COVID-19 RUMOUR BULLETIN #5

Special Edition

Internews is working with Translators without Borders, Standby Task Force and BBC Media Action to collect and analyse rumours and misinformation related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease.

Since March, we have collected close to **3,000 rumours** found on social media platforms in nine languages.

These rumours are a window to a community consciousness. They reflect the fears and anxieties communities feel during this pandemic, information gaps as well as common confusion over key health messages.

This analysis is designed to support communication and engagement strategies via local media and local actors using the languages and communication channels your community prefers.

We aim to ensure that COVID-19 communication efforts begin with the real questions and concerns of our communities.

We connect regional media with evidence based health information from the scientific community and UN Agencies to give them the tools they need to respond to common rumours circulating in their communities.

Our work is fuelled by the hard work of our social media monitors. This human-centered approach ensures that posts are collected by mother tongue speakers who provide valuable information to help our analysts understand the cultural context where the question, comment or complaint is being made.

This special edition of the bulletin brings together highlights from rumours collected between January 23 and May 31, 2020. We highlight rumour data collected in six languages: Thai, Vietnamese, Bahasa Indonesia, Simplified Chinese, Khmer, and Tagalog.

You can access previous editions of the Rumour Bulletin and communication resources on the **Internews COVID-19 site**, including translations of the bulletin in Hindi, Vietnamese, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia and Simplified Chinese.

We are open to questions, collaborations and feedback. Data exports are also available to support risk communication efforts. To find out more about our methodology, please contact covid-19@internews.org

For more information, contact: covid-19@internews.org

UKaid from the British people

H2H Catalysts for Change

Internews

TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

STANDBY TASK FORCE

evidence aid

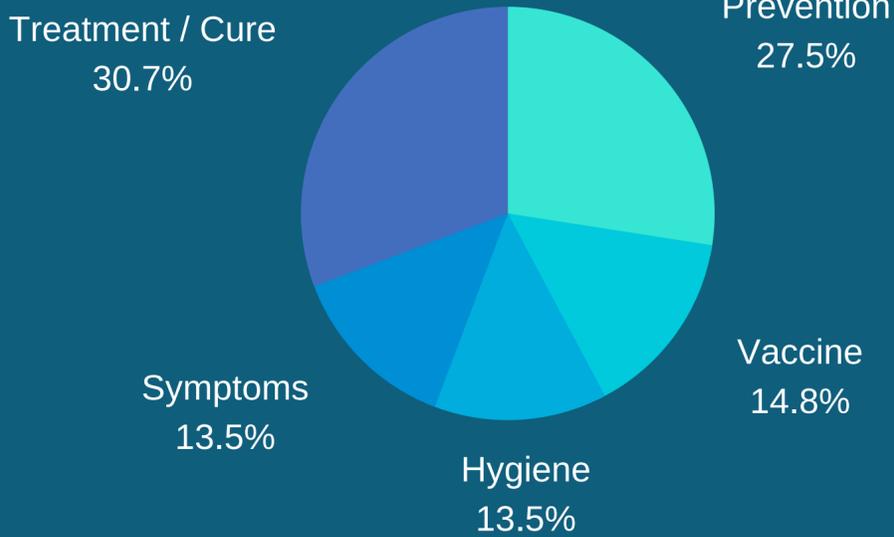BBC MEDIA ACTION TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA AROUND THE WORLD

Thai

This analysis is based on 420 rumours posted between 25th February, 2020 and 31st May, 2020. To access the full dataset, please email covid-19@internews.org.

THEMES

Treatment / Cure
30.7%

Prevention
27.5%

Vaccine
14.8%

Hygiene
13.5%

Symptoms
13.5%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in the Thai language were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Symptoms, Hygiene and rumours about the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Rumour Example: Symptoms

"Most recently, A skin disorder like urticaria found as a symptom of COVID-19. It is too scary." - Facebook

"The virus has mutated to target our brain. There are patients without any symptoms or pneumonia but only headache and depression. When we check the Cerebrospinal fluid, we found they have COVID-19. This means it can become encephalitis. So it is possible that the virus has mutated but it is still called COVID-19." - Twitter

Rumour Example: Vaccine

"A small success of Thailand. Yay!! Vaccine prototype against COVID-19 in "rats" and found immunity created. A team of doctors led by Dr.Kiat Rakrungtham has developed a prototype vaccine called the DNA vaccine." - Pantip

"My friend, who is a doctor, said that when taking vaccination against influenza, low fever in the early stages will happen anyway. Approximately 50% of this symptom may be confused with COVID-19." - Twitter

Rumour Example: Preventative

"In addition to exercise, eating "Thai food" that contains "herbs" can help boost immunity and prevent viruses, such as Miang Kham, stir-fried basil, and tom yum." - Twitter

"Ex Plu Kaow builds antioxidants to prevent COVID-19. The latest research found it is the best to prevent Covid-19. Teacher Israpong Pongsirikun, a specialist in agro-industrial technology said that Plu Kaow has important active ingredients, which is Quercitrin, an antioxidant that strengthen body." - Youtube

