

Fake News Swamping Interpersonal Communication in the Times of Corona Virus

Himani Binjola¹, Keshav Patel²

¹Researcher (Academic) Graphic Era Hill University Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.

²Researcher (Academic) MGCGU Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Correspondence E-mail Id: editor@eurekajournals.com

Abstract

In the times of suffering and devastation of Covid-19 where the World is fighting against the deadly virus of Covid-19 and everyone is destitute for survival. Another virus that is spreading more fear in these times is the virus of fake news and misinformation. Humanity is standing at the threshold of bereavement and torment and misinformation is adding on to the distress of human in this hour of grief and anxiety. The news culture of present times where every social media platform, channel, newspaper and each media respectively want to update the World with the latest trends and happening about coronavirus in the respective parts of the country is also becoming the platform for dissemination of disinformation and fake news.

Through this study, we will try to understand how fake news is spreading misinformation and diffusing fear among people and society. The paper tries to understand how 24*7 news culture and upsurge of social media is spreading the fear of Covid-19 faster than the virus itself. Through this paper, we would be approximating such instances of fake news and misinformation.

Keywords: Social Media, Fake News, Misinformation, Corona Virus, Fear.

Introduction

Media forms an integral part of superstructure in any society (Patel, An Analysis of Impact of Personal Communication Technology on Public Policy Making Process In India, 2017). The human race is deliberated as the superlative conception of the almighty which is believed to have the highest acumen and astuteness. Humans only believe in those instincts which he wants to believe, in short when any information is shared with them, they process the information and especially such information which fits it into their beliefs and perception. Such information is trusted by them without confirming the authenticity of the information and they continue believing. This is where fake news takes the opportunity and advantage of

our preconceptions and prejudgments. Now say if some message doesn't go along with our personal belief so we immediately reject the information, particularly when we have to take some serious measures on the same. We believe any information which goes along with our biases. For example, Chinese Scientists are blamed by racists and alcohol is the cure is believed by drinkers.

The biggest question that arises in these difficult times is that why does fake news superfluities and misinformation spreads like wildfire? Does it bring our attention to one fact that people have become miserably credulous and in this hour of anxiety and distress are becoming receptive to misinformation and fake news? According to some researchers, any misinformation which is sensational and eye-catching in nature is much appreciated by the audience and grabs the attention of the people.

According to Dr Lee Riley, Professor of Vaccinology and Infectious Disease at the University of California believes that something that spreads faster than infection is fear and he also adds that 20 years ago sars was not diagnosed easily as coronavirus has been diagnosed (Cellan-Jones, 2020). He also emphasized on one point that common or garden influenza was much more noxious and lethal but the uncertain behavior and nature of coronavirus have made people atrocious. In present times media access has changed people's behavior regarding news and are continuously accessing news through various platforms and one of the platforms is social media. As social media is continuously updating people with information but at times the information is partial and this partial information is adding into the fear of people and uprising their concerns.

The question that we are trying to answer through this study is that social media is spreading the virus of fear among people. If we look at the kind of information shared on various social media platforms it is not incorrect to say that virus of fear is affecting more people rather than the actual virus. Fake news is affecting the lives of more people and is increasing their suffering. It is also a matter of concern for social media giants that if misinformation and fake news are spreading through their channels, so their reputation is also at stake and they have to take measures to stop or built a mechanism which could identify fake news or misinformation. As people look up to these giants for authentic information and if this uncertainty of news in terms of misinformation continues so the standing of these firms will have a big question mark on them. Even the responsibility lies on people as well that we can't be that vulnerable to fake news that we believe in whatever comes our way, we have to use our common sense as well. It is seen multiple times that whenever there is a crisis, fake news or misinformation also flourishes.

