

## Viral Quackery: Examining the Rhetoric of Fake Coronavirus Cures

by Sean P. Pauley

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people would buy unproven nostrums to prevent or cure the virus. These products, however, did not work. Indeed, some would even have negative effects. So why did people still take quack coronavirus cures? What factors allowed quacks' rhetoric to persuade people into buying these nostrums? By analyzing the rhetoric of fraudulent coronavirus treatments -- and by examining the rhetorical context of the pandemic -- I aimed to find the factors that made these messages persuasive. Furthermore, I sought to discover the audiences most susceptible to this rhetoric. I found that coronavirus quackery is persuasive because it 1) capitalizes on people's fear of the virus, 2) exploits dissatisfaction with conventional medicine, 3) grabs people's attention on social media, 4) uses powerful language to extoll substances that people recognize, and 5) uses conspiratorial logic to address any counter arguments. As a result, quacks' social media messages function to convince people to purchase and consume quack cures. Furthermore, elements of these messages target people on both sides of the political spectrum, and they appeal to both the "worried well" and infected individuals. However, many of these messages are targeted specifically at young mothers. Understanding these different aspects of quacks' rhetoric can help us protect people from being fooled by their convincing claims.