

Ill Advice: A Case Study in Facebook's Failure to Tackle COVID-19 Disinformation

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Contents

Key Findings	2
Introduction	3
What is the World Doctors Alliance?	5
Methodology	5
Fact-check analysis	5
Language-specific datasets	6
Limitations	7
Analysis	8
Social media presence	8
International audiences	9
Narrative analysis	11
Fact-checking & content labelling	12
Impact	15
Discussion	18
Disinformation purveyors produce content in such vast quantities that debunking claims or posts one by one presents an almost impossible task for fact-checkers	18
There are significant gaps in Facebook's fact-checking program in languages other than English	19
Facebook is failing to track down and label all instances of posts they have deemed false	20
Additional information provided by fact-checkers to provide context to claims of inflated death rates are not being used by Facebook	23
Conclusion	24
Appendix	26
Who are the members of the World Doctors Alliance?	26
Examples of policy violations	28
Responses from World Doctors Alliance members	29
List of fact-checking organisations	30

Key Findings

- Despite detailed policies on mis- and disinformation and promises to enforce them, social media platforms are failing to tackle prominent groups and individuals who spread false claims about COVID-19 and vaccines online.
 - Using the World Doctors Alliance¹ as a case study, a group that has spread various problematic, false and conspiratorial claims about COVID-19 and vaccines, ISD found that 78% of the group's 1.2 million online followers are found on mainstream platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok) who claim to prohibit this kind of content.
 - The Facebook pages of World Doctors Alliance members have a following of over 550,000 users, which increased by 13,215% between January 2020 and July 2021. Videos posted by these Facebook pages have been viewed more than 21.1 million times.
 - These pages have accumulated a total of 5.77 million interactions since January 2020, with interaction rates increasing by 85% in the first six months of 2021 compared to the previous six months.
 - Facebook posts mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members have attracted more than three million engagements on Facebook and are present in at least 46 different languages on the platform.
 - ISD found that large proportions—often the majority—of the most engaged with content on Facebook mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members in English, Spanish, German and Arabic contained false, misleading or conspiratorial claims related to COVID-19 and vaccines.
 - Organisations that are part of Facebook's fact-checking program have debunked false claims made by the World Doctors Alliance 189 times since the beginning of the pandemic. Despite this extensive fact-checking effort, Facebook is failing to take decisive action on the group or its members.
 - Facebook's fact-checking program incorporates organisations from 115 countries, but there appear to be major gaps in fact-checking in non-English languages. ISD found minimal application of fact-checking labels across the four languages analysed, with lower application rates on posts in German, Spanish and Arabic than in English. Content that does contain fact-checking labels is still accumulating tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of engagements.
 - Facebook is failing to track down and label all versions of posts that have been deemed false by fact-checkers, despite claiming that they have AI technology that does this with a "very high degree of precision".
 - Members of the World Doctors Alliance produce content in huge quantities. Facebook's one-at-a-time approach to fact-checking presents a huge challenge to fact-checkers and also allows the purveyors of disinformation to continue to spread false claims with little pushback.
 - When information that is true (e.g. hospitals receive higher payments for COVID-19 patients) is used to spread a false narrative about the pandemic (e.g. case/death numbers are being manipulated), Facebook is failing to label posts with additional context provided by fact-checkers.
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Introduction

As the Delta variant of COVID-19 surges worldwide and low vaccine uptake rates in US states such as Alabama, Florida and Arkansas² put further pressure on health services, this report highlights the role that social media platforms play in hosting and amplifying dangerous and false information about the pandemic and vaccinations.

Around the world, heartbreaking stories have begun to emerge of people gravely ill with COVID-19³, some on their deathbeds⁴, who are expressing regret at not accepting a vaccine against the disease when they had the opportunity. A number of these stories specifically mention the role social media played in decisions to refuse the vaccine^{5,6}. Research from universities and media outlets also suggests that disinformation on mainstream platforms is contributing to vaccine hesitancy⁷ and a rising belief in conspiracy theories⁸.

The comprehensiveness of community guidelines and policies in place to deal with COVID-19 and vaccine disinformation varies greatly between platforms. TikTok's policies, for example, do not outline specific claims that are prohibited, instead stating that they "prohibit content that's false or misleading, including misinformation related to COVID-19, vaccines, and anti-vaccine disinformation more broadly"⁹. YouTube, meanwhile, recently announced a ban on all anti-vaccine content, whereas the platform previously prohibited only content that contradicted local health authorities or World Health Organisation advice.

Facebook's community standards lay out in detail the kind of content related to COVID-19 and vaccines that the company says that it removes from the platform¹⁰. This content includes claims that "deny the pandemic's existence or severity", or "false claims about the safety, efficacy, ingredients, development, existence or conspiracies related to the vaccine". In May 2021, Facebook also said that it would be removing groups, pages and accounts that were discouraging people from getting the vaccine, whether the content is provably false or not¹¹.

Despite these promises and efforts¹², tech platforms are rife with groups and individuals who have been allowed to build up significant followings while creating and sharing disinformation related to COVID-19 and vaccines. Some of these individuals had been operating with ease on mainstream platforms for years before the pandemic and have made lucrative businesses out of spreading false and dangerous information^{13,14}. With the arrival of COVID-19, these individuals were presented with the opportunity to use anxieties and uncertainties around the virus as a means for reaching a wider audience.

To provide evidence of this gap in policy enforcement, ISD conducted an analysis of the presence of a coalition known as the World Doctors Alliance on Facebook. Many of the group's 12 key members — medical professionals based in seven different countries — have been able to build large, international, online audiences since the beginning of the pandemic. Members of the Alliance have repeatedly spread information related to COVID-19 and vaccines in direct contradiction to government guidance and the understanding of COVID-19 by the broader scientific community¹⁵. Although many social media platform policies are rooted in authoritative government guidance, World Doctors Alliance members have been able to continuously violate these policies with little pushback.

Another tool in Facebook's content moderation toolbox is its fact-checking program. The company says its program works with 80 different organisations in more than 60 languages across the world to identify false information on the platform¹⁶. Fact-checkers do not have the ability to remove content from Facebook. They simply help to identify, review and rate false content. Facebook says that it then reduces the reach of this content, notifies people who have previously shared the content, and applies warning labels that link to a fact-check article on the claims made¹⁷.

Previous research conducted by ISD into COVID-19 disinformation in Irish¹⁸ and Arabic language Facebook communities¹⁹ has shown that content from the World Doctors Alliance and its members exists in a variety of languages and contexts. This report looks closely at the kind of claims spread by the World Doctors Alliance across four different languages — English, German, Spanish and Arabic — while also examining the role of Facebook's fact-checking program in providing factual information for people who come across their posts.

Facebook has a reputation for prioritizing resources to screen problematic content in the US, while neglecting this duty in other countries. Most recently, internal Facebook research reviewed by the Wall Street Journal found that only 13% of the hours Facebook employees and contractors spent tracking down false and misleading information were spent on non-US content²⁰. This internal research also stated that the platform's ability to detect vaccine hesitancy in comment sections is "bad in English, and basically non-existent elsewhere".

These recent revelations back up claims made by Facebook whistle-blower Sophie Zhang, who spoke in 2020 of a perceived "lack of desire from senior leadership to protect democratic processes in smaller countries"²¹. With this in mind, this report aims to understand whether this inequality of resources is also present within the fact-checking program and scrutinizes whether the program successfully stops false content from being shown to users.

Lastly, this report studies the ways in which the claims of members of the World Doctors Alliance are being amplified online. On Facebook alone, the group — most of whose members were relatively unknown before the pandemic — has increased its collective following by 13,215% since January 2020. These audiences are also becoming more engaged with this content, with interaction rates consistently increasing, particularly for video content that features the individuals associated with the Alliance. This investigation used a mixed methods approach to understand the reach and audiences of false content shared by this network and the possible impact of the problematic and false claims about COVID-19 and vaccines that are resonating with these communities.

What is the World Doctors Alliance?

The World Doctors Alliance describes itself as an “independent non-profit alliance of doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals and staff around the world who have united in the wake of the Covid-19 response chapter to share experiences with a view to ending all lockdowns and related damaging measures and to re-establish universal health determinance [sic] of psychological and physical wellbeing for all humanity”.²²

On its website, the Alliance lists 12 key members from seven different countries²³ — Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium. A number of these members have become leading voices within the COVID-denier and vaccine-sceptic movements, using their qualifications to lend a veneer of credibility to claims that have been proven to be false and often dangerous.

The World Doctors Alliance is one arm of an overarching organisation called the World Freedom Alliance, founded at the end of 2020 by Dr Dolores Cahill and Dr Heiko Schöning, as well as Danish financial executive Mads Palsvig. Dr Cahill, Dr Schöning and Palsvig also act as president, vice president and treasurer of the organisation respectively. Other partners of the World Freedom Alliance include Robert F. Kennedy Jr's anti-vaccine site, Children's Health Defense and the New Earth Project, an initiative that aims to create a new kind of society by encouraging people to “reclaim their sovereign birthright”²⁴. Associates of the New Earth Project have been prominent proponents of 5G²⁵ conspiracy theories and have collaborated with conspiracy theorists such as Alex Jones²⁶ and David Icke²⁷.

Various claims promoted by World Doctors Alliance members²⁸ are unaligned and even contradict one another. For example, Dr Andrew Kaufman has claimed that the COVID-19 virus does not exist²⁹, while Dr Dolores Cahill acknowledges its existence but downplays its severity³⁰. Dr Elke De Klerk has stated that PCR tests are “nasal vaccinations”³¹, while Dr Dolores Cahill has said the tests are detecting influenza, not COVID-19³². A number of members, including Dr Vernon Coleman³³, Dr Mohammad Adil³⁴ and Dr Elke De Klerk³⁵ have propagated overarching conspiracy theories that allege the entire pandemic has been a “scam” or “hoax” perpetrated by governments, health care authorities and the media, who they say are colluding as part of a sinister plot to spread fear and strip people of their freedoms. Please see the Appendix for further details on the claims spread by World Doctors Alliance members.

