



ZH **Zoe Ewa Huczok** YoelN...eeWatts June 2, 2021 at 3:39 PM

Virality Project Weekly Briefing 6/2

To: Joseph Guay, yoel@twitter.com & 12 more Details

Hi Twitter team,

Please find attached the latest weekly briefing from the Virality Project on COVID-19 vaccine social media narratives and misinformation.

I’m Zoe, and I will be taking over from Jack, who has sadly left the team after a heroic stint with the Virality Project.

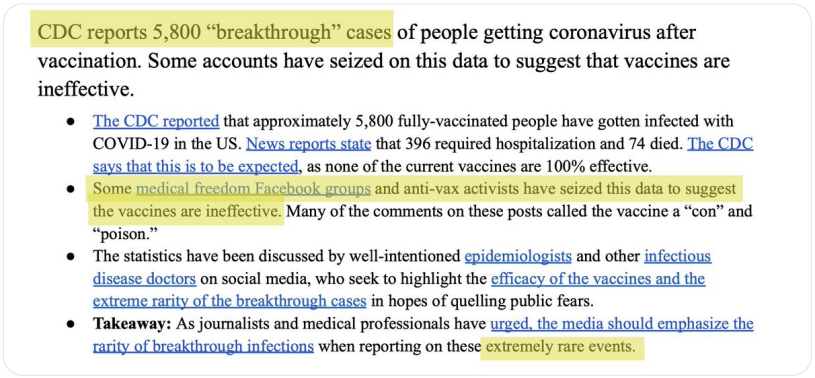
This week we were able to hone in on ongoing tactics and themes—including an increasingly-popular narrative around “natural immunity” and magnet videos seeping from English into other languages—and follow up on news-breaking events that captured the mainstream media’s attention, including the death of Lisa Shaw and the Russian-linked Fazze scandal.

This briefing, along with all previous and future briefings, can also be found as PDFs on our website. Please do let us know if there is anything we can clarify or further investigate for your team.

Best,

Zoe Huczok
MA Candidate, Class of 2021

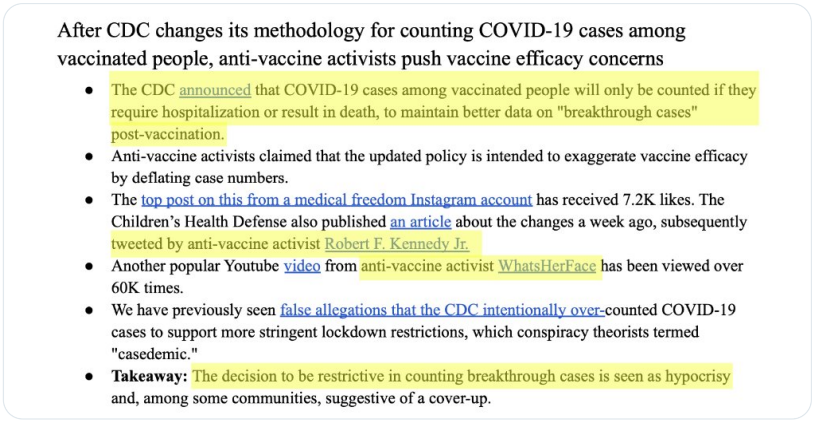
24.The VP in April 2021 mistakenly described “breakthrough” infections as “extremely rare events” that should not be inferred to mean “vaccines are ineffective.”



CDC reports 5,800 “breakthrough” cases of people getting coronavirus after vaccination. Some accounts have seized on this data to suggest that vaccines are ineffective.

- The CDC reported that approximately 5,800 fully-vaccinated people have gotten infected with COVID-19 in the US. News reports state that 396 required hospitalization and 74 died. The CDC says that this is to be expected, as none of the current vaccines are 100% effective.
- Some medical freedom Facebook groups and anti-vax activists have seized this data to suggest the vaccines are ineffective. Many of the comments on these posts called the vaccine a “con” and “poison.”
- The statistics have been discussed by well-intentioned epidemiologists and other infectious disease doctors on social media, who seek to highlight the efficacy of the vaccines and the extreme rarity of the breakthrough cases in hopes of quelling public fears.
- **Takeaway:** As journalists and medical professionals have urged, the media should emphasize the rarity of breakthrough infections when reporting on these extremely rare events.

