

20 October 2020

PRESS RELEASE

CAC warns about the widespread dissemination of Covid-19 denialism online, despite platforms' control measures

- **The Council has alerted YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to content that questions containment measures recommended by the WHO (face masks) and rejects the validity of PCR tests and vaccines.**
- **The CAC report shows how easily misinformation spreads across networks: only two of the videos analysed already have over 13 million interactions.**
- **The contents analysed have been classed as false by the WHO. The College of Physicians of Barcelona has also corroborated the information as false.**
- **CAC chair finds it particularly alarming that misinformation can endanger people's health, especially in the light of a second spike of the pandemic, and calls for unified criteria to combat misinformation, as the same content may be treated differently according to the platform.**

The Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC) has issued a warning about widespread online dissemination of Covid-19 denialism, despite control measures put in place by video-sharing platforms and social networks. The CAC has adopted a report analysing 35 videos featuring Covid-19 deniers on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

The CAC report shows how easily misinformation spreads across networks: just two of the videos analysed already have over 13 million interactions.

Furthermore, the CAC report stresses that platforms and social networks analysed are putting in place measures to fight Covid-19 disinformation, such as displaying information panels linking to information from official sources and removing or tagging content.

However, there are still videos that cast doubt on the containment measures (face masks) recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), reject

the validity of PCR tests and vaccines, and deny the viral origin of the pandemic, which they claim has been caused by 5G or 'chem trails'.

Most feature people who purport to be medical or science professionals and resort to decontextualising data and facts to lend credibility to their arguments.

For the purposes of this report, denial theories means theories that go against scientific consensus and that have been classed as false by either the WHO or one of the fact-checking platforms in Spain signatory to the International Fact Checking Network Code of Principles. The College of Physicians of Barcelona has also reviewed the report.

The chair of the CAC, **Roger Loppacher**, has described it as "especially serious that disinformation on Covid-19 can still be found so easily, which can lead to confusion and endanger people's health, especially in the light of a second spike of the pandemic". "In times of uncertainty, disinformation spreads rapidly and can lead to confusion among the public, who now more than ever need reliable and proven information about the pandemic. We must therefore fight even harder to tackle disinformation and denial of a pandemic that affects us all," he said.

He also warned that "the same denialist content can be treated differently on different platforms. For example, content that has been removed by one may still be available on another. We must urgently unify criteria to combat disinformation and make sure that all platforms have a standardised review system."

The chair of the College of Physicians of Barcelona (CoMB), **Jaume Padrós**, warned: "A situation of fear and threat like this triggers the need for information among the public. This creates an opportunity to send out clear messages, but it is also conducive to disseminating and exaggerating poorly contrasted and dangerous information. Given that this is such a contagious disease with a high mortality rate, the slightest trivialisation poses a great risk." According to the secretary of the CoMB, **Gustavo Tolchinsky**, "we must also be self-critical about messages from various spheres that may have been contradictory, as this has encouraged some denialist rhetoric. However, it is important to note that all of this fake news contains major contradictions and is based on random arguments and the ideological opportunism of various sectors."

The CAC report analyses three types of denialist content related to the pandemic:

- **Denial of the usefulness of containment measures:**

The first type we analysed was denialism that prophylactic measures to tackle the pandemic that the WHO and health authorities have recommended are useful. In 42.9% of the videos analysed, it is argued that masks do not filter the coronavirus, the validity of PCR tests is called into question, or health risks are alleged.

“There are clearly a number of scientific studies that prove that wearing a face mask can have a number of health and psychological complications (...) And apparently even, and this is proven by professor [name], a possible cause of cancer.”

Video no. 24 (Instagram)

“Don't do any tests. I repeat: don't do any tests. There have been complaints from all over the world about the tests even making you ill.”

Video no. 17 (Instagram)

- **Anti-vaccine arguments:**

A second category that emerges when analysing Covid-19 denialist rhetoric comprises videos that defend anti-vaccine claims. These videos reject the usefulness of a future vaccine to combat coronavirus infection and question the safety of such a vaccine, or claim that previous vaccination campaigns are the cause of this disease:

“There are statistical studies that show a high correlation between the flu vaccine and severe Covid-19.”

Video no. 10 (Facebook)

- **Rejection of the viral origin of the pandemic:**

The third category is the rejection of the viral and natural origin of the pandemic, which is the premise in 68.6% of the videos in the sample. They refer to a number of conspiracy theories, including linking Covid-19 to the deployment of 5G technology, 'chem trails', and the beginning of a “new world order”. There are also videos that question the very existence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus or the Covid-19 pandemic:

“Radiation negatively affects a person's health, immune defences and many other things. And it means that someone who receives the virus, even if they're asymptomatic, will generate the disease far more easily if they're exposed to 5G radiation.”

Video no. 16 (Facebook)

“We as doctors have many doubts about the history of Covid-19, about whether the official story is true. In fact we have many doubts and evidence that this is fake news, a hoax.”

Video no. 11 (Facebook)

The CAC report shows how the videos analysed aim to be credible and therefore disseminated by using a range of visual aids and language to make the denialist rhetoric seem scientific: medical or biological terminology, and speakers wearing white coats resembling doctors in a situation that does not entail giving medical care.

Another strategy we identified is presenting specific cases as evidence of the arguments made, while ignoring information that could go against them.

The *#filmatuhospital* and *#filmyourhospital* challenges are one example of this, which involve encouraging people to film hospitals showing supposedly empty wards and medical staff doing nothing to prove the content creators' point that there is no pandemic:

“Rey Juan Carlos de Móstoles Hospital. Utter health emergency. [...] As you can see, this is the third floor of the Rey Juan Carlos Hospital and it's completely empty. Apparently there were lots of patients here too, right? Or patients would be coming. Well they're neither here nor expected. It's so empty here there's an echo and everything. The third floor, gentlemen. So now you can say that this is a lie and a hoax.”

Video no. 30 (Twitter)

Hospital Rey Juan Carlos(Móstoles) al 30 de agosto del 2020

¡Nos toman el pelo descaradamente! 🤔🤔🤔👍👍👍👍👍



[Analysis of COVID-19 denialist audiovisual content on online platforms and social networks.](#)

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