



Virality Project Weekly Briefing #14

March 24, 2021 - March 30, 2021

This report was created by analysts from the [Virality Project](#), a coalition of research entities focused on real-time detection, analysis, and response to COVID-19 anti-vaccine mis- and disinformation. The Virality Project aims to support information exchange between public health officials, government, and social media platforms through weekly briefings and real-time incident response.

Public officials and health organizations interested in officially joining this collaboration can reach the partnership at info@viralityproject.org.

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Key Takeaways

- This week, Krispy Kreme’s offer of free donuts for people who have been vaccinated dominated online conversations about vaccines. While the story received widespread coverage, anti-vax and right-wing accounts used the conversation to elevate false claims about safety concerns and

corporate overreach. **Organizations should be prepared** to deal with anti-vax attention as they offer incentives for vaccinated people.

- As COVID-19 cases spiked in some states, anti-vaccine activists cited poorly worded headlines from various legitimate magazines to falsely connect vaccine rollout to COVID-19 cases. This incident served as yet another reminder that headlines discussing vaccines can easily be taken out of context.
- An online event this week jointly hosted between prominent anti-vax activists and QAnon supporters was the latest example of the convergence of online tactics between these groups. **Mutual concerns about government overreach have led to these groups amplifying each other's platforms.**

Virality Project Update: The Vaccine Passport Narrative in Vaccine Hesitant Communities

- Yesterday, we published a blogpost analyzing the [ongoing discussions about vaccine passports in vaccine-hesitant communities](#). This conversation focuses both on what applications such documents would have, as well as what form the documentation will take.
- Vaccine passports are being **framed as a way to limit the freedoms** of the people by the government and “Big Tech”
- Digitizing proof of vaccination status is also being **framed as a way to systematically disadvantage vulnerable populations**.
- Misleading frames about vaccine passports can happen **on both left and right-leaning political circles**, but at the moment, the narrative that vaccine passports are a loss of freedom and rights is being [pushed across online right-wing conversation](#).
- The narrative of vaccine passports being a loss of rights and freedoms is something we have covered in [previous briefings](#) as a talking point pushed by anti-vaccine communities and in relation to announcements in the UK about a potential vaccine passport program. At the time of this briefing, we have seen these talking points move beyond anti-vaccination and conspiratorial communities to conservative, “medical freedom,” and some left leaning accounts (but not as widespread as right leaning accounts). With [recent public statements by politicians](#), the vaccine passport conversation will continue to evolve both based on US actors and foreign policies (e.g. EU, Israel).
- These critiques are part of a larger, anti-vaccination narrative about **the loss of rights and freedoms** (traditionally framed in relationship to mandates for childhood vaccinations). However, proof of vaccination for travel or school attendance is a long-established practice in many places worldwide including the US.
- The conversation will evolve into not just what documentation would be required, but into what circumstances would it be required (e.g., travelling internationally vs. entering a business). As mentioned in this briefing below, there are already guides online on how to make fake vaccination cards, which we expect to increase in relation to the vaccine passport issue.
- We expect the vaccine passport debate to continue as a key talking point especially bridging the anti vax community with the right-wing media sphere. This is an additional concern because content moderation policies on social media platforms will **most likely not moderate** these conversations, which promote traditional anti-vaccine narratives.

Events this week:

This section contains key events from this past week as identified by our analysts and stakeholder partners.

Krispy Kreme’s vaccine promotion generates controversy and conspiracy theories among Right Wing and Anti-Vax communities

