# Perspectives and Impacts of Social Media Fake News and Misinformation Narratives about Coronavirus (Covid-19) In India.

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**Abstract**
This paper provide a lucid appraisal of  the perspectives and impacts of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India in an attempt to explore the dominant perspective of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about covid-19; to assess how and to what extent these fake news and misinformation narratives has impacted on individuals; to determine the major contributing factor in the widespread of these fake news and misinformation narratives; as well as identify the predominant platform where these fake news and misinformation narratives about covid-19 is prevalent and find out the approach used by individuals to combat the impact.

The findings reveal that majority of the respondents are aware of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India; they often receive these fake news and misinformation narratives about covid-19 from the perspective of its causes; they were impacted negatively in a very significant way; and inaccessibility to reliable sources of information is the major contributing factor in the widespread of these social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India. In addition, WhatsApp social media remain the major platform where they receive these fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India. However, through the mass media narratives and updates about covid-19, they were able to combat the impact of these social media fake news and misinformation narrative about covid-19 in India.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus (Covid-19), Social Media, Fake News, and Misinformation narratives.

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## I.    INTRODUCTION

The emergence and development of social media as digital communication infrastructure is indeed an unprecedented development across the news and information world. However, the development is multifarious in nature and the usage of social media amongst users is now characterized with so much negativity; fake news and misinformation; misleading as well as  inaccurate assumptions. Sundar, (2008) argued that, in today's media environment, information is free-floating on the internet. As such, this pave way for the proliferation of fake news and misinformation on social media because everyone is privilege to share without borders whatever he/ she feels like.

Parsons (2013) defines social media as online tools where user can share opinions, content, perspectives, and insights. Social media is about connecting people and organizations as well as building relationships between them.

The emergence of social media as a key source of news content has created a new ecosystem for the spreading of misinformation. (Gottfried, 2016 as cited in Pennycook, 2019). The recent outbreak of the novel Corona Virus – Covid19 has generated a lot of tensions globally as well as paved way for social media production and dissemination of fake news and misinformation narratives about the virus from different perspectives. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Coronavirus (Covid-19) is an infectious diseases caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. It is a pneumonia of unknown detected in Wuhan, China where it was first reported to the World Health Organization country office in China on 31st December, 2019.

The rate at which users spread fake news, and misinformation narratives about Coronavirus (Covid-19) is making it difficult for audience to verify which information they come across on social media is genuine or not. Social media has changed news consumption and production behaviors profoundly by blurring the contours between professional journalists and users. (Deuze et al, 2007).

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## II.     LITERATURE REVIEW

social media could be define as a platform that provide an avenue for users to connect, create and enhance relationships on virtual platforms based on a shared common interest. Boyd and Ellison (2008) noted that, social media has been defined as websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users.

Alcott and Gentzkow (2017) confirm that fake news is closely related to the growth and development of social media because they have greatly affect the flow of quality news production and dissemination as a result lack of gatekeeping process. Misinformation on social media is multifarious in nature covering a wide range of issues spreads on Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, amongst others to mislead the people. "We refer to misinformation as an umbrella team to include all false or inaccurate information that is spread in social media" (Ling, Morstatter, Carley, and Liu 2019).

Burkhartdt (2017) noted that, while fake news is not a new phenomenon, however the means by which it is disseminated and diffused has dramatically changed in speed and magnitude as well. Therefore, social media platforms like Instagram, facebook, and twitter are fertile ground for the rapid diffusion of fake news and misinformation narratives.

A comprehensive study was conducted by Frigerri et al (2014) about the spread rumors and circulation of fake news and real news as well as information on Facebook. The study reveals that 45% of the stories were fake and 26% were true, while the rest had intermediate truth valves. Figerri et al (2014) concluded that, false information re share spread much deeper and circulate more widely compared to that of true information.

In 2017, Reuters Digital News Report conducts a survey in 36 countries and finds that: "only a quarter of all respondents think social media do a good job in separating fact from fiction Compared to 40% for the news media" (Reuters, 2017. P.10). this is because the combination of a lack of rules and viral algorithms are encouraging the spread of low quality and fake news rapidly.

In March 2020, the World Health Organization also studied various myths, fake news and misinformation narratives about the new pandemic corona virus (Covid19). The WHO in their efforts to counter fake news and misinformation narratives, they provided a published series of graphic information about the myths and factual narratives which explain from scientific point of view, the facts and how misleading and inaccurate information about the symptoms, precautionary tips and causes of Covid19 that are spread to manipulate users.

However, how and to what extent this fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus has impacted users across India is yet unknown; as well as what are the contributing factors and the dominant perspective users hold about the pandemic coronavirus (Covid-19). Thus, the spread of fake news and misinformation is one of the top risks facing the world today. (World Economic Forum, 2013).

## III.     METHODOLOGY

Survey method is used for this study. India is the population of this study, however, the population is narrowed down to focuses mainly on Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India. The sampling elements for this study were obtained using multi-stage sampling approach. The multi-stage sampling approach is used to divide the population into different clusters and a purposive sampling technique is used to select the respondents from each of the clusters to represent the population. A sample size of 400 is used for this study to provide adequate answers to the following research questions:

1.      What is the dominant perspective of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India?
2.      How and to what extent social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) has impacted on users in India?
3.      What is the major factor contributing to the spread of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India?
4.      What is the predominant social media platform where fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) is prevalent?
5.      What is the approach used by users in combatting the impact of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India?

