

INDIAN SOCIAL MEDIA LEADS TO MISINFORMATION ON COVID19

Author Tina Raj

Abstract

Fake news is the most common issue these days. As we know the NOVEL COVID19 started from China and now globally people are infected by this virus. Fake news has many faces and it has turned on the worst face for the whole nation. News has own minor and major aspects because information shapes the new world. We take lots of important decisions on the bases of information. We create a view of the new information. So, we see false pieces of information on social networking sites that are harmful to the society. Sometimes these types of information spread rapidly and people take them seriously. That's why people should make sure when they forward the picture or message i.e. they should check the source of that particular message, video, picture, etc. My study focuses on the misinformation on COVID19 and find out how aware people are of fake news and information related to it.

Keywords: Misinformation, COVID19, India, Fake News, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

"Misinformation" means false information that is spreads without any intention and misleads the Masses. In the past few days, we witnessed the epidemic condition all over the world. The Disease called "CORONAVIRUS" which originated in "Wuhan" of China and now spreading globally. Most of the citizens are dependent on the social media news rather than mainstream media and misinformation on social media spreads in nano seconds. Here, the onus is on the mainstream media for the credibility of the news. We take an example to get a better understanding of it. COVID19's first case came in Kerala, India. After that, we all saw a surge of fake news on it. Fake news creates panic in

the society. Whatsapp holds the first position in spreading the misinformation in the society. It includes home remedies, conspiracy theories, false govt. advisories and misleading narratives around China. Misinformation is on all the platforms but Whatsapp has maximum reach in India so most of it is on WhatsApp. Videos play a vital role in it and these types of content go viral easily and sound good. Facebook is on the second position in misleading pieces of information and it takes fast measures to remove the information from the particular account and block the account. These days twitter is also trending for fake news. Twitter made clear to the public if any information against the guidelines provided by the Health authorities such as social distancing not being competent or drinking bleach to cure COVID19 will be removed because these types of information may put lives in danger. Now, Twitter has joined the hands with Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Reddit, and YouTube to curb the misinformation on COVID19. The seven social networking platforms are now closely working together with health agencies to put a halt on such pieces of information. "We're helping millions of people stay connected while also jointly combating fraud and misinformation about the virus, elevating authoritative content on our platforms, and sharing critical updates in coordination with government healthcare agencies." Everything depends on the facts and figures that are the reason agencies and companies working together to enhance the information.

Research Objectives

1. How many people know about the COVID19 and from where they came to know about it the first time?

2. Which social media platform they are using often for getting the information?
3. Do people know about the term "MISINFORMATION" and how much they think that social media information is authentic?
4. Do People share social media posts with others and cross-check the facts?
5. How much people think that social media keeps them informed and this news harms the society?

Research Questions

- Are you familiar with COVID19?
- How you came to know about COVID19 for the first time?
- Which medium do you prefer to watch/read the news in day to day life?
- Which social media platform you visit the most?
- Do you think social media information is authentic?
- Are you familiar with the term "Misinformation"?
- Do you share the information from the social media platform with others?
- Do you cross-check the facts of social media news?
- Do you think social media keeps you informed?
- Do you think misinformation can be harmful to society?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study confirms the level of awareness towards "MISINFORMATION or FAKE NEWS" in society. These terms are called by many names like junk news, deception, gossip, etc. In today's world, people get more attached to apps like Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat and keep on liking, sharing unnecessary images and posts.

Spreading this kind of information harms the whole environment and people easily manipulate the data. One that arguably threatens any sense of shared truth. On the other hand, social media gives a great opportunity to people for raising the voice. But people misuse the platform in manipulating and spreading misinformation in society. This study will help to understand the awareness about the misinformation which is rapidly spreading from the social media network.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I base this study on the descriptive methodology. I used primary and secondary both methods as some facts by the secondary method were already published. In the primary method, used survey method, simple random sampling and tool were a questionnaire which I used in this study. I took 100 samples Delhi NCR of age limit 18-25 and 25-40. I took two age groups for understanding the awareness on misinformation.