- [Krispy Kreme announced that they would provide free donuts to people who received the COVID-19 vaccine](#) and were met with criticism and [allegations of hypocrisy](#) (for offering a product that contributes to COVID-19 comorbidities while also incentivizing a choice that prevents COVID-19).
- While the concern about the health concerns around donuts [was not limited to anti-vaccine accounts](#), anti-vaxxers leveraged this attention and social media discussion to [reiterate false claims that the vaccine is experimental](#) and accused [Krispy Kreme of medical discrimination](#).
- Natural health Facebook pages alleged that this promotion proved that the goal of COVID-19 vaccine distribution is not health. For example, one post, which received 1.4K interactions, [questions why an unhealthy food would be used to incentivize a supposedly healthy choice](#).
- Additionally, Rizza Islam, an anti-vaccine figure associated with the Nation of Islam who previously promoted the Medical Racism documentary discussed in a previous briefing, [tweeted a claim that Big Pharma may have compensated Krispy Kreme](#) to give donuts to promote their vaccine, which he called “experimental.” His Tweet received 700 interactions on Twitter, and [screenshots have spread to Instagram](#).
- On Patriots.win, an online forum for Trump supporters, a top comment [encourages using a forged vaccine card to get the free donut](#). Overall, comments reiterate the irony that Krispy Kreme also promotes unhealthy foods. The thread has over 1K upvotes.
- A New Jersey gym owner received online attention for his offer [of free gym memberships to people who refused to get a vaccine](#), in response to Krispy Kreme’s offer. This story has been shared by [conservative commentators such as Glenn Beck](#) and [alternative health accounts](#).
- Out of the top 30 Facebook posts about vaccines and Krispy Kreme, stories discussing Krispy Kreme’s promotion received roughly 110K interactions while posts about the New Jersey gym promotion received 85K interactions.
- **Takeaway:** The Krispy Kreme promotion, while a brand marketing effort, was seemingly intended as a gesture to encourage vaccination. However, it generated controversy. **This dynamic may be leveraged as a data void, in which people searching for content for a unique phrase (“krispy kreme vaccine”) find content with false medical information.**

Headlines about COVID-19 cases spiking in states with high vaccination rates prompt concerns about vaccine efficacy

- On March 18, Forbes Magazine published the article, [“Covid Spiking In Over A Dozen States—Most With High Vaccination Rates.”](#) The article explains that highly contagious variants

are causing the increase in COVID-19 cases, and that “national vaccination efforts are in a race against the contagious strains.”

- While the article is not intended to further COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, prominent anti-vax activists shared the headline on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to undermine confidence in the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines.
- While [comments on the Facebook post from Forbes itself](#) mostly point out that vaccination rates and COVID-19 cases are unrelated, the headline alone is effective enough that it has been leveraged by those opposed to the vaccine.
- The Forbes article has received roughly 14K interactions on Facebook with roughly 7.9K of those interactions occurring on anti-vaccine shares of the story. It has also received 1.8K interactions on [anti-vax Instagram posts](#) and has been posted on [conspiracy theory subreddits](#).
- Additional articles from [The Atlantic](#) and [Intelligencer](#) on rising COVID-19 rates have also been shared to discredit vaccine efficacy, though these have received less attention. The Atlantic article, titled “Don’t Be Surprised When Vaccinated People Get Infected,” received 6.2K interactions through [Facebook anti-vax posts](#).
- **Takeaway:** News organizations should ensure that article **headlines are not worded such that they can be taken out of context** to further anti-vax narratives.

Re:Union Summit brings together anti-vax and QAnon wellness influencers, signifying ongoing relationship

- The Re:Union Summit, [an event with high-profile anti-vax activists and QAnon wellness influencers](#) slated to speak, took place last week. Videos of panels and speakers from the event are still available on the event website. The number of attendees is not listed, although the [Telegram channel](#) for the event has close to 3.5K members.
- Some of the most notable speakers include [Chef Pete Evans](#), [Dr. Dolores Cahill](#), [Dr. Rashid Buttar](#), and [Kelly Brogan M.D.](#), all of whom have used their large online platforms to promote COVID-19 misinformation and conspiracies, vaccine misinformation, as well as QAnon content.
- References to “freedom,” “increased centralization” of power, and “waking up” in the promotional content indicate the continued overlap of health misinformation accounts and more conspiracy-theory-oriented accounts. A [social media profile of the summit co-creator Josh del Sol](#), for instance, features 5G and Bill Gates conspiracies, anti-mask and anti-vax content, COVID-19 hoaxes, QAnon content, and general authoritarianism-focused conspiracy theories.
- The most popular content related to the event has come from speakers promoting it, including [Troy Casey](#), [Sayer Ji](#), [Alec Zeck](#), and [Dr. Tommy John](#). Other content from the event has yet to be posted, although it appears that one interview from the event has been uploaded to RE:Union’s [YouTube channel](#).
- The event also lists [Telegram](#) and [Discord](#) channels for participants. Similar to the event copy, the Telegram channel contains a mix of content on “higher consciousness” and self-help advice interspersed with anti-vax content and a [coordinated effort to attack](#) the [Center for Countering Digital Hate’s report on anti-vax influencers](#).
- **Takeaway:** This event is the latest example of a convergence in rhetoric between anti-vax and QAnon influencers. **The overlap in concerns about “freedom” and government overreach have provided opportunities for these communities to amplify each other’s platforms.**

