

The Drinking Bleach Hoax

A Debunk by Scott Adams

Intro

In April of 2020, about half of the people who pay attention to the news in America came to believe the president of the United States, Donald Trump, suggested at a press conference that perhaps “drinking bleach” would help treat Covid.

A milder form of the hoax said Trump suggested “injecting disinfectants,” which believers of the hoax said referred to a liquid disinfectant.

Neither of these versions of reality happened. But millions of Americans came to believe they “heard it with their own ears” and “saw it happen, live.” I’ll explain how the hoax was created and perpetuated. It involves a technique called a [Rupar Edit](#). And as you will learn, Trump was talking about UV light as the disinfectant. Your news sources might have never mentioned that context.

A Rupar Edit is a deceptive edit of a video, often combined with deceptive edits of the related transcript, that can REVERSE or TOTALLY ALTER the meaning of what a public figure said. This is the same method used to create the Fine People Hoax, the Covington Kids Hoax, the Overfeeding Koi in Japan Hoax, and probably a few others. I’ll tell you exactly how it is done. But first, the timeline.

Timeline

April 20, 2020 Aytu Bioscience issued a [press release](#) about a collaboration with Cedars-Sinai to test a medical device, called Healight, that involved inserting a catheter with LEDs down a patient’s throat to bathe it in UV light and kill Covid viruses.

April 20-21, 2020 The Healight story was Tweeted and discussed on livestream by Scott Adams ([@ScottAdamsSays](#)) and a number of other people that Trump and his staff were known to follow. It was common practice for Trump’s staff to make sure he saw anything positive during the pandemic.

April 23, 2020 Trump held a Covid-19 [press conference](#) and asked the experts about using UV light as a disinfectant inside the body, suggesting he was aware of the Healight press release, but probably didn't have a grasp of the details.

The anti-Trump press reported Trump's public comments as recommending "injecting disinfectants," implying he had been referring to household cleaners. Comedians and pundits extended the misinterpretation to "drinking bleach." The hoax was repeated so many times that the public thought they heard it themselves. Their false memories were bolstered by a Rugar Edit of the video that removed Trump's clarifiers that he was specifically talking about light as the only disinfectant inside the body. (You'll see that in the transcript.)

April 27, 2020 The CEO of Aytu Bioscience, Josh Disbrow, [writes in the Wall Street Journal](#) that Trump was referring to his company's upcoming tests that involved inserting a catheter with UV light LEDs into a patient's throat.

Why didn't the "news" tell you about the Healight context of the story?

Are you wondering why this was such a big story and yet you never heard of the Healight context? Here is an explanation from the CEO of Aytu Bioscience, from the WSJ article.

"On April 20 we put out a press release titled "Aytu BioScience Signs Exclusive Global License with Cedars-Sinai for Potential Coronavirus Treatment." The treatment is called Healight, and it was developed by research physicians at the hospital's Medically Associated Science and Technology Program. The technology, which has been in development since 2016, uses ultraviolet light as an antimicrobial and is a promising potential treatment for Covid-19.

Aytu and Cedars-Sinai have engaged with the Food and Drug Administration to pursue a rapid path to human use through an Emergency Use Authorization. But hardly anyone noticed—until Thursday, when President Trump mused, ". . . supposing you brought the light inside the body . . ."

My team and I knew the president’s comments could trigger a backlash against the idea of UV light as a treatment, which might hinder our ability to get the word out. We decided to create a YouTube account, upload a video animation we had created, and tweet it out. It received some 50,000 views in 24 hours.

Then YouTube took it down. So did Vimeo. Twitter suspended our account. The narrative changed from whether UV light can be used to treat Covid-19 to “Aytu is being censored.”

In other words, the story was buried by the anti-Trump censorship machine. We didn't realize how strong that censorship network was at the time. Back then, if a story disappeared, people probably assumed it was never important or not real. Now we have a better understanding, from the Twitter Files, how the government routinely censored material that Democrats found inconvenient.

How the Hoax was Executed

Definition: A Rupar Edit is a malicious edit of a video that is meant to mislead. It is so common in politics that it has a name.

The Transcript

The Rupar Edit of Trump’s comments focused on a segment which – when taken out of context – does sound like he might be talking about a liquid disinfectant, but only if you didn’t know the larger context. The press made sure you didn’t know the context.

Rupar Edit: “And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning, because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it’d be interesting to check that, so that you’re going to have to use medical doctors with, but it sounds interesting to me.”

If you look at the full transcript, below, you will see Trump specified light at the start of his comments and then clarified at the end he was still discussing light. When those clarifiers are removed, it completely changes how it comes across.

That's a Rugar Edit. The Rugar Edit method doesn't work on every topic, but it works great when there is a clarifying sentence or two that can be removed at the start or the end of a video clip or transcript. See for yourself how the full transcript tells a different story. My highlights will help.

