

Virality Project (US): Marketing meets Misinformation

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Source: <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/manufacturing-influence-0>

Marketing meets Misinformation




- **Pseudoscience** and **government conspiracy theories** swirl on social media, though most of them stay largely confined to niche communities.
- In the case of COVID-19, however, a combination of **anger** at what some see as **overly restrictive government policies**, conflicting information about treatments and disease spread, and **anxiety** about the future has many people **searching for facts** and finding **misinformation**.
- This dynamic creates an opportunity for **determined people** and **skilled marketers** to **fill the void** - to **create content** and produce messages designed to be **shared widely**.
- One **recent example** was a **video** called **“Plandemic”**, a slickly-produced video in which a purported whistleblower **mixed health misinformation** about **COVID-19** into a broader **conspiratorial tale** of profiteering and cover-ups.
- Much like the disease it purports to explain, the **video traveled rapidly** across **international boundaries** in a **matter of days**.






Marketing meets Misinformation (cont'd)

- **Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO)** had begun to observe an **increasing number of posts** about **Plandemic's** subject, **Judy Mikovits**, beginning on April 16.
- For **two and a half weeks**, we observed a series of **cross-platform** moments in which Judy Mikovits – a scientist whose **work was retracted by journal editors** – was **recast as an expert whistleblower** exposing a vast government cover-up.
- While it was the “Plandemic” video that propelled her to global notoriety, weeks of **planned activity** led to its **rapid virality**.



The "Plandemic" Video Has Exploded Online — And It Is Filled With Dangerous Falsehoods







 buzzfeednews  • [Follow](#) 

 buzzfeednews  "The Plandemic," a video made to look like a new interview but in reality peddles debunked falsehoods about the coronavirus, has been spreading across social media since May 4th. It features anti-vaccine figure Judy Mikovits. In the video, she falsely says masks can make wearers sick, sand can build up coronavirus immunity, and that as-yet-uninvented vaccines for the virus are dangerous. Link in bio for more details   (: YouTube)

2w

 christina_machuta She said word for word that she wasn't an anti-Vax. 

22,507 likes

MAY 8

Add a comment... [Post](#)

Marketing meets Misinformation (cont'd)

- We analyzed **41,662 posts** on **Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter** starting April 15, when anti-vaccine and natural health Facebook pages began to promote Mikovits and her new book.
- While she had been an anti-vaccine conference speaker for years, social media dynamics suggested that **Mikovits's narratives** were now **being marketed** for far **larger mainstream audiences**.
- While most of the early **content related to Mikovits** stayed **within these echo chambers**, a well-oiled **PR machine propelled the discussion** of her claims into **larger communities** like **MAGA** and **QAnon**, which eventually eclipsed the anti-vaccine and natural health communities in sheer volume of posts.

Marketing meets Misinformation (cont'd)

- After the "Plandemic" video appeared, content related to Mikovits began to spread widely outside of the original collection of communities: over **5000 posts** mentioning her appeared across **1681 pro-Trump/conservative Groups and Pages**.
- More than **800 posts** showed up across 125 "Reopen"-oriented groups, and **875 posts** appeared across **494 generic local chat community** Facebook Groups.
- There were additionally over **3700 niche interest groups** with posts mentioning Mikovits that **did not fit** any of our **community classifications**.

Collective Action Against Bill Gates. We Won't Be Vaccinated!!

Public group

About

Discussion

post

Members

Events

Videos

Photos

Files

Recommendations


Search this group

Shortcuts

+ Join Group ... More Join this group to post and comm

shared a link. May 10 at 11:55 AM

Can someone please tell me why this article was published on this magazine? I seen the Plandemic video and was convinced she was telling the truth. I admire her courage for speaking out against the establishment... NOW I AM CONFUSED.



