

Case study 3: Spit-gate – how a video and made up story went viral

At a film premiere in Venice in 2022, a video with two A-List Hollywood celebrities, Chris Pine and Harry Styles, went viral. It's a short clip with Pine seated clapping Styles' entrance; Styles comes and takes his seat, slightly pursing his lips, at which point Pine looks into his lap and stops clapping.⁹³ The video is poured over by fans convinced that Styles spat on Pine, using this ambiguous video as definitive proof that the two hate each other.^{93,94} They make video clips explaining what they believe the situation is, and it goes viral, ending up all across social media platforms and in mainstream media, including in prominent New Zealand media.⁹³⁻⁹⁵ Pine's and Styles' representatives released a statement saying the incident didn't occur.^{96,97} But this doesn't do anything to stop the quell of speculation about why it happened and the drama that led to 'spit-gate'. Although a relatively light-hearted example, spit-gate shows the alarming rate at which unverified and refuted evidence spreads on social media and that official sources clarifying information don't stop the spread. When the information spread is about vaccinations or election legitimacy rather than the actions of two celebrities, there can be substantial offline consequences.

References

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