



Digital Media
Research Centre

Journalists Behaving Badly: Mainstream Media as Amplifiers of Misinformation

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Acknowledgement of Country

QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.



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<https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/>
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Due Credit:

But.

<https://datasociety.net/library/oxygen-of-amplification/>

The Oxygen of Amplification

Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators Online

By Whitney Phillips
Data&Society

PART 1

In Their Own Words

Trolling, Meme Culture, and Journalists' Reflections on the 2016 US Presidential Election

(It's the Celebrities.)

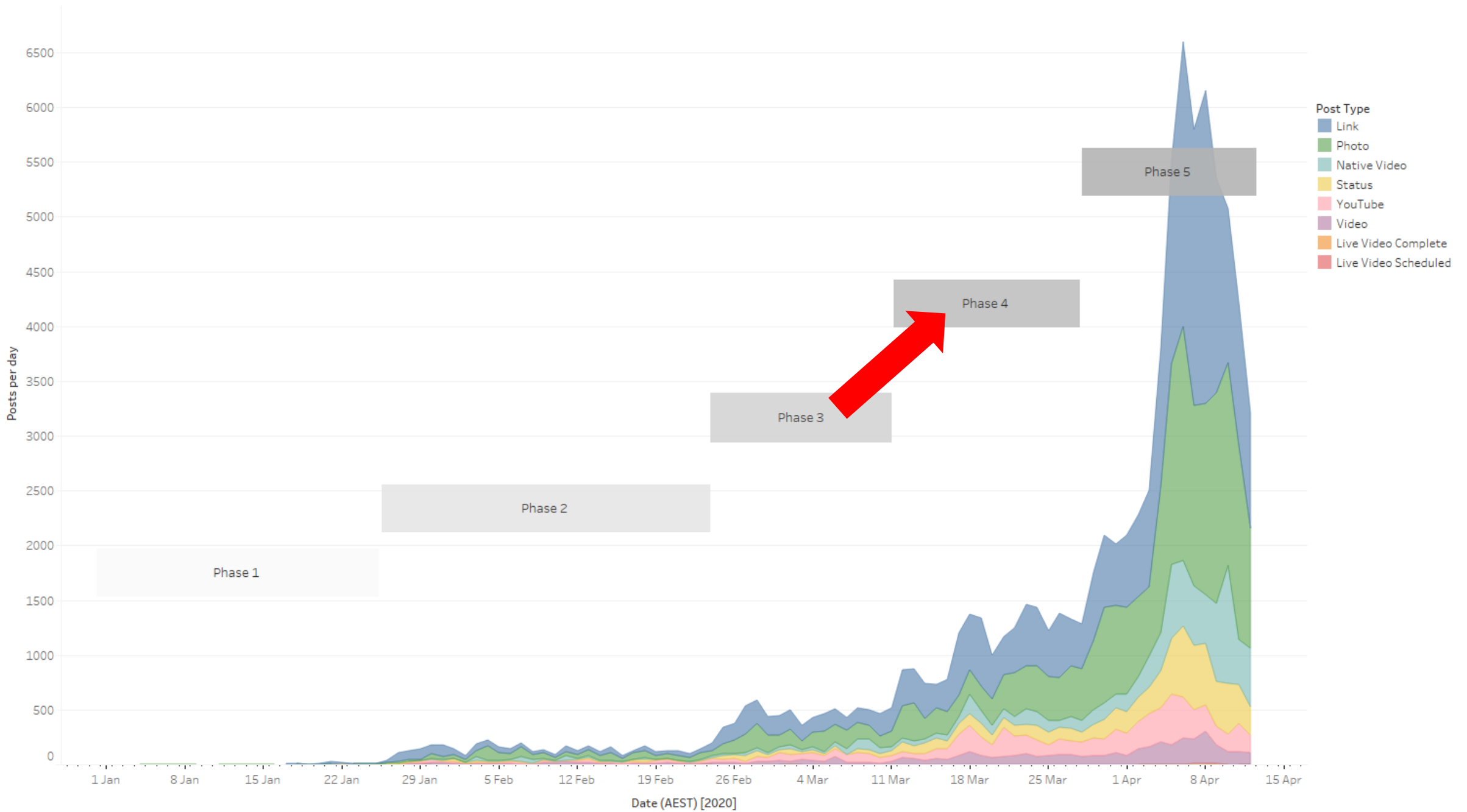
Case Study: COVID/5G Conspiracy Theories

