

Research Article

An Empirical Study on Impact of social media During COVID-19 on Individuals

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Abstract

Communication across borders is feasible, and knowledge on science, technology, health, and other disciplines is disseminated via a variety of digital channels. Despite the importance of traditional media, it is social media that promotes awareness and keeps people informed about current events. Only through social media can you learn about different blogs, websites, innovative apps, and fresh advances in many sectors. These applications have had a significant impact on individuals. Social media platforms, which have become an integral part of everyone's life, are easily accessible at lower costs via smartphones and portable devices such as laptops. As a result, social media has an influence not only in regular conditions, but also during COVID-19. Everyone is depressed and hopeless as a result of the pandemic's fast spread. People are perplexed and indifferent by the many circumstances that surround them. Social media is currently a blessing to society since it informs individuals to impending risks and protects their families by giving information on safety and preventative measures. As a result, it assists individuals in accepting difficulties in order to face any risk and preserve their lives. Simultaneously, false information sent via these applications has caused confusion and mayhem. Fear produced by the spread of misleading information is much more deadly than the sickness itself since it misleads individuals with erroneous beliefs, eventually putting them in panic. However, when used responsibly, social media applications may have only beneficial effects on society and thereby enhance living conditions. This article focuses on the good and bad elements of social media, as well as the main actions made by various groups to improve society.

Keywords: Social Media, COVID-19, Communication

Introduction

Social media is a type of electronic communication that allows individuals all over the globe to learn new things and share their thoughts. According to statistics, 3.96 billion individuals utilise social media globally, accounting for 49 percent of the global population. On average, people have 7.6 social media accounts, and they spend 2 hours and 24 minutes on social media (Dean, 2021). According to a recent poll, more than 85 percent of all firms utilise as part of their marketing strategy, they use social media platforms, which has resulted in a rise in sales, which has led to an increase in manufacturing and production rates. This, in turn, leads to a rise in economic revenue, which, in turn, leads to the settlement of a variety of issues, including unemployment and poverty reduction. This raises the level of living while also extending life expectancy. E-commerce is the finest illustration of how businesses can thrive with the help of social media. As a result, the number of people using social networking sites continues to grow. Each of Facebook, Messenger, and Whatsapp processes 60 billion messages (Dean, 2021). During a crisis, the ever-evolving social media platform has become a critical

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communication medium (Srivastava et al.,2020) Other web-based internet technologies, such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, have greatly affected people's lifestyles by making communication and information exchange simpler through photos and videos. Without a doubt, it had a significant influence even during the emergence of the pandemic, COVID-19. If people did not have access to social media, the world would have been flipped upside down. At the same time, rumours and false information had left many people perplexed and despondent. Not just individual progress, but also societal growth, is contingent on the constructive use of social media. According to a recent poll, the number of social media users increased by 328 million, or 10 new users each second, between October 2018 and October 2019. This rise illustrates the importance of social media in today's culture, as well as how it has altered our understanding of information and communication. As a result, social media is indirectly responsible for the country's economic growth. However, the social media platform, like any other hypothesis, has some drawbacks.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, social distance and virtual working have become essential. Only via social media have individuals begun to connect online. COVID-19 provides access to a variety of online registrations and programmes. On a national and worldwide basis, several webinars and online FDPs are organised to improve teaching abilities in the field of education. Students benefit from online classes as well, and access to them is only available through social media. As a consequence, social media not only supports individuals in overcoming boredom on a personal level, but also in converting idle time into quality time on a professional one. One cannot fathom a healthy world without social media, especially during COVID-19. Despite the fact that numerous cases of domestic violence have been reported, there has been no rise in these events due to social media. This is due to the fact that many individuals utilise social networking programmes in some form or another.

The Internet is the largest information repository, and most recent updates in healthcare, vaccine developments and current COVID 19 cases have spread awareness among a variety of individuals from rich to poor, or between children and elders and therefore make people aware of the problems relating to health through social media apps. Some countries have Twitter and Facebook accounts that give reliable information.

Use of Social media by the Government

To battle the virus, the government established the MyGov.in website and the Aarogya Setu app, which show and update citizens on the latest information regarding the epidemic's development. Mass media acquire passive knowledge of these websites and other authentic blogs, but only one click away to spread the most recent information on these digital tools via social media in seconds.