## IV.     DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to represent the 10 different clusters of the population of study- Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India. However, a total of 396 Questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 98% and they were used for the purpose of analysis in this study.

**Table 1**:  **Showing the level of awareness of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India**.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 311 | 79% |
| No | 85 | 21% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above indicate that, 311 respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India, representing 79% are aware of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India. While, 85 respondents representing 21% are not aware. Thus, majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh Rajasthan, India are aware of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India.

**Table 2 -Research Question One: What is the dominant perspective of social media fake news & misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| About the symptoms of covid-19 | 56 | 14% |
| About the causes of covid-19 | 184 | 47% |
| About the precautionary& health tips of preventing covid-19 | 52 | 13% |
| About the conspiracy theories regarding the emergence of Covid-19 | 67 | 17% |
| About the daily figures, & situations of covid-19 infected persons. | 37 | 9% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above reveal that, 56 respondents representing 14% of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India receive social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India from the perspective of its symptoms; 184 representing 47% of respondents receive from the perspective of its causes; 52 representing 13% of the respondents receive from the perspective of its precautionary, medical, and health tips of prevention; 67 representing 17% receive from the perspective of the conspiracy theories of its emergence; and 37 representing 9% receive from the perspective of the daily figures and situations of the covid-19 infected persons.

Therefore, the findings reveal that majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India receive social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) from the perspective of its causes.

**Table 3- Research Question two: How and to what extent social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) has impacted on users in India?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Positively | 70 | 18% |
| Negatively | 287 | 72% |
| Not impactful | 39 | 10% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above reveal that, 70 representing 18% respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India opined that, social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus has impacted positively on them; 287 respondents representing 72% opined that they were impacted negatively; while 39 respondents representing 10% opined that it is not impactful.

Therefore, majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India were impacted negatively by social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India.

**Table 4- To what extent does social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus impacted on you?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very significantly | 274 | 69% |
| Significantly | 90 | 23% |
| Insignificantly | 32 | 8% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above reveal that, 274 representing 69% of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India were very significantly impacted by social media fake news and misinformation narratives about Coronavirus in India; 90 representing 23% were significantly impacted; and 32 representing 8% were insignificantly impacted. Therefore, the findings reveal that, majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India were very significantly impacted by social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India.

**Table 5- Research Question Three: What is the major factor contributing to the spread of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of Gatekeeping & Social media regulatory policies | 71 | 18% |
| Inaccessibility to reliable sources of information | 204 | 52% |
| Prevalence of automatic social bots | 29 | 7% |
| Prevalence of citizen journalists | 92 | 23% |
| Others | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above reveal that, 71 representing 18% of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India opined that lack of gatekeeping and social media regulatory policies is the major contributing factor in the widespread of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India; 204 representing 52% respondents opined that the major contributing factor is inaccessibility to reliable sources of information; 29 representing 7% of the respondents opined that the major contributing factor is prevalence of automatic social bots; 92 representing 23% of the respondents opined that the major contributing factor is prevalence of citizen journalists.

Thus, majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India opined that the major contributing factor in the widespread of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India is inaccessibility to reliable source of information.

**Table 6- Research Question Four: What is the predominant social media platform where fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India is prevalent?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Twitter | 64 | 16% |
| Facebook | 71 | 18% |
| WhatsApp | 242 | 61% |
| Telegram | 19 | 5% |
| Others | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **396** | **100%** |

The data above indicate that 64 representing 16% respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India often receive fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India through Twitter social media; 71 representing 18% receive through Facebook social media; 242 representing 61% receive through WhatsApp social media; and 19 representing 5% receive through Telegram social media.

Therefore, the findings reveal that, majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India receive fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India through WhatsApp social media platform.

**Research Question Five: What is the approach used by users in curbing and controlling the impact of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (Covid-19) in India?**

Based on the interpretative analysis of the answers provided to this open ended question- "What approach are you using to combat the impact of these social media fake news and misinformation narratives about Coronavirus?", The data shows that majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan India used mass media narratives and updates about coronavirus to combat the impact of these social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus in India.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study it can be deduced that, the advent of social media and internet has indeed paved way for the proliferation of fake news and misinformation narratives. And the usage of these social media platforms has impacted tremendously on individuals as well as how they perceived reality and the perspectives they hold about certain issues or events in their society.

This study concluded that majority of the respondents in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India are aware of social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India; they often receive

these fake news and misinformation narratives about covid-19 from the perspectives of its causes; they were impacted negatively in a very significant way by these social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India; and inaccessibility to reliable source of information is the major contributing factor in the widespread of these social media fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India. In addition, WhatsApp social media remain the major platform where they receive these fake news and misinformation narratives about coronavirus (covid-19) in India. However, through the mass media narratives and updates about covid-19, they were able to combat the impact of these social media fake news and misinformation narrative about covid-19 in India.

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