

COVID-19

RUMOUR BULLETIN #1

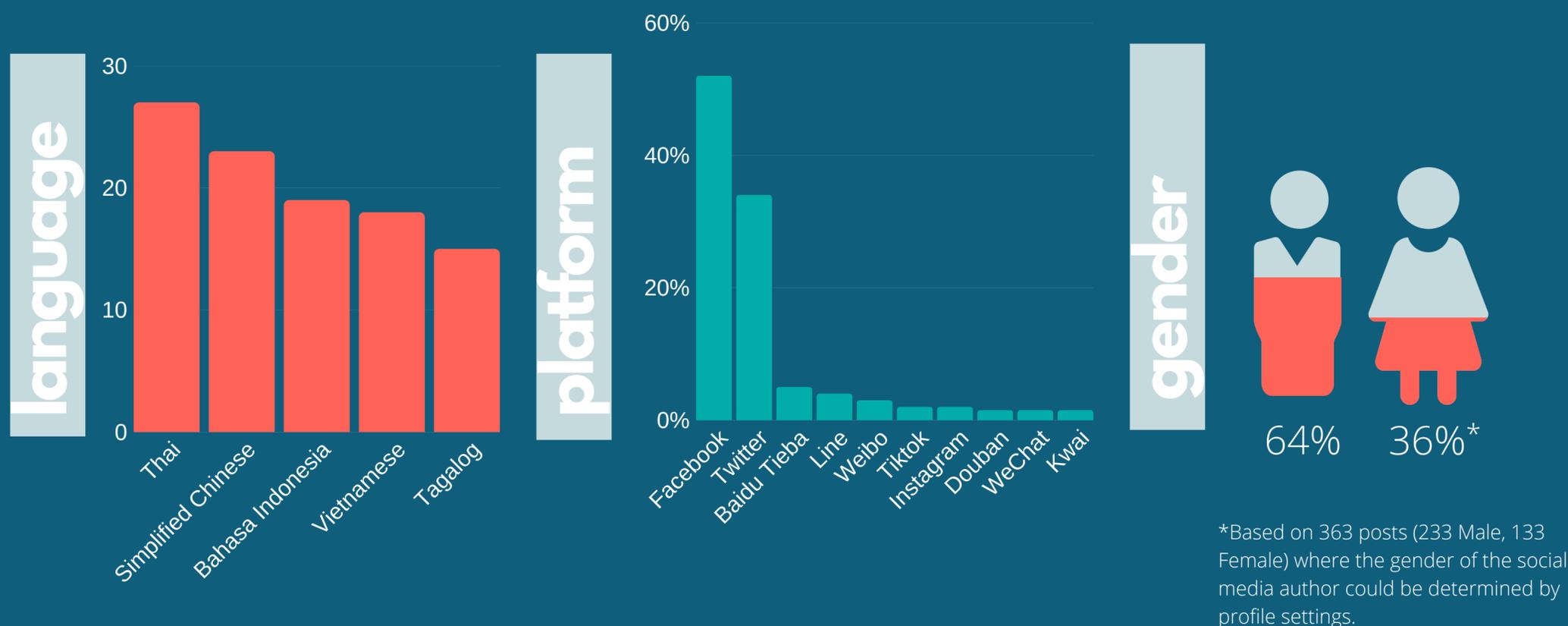


Internews is working with Translators without Borders and Standby Task Force to collect and analyze rumors and misinformation related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease. Data is being collected on social media platforms in six languages across Asia. This analysis is based on 1,024 rumours collected between January 23, 2020, and April 10, 2020, in Thai, Urdu, Indonesian, Simplified Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

What is rumour tracking?

Internews first developed our rumour tracking methodology in 2014 in Liberia, in order to address the deadly Ebola outbreak. Since then, we've implemented rumour tracking as a way to address misinformation during humanitarian crises in numerous countries and contexts, reaching hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries.

We see rumours as a window to community thoughts, fears, and misconceptions. This analysis is designed to support communication and engagement strategies with your target population via local media, online and through communication channels your community prefers. Read more about the [Internews rumour tracking methodology](#) in humanitarian contexts.