Methodology

Fact-check analysis

In order to review fact-checks concerning the World Doctors Alliance, we first created a list of all the organisations around the world who are official members of Facebook's third-party fact-checking network³⁶. These organisations are certified through the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and work with Facebook to help identify, review and rate misinformation on their platforms. **This resulted in a list of 109 websites³⁷ in 115 countries.** See Appendix for the list of organisations analysed. We then used a variety of Google dork searches to check for articles published on the organisation's websites that were related to the World Doctors Alliance or its members. For example, by using Google to search: `site:thejournal.ie "World Doctors Alliance"`.

For outlets that publish content in non-Indo-European languages such as Arabic, we used translated versions of our relevant keywords and search terms where appropriate to factor in local languages.

We compiled all fact-check articles mentioning the World Doctors Alliance, World Freedom Alliance or its members published by these organisations. We then coded each article to note:

- Which World Doctors Alliance member was mentioned
- The language of the article
- The piece of content/video being fact-checked

During this process we also removed a number of false positive results. For example, those that surfaced erroneously as a result of search engine optimisation or content from fact-checking organisations that mentioned the World Doctors Alliance or a member within an article but did not focus on them.

Language-specific datasets

Using the CrowdTangle API³⁸ ISD searched for Facebook posts from public groups and pages mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members between January 1, 2020 - June 13, 2021. Our analysis found a total of **89,315 Facebook posts** during this time period. Using our in-house data analytics tool, Method 52, ISD researchers were able to assess the language of each of the posts mentioning the World Doctors Alliance and found content in 46 different languages.

ISD chose to analyse content in English, Spanish and German — the top three most popular languages in which the World Doctors Alliance were discussed. Researchers also analysed Arabic language posts after fact-checking inconsistencies in Arabic were flagged in previous research conducted by ISD³⁹.

After separating the posts into four different datasets—one for each language—analysts identified the 50 most popular posts in each by totalling all engagements (likes, shares, comments and reactions) and ranking by the highest number of engagements. These four datasets of 50 posts, one each in English, Spanish, German and Arabic, then became the basis for the language analysis.

Each post in the set of the 50 most popular was then coded to identify:

- If the post contained problematic claims. Problematic claims were identified as claims that contain false, misleading or conspiratorial information outlined in Facebook's policies, or information that contradicts advice from leading public health authorities;
 - The kind of problematic claims featured in the post;⁴⁰
 - If posts featuring problematic claims also contained a fact-check label. If a post did not contain problematic claims, it was coded as not applicable;
 - If the content had been previously fact-checked by one of Facebook's fact-checking partners;
 - Which World Doctors Alliance members were mentioned in the post;
 - The type of post (text, embedded video, linked video, linked article or image); and
 - The number of video views on embedded videos.
-

When coding posts for problematic information, claims were identified as being in seven distinct brackets:

- Claims about COVID-19's **lethality or spread**
 - o Examples: "COVID-19 hasn't been isolated", "COVID-19 is less/equally lethal to the flu"
- Claims about COVID-19 that **contradict advice from governments/health authorities**
 - o Examples: "WHO changed its pandemic orders on Inauguration Day to reduce case numbers under Biden", "masks don't work/are dangerous", "COVID deaths rates are inaccurate/inflated as a result of CDC guidance"
- Claims related to **testing and treatments**
 - o Examples: "hydroxychloroquine, vitamins and zinc can cure COVID-19", "PCR tests produce high rates of false positives"
- Claims related to **vaccines**
 - o Examples: "COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility/alter genes/cytokine storms", "vaccines will cause widespread death"
- Claims related to the proliferation of **"scamdemic" or "plandemic" conspiracy theories**⁴¹
 - o Examples: "COVID-19 is a plan to kill off the elderly", "death figures are being manipulated on purpose", "the media are lying because they're in on the plan", "5G is linked to COVID-19"
- Claims related to **pseudo legal advice**
 - o Examples: "your inalienable rights/common law mean you do not have to comply with lockdown restrictions"
- Claims **comparing COVID-19 restrictions to genocide/war**
 - o Examples: comparisons to the Holocaust/Nazism

Limitations

Due to the nature of the analysis and the need to cap the maximum number of problematic claims in each post at five, there are certain limitations to this research. The number of claims noted and analysed is not the total of the problematic claims within all posts in the analysis. It should be assumed that the true number of problematic claims within the posts is significantly higher, as some posts consist of videos that range in length between 2 minutes and 4 hours.

Facebook says that when a piece of content is found to be false, it reduces its distribution so that fewer people see it. This would imply that pieces of fact-checked content that are labelled as such would receive fewer engagements on the platform; however, this also depends on whether the fact-checking label is applied to a post before or after it goes viral.

With this in mind, this analysis was conducted in order to determine what kind of posts are still receiving high feedback, despite being fact-checked, and which posts are not being fact-checked at all.

Analysis

Social media presence

ISD researchers gathered lists of accounts posting under the names of the World Freedom Alliance, World Doctors Alliance and its members across five mainstream platforms and three alternative platforms. Although many members have accounts across multiple sites, the way each member uses online platforms is varied and some accounts, for example on Instagram or Twitter, are rarely used and therefore have low followings. Members of the Alliance have amassed the highest combined number of followers on Facebook, followed by YouTube. Both of these platforms have announced stricter policies on the spread of anti-vaccine content in recent months^{42 43}.

It is clear that since March 2020, the World Doctors Alliance was dependent on their presence on mainstream platforms to spread their messaging, with **951,351 out of a total following of 1,225,382 (78%) attributed to mainstream platforms** (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok).

Analysis of accounts associated with the World Freedom Alliance, World Doctors Alliance and its members across the platforms listed in table 1 found:

- **Facebook:** Six pages have accumulated a following of 553,669 users. Dr Scott Jensen accounts for the highest number of followers, with 394,857 users following his verified page. Accounts under the name of the World Freedom Alliance and Dr Vernon Coleman were previously identified and had accumulated 35,918 followers and 8,855 followers respectively, but were removed by the time of publication.
- **Twitter:** Eight profiles have amassed a total following of 75,407.
- **Instagram:** Five Instagram accounts associated with the network had a total following of 26,043 users.
- **YouTube:** Eight accounts have amassed a total of 296,139 subscribers, with videos from these accounts viewed more than 8.8 million times. Dr

Table 1 Outline of the online presence and follower numbers of the World Freedom Alliance, World Doctors Alliance and its members

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok	Telegram	Brand NewTube	Odysee	Total
World Freedom Alliance		3,364	2,998	8,470	5	20,261	9	349	35,456
World Doctors Alliance			851			122,784	3,389		127,024
Dr Dolores Cahill	128,942	9,418		6,240	57	584	11,589		156,830
Dr Mohammad Adil	1,006	27		189			620		1,842
Dr Zac Cox							795		795
Dr Andrew Kaufman	22,170	1,270	1,641	59,700	18				84,799
Dr Heiko Schöning						6,663			6,663
Dr Heinrich Fiechtner	4,873	1,887	1,253		13	28,618			36,644
Dr Scott Jensen	394,857	59,200	19,300	3,460					476,817
Dr Elke De Klerk									0
Dr Mikael Nordfors	1,821	28		4,020					5,869
Dr Hilde De Smet		213		1,060		1,096			2,369
Dr Vernon Coleman				213,000		8,696	66,584	1,993	290,273
Dr Johan Denis							1		1
Total	553,669	75,407	26,043	296,139	93	188,702	82,987	2,342	1,225,382

Vernon Coleman claims the top spot on YouTube, accountable for 213,000 of these subscribers and more than 6.2 million video views.

- **TikTok:** Four accounts have a total following of 93 with 2,865 views.
- **Telegram:** Seven channels have a total subscriber number of 188,702.
- **Brand New Tube:** Seven accounts with a total following of 82,987.
- **Odyssey:** Two accounts with a total of 2,342 followers.

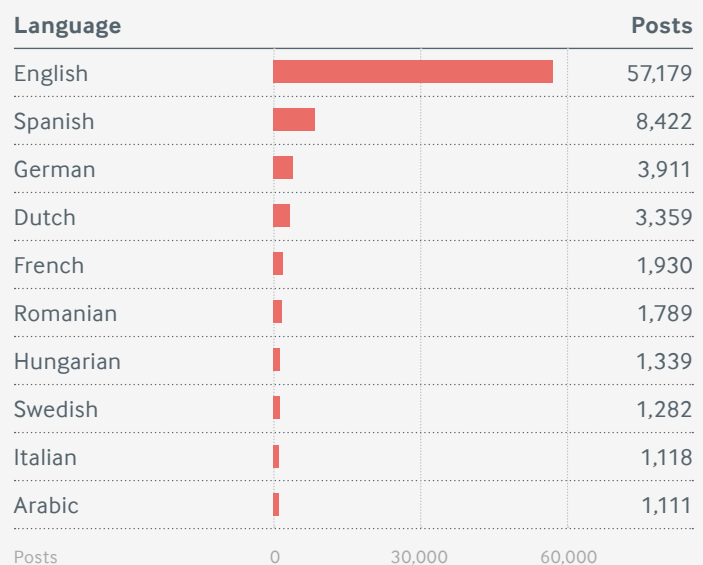
International audiences

ISD chose the World Doctors Alliance and its members on Facebook for further study due to the large audiences outlined above and the company's various statements about moderating false and misleading content about COVID-19. First, ISD undertook an assessment of how the 89,315 posts identified in the methodology above may be spreading internationally and found content in 46 different languages (see figure 1).

An analysis of the 50 most popular posts (see table 2) in English, Spanish, Arabic and German indicated that a significant proportion contained claims that fit into the categories of problematic information outlined in the methodology section. While over 70% of the posts in English, Spanish and Arabic were determined to include problematic claims, the proportion in German was much lower (48%). This appears to be due to a high volume of posts in German that mentioned World Doctors Alliance

members while advertising protests and rallies, along with a number of posts related to Dr Heinrich Fiechtner's removal from parliament. Other posts within the set that didn't contain problematic claims were either posts made by fact-checkers debunking false information mentioning World Doctors Alliance members or posts that had been removed at the time of analysis.

