Covid-19 – rumours and facts in media

Tarare Toshida, Chaple Jagruti*

Department of KriyaSharir, Mahatma Gandhi Ayurved Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Salod (H), Wardha, DattaMeghe Institute of Medical Sciences (DU), Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT

The covid-19 resulted in broad range of spread throughout the world in which India has also become a prey of it and in this situation the means of media is extensively influencing the mentality of the people. Media always played a role of loop between society and sources of information. In this epidemic also media is playing a vital role in shaping the reaction in first place for both good and ill by providing important facts regarding symptoms of Corona virus, preventive measures against the virus and also how to deal with any suspect of disease to overcome covid-19. On the other hand, there are endless people who spread endless rumours overs social media and are adversely affecting life of people but we always count on media because they provide us with valuable answers to our questions, facts and everything in need. Media always remains on top of the line when it comes to stop the out spread of rumours which are surely dangerous kind of information for society. So on our side we should react fairly and maturely to handle the situation to keep it in the favour of humanity and help government not only to fight this pandemic but also the info emic.

*Corresponding Author
Name: Chaple Jagruti
Phone: 9403223962
Email: jagsru@yahoo.com

ISSN: 0975-7538
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26452/ijrps.v11iSPL1.2344

INTRODUCTION

Why is it that during epidemics people don’t choose to believe accurate scientific information? People go straight away with whatever they see or read on means of social media. Also the rumours spread like fire and lot of people fall prey to it. Indeed, the presense of fake news found and distributed in online settings is increasing over the years (Pulido et al., 2020).

‘Viral rumours are more dangerous than virus.’ This line goes perfectly with the present disastrous situation of Corona virus. Covid-19 is a phenomenon of enormous magnitude and relevance. It has affected various social domains, including the media and journalism (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). The virus causes respiratory illness like flu with the symptoms such as cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing. Also most of the infected people experience mild-to-moderate fever and respiratory illness with no special treatment available (Brindha et al., 2020). Due to this the suspects are increasing with an exponential rate and with the same rate rumours too.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Media plays a very crucial role in strengthening the society. Social media can help to inform and connect the population bringing people socially close (Thelwall and Thelwall, 2020). But what if the information and the impact turns out to be regrettable and adverse as media sometimes exaggerate the news which surprisingly turn out to be opposite which affects and reflects thoughts and reaction to the of
society to the crises. In the situation which we are facing today the media should aware society about covid-19 with very precise information but many people around the globe are not taking the situation soberly and are just disseminating false deeds and counsels regarding corona. The social media like Facebook and Twitter is playing a crucial role in incidentally boosting this misperceptions (Bridgman et al., 2020).

In January 2020 the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease also referred as COVID-19, to be a public health emergency of international concern. WHO stated that there is a risk of COVID-19 spreading to other countries around the world. On January 13, the disease began its world tour with the first reported case outside of China – in Taiwan (Sukhankin, 2020). In March 2020, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterised as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). Simultaneously, numerous rumours and hoaxes appeared on several social media platforms regarding the etiology, outcomes, prevention, and cure of the disease (Tasnim et al., 2020). Total number of confirmed cases were 87, 137 on 1st March, 2020. With steep rise of epidemic curve, there has been surge of unprecedented level of information as well as misinformation about COVID-19 on social media (Subedi et al., 2020).

Day by day the worsening conditions are scaring people and making them believe every news they come across over social media. As like, in the initial days of spread of virus it was a rumour that the government of China is shooting the suspects of corona. This made Indian citizens furious about the upcoming decision of Indian government regarding corona. This single rumour hit the heads of the citizen so badly that some sections of society especially in rural areas started accepting the rumour; if people who sleep during the pandemic will turn into stone. So people were calling their relatives to keep them awake. This rumour emerged from villages of North India (Sharma and Sharma, 2020).