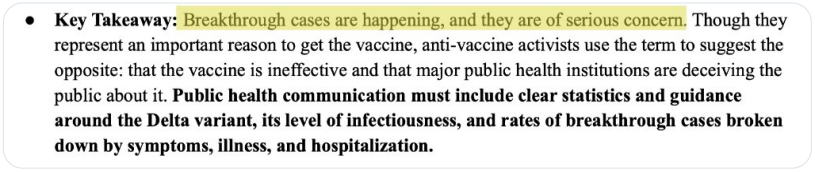
25.Later, when "the CDC changed its methodology for counting Covid-19 cases among vaccinated people," only counting those resulting in hospitalization or death, VP complained that "anti-vaccine" accounts RFK Jr. and "WhatsHerFace" retweeted the story to suggest "hypocrisy."



After CDC changes its methodology for counting COVID-19 cases among vaccinated people, anti-vaccine activists push vaccine efficacy concerns

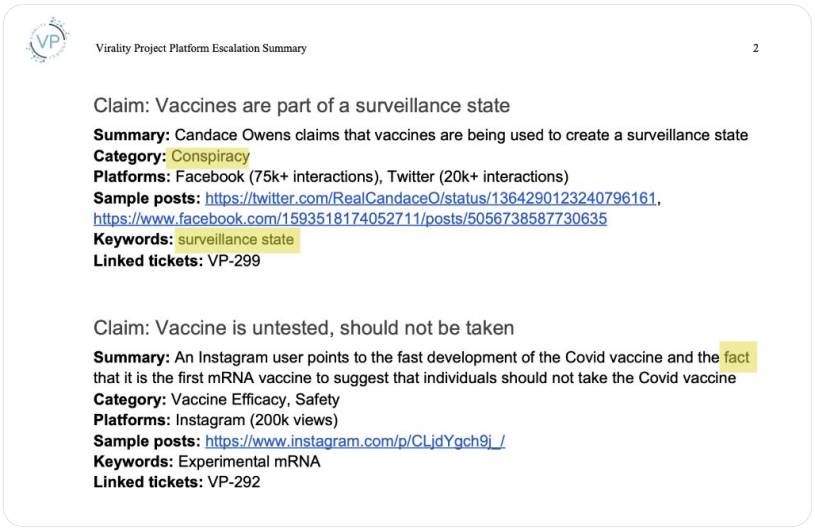
- The CDC announced that COVID-19 cases among vaccinated people will only be counted if they require hospitalization or result in death, to maintain better data on "breakthrough cases" post-vaccination.
- Anti-vaccine activists claimed that the updated policy is intended to exaggerate vaccine efficacy by deflating case numbers.
- The top post on this from a medical freedom Instagram account has received 7.2K likes. The Children's Health Defense also published an article about the changes a week ago, subsequently tweeted by anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
- Another popular Youtube video from anti-vaccine activist WhatsHerFace has been viewed over 60K times.
- We have previously seen false allegations that the CDC intentionally over-counted COVID-19 cases to support more stringent lockdown restrictions, which conspiracy theorists termed "casedemic."
- **Takeaway:** The decision to be restrictive in counting breakthrough cases is seen as hypocrisy and, among some communities, suggestive of a cover-up.

26.A few months later: "Breakthrough cases are happening."



- **Key Takeaway:** Breakthrough cases are happening, and they are of serious concern. Though they represent an important reason to get the vaccine, anti-vaccine activists use the term to suggest the opposite: that the vaccine is ineffective and that major public health institutions are deceiving the public about it. **Public health communication must include clear statistics and guidance around the Delta variant, its level of infectiousness, and rates of breakthrough cases broken down by symptoms, illness, and hospitalization.**

27.In a chilling irony, the VP ran searches for the term "surveillance state." As an unaccountable state-partnered bureaucracy secretly searched it out, the idea that "vaccines are part of a surveillance state" won its own thoughtcrime bucket: "conspiracy."



Virality Project Platform Escalation Summary 2

Claim: Vaccines are part of a surveillance state

Summary: Candace Owens claims that vaccines are being used to create a surveillance state
Category: Conspiracy
Platforms: Facebook (75k+ interactions), Twitter (20k+ interactions)
Sample posts: https://twitter.com/RealCandaceO/status/1364290123240796161, https://www.facebook.com/1593518174052711/posts/5056738587730635
Keywords: surveillance state
Linked tickets: VP-299

Claim: Vaccine is untested, should not be taken

Summary: An Instagram user points to the fast development of the Covid vaccine and the fact that it is the first mRNA vaccine to suggest that individuals should not take the Covid vaccine
Category: Vaccine Efficacy, Safety
Platforms: Instagram (200k views)
Sample posts: https://www.instagram.com/p/CLjdYgch9j_/
Keywords: Experimental mRNA
Linked tickets: VP-292

28.After about a year, on April 26, 2022, the VP issued a report calling for a “rumor-control mechanism to address nationally trending narratives,” and a “Misinformation and Disinformation Center of Excellence” to be housed within CISA, at the Department of Homeland Security.