- Facebook:
 - Bruns, A., Harrington, S., & Hurcombe, E. (2020). 'Corona? 5G? Or Both?': The Dynamics of COVID-19/5G Conspiracy Theories on Facebook. *Media International Australia*, 177(1), 12-29.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1329878X20946113>
- Media coverage:
 - Bruns, A., Hurcombe, E., & Harrington, S. (2021). Covering Conspiracy: Approaches to Reporting the COVID/5G Conspiracy Theory." *Digital Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1968921>.
- Combined analysis:
 - Bruns, A., Hurcombe, E., & Harrington, S. (2021). Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories: Tracing Misinformation Trajectories from the Fringes to the Mainstream. In [*Communicating COVID-19: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*](#), eds. Monique Lewis, Kate Holland, and Eliza Govender. London: Palgrave.

Approach

- Facebook:
 - Search for (*covid,corona,virus,epidemi,pandemi*) AND (*5g*) via CrowdTangle
 - Timeframe: 1 Jan. 2020 to 12 Apr. 2020 (i.e. after the arson attacks in the UK and elsewhere)
 - Limitations: only *public* pages, groups, verified profiles (for short, *spaces*); availability and use of Facebook differs across countries; Latin alphabet; divergent local terms for the virus (e.g. *koronawirus*)
 - 89,664 Posts, including false positives
- Media reporting:
 - Search for (?i)(*corona|virus|covid|epidem|pandem|wuhan|hubei*) AND (?i)\b(*5g|fiveg|5-g|five-g*)\b via GDELT
 - Timeframe: 1 Jan. 2020 to 12 Apr. 2020
 - Limitations: only article titles and URLs; GDELT coverage; Latin alphabet; divergent local terms
 - 2,812 articles, manually reviewed and coded → 1,871 true positives

Volume of COVID/5G Posts in Public Facebook Spaces



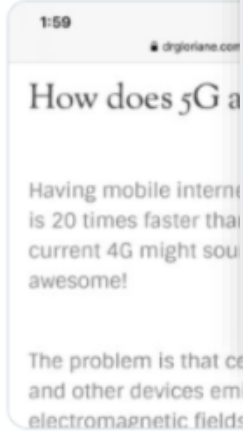
GQBUZZ 16 March 2020

Keri Hilson has gone on Twitter to claim the corona by 5G network. She went on to ask her followers to "LTE." The American about the dang dangerous leve contagious viru https://www.gqb



She wrote: "People have been tr organizations, studies...what we launched in CHINA. Nov 1, 2019 stories for more. TURN OFF 5G I

Keri Hilson @KeriHi More on last tweet... (R)

