

Impact of Using Social Media During Pandemic

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Abstract.

Currently, the world has been hit by a pandemic which is COVID-19 or coronavirus. COVID-19 or Coronavirus is the disease or virus that started in a city in China which is Wuhan in December 2019. This forced people to stay at home and make the people actively engaged with their social media. In this paper, there are several discussions on the negative impacts of using social media during a pandemic.

Keywords: Social Media, Pandemic, COVID-19, Fake News, Panic and Fear, Stockpiling, Public Health, Racism and Conspiracy

Introduction

Social media is the most popular and people around the world aware of the existence of this technology. Social media can be defined as the website and applications that are designed to allow users to create and share content with the public in a faster, real-time, and efficient manner. The example of social media is Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and many more. According to Ahmed et al (2020); Kumar Chandan Srivastava et al (2020), social media is a crucial source of information nowadays, Twitter has the potential to provide a real-time content analysis acknowledging the public health authorities to answer the queries of the people quickly. People use this social media as their platform to find any information, search for some entertainment, exchange ideas, and also can be used as a place to do e-commerce.

As simple as it functions, the user of social media can start with creating their profile, and then the user may share their content. For example, to create a Facebook, users need to sign up by providing their email and password then create their profile by adding a profile picture and name. Then the user can start to upload their content such as pictures, videos, and information to their feed. Social media also allow users

to create a new connection with other people by sending a friend request or follow them which allows people to communicate with other people around the world.

Nowadays, most of the country is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 or Coronavirus is the disease or virus that started from a city in China which is Wuhan in December 2019 and today has affected many countries around the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this pandemic is started on 11 March 2020. This pandemic has spread to many countries and millions of cases have been recorded. During this pandemic, people are using social media more often rather than the previous year because people are staying at the house when the lockdown began. The social media user also tends to use social media to get information related to COVID-19 and the update on what has going on during this pandemic in this world. Thus, the increased usage of social media has given a negative impact on the social media user in many ways either mentally or physically.

Negative Impacts of Social Media During Pandemic

Panic and Fear

The excessive use of social media during a pandemic can create fear and panic among the people. Hawes et al. (2020); Tugberk Kaya (2020), state that social media use might create anxiety, depending on the time spent. Social media can create panic because during this pandemic there are many misinformation and fake news are circulating on social media. People are more likely to get information through social media without knowing the information is true or fake. By believing the information and news without knowing the information are reliable, can cause panic and fear among people about the disease. According to Heena Sahni & Hunny Sharma (2020), social media is the key platform to create and spreading misinformation which the topic can include the disease statistic, medications, methods of prevention, nutritional guidelines, and method of transmitting the virus. In addition, according to Moghanibashi-Mansouriehab (2020); Tugberk Kaya (2020), said that anxiety level related to the COVID-19 are higher within the people that follow more news. It also supported where Araz Ramazan Ahmad & Hersh Rasool Murad (2020), mentioned that 76.4% of people in Iraqi Kurdistan are always read and follow the COVID-19 news on social media. This shows that most people are following and read news regarding the COVID-19 more often and the misinformation or fake news can create the reader or social media users panic and fear with the current situation. This situation not only happens during this COVID-19 pandemic but several studies show the role of the social network has played in spreading misinformation about Ebola. According to Heena Sahni & Hunny Sharma (2020), the terms “Misinfodemics” are suitable to be called in order to show the spreading of panic and misinformation about COVID-19.

Moreover, most of the reader that read the COVID-19 news through social media has come from the youth generations. According to Araz Ramazan Ahmad & Hersh

Rasool Murad (2020), the majority of youth people in Iraqi Kurdistan aged 18-35 years old are facing psychological anxiety because of the social media during this pandemic. Even though the youth generations are probably aware of the fake news trends but they still lack the knowledge to distinguish the reliability of the information. This can give a result to the panic and fear feeling about the information that they believe it is true meanwhile it is fake news. Those panic and fear feelings can give a bad effect on their mental health and psychological well-being.

Stockpiling Behaviour

Stockpiling behavior is an act or practice of storing or accumulate a large supply of goods for future use. During the pandemic of COVID-19, stockpiling behavior has drastically increased. According to Shaw (2020); Muhammad Naeem (2020), many UK retail store websites were crushed because of the excessive online orders for groceries. According to Lufkin (2020); Muhammad Naeem (2020), Malaysia itself has recorded an 800% increase in sales of hand sanitizer compared to the same week of the previous year. This is happened because of the people's fear of the goods in markets out of stocks, the disease itself, misinformation, and fear of going out from home.