Use of Social media by Public Health authorities

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has utilised a number of means of communication to prepare citizens for the difficulties and risks posed by COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established a CDC app as well as an active page on Twitter and Facebook to allow individuals to make many comments. (microblogs), which are then reviewed by legitimate technologies to ensure correct information is disseminated among people.

According to a research, social networking sites were used for crisis management and outbreak prevention during the outbreaks of pandemics such as Ebola (2014) and the Zika virus (2015). These social media sites disseminate and access critical information acquired by the WHO and the CDC, as well as provide trustworthy information. As a result, social networking sites assisted in the virus's prevention by providing people with accurate information and urging them to heed the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's warnings.

Social Media – A two-sided Implication

The use of social media has two faces, much like a coin with two sides. Aside from the advantages, there are some disadvantages. While social media has been useful in raising awareness and disseminating reliable information during epidemics, it has also been used to spread fake news, hatred, and prejudice Facilitating the spread of rumours (including misrepresenting identity), misleading and altered information, pictures and sounds, cyberbullying, coercion and harassment, and privacy violations (Mirbabaieros et al.,2019)

Psychological Impact

The dissemination of false information is surpassing the spread of the disease. So, more than the sickness that affected people, it was terror that stayed with them and damaged them mentally, creating hysteria, anxiety, obsessiveness, an increase in stress levels, paranoia, and sadness in the long term. Cornophobia is a term for the excessive and irrational fear caused by the spread of the coronavirus epidemic, which has caused anxiety in numerous countries. The uneasiness is exacerbated further by a 'infodemic' spreading across various social media channels. It is heartbreaking to see the world experience unexpected eruptions of dissatisfaction, indifference, prejudice, racism, and stigmatisation of specific populations.

The Director-General of the World Health Organization declared that the COVID 19 pandemic is suffering an infodemic. According to WHO, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres remarked on his Twitter account on March 18 that "our joint foe is COVID-19, but our opponent is also an infodemic of disinformation."

False cures, anti-vaccination advertising, and conspiracy theories have had such an impact on people that they began taking medications without seeing their physicians. For example, After taking chloroquin without prescription of a physician, a citizen of Phoenix, Arizona, died. News of mass murders of patients in China, herbal treatment and traditional disease transmission remedies, false notification, communal contents and national emergency sound clips have not only confused the general public but made it difficult for the government, private sector, etc. to do their job.

Impact of social media on Agriculture and Poultry

False information on social media has also resulted in significant losses in poultry and agriculture. A popular myth on social media is that eating chicken and watermelon promotes the illness. Farmers were unable to feed the birds as a result of this false information, and they were forced to slaughter them. Because maize is a superior feed for chicken, it went unsold, and the maize farmers suffered as a result. In a news conference, People have stopped eating chicken, according to Agriculture Minister B.C Patil, resulting in a huge loss in the poultry and agricultural sectors. He requested the media, in order to aid farmers, to rectify this mistake and advised them not to accept scientific knowledge and not to consume chicken.

False Medication

By trusting in questionable medical claims, people are resorting to unscrupulous practises of fake medicine. Unhealthy activities such as washing hands with Vodka and Vinegar has landed people in hot water ("List of dubious treatments against COVID-19",2021).

Several illegal groups emerged, cashing in on people's fears and engaging in harmful practises such as selling seeds, flowers, and roots of various medicinal plants, which are regarded traditional treatments and treatments for COVID-19. False advertising of organically prepared drinks using all of the spices accessible at home, such as pepper, ginger, cinnamon, saffron, and turmeric, spread virally throughout the globe via Twitter.

The true perpetrators are those who spread false information and misinformation. There is devastation all around. Miscommunication between people and across countries resulted in assaults on both the national and international levels. Telecommunication engineers were exploited, and phone towers were damaged in nearly every foreign country just because of conspiracy ideas.

Speculative statements regarding the efficacy of the drug, Hydroxychloroquine, began circulating on social media, and many people mistakenly ingested it and died as a result. Because of an upsurge in cases of hydroxychloroquine use in Nigeria, Lagos state officials have advised individuals against using this medication. The World Health Organization does not advocate the use of hydroxychloroquine since it increases death rates. Many people in Iran have died as a result of the false rumour that alcohol intoxication could save lives. According to Kambiz Soltaninjad, an official from Iran's Legal Medicine group, the total reached 796 at the end

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of April, and it was caused by misleading news on social media. As a result, alcohol was prohibited in their nation.