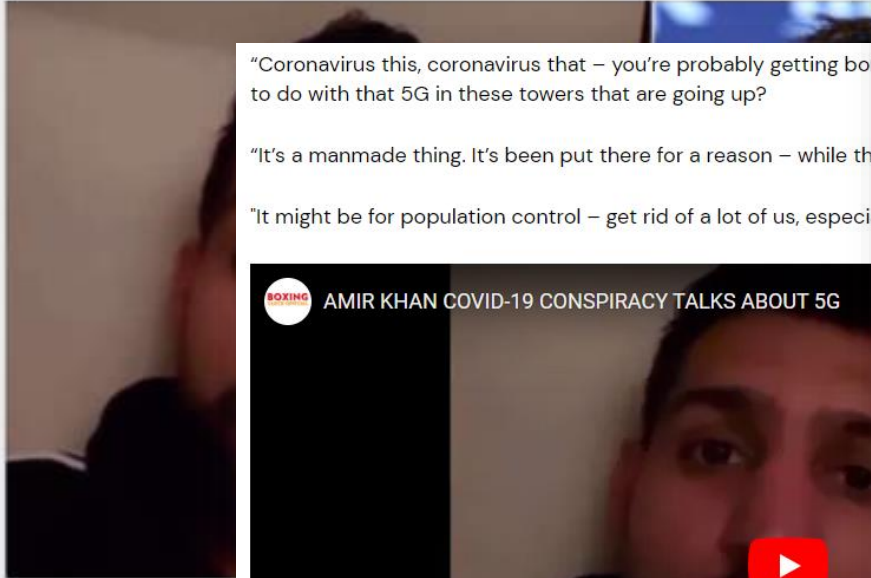


42 135 239

GQBUZZ.COM Coronavirus That's Why I

GiveMeSport 4 April 2020

'It's a manmade thing. It's been put there for a reason - while the 5G. It might be for population control - get rid of a lot of us' Isolation might be getting a bit much for Amir



"Coronavirus this, coronavirus that - you're probably getting bored to do with that 5G in these towers that are going up?"

"It's a manmade thing. It's been put there for a reason - while the

"It might be for population control - get rid of a lot of us, especia



"Look at these towers at nighttime that have been put up, then telling people not to go out."

Home > News > Weird

Coronavirus: YouTube tightens rules after David Icke 5G interview

CORONAVIRUS conspiracies have spread almost as fast as the virus, in part due to their popularity on social media. Now YouTube has banned all conspiracy theory videos bizarrely linking coronavirus symptoms to 5G networks.

By TOM FISH 14:31, Tue, Apr 7, 2020 | UPDATED: 14:55, Tue, Apr 7, 2020



Amplification and Permanence

- Impacts:
 - Celebrity makes post, gets criticised, deletes post: a temporary problem
 - Celebrity media report post, embed post – or include screenshot: a permanent problem



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Despite the constant negative press
covfefe

5-31, 12:06 AM



Observations and Recommendations

- Key takeaways:
 - The immediate impact of conspiracist sites is limited
 - Hardcore conspiracy theorists are a problem in themselves, but have limited influence
 - Celebrities can become superspreaders
 - Their amplification inserts mis- and disinformation into more general conversations
 - ‘Soft’ newsbeats are journalism’s weak spot
 - Journalistic ethos less well developed – **need to reflect on impact and act more responsibly**
 - Take-downs can delay dissemination – especially amongst ordinary users
 - Communicative distance between mainstream and fringe groups is critically important – **need to avoid news coverage that undermines take-downs by creating more persistent copies**
 - The right time to respond to mis- and disinformation is... when?
 - Earlier than in the case of 5G conspiracy theories, but not so early that it aids dissemination – **need to respond in ways that reach the same audiences: including in celebrity / tabloid media**

The Soft Underbelly of the News Industry

Precarious Clickworkers or Bad-Faith Actors?

- Tabloid and celebrity media content:
 - Clickbait as a business model
 - Sensationalist, controversial, sticky content
 - Stupid celebrities as the perfect content fodder
- Tabloid and celebrity media staff:
 - Precarious, pay-by-the-click freelance positions
 - Poorly trained journalistic staff
 - Very limited adherence to journalistic standards
 - Encouraged to 'glean' content from elsewhere

12 Surprising Examples of

Clickbait Headlines



That Work

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/12-surprising-examples-of-clickbait-headlines-that-work/362688/>

Irresponsible Journalism

Coronavirus

Australia's top 10 misinformation spreaders use Facebook to share dangerous, unproven vaccine data

Influencers with more than 100,000 followers are still spreading dangerous misinformation about the Covid vaccine in Australia. See the list.

Jennifer Dudley-Nicholson National technology editor [Follow](#)
@jendudley 7 min read August 6, 2021 - 9:41AM News Corp Australia Network



Australia's top doctors have signed an open letter begging young Australians to get the first vaccine available to them.

Exclusive: Australians are being targeted with dangerous misinformation about vaccine risks, medical cover-ups, 'lethal' lockdowns, and questions about whether Covid-19 is actually harmful by a network of high-profile social media influencers.