Figure 1 Top ten languages found in World Doctors Alliance posts on Facebook



In terms of the specific members of the Alliance mentioned in these posts, Dr Scott Jensen and Dr Dolores Cahill were found to be the most popular in English language posts, while Dr Heinrich Fiechtner took the lead in German. The popularity of Dr Dolores

Table 2 Analysis of the 50 most popular posts in English, Spanish, Arabic and German

	English	Spanish	Arabic	German
Posts containing problematic claims	37 (74%)	44 (88%)	41 (82%)	24 (48%)
Engagement on posts with problematic claims	689,220	167,611	58,764	65,965
Video views on problematic posts	17,784,000	2,321,600	2,416,286	480,100
Most mentioned WDA members (# of posts)	Dr Scott Jensen (26) Dr Dolores Cahill (22)	Dr Dolores Cahill (19) Dr Scott Jensen (11) Dr Andrew Kaufman (10)	Dr Vernon Coleman (32) Dr Andrew Kaufman (13)	Dr Heinrich Fiechtner (38) Dr Dolores Cahill (7)

Cahill, Dr Scott Jensen and Dr Andrew Kaufman in Spanish-language posts could be attributed to the connections within the wider international COVID-sceptic movement. Dr Heiko Schoning, for example, is the founding member of a German group called Doctors for Truth, and he also spoke at the launch of a Spanish group of the same name (Médicos por la Verdad) in July 2020⁴⁴. Both Dr Schoning and Dr Cahill also spoke at a “world freedom” event that took place in Spain in June 2021⁴⁵. Dr Vernon Coleman’s popularity among Arabic-language communities is also indicative of the ease with which content can be translated and made available for audiences in different regions across the world.

The posts deemed problematic across the English, Spanish, Arabic and German datasets accumulated a total engagement of 981,560 (likes, comments, shares and reactions), with embedded videos included in these posts viewed 23,001,986 times. Videos of interviews with World Doctors Alliance members that were conducted in English but had subtitles or dubbing were found to draw some of the highest engagement across languages.

Narrative analysis

ISD coded the subset of the 50 most popular posts that did contain problematic information in order to assess which specific narratives were proving popular with audiences of the World Doctors Alliance and its members on Facebook.

As shown in table 3, the most popular claims made by members were found to be conspiratorial in nature, implying some sort of overarching ‘master plan’ involving world governments, the media and healthcare authorities. This content was pervasive in all four languages and forms a core tenet of COVID-19 and vaccine disinformation associated with the Alliance. These kinds of narratives complement more specific false claims by providing a justifying mechanism to explain why governments, the media and healthcare authorities are pushing such measures.

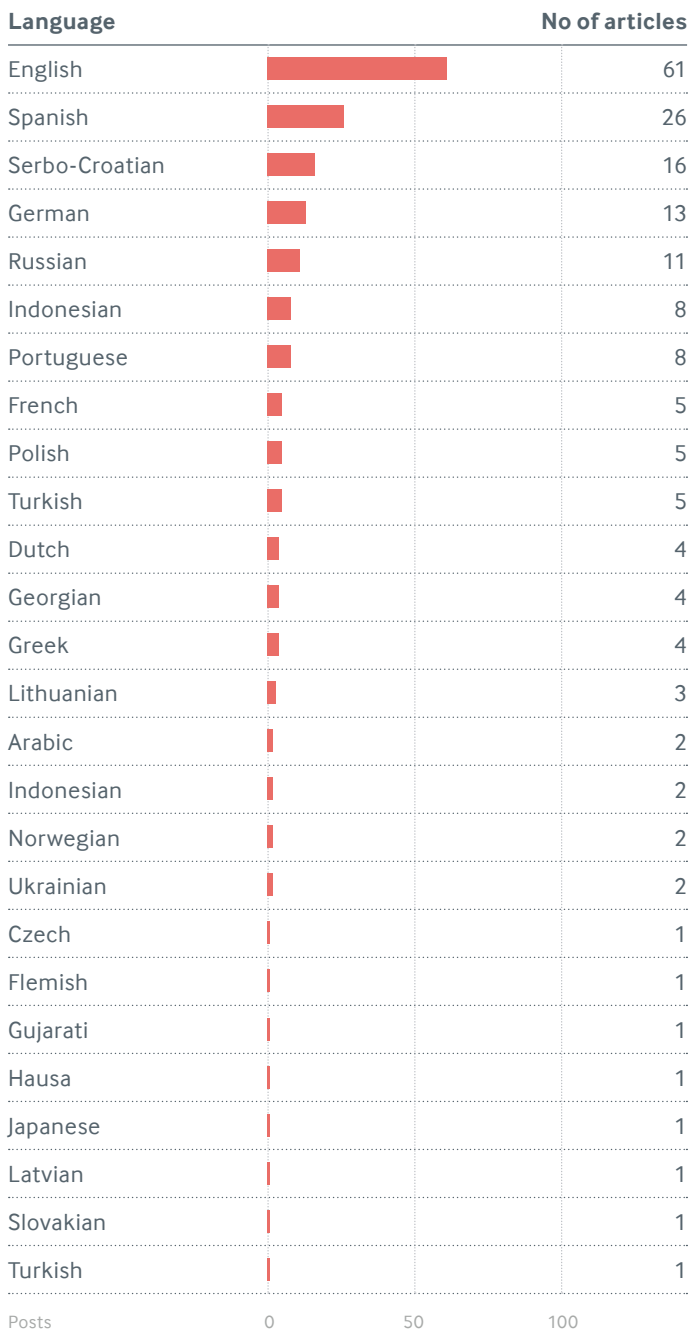
For example, the allegation that PCR tests produce high numbers of false positives is explained by the notion that there is a plan in place to inflate case numbers and keep people in “a state of fear”. Similarly, healthcare authorities allegedly “ignoring” cures and treatments is explained by implying that the pandemic is a plot by Big Pharma to make money through vaccines. These narratives play on distrust in authorities and institutions and act as a compelling way to explain difficult world events.

Fact-checking & content labelling

Facebook has a number of approaches to limiting the reach and impact of disinformation and misinformation on the platform. One approach is its third-party fact-checking program, which ISD’s analysis found to include 109 fact-checking websites operating in 115 countries around the world. Crucially, these partner organisations

Table 3 Top five most common claims found across languages analysed, ranked by prominence among the 50 most popular posts

	English	Spanish	Arabic	German
1	Hydroxychloroquine/Vit C/ Zinc can cure COVID-19	Masks aren’t necessary/ don’t work/are dangerous	COVID-19 is no more lethal than the seasonal flu	PCR tests are inaccurate
2	COVID-19 death rates are inaccurate/inflated as a result of CDC guidance	COVID-19 is a “scamdemic” or “plandemic”	COVID-19 is a “scamdemic” or “plandemic”	Comparing COVID-19 to Holocaust/nazism/genocide
3	COVID-19 is a “scamdemic” or “plandemic”	Lockdowns aren’t necessary/are killing more people	Hydroxychloroquine/Vit C/ Zinc can cure COVID-19	COVID-19 is a “scamdemic” or “plandemic”
4	COVID-19 is a seasonal disease	Hydroxychloroquine/Vit C/ Zinc can cure COVID-19	The media is in on the plan and is lying to you	mRNA vaccines will cause widespread death in years to come
5	The media is in on the plan and is lying to you	The flu vaccine contains coronavirus	COVID-19 is being used to kill off the elderly	COVID-19 is less dangerous than we’re being told

Figure 2 Language distribution of 189 fact-checking articles mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members

are not tasked with removing Facebook content, but rather with providing fact-checks and correct information on specific stories and pieces of content that appear on Facebook across multiple issue areas, including COVID-19 and vaccinations. Some of them, for example AFP, cover multiple languages and multiple regions. ISD's analysis surfaced a total of 189 articles from Facebook fact-checking partners mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members, across 24 different languages (see figure 2).

As noted, the highest volumes of content related to the World Doctors Alliance were found to be in English, Spanish and German respectively. These three languages also appeared in the top four languages of fact-checking articles about the Alliance and its members (see figure 2). There appear to be major gaps in the ability of the fact-checking program to reach audiences in less frequently used languages. For example, over 5,528 posts mentioning the World Doctors Alliance were found in either Romanian, Hungarian, Swedish or Italian, yet no fact-checking articles about the organisation were found in these languages in ISD's analysis (see table 4).

Table 4 Number of fact-checking articles found in top ten most popular languages

Language	Number of posts	Number of fact-checks
English	57,179	61
Spanish	8,422	26
German	3,911	13
Dutch	3,359	4
French	1,930	5
Romanian	1,789	0
Hungarian	1,339	0
Swedish	1,282	0
Italian	1,118	0
Arabic	1,111	2

Most often, once a fact-checking partner has reviewed a piece of content, Facebook applies a label to the post which allows readers to access additional or alternate information.⁴⁶ ISD found that there was minimal application of these labels across the 50 most popular posts mentioning the World Doctors Alliance or its members in English, Spanish, Arabic and German, despite these posts containing problematic claims.

Facebook says that when a post is found to contain false information and is given a content label, the platform also reduces its distribution so that fewer people see the post.⁴⁷ Yet according to ISD's analysis, posts that contained a fact-check label in both English and Spanish had a higher average engagement rate per post than those without fact-check labels (see table 5). The posts that do contain fact-check labels have accumulated a total of 135,641 interactions (likes, comments, shares and reactions), with embedded videos receiving 1,455,000 views.

