

We Need Platforms That Prioritize Human Rights and Democracy Over Profit | Centre for International Governance Innovation

By Samuel Woolley

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It has been well over a decade since the British General Medical Council found that Andrew Wakefield falsified elements of his study linking autism to the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. Yet the unsubstantiated argument underlying Wakefield's work, which the discredited physician has since falsely presented as a "cover-up," continues to spread online in connection to broader anti-vaccine campaigns related to COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the Delta variant of the virus is spreading across the globe at an alarming rate. With its particular rise among unvaccinated communities, conversations about the problem of vaccine dis- and misinformation are at the forefront of world news. Many of these reports point to the viral spread of misleading, and often completely false, social media content related to the various COVID-19 jabs.

The spread of anti-vaccine content over social media is nothing new. When I first began studying computational propaganda in 2013, my team at the University of Washington was well aware of highly prolific individuals and groups on Twitter and YouTube that spent inordinate amounts of effort to amplify inaccurate and even deliberately misleading anti-vaccine content.

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