- Implement a Misinformation and Disinformation Center of Excellence housed within the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.[3]
- Establish a rumor-control mechanism to address nationally trending narratives.

Establish a rumor-control mechanism to debunk nationally trending narratives.

A Rumor Control page could serve as a central authority with information to clarify emerging narratives and get ahead of predictable tropes and narratives (see Figure 6.1). The page can also help coordinate public messaging, much like the CISA's Rumor Control page did for the 2020 US election.[10]

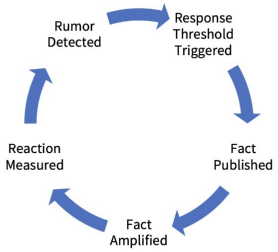


Figure 6.1: The cycle of rumor detection and response a Rumor Control page should follow to counteract mis- and disinformation.

Operators of a Rumor Control page must exercise caution in deciding when to respond to emerging narratives, so as not to accidentally elevate narratives that would otherwise have little reach. First Draft offers five criteria to consider when determining whether to respond to an emerging anti-vaccine narrative.[11] These

29. The next day, April 27, 2022, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced in a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing that a “Disinformation Governance Board” had been created, to be headed by the singing censor, Nina Jankowitz.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/3ypfVsVA70M

30.Even in its final report, VP claimed it was misinformation to suggest the vaccine does not prevent transmission, or that governments are planning to introduce vaccine passports. Both things turned out to be true.

31.The Virality Project was specifically not based on “assertions of fact,” but public submission to authority, acceptance of narrative, and pronouncements by figures like Anthony Fauci. The project's central/animating concept was, "You can't handle the truth."

32. One of its four core partners, Pentagon-funded Graphika, explained in a report about "Fauxi" that because the public cannot be trusted to make judgements on its own, it must be shielded from truths that might undermine its faith in authority.

Home Policy Analysis Rapid Response Weekly Briefings

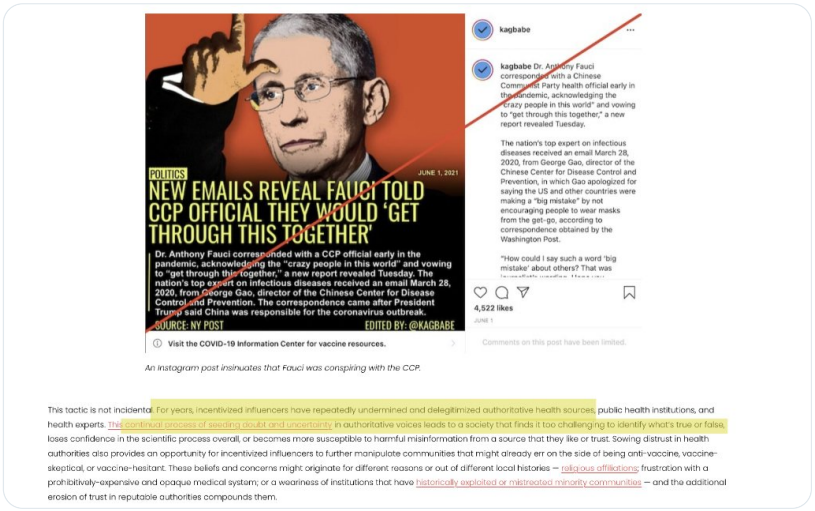
Jun 25

Fauxi: Undermining Authoritative Health Sources

Authors: Erin McAweeney (Graphika), Lily Meyersohn (Stanford Internet Observatory), Avneesh Chandra (Graphika)

The June 1 release of thousands of Dr. Anthony Fauci's emails from his National Institutes of Health account gave the public a glimpse into the challenges experienced by US government officials in the early days of the pandemic. The emails were obtained via FOIA requests submitted by the *Washington Post* and Buzzfeed News and were published by each outlet. Although they were obtained legally, anti-vaccine and conservative influencers have largely referred to the documents as "leaked emails," and quickly began to produce stories alleging that they revealed Fauci's deep ties to the Chinese government, dishonesty in public communications about the lab leak theory of the virus, and otherwise-nefarious intentions for prolonging the pandemic and lying to the public.

33. "This continual process of seeding doubt and uncertainty in authoritative voices," Graphika wrote, in a report sent to Twitter, "leads to a society that finds it too challenging to identify what's true or false."



