

Fake News on Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Fake news is not a new means. Some studies found that fake news spreads more rapidly on social media than real news does. Much of existing literatures on false information examine political, social issues or economic benefits. However, there is limited study on the false information on health. Coronavirus Disease, named as Covid-19 that happens on 2019 has rapidly spread all over the world and has sparked the alarm. Social media platform has been abused by certain people or “expert” on sharing the information. This study discussed the factors that contributed the people to share the fake news during the period of Covid-19. This paper is a cross-sectional study on the misinformation that shared by the society during this pandemic. This paper is intended to serve several functions: to aware the society on the misinformation; to discuss the factors including online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out and social media fatigue on sharing the fake news, and to improve the knowledge of society on Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19, Corona virus, Disease, Pandemic

1. Introduction

Fake news or misinformation is not a new term in media, especially during the crisis and election time. According to Martina Chapman, an expert of media literacy said that social media giving everyone opportunity to share own content, to search information, and maintain the relationship (Childnet, 2017). With the development of technology, more and more social media platforms are introduced and people are able to seek the information for live, up to the minute news. Misinformation is simply news that is counterfeit, wholly or in part. Academicians and society are identified various types of fake news including clickbait, propaganda, sloppy journalism, satire, misleading headings or biased. Fake news are created for many reasons, however, in many cases, people actually share the false information for fun.

In Malaysia, there are 572 fake news cases being recorded at September 2019. The number of cases has been increased about 55% from 2018 to 2019. Recently, a total of 207 cases about the fake news on Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) pandemic have been reported as of April 10, 2020.

This virus has rapidly spread all over the world and has sparked the alarm. This pandemic has threatened all industries over the world. However, another scenario that threatens our mental health is fake news. The fact that fake news is not a new phenomenon, technological advances has aroused the spread of fake news on social media. Recently, a number of misinformation about Covid-19 is gradually increases and spreading panic on social media, including Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp and Facebook since the coronavirus emerged in December 2019. The misinformation that usually share by “very well educated” people on recipes for herbal to prevent the virus, false claims that can cures the virus, video of empty

streets and packed supermarket, etc that can cause the panic buying and fear of society (AFP, 2020). If fake news is not debunked and curbed in a timely manner, it can lead to tragedy.

In India, a fifty-year-old man who believed that he had Covid-19 hanged himself to prevent his wife and children from getting infected. After his death, the presence of Covid-19 is not found and his son told that his dad died from fear and anxiety after watching hundreds of videos online (Tardáguila, 2020). Covid-19 which emerged in late 2019 has turned into pandemic that has killed thousands of people and the uncontrollable spread of misinformation about Covid-19 on social media is putting many people at risk. Hence, there is a pressing need to discuss the factors caused people share fake news and the examples that rises during this pandemic.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to investigate the factors that contribute to the spread of fake news. In addition, this paper also aims to discuss the examples of fake news during Covid-19 pandemic. The motivation of this paper is to understand the reasons that encourage residents to share the misleading information through social media. There are a lot of speculation, misinformation and fake news about this epidemic being circulated on social media and will be discussed in this paper.

2. Factors Encourage the Spread of Fake News

People like to share false allegations and rumors on social media. According to Talwar et al. (2019), the reason why people like to share misleading or fake news are online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out and social media fatigue.

In this new era of technology, people like to share information through online to meet new friends. The easier way to strengthen the relationship is to exchange information, gossip and provide more social support (Lin and Liu, 2012). Moreover, the content of the information can be freely generated by the users. Consequently, people may share the information or news on their social media that shared to them due to online trust. Therefore, the misleading or fake news will being viral through it.

For self-disclosure, people like to share their personal information to the strangers via social media. According to Whitty and Joinson (2009), the main reason for self-disclosure is to improve the relationships, create mutual understanding, build linkage, strengthen the bonds among the peers, and create same topics with others such as hobbies, interest, etc. This can be supported by referring to Christofedes et al. (2009) that online self-disclosure can gain more attention and popularity. For example, people nowadays like to record their daily life styles, traveling places, foods or drinks, or even the prank they have done and then share on the social media. However, there are some online users like to share fake news, gossip or misleading information to gain more attention and social support.

Another factor encourage the spread of fake news is fear of missing out. It is a psychological reaction that individuals may feel being excluded from the members if they didn't follow the trend (Beyens et al., 2016). Blackwell et al. (2017) also suggested that individuals who are fear of missing out are most frequently use social media online. In addition, these groups of online users also have low self-regulation and this may lead to share fake news without authenticate it.

Social media fatigue is a feeling of anxiety and depression of an individual. The continuous use of social networking sites can result in symptoms of negative emotions such as stress, anger, disappointment, anxiety and depression (Bekalu et al., 2019). Individuals with negative emotion might lead to share misleading information or news in accordance to their beliefs or preferred social outcome, in addition to release their stress with negative comments or information.

