

# The Impact of Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society

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**Abstract-** Because of the lockdowns and stay at home orders, people are staying home and have more free time. They are on top of the trending topics on social media. The current trending topics normally reflect the interest of the public, which currently are about COVID-19 or topics linked to the pandemic because of how important this issue has become for the society. There are thousands of people infected with this virus, and there is no cure or vaccine for it. The media is trying to cover as much relevant content as possible because people need to be aware of the correct guidelines to prevent the quick widespread of COVID-19. Social media is a platform that enables people to share current research, information, and opinions of healthcare experts, governments, and people around the world. Social media helps global society stay connected and learn more about this disease. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society. The methodology used to conduct this research is basic research to identify the perception of people living on this pandemic. Focusing on analytical research to explain the causes and consequences of the spread of misinformation of COVID-19. This research is based on secondary data, which means that it has been collected from other sources. By using qualitative methods. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society. The methodology used to conduct this research is basic research to identify the perception of people living on this pandemic. Focusing on analytical research to explain the causes and consequences of the spread of misinformation of COVID-19. This research is based on secondary data, which means that it has been collected from other sources. By using qualitative methods, the emphasis is on the words and meaning of the information. The results of the analysis showed that people need to know how to identify sources that they can trust, such as official government sites or healthcare sites. If people find news in social media, it is recommendable to cross-reference the sources to confirm reliability. Also, look for another similar source that corroborates the information found. Making sure that only the right information is out is could help control this pandemic and avoid people getting harmed by misinformation on the web.

**Keywords:** Fake News; NGOs; Social Media; Times of Crisis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Some rumors are surrounding the use of Social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the spread of false information around the world. People are already very terrified and want to be safe from this new virus, and if someone uses social media for the wrong purpose, this will simply cause chaos and make the quarantine even longer. People are depending and trusting that social media will inform accurate news. Social media is a crucial platform

nowadays for sharing a story with people around the world within just one click. There is a need for people to be aware of the problems that surround them to they can take the precautionary measures and save themselves from exposure (Hekren, 2020). Currently, Coronavirus news is trending as people want to stay on top of this disease and want to know how to prevent it, what guidelines to follow, what are the new developments about a vaccine, what are doctors and the governments doing to solve this pandemic, etc.

The latest news and social media posts help people stay updated on the current situation with COVID-19 and also helps them answer their questions and concerns. In this research paper, I will discuss various topics related to the Coronavirus pandemic. First, I will talk about the virus itself, its origins, how it is changing the world, and how to prevent its spread. Then I will argue about the importance of delivering accurate information during difficult times and how fake news can severely impact the society. Lastly, I will talk about how some companies are taking action to prevent misinformation in social media posts. This paper will show the impact that fake news on Social Media has in our society during times of crisis. The study examined the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society?

The study also developed the following null hypothesis:

- H1: There is a relationship between Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society.

Evidence from various past studies stated that the existing Evidence is not enough about The Impact of Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society. It is from this perspective that this study will be contributing to knowledge. The rest of the study is divided into three sections: Section two deals with the literature review, section three deals with methodology empirical analysis respectively, while section four concerns conclusion and recommendations.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

*2.1 The virus itself, its origins, how it is changing the world, and how to prevent its spread.*

As of today, thousands of people have died due to COVID-19. Not only because there is no cure or vaccine, but also because the society is not preventing the quick spread by following the

doctors and experts' guidelines. A news article posted on the BBC Future titled COVID-19: The history of pandemics, mentions a lot of good information about the start of this pandemic, the vulnerability the world is facing, and how to avoid similar pandemics in the future. "As of March 26, there were more than 470,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 around the world and more than 20,000 deaths, touching every continent save Antarctica" (BBC Future, 2020). Wuhan, China, was the epicenter of the virus COVID-19 pandemic, and it has spread widely at a fast pace all over the world.

On December 31, 2019, the Government of Wuhan, China, confirmed a dozen cases of severe pneumonia. Researchers in China later identified COVID-19 or Coronavirus as a new virus that has infected thousands of people in Asia. As recorded by World meter: In the past two months, the virus has spread to over 109 countries. According to BBC Future, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared this virus as a global pandemic as of March 1.

Because of this announcement, and in some countries, even before then, many countries decided to close their borders, and travel bans are stringent to prevent more people from getting infected. According to UNESCO, over 290.5 million students have been affected due to the virus outbreak in more than 22 countries. Italy- has recorded as the most affected region in Europe with 200 deaths. Therefore, they have shut down schools till March 15. Spain- The Government of Spain, has closed education centers from nursery schools to universities in Madrid. China has been in lockdown for more than two months; millions of students are homebound and relying on online learning. The main thing is that people should trust the facts that their Government will share with them. Social media may spread false news, but not all the time, this thing is to write. People must rely and follow official announcements and guidelines that come from government officials, authorities, and healthcare experts that are working on this pandemic. Several things are going to manage in this disease as by the fact COVID-19 is not an easy thing to consider it lightly (Krishnamoorti, 2020).