POLITICS JUNE 1, 2021

NEW EMAILS REVEAL FAUCI TOLD CCP OFFICIAL THEY WOULD 'GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER'

Dr. Anthony Fauci corresponded with a CCP official early in the pandemic, acknowledging the "crazy people in this world" and vowing to "get through this together," a new report revealed Tuesday. The nation's top expert on infectious diseases received an email March 28, 2020, from George Gao, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The correspondence came after President Trump said China was responsible for the coronavirus outbreak.

SOURCE: NY POST EDITED BY: @KAGBABE

Visit the COVID-19 Information Center for vaccine resources.

kagbabe

kagbabe Dr. Anthony Fauci corresponded with a Chinese Communist Party health official early in the pandemic, acknowledging the "crazy people in this world" and vowing to "get through this together," a new report revealed Tuesday.

The nation's top expert on infectious diseases received an email March 28, 2020, from George Gao, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in which Gao apologized for saying the US and other countries were making a "big mistake" by not encouraging people to wear masks from the get-go, according to correspondence obtained by the Washington Post.

"How could I say such a word 'big mistake' about others? That was

4,522 likes

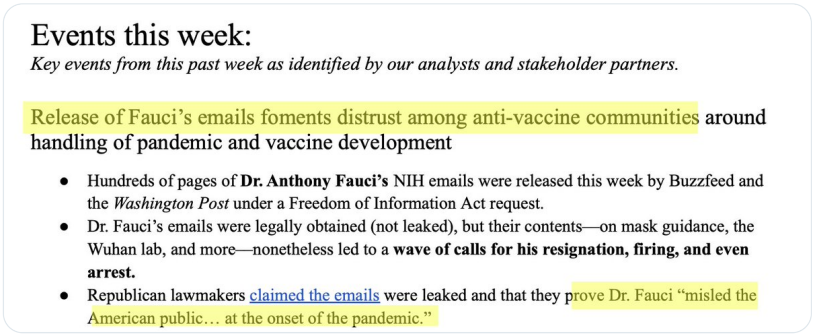
JUNE 1

Comments on this post have been limited.

An Instagram post insinuates that Fauci was conspiring with the CCP.

This tactic is not incidental. For years, incentivized influencers have repeatedly undermined and delegitimized authoritative health sources, public health institutions, and health experts. This continual process of seeding doubt and uncertainty in authoritative voices leads to a society that finds it too challenging to identify what's true or false, loses confidence in the scientific process overall, or becomes more susceptible to harmful misinformation from a source that they like or trust. Sowing distrust in health authorities also provides an opportunity for incentivized influencers to further manipulate communities that might already err on the side of being anti-vaccine, vaccine-skeptical, or vaccine-hesitant. These beliefs and concerns might originate for different reasons or out of different local histories — religious affiliations; frustration with a prohibitively-expensive and opaque medical system; or a weariness of institutions that have historically exploited or mistreated minority communities — and the additional erosion of trust in reputable authorities compounds them.

34.For this reason, the CDC-partnered project focused often on disinformation "events" involving Fauci, saying "release of Fauci's emails foments distrust," and deriding assertions he "misled the public."



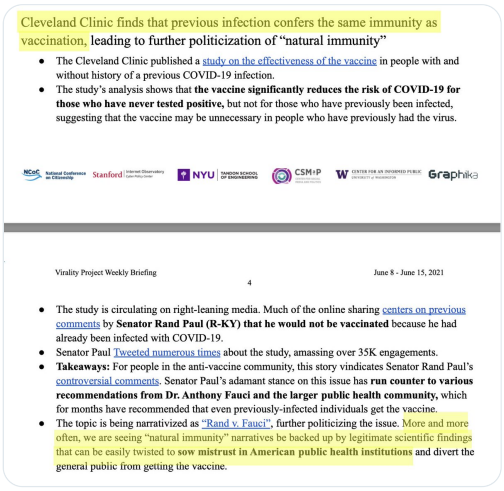
Events this week:

Key events from this past week as identified by our analysts and stakeholder partners.

Release of Fauci's emails foments distrust among anti-vaccine communities around handling of pandemic and vaccine development

- Hundreds of pages of **Dr. Anthony Fauci's** NIH emails were released this week by Buzzfeed and the *Washington Post* under a Freedom of Information Act request.
- Dr. Fauci's emails were legally obtained (not leaked), but their contents—on mask guidance, the Wuhan lab, and more—nonetheless led to a **wave of calls for his resignation, firing, and even arrest.**
- Republican lawmakers claimed the emails were leaked and that they prove Dr. Fauci "misled the American public… at the onset of the pandemic."

