

Who Benefits from Health Misinformation? | Data & Society

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It's clear who loses from health misinformation. Mothers lose children after seeking advice in Facebook free-birth groups, measles break out in anti-vaxx communities, children with autism are poisoned from being fed bleach marketed as a miracle cure, and people die from misleading hope about a fake COVID-19 cure.

The answer as to who profits from the casualties of health mis- and disinformation is less obvious than who loses. It's a question I've been getting asked a lot, and it isn't as straightforward an answer as, say, foreign interference in an election to usher a favored candidate into office. Campaigns run by foreign actors meddling with election integrity have a linear thread of content that can be traced back to the political power at the center. The sales of doomsday preparation gear and attention garnered for making bold claims online about the coronavirus spread have clear motivations, but the long-term effect of health mis- and disinformation is more insidious. It's both of a question of who benefits now — a profiteering televangelist or a growing movement against vaccination — but also who profits later from the gradual erosion of institutional belief.

[...]

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