Social Media Misinformation's Effect on the General Population Under COVID-19 the Public's Emotional Response to False Material

Zhi Zheng(✉)

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
19905938169@163.com

Abstract. This paper discusses the explosive spread of disinformation under Covid-19 due to increased public use of social media. With the public unable to judge right from wrong, mass emotions can be affected, especially in societies in the midst of a Covid-19 outbreak, where misunderstood or insensitive language may be amplified in social media and mass emotions become more sensitive. Disinformation on the internet affects people's independent judgement and appeals to emotion reduce the audience's incentive to verify sources and question the authenticity of news, objectively reducing the cost and resistance to the spread of fake news and leading to mass anxiety due to misinformation. Covid-19 outbreak, disinformation may mislead the masses to use the wrong methods to defend themselves against the virus, leading to life-threatening risks.

Keywords: Covid-19 · Disinformation · Social media · Emotional

1 Introduction

In 2020, the sudden outbreak of covid-19 disrupted the lives and work of people around the world, and social media played a crucial role in the spread of the outbreak. A number of newspapers chose to take a temporary hiatus, with many people keeping up to date with the latest developments through social media, news apps, and the like. Social media usage has significantly increased as a result of this. The general public now has access to a wholly new method of gathering knowledge and interacting with others because of social media. Through social media, users can now choose the information that interests them based on their personal interests and share it in a very practical manner with friends and even complete strangers. Although most social media platforms were originally created to facilitate human connection, when they reach a certain scale of users, they inevitably become a public information dissemination platform. The explosive growth of social media has led to an increase in false information on the internet, and the epidemic has given us a very important warning: rumors are not always rumors or false news, and some information that we cannot judge to be true for the time being cannot simply be classified as rumors. Nor can it simply be classified as a rumor. Roughly stopping the

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spread of rumors without a sufficiently accurate judgment may even obscure important facts and cause unpredictable consequences. In such situations where the public is unable to judge right from wrong, the mood of the masses is affected. In social media, some misunderstood or insensitive language may be amplified [1]. In extreme cases, these types of situations led to severe amplification of indefinable messages, which affects mass sentiment, especially during the covid-19 outbreak, when mass sentiment is sensitive. In Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann, the concept of the "pseudo-environment" highlights the influence of images and views that shape public opinion, but often mislead individuals and society [2]. He argues that public opinions create a world between individuals and their real environment, which can result in misinformation. This can have severe consequences, especially in the context of medical and scientific facts, as seen in the current pandemic. The danger of misinformation in these areas is immediate, far-reaching, long-lasting, and challenging to reverse. The pandemic serves as a powerful reminder of the dangers of misinformation and the importance of considering the sources and validity of the information.

2 Increase in Social Media Usage Leads to Rise in Disinformation

2.1 Social Media Usage Has Increased Significantly

During COVID-19, social media was instrumental in the dissemination of information and communication. The unprecedented global spread of the virus led to increased use of social media platforms for information, communication, and social connection. Studies have shown that social media use increased during the pandemic, with people spending more time on these platforms to stay informed and connect with others. The crisis led to COVID-19 leads, a swell in social media use, and more users going surfing to connect with family members, friends, relatives, and official members. The mobile app called WhatsApp experienced the best gains as a social media-focused app because of COVID-19, consistent with a survey of more than 25,000 users in 30 markets conducted between March 14 and 24. With overall usage of Facebook swelling by 37% and usage of social media apps designed and developed in China climbing by 58%, Kantar describes the rise of social media as meaning that individuals are getting extra commitment to the amount of isolation on social media and people are getting extra attention to the knowledge spread on social media [3].

In research on microblogs, the number of trends in daily microblog texts was positively correlated with public attention [4]. The quantity of new confirmed cases, the quantity of new hype suspected cases, amount of new deaths, and the number of lag days of public attention were all positively correlated with the amount of covid-19 pneumonia-related cases (i.e. quantity of new confirmed cases, the quantity of new hype suspected cases, the number of new deaths). The number of suspected cases and subsequent deaths were favorably correlated with the number of covid-19-related cases, indicating that the conversation about this issue will go on for a while. The spread of the infection has also drawn people's focus to social media.