The information environment on COVID-19 is constantly evolving, with inconsistent and unclear messages regarding risk levels and appropriate protective behaviours coming form the media, employers, public health officials, and all level of government as well as friends and family (Krause et al., 2020). Although while a hoax, a old lady digging her veranda came up with a collyrium ball on the nether side and drew some patterns on the ground believing it to be a preventive measure against corona virus which turned into a dispute that all the neighbours end up doing the same. Social media played a decisive role in shooting up all such falsehood. For this reason, the circulation of false information has become a social threat (Rodríguez et al., 2020). People were just blindly counting on ersatz news which then seems to be a mimic war, there was a chicken found in Bangalore had been identified as infected by corona virus and definitely that news was from unknown resource and it was spreading across Bangalore city about people whatsapp to whatsapp. What did it create? Only endless curious questions and a state of panic in minds of people which turned to be a danger for all. Also this news made people avoid consumption of not only chicken but other non-vegetarian stuffs which resulted in the loss of chicken suppliers. But the researchers with the help of means of media such as newspaper and news channels successfully trounced this news and corroborated it to be a rumour. This is how media is playing very massive role in flushing the words of street from minds of fellow citizen which is causing panic and dangerous situation all over the realm. The researchers have found that roughly 45% of the world’s population use social media, with an average of 2 hours and 45 minutes spent per day, about 32% of office hours on social media. So, any unscientific rumours being spread over in the various social sites faster than covid-19 virus itself may impact negatively in the control of virus (Amgain et al., 2020).

Media turned to be a backbone of our society who were in need of meaningful information. “Disease can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity”. Media has tried to explore this particular fact. People themselves developed sense of sincerity by being open about this disease that it can affect anyone regardless their race or ethnicity. They have indeed acknowledge that to fight against this disease all that matters is humanity should come together and fight against it. Fear and anxiety has taken over the world as the people are afraid to come in contact with specific race, they fear the emergence of this virus from the particular race might infect them or take their lives for which in turn people began to discriminate against people or their whole race.

By providing appropriate information on time news channels gained the trust and belief of society and eventually made them believe on the statement that for someone who has completed quarantine period or has been released from isolation does not necessarily implicate that he/she is cured, of course it also does not implicate they are immune to it (Chow et al., 2020). The concept of quarantine or isolation is to stop the spread of virus hence break the chain. Since this virus has a high rate of transfer through physical contact, social distancing or physical distancing was the best resolutions that came into the
image. Through social distancing it simply tell us that spread of virus can be controlled and can help save many more lives. In this way people maintained proper social distance and followed home quarantine.

Social media has also been significant in helping improve the situation as just being quarantine does not completely help in stopping the spread of virus but the awareness regarding extra necessary measures to be taken few extra necessary such as washing hands at regular intervals, use hand sanitizers and masks while heading out of the house.

People who are extremely isolated due to corona such as that of the Diamond Princess cruise liner – a corona virus infected ship recorded to be on lockdown from most of February with more than 3500 people onboard including 700 corona virus patients, are having media as the only option to communicate with their relative and the world at large. Also, people at home are just spending their time by banging their eyes on news channels where they except to get a valuable news and our media on their side is doing a sensational job by representing key points very well which is their biggest contribution to our society to keep us update, alert and also make us stay home.

Media has very finely kept society in touch with the researchers and community health organizations and helped them with how to act when they come across any dispute of whether they are dealing with or any confirmed suspect of corona in the community.

“ Misinformation always plays on the fault lines of our fears and deepest belief” (Lee, 2017). Also people are anxious to tell their stories and document their life in the face of this deadly disease. As a result, media became both a major source of prime information and a very fertile ground which is giving rise to threatening rumours.

Establishment of effective and transparent communications during the crisis phase is extremely important to reduce the after-effects of the events (Azim et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the democratic nature of social media, where anybody can easily become a news producer, has raised questions about the quality and the factuality of the information shared on social media and the public is very much informed of the news.

CONCLUSIONS

The condition which we are fighting today is not only against the virus but also against the misinformation rolling over social media. On the other hand media is also acting as a major source of help to people for connecting world and getting latest updates of the epidemic. Help media help yourself. Let’s protect our nation stay home, stay healthy, stay away, stay safe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is greatful to the Dr.Jagruti N. Chaple, Associate professor, dept. Of KriyaSharir, Mahatma Gandhi Ayurved Medical College, Hospital and Research Centre, Salod(H), DattaMeghe Institute of Medical Sciences(DU), Wardha for guiding such type of study.

Conflict of Interest
Nil.

Source of Funding
Nil.

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