

Trading Up the Chain: The Hydroxychloroquine Rumor | Media Manipulation Casebook

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In early 2020 as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) took hold and turned from epidemic to pandemic, global information ecosystems became overwhelmed in what the World Health Organization called an infodemic, “an overabundance of information — some accurate and some not — that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.” In times of crisis, when local, timely, and relevant information is sorely needed, medical misinformation thrives.

This case study focuses on one such rumor: that the antimalarial medications chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) were effective treatments for COVID-19. Beginning as cloaked science published as a Google document, the rumor quickly traded up the chain to President Trump and his administration, who amplified it and muddied the waters around COVID-19.

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