

While the truth is still putting on its shoes, Fake News runs rampant in Latin America | Latin America Reports

By Emily Hart

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The Pope shared a joint with a Bolivian President. Drinking bleach is a cure for coronavirus. Vaccinations increase your chance of developing AIDS. A 1960s sci-fi movie predicted the arrival of the Omicron variant.

Viral disinformation straddles the spectrum from comically absurd to dangerously misleading: it's a tsunami of online content which has hit Latin America hard, and with dire consequences – both personal and political.

Latin America is home to over 430 million internet users (a number which has doubled in the last decade) and has one of the world's highest rates of social media use – as well as a young population. Its citizens are particularly prone to getting their news on social media and messaging apps like WhatsApp.

In a pandemic, information becomes a life or death issue: social media and WhatsApp groups across the region were suddenly full of home recipes for prevention and cures to the virus, like bananas, eucalyptus vapors, lemon juice, and (of course) *agua panela* (sugarcane water) – or even bleach – as well as disinformation about vaccines, including conspiracies about mind control chips, satanism, or fetal cells.

[...]

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