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QUESTION

Social media and proliferation of fake news, dodgy health advice and fake cures of COVID 19.

Answer

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* **Social media**

Social media are websites or applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media are also interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and network.

* **Fake news**

Fake news is a form of news consisting of deliberate disinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional news media (print and broadcast) or online social media. Digital news has brought back and increased the usage of fake news, or yellow journalism. Unreliable and false information is spreading around the world to such an extent, that some commentators are now referring to the news as true.

* **Dodgy health advice**

This refers to bad health advices that people spread mostly on social media platforms. Some of this tips we see on social media “healthy living” blogs won’t work, and are most times downright dangerous.

* **COVID 19**

The coronavirus which is commonly known as or called ‘COVID 19’ are a large family of zoonotic viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory diseases. Zoonotic means this viruses are able to be transmitted from animals to humans. There are several coronaviruses known to be circulating in different animal populations that have not yet infected humans.

The coronavirus pandemic has led to mass scientific conference cancellations, travel restrictions, social distancing, and other unprecedented prevention measures. How did we get to this point?

**A brief history on COVID 19**

A novel coronavirus outbreak was first documented in Wuhan, Hubei province, China December 2019. It has now confirmed on six continents and over 200 countries of the world. Two other recent coronavirus outbreaks have been experienced. Middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) of 2012 was found to transmit from dromedary camels to humans. In 2002 severe Acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) was found to transmit from civet cats to humans. According to the World Health organization (WHO) ass of 2020, MERS cases total more than 2,500, have been reported in 21 countries, and resulted in about 860 deaths. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human has been confirmed widely.

* **Social media and proliferation of fake news, dodgy health advice and fake cures of COVID 19**

Social media activists, influencers and self-styled warriors are using their social media platforms and fringe websites to proliferate misinformation, propagate conspiracy theories and promote the denial of COVID 19. Sometimes their motivation is simply to draw their online followership. For instance, the controversial blogger Kemi Olunloyo tweeted that president Muhammadu Buhari is sick with a persist cough and that a makeshift ICU had been set up to treat him. Within hours, the tweet had been liked more than 3,300 times and retweeted more than 2,000 times.

The platforms used to share COVID 19 misinformation vary across geopolitical zones and demographics in Nigeria. Facebook and WhatsApp continue to be the most popular messaging platforms, whilst Twitter, Instagram and traditional media play complementary roles. There is cross posting across all platforms.

In other instances, sensationalist comments from supposed “health experts" have been spread widely. On 23 march, for example, an audio clip emerged on WhatsApp of an alleged World Health Organization(WHO) officer predicting that at least 45 million Nigerians would die in the pandemic. The audio provoked so much attention that the NCDC issued a rebuttal. Other so called experts have proffered cures such as constant sex or sitting in the sun or have claimed that African blood is immune to the coronavirus. None of this have any medical basis

They’ve also been misleading video about virus testing in South Africa. The clip begins with a man having a swab stuck up in his nose. ‘do not allow them to test you there’s a possible the swabs are contaminated with COVID 19’ he says. He alleges that people globally are saying the swabs are being used to spread the virus, and refers to reports in the UK that test kits there were contaminated. But this news is misleading , the tests were giving false positive readings, it wasn’t that the swabs were contaminated with the actual virus.

Also there was also news spreading on social media platforms that Africans are to be used as guinea pigs to test a new coronavirus vaccine. However, such claims are false-there is no vaccine for COVID 19 and only a number of clinical trials are taking place, none of them currently in African countries.

There have been persistent suggestions on social media about skin color and resistance to the illness. 0n 13 march, the Kenyan health minister dismissed the rumors that “those with black skin cannot get the virus". Black skin is not isn’t resistant to COVID-19.

Also news about fake cures were also spread. Recently Kenyan media have been highlighting false claims that drinking tea is effective in curing COVID 19. It’s a myth that has been spread elsewhere and has no medical basis. Keeping hydrated is important for our health but drinking black tea is not a cure or treatment for COVID 19 as has been claimed.

Also they’ve been lots of posts recently on various cures and health advices. For instance, the drinkable silver. Colloidal silver is tiny particles of the metal suspended in liquid. A guest in the show claimed the solution kills some strains of coronavirus within 12 hours (while admitting it hasn’t been tested on COVID 19). The idea that it could be an effective treatment has been widely shared on Facebook, particularly by “medical freedom “ groups which are deeply suspicious of mainstream medical advice. Also cocaine and bleach like solutions are also among the risky fake touted online. COVID 19 cures, medicines and test kits online as part of it’s fake medicines crack down.

Also an old graphic created by the US health authorities about facial hair and respirators have been used incorrectly to suggest men should shave off their beards to avoid catching the coronavirus.

The Nigerian Punch Newspaper’s headline said:

“To be safe from coronavirus, shave your beards, CDC warns". No you don’t need to shave your beards to protect against the virus. It is false.

Most of the fakes news, cures and dodgy health advice are on social media platforms like Facebook, through groups and posts, WhatsApp majorly through broadcasts, this period a lot of fake broadcasts and audio messages have been sent to people across the world on fake cures and news about the COVID 19 . Also on Instagram and Twitter people also post videos and audio messages on this platforms proliferating fake news, cures, dodgy health advice on COVID 19.

Sources or references

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