Garlic can cure disease, Pakistan's Prime Minister is diagnosed with coronavirus, Ronaldo is diagnosed with Covid-19, Corona is a result of bio-weapon experiment all such fake news has hit all the social platforms very hard and people have surfed this news with huge in numbers (Sharma, 2020). In the age of Internet and computer, the journey from information

to facilities can be decided from home (Patel, Study the Diverse Nature of News Presentation on Facebook and its Impact on Youth, 2019). Sometimes we share this news for fun and without authenticating the source of news we share it with hundreds and thousands of people and then those also share and, in this way, we increase and contribute in the vicious circle of fake news. The fake news scenario in case of COVID-19 started with bat soup stories, then celebrity getting diagnosed with Covid-19 and then all such fake news and misinformation is continuing across social media platforms. More tormenting fake news is the cure for Covid-19, which is still not there but fake news such as chloroquine could be the possible drug for the cure of Covid-19, another one that my friend who is in Wuhan has made this audio message for information and cure from coronavirus and all such audios are getting circulated on Whatsapp numbers without confirming the source and genuineness of the news.

The problem is not that people are becoming victim to fake news, on the other hand, the problem is that people are dwindling to enthrall recommendations. People are not listening to government advice and advises suggested by experts and medical fraternity. If we look at instances where people simply refused to keep medical advice in mind and challenged corona times by visiting Churches for Sunday services from Moscow to Rio. Another example of people negligence comes into play when you delve into Tablighi Jamaat's example where dozens of people tested corona positive. Tablighi Jamaat which had a huge gathering of more than 3000 people on 13th March in Nizamuddin, Delhi with foreign Nationals from Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Saudia Arabia and Indonesia became the blistering plug for the deadly virus. (theprint, 2020) The congregation which was gathered at Nizamuddin Markaz in Delhi has brought so many nations in trouble along with India. Another example to it is that American people were warned regarding the hurricane during these critical times but New Orleans ignored warnings of the officials and suffered the bursting dynamism of Hurricane Katrina's Landfall.

We need to understand one thing that any information which is hammering us is from a credible source and we also need to apprehend our responsibility that any information should not manipulate us. This way we will defend us from misinformation and we will only be exposed to less fake news in the first phase. The need of the hour is that we all remain vigilant and only trust information when we are sure of the credibility of the source. Our vigilant attitude will curb spreading misinformation and fake news. Markedly the concern that is also arising is that social media giants will loose on their reputations if they are found spreading misinformation and fake news in these Covid-19 crises. Several health care systems are deafening in these hard times, so we all need to be observant and watchful. We should look for real news and the right practices and advice to be followed.

Fake News and Misinformation Hammering Social Media Podia

In these times of distress and agony, something that has matched and paced with Covid-19 is the misinformation and fake news hitting the social media platforms. These days Facebook,

text messaging, Whatsapp, Instagram and other various social media platforms are becoming the channel for spreading misinformation and fake news. Though Google, Facebook and other social media giants are trying to curb this menace still these deceitful messages are not getting clogged and are disbursed by people. Some of this deceitful misinformation is in escapable.

Potential Drug for COVID 19 and Various Health Myths

- As per some of the social media platforms, Chloroquine is the potential drug for fighting against Coronavirus whereas the hydroxychloroquine drug is an anti-malarial drug and the a like compound chloroquine is majorly used for patients suffering from autoimmune diseases i.e. Rheumatoid arthritis. This drug has terminal side effects if tainted and it could result in toxicity and heart attack. Researchers said that these are just suggestions and there is still no drug found that could be the treatment for Covid-19.
- Another myth that is grabbing people's attention is that consuming a lot of water will keep the virus away, as we are already informed by the medical practitioners that this virus is getting communicated through surfaces and keeping the throat moist is not the ultimate solution. Drinking water usually is beneficial for the body but at the present situation, water consumption has no relevance with COVID 19.
- According to epidemiologist Gideon Meyerowitz-Katz, it is also a myth that hot water (27C) consumption will keep the virus away from the human body as the average temperature of the human body is 37C (98.6F) and if this myth is to be believed so nobody would have been suffering and going through this agony of COVID 19. So, hence it is a myth that hot water will help in killing Covid-19 virus.
- Another myth that is hitting the social media platform is that saunas and hot air can kill coronavirus and this myth was condemned by WHO that hand dryers do not have an impact on coronavirus, while other researchers have also warned that putting blow dryers on mouth, nose and face can be more problematic and it can hardly have any impact on coronavirus. These myths have not been promoted by any respective hospitals but these myths have been promoted by social media platforms in the name of hospitals. The situation is really dangerous as for fetching likes and comments social media platforms are going to extreme levels of misinformation and fake news.
- The Royal Melbourne Hospital had to condemn a hospital newsletter which was getting circulated on Facebook, Whatsapp and other social media platforms saying that medical team of Melbourne hospital has informed that hot water, dryer and regularly drinking of hot water will help in killing the coronavirus where as the hospital team said that nothing of this sort was communicated by any newsletter of the hospital. Such cases tell us how dangerous this virus of misinformation and fake news is which is gravely affecting people, society and countries. The major concern is that populaces are circulating such fake news through their discrete social media accounts as without verifying the credibility of the news.