Non-English and Foreign Spotlight:

This section highlights content in additional languages and content spread by foreign state media. The non-English content and foreign state media targets users in the U.S. though may also have international spread.

Russian state media outlets claim fake vaccines bound for Honduras are part of an “information attack”

- On March 18, [Mexican customs officials](#) seized 1,155 vials containing more than 5,700 doses of fake Sputnik V vaccines aboard a private plane headed for Honduras.
- Mexican officials did not determine the veracity of the doses, but the [Russian Direct Investment Fund](#) reviewed the packaging to make the determination. This determination was echoed by [the Sputnik V account on Twitter](#) with more details on the discrepancy and added images as alleged proof.
- Russia is framing this as a geopolitics-motivated influence operation. The [RT Instagram channel](#) [wrote](#), “The discovery of the fake haul comes amid a wave of perceived 'information attacks' by the West after it was revealed the US attempted to strongarm Brazil into rejecting Sputnik V. Kremlin officials have voiced concerns about other potential attempts to stop the rollout of Sputnik V, pointing the finger at controversial billionaire George Soros and the US government, among others.”
- In their original statement, [the Russian Direct Investment Fund said](#), “This is an example of possible provocations against Sputnik V just as Russian officials warned last week. Mexican government stopped and prevented this provocation possibly aimed at discrediting Sputnik V vaccine through shipment of fake vaccine.”
- 7% of the comments on archived posts mentioned these fake vaccines were an inside job. Of those, half blamed the CIA. 30% of the comments claimed that concerns of fake vaccines were one of the many reasons why they would not receive a vaccine.
- [Reporting](#) also emerged claiming over 1,000 fake Sputnik V vaccines had been administered in Honduras.

Telegram messages tell Chinese Trump supporters to decline vaccine

- Two messages spreading in a Chinese language Telegram group with more than 6,000 members advise Trump supporters not to be vaccinated.
- One message claims that Trump was forced to support vaccination and that his “100% support” of hydroxychloroquine is a clue that he does not want people to be vaccinated. This message has been viewed more than 4.9K times.
- Another message from the same Telegram account shared an anonymous survey that said 97% of respondents would decline the COVID-19 vaccine. The message also says that real Trump supporters should not be vaccinated, as vaccines are part of the deep state plot against Trump. That message has been viewed 4.4K times.

Father of actress Carmen Madrid dies three weeks after receiving Covid-19 vaccine

- Carmen Madrid, a Mexican telenovela actress, is speaking out about her father's death, which she says happened three weeks after he received the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine and experienced negative side effects.
- Spanish-language outlets have covered his death and shared the story on social media, including [People en Español](#), [Univision](#), [De Primero Mano](#), [Ventaneando](#), and [Imagen Televisión](#), garnering more than 260K engagements across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. A few mentions of the story received low engagement on Twitter.
- At least one clip of Madrid's interview on De Primero Mano has also appeared on [TikTok](#), though it has not received much traction.
- **Takeaway:** This story is not explicitly anti-vaccination and has not yet garnered widespread attention in the anti-vaccination community. **However, it has the potential to be exploited, as we have previously observed as high-profile deaths following vaccines are used to further vaccine safety concerns.**

Ongoing Themes and Tactics:

This section highlights ongoing themes and tactics that we track each week including notable vaccine injury stories and overall key statistics about online vaccine discussions.