SCIENCEMAG.ORG

Fact-checking Judy Mikovits, the controversial virologist attacking Anthony Fauci in a viral conspiracy video

123 567 Comments 61 Shares

Like Share

View previous comments 50 of 358

Get her book! Like · 1w 1 Reply

Don't be confused I believed whole heartedly she is telling the truth. Retired nurse Like · 1w 7

yes on kindle 'plague of corruption' amazon Like · 1w 1 2 Replies

It's a scam to make you confused! Like · 1w 4

OFFICIAL Q / QANON

Public group

About

Discussion

post

Members

Events

Videos

Photos

Files

Search this group

+ Join Group ... More Join this group to post and comm

shared a link. May 14 at 4:58 AM

The guy who made this video was paid to do it. He deleted all the negative comments. While explaining why he thinks Plandemic is fake, he skipped many points and giving faint explanations on others. would you help to dislike it? Too many of his followers believed him blindly... It's not good to manipulate people like that...



YOUTUBE.COM

Doctor Fact-Checks PLANDEMIC Conspiracy

Hundreds of you have requested that I watch and respond to the Plandemi...

67 213 Comments 10 Shares

Like Share

View 5 more comments 50 of 56

Don't even pay attention to this. It is only a signal that they are really starting to panic. It makes it easier to drain the swamp 🤪 Like · 1w 5 1 Reply

HE GOT DEBUNKED!! ... See More



YOUTUBE.COM

Doctor Gets DEBUNKED after trying to fact check Plandemic - PART 1

Like · 1w 35 Replies

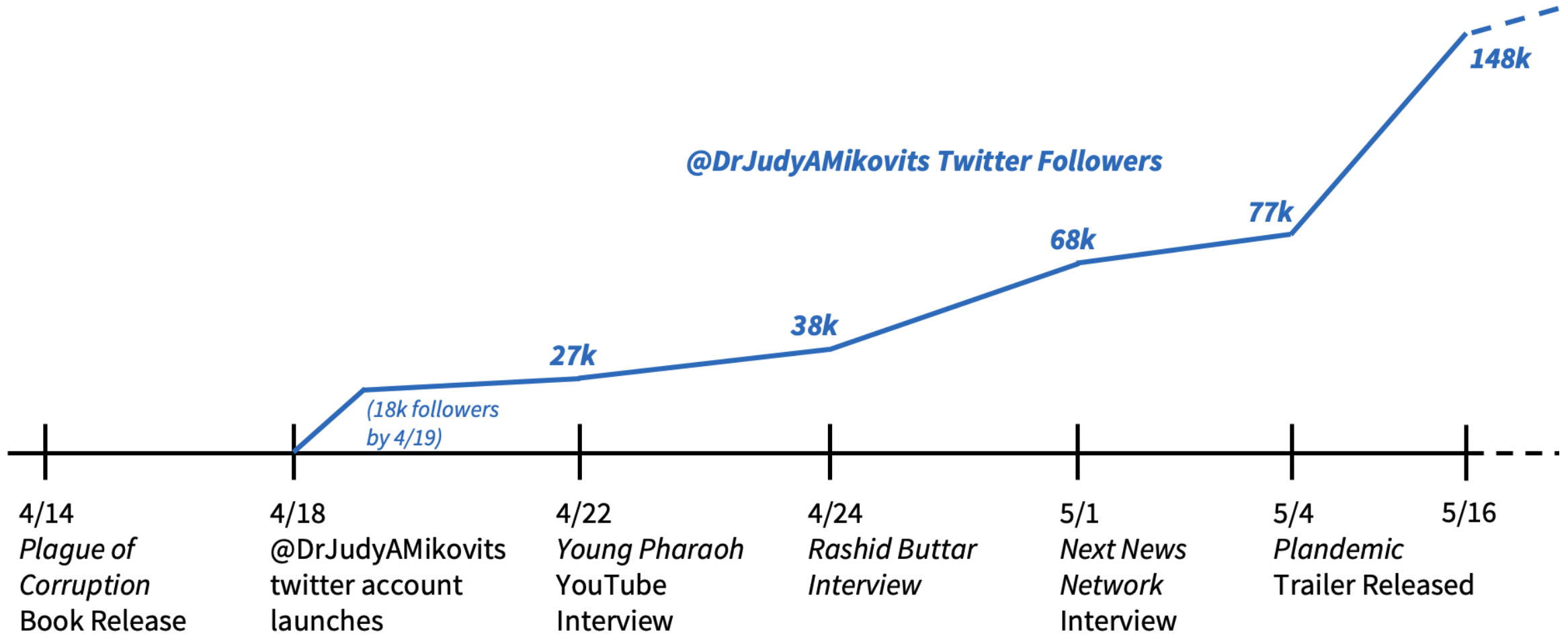
Marketing meets Misinformation (cont'd)