Some people are terrified and worried about staying in their houses, which can lead to exhaustion and depression. People have gathered and stocked toilet papers, hand sanitizer, and all other groceries from the market and isolated themselves in their houses. Some of them are not taking precautions and still roaming around, which is not a responsible way to behave in this pandemic situation. That's why security departments are in action to make sure that no one is out of their house unless they have an emergency. There are a lot of rumors running on Social Media and other platforms, which is misleading the people and causing fear between them. First and the common one was that this virus is lab-engineered and used as a kind of bioweapon, which is wrong because scientists found out that (McKinsey, 2020) this virus is passed into humans by animals. Suppliers have stocked the groceries, hand sanitizers, face masks, and toilet papers, which is causing anxiety in people to collect all those groceries as soon as possible,

making them worried about the food and all groceries, which is not good. Due to the increase in demand, some companies have increased the prices of their hand sanitizers and other items to earn more profits, which is very unethical considering that the world is fighting for survival, and some are using this opportunity to gain personal benefits (NBC.News, 2020).

The virus has not only affected humans but has adversely impacted the world economy and businesses with its uncontrollable outbreak. According to BBC Future, "Early estimates of the economic damage from COVID-19 have already crossed the trillion-dollar mark." To which global financial markets are reacting strongly, and business leaders are questioning the growth and recovery of the world economy. With jobs of millions at stake and the survival of many industries and businesses at risk, plus thousands of people losing their jobs during the present situation seems that a global recession is unavoidable in some time to come.

The World Economic Forum recently published an article discussing the forthcoming recession. The article says that Kristalina Georgieva told the BBC in an interview that the COVID-19 pandemic will "leave 170 countries with lower GDP per capita by the end of the year, but the projection 'may be actually a more optimistic picture than reality produces'" (Winck, 2020). After the 2008 financial crisis, the world stock market started to experience a similarly severe impact in February 2020. At first, this pandemic was supposed to impact companies that have a direct and indirect connection with China only. Now, the virus has reached 170 countries. Investors are worried about its impact on buying and selling shares. Investors are nervous; therefore, they are selling into an overvalued market to save profits. In an article for Yahoo Finance, Brian Sozzi said that, "after three consecutive weeks of jobless claims in the millions, another 5.245 million Americans filed for unemployment benefits in the week ending April 11".

In the article Sozzi quotes Bliss, who has over 30 years of experience in the financial world saying that, "the economic restructuring will be so intense and so immense it will be very hard to come back from." It is clear that the stock market is greatly affected by this virus and so are many businesses, not to mention all the people who lost their jobs.

Like all kinds of organizations, companies and businesses are shut down and allowing their employees to work remotely in their homes, including all educational Institutes and restaurants. The cancelation of all sporting events created a significant loss for many athletic organizations. A lot of big games, such as the Olympics, decided to delay all competitions until further notice (WHO.int, 2020). Nobody is safe from this virus, at this point the appropriate thing to do is to protect human lives.

When there are losers, there are winners too. Coronavirus has shaken the whole world, and people are living in a state of fear. On the other hand, some people are also benefiting from this new outbreak. The demand for face masks, hand

sanitizers, hand-washes, toilet paper, and other sanitary products have drastically increased in no time boosting sales for the health sector and pharmaceutical sector. Reckitt Benckiser, Getz Pharma, are some names who are on the winning side. Due to the lockdown, people are turning towards online shopping, which has increased the sales for e-commerce sector and companies such as Amazon and Ali Baba. Walmart's sales also increased as people shopped the necessary items in bulk, leaving the shelves empty. Coronavirus has impacted the world in the worst way possible, and as the numbers of the virus victims are increasing, the world economy will face more implications. The global economy is also suffering from COVID-19 because many countries are pausing their economic activities until further notice. Economies seem to be suffering for survival as soon many will not be having the capacity to generate enough incomes to meet their expenses.

At this moment, we must prevent the spread of this disease and stay at home as much as possible. According to the CDC everyone must follow some guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus. The CDC says that "The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus." Some people can carry the virus even if they don't have any symptoms, this is why we must keep distance from others, 6 feet to be specific. Everyone must:

- Wash their hands often, for at least 20 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face without cleaning your hands first.
- Cover your mouth and nose when in public, a bandana or scarf works.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing, wash your hands immediately after.
- Disinfect touched surfaces daily, including phones and doorknobs.
- Use soap and water to clean surfaces and disinfect right after with a household disinfectant.