*Based on 363 posts (233 Male, 133 Female) where the gender of the social media author could be determined by profile settings.

This bulletin is produced with generous support from the H2H Network. The network and its fund are supported by UK aid from the UK government. This project focuses on equipping journalists and newsrooms across Asia with the tools they need, in the languages they prefer, to combat rumour and misinformation in the COVID-19 crisis.

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





Rumour #1 The Cure in your Cupboard

Many social media rumours suggest a person can drink something to protect or cure themselves of COVID-19. Close to one fifth of rumours about cures and treatment (in all 6 languages) contained the word “drink” with the majority encouraging readers to drink natural remedies that are commonly used in the treatment and/or prevention of the common cold.

Of these, the most frequently recommended drinks were boiled ginger, lemon or lemongrass tea, garlic water, and honey, as well as recommendations to gargle warm or salty water. In Thailand, a monk with a significant social media following has suggested the drinking of warm cow urine to ward off the disease.

There were differences in the most frequently recommended drinks across language. Ginger seems to be very popular amongst Tagalog speakers, whereas posts in Vietnamese were more likely to mention lemon.

Food is another common topic in COVID-19 posts. Of the rumours related to treatments or cures that involved food, eggs were consistently mentioned across the language groups. Nearly a quarter of rumours that included the word “eat” also contained the word “egg”.

This rumour about eating boiled eggs was spotted in several countries across the region, often referring to a mystical baby that was born, that directed people to eat hard-boiled eggs to prevent infection. Each time the rumour was spotted, it adapted to local context. For example, in the **Philippines**, the baby was called ‘Sto Nino’ (child of Jesus), in Thailand a Buddhist adaptation of the rumour emerged. Days later, influencers in **Cambodia** were on to it before it landed in Uganda.

Interestingly, only 15 percent of posts that encouraged readers to eat or drink substances encouraged potentially high-risk or harmful behaviour. For example, in the last week, rumours have begun to emerge in Thailand that methamphetamines can cure COVID-19.

The majority of natural remedies advocated for are household foods and drinks often used to treat ailments like the common cold in traditional and Ayurvedic medicine. While drinking ginger, honey, or lemon is certainly not harmful and may even be beneficial towards health, there is no evidence that drinking ginger, honey, or lemon can prevent or cure coronavirus. Cow urine is used for therapeutic purposes in ancient Ayurvedic medicine for the treatment of various conditions. There have been previous studies into the potential anti-bacterial properties of cow urine, but no scientific evidence to show that cow urine has anti-viral characteristics.

Examples:

“Prevent NCOV19... To combat the virus, just drink ginger tea... Ginger tea is the best... And honey and lemon...Don't just eat bananas.” - Tagalog, Facebook

“To prevent Wuhan virus, as long as the human body maintains heat energy, eat more ginger and exercise more, you will not be infected with the virus.” (The author of this message also claimed to have heard this directly from a relative who is a physician.)
- Tagalog, Twitter

“Buddha told his followers to drink urine to protect and cure themselves. It can relieve coughing. To increase alkaline in our body by drinking urine, we can prevent COVID-19. No one is ill from drinking urine. I believe in Buddha's teaching. Everyone should try.”
- Thai, Facebook (233,922 followers)

“Everyone, rumor has it that there is a newborn baby in Dien Bien province who could speak right away. He/she told the family that, if the world wanted to overcome this pandemic, each person had to eat one boiled egg within 7 hours, and there were only 4 hours left. After saying that, the baby died immediately. It is really confused and although I do not quite believe, it is still better to eat one. Since it does no harm to our body anyway.” Vietnamese, Facebook

Reporting Tip:

While the cure to COVID-19 may not be in your cupboard, there are currently more than 500 medical trials in progress looking at pharmaceutical and alternative medicines that may help beat the spread of the disease. The pace at which these trials are progressing is dizzying. To help you navigate this challenging aspect of the crisis, we have created [this guide](#) for journalists. Also available in [Vietnamese](#) and [Bahasa Indonesia](#). More languages to follow.