Rumour Example: Hygiene

"Research shows possible infection of covid-19 in cats and ferrets. We can assume that we might have to do social distancing with cats as well." - Facebook
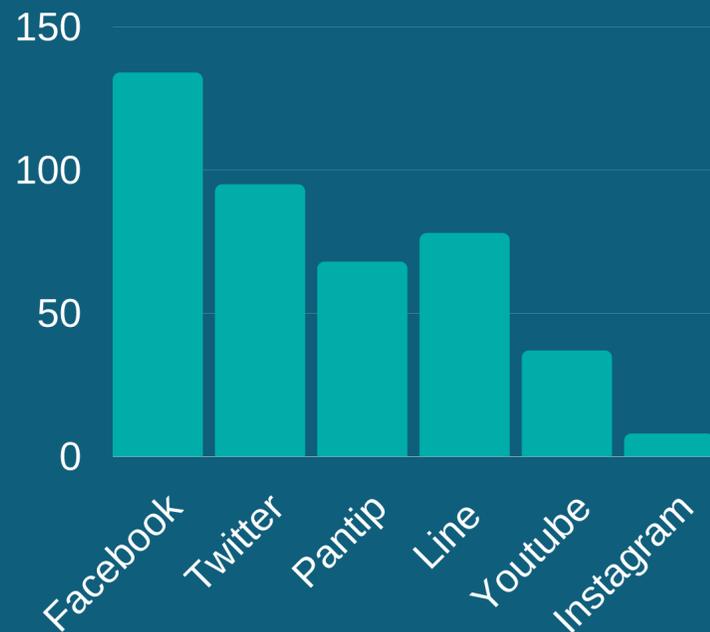
"Today, I talked to Ajarn Aod from Kasetsart University and I know that the "copper" that I am holding or that monks always use can kill COVID-19 by itself in just 2.5 minutes! But caution is "it is electrical conductive and sharp." - Twitter

Rumour Example: Treatment / Cure:

"Boiling ginger, Galangal, lemon grass, onion, garlic together and drink to cure COVID-19 as it was able to cure cholera in Thai history." - Facebook

"To cure covid-19, stay outdoor in the sun for 8 hours!" - Facebook

PLATFORM

Facebook and Twitter were the main platforms from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Pantip, Line, Instagram, and Youtube.

HIGH RISK

The rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Our data showed that of the total 420 rumours analysed, 34% were been labeled as 'High Risk'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"The number of new COVID-19 cases yesterday was criticised widely. There are 53 new cases and 42 of them are illegal migrant workers that escaped to Thailand along the border. No matter how many of them are arrested, they keep coming to our country because they know that Thailand takes good care of COVID-19 patients. Despite Burma have not reported the infection, there are these infected people escaping to Thailand for treatment. - Facebook

"Endocannabiniod in cannabis will cover lung cells so covid-19 could not attach to it. It can also boost immune system by increase body temperature. Higher body temperature is not suitable for covid-19 to grow."- Facebook

MAY 2020

The month of May also marked the second month of Thailand's lockdown. This prompted a growing sense of weariness, anxiety, and confusion in social media posts about the possibility of a 'second wave' of Coronavirus infections later in the year. Our data shows that out of the 201 rumours recorded in May, 15 were about the possibility of a second wave of infections.
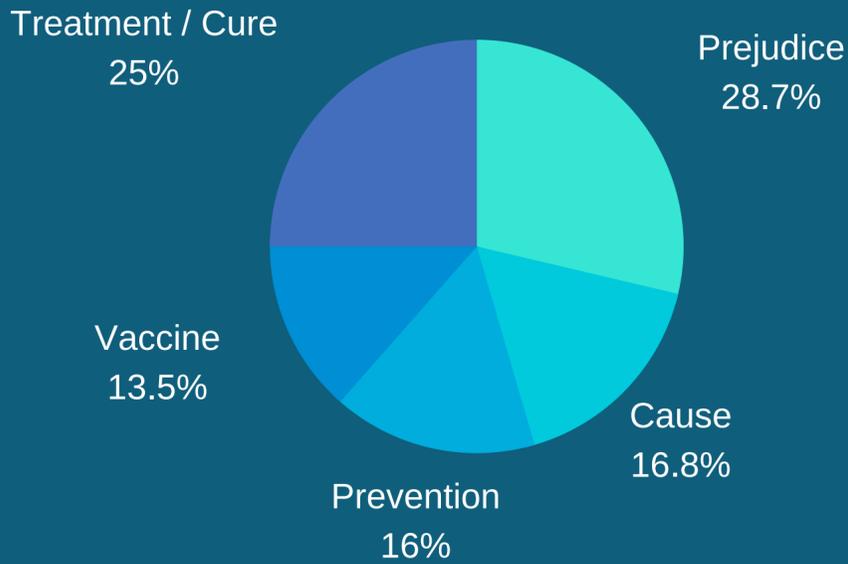
One post on Pantip read:
 "It is scary as the Secretary of The Ministry of Finance said that if there is a second wave of COVID-19 outbreak, we will not have enough budget to fight. The current money heals 5,000 THB x 3 months could not even cover people who need it. If the second wave of COVID-19 outbreak happen and the government has no money - will there be riots?"

