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# SOCIAL MEDIA'S UNSEEN INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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# SOCIAL MEDIA'S UNSEEN INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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## ABSTRACT

Social media is a medium that provides an opportunity for people to express themselves, share their ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. This social media plays a major role during COVID -19 lockdown. Though people were physically disconnected during lockdown they were socially connected through social media networks. It provides current affairs to the people during lockdown but this social media also caused unseen influence on people as a result of this the manipulative, fake news spreads in India under lockdown. This present paper is highlighting the impact of social media on people which is responsible for the mental health of people. It also deals with certain fake news, how fake news spreads on social media, how it influences the people, and their causes and intensity also have been mentioned.

## INTRODUCTION

The sudden spike of pandemic COVID-19 affects human beings dolorously worldwide. To curb down this spreading of coronavirus the governments worldwide imposed lockdown, by which everyone was bound to stay home and maintain social distancing. Due to this many social media users connected themselves digitally. They wanted to gather information about the pandemic COVID-19, how it affects the human body, what are the symptoms of COVID -19, how to control this, and many types of questions had come in the mind of people. This eagerness to gather information gave an opportunity to those people who have expertise in spreading fake news and getting many viewers as much as possible.

As we know that, "false or fake news spreads more rapidly on the social network than real news does.' These

fake news or false pieces of information highly targets emotions and focuses less on the real facts of the incident. The youth of today's generation most of the age group of 25-35 are major social media users, and the majority of them believed in this news which circulates on social media without checking its credibility.

## DICTIONARY MEANING OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media: forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

## ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The very most important and primary role of social media is to connect people. The secondary purpose is to provide the platform on which people can share their ideas, views, information. It also helps to connect our old friend through Facebook. We can share our photos on Instagram. So, social media is used for gaining information but it is the responsibility of the users to check out the facts of the information or news they are receiving, whether it is true or fake and then share it further or forward it.

## SOCIAL MEDIA: A TOOL OF SPREADING FAKE NEWS DURING LOCKDOWN

The pandemic COVID-19 lockdown has led to an increase in the use of the internet because people are at home, the colleges, schools, and workplaces are closed, and this has triggered the spreading of fake and manipulative news on social media. The main motive behind the fake news is to influence the viewers and specifically attack their emotions to create hatred and confusion in the minds of people.

The Maharashtra cyber state has registered 363 offenses of rumor, hatred fake news on social media during the lockdown, and 196 persons were arrested for sharing or uploading objectionable posts, videos, and photographs on social media. This has happened not only in Maharashtra but also in the whole of India is facing it. Some of the examples of fake and manipulative news are:

1) One of the most circulated and propagated misinformation was that the virus is a man-made bioweapon.

2) China was the first country where the first COVID -19 positive was found, and fake news was spread to mislead the world regarding China seeking court approval to kill over 20,000 coronavirus

patients.

3) In India, the fake news about herbal products cures coronavirus infection was circulated.

4) To misguide the people the news was circulated that a particular community is responsible for the coronavirus.

5) At the very beginning of this coronavirus, the fake news on social media went viral that the SERUM institute of Pune has manufactured the coronavirus vaccine.

6) Another fake news was on WhatsApp that US-based 'Roche Medical Company' has finally readied a coronavirus vaccine.

7) Fake news relating to the opening of liquor shops on social media.

8) The fake list of plasma donors was shared on media which was an old list of blood donors.

There is so much news that was spread during the lockdown, while some of them were accurate but most of them were untrue and fake. Even the Government was also tracking this fake and manipulative news on social media and the internet. There is 6 fact checkers network which helped a lot during the lockdown and they are ALT news, BOOM live, factly, India today fact check, Quint, Webbook, and news mobile

fact-checkers. These fact-checkers network searches any post and any video which goes on viral on social media and spread fake news about COVID- 19 and gave us exact and accurate information.

## IMPACT OF THESE FAKE NEWS

These fake and manipulatives news causes many impacts on people. They are as follows**:**

### IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

While everyone was facing the problems of the pandemic COVID-19 and the effect of the lockdown that had a deleterious impact on people worldwide, but some people shared false and manipulative news about symptoms of coronavirus. Some of the posts consisting series of photographs which was shared on social media said that a doctor giving advises to the patients about some medicines which help to cure coronavirus and suggests people not visit a hospital as they can treat themselves at home.

