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

**By JESSICA NDUBA**

The current young generation often finds news in traditional media boring, difficult to understand, and irrelevant to their lives. They prefer to get news from social media for a number of reasons.it is not clear whether social media might have created a news environment that promotes news externalization, which in turn promotes people to function without constantly stopping to think about their next course of action [heuristic thinking] as opposed to analytical thinking, people are more likely to access news through stories shared or commented by connected friends and family, and reckoned that reading posted commentaries helped them understand the relevance of news stories to them. The deliberate making up of news stories to fool or entertain is nothing new. But the arrival of social media has meant real and fictional stories are now presented in such a similar way that it can sometimes be difficult to tell the two apart. While the internet has enabled the sharing of knowledge in ways that previous generations could only have dreamed of; like a popular saying by Winston Churchill that “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on”. A fake news website might publish false news content, then because it’s getting social attention another site might pick it up, write that story as though it’s true and may not link back to the original fake news website. From there is a reaction until a news worthy person at a largely credible outlet might see it and quickly write something up, because many journalists for instance are trying to write as many stories as possible and write stories that get the audience attention to comment. Most Nigerians tend to trust information shared by family members and friends more than strangers. They are more likely to share mis-informed news about entertainment, political news, job adverts, kidnapping and those have elements of emotions. Over the last four years, fake news has become an everyday expression, and major part of discourse around the media. But what is the impact of fake news, dodgy health advice and fake cures in the time of this pandemic virus, COVID-19?

Recently, the virus has come to dominate the media, both domestically and abroad. Alongside increased attention on the pandemic, has come the viral spread of fake news online. Many of these stories, as very pleasantly inviting as they are, are patently false. In the case of COVID-19, the spread of fake news offers challenges and dangers to the public. Misinformation is something that we might expect for any major event that captures people’s imagination, but in the case of coronavirus, there has been disinformation blaming the governments for spread of the virus which is disinformation that it appears the certain political groups and state agents may wish to spread it for political gain. While there is misinformation, spreading innocently despite being incorrect, misconstrued understandings of the disease like 5G technology caused the virus, the virus was introduced by members of the United States Army who visited Wuhan in October; another is wishful thinking about false remedies and fanciful implications drawn on how the spread of the virus will play out. COVID-19 is unknown and uncontrolled, but more also fake news and false information on the virus can spread just as quickly as the pandemic itself. But there is a clear threat on our basic needs such as shelter, food and safety most importantly. As a result, false information but seems to restore these basic needs spreads quickly. Examples are quack vaccine is just around the corner.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, an outbreak of false information is spreading online. Whether it’s via WhatsApp messages or rogue Facebook posts, fake news always has a way of reaching people. The global COVID-19 pandemic is happening at a time when sorting facts from fiction is increasingly difficult. In Nigeria, misinformation and disinformation has accompanied the virus’ spread, provoking fear and exploiting vulnerabilities. Many Nigerians simply refuse to believe the disease’s existence. Health misinformation is nothing new to Nigeria. At the height of the Ebola epidemic in 2014, false news swirled around the country. This included advice, that bathing in and ingesting saltwater could stop you getting the disease. This false information led to two deaths. Ebola itself killed eight people in Nigeria. A fear of unknown and a deluge of information in the digital space create fertile ground for fake news. Nigerians may be particularly vulnerable because of weak communications between the governments and governed. Moreover, the threat of fake news is even greater in 2020 than in 2014. False information is more sophisticated than ever and its potential spread much wider. In 2015, Nigeria had 76 million internet subscribers. By 2019, this had increased to 122 million in history as records shows. Sometimes social media influencers, their aim is to grow their online followership. For instance the controversial blogger Kemi Olunloyo tweeted that the president Muhammad Buhari is sick with a persistent cough and that a makeshift ICU had been set up to treat him. Within hours, tweet had been liked 3,300 times and retweeted more than 2,000 times. Other so-called experts have presented cures such as constant sex or sitting in the sun, or have claimed that African blood immune to the coronavirus. But none of these have any medical basis. One You-tube video watched by more than 16,000 people promotes chlorine dioxide- a type of bleach- as a cure for COVID-19. Another Facebook video viewed more than 100,000 times shows a British woman describing herself as a nurse blaming deaths from the virus 5G networks. Fake news about ways to prevent or cure COVID-19 is also widespread, causing confusion about how to best protect ourselves from the virus. It has also disabled nine domain names and social media accounts selling fake or unauthorized coronavirus products to people in the UK. Among the products seized were authorized anti-viral medication, self-testing kits and ‘anti-viral misting sprays’ publicity around drugs, such as the anti-malarial Chloroquine, currently being tested as potential treatments for coronavirus, has added fuel to the fire as people try to get hold of these as-yet unproven ‘cures’

In my view, if you are putting up content regarding this COVID-19 pandemic virus that is going on in the world right now, I want you to have this in the back of your mind that there are people who are in deep scary to understand what is going on and when you put up a fake information online and they read it, it might go beyond what is unexpected, it might actual result into something bad to other people because knowing fully well that this information seems authentic, and they can easily believe that information is authentic and they can carry it and be spreading it. It is same as spreading the virus actually, so what I’m saying is whatever someone is trying to put online regarding this the COVID-19 pandemic virus, has to be realistic, fact-check information , get source right and make a good impression for people to know that actual this person knows what he or she is saying’. That is my great opinion. End…

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