2.2 Increase in the Spread of Disinformation in Social Media

The dissemination of false information and deception is one of COVID-19's most significant effects on social media. Due to the virus's quick spread, a lot of misinformation and conspiracy ideas have been going around on social media. Public health officials have expressed concern about this because false information can cause misunderstandings and possibly harmful behavior. The occurrence was dubbed an "infodemic" by the WHO director general. The COVID-19 pandemic generated a lot of information that was broadly shared. Many of the facts were incorrect, though some of them were accurate. This caused an "infodemic," in which the pandemic's control was hampered by a never-ending stream of false information and reports.

It was expected that COVID-19 would cause an informational explosion. In 2018, Heidi Larson foresaw that a digital contagion of emotions would increase the effect of the next pandemic [5]. Her prediction is based on epidemiological research which shows that confidence in vaccines has declined between 2015 and 2018. While misinformation has been spread throughout history, advances in social media and communication technologies have amplified its impact. Previous studies have shown that through social media, people share far more disinformation than evidence-based information.

Rumors are classified as wishful, fearful, well-intentioned, hostile, and neutral. Fear and hostility can lead to anxiety spreading on the internet, and while there are many hostile and fearful rumors on the internet, there is no shortage of well-intentioned ones in comparison [6].

The most frequent type of rumor was about the prevention and control of the epidemic, followed by the international-related category. During an epidemic, prevention methods and control measures are closely related to people's livelihoods and involve the safeguarding of their lives. The predominance of rumors in the prevention and control category reflects the fact that rumors revolve around topics that are closely related to the public. However, rumors with global implications are typically based on national sentiment and acquire credibility by appealing to pre-existing public perceptions.

Most of the rumors involved areas where the epidemic was serious and most of the rumors were generated in the early stages of the epidemic. This is partly due to the uncertainty of information in the early stages of the epidemic, as the public's understanding of the epidemic is very vague, which gives the rumor mill an opportunity to spread, and partly due to panic in the early stages of the epidemic, as the unsettling factors intensify the spread of rumors.

Fake news spreads faster and more efficiently than a virus, and is just as dangerous. WHO later announced that it would work closely with social media platforms such as Facebook, Google, Pinterest, Tencent, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and search engine companies to stop the spread of rumors and misinformation [3].

A study of the fake news during the epidemic shows that many of them used the emotions of the audience as 'leverage,' causing them to spread online for profit in the context of an eye-candy economy. Unfortunately, such abuse of the rules of dialogue is frequently very successful. In reaction to shifting contexts, fake news has also given rise to new variants. Some travel bloggers have discovered that their images have been altered into a "Guangzhou viral transmitter" and reposted online, while others have come under fire for writing dozens of articles about the "social catastrophe under covid-19" in

an effort to increase traffic. False news producers take advantage of people's curiosity and informational imbalance to sell their products and to incite fear and social anxiety, which has a detrimental effect on the social order.

As audiences increasingly access news on social media, they often receive the information itself along with comments on social retweets, which affects their independent judgment of the news, infects them with homogenized group emotions, and reduces their vigilance against fake news. Appeal to emotion (Argumentum ad passiones) is a non-formal fallacy, which refers to the manipulation of emotions rather than valid logic in order to win an argument. This fallacy is more pronounced in situations where there is a lack of factual evidence to support it [7].

