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Social media and Proliferation of Fake New

Most research on fake news has emerged from developed countries. This work concentrated on the Nigerian setting. Despite the Anti-fake news campaign launched in Nigeria, the spread of fake news remains alarming. Sharing news among 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 Nigerians tend to trust information shared by family members and friends more than strangers. They are more likely to share misinformation about entertainment, political news, job adverts, kidnapping and those that have elements of patriotism and emotions. Moreover, religion or ethnic organization or someone they hold in high esteem and share the same faith with also motivates such sharing. This work suggests the need to increase fake news awareness through media and information literacy because, in Nigeria, fake news awareness campaigns have not been fully actualized. There is a need to increase the media literacy of the public, particularly young people to critically access and respond to media messages. Furthermore, social media users should be constantly informed about the consequences of fake news, how to spot it, and why it is important to be self-aware before forwarding any message There should also be adequate adverts, workshops, conferences, and other forms of sensitization across all media to enable individuals to differentiate between factual and made-up new

Fake new Associating causes of COVID-19

As the coronavirus epidemic reaches the African continent, false information is spreading faster than the virus itself. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against the consequences of a pernicious “infodemic.”

Despite Donald Trump’s conviction that the coronavirus wouldn’t be able to survive warmer springtime temperatures, the illness has made it to Africa, with countries like Senegal, Algeria, Egypt, Kenya and Nigeria affected.

**With even the president of the United States ruffling** the feathers of scientists, regular citizens in panic mode are hardly reassuring to the medical community.

Internet users are at once targeted by and purveyors of false information. The WHO asserts that rumours contribute to triggering unnecessary panic. Fighting an epidemic also involves tackling an infodemic.

### We’ve debunked the top 10 fake news stories

Social media sites shoulder the huge responsibility of stemming the spread of counterproductive rumours. Facing pressure from the WHO, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube confirmed that they have taken measures to counter disinformation about the coronavirus.

“Going viral” has never been so aptly named….

### • Transmission via mosquito bites

Although it’s always appropriate to keep a safe distance from the insect that spreads paludism and dengue fever, respiratory viruses don’t seem, at this stage, to be transmitted by mosquito bites, but by droplets of saliva or nasal secretions expelled by an infected person when coughing or sneezing. Speaking of animals, no house pets seem to have been infected by the new coronavirus.

### • Some plausible, but useless, remedies

Antibiotics work against bacteria, not viruses. Taking antibiotics to treat or prevent coronavirus could prove harmful by reducing a person’s vigilance. Vaccines against pneumonia don’t provide protection against COVID-19 either. The potential efficacy of chloroquine is currently being studied but doesn’t look particularly promising.

### • Temperature as a cure

Just as the scientific community didn’t give Trump’s theories on COVID-19’s survival in high temperatures a seal of approval – hand dryers and UV lamps don’t effectively guard against the virus – the WHO has also discredited the idea that cold weather and snow can kill the new virus. So don’t bother going on an ice cream binge.

### • Far-fetched remedies

Some wrongly maintain that people can protect themselves against COVID-19 by washing their hands with children’s urine, applying sesame oil all over their body or consuming cannabis. These are simply examples of false advertising and/or click bait. Although people joke that consuming too much garlic will keep away potentially infected individuals due to extremely bad breath, this edible plant doesn’t boost the body’s immune system.

### • Transmission via parcels from China

Although their lifespan varies depending on the environment and temperature, pathogenic germs can only survive on objects such as parcels, coins and credit cards for a few hours. Products imported from China to Africa have been travelling for too long to transmit the virus.

### • Youthful immunity

The virus doesn’t just impact the elderly, although being in a fragile state influences the body’s ability to fight infection.

### • A conspiracy brought to you by big pharma

According to this theory, pharmaceutical giants that have made a fortune off of drugs are hiding simple, effective coronavirus treatments so that they can profit from the sale of a future vaccine. The anti-vaccine movement piggybacks on the delayed treatment conspiracy.

### • Bioweapon rumours

Just as conspiracy theories proliferated about HIV, theories surrounding the coronavirus posit that the disease is a bioweapon engineered by the Chinese government, the US government or Bill Gates’s foundation and that it was either deliberately or accidentally released. These rumours overlap with tall tales of former Soviet bloc countries supposedly carrying out secret geopolitical operations to weaken democracies via massive viral propaganda campaigns.