Some of these individuals now boast more than 100,000 followers on Facebook alone — and while that social platform and YouTube have been pulling down some risky posts — health and digital media experts want misinformation superspreaders de-platformed.

Here are 10 influencers whose posts have gone viral, according to CrowdTangle.

1. Malcolm Roberts (84,000+ followers)

Malcolm Roberts - Pauline Hanson's One Nation 24 July at 21:08
I recorded this message for today at the [MMAMV Australia](#) march at Parliament House in Canberra.
Governments are squashing Australian freedoms like never before in history. I commit to standing against it.



Politician Malcolm Roberts. Picture: Facebook

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Tech

Coronavirus: YouTube tightens rules after David Icke 5G interview

7 April 2020



A lengthy interview with David Icke was live-streamed on YouTube on Monday

By Leo Kelion
Technology desk editor

YouTube has banned all conspiracy theory videos falsely linking coronavirus symptoms to 5G networks.

The Google-owned service will now delete videos violating the policy. It had previously limited itself to reducing the frequency it recommended them in its Up Next section.

The move follows a live-streamed interview with conspiracy theorist David Icke on Monday, in which he had linked the technology to the pandemic.



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By TOM FISH
14:31, Tue, Apr 7, 2020 | UPDATED: 14:55, Tue, Apr 7, 2020



YouTube has moved to delete any coronavirus conspiracy videos violating the Google-owned service's policies. The video sharing platform had attracted criticism to previously only limited itself to reducing the frequency it recommended them in its Up Next section.

YouTube's latest move follows a live-streamed interview with notorious conspiracy theorist David Icke yesterday.

There is a link between 5G and this health crisis
David Icke



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So...

What Now?

- What can change?
 - Celebrities will continue to do and say stupid things
 - Celebrity news sites and tabloids will continue to cover them
 - Fans will continue to be fans
- Incremental change:
 - Embeds, not screenshots
 - Reporting, not embeds
 - Critical reporting and fact-checking, not just stenography
 - Better journalistic training even for entertainment reporters
 - Better visibility for fact-checking and debunking in the same media
 - Better enforcement of press standards on misinformation and plagiarism

PROG Astounding sounds, amazing music f

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TRENDING New issue on sale now! The stoy of Kate Bush's Hounds Of Love

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Roger Waters: "I'm on a kill list supported by the Ukrainian government"

By Paul Brannigan (Prog) published 2 days ago

Former Pink Floyd leader Roger Waters tells Rolling Stone magazine that he has been placed on a 'kill list' because of his stance on the conflict in Ukraine

[f](#) [t](#) [p](#) [r](#) [e](#)



(Image credit: The Late Show CBS Television)

Former **Pink Floyd** leader **Roger Waters** has shared his belief that he has been placed on a 'Kill List' after voicing his opinions about the conflict in Ukraine.

Back in August, Waters appeared on CNN and defended his decision to label US President Joe Biden a "war criminal" in a segment of his current This Is Not A Drill tour, stating his belief that Biden is "fuelling the war in the Ukraine" and insisting that the US President is committing a "huge crime" by not encouraging Ukrainian President Zelensky to negotiate with Russia to bring an end to the conflict.

An Analogy?

- Dealing with viral mis- and disinformation:
 - **Take-downs, deplatforming, digital literacy** \approx lockdowns, quarantine, mask mandates: it slows the spread of problematic information to vulnerable communities, but does not solve the underlying problem itself.
 - **Deradicalisation** \approx vaccination: it starves the viral event of potential carriers and superspreaders, but it is efficient only if the vast majority of the population are protected from infection.
 - **Public information campaigns** = public information campaigns: in either case, clear and accurate information from public officials and other stakeholders is crucial in ensuring community trust in these physical / informational health measures.

Acknowledgments

This research is funded in part by the Australian Research Council projects *DP200101317 Evaluating the Challenge of 'Fake News' and Other Malinformation* and *FT130100703 Understanding Intermedia Information Flows in the Australian Online Public Sphere*, and supported by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society.

Facebook data are provided courtesy of CrowdTangle.