- Of the **41,662 posts** mentioning **Mikovits** on **Facebook** and **Instagram**, the majority had **very low engagement**; **37,120 (89%)** had fewer than **50 engagements**, and **11,548 posts (28%)** had **zero interactions**.
- Some of **the highest-engagement posts supportive** of Mikovits came from verified **“blue-check” influencers**, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr, Rashid Buttar, and **some Italian** and **Spanish-language influencers**.
- **11** of the **top 30 high-engagement posts** overall appeared on **Instagram**, despite only 503 Instagram posts in the data set (1.2%).

Manufacturing an Influencer

- Mikovits (or her team) **had previously run a Twitter account** for her speaking and writing career on the **anti-vaccine conference** circuit; it amassed roughly **1700 followers** in **three years**.
- Following the **release of the new book**, on April 18th a **new Twitter** account appeared: **@drjudyamikovits**.
- Within **24 hours** it tweeted only once yet amassed nearly **18,000 followers**.
- **Rapid follower growth** continued for days, sometimes by **thousands overnight** despite **no new tweets** or prominent mentions.
- An analysis of the new account's followers turned up **thousands of accounts** created within the **prior two weeks**.
- **Follower clusters of older accounts were created** within close time proximity that **had no tweets** or **profile pictures**.

TIMELINE OF KEY SOCIAL MEDIA DATES



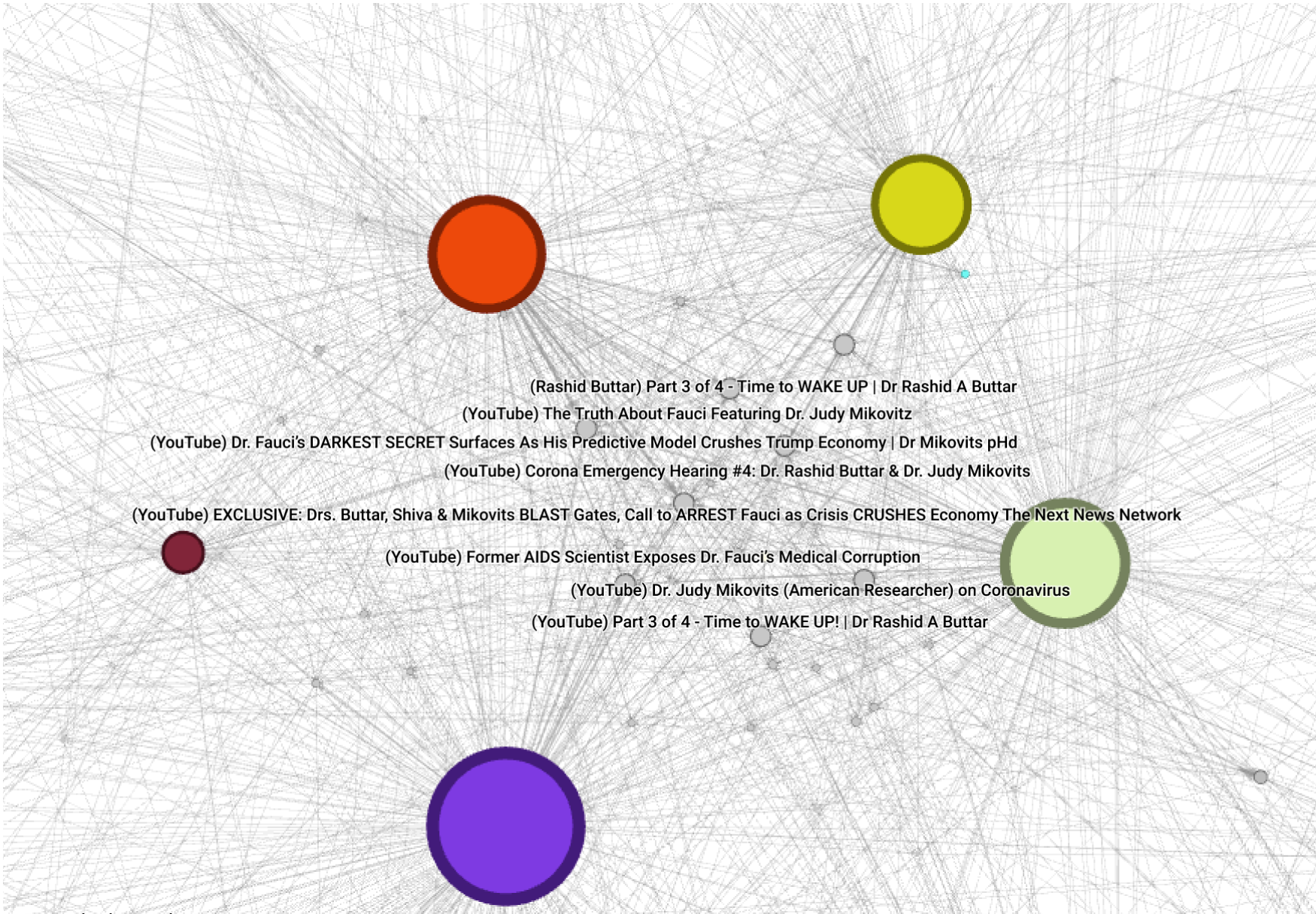
Manufacturing an Influencer (cont'd)