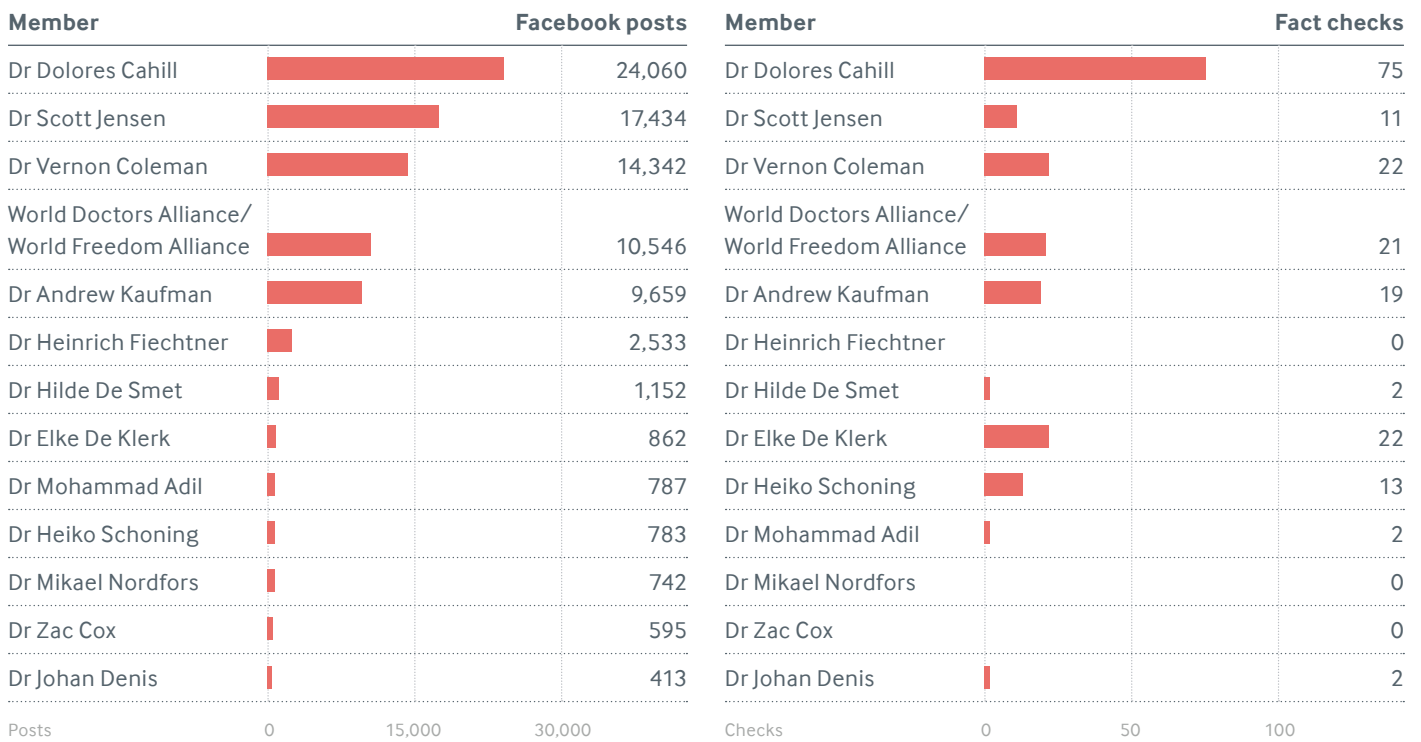
The high engagement rates on some fact-checked posts could also be a result of when the post was fact-checked and when the label was applied. If a post was selected for a fact-check after it had already received significant engagement, the majority of the engagement could have taken place before a fact-check

label was applied. Without further information about the process and timing of fact-check labelling on Facebook, it is not possible to deduce whether the application of a label had any impact on the post's overall engagement.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of mentions of the World Doctors Alliance or its members in Facebook posts versus in fact-check articles, highlighting that the attention paid to some members by fact-checking partners is disproportionate to their online popularity. Dr Scott Jensen, for example, is the second most-mentioned member of the World Doctors Alliance on Facebook, but is only mentioned in 11 fact-check articles. Dr Elke De Klerk, on the other hand, features prominently in fact-check articles, but not in Facebook posts. This anomaly may be due to the fact that fact-checking articles mentioning Dr De Klerk mostly deal with the comments she made in two specific videos where she appeared alongside other members of the World Doctors Alliance. These posts were often shared with generic captions that do not mention the World Doctors Alliance or the members in the videos and therefore may not have been picked up using the keyword analysis conducted by ISD.

Table 5 Analysis of posts with fact-check labels among the 50 most popular

	English	Spanish	Arabic	German
Problematic posts featuring fact-check labels	5 (13%)	2 (4.5%)	1 (2.4%)	2 (8.3%)
Total engagement on posts w/ fact-check label	122,091	10,075	517	2,958
Average engagement on posts w/ fact-check label	24,418	5,075	517	1,479
Total engagement on posts w/o fact-check label	567,129	157,536	58,247	63,007
Average engagement on posts w/o fact-check label	17,722	3,750	1,456	2,863
Total video views on problematic posts w/ fact-check label	1,349,000	106,000	-	-
Total video views on problematic posts w/o fact-check label	16,435,000	2,215,600	2,416,286	480,100

Figure 3 Distribution of members of the World Doctors Alliance or its members in Facebook posts versus fact-check articles

Impact

ISD researchers examined the group's reach and impact on Facebook between January 2020 and July 2021.

Using data from CrowdTangle to examine seven pages associated with the network⁴⁸, ISD found that:

- The number of users who followed these pages grew from 3,456 at the beginning of January 2020 to 460,179 by July 1, 2021, representing a 13,215% increase.
- Five of the seven pages were created after the beginning of the pandemic, with only two pages (Dr Dolores Cahill and Dr Scott Jensen) existing prior to January 2020.
- The accounts have published a cumulative total of 1,580 posts since January 1, 2020, accumulating 5.77 million interactions.
- Videos posted by the pages (including both live and embedded videos) accounted for 68% of the 5.7 million interactions and have been viewed a total of over 21.1 million times.
- Between January 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021, the pages had an average interaction rate of 299,100 per month. Yet in the most recent six months, February - July 2021, there were an average of 679,157 interactions per month, far exceeding the overall average.

In addition to these audiences growing and becoming more engaged with World Doctors Alliance content, ISD assessed the popularity of its members over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic so far. Using the CrowdTangle API to search for Facebook posts from public groups and pages mentioning these individuals between January 1, 2020 - June 13, 2021, ISD identified 89,315 Facebook posts, which had generated a total of 3,562,400 interactions.⁴⁹

Figure 4 Certain World Doctors Alliance members have increased their following on Facebook significantly since the beginning of the pandemic

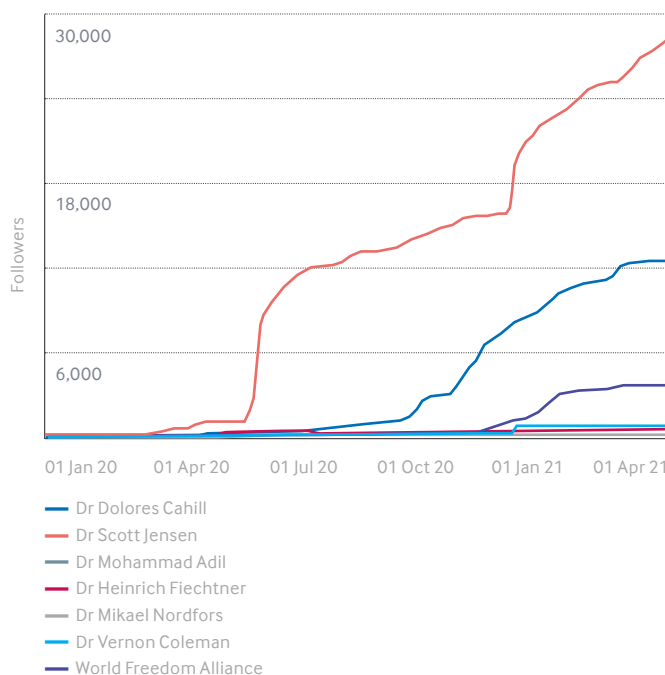


Figure 5 Interactions on posts from pages associated with the World Doctors Alliance, showing increases in average interactions in the first six months of 2021

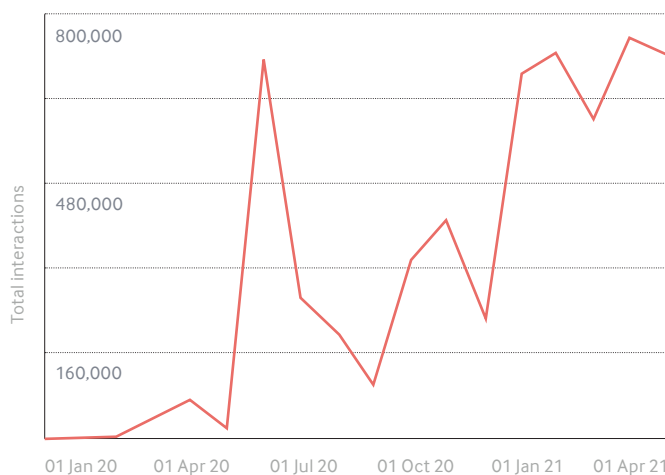
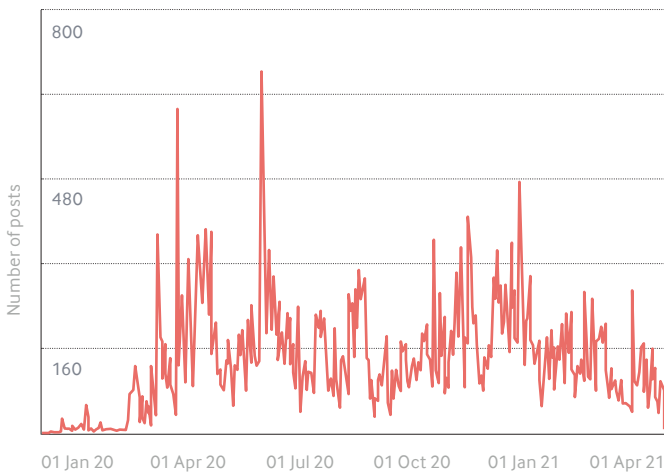


Figure 6 Volume of Facebook posts mentioning the World Doctors Alliance over time

The World Doctors Alliance member with the highest number of mentions was Dr Dolores Cahill, referred to in 24,060 posts on the platform. This was followed by Dr Scott Jensen with 17,434 posts and Dr Vernon Coleman with 14,342. Overall, higher mentions were found to be associated with members who have named accounts on Facebook. Although only 332 out of 89,315 posts came from pages associated with World Doctors Alliance members, the large number of mentions of these members across the platform implies that they have established a broader presence and reputation beyond content produced on their own pages/accounts.