35.A Cleveland Clinic study showed previous infection offered the “same immunity” as the vaccine, but VP said discovery was susbservient to narrative: “Whether or not… scientific consensus is changing, ‘natural immunity’ is a key narrative… among anti-vaccine activists.”



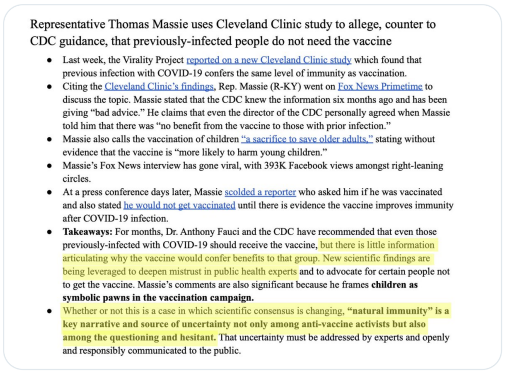
Cleveland Clinic finds that previous infection confers the same immunity as vaccination, leading to further politicization of “natural immunity”

- The Cleveland Clinic published a study on the effectiveness of the vaccine in people with and without history of a previous COVID-19 infection.
- The study’s analysis shows that **the vaccine significantly reduces the risk of COVID-19 for those who have never tested positive,** but not for those who have previously been infected, suggesting that the vaccine may be unnecessary in people who have previously had the virus.

Virality Project Weekly Briefing June 8 - June 15, 2021

4

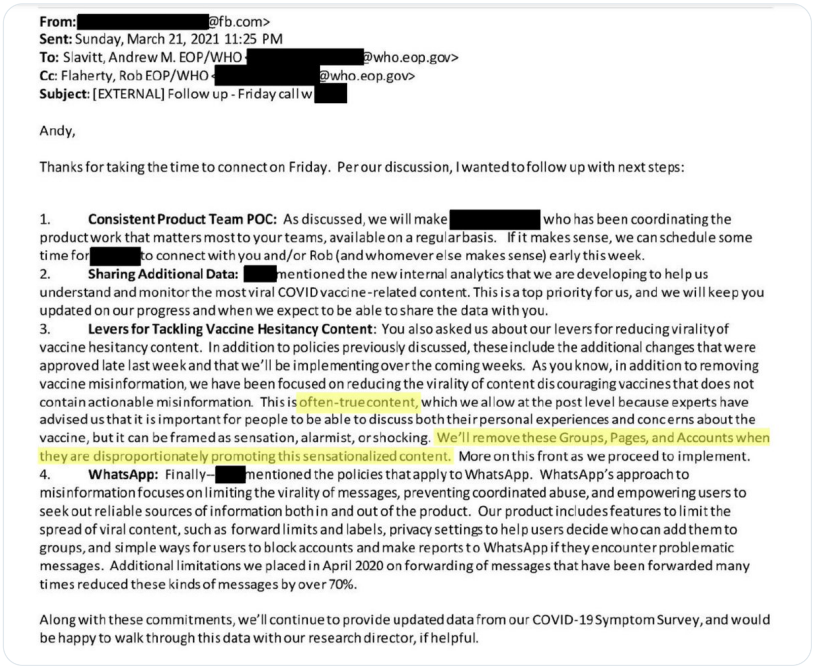
- The study is circulating on right-leaning media. Much of the online sharing centers on previous comments by **Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) that he would not be vaccinated** because he had already been infected with COVID-19.
- Senator Paul Tweeted numerous times about the study, amassing over 35K engagements.
- **Takeaways:** For people in the anti-vaccine community, this story vindicates Senator Rand Paul’s controversial comments. Senator Paul’s adamant stance on this issue has **run counter to various recommendations from Dr. Anthony Fauci and the larger public health community,** which for months have recommended that even previously-infected individuals get the vaccine.
- The topic is being narrativized as “Rand v. Fauci”, further politicizing the issue. More and more often, we are seeing “natural immunity” narratives be backed up by legitimate scientific findings that can be easily twisted to **sow mistrust in American public health institutions** and divert the general public from getting the vaccine.