- **Mikovits** was known within **anti-vaccine** and **alternative health communities**, but **largely unknown** to the broader public as **her book promotion** got underway.
- YouTube creators with large numbers of subscribers provided a way to put her message in front of large, new audiences.
- These included **alternative medicine influencers** like Rashid Buttar, **right-wing media** such as Next News Network, and **generic interview channels** such as Valuetainment.
- Facebook data shows that at least **77%** of pre-"**Plandemic**" mentions of **'Mikovits' (9269 posts) included video content**, and **43%** of the posts had a **YouTube link**.
- Buzzsumo YouTube data showed that the top ten most-watched videos in the early days of the media campaign **amassed 2.9 million views**.

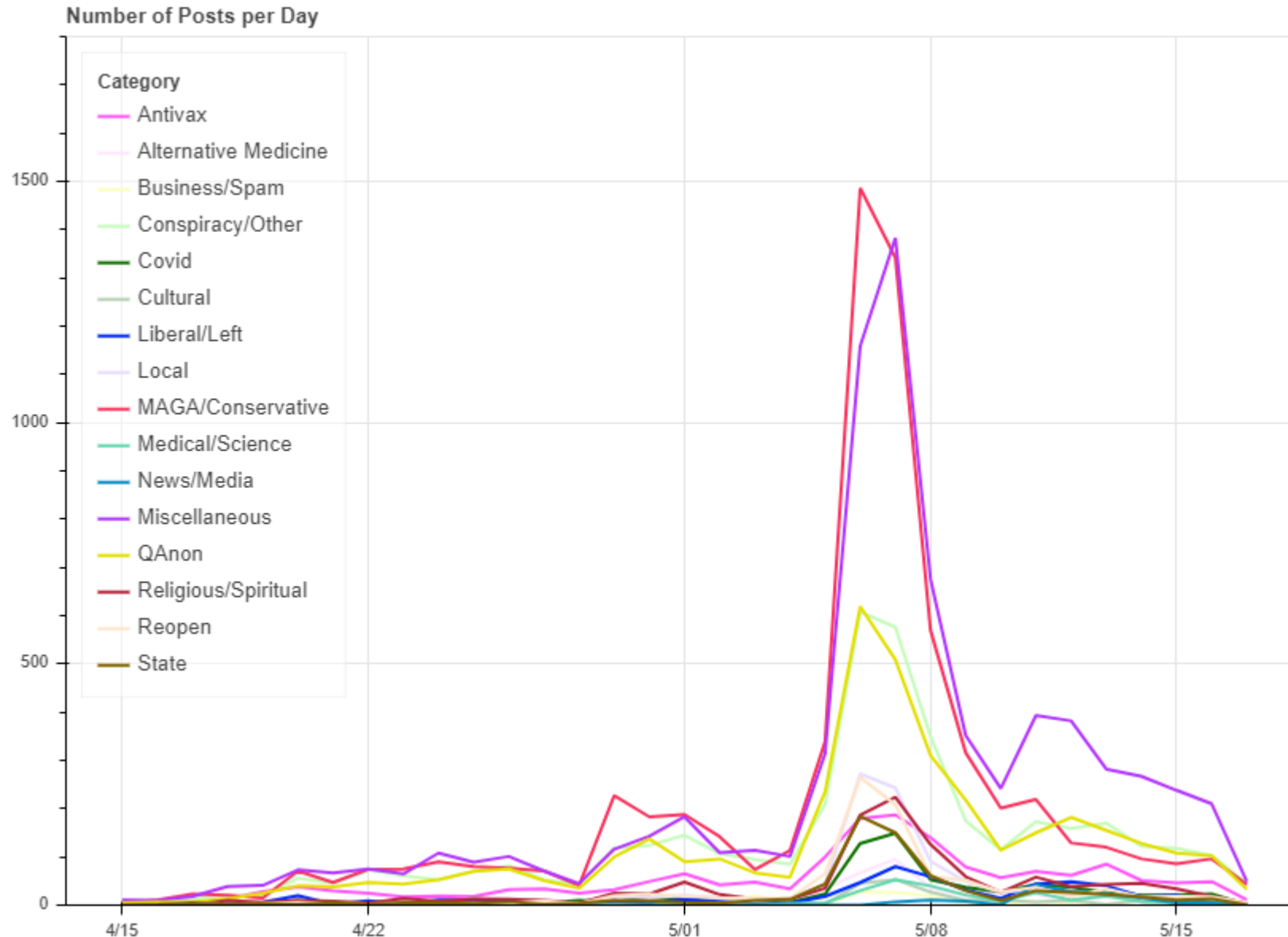
Manufacturing an Influencer (cont'd)

- **Many of these YouTube videos** were **taken down** because they contained **health misinformation**.
- This was done after they achieved **high view counts** and **social reach** (for example, Next News Network's video had at least **765,000 views**, and **242,600 engagements** across **Facebook** and **Twitter** before coming down).
- Several of the **takedowns led to secondary videos** – and **secondary waves of attention** – in which channel creators **complained** about **YouTube censorship**.

In the **Gephi network** graph below we show some of the **links about Mikovits** that **early-adopter communities** were sharing early on.