Ongoing Theme: Eugenio Derbez's interview with Anthony Fauci picked up by Children's Health Defense

- On March 10, Mexican celebrity Eugenio Derbez [interviewed](#) Anthony Fauci on Derbez's Instagram account. Derbez, who admitted he had doubts about the Covid-19 vaccine, asked Fauci several questions framed from an anti-vaccination perspective. We covered this story previously in [Weekly Briefing #12](#).
- On March 19, Children's Health Defense [covered the story](#) and translated the full interview into English. CHD received 1,100 Facebook engagements on the story.
- **Takeaway:** While we often see English-language anti-vaccine content and narratives subsequently translated into other languages, in this case, **a vaccine skeptical story emerged in Spanish and was later translated and packaged for consumption for an English-speaking anti-vaccine audience.**

Ongoing Theme: Bill Gates implicated in vaccine conspiracies, including vaccine passport

- Spanish language YouTube channel [Parafantástico](#) shared a [video making conspiratorial claims about vaccines](#), including that Bill Gates and the Rockefeller Foundation will profit from the introduction of vaccine passports. The video achieved more than 99,000 views in six days.

- The video has spread through a small number of Facebook groups (2.5K engagements total) and was shared in at least one Spanish language anti-vaccination Telegram group with 2,000+ members.
- The video cites the [ID2020 conspiracy](#) and claims that vaccine passports are part of it.

Key Statistics

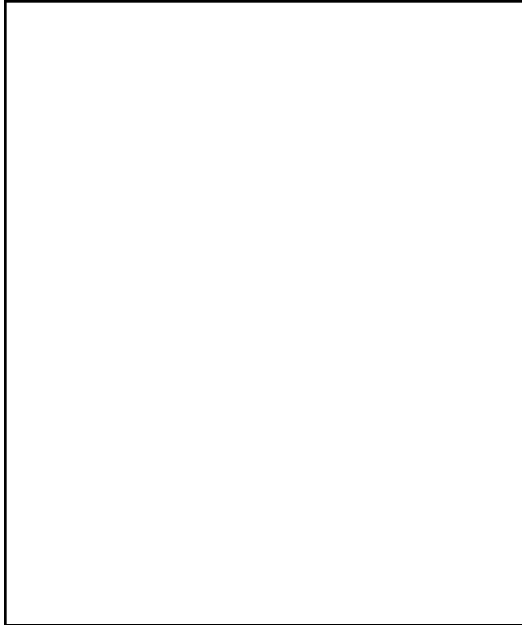
Here we contextualize the above narratives by examining the engagement of other posts from this week.

- The top **Facebook post** from this week containing the word “vaccine” was a photo by [Yeah1 Music](#), captioned in Vietnamese, of Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam Vũ Đức Đam getting vaccinated from the “made in Vietnam” vaccine Nanocovax. The post had over 136K interactions.
- This week’s top **Instagram post** containing the word “vaccine” is a picture of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge standing in Westminster Abbey with masks, posted by their account [kensingtonroyal](#). This post discussed the vaccination center run out of that area and has around 423K interactions.
- This week’s top **post** with the word “vaccine” on **Reddit** is from [/r/mildlyinteresting/](#). The post shows someone showing a label with “3-Skittles” and “2-Smarties” with a package of candies that they purportedly received after getting a COVID-19 vaccine. This post has over 85K upvotes and 2.9K comments. In some comments, users seemed to think that this meant the person was in the “placebo group,” although some of these comments may have been joking.
- This week’s top **post** from a **recurring anti-vax influencer on Facebook** was from [Erin at Health Nut News](#), who shared an article on thehill.com that lists her as one of “12 prominent people” who are “responsible for two-thirds of anti-vaccine content online” and asks users to join [Health Freedom Group](#). It had 2.6K likes and 257 shares.
- This week’s top **Tweet** from a **recurring anti-vax activist on Twitter** was from [Naomi Wolf](#), who retweeted a clip of her interview on Fox News. In the clip, she refers to vaccine passports as “the end of human liberty in the West” and claims that the platforms supporting vaccine passports will have access to personal financial and geolocation information. The Tweet has received over 21K interactions.

Appendix

We have included some notable screenshots from the above incidents. More screenshots and assets can be made available, upon request and as needed!

