

Beyond Verification: Algorithmic Authenticity and Polarizing Trust | Items

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Conspiracy theories have mediated the current Covid-19 pandemic, threatening to turn it into a never-ending crisis. According to salient and popular theories, Covid-19 is: (1) a hoax; (2) a Chinese bioweapon; (3) a US bioweapon; (4) a “plandemic,” by which Bill Gates will dominate the world through microchips planted via vaccines and activated via 5G radio towers; (5) a “plandemic,” by which pharmaceutical companies will make billions through vaccines. The effects of these conspiracies bleed well beyond their proponents. If enough people hesitate to become or refuse to be immunized for Covid-19, we will not attain herd immunity. Countering disinformation distracts from action on containing the pandemic and the inequalities that drive its spread. Decades lost to debating the existence of global climate change have made this clear. Conspiracy theories threaten to make the Covid-19 virus—in addition to many strands of disinformation—forever undead.

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