As a conclusion, people feel free to comment and share the information via online social media platform without authenticate the news before sharing. In fact, they can easily authenticate the fake news, but most of them unwittingly share it online once they received it from elsewhere. The behavior such as fear of missing out and want to be the first person share it is the main reason encourage fake news being viral on social media.

3. Example of Fake News during Covid-19 Pandemic

This pandemic has greatly produced a lot of misleading information that could cure or prevent the Covid-19 infection. The fake health advices being circulated online are eat garlic, drink bleach, drink alcohol, drink dettol, eat boiled eggs, etc. Some of the advices like drink alcohol, bleach and dettol may lead to death or serious injury. While for the eat garlic or boiled eggs, it couldn't cure or protect us from the Covid-19 virus but to increase our immune system.

The misinformation or fake health advices about the Covid-19 are as follows:

1. Eat garlic

Garlic is a popular ingredient in cooking to enrich the taste of a food, in addition to use for health benefits. The different compounds in garlic can help to prevent and reduce severity of illnesses such as flu and cold. Moreover, garlic also found that able to reduce the risk for cardiovascular diseases like heart attacks and strokes due to its compounds have significant impact on reducing blood pressure (Ashraf et al., 2013), in addition to have anti-microbial and anti-tumor effects. However, Bayan et al. (2014) found that garlic can increase our immune system but there are not enough proven to show that garlic is able to protect from the disease especially Covid-19. As a conclusion, garlic can improve our immunity, but it couldn't protect us from Covid-19.

2. Virus cannot be transmitted through hot and humid area

Coronavirus can be killed if the temperature is around 26-27 degrees and believed that the number of cases will be reduced at summer. This rumor is being circulated online due to the investigation of SARS outbreak in 2003. Tan et al. (2005) and Chan et al. (2011) showed that SARS virus survive best in cooler and drier conditions. Thus, there are some researchers suggest that the pandemic Covid-19 will be inactivation in cool (average temperature around 5 to 11 degree Celsius) and low relative humidity (Gray, March 24, 2020). This speculation make people believed that Covid-19 might eventually become seasonal.

3. Drink Dettol

According to Omondi (2020), a South African pastor asked his followers to drink dettol as a preventative medicine of Covid-19. There are at least 59 followers were dead and four are in

critical condition. Dettol products have found that effective to against the virus strains, but not for consumed since it will caused death or serious injured.

4. Drink alcohol

Fake new that circulating in the social media is drinking alcohol enable to reduce the risk of being infected by Covid-19. According to Bote (March 10, 2020), there are 44 people died from alcohol poisoning and hundreds have been hospitalized in Iran. In Iran, drinking alcohol is prohibited; however, the fake information that circulated online is the main encouragement that caused the tragedy happened. In fact, alcohol that used to make hand sanitizer can reduce the risk being infected but drinking alcohol cannot.

5. Drink Bleach or Clorox

Bleach or Clorox, is well known for cleaning used, however, these cleaning product has been viral as a tip to prevent the Covid-19 virus. Chloroquine is a component in the Clorox which is one of the best disinfectants. But there is misleading information in the media suggested that drink it in water can protect us from being infected. Clorox is toxic and can kill people. Hence, the Blue Ridge Poison Center warns the people from drinking the bleach or Clorox that could kill them or cause serious injury(Richmond, March 14, 2020).

6. Eat boiled egg

In Indonesia, there is a video being viral in the social media recorded about a newborn baby said that eating boiled eggs can protect us from the novel coronavirus (Jakarta, March 27, 2020). Hence, the residents start to stockpile the eggs although the baby's mouth in the fake viral videolooks weird and has been edited. The Indonesia's Information and Electronic Transactions Act have strict the rule to those who share fake news or hoaxes online will be jailed up to six years.

7. Take Cow Dung Bath

In social media, there is a video showing that a group of Indian men from India claimed that taking a cow dung bath can resist or cure the virus. They believed that it has medical properties and hosted a party to drink cow urine and bath with the cow dung. This party has been catered around 200 people (Reuters, March 14, 2020).

4. Government Strategy

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (January 27, 2020) issued a warning to those who spread the fake news at social media. The punishment of it is being jail for a year or fined up to RM100,000 or both. By referring to Tee (April 10, 2020), there are 207 investigation papers related to the spread of fake news on Covid-19. 23 cases from it had been charged in court and the remaining are under investigation or classified as "no further action". Moreover, Malaysian government also provides hotline that enable people to verify the news.

In addition, the United Nations agency collaborate with social media platforms including Twitter, Tencent, Facebook, Tiktook and Pinterest in preventing the fake news by enable

online users to be automatically directed to WHO's webpage about Covid-19 news and information (Bulut, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Internet is a platform where the people share their own idea, information, news although it may be false. The fake news and misinformation could make the situation of outbreak become worst, especially when the Covid-19 pandemic. There are four reasons that caused people like to share fake news, include online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out and social media fatigue. The impact of the spread of fake news or rumors may lead to death or serious injuries.

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