Vietnamese

THEMES

Treatment / Cure
25%

Prejudice
28.7%

Vaccine
13.5%

Cause
16.8%

Prevention
16%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in the Vietnamese language were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Cause, Prejudice and rumours about the development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Rumour Example: Prejudice

"So disgusting Chinese. They want to visit Vietnam so that they could spread the virus, don't they? Since we have fewer confirmed cases, they want to increase the number right? Hope our government would make the right decisions."- Facebook

"We must say thank you to the coronavirus. Because of it, the entire world finds out the real face of China."- Youtube

Rumour Example: Treatment / Cure

"The coronavirus could not survive at high temperature, so I usually go out at 12pm and walk around until 6pm. Now I believe that the coronavirus will die... after me!"- Facebook

"Will vitamin D found in foods and hot-temperature places be the cure for COVID-19?"- Facebook

Rumour Example: Prevention

"Dipping the face mask in salt water and wearing it, the coronavirus will be wiped out within 5 minutes"- Facebook

"Drink lemon tea in the morning, swallow your own phlegm so that your throat will not be too dry; drink hot water at noon, swallow your phlegm often in the afternoon, drink hot ginger tea in the evening. By doing so, you are safe from the Coronavirus."- Facebook

Rumour Example: Vaccine

"The Communist Party of China planned to spread the coronavirus around the world. And now it is preparing vaccine before any other countries. It clearly shows that all these things have been well-planned in advance."- Facebook
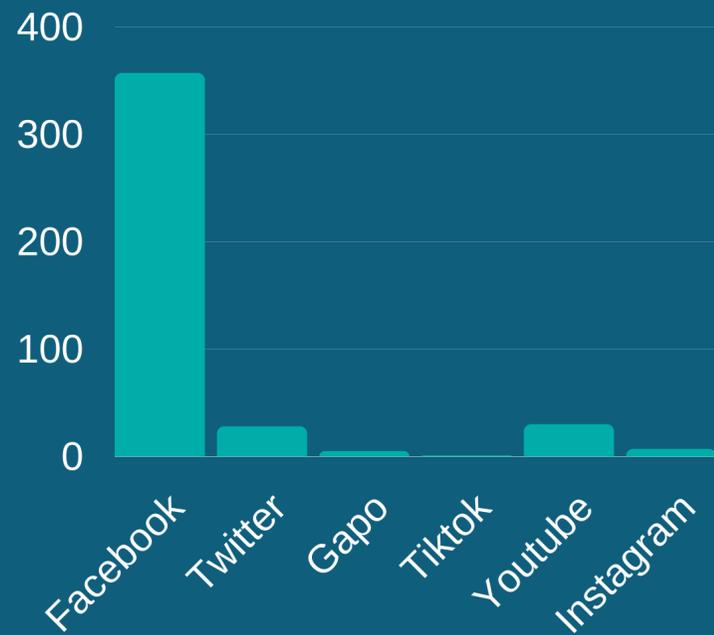
"I have read somewhere that children will have light symptoms of the covid-19 if they inject other kinds of vaccines before. I am not sure whether it is true though."- Facebook

Rumour Example: Cause

"I have heard that covid leaked from the Chinese lab."- Facebook

"Bill Gates and his ambition to become "the savior of all human beings. Coronavirus is a product made by the cooperation between Gates and China, isn't it?"- Facebook

PLATFORM

400
300
200
100
0

Facebook | Twitter | Gapo | Tiktok | Youtube | Instagram

Facebook was the main platform from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Twitter, Youtube, Gapo, Tiktok, and Instagram.

HIGH RISK

The rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Of the 428 rumours analysed, only 4% were labeled as as 'High Risk', with most of them seeking to sell herbal cures or branded face masks promising 'full immunity'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"I do agree with this drug (hydroxychloroquine) , and I already used it. Using a mix of antipyretic and anti-inflammatory medicine is very useful. Side effects are rare."- Facebook

"The WHO director-general has been bribed by the Chinese Communists. Therefore, he tries to change the initial name of the virus into a real difficult-to-write-and-to-remember one. The fact is, the correct name is Wuhan acute pneumonia and it is originated and spreads from China."- Facebook

"In order to protect citizens' health and national security, I suggest to burn the one intending to spread the disease." Facebook
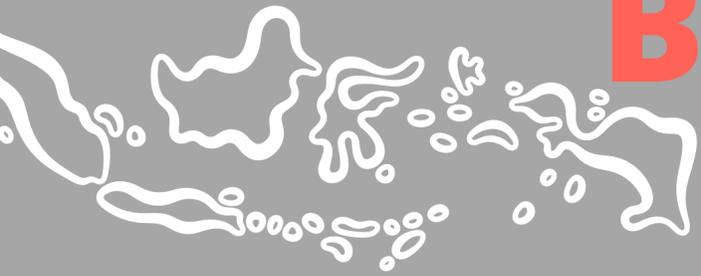
MAY 2020

Vietnam's success in containing the virus and ensuring minimal spread has been widely documented. However, its success has also brought with it anxiety about the future when international flights are re-opened.

This in turn spawned a number of social media rumours in May which spoke out against the re-opening of Vietnam's airways.
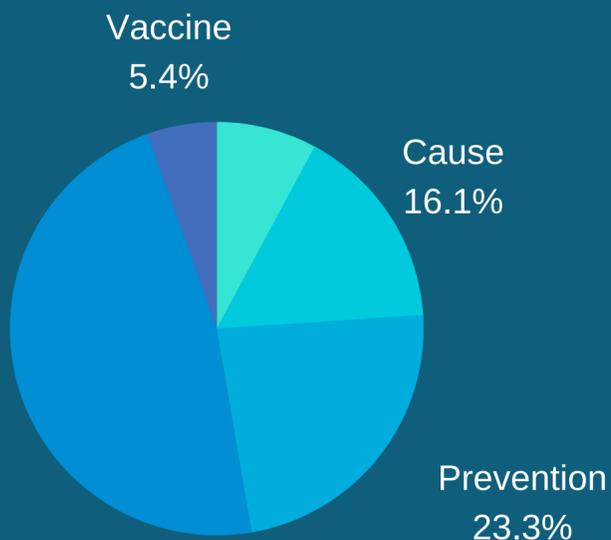
One such example from Facebook is:

"We re-open international flights to bring back the disease, don't we?"