Links	Screenshot
<p>Anti-vax accounts heavily criticized Krispy Kreme’s donut promotion. On Krispy Kreme’s Facebook announcement, anti-vaxxers posted criticism.</p>	
<p>After Forbes published an article with a headline that inadvertently linked vaccines to rising COVID-19 case rates, prominent anti-vax activists used the article to sow doubt in COVID-19 vaccine efficacy. Some of the top comments on Forbes’ Facebook post tended to push back on the idea that vaccines are at fault while the top comments on various anti-vax posts expressed concern about vaccine efficacy.</p>	<p>Forbes:</p> <p>Erin at Health Nut News:</p>



Catherine Cash
 Yeah, duh - don't you see the intent here? To keep installing fear to get people to keep vaccinating. Wake up people! They are always going to be touting a new strain on the horizon to keep people in mental (and physical) lockdown!

Like · Reply · 1w 👍👎🗨️ 87

↳ 9 Replies

Niki Salvo
 Yep we had a article on spectrum news here in NY about a woman and her sister and mom all had both shots and still got covid. They have had their shots for over a month and all 3 tested positive today. She said she has been tested weekly, sometimes 2x a week due to her job and always has tested negative. But you gotta have a shot to go on a cruise or to a ball game????? For what! You can still get and give the damn virus!

Like · Reply · 1w 👍👎🗨️ 70

The Re:Union Summit anti-vax Telegram channel has 3.34K subscribers. The organizers asked members to comment on the Center for Countering Digital Hate's report that identified 12 anti-vaxxers responsible for the majority of misinformation.

Telegram (41082)

Re:Union Summit 2021
 3,434 subscribers

Pinned message
 Photo, Welcome to the official Telegram Channel for the Re-Union Summit 2021! ...

Re:Union Summit 2021
 Forwarded from GreenMedInfo/Sayer JI

Thank you to everyone willing to take a stand with us against the accusation that those who speak out about the dangers of COVID vaccines, or vaccines in general, are guilty of "hate speech" and should be accused of crimes, according to CCDH founder. Take action with us and comment on their newest defamatory hit piece called "The Disinformation Dozen" on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/CCDHate/status/1374769469818556421>
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ccdhate/photos/pb.2396750113877082.-2207520000..2987103701508384/?type=3&theater> and Instagram:
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMzy54ily9n/?igshid=ctfn3oj4by6s>

Twitter
Center for Countering Digital Hate
 NEW: Just 12 anti-vaxxers are responsible for almost 2/3rds of anti-vaccine content circulating on social media platforms.
 @Facebook, @Instagram, @Twitter and @YouTube must deplat...

THE DISINFORMATION DOZEN
 WHY PLATFORMS MUST ACT ON TWELVE LEADING ONLINE ANTI-VAXXERS

CCDH

1032 6:27 PM

JOIN CHANNEL

Messages spreading in a Chinese language Telegram group with more than 6,000 members advise Trump supporters not to be vaccinated.

The first message claims that Trump was forced to support vaccination and that his “100% support” of hydroxychloroquine is a clue that he does not want people to be vaccinated. This message has been viewed more than 4.9K times.



西行小宝

3/18 病毒是谁制造的，谁投放的，为什么投放的？我希望在本群的朋友们都已经知道真相。如果还是不知道，建议你好好再看一下这个录像，很多人因为这个录像被推特脸书和油管封号了。

你可以反驳说，你怎么确认你所知道的就是真相？一句话：逻辑和现实事件持续不断的吻合。如果在目前媒体，科学家，政客...以及任何权威人士都已变成权力帮凶的情况下，你还在依赖权威来告诉你什么是真相的话，我只能说你太习惯于被“喂食”，已经忘记了怎么依靠自己的头脑和嗅觉去寻找健康的食物。

很显然，每一个DS投放的东西，都已经成为分化挺川阵营的武器，比如说疫苗。

其实有一部分挺川者是支持打疫苗或者干脆已经打了的。他们的推理是这样的：川普总统推荐了，这些疫苗是川普总统在任时开发的，川普总统说是安全的；其次，还有一部分的人，对于武汉病毒的来龙去脉并不了解，认为疫苗可以防治病毒；还有一部分人，其实是对DS的恶没有深入了解。对DS控制大药商推行减少人口的黑暗计划，大药商靠卖疫苗发财的黑商业模式，完全不了解。