Figure 7 Volume of Facebook posts mentioning individual members of the World Doctors Alliance

Individual	Posts
Dr Dolores Cahill	24,060
Dr Scott Jensen	17,434
Dr Vernon Coleman	14,342
Dr Andrew Kaufman	9,659
Dr Heinrich Fiechtner	2,533
Dr Hilde De Smet	1,152
Dr Elke De Klerk	862
Dr Mohammad Adil	787
Dr Heiko Schoning	783
Dr Mikael Nordfors	742
Dr Zac Cox	595
Dr Johan Denis	413

Discussion

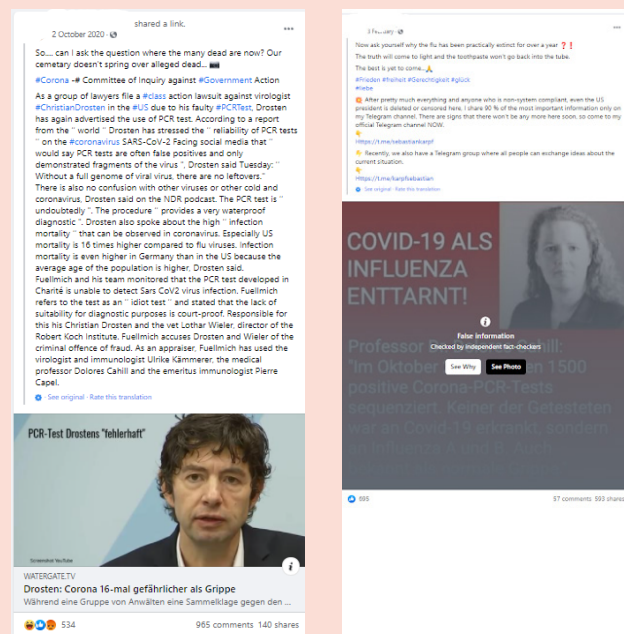
Disinformation purveyors produce content in such vast quantities that debunking claims or posts one by one presents an almost impossible task for fact-checkers.

According to Dr Vernon Coleman's BrandNewTube account⁵⁰ he has published 128 videos related to COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, which range from between three and 23 minutes long. ISD analysis found that Dr Coleman has been featured in 22 fact-checking articles published in eight languages in the same time period. However at least 10 of these articles debunk the same video and claims, while dozens of other videos have received no fact-checking analysis. As a result, none of the 30 problematic posts that featured Dr Coleman contained a fact-checking label.

This trend is repeated with other World Doctors Alliance members. According to CrowdTangle statistics, Dr Dolores Cahill posted 149 times to her Facebook page between March 1, 2020 and August 1, 2021. Dr Cahill is by far the most fact-checked member of the World Doctors Alliance, being mentioned in 75 fact-checking articles since the beginning of the pandemic. However, as with Dr Coleman, a large number of these fact-checks debunk the same claims or videos across multiple articles and languages, and only a small fraction of the problematic posts featuring Dr Cahill within ISD's analysis have received a content label (see figure 8).

Fact-checking posts or videos on an individual basis is untenable when the individuals being fact-checked (and their audiences) continue to post on Facebook or other platforms at a rapid pace. The challenge is compounded by the repetition of the same claims, or slight variations of them, ad infinitum elsewhere and in different languages.

Figure 8 Two Facebook posts discussing Dr Dolores Cahill's debunked claims about PCR tests, one fact-checked, one not. NB: post text has been translated from German.



There are significant gaps in Facebook's fact-checking program in languages other than English

Dr Vernon Coleman was the most mentioned member of the World Doctors Alliance in Arabic-language posts, yet ISD did not find evidence that his claims had been fact-checked in the language. Of the 26 Arabic-language posts mentioning Dr Coleman that contained problematic claims, 14 featured the same video of Dr Coleman recorded in March 2020 with subtitles in Arabic added to the video. These 14 posts had a combined total of over 1.4 million views.

The video in question features Dr Coleman laying out what he believes is the “hidden agenda” behind the pandemic, explaining why he believes governments and the media are lying about COVID-19. After downplaying the severity of the disease, he concludes by implying that COVID-19 is part of a sinister plot by governments around the world to cull the elderly population because “they have become a global problem in economic terms”.

These claims are outlined in Facebook's community standards as being prohibited on the platform, yet the video has reached viral levels of popularity in Arabic-language communities and has not been included among the content scrutinized by Facebook's fact-checking program.

Similarly, a video of a Dr Andrew Kaufman interview where he states, among a myriad of false claims, that those administering and promoting vaccines want to “inject genes into us” and “make us into genetically modified organisms”, was fact-checked in both English⁵¹ and Spanish⁵² by Reuters. Despite this, the video appeared without a fact-check label twice^{53 54} in the top-50 Arabic posts analysed by ISD, where it had been viewed more than 40,000 times (see figure 9).

Figure 9 Example of a video featuring Dr Andrew Kaufman that was fact-checked in English and Spanish, but appeared in Arabic-language results without a fact-check label



Facebook is failing to track down and label all instances of posts they have deemed false

Not only do disinformation purveyors produce content at an enormous rate, the speed at which the content spreads and the endless ways it can be clipped, edited and shared, make tracing all instances of problematic content a particular challenge. Facebook says it uses AI technology such as SimSearchNet and ObjectDNA to track down variations of content “with a very high degree of precision”⁵⁵, but ISD’s analysis shows that videos that have barely been edited and are uploaded locally to the platform are still being missed by the company’s labelling and moderation efforts.

In one case, a video featuring Dr Vernon Coleman that was originally fact-checked by Lead Stories⁵⁶ was uploaded directly to Facebook by a Spanish-language conspiracy page with over 47k followers, this time with a Spanish title and audio subtitles⁵⁷. This Spanish copy of Dr Coleman’s video had more than 3,900 views at the time of writing and was not given a fact-checking label.

Another example of this is the repeat appearance of videos featuring an interview Dr Dolores Cahill gave to The Highwire’s Del Bigtree in May 2020. The video was fact-checked by four different fact-checkers in both Spanish⁵⁸ and English^{59 60 61}, yet clips of the interview still appeared in ISD’s Spanish dataset four times in the form of embedded videos uploaded to Facebook, together accumulating 465,000 views. None of these posts contained a fact-checking label (see figure 11).

Figure 10 Top: Vernon Coleman video appears without fact-checking label; Below: Lead Stories fact-check article

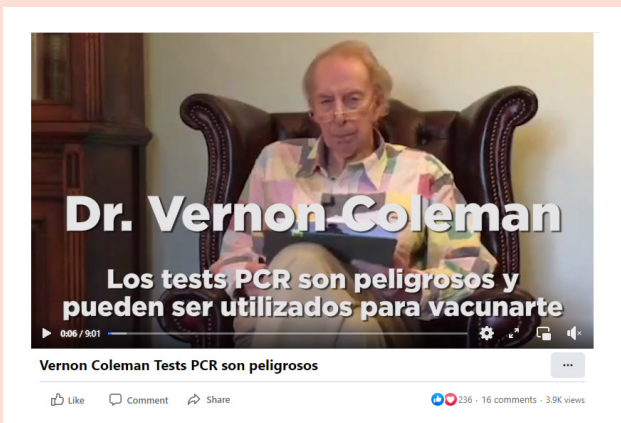


Figure 11 An embedded clip of a Dr Dolores Cahill interview with no fact-checking label, despite being fact-checked multiple times



A further example of this can be seen in figure 12. A video released by Dr Scott Jensen on February 17, 2021 in which he claims the WHO changed its directive on Inauguration Day in order to reduce the number of false positive COVID-19 cases was fact-checked by the Associated Press⁶², found to be false and a fact-checking label was applied to his video.

However, within ISD's top 50 popular posts analysis, two instances of this same claim appeared in different formats without fact-checking labels (see figure 13). One featured a post from Dr Jensen himself, linking to an article from which he says many of the claims in the video came. The other was a post from a Facebook-verified Canadian politician who linked to an article about Dr Jensen's video titled: "Dr. Scott Jensen, WHO Confirm: 'We've All Been Played' on COVID-19".

Figure 12 Facebook post with fact-checking label applied

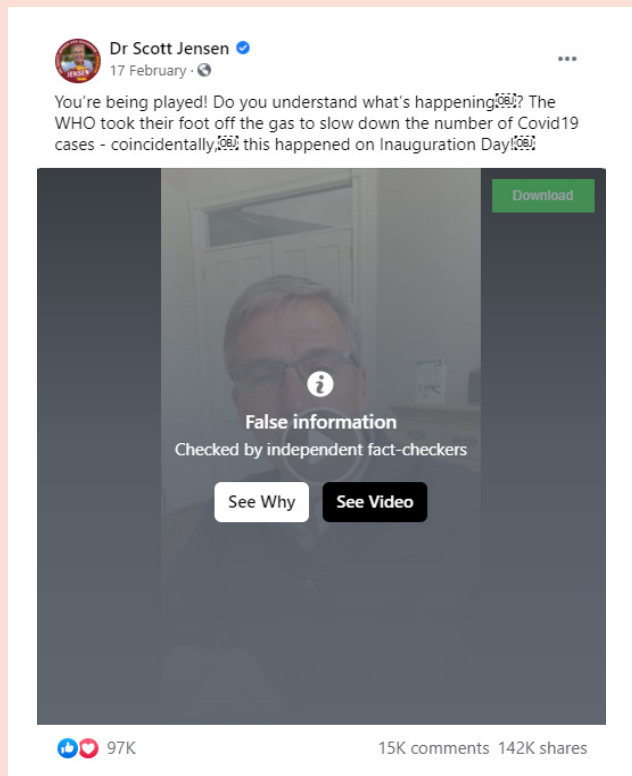
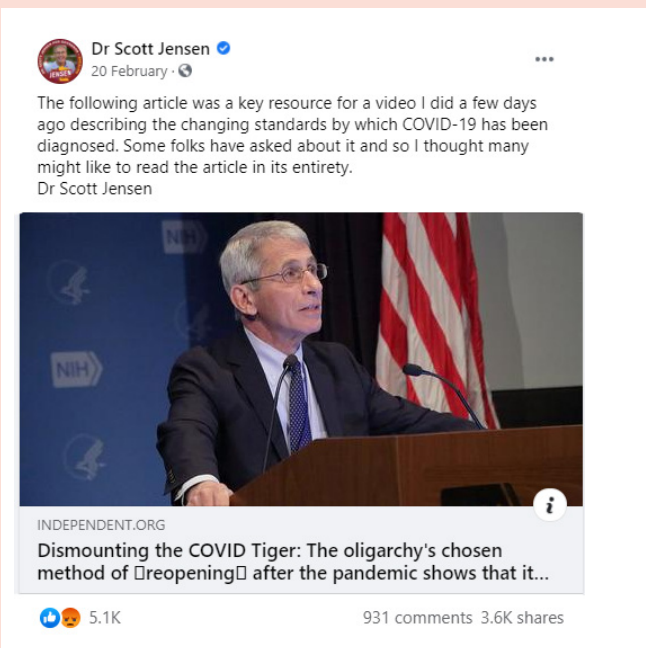


