

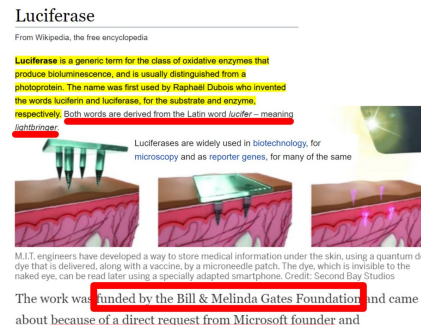
Key Highlights

- Twitter and other social media platforms [have increased their monitoring and surveillance](#) of conspiracy theories and disinformation, resulting in an observable suspension of accounts and deletion of tweets spreading disinformation.
- According to a recent poll released by Axios-Ipsos, [nearly a third of Americans](#) believe that the number of deaths resulting from COVID-19 are less than what is officially reported. These poll results, which were released on July 18, are consistent with other disinformation campaigns such as the ongoing efforts to discredit public health experts, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, regarding COVID-19 guidance and recommendations.
- Conspiracies regarding government surveillance via microchips in vaccines and through contact tracers are ongoing.
- The majority of tweets about COVID-19 are retweets or quotes. Original tweets or replies about the virus make up only 18% of total tweets. This indicates that the majority of tweets are not original ideas but are instead regurgitated statements contributing to echo chambers.
- In Michigan, [local medical experts](#) are combating the view that government officials are inflating mortality numbers for the purpose pressuring mandatory mask usage. Similar trends have emerged in Wisconsin, where disinformation campaigns have been labelling contact tracers and contact tracing activities as a form of government surveillance.
- Our social media analysis indicates the overall sentiment of the conversation regarding “masks” were 59% negative and 44% negative for “contact tracing.” This suggests the compliance on mask usage and contact tracing will continue to face an uphill battle as many social media conversations are negative instead of viewing the initiatives as positive actions that will save lives.

Ongoing COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theories

Bill Gates continues to be the subject of disproved [conspiracy theories](#) claiming that he wants to use the pandemic to monitor people. The outlandish theory claims that Gates’ involvement in COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution efforts is motivated by his goal to monitor billions of people using tracking devices or “microchips”. In light of recent COVID-19 vaccine developments, “microchips” were mentioned over 143K times on Twitter (up 13% from last week.) A [42-tweet thread](#) by account @jcho710 spanning June 19 - July 13 has had 11M impressions. His latest tweet references Bill Gates in a conspiracy regarding “quantum dot tattoos”:

This is the quantum dot tattoo, research for which Bill Gates funded. It's scannable via the artificial enzyme Luciferase, via a bioluminescent "mark." The tattoo-vaccine-chip is to contain not only your medical/COVID vaccine history, but proposed digitized govt currencies. (852 retweets, 613 likes)



Conspiracy theory tweeted by @jcho710 claiming that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has sponsored funding of bioluminescent microchip research.

Ongoing COVID-19 origin (“hoax”) conspiracy theories

[Mixed signals](#) from President Trump (84M Twitter followers) regarding the truth of COVID-19 spread and transmission continues to inspire conspiracy rhetoric among his followers. This includes the President’s July 13th retweet of the following tweet (since shifted to a private account) from conservative talk show host [Chuck Woolery](#) (689.2K) regarding “lies” surrounding COVID-19:

The most outrageous lies are the ones about Covid 19.

Everyone is lying. The CDC, Media, Democrats, our Doctors, not all but most ,that we are told to trust. I think it's all about the election and keeping the economy from coming back, which is about the election. I'm sick of it.

“Death toll” and government surveillance conspiracies
According to a recent poll released by [Axios-Ipsos](#), [nearly a third of Americans](#) believe that the number of deaths resulting from COVID-19 are less than what is officially reported, despite evidence that deaths are likely [undercounted](#). These poll results, which were released on July 18, follow ongoing efforts to discredit public health experts, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, regarding COVID-19 guidance and recommendations (attacks against Fauci covered in our last report). #FireFauci continued to trend this week, consequently peaking on Twitter on July 18 with over 103M tweets and 27M impressions and an overall 50% negative sentiment. The top tweet on July 18 was from Del Bigtree (@delbigtree) anti-vaccine activist and TV host:

If I was @realDonaldTrump and I CAUGHT HEALTH DEPARTMENTS LYING ABOUT COVID CASES leading GOVERNORS to DESTROY the ECONOMY and people's CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS I'd take data collection into my own hands. How about you? #FireFauci #BeBrave <https://t.co/S7yTT0NhGb> (1.3K retweets, 2.8K likes)

In Michigan, [local medical experts](#) are combating theories regarding government officials inflating numbers of death in order to pressure residents to follow orders to wear masks. Similar trends have emerged in Wisconsin, where conspiracy theorists have been labelling contact tracers and contract tracing activities as a form of government surveillance. Sentiments regarding “masks” were 59% negative and 44% negative for “contact tracing.”