Representative Thomas Massie uses Cleveland Clinic study to allege, counter to CDC guidance, that previously-infected people do not need the vaccine

- Last week, the Virality Project reported on a new Cleveland Clinic study which found that previous infection with COVID-19 confers the same level of immunity as vaccination.
- Citing the Cleveland Clinic’s findings, Rep. Massie (R-KY) went on Fox News Primetime to discuss the topic. Massie stated that the CDC knew the information six months ago and has been giving “bad advice.” He claims that even the director of the CDC personally agreed when Massie told him that there was “no benefit from the vaccine to those with prior infection.”
- Massie also calls the vaccination of children “a sacrifice to save older adults,” stating without evidence that the vaccine is “more likely to harm young children.”
- Massie’s Fox News interview has gone viral, with 393K Facebook views amongst right-leaning circles.
- At a press conference days later, Massie scolded a reporter who asked him if he was vaccinated and also stated he would not get vaccinated until there is evidence the vaccine improves immunity after COVID-19 infection.
- **Takeaways:** For months, Dr. Anthony Fauci and the CDC have recommended that even those previously-infected with COVID-19 should receive the vaccine, but there is little information articulating why the vaccine would confer benefits to that group. New scientific findings are being leveraged to deepen mistrust in public health experts and to advocate for certain people not to get the vaccine. Massie’s comments are also significant because he frames **children as symbolic pawns in the vaccination campaign.**
- Whether or not this is a case in which scientific consensus is changing, **“natural immunity” is a key narrative and source of uncertainty not only among anti-vaccine activists but also among the questioning and hesitant.** That uncertainty must be addressed by experts and openly and responsibly communicated to the public.

36."OFTEN TRUE CONTENT" The Virality Project communications mirror those produced in the recent court case Louisiana vs Biden, which showed Facebook admitting to the WHO that it, too, was censoring true content.



From: [redacted]@fb.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 21, 2021 11:25 PM
To: Slavitt, Andrew M. EOP/WHO <[redacted]@who.eop.gov>
Cc: Flaherty, Rob EOP/WHO <[redacted]@who.eop.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Follow up - Friday call w[redacted]

Andy,

Thanks for taking the time to connect on Friday. Per our discussion, I wanted to follow up with next steps:

1. **Consistent Product Team POC:** As discussed, we will make [redacted] who has been coordinating the product work that matters most to your teams, available on a regular basis. If it makes sense, we can schedule some time for [redacted] to connect with you and/or Rob (and whomever else makes sense) early this week.
2. **Sharing Additional Data:** [redacted] mentioned the new internal analytics that we are developing to help us understand and monitor the most viral COVID vaccine-related content. This is a top priority for us, and we will keep you updated on our progress and when we expect to be able to share the data with you.
3. **Levers for Tackling Vaccine Hesitancy Content**: You also asked us about our levers for reducing virality of vaccine hesitancy content. In addition to policies previously discussed, these include the additional changes that were approved late last week and that we’ll be implementing over the coming weeks. As you know, in addition to removing vaccine misinformation, we have been focused on reducing the virality of content discouraging vaccines that does not contain actionable misinformation. This is often-true content, which we allow at the post level because experts have advised us that it is important for people to be able to discuss both their personal experiences and concerns about the vaccine, but it can be framed as sensation, alarmist, or shocking. We’ll remove these Groups, Pages, and Accounts when they are disproportionately promoting this sensationalized content. More on this front as we proceed to implement.
4. **WhatsApp:** Finally—[redacted] mentioned the policies that apply to WhatsApp. WhatsApp’s approach to misinformation focuses on limiting the virality of messages, preventing coordinated abuse, and empowering users to seek out reliable sources of information both in and out of the product. Our product includes features to limit the spread of viral content, such as forward limits and labels, privacy settings to help users decide who can add them to groups, and simple ways for users to block accounts and make reports to WhatsApp if they encounter problematic messages. Additional limitations we placed in April 2020 on forwarding of messages that have been forwarded many times reduced these kinds of messages by over 70%.

Along with these commitments, we’ll continue to provide updated data from our COVID-19 Symptom Survey, and would be happy to walk through this data with our research director, if helpful.

37.From the start, Stanford explained the Virality Project would essentially continue the work of its 2020 Election Integrity Partnership. “The same JIRA system from the EIP is up and running,” they wrote.

Vaccine Project Work

From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo < @stanford.edu>
To: Yoel Roth <yoel@twitter.com>, Brian Clarke <brianclarke@twitter.com>, Nick Pickles <npickles@twitter.com>, Neema Guliani <nguliani@twitter.com>, Stacia Cardille <scardille@twitter.com>
Cc: Renee DiResta <rdiresta@stanford.edu>
Date: Fri, 5 Feb 2021 22:18:21 +0000 (*05/02/21 23:18:21*)

Hello Twitter Team:

Happy Friday! I wanted to follow up on our conversation at the end of last year, when we introduced the work that the Stanford team was starting up on Vaccine disinformation response. Since we last spoke, we’ve begun our new partnership across three academic organizations (Stanford IO, UW CiP, NYU CSMaP) and in collaboration with Graphika and the DFRLab. Our analysts are chugging along, conducting monitoring across 7 key internet factions that we have identified in this space.