They're much more than just the negative stuff related to this virus. It has also helped the world appreciate friends, family, teachers, health care workers, Government, and technology. This new Coronavirus already changed many things in the world, and some stuff may remain the way they are right now. Politico Magazine published an article that addresses these changes. Still, in a more positive way, "crisis moments also present an opportunity: more sophisticated and flexible use of technology, less polarization, a revived appreciation for the outdoors and life's other simple pleasures" (Politico, 2020). As the article says, nobody knows how the future will look like in any matter. Everything is uncertain at this point, but as a community, we need to stand together and do our best to overcome all these challenges.

*2.2 Importance of delivering accurate information during difficult times and how fake news can severely impact the society.*

Nowadays, it is a quarantine situation, and people are bound to sit in their homes just to stay prevented from this disease. People are relying only on the news they get from social media and electronic media to plan their everyday lives. Therefore, many of the times, it happens that some news was not accurate, but people started following just because it's up on different social media platforms. The main problem lies is that there is no authenticity on these platforms to get rid of false news in terms of making it approved by some trustworthy resource. A way to prevent this from happening is to report the post to get it out of the internet. People should not only rely on that news. They must search on their own as well. And when people do not get into the details of any news, these cause problems because they start believing whatever is told to them and to make matters worse, also start sharing it with their friends and families (Chaing Mai, 2018).

Most, if not all, of the trending topics, are somehow related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic is changing the interests of what people are searching online, what they do at home, what they buy in the store, how they work, etc. People have extra free time, which means that they have more time to check social media platforms. According to a recent article posted on Forbes magazine, "The things we care about the most often become trending topics. (Brandon, 2020)." Everyone's eyes are on top of the global pandemic. Unfortunately, there is misinformation about this from the precautionary measures to the cure of the disease. COVID-19 cases increase constantly and globally, which creates a global concern on how to deal with this sanitary emergency. Currently, scientists haven't been able to find a vaccine or medicine for fighting COVID-19. In module 4 of the Journalism, 'Fake News,' and Disinformation handbook mention that when researching an outbreak, like COVID-19, people "should search their respective social media feeds for a scientific or medical news story" (Ireton, 2018). They listed a few suggestions when searching, people should be curious about who produced the story, how that reporter or person knows what was published, and if he/she stands to benefit from disseminating it; double-check the data, statistics, infographics.

The basic guidelines say that we must take care of our surroundings and ensure our places are clean and decontaminated from dust and dirt. Cleanliness is the main prevention of this disease. Several rumors are spreading around the world related to the cure of this disease as some people are suggesting that this disease will end when weather temperatures increase, and they will kill the virus. This myth is spreading widely on the internet, and this is not quite accurate. According to BBC news, we need to be cautious about this information "The virus that causes COVID-19 – which has been officially named SARS-CoV-2 – is too new to have any firm data on how cases will change with the seasons." (Will warm weather kill off COVID-19? 2020). Once these kinds of news are circulating on one social media platform, there will be a list of others to follow with the

purpose to start spreading it to increase the traffic of their page, even if they are spreading fake news. The circulation of this news needs regulations for the reason that users and other platforms do not authenticate the information before sharing it, they only share what they believe will appeal to the readers regardless of its authenticity (Lomas, 2018).

### *2.3 How some companies are taking action to prevent misinformation in social media posts.*

Some social media platforms like Facebook are starting to notice this problem and will start to take action to prevent the spread of fake news and misinformation. Mark Zuckerberg told CNN in an interview that Facebook and its apps can do right now is to connect people and experts, but also stop the spread of misinformation. They have directed over 2 billion people to a COVID-19 information center with information from health experts and government officials on top of the Facebook app and in pop-ups. Facebook is taking down fake news, mainly the ones that can lead to physical harm like drinking bleach. They develop a system that shows warning labels for unreliable sources (CNN Business, 2020). Actions like this one can help to stop the spread of misinformation and, most importantly, prevent people from doing things that can harm them or panicking during this pandemic. Guy Rosen, the Vice president of Facebook, said that “during March, we displayed warnings on about 40 million posts related to COVID-19 on Facebook, based on around 4,000 articles by our independent fact-checking partners” (Facebook, 2020). He also said that 95% of the time, people did not read that source after seeing those warnings. Some of Facebook's plans are to show warnings to people who have liked, commented, or interacted with fake news on the app. Knowing that big social media platforms are taking action is a big relief for the world. These changes are a big step to take and will play a big role in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### *3.1 Research Methodology*

The methodology used to conduct this research is basic research to identify the perception of people living on this pandemic. Focusing on analytical research to explain the causes and consequences of the spread of misinformation of COVID-19. This research is based on secondary data, which means that it has been collected from other sources. By using qualitative methods, the emphasis is on the words and meaning of the information.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *4.1 The Impact of Fake News on Social Media in Times of Crisis on Society*

The purpose of this paper will show the impact that fake news on Social Media has in our society during times of crisis. It is to argue that society is being affected negatively by people who are spreading false news on many social media

platforms. Some people do not have regular TV cable, so social media will be the only platform for people to know about the details about COVID-19. People believe that social media is the most authentic and efficient platform that will give them accurate information.

