Seeking Clarity in a World Infected by COVID-19 and Fake News

Michael McAleer1,5

1Department of Finance, Asia University, Taichung City, Taiwan
2Discipline of Business Analytics, University of Sydney Business School, Sydney, Australia
3Econometric Institute, Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands
4Department of Economic Analysis and ICAE, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain
5Institute of Advanced Sciences, Yokohama National University, Kanagawa, Japan

Abstract

The world has been changed irrevocably by the infectious severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. COVID-19 affects everyone everywhere. A separate and significant, though not necessarily as infectious, malady affecting many, though not all, individuals worldwide, is “Fake News”, known alternatively as yellow journalism, junk news, pseudo news, false news, alternative facts, hoaxes, misinformation, disinformation, fabricated news, corrupt news, unfathomable nonsense, or outright lies, which are typically based on provably false statements, and are distributed widely through mainstream news media and social media. The commentary presents a brief history of COVID-19 and fake news, and existing international efforts to deal with each of these infections.

Examples of Trump’s confused tweets containing fake news on Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un and nuclear weapons are examined by means of a data mining technique, sentiment analysis [5]. A set of 115 tweets on global warming, climate change, and weather by President Trump, from 2011 to 2015, are analysed by means of sentiment analysis [6]. Trump’s version of Democratic America and similarities with Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) Germany are examined by Allen et al. [7]. A comparison of President Trump’s State of the Union Addresses (SOUAs) with those of President Obama, and a series of recent of tweets by Trump, are evaluated by Allen et al. [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic might recede in intensity in the coming years, though it will not necessarily disappear alongside the SARS epidemic, or the ongoing but relatively inconspicuous MERS epidemic. However, fake news is embedded in the vernacular language, and is clearly here to stay.

How are individuals expected to seek clarity in a world infected by COVID-19 and fake news? Even the science that is presented by undisputed experts is deliberately ignored or dismissed, including by Dr Anthony Fauci, the leading infectious diseases expert and respected Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) [9], who has stated repeatedly the need to adhere to heath care recommendations in order to restrict the spread of COVID-19.

World experts at the renowned US Centers for Disease Control and Infection (CDC), under the direction of Dr Robert Ray Redfield Jr. [10], focuses attention on a wide range of infectious diseases.

Keywords: COVID-19; Fake news; Infectious; News media; Social media; International efforts

Introduction

The world has been changed irrevocably by the infectious severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

COVID-19 affects everyone everywhere.

As of 22 September 2020, according to Worldometers, there were more than 31 million reported infections and over 970,000 deaths worldwide, both of which are known to be substantially lower than the true figures [1].

A separate and significant, though not necessarily as infectious, malady affecting many, though not all, individuals worldwide, is “Fake News”, known alternatively as yellow journalism, junk news, pseudo news, false news, alternative facts, hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation [2].

Fake news, false news, fabricated news, corrupt news, unfathomable nonsense, or outright lies, are typically based on provably false statements, and which are distributed widely through mainstream news media and social media.

Fake news also affects everyone everywhere.

The following section presents a brief history of COVID-19 and fake news, and international scientific, medical, and health care efforts to deal with each of these infections. The final section provides some concluding remarks.

A Brief History of COVID-19 and Fake News

Fake news seems to have originated in the small town of Veles, Macedonia [3], and was popularized in 2014 by BuzzFeed News media editor, Craig Silverman [4].

President Donald Trump has claimed ownership of Fake News as his invention, which is a genuine case of true fake news. In Trump’s parallel universe, fake news is anything that does not paint a claying and obsequiously glossy picture of himself. This version of fake news might be called Trumpian fake news, or Trumpian news.

Examples of Trump’s confused tweets containing fake news on Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un and nuclear weapons are examined by means of a data mining technique, sentiment analysis [5]. A set of 115 tweets on global warming, climate change, and weather by President Trump, from 2011 to 2015, are analysed by means of sentiment analysis [6]. Trump’s version of Democratic America and similarities with Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) Germany are examined by Allen et al. [7]. A comparison of President Trump’s State of the Union Addresses (SOUAs) with those of President Obama, and a series of recent of tweets by Trump, are evaluated by Allen et al. [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic might recede in intensity in the coming years, though it will not necessarily disappear alongside the SARS epidemic, or the ongoing but relatively inconspicuous MERS epidemic. However, fake news is embedded in the vernacular language, and is clearly here to stay.

How are individuals expected to seek clarity in a world infected by COVID-19 and fake news? Even the science that is presented by undisputed experts is deliberately ignored or dismissed, including by Dr Anthony Fauci, the leading infectious diseases expert and respected Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) [9], who has stated repeatedly the need to adhere to heath care recommendations in order to restrict the spread of COVID-19.

World experts at the renowned US Centers for Disease Control and Infection (CDC), under the direction of Dr Robert Ray Redfield Jr. [10], focuses attention on a wide range of infectious diseases.

Keywords: COVID-19; Fake news; Infectious; News media; Social media; International efforts

Copyright: © 2020 McAleer M. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.
COVID-19 and fake news affect everyone everywhere.

It is a statement of fact that fake news will outlive the COVID-19 pandemic, with only one of these infections being directly life threatening.

One cannot ignore science in the fight against COVID-19 and fake news, including fake news about COVID-19.

Acknowledgements

For financial support, the acknowledges the Australian Research Council and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Taiwan.

References

1. Worldometers (2020) Reported Cases and Deaths by Country, Territory, or Conveyance.
2. Wikipedia (2020) Fake News.
3. BBC Trending (2020) The (Almost) Complete History of 'Fake News'.
4. Washingtonian (2020) Trump claims he invented the term "Fake news": Here’s an interview with the guy who actually helped popularize it.
5. Allen DE, McAleer M (2018) President Trump tweets supreme leader Kim Jong-Un on nuclear weapons: A Comparison with climate change. Sustainability 10: 1-6.
6. Allen DE, McAleer M (2018) Fake News and Indifference to Scientific Fact: President Trump’s confused tweets on global warming, climate change and weather. Scientometrics 117: 625-629.
7. Allen DE, McAleer M (2019) Fake news and propaganda: Trump’s democratic america and Hitler’s national socialist (Nazi) Germany. Sustainability 11: 5181.
8. Allen DE, McAleer M, Reid DM (2018) Fake news and indifference to truth: Dissecting tweets and state of the union addresses by Presidents Obama and Trump. Adv Decis Sci 22: 1-23.
9. Changing America (2020) Fauci says Americans are Ignoring Science Amid Coronavirus Pandemic.
10. Wikipedia (2020) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
11. European Centre for Disease Prevention And Control (2020) Coronavirus Disease.
12. World Health Organization (2020) WHO COVID-19 Global Literature on Coronavirus Disease.