Bahasa Indonesia

This analysis is based on 734 rumours posted between 4th February, 2020 and 31st May, 2020. To access the full dataset, please email: covid-19@internews.org.

THEMES

Vaccine
5.4%

Cause
16.1%

Treatment / Cure
47.3%

Prevention
23.3%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in Bahasa Indonesia were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Cause, Prejudice and rumours about the development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Rumour Example: Treatment / Cure

"Is it true if Mount Merapi, Mount Krakatoa, and Mount Kerinci erupt the coronavirus will be gone?"- Twitter

"Indonesia was astonished by the emergence of earthworms, and we all know that earthworms are really useful in medical science. It can cure fever and typhus, kill bacteria, complement immunization, etc. It wouldn't be wrong to use earthworms to make medicine for coronavirus."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Prevention

"Good news, every disease has its cure!! A man found coronavirus prevention drink only from snake fruit seed"- Facebook

"They say drinking anggur merah (red wine) should prevent you from coronavirus because it contains alcohol with the same composition as hand sanitiser."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Cause

"In Jember (a city in East Java) there's an issue that corona can spread via poultry. It makes the price of chicken and duck meat fall really low. They say that because avian flu is in the same family with covid virus."- Twitter

"They say 5G signal can lessen our immunity and that's why people have been infected by corona"- Twitter

Rumour Example: Prejudice

"I overheard my neighbours talking, they say coronavirus is actually a drug. It came from New York and the wind blew it away, that's why coronavirus spread. Also, coronavirus is a conspiracy targeted to Islam so that muslims cannot go the mosque to pray...."- Twitter
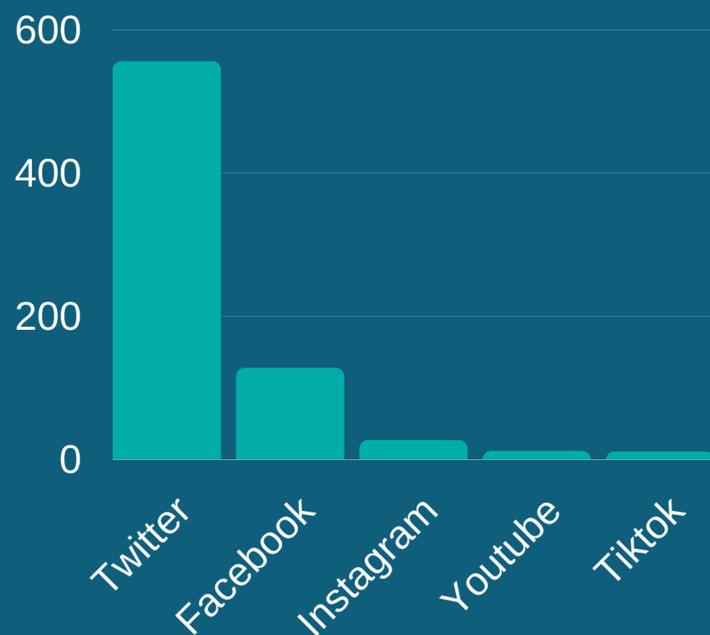
"Isn't LGBT prohibited by religion? LGBT is the one causing us all to be punished by God through coronavirus. I hope they realise their sins."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Vaccine

"There were already several scientists who discovered vaccines or cures for COVID-19 and they all died after they declared their discoveries. Seems like coronavirus is a billion dollar business, just like HIV/AIDS."- Twitter

"Is this a hoax or not? Remdesevir officially becomes the vaccine for coronavirus, but isn't it the vaccine for Ebola? #iwanfals"- Twitter

PLATFORM

600

400

200

0

Twitter   Facebook   Instagram   Youtube   Tiktok

Twitter was the main platform from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Facebook, Youtube, Tiktok and Instagram.

HIGH RISK

The rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Of the 734 rumours analysed, only 6% were labeled as 'High Risk'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"Don't you ever want to be tested for coronavirus. If more people getting tested, it would only smoothen Bill Gates' agenda in monopolising the world. If you're sick, DON'T GET TESTED FOR CORONAVIRUS. Just focus on healing yourself using usual measures that are APPROPRIATE to the illness. Something that is MORE DANGEROUS THAN CORONAVIRUS is when Bill Gates (the majority owner of global pharmaceutical companies) CONTROLS what you have inside your body.- Instagram

"WHO wanted to give 20 million dollars bribery & poisoned COVID-19 drug! Anyone who still believes that WHO is a humanitarian organization must have the same intelligence level as people who insist that G30S/PKI movie isn't a manipulation of history."- Instagram

