

Disinformation on coronavirus 'massive' says report

July 1 2020



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From quack cures to smoking cigarettes to ward off COVID-19, disinformation circulating online about the coronavirus has been massive, a report by five European fact-checking organisations, including AFP, has found.

As the virus reached its peak across Europe in March and April, "false and sometimes dangerous advice about supposed cures" spread rapidly, from gargling with vinegar to drinking disinfectant, said the analysis, which covers the UK, Italy, Spain, Germany and France.

Conspiracy theories also ran wild, the authors said, including that the virus was man-made, that it was linked to the 5G network, with the Microsoft founder Bill Gates a particular focus of paranoia.

"Like a super villain in a James Bond movie, the billionaire is portrayed as someone who wants to 'control people', at any cost," the report found.

In France many claimed that "Gates wants to take advantage of COVID-19 to implant 'microchips' through vaccines in order to label and geolocalise the population."

Hydroxychloroquine, the anti-malaria drug which has not been proven to help beat the [coronavirus](#), was heavily promoted as a possible silver bullet in the UK, Spain and in France, where one of the country's leading virologists also promoted the use of the drug.

It was also touted as potential cure by US President Donald Trump and Tesla chief Elon Musk.

The World Health Organization warned in February that the "infodemic" of [false information](#) about the virus—which has so far claimed more than half a million lives worldwide—was making fighting it more complicated.

False rumours about helicopters spreading pesticide or disinfectant, which appear to have started in Italy, spread to Spain, Germany and Britain.

The report also found that theories often dovetailed with local concerns, with false claims often centring on pets in Britain and on migrants in Germany.

While the wave of disinformation has ebbed in recent weeks, many false cures and theories are still circulating on [social media](#), it said.

The analysis—based on 654 articles published in March and April—was conducted by AFP, Pagella Politica/Facta in Italy, Maldita.es in Spain, Full Fact in the UK and Correctiv in Germany.

The report can be consulted at [COVIDinfodemicurope.com/report/COVID_report.pdf](https://covidinfodemicurope.com/report/COVID_report.pdf).

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