The several social media posts about mistreatment given by doctors to patients and missing of organs of the dead body of patients who died due to coronavirus were such kind of fake news that caused a detrimental impact on both

COVID -19 infected as well as on the non-infected person. The fake post and fake news about the mistreatment of COVID-19 patients resulted in many patients running away from the hospital while they were supposed to take treatment and some of the infected person hiding about their health and refusing to check themselves due to the fear of being infected by COVID-19. This caused a negative psychological impact on the mental health of the people.

## SPREADING HATRED AGAINST PARTICULAR RELIGION OR COMMUNITY

On 24 March 2020, the Government of India ordered the nationwide lockdown for 21 days. Then the incident of religious gathering at Markaz, known as Jamaat headquarters in New Delhi on 13-15 March which consisted of 2,500 worshippers was remained there, as a result of which the rumors and fake news relating to a particular religious group with intentions to propagate hatred and malignity were spread and circulated. The social media users who were spreading fake news about the cure and remedies of COVID-19 suddenly turned and started blaming the Muslims for spreading COVID-19. The Maharashtra

government registered the case against some people for uploading a Tik-Tok video about a particular community that was responsible for the spreading of coronavirus. After this several news like 'Muslims attacks on police' when they were restricted to offer prayers by cops started circulating. The mainstream media also highlighted this issue which was also and untrue. People coming outside due to shortage of essentials supplies like food, vegetables, medicines, etc... all these fallacious and illogical news created communal violence.

## VIOLATION OF PRIVACY AND CYBER CRIMES

The sudden spike of the pandemic COVID-19 created chaos and cyber threats by the circulation of misinformation on social media. The personal data as well as the government official data was the target of cybercriminals. The lack of information and awareness about the pandemic gave golden opportunities to those criminals, many fake apps were introduced informing that it helps us to find out who is coronavirus infected during the lockdown. These criminals created the sites and promoted the misbelief that the particular people can donate some money and help the poor. This lockdown stirs up

the violations of the privacy of the persons and is responsible for the cyber-crimes.

## FRAUDULENT ACTS AND CRIMES

By misleading and spreading fake news people try to get the attention and claim that they have discovered the cure for COVID-19 and advertising this kind of product without getting permission from concern authority. Recently the FIR was registered under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code and sections 4 and 7 of the Drug and Magic Remedies (objectionable advertisement) act 1954 against the Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev's who were claiming that they found the cure named CORONILE for COVID-19. This issue highlighted on social media as well as on mainstream media including newspapers, news channels, all media houses were advertising Baba Ramdev's cure for COVID-19 which contributed to the spread of false information and misleading the people and giving them false hopes.

## CONCLUSION

After the declaration of the lockdown, plenty of news being fake and manipulative relating to coronavirus about their remedies and vaccine knowingly started spreading which were

not appropriate and not supported by fact. Not all news was fake and some of them were accurate and true but most of them being bogus and faithless, spread quickly online on social media. Because this untrue expression emboldened the emotions, fear, and feelings of the people. Even the Bollywood actor and actresses took a step to stop such fake and manipulative news by initiating a moment named "matkarforward" by which they were trying to inform everyone that what will be the consequences of such news spreading of fake news on social media and it's dangerous effect on the life of people. Further informing that without having proper knowledge and authentic information you must not forward it.

Though, Article 19 (a) deals with the freedom of speech and expression, which guarantees fundamental freedoms to the citizen of India, by which they can speak and express themselves freely. This freedom of speech and expression also encompasses the freedom to express themselves on social media. But under Article 19 (2) it imposes the reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the fundamental freedom of speech and expression, that their freedom of speech and expression should not disturb the security of the state, public order, friendly relations with foreign states,

decency or morality, contempt of court, sedition. So, it is the duty and responsibility of the citizens that they must abide by the law and should not violate it. They can post, share, and communicate on social media but their content should be accurate and true. If they share something, for example, any post, photographs to promote rumors and contain objectionable material on social media which could spread hatred, communal violence and promote fake news it can lead to something very bad, they may be entitled to punishment and further, it also disturbs the internal peace and security of the state. As a responsible social media user, they should verify any news which they find on social media with the help of several fact-checking networks and if it is true and accurate and does not promote any propaganda then must share it on social media.

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