MAY 2020

Indonesia saw it's cases more than double in the month of May from twelve to twenty four thousand. This in turn prompted a rash of rumours online about the Indonesian Government's handling of the situation.
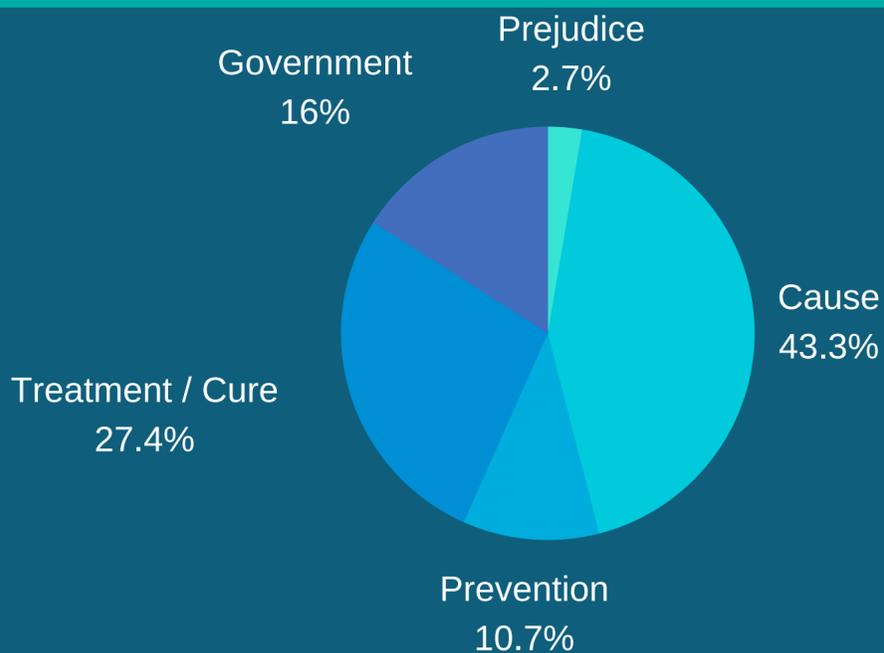
One user on Twitter wrote:

"A friend at work makes it her daily habit to talk about lockdown, she said the government intentionally releases false news about how the virus has spread everywhere, she said it's only a political conspiracy, and she also said it has negatively affect the people and muslims."
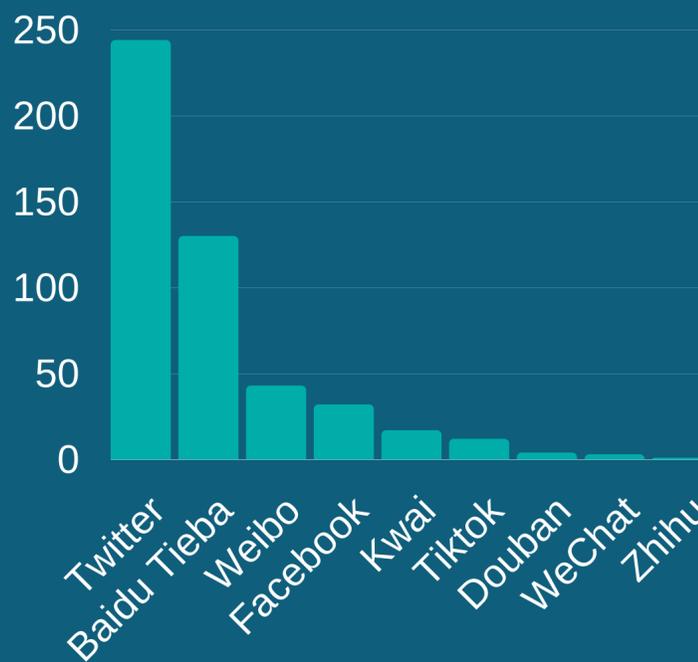
Simplified Chinese

THEMES

Government 16%
Prejudice 2.7%
Cause 43.3%
Treatment / Cure 27.4%
Prevention 10.7%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in Simplified Chinese were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Cause, Prejudice and rumours about the Government response to the pandemic.

Rumour Example: Cause

"A simple common sense deduction at its simplest, where the epidemic is most severe is where the virus originates. The virus did not originate in Asia, where the epidemic is not serious. The U.S. has the worst epidemic, followed by Europe, where the virus originated is obvious at a glance."- Baidu Tieba

" How can the Chinese Communist Party silence the world by using the silent power of global foreign propaganda to launch a propaganda war to distort the truth and turn biological and chemical weapons into natural viruses?

Rumour Example: Treatment Cure

"Studying and researching Chinese medicine is the right line to fight viruses, Western medicine doesn't work on viruses!"- Weibo

Rumour Example: Government

"Death lists from the internal statistics of the CCP show that among 100s of deaths, the proportion of party members is as high as nearly 90%. From the death data of various countries, it is found that the CCP virus is highly targeted and aimed at the CCP. Party members and people close to the CCP. On one page, there were 65 deaths, most of them on the frontline of the Communist Party and police. The cause of death is also written as "overwork sudden illness".- Twitter

"Hubei just unblocked yesterday, and there was also a violent counterattack against Jiujiang police. It was reported today that rural villagers in Suizhou, Hubei, were directly killed by the village secretary yesterday because they were newly infected with the CCP virus. Don't get infected, it 's possible to be buried alive if you are infected."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Prevention

"Raw astragalus root, Pseudostellaria heterophylla, A. ginseng, Agastache rugosa, Thrush leaf, Nepeta, wild chrysanthemum and fleas can help prevent the new coronavirus"- WeChat

"Burning incense helps to prevent the virus, and I've been producing a large amount of Hainan natural agarwood powder, 5 kg per bag. Agarwood is antiviral. You must do a good job of prevention and control in advance to reduce the probability of unnecessary viral infections in humans and increase health awareness!"- Weibo

Rumour Example: Prejudice

"There is already evidence to show that the new coronavirus comes from the United States, so it should be called "American pneumonia"."- Weibo

"If the Chinese Communist virus ravaging the world is a war, they are war criminals."- Twitter

PLATFORM

Twitter was the main platform from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Baidu Tieba, Weibo, Facebook, Kwai, Tiktok, Douban, WeChat and Zhihu.