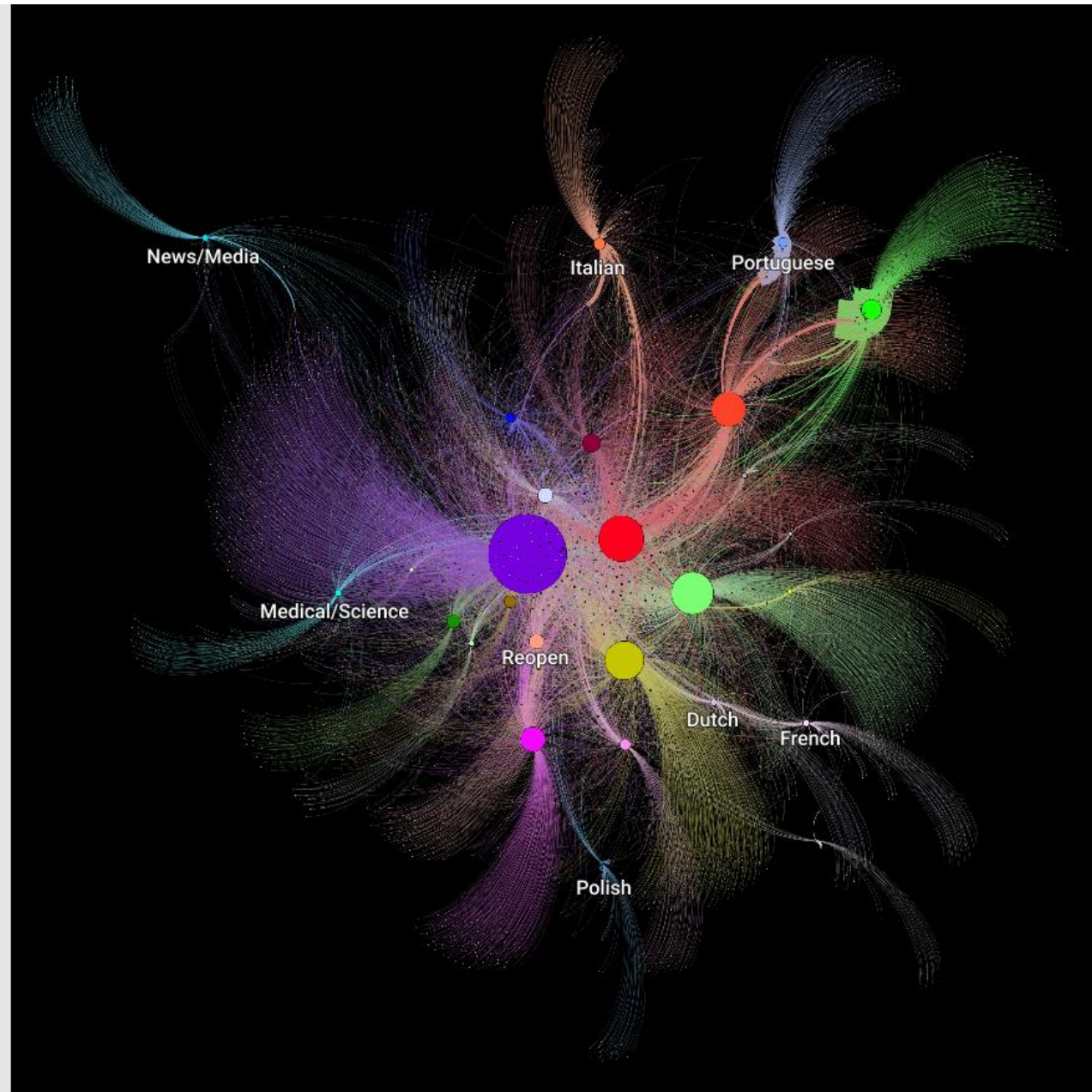