Congressional candidate spreads disinformation through videos

Antoine Tucker is a Congressional candidate in New York who filed his candidacy in early June, after gaining 100,000 followers on his [Twitter account](#). This week, he shared a [tweet](#) inaccurately claiming a 99.9% survival rate, and that Colorado created unconstitutional laws to enforce mask use. This tweet reached 168K Twitter users and had 328,877 impressions.



Also on July 17th, Tucker shared a [video](#) (166.5K views) claiming “the Truth” about COVID-19. He claims that if masks worked, there would be no need to be 6

feet apart, that the virus has a 99.9% survival rate, and says that “they are trying to trace and track you” through the pandemic. He also addresses that “sex child trafficking rings” continue while Americans comply with mask use and social distancing. Including 5.42K retweets and 2K quotes, this tweet reached 29M Twitter users in only 6 days.

His videos have especially become popular, in which he argues in favor of COVID-19 conspiracies against mask use, social distancing, and vaccination. Over the duration of the pandemic, Tucker has increased in popularity — with 7M impressions of 74 tweets about COVID (including virus OR coronavirus OR corona OR COVID OR COVID-19) since March 17th.

Twitter Statistics

Negative sentiment trend continues

Of all tweets mentioning COVID-19 in the last week, overall sentiment was negative (46%) globally. In the United States, sentiment was more negative than global trends, 58%.

Negative sentiment has fluctuated but has remained high since the start of the pandemic.

#trumpvirus is the new #chinavirus?

The hashtag #trumpvirus has emerged as a trending hashtag in recent weeks. Two of the top 20 most retweeted tweets this week ([both statuses](#) by @TheLincolnProject) used “Trump Virus”. Though it has been used by Twitter users since the start of the pandemic, it peaked on July 6, when 152M tweets used this hashtag for the first time. This hashtag had another peak of usage this week, when 75M tweets used this hashtag on July 22. Majid Padellan (@mmpadellan) has 585.3K followers, and shared the second most retweeted tweet using the hashtag, “Since COVID-19 has killed more people in America than anywhere else in the world, shouldn't it be called the #TrumpVirus?” His push to use this hashtag has contributed to its use 337,000 times since June 24th (compared to 35,000 mentions of #chinavirus in the same time period). Previously, Gail Collins, a New York Times opinion columnist, authored an opinion [piece](#) “Let's Call it Trumpvirus” on Feb 26th.

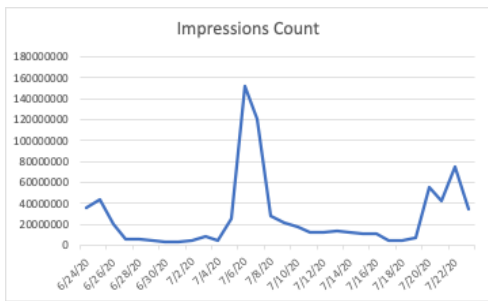


Figure A: shows the use of the hashtag #TrumpVirus since June 24.

The majority of coronavirus tweets are not original

The majority of tweets about COVID-19 are retweets or quotes. Original tweets or replies about the virus (virus OR coronavirus OR corona OR COVID OR COVID-19) make up 18% of total tweets historically; this trend continues, with 19.7% of tweets about the virus this week being original tweets or replies. This demonstrates that the majority of tweets about the virus are sourced from other accounts, rather than original ideas or statements.

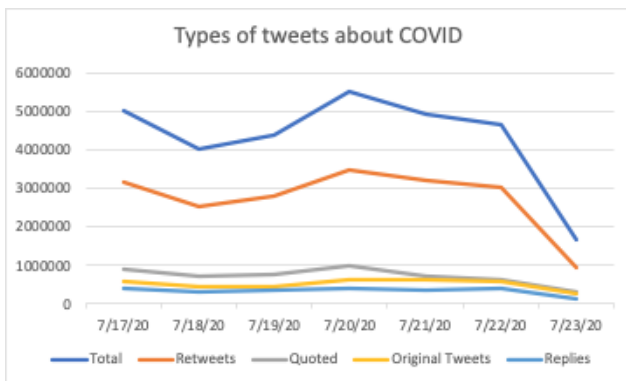


Figure B: This graph demonstrates the high proportion of tweets that are retweets.

Methodology

Using open-source investigation techniques, FAS evaluated the volume of social media interactions regarding coronavirus using Twitter posts and digital news articles published between July 13-23. The breakdown of the following information was primarily focused on results in the United States, but also provided data from other English-speaking contexts, including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. FAS analysts evaluated the volume of tweets that emerged over time, the reach of trending tweets, and overall public sentiment. The search term used to identify the highest reaching tweets were (“COVID” OR “virus”, OR “coronavirus”).