Figure 13 Posts containing the same claims without fact-checking labels



Additional information provided by fact-checkers to provide context to claims of inflated death rates are not being used by Facebook

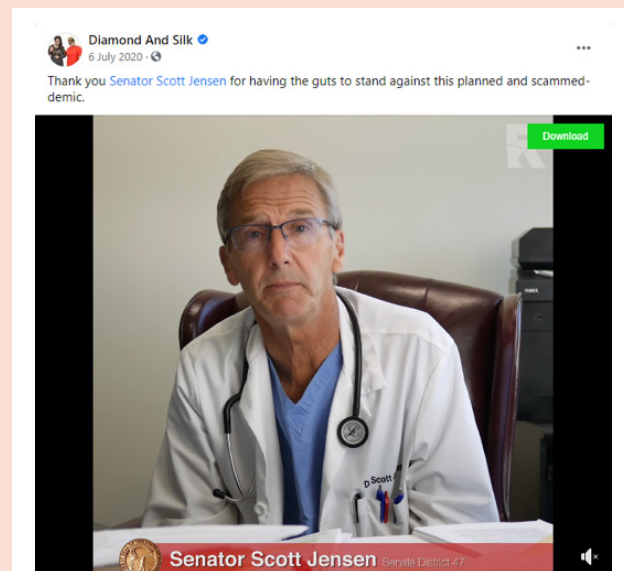
In Facebook's Community Guidelines, it states that the platform prohibits claims that "the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 are much lower than the official figure", while also saying that this requires additional information and/or context.

ISD's research found that these kinds of claims, common in posts featuring Dr Scott Jensen, were some of the most popular in the English-language analysis. Dr Jensen is an outlier within the World Doctors Alliance. Whereas other members definitively spread claims that are false and conspiratorial, Dr Jensen's claims are often based on speculation, his own professional opinions or are presented as questions to his audience⁶³ such as "Do you think it's ok for physicians to certify on death certificates that someone died of COVID-19 even if a positive test had never been obtained? Even if a COVID-19 test had never been done or considered?".

These claims, and claims that hospitals in the US were inflating COVID-19 cases to receive greater financial assistance, were scrutinized in nine fact-check articles in four different languages (USA Today⁶⁴, Politifact⁶⁵, FactCheck.org⁶⁶, AFP (Polish)⁶⁷, USA Today⁶⁸, Lead Stories⁶⁹, Ellinika Hoaxes (Greek)⁷⁰ and Vox (Ukraine)⁷¹). All came to the conclusion that although it is accurate that Medicare payments are higher for COVID-19 patients under the CARES Act, there is no evidence that cases or deaths were being fraudulently recorded. Reporting at the time from the New York Times⁷², Washington Post⁷³ and USA Today⁷⁴ also concluded that instead of death numbers being overcounted, it was more likely that cases were being undercounted as a result of inconsistent protocols and some states not following CDC advice on recording deaths.

Dr Jensen clarified in April 2020 when speaking to FactCheck.org that he did not believe widespread medical fraud was taking place, but was concerned that "less precise standards" around recording COVID-19 deaths could lead to overcounting.

Figure 14 Jensen's claims used to bolster the idea of a "scamdemic"



Despite his clarification and the additional information and context provided by fact-checkers, none of the posts which featured these kinds of claims that appeared in ISD's analysis contained a fact-checking label or directed readers to additional information.

These claims have been used to bolster the wider conspiratorial narrative about COVID-19 being a "plandemic" or "scamdemic", earning Dr Jensen a mention in Politifact's 'Lie of the Year' related to downplaying and denying COVID-19⁷⁵. This was also evident in ISD's analysis as seen in the post in figure 14 where Dr Jensen's video was shared by conservative media commentators Diamond and Silk to further claims of a "scamdemic".

ISD's English analysis also picked up a number of interviews Dr Jensen took part in with known COVID-19 disinformation purveyors such as The Highwire's Del Bigtree⁷⁶ and Truth In Media's Ben Swann⁷⁷, where similar claims were reiterated. Again, none of these posts contained any form of fact-checking or additional information labels on Facebook.

Conclusion

It is clear that the World Doctors Alliance has enjoyed a period of dramatic growth in engagement and number of followers across platforms since the beginning of 2020, despite platform commitments to limit or remove the kind of false and misleading information that members of the network have been shown to spread. On Facebook in particular, members have seen their pages grow in popularity by staggering amounts, which could continue at pace if left unimpeded. This is significant as it reflects the limitations of social media platforms to uphold and enforce their own policies to tackle the issue of harmful disinformation about COVID-19 and vaccinations.

The findings of this report call into question the effort and resources that Facebook dedicates to the threat of false content relating to COVID-19 and vaccines. Facebook's community guidelines and policies provide ample detail on the kinds of claims that are prohibited. The vast majority of the claims found in ISD's analysis of the World Doctors Alliance are included in the list of claims that Facebook says it prohibits and removes.

This report shows that not only is Facebook failing to enforce its own policies, but also that the content that remains on the platform is receiving significant engagement. Facebook's promise to remove groups, pages and accounts that are discouraging people from getting the vaccine is also not being upheld, as members of the World Doctors Alliance continue to spread these kinds of claims to their hundreds of thousands of followers through their pages and accounts.

Facebook relies significantly on its relationship with fact-checking organisations in order to identify and act on problematic content on its platform. Fact-checking is an essential service in today's world, but this report also finds that the efficacy of Facebook's fact-checking program in stopping or limiting the spread of false information must be re-examined. Facebook says that it uses various forms of AI technology in order to track down duplicates and variations of false claims, but ISD's investigation has found that the platform is failing in this regard, even falling short in efforts to pick up thoroughly fact-checked content that has been uploaded natively to the platform with little variation from known copies.

This report also highlights the severe language gaps in Facebook's international fact-checking program. The online world has no borders and the discovery of World Doctors Alliance content in 46 different languages shows how quickly content can be translated and repurposed for audiences in non-English speaking regions. The high number of fact-checkers dedicated to English-language content, compared to those in less common languages, is a huge issue considering internal research has shown that almost all of Facebook's new users are coming from developing countries⁷⁸.

Facebook's content-first approach to fact-checking also leaves the accounts and pages that consistently post and host false information live on the site and provide ready playing fields for new types of disinformation in the future. Fact-checking is a laborious task that requires a lot of time and resources. Fact-checking content one post at a time fails to tackle the root cause of how false information spreads online. The Wall Street Journal's recent review of Facebook's internal research shows that the platform is aware that a large percentage of problematic content related to vaccines comes from a small number of users⁷⁹, yet the evidence points to an unwillingness to take meaningful action against these bad actors. Facebook briefly introduced "strike" policies for individuals and spaces on the platform that consistently broke rules about election-related disinformation in the US in 2020. Similar 'strike' approaches should be implemented to provide clear rules around account-level and group/page-level violations.

The overarching takeaway from this study is that Facebook is failing in its commitment to the public and policymakers to prohibit and remove content that contains false claims about COVID-19 and vaccines. Provably false content remains on the platform generating high engagement, even when it violates its policies and has been identified as false by fact-checkers. Facebook is not leveraging the knowledge of fact-checking organisations to take action on the individuals and networks known to consistently spread false and problematic information about COVID-19 and vaccines, even as evidence shows that belief in this kind of information is resulting in real world harm and tragic loss of life.

Appendix

Who are the members of the World Doctors Alliance?

Dr Dolores Cahill is president of the World Freedom Alliance and one of the founding members of the World Doctors Alliance. Dr Cahill holds a PhD in immunology and was, until September 2021, employed as a professor at University College Dublin⁸⁰. Until March 2021, Dr Cahill was the chairperson of the Irish Freedom Party⁸¹, a right-wing eurosceptic political party. Dr Cahill regularly claims that COVID-19 vaccines will cause widespread death⁸², while misinterpreting science⁸³ or citing irrelevant or outdated studies⁸⁴ to substantiate her claims.

Dr Mohammad Iqbal Adil is the founder of the World Doctors Alliance. He qualified as a doctor in Pakistan and worked with the UK National Health Service for over 30 years before being suspended in June 2020⁸⁵ for posting videos online claiming that COVID-19 is a hoax orchestrated by global elites.

Dr Heiko Schöning is a German physician and vice president of the World Freedom Alliance who also founded an organisation called ACU2020, which claims to be an “extra-parliamentary corona commission of inquiry”. Dr Schöning also founded the German anti-vaccination group Doctors for Enlightenment. He was arrested in London⁸⁶ after appearing at an anti-lockdown protest in September 2020 and had to be removed from a Mallorca airport⁸⁷ in July 2021 after pushing his way, maskless, into a photo with the Balearic Prime Minister Francina Armengol and Tourism Minister Reyes Maroto.

Dr Andrew Kaufman is an American psychiatrist who describes himself as a “natural healing consultant, inventor, public speaker... and expert witness”⁸⁸. Dr Kaufman rose to prominence at the beginning of the pandemic by falsely claiming that the COVID-19 virus did not exist and that what was being detected was in fact exosomes⁸⁹. Dr Kaufman has also denied the existence of the viruses behind the common cold, polio and HIV/AIDS and has said that “demon possession may actually be a factor in some mental illness”⁹⁰.

Dr Heinrich Fiechtner is a doctor and politician who was a member of the state parliament in Baden-Württemberg, Germany until April 2021. He was also the founder of a local branch of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) although he left the party in 2017. Dr Fiechtner is a provocative figure⁹¹, who has made regular appearances at anti-lockdown rallies. He has accused those promoting the COVID-19 vaccine as being “disciple[s] of Josef Mengeles”⁹².