HIGH RISK

Aside from these groupings, the rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Of the 486 rumours analysed, 5% were labeled as 'High Risk'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"More and more evidence shows that there are Chinese people deliberately spreading the Wuhan virus in the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom."- Twitter

"New coronavirus has no special effects drugs yet. However, as long as the symptoms are not aggravated, they can be cured, as the body will eventually develop immunity. So, the best idea for treating is to lower your immunity! 1, lower the immunity, so that the inflammation will not increase. 2, after 14 days, the body automatically becomes immune to the virus. 3, during the period, supplemented by Chinese medicine to clear the lung, anti-inflammatory and detoxification."- Baidu Tieba

MAY 2020

The month of May saw Chinese social media abuzz with allegations that the Coronavirus was a genetically engineered bio-weapon created in a lab.

14 unique social media posts collected discussed this issue with one user on Twitter saying:
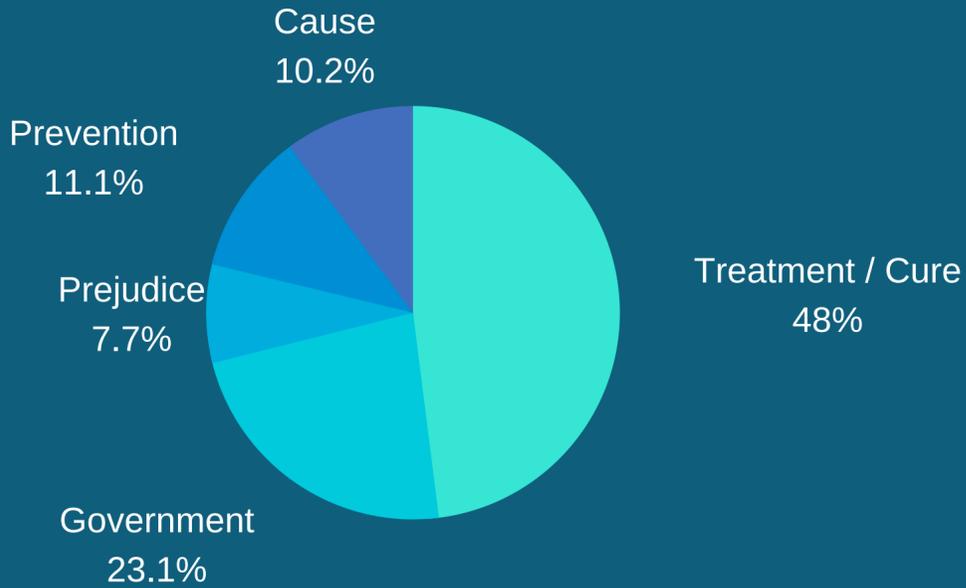
"The Wuhan laboratory also has a large number of other synthetic virus samples, and if the CCP is claimed by the whole world, it is likely that the CCP will start to deliberately spread other virus samples to the whole world to fight against it, and the whole world must be alerted in advance to the CCP's haste to jump the wall."

Tagalog

THEMES

Cause 10.2%
Prevention 11.1%
Prejudice 7.7%
Treatment / Cure 48%
Government 23.1%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in Tagalog were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Cause, Prejudice and rumours about the Government response to the pandemic.

Rumour Example: Treatment Cure

"Good amount of people wearing masks in Manila. Don't they know heat kills coronavirus?"- Twitter

"SEMEN, a cure for COVID-19 according to a doctor. Guys, donate semen for those who are infected."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Government

""Hospitals are getting raided, private sectors donating relief goods need to go through Malacañan? What's that? You refuse to see what's happening because you live in your privileged bubble."- Twitter

"The Fabunan Antiviral Injection was discovered by another Filipino doctor. A repeat of before- the Government refuses to acknowledge it because they get no kickback. Why are the ways of Government agencies like this? They refuse to patronise our own. Why? Why? Why?" - Facebook

Rumour Example: Prejudice

"It's better to contract coronavirus than get infected with HIV."- Twitter

"There's a new virus spreading in China called hantavirus. This time, it's from rats. Just keep on eating live rats, okay? What is wrong with you, you Chinese people? Can anyone tell the Chinese people what normal food is???? Gosh. We're not even done with the deadly COVID-19 yet... Please help us, Almighty God... Have mercy on us..."- Facebook