LIMITATIONS

Every study has its limitations. This study also has few limitations. First, the sample is limited to Delhi and NCR. I could not include opinions of people of other regions. Second, the sample includes people of age group from 18 to 25 and 25-40. I took two age groups for understanding the population.

Results and discussions

So from my study conclusion can be derived that age group of 24 used mostly social networking sites. It means the youth of the nation is mostly using the social networking platforms. Figure no. 1.

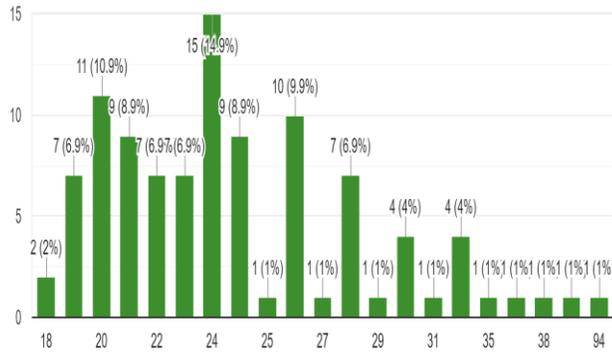


Figure 1

Q1- Are you familiar with “COVID19”?

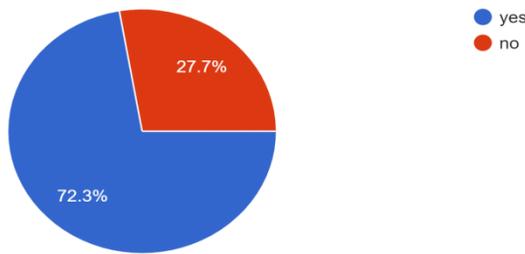


Figure 2

It was found that majority of population knew about the COVID19. 72.3% population is familiar with this epidemic and rests are not(fig 2). That means most of the population is aware about this epidemic and population is trying to understand it more. This can be the result of many other things like govt. campaign and general awareness on the topic. More awareness means less scope of misinformation. As told above (fig.1) majority of population of study includes youth. So we can say that younger people are quite aware of misinformation but

We don't know about the older ones. As it is usually observed that older people are more vulnerable to misinformation and they are easy target to disseminate fake news. Also the population includes people of Delhi and NCR so they are literate enough to understand the problem of fake news. But if we talk about rural areas, Majority of people might be unaware with the term

“MISINFORMATION”. However the level of usage of social media is quite similar in rural and urban areas.

Q2- How you came to know about COVID19 for the first time?

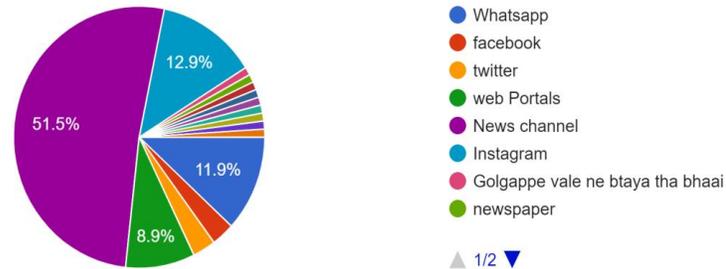


Figure 3

With this question I found that majority of population watch News channels and from there 51.5% population came to know about covid19. But after news channels social media platforms are in trend because youth are more concentrated on social networking, that's why Instagram with 12.9% is on second position. Side by side these platforms give information related to current issue so population gets more informed from these sites. After Instagram WhatsApp is used by the youngsters and they are more influenced by WhatsApp. Apart from these, populations get informed from sources like web portals, newspapers, class discussions, twitter, YouTube etc. From this data we can understand that nowadays population is less interested in newspapers. They try effortless ways to get information. It means youngsters get more informed from social networking sites where they spend more time and trust the information. All data is shown in fig 3.

Q3- Which medium do you prefer watch/read the news in day to day life?