Dr Scott Jensen is a physician and former state senator from Minnesota, USA. He rose to prominence when he appeared on Fox News in April 2020 claiming that doctors may be inflating COVID-19 case numbers for financial benefit⁹³, which was later repeated by Donald Trump during his 2020 election campaign⁹⁴. In April 2021, Dr Jensen was removed from TikTok where he had a following of 280,000, for violating community guidelines on COVID-19 misinformation⁹⁵. Dr Jensen is an outlier within this group due to the nature of the claims he makes, which are often based on speculation and professional opinion as opposed to provably false statements.

Dr Elke De Klerk is a Dutch General Practitioner (GP). Speaking at an anti-lockdown rally in Eindhoven in December 2020, she claimed that the vaccines contained nanoparticles and that those who take them will “officially become the property of Microsoft”⁹⁶. She also claimed that the PCR tests were “a kind of nasal vaccination” and that there is no evidence the COVID-19 virus exists⁹⁷. Dr De Klerk founded Doctors for Freedom and also launched a lawsuit in the Netherlands to have COVID-19 taken off the list of notifiable diseases⁹⁸.

Dr R. Zac Cox is a holistic dentist⁹⁹ from the United Kingdom who has campaigned and spoken out against the use of wireless technology and 5G¹⁰⁰. Freedom of information records also show that he has raised concerns about the fluoridation of water¹⁰¹. He spoke at a number of anti-lockdown protests in the UK throughout 2020, along with other members of the World Doctors Alliance¹⁰².

Dr Mikael Nordfors is a Swedish physician and alternative medical doctor who has been investigated for malpractice a number of times¹⁰³. He is barred from practising medicine in Denmark¹⁰⁴, and in Sweden, he has been investigated for eleven cases of treating patients with ozone¹⁰⁵. According to this tweet¹⁰⁶ Nordfors wrote an article for David Icke's site in 2018, although the original article has since been deleted.

Dr Hilde De Smet is a Belgian doctor specialising in natural and complementary therapies¹⁰⁷. She has claimed that there is "no global medical pandemic", that COVID-19 vaccines skipped animal trials and that PCR tests return a high number of false positive results¹⁰⁸.

Dr Vernon Coleman is a British doctor who has had a long history of spreading pseudoscience, including claiming that AIDS was a hoax and not a risk to the heterosexual community¹⁰⁹. He authored a book called 'Anyone Who Tells You Vaccines Are Safe and Effective is Lying'¹¹⁰. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Coleman has spread conspiracy theories about the virus and vaccines, and has claimed that doctors administering the vaccines are committing war crimes¹¹¹.

Dr Johan Denis is a General Practitioner (GP) from Antwerp, Belgium. His license was suspended in early 2021 after he was found to be giving patients mask exemption certificates on demand and after stating that the pandemic is part of a worldwide conspiracy¹¹². Dr Denis also refused to perform PCR tests or refer patients to local test centres and has claimed that COVID-19 vaccines are dangerous and have not been tested¹¹³.

Examples of policy violations

Table 6 Matrix of specific claims made on social media platforms by members of the Alliance

Claim	COVID-19 vaccines cause serious harm/widespread death/are untested				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹¹⁴	Instagram ✓ ¹¹⁵	Twitter ✓ ¹¹⁶	TikTok ? ¹¹⁷	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁸
Examples of claims	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹¹⁹	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹²⁰	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹²¹	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹²²	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹²³
	Dr Vernon Coleman ¹²⁴	Dr Vernon Coleman ¹²⁵	Dr Vernon Coleman ¹²⁶	Dr Vernon Coleman ¹²⁷	Dr Vernon Coleman ¹²⁸
	Dr Heinrich Fiechtner ¹²⁹	Dr Heinrich Fiechtner ¹³⁰	Dr Heinrich Fiechtner ¹³¹		Dr Heinrich Fiechtner ¹³²
	Dr Zac Cox ¹³³	Dr Zac Cox ¹³⁴	Dr Zac Cox ¹³⁵		
Claim	There is no medical pandemic/the pandemic is fake/a hoax				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹¹³	Instagram ✓ ¹¹⁴	Twitter ✓ ¹³⁶	TikTok ? ¹¹⁶	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁷
Examples of claims	Dr Elke De Klerk ¹³⁷	Dr Elke De Klerk ¹³⁸	Dr Elke De Klerk ¹³⁹	Dr Elke De Klerk ¹⁴⁰	Dr Elke De Klerk ¹⁴¹
	Dr Hilde De Smet ¹⁴²	Dr Hilde De Smet ¹⁴³	Dr Hilde De Smet ¹⁴⁴	Dr Hilde De Smet ¹⁴⁵	
	Dr Mikael Nordfors ¹⁰⁴	Dr Heiko Schöning ¹⁴⁶	Dr Johan Denis ¹⁴⁷	Dr Heiko Schöning ¹⁴⁸	
	Dr Heiko Schöning ¹⁴⁹	Dr Mikael Nordfors ⁹⁴	Dr Mikael Nordfors ¹⁵⁰		
Claim	COVID-19 does not exist/viruses don't cause diseases				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹¹³	Instagram ✓ ¹¹⁴	Twitter ✓ ¹⁵¹	TikTok ? ¹¹⁶	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁷
Examples of claims	Dr Andrew Kaufman ¹⁵²	Dr Andrew Kaufman ¹⁵³	Dr Andrew Kaufman ¹⁵⁴	Dr Andrew Kaufman ¹⁵⁵	Dr Andrew Kaufman ¹⁵⁶
			Dr Mohammad Adil ¹⁵⁷		
Claim	COVID-19 is only as lethal as the flu				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹¹³	Instagram ✓ ¹¹⁴	Twitter ✓ ¹¹⁵	TikTok ? ¹¹⁶	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁷
Examples of claims	Dr Johan Denis ¹⁰⁴	Dr Johan Denis ¹⁵⁸	Dr Heiko Schöning ¹⁵⁹	Dr Johan Denis ¹⁶⁰	Dr Heiko Schöning ¹⁶¹
Claim	Masks are unnecessary/cause hypercapnia/hypoxia				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹¹³	Instagram ✓ ¹¹⁴	Twitter ✓ ¹⁶²	TikTok ? ¹¹⁶	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁷
Examples of claims	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹⁶³	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹⁶⁴	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹⁶⁵	Dr Dolores Cahill ¹⁶⁶	Dr. Hilde De Smet ¹⁶⁷
Claim	WHO admitted that PCR tests are flawed				
Included in policy violations	Facebook ✓ ¹⁶⁸	Instagram ✓ ¹⁶⁹	Twitter ✓ ¹⁷⁰	TikTok ? ¹¹⁶	YouTube ✓ ¹¹⁷
Examples of claims	Dr Scott Jensen ¹⁷¹	Dr Scott Jensen ¹⁷²	Dr Scott Jensen ¹⁷³	Dr Scott Jensen ¹⁷⁴	Dr Scott Jensen ¹⁷⁵

Responses from World Doctors Alliance members

ISD contacted all individuals named in this report who are members of the World Doctors Alliance for comment ahead of publication. The team did not receive responses from Dr Dolores Cahill, Dr Mohammad Adil, Dr Heiko Schöning, Dr Andrew Kaufman, Dr Scott Jensen, Dr Hilde de Smet, Dr Johan Denis, Dr Zac Cox or Dr Mikael Nordfors regarding the claims outlined in this report. Dr. Heinrich Fiechtner responded and his comments have been reflected in the final text.

Dr Vernon Coleman responded to the claims outlined by ISD with the following:

“Your report merely repeats the customary nonsense without regard for truth.

I have provided scientific evidence for everything I have said and if you had bothered to read my articles and books you would know that.

I note no one has the courage to sign your letter.

If you publish your report without my note I shall make a formal complaint to the charities commission and may take appropriate legal action.”

Dr Elke De Klerk responded saying that she no longer practices as a doctor and is working to “create new earth”.

List of fact-checking organisations

<https://www.thejournal.ie/factcheck/news>

<https://fullfact.org/>

<https://factcheckni.org/>

<https://reuters.com/>

<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-usa>

<https://apnews.com>

<https://checkyourfact.com/>

<https://factcheck.thedispatch.com/>

<https://www.factcheck.org/>

<https://leadstories.com/>

<https://www.politifact.com/>

<https://sciencefeedback.co/>

<https://eu.usatoday.com/>

<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-canada>

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/decrypteurs>

<https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/desintox/>

<https://factuel.afp.com/>

<https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/>

<https://www.lemonde.fr/verification/>

<https://observers.france24.com/fr/>

<https://dpa-factchecking.com>

<https://www.knack.be/nieuws/factcheck>

<https://correctiv.org/>

<https://faktencheck.afp.com/list>

<https://www.mm.dk/tjekdet?>

<https://www.faktisk.no/>

<https://kallkritikbyran.se/>

<https://sprawdzam.afp.com/list>

<https://demagog.org.pl/>

<https://www.delfi.lt/news/melo-detektorius/>

<https://rebaltica.lv/>

<https://www.stopfake.org/ru/glavnaya-2/>

<https://voxukraine.org/uk/voxcheck>

<https://verificat.afp.com/list>

<https://factcheck.afp.com/>

<https://fakty.afp.com/list>

<https://factcheckgreek.afp.com/>

<https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/>

<https://pagellapolitica.it/>

<https://factual.afp.com/afp-espana>

<https://comprovem.afp.com/list>

<https://verifica.efe.com/>

<https://maldita.es/>

<https://www.newtral.es/zona-verificacion>

<https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/>

<https://observador.pt/>

<https://faktograf.hr/>

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/>

<https://www.raskrinkavanje.me/>

<https://vistinomer.mk/>

<https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/>

<https://teyit.org/>

<https://factcheck.ge/ka?>

<https://www.mythdetector.ge/ka>

<https://teyit.org/>

<https://napravoumiru.afp.com/list>

<https://demagog.cz/>

<https://factuel.afp.com/ar/list>

<https://fatabyyano.net/>

<https://afghanistan.factcrescendo.com/>

<https://semakanfakta.afp.com/list>

<https://cambodia.factcrescendo.com/>

<https://myanmar.factcrescendo.com/>

<https://srilanka.factcrescendo.com/>

<https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/>

<https://www.mygopen.com/>

<https://www.rappler.com/>

<https://verafiles.org/>

<https://www.factcrescendo.com/>

<https://www.boomlive.in/>

<https://factly.in/>
<https://www.indiatoday.in/>
<https://www.newschecker.in/>
<https://newsmobile.in/>
<https://www.thequint.com/>
<https://www.vishvasnews.com/>
<https://periksafakta.afp.com/list>
<https://www.kompas.com/>
<https://www.liputan6.com/>
<https://www.mafindo.or.id/>
<https://www.tempo.co/>
<https://tirto.id/>
<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-australia>
<https://www.aap.com.au/>
<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-south-africa>
<https://africacheck.org/geofocus/south-africa>
<https://pesacheck.org/>
<https://congocheck.net/category/actus/fact-check>
<https://africacheck.org/geofocus/kenya>
<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-kenya>
<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-ethiopia>
<https://africacheck.org/geofocus/nigeria>
<https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-nigeria>
<https://www.dubawa.org/>
<https://africacheck.org/>
<https://africacheck.org/geofocus/senegal>
<https://factual.afp.com/afp-chile>
<https://chequeado.com/>
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<https://factual.afp.com/>
<https://larepublica.pe/verificador/>
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<https://colombiacheck.com/>
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Endnotes