Trump: "A question that probably some of you are thinking of if you're totally into that world, which I find to be very interesting. **So, suppose we hit the body with a tremendous, whether it's ultraviolet or just very powerful light**, and I think you said that hasn't been checked, but you're going to test it. And then I said supposing you brought the light inside the body, which you can do either through the skin or in some other way. (To Bryan) And I think you said you're going to test that, too. Sounds interesting, right?"

"And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning, because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it'd be interesting to check that, so that you're going to have to use medical doctors with, but it sounds interesting to me. **So, we'll see, but the whole concept of the light, the way it kills it in one minute. That's pretty powerful.**"

Going Down the Hoax Funnel

I know from my experience in debunking hoaxes that people who have been fooled by the original hoax will predictably "go down the hoax funnel" when they learn they have been fooled. That means retreating to a related claim that is even weaker than the first, but never giving up on the "Orange Man Bad" nature of their beliefs.

In this case, debunking the "drinking bleach" hoax by proving Trump never mentioned bleach at all causes people to retreat to the "injecting liquid disinfectant" hoax. And when they are forced to read the transcript, which clearly specifies light alone, they imagine seeing an "or liquid disinfectant" in the transcript that is not there.

What they do see is this sentence:

“And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in *one minute*. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning...”

Out of context, one can imagine Trump means a liquid disinfectant, but that also requires believing Trump is the only living human who thinks injecting a liquid disinfectant in a human body is an idea worth discussing in public. (The absurdity level of this hoax should have tipped off most observers.)

What is left out of the ambiguous-sounding quote is that Trump bookended that sentence with direct references to light as the “one minute” disinfectant.

“So, we’ll see, but the whole concept of the light, the way it kills it in **one minute**. That’s pretty powerful.”

Two references to light, both as “one minute” killers of virus, one before the body of his comments, and one to summarize them. Never did Trump change the topic to liquid disinfectants. And why would he? No one would recommend injecting liquid disinfectants in a human body. That’s insane. But the UV light idea was interesting.

I must be brutally honest with you, for your own good. If you ever believed this hoax, you should feel embarrassed. It should have been obvious to you it was untrue by the absurdity level alone. That’s often the first and best signal of a hoax: No one in the real world would act that way.

If you were fooled by the hoax, and you have read this far, you should already be heading down to the next level in the Hoax Funnel. You might be shouting at me in your mind, “THEN WHY DID TRUMP SAY HE WAS JUST BEING SARCASTIC???”

Trump did say he was just being sarcastic when asked to comment on the story. I can’t read his mind, but I’ll venture an educated guess. He had two options at that point, given that the hoax was raging in the headlines.

Option 1: Double-down

Double-down on his non-scientist speculations about using UV light inside the body, without remembering where he saw the story, or any details, or maybe mentioning it was something he saw on a cartoonist’s tweet. You know how badly he would have been mocked for that. It wasn’t a good option.

Option 2: Brush it off

Trump could try to minimize the issue and starve the news cycle because there was no way for him to win. No one believes he was being sarcastic. But it was, arguably, his best play.

USA Today Fact Check

A [USA Today fact check](#), on May 2, 2020, confirmed Trump was referring to the Healight technology, but because the press was motivated to find an anti-Trump angle, the fact check focused on the dangers of UV light on human tissue.

How would Trump know about some obscure technology test?

Trump's White House staff followed me (@ScottAdamsSays) on old Twitter and routinely watched my livestreams during the pandemic. One of the topics I tweeted and discussed was the planned UV light tests by Aytu BioScience. I heard about it from their press release that was floating around Twitter.

During the pandemic, my daily livestream, *Coffee with Scott Adams*, focused on the best "good news" I could find, to keep people's spirits up. I knew from experience that my "good news" content that involved Trump often got to his desk. Trump liked good news, and his staff liked giving it to him. If you need to see a personal note Trump sent me about one of my shows, I can provide it. And in 2018, I was invited to the White House to meet and chat with Trump. One of Trump's political strengths is that he was always "reading the room" of his supporters and followed most of the top opinion-makers.

I do not have confirmation Trump knew about the planned Aytu BioScience tests from me. It could have been another source that retweeted my tweet, for example. Or it could have been a different path. Trump and his staff followed a lot of political pundits in my circle. When Trump's comments are seen without edits, it is obvious he had some knowledge about "bringing light inside the body."

How to know you are still in the hoax

By now, some of you have dropped to level 3 of the Hoax Funnel. It looks like this.

Level 1: Trump suggested drinking bleach.

Level 2: Okay, not bleach, but Trump suggested injecting chemical disinfectants.

Level 3: Trump said he was being sarcastic, so that must be a lie to cover it up.

If you have read this far, you are likely to spontaneously forget what you have read and loop back to the top of the Hoax Funnel, claiming Trump did in fact suggest drinking bleach. That's the most common pattern for people who are initially exposed to this debunk.

Wait until you find out how the Rugar Edit was used to create the Fine People Hoax. That Hoax Funnel is even deeper.