Rumour Example: Prevention

"We actually have an alternative cure for the COVID-19 which is taking or consuming Nitric Oxide. It's a property that can be found from Noni Plant. Tho, I wouldn't say it's an alt but it prevents people from getting infected from the disease by strengthening the immune system"- Twitter
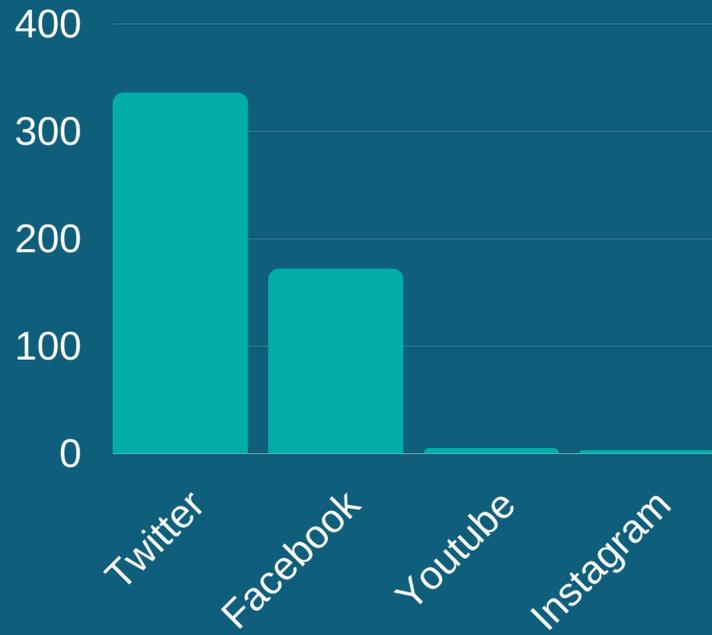
"For combatting nCoV-19. BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM. HONEY-C SYRUP (250ml)"- Facebook

Rumour Example: Cause

"Alibaba is in China, and behind its suppliers are the very manufacturers that cater worldwide. When everyone gets sick, they have the machines capable of 'mass production' and the whole world will be at their mercy for supplies. PPEs, facemasks, surgical gloves, alcohol, etc., the largest manufacturer, where everyone in the world hit by COVID-19 buys from, belongs to them. ☹☹☹"- Facebook

"Currently, the coronavirus came from bats and it's a type of rabies which was transmitted through consumption by humans. This is also the case with eating dogs, which have rabies, in China. It's dangerous to eat bats and dogs as the rabies becomes stronger. - Facebook

PLATFORM

Twitter was the main platform from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Facebook, Youtube and Instagram.

HIGH RISK

The rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Of the 534 rumours analysed, 14% were labeled as 'High Risk'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"Methamphetamine (Shabu) is the cure for Covid-19."- Twitter

"That means the virus can only be calmed down but not neutralized. So, if you get infected and then recover, it's like a time bomb.

What if the curve has flattened and everything's back to normal, then the dormant virus carried by those infected suddenly becomes active? What should be done with them is send them to those who came before them... Kill them like how North Korea dealt with their first patient."- Facebook

MAY 2020

The month of May saw fierce debate on Philippine social media about claims from that the Fabunan Medical Clinic had an 'FDA approved' vaccine against the Coronavirus. This prompted the Philippine Health Department to issue a warning to social media users to stop promoting the treatment as a cure or prevent the Coronavirus.
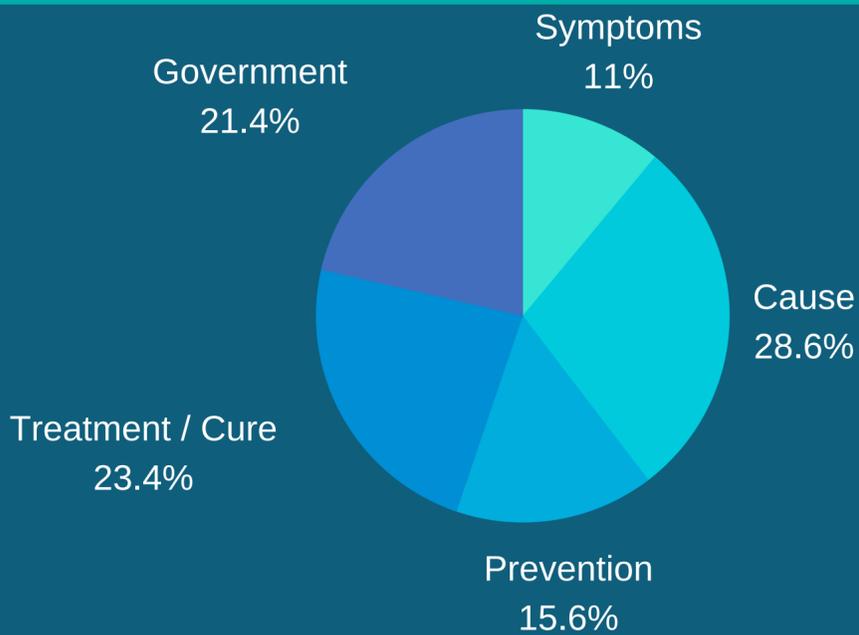
One user took to Facebook to write:

"This is oppression.May God bless the Fabunan doctors. Please use social media to tell the truth. The Filipino people deserve to have an effective cure and vaccine against COVID-19, and not those tainted vaccines endorsed by the World Health Organization, Big Pharma, and Bill Gates. Please speak up about the Food and Drug Administration and Department of Health's oppressive behaviour."

Khmer

This analysis is based on 233 rumours posted between 8 April, 2020 and 31st May, 2020. To access the full dataset, please email: covid-19@internews.org.