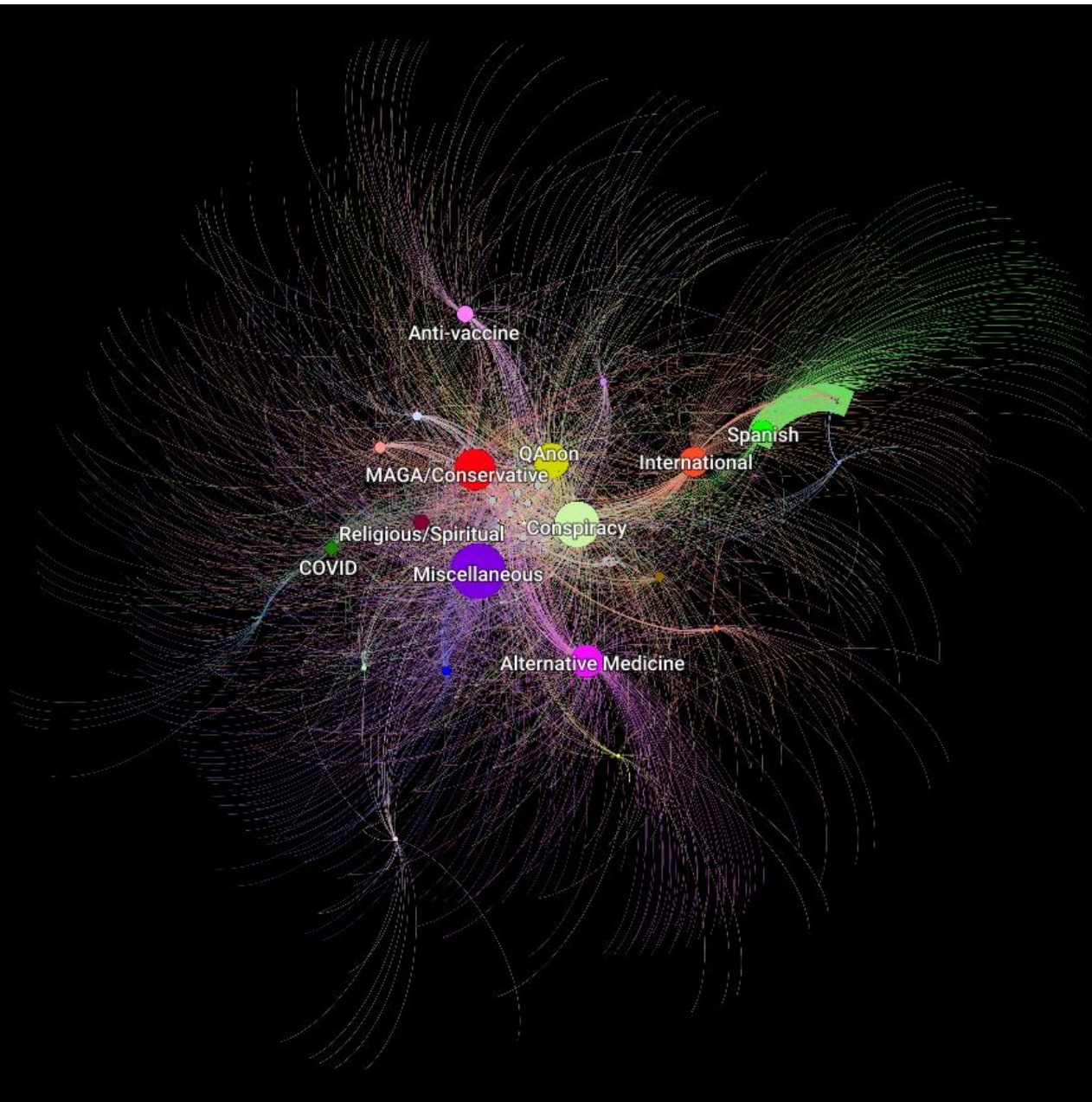