### • Digital contagion

Based mainly on the fact that the 5G network was rolled out in the Chinese city of Wuhan just a few weeks before the coronavirus came on the scene, and that infected passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship had been using the technology, chat groups have been fuelling suspicion towards the electromagnetic fields (EMF) emitted by wireless communications networks.

For some, 5G is the source of the virus while, for others, COVID-19 is actually as harmless as the common cold but is being used to cover up the outbreak of other diseases. . .

### • Choose your own conspiracy

The hardest conspiracy theories to disprove by fact checking are ones that are merely implied. Disappointed by the cancellation of one of his concerts set to attract more than 5,000 people after France imposed a temporary measure prohibiting large gatherings, French singer Matt Pokora reacted with an insidious “Are they hiding something from us or what?” What was he referring to exactly, an anti-R&B conspiracy? Although internet users and editorialists made fun of the artist’s reaction, it’s difficult to assess the impact such comments have on a fan club.

Covid-19 fake news in Nigeria

Coronavirus has put the world on lockdown – creating fear, anxiety, economic downturns and drastic change in our social lives.

As I write, 199 countries are affected by the pandemic and nearly 3.5 billion people are in mandatory or voluntary confinement. In Nigeria, the virus has begun to spread at a geometric rate.

However, beyond this pandemic in an information war (lack of adequate information, Fake news, misinformation, disinformation and uneven distribution of news) that has been described as “an infodemic.”

More so, obeying the shelter-in-place order by the government has created boredom and more anxiety for many young individuals. People, most especially in Lagos, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) that were locked down by the President, are observing mandatory confinement to their homes.

Aside a few that their work and businesses are adaptable to teleworking, most of the people in these areas would remain idle for the next few days. This idleness would create obvious economic and psychological challenges for some.

Amidst these series of challenges, a group of young Nigerians teamed up to establish “Know COVID-19 Nigeria” to address the pressing needs that could help reduce the pandemic.

The initiative was created with the goal of ensuring the provision of adequate, relevant, reliable and relatable information, debunking fake news and providing safety, health and precautionary tips that could help people stay safe, informed and protected.

In achieving this, they are engaging young professionals in various fields like media, medicine, graphics designing, web development, public relations, data analytics, research and monitoring and evaluation, etcetera, who are volunteering their time and expertise, thereby, relieving them of boredom from staying at home as a result of the lockdown in the country.

Within a week of its establishment, Know COVID-19 have been able to directly reach and engage over 2 million Nigerians.

Debunked over 20 fake news reports on the pandemic, sensitize the public on myths and facts about the virus and shared relevant information about cases, preventive measures and medical observations and advice.

The organisation is reaching people majorly by leveraging on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

With a team of over 100 volunteers, they are distilling and interpreting data from relevant sources only, curating different stories, matrix map of victims to prevent spread and sensitizing people on coping strategies while they shelter-in-place.

WhatsApp has proven to be a relevant platform for sharing information and reaching a wide range of people. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a great deal of misinformation (in form of articles, pictures, audios and doctored videos) have been shared via the platform.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recently launched its official WhatsApp chatbot to share credible information with people. Likewise, Know COVID-19 is leveraging on the platform to reach out to people and debunk all fake information passing across. This platform has helped them reach out to more vulnerable people.

When the Ebola epidemic hit Nigeria in 2014, there was serious panic and misinformation about the virus. A lot of people followed flimsy, inaccurate and unverified information about preventive or precautionary measures.

At least, two people died from drinking and/ or bathing with salt water which was rumoured to be a preventive solution. Similarly, rumours about issues surrounding COVID-19 have been spreading across social media. Immediately after President Donald Trump’s reckless endorsement of Chloroquine as cure for COVID-19, there was an upsurge in the demand for the drug Lagos State and cases of poisoning were recorded.

To avert its widespread, Know COVID-19 engaged medical personnel to create awareness and myth-buster posters on various social media platforms.

Beyond tackling fake news, the organisation is gathering data on cases, perceptions, emotions and other relevant variables on the Coronavirus. They are building a database of information that could help researchers and scholars during and after this outbreak.

Know COVID-19 shares information through relatable graphics with pictorial designs that attract attention rather than boring long texts that get people bored. This makes them unique and attracts them to people that might not read new stories and articles from relevant sources like the World Health Organisation and the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control.

When young people get involved in sharing reliable information or work on productive ideas while they shelter in place, they help to reduce the spread of fake news and anxiety.

References; WHO, RESEARCHGATE