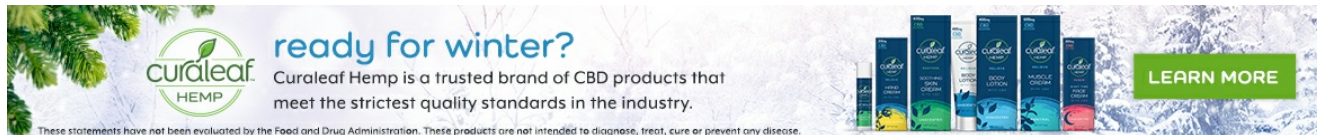


# Coronavirus rumors shape consumer behavior

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***Editor's Note: In the fifth part of their series, Alice Wang and Ed Rowland look at the way surprising rumors can lead to hoarding. As in the United States, eggs seem to be one of the products involved.***

***Part one is available [here](#). Part two is available [here](#). Part three is available [here](#). Part four is available [here](#).***

The coronavirus information overload hits every day from the minute you open your eyes. There's good-to-know expert information and then, there are rumors. Eggs fall into the rumor bucket.

While surfing the internet, a rumor popped up that eating nine eggs at midnight helps prevent coronavirus. This falls into not just rumor, but stupid rumor. Even a 5-year-old could figure it out.

And then, amazingly, eggs became more and more difficult to buy in the following days. While questioning my IQ, a new internet search noted, "Eggs have high-quality protein, which is an important immunity enhancer." And the coronavirus connection is complete.

More internet digging unearthed that "pharma companies usually cultivate vaccines on eggs. This is a significant part of vaccine production process."

In short order, eggs became a scarce commodity. Rumors are everywhere and have always traveled at lightning speed in China or America. Mark Twain once said, "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."

Cass Sunstein, director of the information and regulatory affairs office during the Obama Administration, believes that there are two main sources for rumors: people who transmit unconfirmed statements without any mal-intention and bad actors seeking biased



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assimilation and/or group polarization. In the abyss of coronavirus despair/panic/loneliness there's fertile land for rumors to blossom.

And in fact, ugly unfounded rumors have popped up in China and the U.S. In China, rumors stated that the coronavirus is a genetic weapon developed by the U.S. military. In the U.S., there have been reports that the coronavirus was shipped to the U.S. in the integrated supply chain that depends on China for parts. Both rumors have of course been disproven, but not without internet discussions and bots. Twain would have been amazed at how fast it happened.

In ancient times, rumors were readily believed to explain natural occurrences. If a reasonable explanation allowed for people to feel safe, the rumor had served a useful purpose. The Gods of Olympia protected us. In modern times, the Olympian Gods are a just a good story. Instead, trust is placed in medical technology and systems. Now, the new coronavirus is tearing that trust apart. Rumors can, will and already have filled the void.

Rumors confirm long-standing convictions; the human tendency is to look for confirming information while discarding contradictory information. So, what made the egg rumor fly around the world?

Consider the following factors:

**Well-written.** The threshold of a good rumor is good language with no typos, formation or grammar mistakes. A good title is also essential.

**Timely.** A rumor will be rooted in life and the news. Exhibit #1 is the coronavirus.

**Include Science.** A rumor with detailed scientific evidence is more likely to succeed. Here's a good egg example: According to the latest report from Professor Dr. Davies of the British Institute of Virology sufficient intake of proteins, especially those from eggs, contributes greatly to the prevention of coronavirus since it improves the immune system. The fake name is seldom verified. There is no Dr. Davies.

Meanwhile, a neighbor broadcasted that toilet paper is available in the market NOW! And about the rumor about toilet paper, that will be for next time.

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