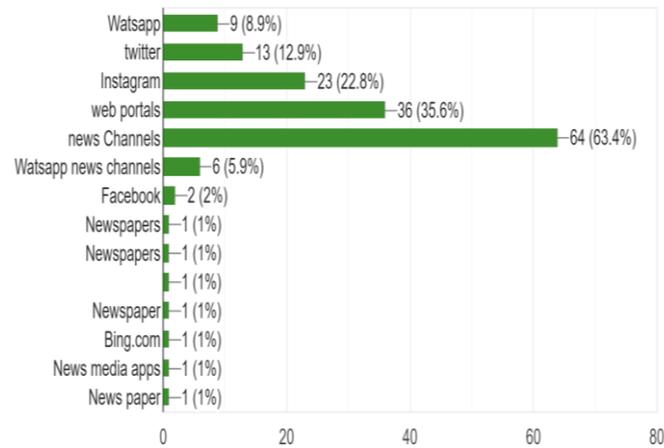


Figure 4

Television is the most powerful medium of mass communication. It has the highest media penetration till now in India, most of the people are still dependent on TV for entertainment and information. But in recent years, many questions have been raised on the credibility of TV when it comes to news and information. In the survey, it is found that 64% people depend on News channels, 34% on web portals, and 23 % on Instagram. Most of the population still relies on the TV channels because TV has the power to inform rural masses as well. Audio visual mediums are still very strong in the society. Illiterate population is diverted to many other platforms like web portals &instagram. People have unlimited options to opt for getting information that’s why population is influenced by the many misinformation.

Q4- Which Social media platform you visit the most?

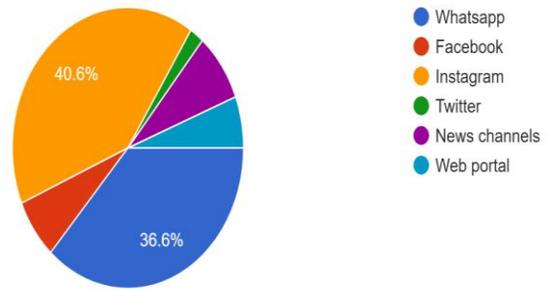


Figure 5

As population wants information with entertainment, we can see Instagram with 40% is on top. In recent years, people started raising question on credibility of news, authenticity of news because they have many platforms and getting diverse information. They can collect information from various sources. Now question is which medium they use most. We can see in the fig 4 that after Instagram, WhatsApp with 36% is on second position. Most of the population is using this app for information or entertainment. In literature review we found that most of the misinformation is circulated on WhatsApp because every age group is using WhatsApp and no one takes the pain to cross check the source if it is true or false. This is the issue in India that people doesn’t check the source and blindly trust information. These types of information spread rapidly and harm the society.

Q5- Do you think social media information is authentic?

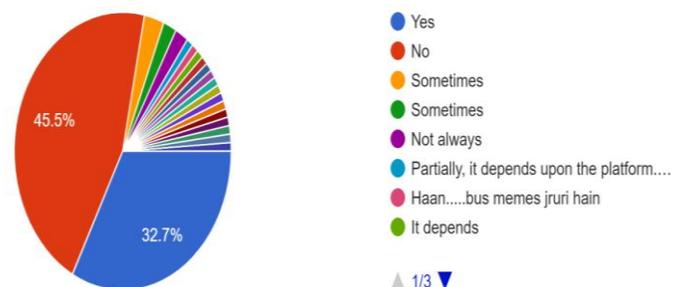


Figure 6

This question is open-ended because we get more options when people get involved themselves. We can find if the population thinks social media information is authentic or not? So, we can see in (fig6) people know about social media information is not authentic. We get “No” in 45% and “YES” in 32.7%. In an open-ended question, I got too many options like sometimes people will check the information and some people said they don’t always check. Some population said it depends on the platform or depends on the issue. The rest of the population said that fake news or misleading information is circulated on online platforms and sometimes its proportion is of 50-50. Many people said the only source of the news is verified news so that news will not be fake.

Q6- Are you familiar with the term of “misinformation”?