川普总统关于疫苗的意见，我想提醒大家。他最初提出的是：羟氯喹治疗武汉病毒是有效的。

结果呢，他遭到了左媒疯狂的攻击。美国医疗学会居然发声证明羟氯喹没有效果，柳叶刀就更无耻了，汇集了200多名所谓专家学者联名写信攻击羟氯喹，FDA也不批准羟氯喹治疗武汉病毒，很多州居然禁止医生开羟氯喹处方治疗武汉病毒。一年后如何呢？羟氯喹在早期感染病毒的有效性被真实数据所证实；200多名专家跟柳叶刀以及相互之间的邮件被曝光，证明这是一群打着科学之名推政治舆论的流氓；美国医疗学会更悄悄发布声明，证明了羟氯喹治疗武汉病毒的有效性；那么，这些挺川者，为什么不听川普总统对羟氯喹的推荐，偏要相信疫苗这个鬼呢？

川普总统作为个人，是无法通过一纸命令就改变大众思维的。长久以来，我们已被DS洗脑，相信疫苗才是防止病毒的灵丹妙药。在此情况下，川普总统更无法不支持疫苗的开发。否则代价就是再次被弹劾！然后疫苗会继续开发。要知道，川普总统任命的服岐，伯克斯博士，都是DS的一份子，因为政府健康机构早就被DS控制。在这么紧急的情况下，川普总统是无法不使用这帮人。另外，他们负责开发疫苗，也把安全责任给了他们。川普总统只能在行政上简化程序，在医疗专业和医学安全性上，当然还要靠CDC/FDA和药商。川普任上开发的疫苗，川普总统当然无法不推荐。但是，但是，川普总统总会说一句话：我更相信人们是有自由的。

因此，挺川者要理清川普总统对这两种治疗和预防方式的态度：羟氯喹：有效，完全推荐；疫苗：推荐，但是你有自由。

川普总统在他的位置上，是不能发布跟大众意见非常相左的说的。否则不但被左媒喷，还要被左派喷，还要被沉睡的人喷，还要被一部分简单挺川者喷，而且还要承担责任。你只要想一下羟氯喹的例子就会清楚了。

总之，觉醒才是真正的救命药，自由是你保护自己的权力；我希望我们每个人在了解了疫苗危险之后，也要尽量告诉我们身边的人。尽管他们是自己安全的最终守护人，但是，我们有责任提醒他们。这才是我们一起生活的价值。

t.me/ruldophwest17/1057

4.9K edited Mar 18 at 17:22

A second message, from the same Telegram account, shared an anonymous survey that said 97% of respondents would decline the Covid-19 vaccine. The message also says that real Trump supporters should not be vaccinated, as vaccines are part of the deep state plot against Trump. That message has been viewed 4.4K times.

西行小宝
你会打武汉病毒疫苗吗?
Anonymous Poll

3% 打
97% 不打

1417 votes 3176 12:21 PM

74 comments

3/19 是否打武汉疫苗的调查出来了：本群有 3% 的人还是要打武汉疫苗的。

打不打是个人自由，这是绝对要尊重的。但是我们必须明白：并不是川普的支持者都是觉醒者。为什么这么说？

昨天我唠叨了为什么川普要研发疫苗。但是觉醒者都知道：病毒-》选举，病毒-》疫苗，这都是DS/猪党/CCP跟川普博弈的战场。

联邦机构FDA/CDC/NIH都是沼泽深地，大药商无一不是帮凶钱串子利益群体。记得Event201吗？在武汉病毒放出一个月前，这帮反人类集团就已经公开以“新冠病毒”做“假想”病毒，探讨他们各自瓜分利益，以及如何掩盖信息，打压真相，和疫苗开发方案了。

如果你不知道谁是川普和美国人的真正敌人，你当然对深层政府以及他们控制联邦机构和大药商毫无抵御能力，你很显然不会对疫苗有任何疑问。因此，有一个朋友就批评我说：