Conspiracy theories propagate the erroneous concept that 5G technology is hazardous and that the disease may spread quickly through 5G, resulting in the destruction of phone towers.

Racial tensions

In March, the World Health Organization's Director-General declared the coronavirus a dangerous adversary. He was alluding to racism and the heightened tensions throughout the world as a result of the disease. Three Muslim males were badly beaten up in Delhi in April as a result of internet claims that Muslims are responsible for the virus's spread. Rival gangs battled in a tiny hamlet in Sinai. A young man was killed after being struck by a car. Another case in Indore, when physicians were attacked by the public after being deceived by Whatsapp rumours that Muslims would be injected with the coronavirus. Even ethnic groups in England have not been spared from this misleading information. Non-white individuals in Bradford were not provided immediate treatment for the disease and were left at risk.

Fake stories such as the release of a tiger on Russia's streets by Russian President Vladimir Putin to keep people home has increased the anxieties of the people. Other false news, including the expansion of the threat of lock-down, drove many to escape to their hometowns, which cost lives as a result of the death of many immigrants. The Supreme Court voiced grave worry over the enormous flight of immigration caused by misleading information spread on social media. Arson and assaults have occurred as a result of this false information. The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene has released a research that shows that around 5,800 persons have been dispatched to hospitals as a result of incorrect information distributed through social media.

Virag Gupta, an advocate of the Supreme Court, stated that India must keep in touch with the international network since it is a matter of domestic security. If incorrect information continues to propagate on the internet, it will be increasingly difficult for humanity to survive since there is a greater risk that data colonisation will dominate the globe.

Urgent need to monitor Social media

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), describes the fight against the Pandemic as a struggle against "trolls and conspiracy theories." Misinformation generates confusion and panic, slowing the response to the pandemic. 'Misinformation regarding the coronavirus may be the most infectious aspect of it,' he adds (Depoux & Martin,2020)

Unverified and untrustworthy information, he claims, fosters xenophobic concerns and racial prejudice. Aside from encouraging digital literacy, it is critical to counteract the various ways in which social media impacts people.

The Indian government must step in to regulate and manage bogus social networking sites, as well as create a balance with social media usage. Because coronavirus information is contaminated and travels on social media like Wi-Fi, it is always better to check health-related information from trustworthy sources such as the Ministry of Health, Family Welfare, and Government medical colleges and hospitals rather than shared stories.

Standards for the usage of social media in health-care organisations have been maintained. The UK Nursing and Midwifery Council, for example, suggests that social media be used appropriately. Local organisational policies support and monitor the guidance. For example, according to Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust's social media policy and advice, "Do not publish, upload, forward, or publish a link to chain mail, junk mail, cartoons, jokes, or gossip."

Steps taken to contain misinformation

It is usually a good idea to double-check health-related facts. When consuming news from social media, one must constantly use caution. This disinformation, if not taken seriously, has the potential to damage lives. In

light of this, the WHO has launched the WHO myth busters site in order to reach out to individuals by offering important and trustworthy information. This is particularly effective in combating the concerns caused by false statements spread on social networking sites. All government and commercial authorities, as well as technical people, have a responsibility to use social media to alleviate public fears and aid public health response.

The report spreading on social media concerning the declaration of emergency in mid-April and the employment of Indian Army veterans and youth armed groups such as NCC and NSS is inaccurate, according to the Additional Directorate General of Public Information.

Even the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in an Emergency Fund (PM CARES Fund), which was created up in an emergency circumstance, was not spared, according to official sources. Many fraudulent websites were formed within a few hours of its introduction, and this erroneous information circulated quickly through social networking sites. Nonetheless, groups such as CERT-IN (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) are cautious in blocking such websites and social networking platforms. The fact-checking service of the Press Information Bureau The Twitter handle also cautioned users to be wary of fraudulent account information spreading under the guise of the PM CARES fund. The Home Ministry has decided to make it a criminal crime if anybody publishes information on the cure and treatment of COVID-19, which has led people to become concerned, is another piece of fake news that authorities have debunked.