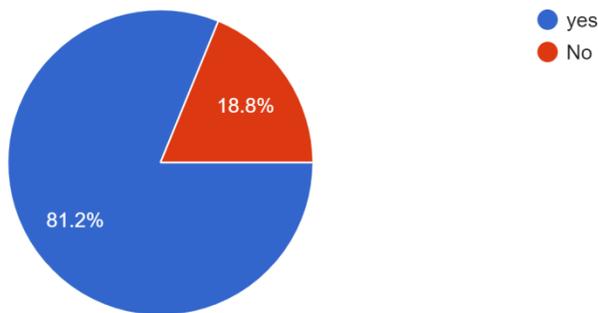


Figure 7

It was found that majority of the population knew about misinformation. 81.2% of the population was familiar with the misinformation and rest not (Fig. 7). This is a good sign that majority is aware of misinformation. This can be the result of many things like government campaigns and general awareness. More awareness means less scope of fake news. However this is not the case. As told above (fig.6) majority of population of study includes youth. So we can say that younger people are quite aware of fake news but we don’t know about the older ones. As it is usually observed that older people are more vulnerable to misinformation and they are easy target to disseminate fake news.

Also the population includes people of Delhi and NCR so they are literate enough to understand the problem of fake news. But if we talk about rural areas, majority might be unaware of the term “fake news”. However the level of usage of social media is quite similar both in rural and urban areas. Social Media users in Rural India have grown by 100% and in Urban India they have grown by 35% since December 2013.

Q7- Do you share the information from the social media platform with others?

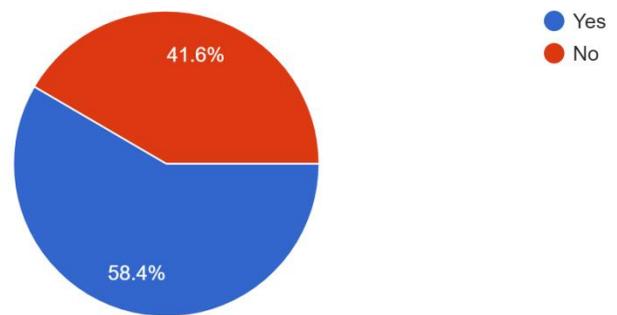


Figure 8

The major problem with fake news on social media is its dissemination. As social media is the easiest way of mass communication so people use it for sharing information whether it is real or fake. However in our survey it was found that majority (58.4%) don’t share news on social media (fig.8). As mentioned above most of population of this survey includes people of age 18-25, so this shows that young people don’t use social media for sharing news. This is good sign; it shows young generation is aware of fake news. However there is no problem in sharing news on social media. If news is correct and sources are verified, sharing information will not mislead the population.

Q8- Do you cross-check the facts of social media news?

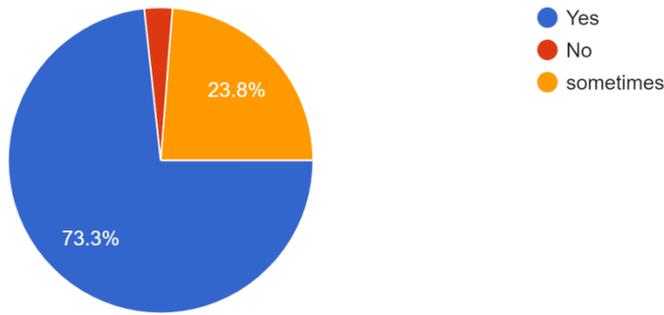


Figure 9

Fact checking is a useful weapon in combating fake news. In the survey, 73.3% people said they cross check the facts of social media news and 23.8% said they check sometimes, which is a good sign. Obviously, we should not believe everything we see or read on social media. But critically disbelieving everything is just as bad as well. If we check authenticity of information, we can draw a line between real and fake news. It's very important to cross check the news because viral half-truth is part of the fabric of today's internet, and the kind of anger it inspired has been turned into a dangerous commodity. It has been exploited by businesses for ad-supported "misinformation, by scammers raising money online, and by authoritarian governments to spread hate and fear.

Q9- Do you think social media keeps you informed?