THEMES

- Symptoms 11%
- Government 21.4%
- Cause 28.6%
- Treatment / Cure 23.4%
- Prevention 15.6%

A closer look at the rumour allows us to categorise them in broad themes. The five most prevalent rumour themes in Khmer were Treatment or Cure, Prevention, Cause, Prejudice and rumours about the Government response to the pandemic.

Rumour Example: Cause

"The fatal case of COVID-19 is due to an overdose of the urinary tract. This condition causes a large number of pro-inflammatory cytokines to be released. This technical term is a cytokine storm."- Facebook

"The COVID-19 is a scientific virus, not like SARS and MERS viruses transmitted by animals"- Facebook

Rumour Example: Treatment / Cure

"I agree with your idea, I still believe that COVID-19 is related to malaria, as long as we explore whether malaria or the elements of malaria can cure the COVID-19. How or why not?"- Facebook

"Cambodia = Population: 17 Million. 122 COVID-19 cases...all recovered, zero deaths. The reason why = Hydroxychloroquine, and sunshine. In the immortal words of Al Gore, "The Debate is Over." - Twitter

Rumour Example: Government

"No Corona! No funding! Is Corona fake or true? PM Hun Sen collected millions of dollars from the tycoon's million dollars. Where does the money go? The PM announced to prepare 1 billion dollars for prevention Covid-19, where is the 1 billion dollars? - Facebook

"Hubei just unblocked yesterday, and there was also a violent counterattack against Jiujiang police. It was reported today that rural villagers in Suizhou, Hubei, were directly killed by the village secretary yesterday because they were newly infected with the CCP virus. Don't get infected, it 's possible to be buried alive if you are infected."- Twitter

Rumour Example: Prevention

"Hello everyone! Today, I have good news to tell. As Coronavirus is threatening our life so seriously, please eat black garlic to prevent this disease. The black garlic surely can prevent it as the black garlic can detoxify toxic substances from our bodies. If everyone is interested, please go to Aeon Mall. Thank you!"- Facebook
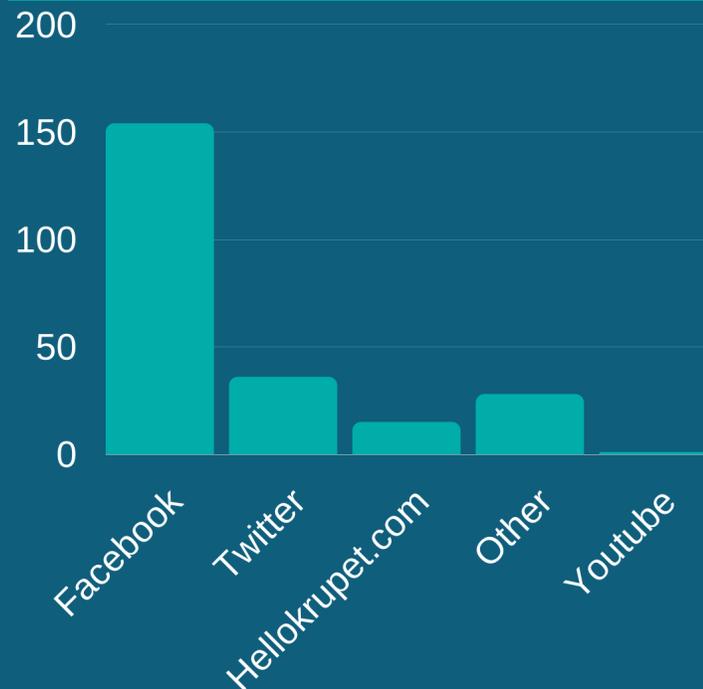
"Believe or not, it's up to you: Open the door! Open the window! Significant experiments showed that daylight can kill up to 90% of COVID-19 within 10 minutes. "- Facebook

Rumour Example: Symptoms

"Purple and swollen toes may be new symptoms of Covid-19."- Facebook

"The new symptom of coronavirus takes 41 days to see if infected or not"- Facebook

PLATFORM

Twitter was the main platform from which information was collected, we also recorded a number of rumours from Twitter, Hellokrupet.com, Youtube and from discussions on a number of news sites.

HIGH RISK

The rumours are also grouped by their potential risk. Of the 233 rumours analysed, 5% were labeled as 'High Risk'. Here are a few recurring high risk rumours we found:

"Police can infect and transfer Coronavirus to families and can spread throughout the country. The transmission is through money that the police fine from the poor who do not have proper wallets to keep the money in. The money can get wet and spread the virus easily. Another issue is the lack of social distancing when it comes to fines and processing driving licenses, standing close to each other, droplets, and sweat."- Facebook

"Savers are starting to panic and want to withdraw their money. This is becoming harder and harder as the banks are short of liquidity because of the increase in unpaid debts. The forced freezing of deposits is creating mistrust which is pushing the banks and microfinance establishments towards bankruptcy." - Facebook

MAY 2020

In the middle of May, Cambodia announced that its last COVID-19 positive patient had recovered and left hospital. The last positive case had been reported in April and with just 126 positive cases and no deaths, Cambodian social media saw rumours discussing the possibility of people in the South-Asian region having more immunity to the virus.

One user on Facebook wrote:

"We are more resistant to COVID-19, probably we do a lot of intensive works so our bodies resistant to various diseases. We live and work under the sun than in air conditioning....."