

# PEN America's Guide on COVID-19 and Disinformation | PEN America

By PEN America

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As the coronavirus pandemic heightens nerves, disinformation—defined as information being spread with the intention to mislead—has found fertile ground. In the United States, text messages encouraged people to stock up on food and supplies in advance of a national quarantine. In Europe and China, a video circulated on WhatsApp and TikTok that appeared to show shoppers mobbing a Dutch supermarket. Both warnings were false, and yet both landed in countless inboxes and feeds.

While those messages may have been intended to cause panic, there's also been earnest confusion (what we at PEN America define as misinformation, rather than disinformation). One rumor said a salt water rinse could stop the virus. Another Facebook post claimed scientists had already found a vaccine. People may have shared them out of benevolence or a desire for hopeful news, but both turned out to be inaccurate.

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