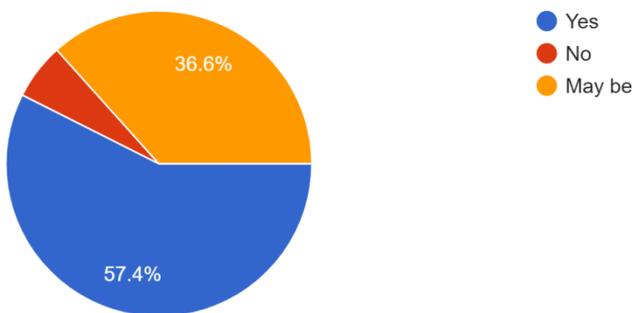


Figure 10

57.4% People get informed from the social platforms as shown in (fig 10). 36.6% people said maybe they get informed or maybe not. They are not sure of the information which they get. Rest of the population denies. That means people are aware about the information or misinformation because it has thin line to understand which news is misleading and which news gives information.

Q10- Do you think misinformation can be harmful to society?

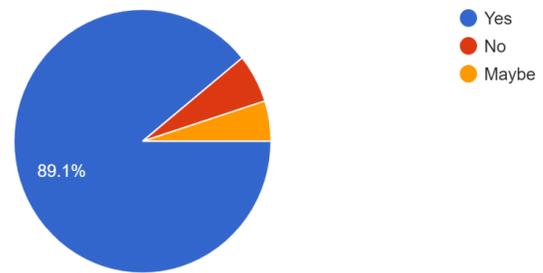


Figure 11

Here, a good indication is that people knew misinformation harms society. So most of the population is cross-checking the facts, check the source of the link which is helpful to verify the information. In the survey, we got to know that 89.1% think that fake news spread rumors in the country.

Sometimes we pay a big price for this kind of thing. Everyone doesn't have many options to check the information or cross-check the facts on other platforms. But some people said maybe misinformation is harmful to society.

CONCLUSION

There is a saying "THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK" but due to this misinformation raising we consider the saying " THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE "

COVID-19 rises on Indian social media and leads to misinformation. The people who use social media are confused that the news information updated on new media is INFORMATION OR MISINFORMATION. Our survey says that instagram and whatsapp are the most used platforms and are in trend used by the youngsters. When the questions rises to know the authenticity and the credibility of the information we found that people reacted to the social media posts by not confirming the sources and blindly trust information further forward or share it with their friends and family, i.e. dissemination of information is rapid and can harm the society. As above research shows that in the survey various questions were asked to know how they understand the term “MISINFORMATION”. We found that in people’s perspective the authenticity of information is dependent on the type of information and accordingly they will decide to see the sources or to find the credibility, which raise the scope of dissemination of fake information using social media. With the help of this research we found that youngsters are quite aware of misinformation but, in majority considering both rural and urban areas, youngsters are easy target to disseminate the fake news and information. In conclusion to combat fake information we suggest every individual for fact check and then disseminate it further to “stop the information which can start without any wrong intention but can lead into wrong action”.

References

- DICTIONARY, C. E. (n.d.). Misinformation. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/misinformation>
- Mandavia, M. (2020, March 06). Fake Covid-19 'gyaan' goes viral. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/fake-covid-19-gyaan-goes-viral/articleshow/74503173.cms?from=mdr>
- Jha, N. (2020, March 23). Fighting With Boomers About Coronavirus Misinformation On WhatsApp Won't Make Any Of Us Less Afraid. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/nishitajha/coronavirus-india-whatsapp-rumors>
- Chatterjee, R. (2020, March 24). COVID-19 Misinformation Tweets Being Removed By Twitter. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://analyticsindiamag.com/covid-19-misinformation-tweets-being-removed-by-twitter/>
- Priyadarshini, S. (n.d.). Fighting the coronavirus misinformation epidemic. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.natureasia.com/en/nindia/article/10.1038/nindia.2020.36>
- Paliath, S. (2020, March 20). COVID-19: 'We Have Been Lucky So Far, But This May Not Last'. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.indiaspend.com/covid-19-we-have-been-lucky-so-far-but-this-may-not-last/>
- Global research on coronavirus disease (COVID-19). (n.d.). Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>
- Thelancet. (1891). *The Lancet*, 137(3529), 890-893. doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(02)18394-2