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18/SMS04/047

CMS 204

### **Social media and proliferation of fake news, dodgy health advice and fake cures of Covid-19**

Social media can be defined as 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)

Fake news is a form of news consisting of deliberate disinformation spread via traditional news media (print and broadcast) or online social media. Proliferation of such information basically means the rapid increase in the spread of the fake news.

Dodgy health advice and fake cures can basically be classified as any health-related advice that hasn't been given by a medical practitioner.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The disease was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province, and has since spread globally, resulting in the ongoing 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. At the moment, the whole world is on lockdown due to this pandemic.

As part of the fake news going about, there has been a rapid spread of various Covid-19 theories. One of the most common conspiracy theories we found around Covid-19 was that it's a myth created to hide the effects of 5G on human health. Some people are even convinced that this technology is harmful and specifically out to harm them and their families, and the conversation so far is highly pessimistic. Research has shown that viruses cannot travel on radio waves/mobile networks. Moreover, COVID-19 is spreading in many countries that do not have 5G mobile networks.

The second strongest myth, which keeps reoccurring in countries with new outbreaks, is the virus can be traced back to eating bats or bat soup, with about 40.8K mentions and more as the days go. Other theories include that the virus was manufactured in a lab and that garlic is a cure for Coronavirus. According to the WHO, there is no cure for the Coronavirus.

The spread of fake news remains alarming. Sharing news among people including Nigerians is seen as contributing to social cohesion. Users doing so are motivated by the emotional impact the news is seen to have, the relevance it might have for the receiver, and the sender's intention to 'provide advice or warning.' Most people tend to trust information shared by family members and friends more than strangers. This is where the social media plays a major role in the dissemination of fake news.

Today, social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, have become primary sources of information. People turn to the social media not only for support and entertainment, but also use it as a source of information...and fake news.

This is where we need to warn for the dark side of social media and its role in spreading fake news. Platforms have been slow in acknowledging their responsibility in helping platform users distinguish fake news from facts, but they are taking steps in the right direction. Instagram, for example, announced to only include COVID-19 related posts and stories in their recommendation section that are published by official health organizations. In general, my advice is to crosscheck information that you get through social media with at least two other information sources such as government websites and high-quality news outlets. Spotting fake news could be quite task so be sure to look out for and always

question the source of a particular information. Be sure to check that the organization's logo used in the message looks the same as on the official website. Be on the lookout for bad grammar because credible journalists and organizations are less likely to make repeated spelling and grammar mistakes. Lastly, make use of fact checking websites such as APFactCheck and Full Fact. Those websites highlight fake common news stories.

Another major problem during this pandemic seems to be the dodgy health advice and fake cures for the Covid-19. There are several falsified and unproven medical products and methods that claim to diagnose, prevent and cure COVID-19. Falsified medication are unauthorized, fake medicines, that are being sold in the pretext of offering cure for COVID-19. They may contain wrong ingredients or the right ingredient in wrong amounts. No vaccine is currently in use for COVID-19 prevention. As of March 2020, WHO does not recommend any medicines to treat or cure the virus although research is underway in many countries. WHO has requested member countries to immediately notify them if any falsified products are discovered.

## **References**

- Wikipedia
- Brand watch
- World Health Organization
- Research Gate

