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**Matric No**.:18/SMS04/007

**Course Code**:CMS 204.

**Course Title**:Specialized Reporting.

**Question:** Submit a feature article on any one of these topics.

1. User-generated images and memes on Covid-19

2. Social media and proliferation of fake news, dodgy health advice and fake cures of Covid-19 (the one I chose)

3. Mainstream media coverage and social media narratives about Covid-19

***Is Social Media Shaping Our Fears and Response to the Coronavirus?***

*Akpe Chekwube, 12/04/2020.*

Beyond serving as an arena or community forum, experts say social media is actually changing the way society is perceiving and responding to the Coronavirus outbreak. “Classic overreaction,” wrote one Facebook user, remarking on a March 4 decision by Washington State’s North-shore School District to close their facilities for 14 days. Others in the thread of more than 250 comments supported the move, congratulating administrators for their rapid response. Such conversations are just one way that social media is both offering a window into our collective response to the Coronavirus outbreak. Is social media shaping our fears and response to the Coronavirus? Well, this remains a question completely unanswerable as many people have different views on this topic. Although it seems to have done more harm than good by instilling panic and blowing things out of proportion.

Social media platforms are becoming the ground for sensationalism and misinformation to spread with applications such as Twitter and Reddit facilitating conversations about the ongoing pandemic thus giving way for conspirators, internet trolls and scam artists to spread misleading information and content. This misleading content is then spread further with the help of social media algorithms; the work of algorithms is to typically promote content with the most engagement which unfortunately happens to be misleading content as it gets the most reactions from users.

Some of this dis-informative content may not be intentional for example posting oneself stockpiling various supplies. This could generally be seen as harmless but the resulting reaction may be catastrophic. Humans take cues from other humans. As my first example stated, humans are likely to panic buy if others are posting about panic buying. A lot of behaviors are triggered by fear and anxiety and such behaviors get normalized when they are constantly discussed on social media.

Although some experts say a healthy dose of fear might just be what we need during a potentially world altering crisis like this. A moderate level of fear-arousing sensationalism helps people protect themselves or diagnose symptoms. In the midst of a public health crisis, it’s not necessarily a problem for people to be nervous, so long as that anxiety motivates them to prepare and stay safe, and they don’t cross into a full-blown panic. As Jeff Hancock, a professor of communication at Stanford University, says “Oftentimes we think anxiety is a bad thing, but sometimes it’s an appropriate response. It means people are paying more attention.”