Fact-checkers have been assisting individuals in determining the authenticity of sources and the reliability of information. However, It's disappointing to find that India, which has over 350 million social media users, is unaware of fact-checking websites.

In response to the alarming spread of misinformation, Facebook and WhatsApp officially said that they would not promote the transmission of harmful information and that they will take additional efforts to prevent it.

Role of Fact-checkers

Genuine fact-finders, such as PIB facts, tweeted that inhaled steam did not kill the virus since scientific data did not support it. Instead it suggested social gathering, hand washing, and breathing sanitary treatment to eliminate the illness. Private inspectors such as the boom check have also been able to help net-citizens with unquestionable tweets to warn people that the new coronavirus symptoms, which have spread several times on Facebook, are not correctly known.

It also refuted another "false" letter saying that some parts of Mumbai, including Mohammed Ali Road, had been declared illegal and placed under Army administration. A social media hoax film was debunked by fact checker SM Hoax Slayer. In the video, a ghost follows a bicycle and delivers a message. It is then found that the video is an old one from Jakarta, Indonesia. The public health agency responded appropriately to the false information that was deceiving people.

A viral audio clip in which the World Health Organization recommended that the lockdown be prolonged from April 15 to June 15 was debunked by Alt News, a fact-checking website.

Future

According to medical experts, the future is extremely terrifying, and if this trend continues, the COVID 19 vaccine, a human achievement, will be destroyed.

Steps taken to mitigate the influence of the pandemic

A well-planned examination of worldwide internet interactions might give a quick evaluation of the spread and potential shifts in popular views and behaviours (Depoux & Martin,2020)

People lose tolerance in times of crisis and are always in desperate need of access to accurate information. They accept whatever comes their way at these times. Some fraudulent websites take advantage of this chance. The issue is that officials do not always give correct information when it is needed right away. The public should be able to ask public health authorities questions. For example, are there any therapies on the horizon?

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When will the government issue its response to those trials? And how is the government addressing these issues? Another well-thought-out option to preventing the quick spread of disinformation is for health officials to have a direct link to every home that is trusted and dependable. Every residence should get a message from an authentic source every day. People would be clearer and more consistent this way.

In a society where conspiracy theories reign supreme, monitoring social media should be the order of the day in order to track rumours. This contributes to the reduction of stigma not just on an individual but also on a communal level. Health organisations must monitor disinformation about COVID-19 and work with local authorities to refute it.

Policies that restrict the use of social media entirely or the dissemination of any information via social media platforms should be avoided since they make people uninformed of what is going on around them and, more significantly, prevent millions of people from getting life-saving information.

Researchers that successfully mitigated the negative impacts of the social media and used them effectively for the control of Ebola, acceptance of Ebola vaccines and other vaccines have proposed measures such as creation of a system for shared information in real time, creation of a multidisciplinary expert team, which will collect data and analyse data from a variety of social media platforms around the world (Kadam & Atre,2020)

Following a comprehensive examination of the difficulties associated with social media during pandemics such as Ebola, researchers from several nations proposed a few solutions to the situation.

- Campaigns to educate people about the usage of social media should be carried out all across the world.
- The government and legal authorities should take appropriate steps to sanction or punish those who gain from the dissemination of false information.
- To increase people's digital literacy so that they understand how to deal with false information and are aware of how to report it.

In order to improve public confidence, cooperation and compliance with the efforts of epidemic control, social media can also be used. Legal arrangements may also help save lives. Everyone should be responsible for tackling infodemic coronavirus via social media. Some behaviours, such as good behaviours, reputable sources of essential information, checking evidence before social media communications, and encouraging consciousness instead of misinformation would surely assist a huge number.

Conclusion

The constructive use of social media will undoubtedly provide more productive outcomes than imagined. Because it is easily accessible to the general public, it provides individuals with previous information about the condition, allowing them to predict the impending risk. It enables people to overcome social distance limitations and communicate even when communication is otherwise impossible during these periods. One must be well-versed on social networking platforms. Learning how to master them reaps rewards such as adjusting to new adjustments and a new way of life. It makes individuals aware of societal changes and psychologically prepares them to cope with the changing environment. As a result, it equips the average person to plan his future and carry out his responsibilities effectively. In this way, it helps individuals in a variety of ways to have a brighter future.

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