- Another misinformation that came from Australia was that the Asian community was emptying supermarkets and hoarding goods. This news targeted the Asian community that Asian people were seen panic buying and were creating chaos, whereas this news was condemned by Australian officials that nothing of this sort was happening across. Now such fake news creates misperceptions among people and community and leads to several serious apprehensions.
- Speculations started in the case of corona virus initially from the outbreak of the virus from its origin in Hubei region of China and as there was no clarity about the virus how it came, from what it came, what will be the possible treatment of the virus so theories just rose and an environment of uncertainty prevailed and is prevailing. Moment Wuhan city was put down on complete lockdown, the upsurge of fake news and misinformation was so high that Google, Twitter and Facebook are belligerent to cope.
- The biggest misinformation that was across all major social media platform was a woman eating bat and people eating bat in Wuhan and this fake news was spread by the Daily Mail, RT and YouTube Paul Joseph Watson among others. This bat eating video was circulated in name of Wuhan but originally this video was made in Palau, Micronesia, for a travel video in 2016.
- Another sensational story that made its place in all the social media platforms and grabbing the attention of the people, that Covid-19 was a result of bioweapon testing. According to the claim of The Washington Times, the outbreak of coronavirus had a link with the Wuhan Institute of Virology and quoted a former Israeli Military Intelligence Officer who claimed that coronavirus was a result of bioweapon and bioweapon was the only possibility of the virus. (Monitoring, 2020) Other theories claimed that the virus was produced in Canada and then exported to China. Again, a theory came that The Washington Post spoke to several researchers and experts regarding the genome of the virus and experts mentioned that the virus had no indication that it was contrived and there was no evidence that Covid-19 was a bioweapon. If we look at the series of such theories haunting people every day it is clear that misinformation and fake news is just adding on to the suffering of human race and fright is killing us more than the actual virus.
- Another precarious remedy stories for the treatment of coronavirus included consumption of saltwater, vitamin C and oregano oil as a good alternative for treating Covid-19. Another treacherous story that flooded the social media platform was the consumption of bleach, it was propagated that dinking bleach could be very effective in the treatment of coronavirus whereas we all know that how dangerous the results of the same will be, means just for fetching likes and popular social media platforms are risking human lives by disseminating misinformation and fake news. This way they are also stroking their image at stake and are obscuring and muddling their image.

Conclusion

If we could see in the entire study that how diverse customary of misinformation and fake news is misleading masses and is creating havoc in the society. It is very important to change our approach of ‘publishing first and checking later’ defiance. It is very important to realize that journalists, citizen journalists can easily curb this menace by being watchful, vigilant and observant. We can only put a stop on fake news and misinformation when we only disseminate news when we authenticate the source of news and we think before sharing any news. If we share one misleading information and fake news it could create greater risks for our friends and family, it is significant to understand our accountability discretely.

We need to understand that we are not living in the calm time precinct, during these times of coronavirus we need to be more careful as dissemination of misinformation leads to speculation and panic and already there is too much fear in the World.

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