

# The pandemic has spawned disinformation campaigns that blend truth, lies, and sincere beliefs | Nieman Journalism Lab

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The COVID-19 pandemic has spawned an infodemic, a vast and complicated mix of information, misinformation and disinformation.

In this environment, false narratives — that the virus was “planned,” that it originated as a bioweapon, that COVID-19 symptoms are caused by 5G wireless communications technology — have spread like wildfire across social media and other communication platforms. Some of these bogus narratives play a role in disinformation campaigns.

The notion of disinformation often brings to mind easy-to-spot propaganda peddled by totalitarian states, but the reality is much more complex. Though disinformation does serve an agenda, it is often camouflaged in facts and advanced by innocent and often well-meaning individuals.

As a researcher who studies how communications technologies are used during crises, I’ve found that this mix of information types makes it difficult for people, including those who build and run online platforms, to distinguish an organic rumor from an organized disinformation campaign. And this challenge is not getting any easier as efforts to understand and respond to COVID-19 get caught up in the political machinations of this year’s presidential election.

[...]

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