- 1 The World Doctors Alliance is an international coalition of doctors and scientists who have spread various problematic, false, and conspiratorial claims about COVID-19 and vaccines. A number of the members are either discredited in their fields; not qualified on issues related to virology or vaccines; or have been banned from practicing medicine in certain regions.
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 - 4 <https://www.wbur.org/news/2021/08/13/unvaccinated-covid-death-bill-ohare-regret>
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 - 6 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/26/covid-patients-tell-of-regrets-over-refusing-jab-vaccine-intensive-care>
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 - 8 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/social-media-use-linked-to-belief-in-covid-19-conspiracies-and-breaking-lockdown-rules>
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 - 11 <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-57051691>
 - 12 <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/04/covid-19-misinfo-update/#removing-more-false-claims>
 - 13 <https://www.counterhate.com/disinformationdozen>
 - 14 <https://www.counterhate.com/disinfo sequel>
 - 15 See Appendix for further details on claims made by members of the World Doctors Alliance.
 - 16 <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/how-it-works>
 - 17 <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/how-it-works>
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 - 20 https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-drug-cartels-human-traffickers-response-is-weak-documents-11631812953?mod=series_facebookfiles
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 - 22 <https://worlddoctorsalliance.com/>
 - 23 <https://worlddoctorsalliance.com/>
 - 24 <https://newearthproject.org/about-new-earth-2/frequently-asked-questions/>
 - 25 <https://www.facebook.com/newearthhorizon/posts/2650642121821131>
 - 26 <https://www.facebook.com/newearthhorizon/posts/1909217065963644>
 - 27 <https://www.facebook.com/newearthhorizon/posts/2839978839554124>
 - 28 Specific claims made by members of the World Doctors Alliance are detailed in the Appendix.
 - 29 <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/covid-19-pseudoscience/psychiatrist-who-calmly-denies-reality>
 - 30 <https://www.thejournal.ie/dolores-cahill-coronavirus-video-facebook-twitter-5148488-Aug2020/>
 - 31 <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/inspectie-onderzoekt-vreemde-uitspraken-arts-coronatest-is-verkapte-vaccinatie-br~a30492d4/>
 - 32 <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-sequencing-idUSKBN29R2NR>
 - 33 <https://www.vernoncoleman.com/storyofagenda21.htm>
 - 34 <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2714>
 - 35 <https://apnews.com/article/fact-checking-afs:Content:9573357676>
 - 36 <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/partner-map>
 - 37 A number of these organisations, such as AFP, operate across multiple jurisdictions
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- 38 Data was collected using the CrowdTangle API, which provides data on posts made by in public pages and groups across Facebook. This data includes: the text of the post, the group where it was shared, time and date of publication, any associated links or media, the number of comments, shares and reactions, and other metadata. This data does not include posts from personal profiles or private groups.
- 39 <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MENA-Covid-Vaccine-Misinformation-Monitor-1.pdf>
- 40 A maximum of five claims were noted per post due to the nature of some of the content, which could consist of hours long videos containing countless pieces of problematic information.
- 41 These theories posit that the pandemic is a scam or hoax perpetrated by governments, health care authorities and the media, who they say are colluding as part of a sinister plot to spread fear and strip people of their freedoms
- 42 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/29/technology/youtube-anti-vaxx-ban.html>
- 43 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/feb/08/facebook-bans-vaccine-misinformation>
- 44 <https://www.efe.com/efe/espana/sociedad/medicos-por-la-verdad-red-negacionista-que-se-expande-el-mundo/10004-4502057>
- 45 <https://www.facebook.com/1528007537516919/posts/2878736589110667>
- 46 <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2593586717571940>, 'We apply a label to content that's been reviewed by fact-checking partners, so people can read additional context.'
- 47 <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2593586717571940>, 'Once a fact-checker rates a piece of content as False, Altered or Partly false, it will appear lower in News Feed, be filtered out of Explore on Instagram, and be featured less prominently in feed and Stories. This significantly reduces the number of people who see it.'
- 48 These seven pages appear to belong to Dr Dolores Cahill, Dr Scott Jensen, Dr Mohammad Adil, Dr Heinrich Fiechtner, Dr Mikael Nordfors, Dr Vernon Coleman, World Freedom Alliance. Andrew Kaufman uses a personal profile on Facebook, where he has accumulated 21,790 followers. This profile cannot be analysed using CrowdTangle, therefore statistics from his page are not included in the above analysis. The World Freedom Alliance and Dr Vernon Coleman pages had been removed by the time of publication.
- 49 Interactions include the total number of likes, reactions, comments and shares
- 50 <https://brandnewtube.com/QDrVernonColeman>
- 51 <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-covid-19-vaccine-modify-idUSKBN22U2BZ>
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- 53 <https://www.facebook.com/100763059965534/posts/3830940260281110>
- 54 <https://www.facebook.com/789743788083898/posts/1391096361281968>
- 55 <https://ai.facebook.com/blog/heres-how-were-using-ai-to-help-detect-misinformation/>
- 56 <https://leadstories.com/hoax-alert/2021/04/fact-check-video-does-not-prove-pcr-test-can-kill-you-can-be-used-to-vaccinate-you.html>
- 57 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=229311162189597>
- 58 <https://maldita.es/malditaciencia/20200603/entrevista-dolores-cahill-the-hightwire-coronavirus/>
- 59 <https://www.boomlive.in/world/no-influenza-vaccines-do-not-contain-coronaviruses-8829>
- 60 <https://factcheck.afp.com/flu-shots-do-not-contain-coronaviruses>
- 61 <https://sciencefeedback.co/claimreview/to-date-no-therapy-has-been-proven-effective-for-preventing-or-treating-covid-19-contrary-to-claim-by-dolores-cahill/>
- 62 <https://apnews.com/article/fact-checking-9953495293>
- 63 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=265249484771683>
- 64 <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/04/24/fact-check-medicare-hospitals-paid-more-covid-19-patients-coronavirus/3000638001/>
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- 67 <https://sprawdzam.afp.com/nie-lekarze-nie-dostaja-13-tys-dolarow-za-pacjenta-z-diagnoza-covid-19>
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- 70 <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2020/09/17/covid-19-conspiracy-video-collection/>
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- 72 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/05/us/coronavirus-deaths-undercount.html>
- 73 https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/cdc-wants-states-to-count-probable-coronavirus-cases-and-deaths-but-most-arent-doing-it/2020/06/07/4aac9a58-9d0a-11ea-b60c-3be060a4f8e1_story.html
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- 113 <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/fact-check/covid-19-vaccines-not-proven-safe-effective>
- 114 <https://www.facebook.com/help/230764881494641>
- 115 <https://help.instagram.com/268041307701567>
- 116 https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid19-vaccine ("False claims which have been widely debunked about the adverse impacts or effects of receiving vaccinations")
- 117 <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en-us/covid-19/> ("TikTok's Community Guidelines prohibit content that's false or misleading, including misinformation related to COVID-19, vaccines, and anti-vaccine disinformation more broadly.")
- 118 <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9891785?hl=en>
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- 120 <https://www.instagram.com/tv/COfhHdVA64s/>
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- 126 <https://twitter.com/SamWhit37845181/status/1359093762304036865>
- 127 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMR6Cqg5R/>
- 128 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKhIOmY0QG0>
- 129 <https://www.facebook.com/925728750883560/posts/3386021834854227>
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- 131 <https://twitter.com/BoysieDent/status/1385115490603909120>
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- 133 <https://www.facebook.com/663251520811711/posts/1115254352278090>
- 134 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIqEN3jnGE8/>
- 135 <https://twitter.com/SoniaPoulton/status/1337513704296943616>
- 136 https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid-19#protecting ("For a Tweet to qualify as a misleading claim, it must be an assertion of fact (not an opinion), expressed definitively, and intended to influence others' behavior. Some examples include information about: the origin, nature, and characteristics of the virus; the prevalence of viral spread, or the current state of the crisis")
- 137 <https://www.facebook.com/393517784055303/posts/4595787167161656>
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- 139 <https://twitter.com/hicbirseyim/status/1429379608965787648>
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- 151 https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid-19#protecting ("For a Tweet to qualify as a misleading claim, it must be an assertion of fact (not an opinion), expressed definitively, and intended to influence others' behavior. Some examples include information about: the origin, nature, and characteristics of the virus; the prevalence of viral spread, or the current state of the crisis")
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- 155 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMR6XbM1Y/>
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- 160 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMR64LbQP/>
- 161 <https://youtu.be/McQ7v9kKLxk>
- 162 <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/medical-misinformation-policy>
- 163 <https://www.facebook.com/663251520811711/posts/1145945685875623>
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- 165 <https://twitter.com/HighWireTalk/status/1260993344278155265>
- 166 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMRBXMjcn/>
- 167 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soN2iLuSNB8>
- 168 <https://www.facebook.com/help/230764881494641> ("Claims that COVID-19 tests approved by public health authorities cannot detect COVID-19")
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- 170 <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/medical-misinformation-policy>
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