- Although the early interviews got some reach, **high-engagement posts** about Mikovits largely stayed within anti-vaccine and **alternative-health echo chambers**.



Plandemic: misinformation goes viral

- "Plandemic" was a **pivotal step** in framing Mikovits as a **whistleblower icon**; **40% of the 41,662 posts** in the data set included **a link to plandemicmovie.com** or a mention of Plandemic.
- The **video was rife with misinformation**, but it propelled awareness of Mikovits to a **broad range of new audiences**.
- Communities mentioning her expanded to include **hundreds of Groups** and **Pages** representing local communities ("New Brunswick Community Bulletin Board"), religious communities ("Love Of Jesus Fellowship"), and a small handful of liberal and left groups ("The Struggle for Equality").
- The **network graph** in the next page shows the **significant increase** in **mentions** and the emergence of **new communities**.



Plandemic: misinformation goes viral (cont'd)

- The second dynamic that picked up around May 7th, 2020 was the appearance of **mainstream media**, **medical and scientific influencers**, and **fact-checking organizations**.
- We tracked **65 links** featuring debunking content created between May 6th and May 12th.
- These links appeared in **1,132 posts** in our **41,662-post data set**.
- Most (**714**) were **links to articles**; **366** were shares of **video or YouTube** content.
- The network graph shown in the following illustrates **the four links** that were shared the most among **large communities**: **ZDoggMD** and **Doctor Mike**, two doctors who posted point-by-pint YouTube videos, as well as **Washington Post** and **Science**.