Now that most people are locked down in their homes and have plenty of free time, they spend even more time using their phones and different social media platforms. Updates on Coronaviruses are drifting the web. The primary concern after this illness is hazardous for everyone, no matter if you are in your 20's or 80's. People are not careful enough, and this increases the odds of threat for them and their families, and they are putting everyone at risk. But the misinformation from different sources on social media platforms put people at risk of treating symptoms with the wrong medications or harming themselves because of this fake news. For example, the rumor of drinking bleach prevents the contagion of the Coronavirus.

At the beginning of the pandemic, many social media platforms didn't have a system to check the factual or trustworthy background of the content posted, and this may present false information and put people at risk.

A lot of negative things can happen if people are unable to identify and distinguish reliable sources from those that have inaccurate information. People could start self-medicating and hurting themselves or doing something that can put them at a higher risk. COVID-19 can be deadly for those who have underlined health issues, especially the elderly, but it can also really put a young/healthy person at high risk of upper-respiratory problems.

There are some people present in this pandemic who are taking advantage of people's fear and guiding them wrong about the cure. These people create myths and false information that is circulating on social media. These people are not doctors, but they are pretending to be a doctor, are trying to fool some people who are already very scared of this disease and have trust issues. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, "Rumors about the new coronavirus, including ones citing Johns Hopkins immunologists, infectious disease experts, and other specialists, lack credibility because Johns Hopkins Medicine does not publish them" (JHMedicine, 2020). This information is not published on the John Hopkins website but still cite experts linked to the famous hospital. People need to make sure just to cross-reference the information with the original source.

People are taking advantage of this crisis to spread false information so that they can reach out to more and more users on the internet. When a piece of new information is shared, regardless it is wrong, it instantly gains the attention of internet users, and they start spreading the news. Though the users have the right intention to educate their social circles, the news they are spreading may be wrong and may cause more damage than good. Some of the preventive measures to protect yourself and your loved ones are taking a bath right after you get home, drinking warm water or tea, and wash

your hands for at least 20 seconds. If anyone suggests anything different from the basic guidelines published by the CDC, then you must ask yourself if that information is accurate. There are some things that people can do to spot a rumor regarding COVID-19, according to John Hopkins medicine:

- Use trusted sources, such as official government or health care websites and social media channels.
- Evaluate other information from the source, including links and sources, to see if it appears reliable.
- Search other credible resources to see if they are sharing similar information.

Not everything that is on social media is false news. There is also trustworthy and reliable news from trustworthy sources transmitting information from healthcare experts and government officials. These reliable sources are sharing the true story that is backed up by research. Also, the methods implemented by social media platforms like Facebook increase the chances of making sure that accurate is being delivered to users of the app. If people find the warnings mentioned by the creator of Facebook, they must not panic and go to the COVID-19 information center with information from health experts and government officials on top of the Facebook app and in pop-ups.

#### 4.2 Conclusion

To conclude, because of the lockdowns and stay at home orders, people are staying home and have more free time. They are on top of the trending topics on social media. The current trending topics normally reflect the interest of the public, which currently are about COVID-19 or topics linked to the pandemic because of how important this issue has become for the society.

There are thousands of people infected with this virus, and there is no cure or vaccine for it. The media is trying to cover as much relevant content as possible because people need to be aware of the correct guidelines to prevent the quick widespread of COVID-19. Social media is a platform that enables people to share current research, information, and opinions of healthcare experts, governments, and people around the world. Social media helps the global society stay connected and learn more about this disease.

People need to know how to identify sources that they can trust, such as official government sites or healthcare sites. If people find news in social media, it is recommendable to cross-reference the sources to confirm reliability. Also, look for another similar source that corroborates the information found. Making sure that only the right information is out is could help control this pandemic and avoid people getting harmed by misinformation on the web.

Having big social media platforms like Facebook using different methods to prevent the spread of misinformation by using pop-ups to connect people with accurate information

from legitimate experts. Also, by having social media take down fake news will prevent the spread of fake news. The warnings that pop-up on-site with unreliable sources will automatically decrease the traffic on those pages. Actions like the ones mentioned before will help people stay informed and follow the right steps during this pandemic.

#### 4.3 Limitations and Recommendations

One of the most important determinants of this study is the extent of the novelty of the Corona virus and the lack of research on it, so many rumors and fake news about this disease appeared on social networking sites, television and the Internet, so it was very difficult to choose reliable and reliable information in this study.

#### 4.4 Suggestions for Future Studies

One of the important recommendations from the researcher's point of view is to do more research and experiments on Covid 19, but the information should be collected from reliable sources and avoid false news and rumors that may affect the community negatively.

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