Moreover, social media also is the main factor of this increase because social media played an important role in creating social interactions and exchanging information. Social media are being used to share evidence such as videos, and pictures that show the retail stores are out of stocks. According to Dholakia (2020); Muhammad Naeem (2020), fear and anxiety during this pandemic are possible reasons for the development of panic buying among consumers around the world. Misleading content and messages are spread faster. This messages and information that a person gets from the social media which get through friends, celebrities, and other social media users have developed a fear, rumors, and uncertainty to the person that read the messages or information which lead to the persons want to always stay at the home and taking more precaution decision to stockpile to prevent the person from always going out buying the goods. According to Muhammad Naeem (2020), social media have the opportunities to misinterpret information that comes from different sources and if the person has insufficient information about it, this can lead to an increase of negative feelings and a sense of uncertainty in making the decision.

Public Health

Society nowadays is depending on online information either for general information or specific information. One of the information that has always been found in social media is related to health information. According to the 2014 Digital Health Literacy Survey, 59% of European citizen used the internet to check for health information, 55% of European citizen are requested for general information, 54% of

European citizen are searching for information on a particular illness, 23% of European citizen looks for detailed information about diagnosis and the other 10% are used to get the second opinion after consulting with their physician. The statistic shows that people today are frequently using social media to find health information. Not only that, according to Nisar and Shafiq (2019); Tugberk Kaya (2020), state that social media could be used for online healthcare support.

People often use social media as their fasters way to get the important informal source of data that no been officially reported by health departments. However, when people using this information, the information can be mixed with misinformation and inaccurate information which can lead to a crisis in public health where people panic because of the information and can lead to a worse situation. According to Heena Sahni & Hunnny Sharma (2020), in India, the misinformation can lead people to unnecessary expectations requiring diagnostic, medication, or referral services and it also led to the shortage and black market of face masks and hand sanitizer. This shows that misinformation can give a bad impact on public health, especially in low and middle-income countries. Moreover, this social media also keeps spreading to social media user about the fake treatments in treating COVID-19 especially through WhatsApp messages which this influence people to ignore the official health organization messages. Abdelhafiz et al. (2020); Kumar Chandan Srivastava et al (2020), said that misinformation on Facebook about possible medications including hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 has influenced many people to buy the medicine without medical approval. The misinformation about this medicine has resulted in inadequate medicine for the patients that needed it. Besides that, the negative impact of social media on the user is cyberchondria. According to Kumar Chandan Srivastava et al (2020), cyberchondria is the user's characteristic where he or she obsessive with the online searching for information related to health, usually about the specific symptoms. This obsession can make the person become panic and lead to information overload.

Racism and Conspiracy

Social media always be a platform to spread fake news especially during the crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic. According to Huang & Carley (2020); Tugberk Kaya (2020), mention that almost half which is 45% of the tweets in social media relate to COVID-19 are fake news that posted by bots. With the fake news such as the fake news about the disease that related to a particular country can create racism among people. For example, in western countries, they will try to avoid Asian people because they think Asian people bring the risk to infected them with COVID-19. According to Shimizu (2020); Tugberk Kaya (2020), state that misinformation and fake news related to COVID-19 resulted in a rise of racism and xenophobia towards patients and Chinese visitors in Japan where the #ChineseDon't cometoJapan hashtag has become popular.

Moreover, the use of social media also can be a platform for conspiracy. According to the Ahmed and Lugovic (2019); Kumar Chandan Srivastava et al (2020), some researcher has mentioned that users that joined the discussion to ridicule conspiracy theory can make a threat for misinformation. The example that shows the conspiracy that happens during this pandemic is COVID-19 and 5G conspiracy. Social media users are believed that 5G technology is been used to spread COVID-19 disease to people around the world. According to Ahmed et al. (2020); Tugberk Kaya (2020), the author analyses COVID-19 and the 5G conspiracy theory on Twitter, and they outline that one fake profile to form the cluster with 408 Twitter users and posted 303 tweets before their closure by Twitter. By using the Twitter platform only, the fake news on the conspiracy is spread widely and faster. The conspiracy is beginning with fake news where people create something news that shows some conspiracy then it is believed by the people who did not aware it is fake news. The result of this action can bring to the damage of reputation for some countries.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, social media play an important role in disseminating information. But, social media also show a lot of finding on negative impacts to the users especially when the pandemic occurs. People always relay online information even though the information may create a mental illness such as panic and fear to users. From the discussion and finding above, the main factor that leads to those negative impacts on social media has come from misinformation, rumors, and fake news circulating in social media across the world. As social media users especially during this pandemic situation, we need to educate ourselves to able to distinguish the real information or fake information. This is because it can prevent us become panic, fearful, and making a hasty decision such as do panic buying or stockpiling during a pandemic. In addition, the government itself needs to take big steps to prevent those fake news from spreading on social media such as the government can create an official website to update the information related to COVID-19 cases. Preventing fake news first can reduce the negative impact of social media on social media users because fake news making the disease outbreak become worsen

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