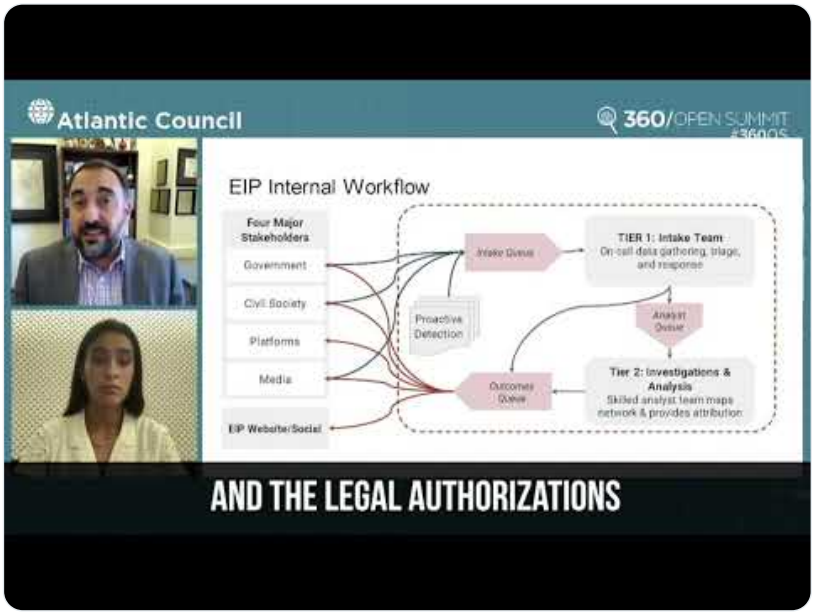
Now that the partnership is underway, we would love to open up this conversation again to understand how we can best collaborate with the Twitter team in this work. The same Jira system from the EIP is up and running, and we have improved the notification system to incorporate your feedback from our last chat. We would not have as short of an SLA expectation as the election work: this is certainly a marathon, not a sprint. Our goal would be to have a line of communication with your team, by which we can raise vaccine-related disinformation narratives we are noting either on Twitter or across other platforms.

Please let us know if you would be interested, and we can find some time to sync next week.

Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

38. In the last #TwitterFiles thread, we posted a video of EIP Director Alex Stamos describing that project as Stanford trying to “fill the gap of things the government couldn’t do” legally. (h/t Foundation for Freedom Online).



https://www.youtube.com/embed/QbF2UXKV1q8

39.We also showed video in which Stamos introduced EIP Research Director Renee DiResta as having "worked for the CIA." DiResta in 2021-2022 would be listed as a "Stanford scholar," "leading" the Virality Project.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/GsooGvgLh7U

As the pandemic continues to be an ongoing health emergency with new variants rapidly spreading, it is increasingly urgent that accurate vaccine-related information be accessible and readily available to the public, said Stanford scholar and leading expert on mis- and disinformation, **Renée DiResta**.

Stanford scholar Renée DiResta is the author of a new report looking how to stop the online spread of mis- and disinformation related to the COVID-19 vaccine. *(Image credit: Andrew Brodhead)*

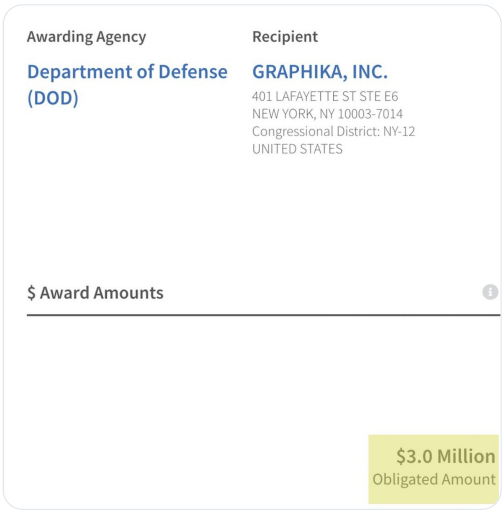
Throughout 2021 and into the present, DiResta's team at the **Stanford Internet Observatory** (SIO) has been working hard to detect and disrupt mis- and disinformation related to the COVID-19 vaccines in real-time as part of her work leading **the Virality Project**, a multi-year effort between SIO and five other research groups. Their collaboration has culminated in a new report, ***Memes, Magnets and Microchips: Narrative dynamics around COVID-19 vaccines***, that offers specific recommendations for how public health officials, social media platforms and other academic institutions can counter and curb the spread of false or misleading information that has a potential negative impact on individual or public health.