Rumour #2 Reinfection and Reintegration

Another theme in our social media, particularly in Thai and Vietnamese languages, was a deep suspicion and fear of people infected by COVID-19. Several posts advocated for violence against infected persons to limit the spread of the virus, including burning them and detaining them.

Other posts recounted anecdotes of discrimination against people who had recovered from COVID-19 citing barriers to them reintegrating into their communities. Discrimination or advocacy of violence against people who were infected with, or had recovered from COVID-19 was the second most common kind of prejudice we documented in our social media data, after anti-Chinese sentiments.

Examples:

“In order to protect citizens' health and national security, I suggest to burn the one intending to spread the disease.” Vietnamese, Facebook (46,571 followers)

“Even though they wear mask and be careful in contacting with people, their neighbors will not allow them to live in the village as there are many elders. They suggest the hospital to continue taking care of COVID-19 patients. Local authority has talked to the hospital and will assign staff to explain in the village. However, if they insist, the authority will provide patients with temporary accommodation until the situation will be better.” - Thai, Facebook (326,234 followers)

“A patient was told to go back home after testing positive for COVID-19 at a hospital. She was asked to move out within 14 days by her landlord and does not know where to stay. The whole family has COVID-19 as well.” - Thai, Facebook (11,983,913 Followers)

The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered social and political fractures within communities, with racialised and discriminatory responses to fear, disproportionately affecting marginalised groups. Internews is investigating how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected migrants living and working in Thailand, This research aims to map how these communities are accessing and verifying information about the pandemic and will be released in early May 2020. If you would like to contribute to this research, please [email us: covid-19@internews.org](mailto:covid-19@internews.org).

Reporting Tip:

Struggling to understand what science there is to explain whether COVID-19 patients are immune to COVID-19 once they have recovered? We have produced [this guide](#) to assist you in your reporting.



Rumour #3 **Sunshine and Heat**

From mid-March to mid-April, we saw several rumours in Bahasa Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese and Tagalog that suggested spending time in the sun could prevent or kill coronavirus. Several of these cite information attributed to UNICEF that coronavirus will be killed if exposed to a temperature of 26-27 C. UNICEF has since refuted these claims in [various media articles](#).

Many of these posts claim that the virus cannot spread effectively in warm countries. However, in reality, the virus has appeared in countries with a wide range of climates, including hot humid ones. The WHO offers [this guidance](#) on the issue.

One potential risk of the belief that spending time in the sun can prevent or cure coronavirus gaining legitimacy is more people deciding to spend time outdoors where they may encounter other people, rather than staying home and isolating.

This also highlights a disturbing trend in many COVID-19 rumours, where an official source, perhaps a UN Agency, government or a health professional is sometimes cited as the source of the information. These rumours have the potential to be especially problematic and dangerous.

Examples:

"After morning workout, sunbathing to kill coronavirus..."

- Bahasa Indonesia, Twitter. (28,400 followers)

If the virus is in 26-27°C temperature, it will die so it can't live in hot regions. Also, drinking hot water and sunbathing are enough to prevent being infected. Avoid cold food and drinks including ice cream. - Bahasa Indonesia, Facebook (1,108 followers)

"Stay outdoor in the sun to prevent covid-19." Thai, Facebook (3,004 friends)

A Chinese expert emphasized and confirmed that inhaling hot steam can 100% kill coronavirus, if the virus lives in our lungs, throats, or noses, because the virus can't tolerate the hot temperature of warm water steam....just try it..it's a form of effort.
- Bahasa Indonesia, Facebook..

This bulletin relies on social media data collected by monitors working for Internews and partner organisations. Data is collected both manually and with the use of specialist monitoring platforms. Content will focus based on key trends in social media data collected in our target language groups and aims to provide tools and resources to help journalists and community workers to respond to misinformation in their work.

If you would like us to analyse social media posts related to a specific category of COVID-19 misinformation, would like us to create new resources for your newsroom, or would like to provide any feedback on our service, please contact us: covid-19@internews.org