

The SQUINTSTAGRAM™

Fighting COVID-19 Misinformation



February 8, 2020—Part 1—Conspiracy Theories

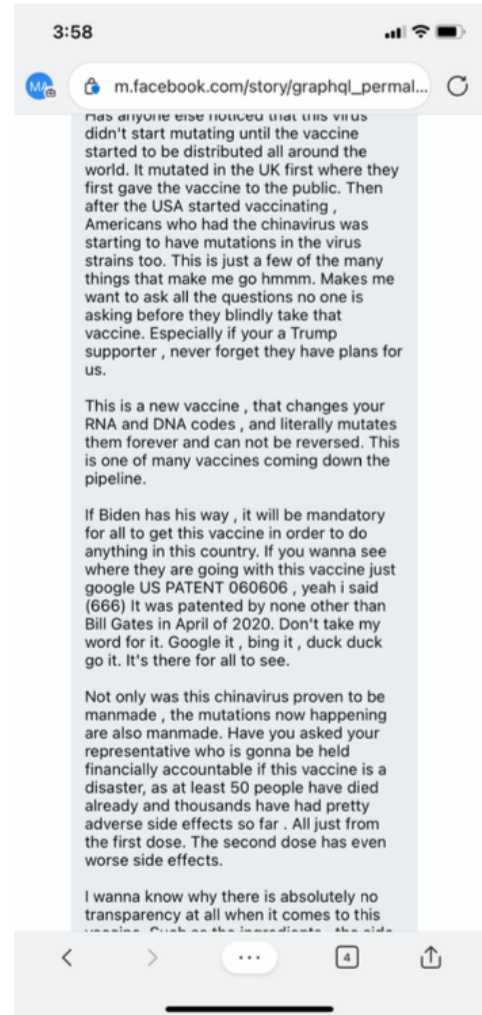
As part of our SQUINT for fighting COVID-19 misinformation, we received a publicly available Facebook posting that is a veritable smorgasbord of misinformation. The five claims that we have identified in it are representative of the major misinformation themes and distortions that are currently prevalent on Social Media. This is Part 1 of a 2-part focus on three “conspiracy” issues. Part 2 will discuss two vaccine side effect claims.

Misinformation Claim 1: The COVID-19 variants are a result of starting widespread COVID-19 vaccinations.

Facts: Source (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>). Viruses such as the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 constantly change over time and multiple variants have been documented during this pandemic. Of the three best known variants, B.1.1.7 (United Kingdom Variant), B.351 (South Africa Variant), and P.1 (Brazil Variant), the B.1.1.7 variant was detected in the fall of 2020 and the B.351 variant was detected in early October 2020 before widespread vaccinations began.

Misinformation Claim 2: The United States will have mandatory vaccines and leverage Bill Gates’ US PATENT 060606 (aka 666) to inject microchips as part of the vaccination.

Facts: Sources (<https://fullfact.org/online/bill-gates-patent-microchips/>, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia’s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf, and <https://www.jhsph.edu/covid-19/articles/can-covid-19-vaccines-be-mandatory-in-the-u-s-and-who-decides.html>). Multiple sources describe this as disinformation including the U.S. Department of State report referenced above which identifies the Russian Website *Geopolitca.ru* as publisher of this disinformation. While Microsoft did apply for a patent in 2019 under the identifier WO/2020/060606 (the patent has not yet been granted), it is for wearable technology such as smart watches and does not mention injecting microchips into people. As to the United States having a mandatory vaccine, Johns Hopkins



School of Public Health published the article referenced above noting that the individual States and local governments have the authority to mandate “reasonable regulations as the safety of the general public may demand.” Similar to mask wearing and other public health mandates, these are made at the State level and not at the federal level. Note that the recent Executive Order from President Biden is a requirement for Federal Buildings and Federal Lands only (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-the-federal-workforce-and-requiring-mask-wearing/>) while encouraging State, local, Tribal, and territorial officials to issue similar mandates.

Misinformation Claim 3: The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 was manmade and the mutations are manmade.

Facts: Sources (<https://apnews.com/article/9391149002> and <https://www.swtimes.com/story/news/2020/10/29/fact-check-coronavirus-not-man-made-or-engineered-but-its-origin-remains-unclear/42908315/>). Multiple news and scientific organizations have concluded that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 was not manmade. Two news stories that reference these studies and that discredit the claims that the virus was manmade are referenced above.

To join SQUINT, help fight COVID-19 misinformation, and receive these updates, send an email to squint@mitre.org.