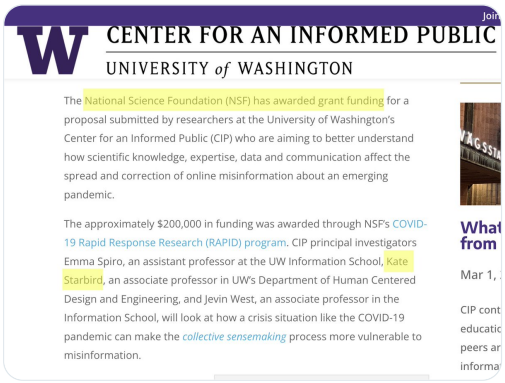
40. By October 2020, Stamos was hinting at the direction of the future Virality Project, telling a national cybersecurity conference that the "Anti-Disinformation" mission needed a new focus.

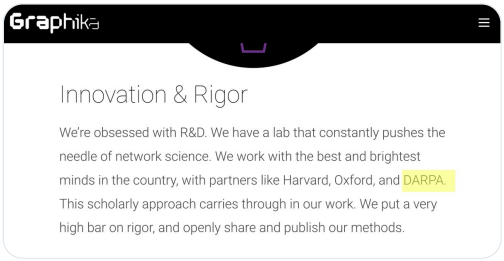
41.“We talk way too much about foreign…it's sexy, and it's fun, and it's a little bit cold warry,” Stamos said, adding the “vast majority” of problems were now domestic. “We have like an 80-20 breakdown… I think that needs to be flipped.”

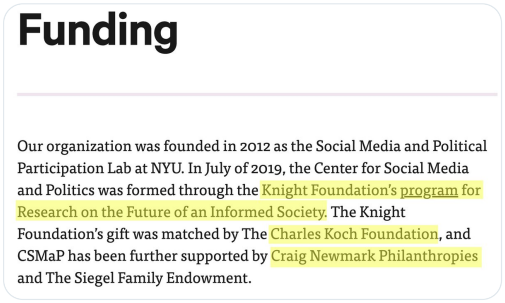
https://www.youtube.com/embed/PGgIf56vEiA

42.VP’s partners: DOD-funded Graphika, the National Science Foundation funded Center for an Informed Public (CIP), the GEC-funded DFRLab, and the NYU Center for Social Media and Politics, or CSMaP.

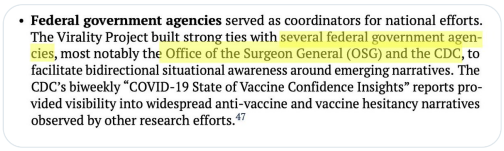




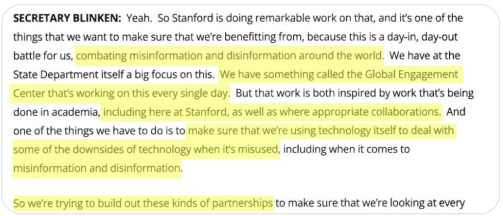




43.VP would later say it partnered with “several government agencies,” including the Office of the Surgeon General and the CDC. It reportedly also worked with DHS’s CISA (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) and GEC, among others.



- **Federal government agencies** served as coordinators for national efforts. The Virality Project built strong ties with several federal government agencies, most notably the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG) and the CDC, to facilitate bidirectional situational awareness around emerging narratives. The CDC's biweekly "COVID-19 State of Vaccine Confidence Insights" reports provided visibility into widespread anti-vaccine and vaccine hesitancy narratives observed by other research efforts.[47]



SECRETARY BLINKEN: Yeah. So Stanford is doing remarkable work on that, and it's one of the things that we want to make sure that we're benefitting from, because this is a day-in, day-out battle for us, combating misinformation and disinformation around the world. We have at the State Department itself a big focus on this. We have something called the Global Engagement Center that's working on this every single day. But that work is both inspired by work that's being done in academia, including here at Stanford, as well as where appropriate collaborations. And one of the things we have to do is to make sure that we're using technology itself to deal with some of the downsides of technology when it's misused, including when it comes to misinformation and disinformation.

So we're trying to build out these kinds of partnerships to make sure that we're looking at every

44.To recap: America’s information mission went from counterterrorism abroad, to stopping “foreign interference” from reaching domestic audiences, to 80% domestic content, much of it true. The “Disinformation Governance Board” is out; but truth-policing is not.

45. Special thanks to @NAffects for hard work on this story, with @Techno_Fog, @ShellenbergerMd, @bergerbell, @SchmidtSue1, @aaronjmate, and the racket.news team. Thanks especially to @MikeBenzCyber. Searches conducted by a third party; material may be left out.

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