Appealing to emotions reduces the incentive for audiences to verify sources and question the veracity of news, objectively reducing the cost and resistance to the spread of fake news. Some fake news may appear to be a statement of "fact", but both the presentation and the choice of content are embedded with a tendency towards opinion, and deliberately provoke certain emotions. As Duke talked about in the book Thinking in bets, once a belief is established, it is difficult to remove it. Emotions and beliefs that have been reinforced can cause us to selectively accept news and be less likely to question the validity of the evidence [8]. According to Chen, the study mentions that people will engage in avoidance behavior after coming across unreliable news [9], but in another research, it is found that subjective perception still has an impact on human emotions [10]. Perceived credibility refers to the information recipient's assessment of the degree of truth or falsity of the information, which is different from the objective credibility of the information. Investigators would rather believe that the information exists than that it is false. When it comes to untrustworthy information, the public's subjective perception is more likely to cause an emotional reaction, and although someone will eventually appear to disprove the rumor, it has already caused emotional fluctuations in the process of dissemination.

3 Public Sentiment and Comparison of Disinformation Orientation at Different Times

3.1 Mass Emotions Affected by Disinformation

10.56 million individuals in more than 100 countries posted 654 million times on Twitter and Weibo between January and May 2020. MIT researchers used this data and machine learning to create a daily sentiment index. This data and machine learning was used to create a daily sentiment index. The index was used by the authors to monitor users' emotional reactions to 2020 covid-19 on social media. All of the research nations experienced a rapid decrease in emotional feelings as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, with Australia, Spain, the UK, and Colombia seeing the biggest drops. On average, slower recovery (in terms of the number of days it took for a country's mood to return to half its steady-state level) was observed for positive expressions of emotion, ranging from 1.2 days in Israel to 29.0 days in Turkey. In contrast, the closure policy had a small positive effect on expressed sentiment in most countries. The authors suggest that these results may reflect the fact that in countries severely affected by the epidemic, allowing the virus to spread without restrictive measures can cause comparable or even more

severe psychological distress [11]. In a survey of 17,865 active Chinese microblog users, Li discovered that the emotional components of anxiety, anger, and sadness in message content rose considerably after the outbreak compared to before the outbreak, and that satisfaction with life decreased [12]. Another impact of COVID-19 on social media is the increasing use of social media to support mental health. The pandemic has led to an increase in stress, anxiety, and loneliness, and social media has become an important source of support for many people. Social media can be a valuable resource for providing emotional support and connecting people with others who are going through similar experiences.

3.2 The Extent to Which People Recognize Disinformation Before and After the Covid-19 Outbreak

Disinformation was certainly a concern prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, but it did not have the urgency and severity that it did during the pandemic. People tended to be more confident because there was no anxiety and were less likely to critically assess the information they encountered on social media. While misinformation and disinformation exist, they do not have the potential to affect people's lives and health as they did during the pandemic. Examples include democracy at risk, disinformation on elections, and the presence of disinformation on social media that could influence political debates. Allcott and Gentzkow tracked 20.16 million pieces of misinformation that were considered beneficial to Donald Trump during the 30-year US presidential campaign, while Hillary Clinton had 80,000 pieces of potentially positive content [13]. Shao provided empirical evidence, that "bots played a fundamental role in virally spreading false news on social media" during the US election [14].

In the COVID-19 outbreak, the spread of disinformation became a matter of life and death. People were suddenly confronted with a wealth of information about the virus, its transmission, and possible treatments. Disinformation could lead people to disregard public health guidelines, adopt dangerous or ineffective treatments and delay seeking medical care, or listen to absurd rumors.

With the increase in covid-19 instances and fatalities, there are various reports of false information on the internet misleading people's behavior [15]. Some people in Iran are looking to use so-called "traditional" and "Islamic" anti-covid-19 medications. On social media, the medication known as Imam Kazim's Medi-cine has been promoted as a treatment for the virus. Some individuals assert that the drug has cured them or someone they know. A man who purported to practice traditional medicine recently gave an interview on Iranian state television. A mask, according to this individual, was unnecessary because protection could be obtained by dousing oneself in salt. Another so-called "expert" claimed in another interview that the virus could be treated with bee venom; in Uzbekistan, social media platforms are inundated with false information, including that drinking. The mayor of Osaka Prefecture in Japan asserted that the medication contained povidone-iodine. In Morocco, many tips for purportedly preventing covid-19 infection were circulated online, including that sunlight and heat can kill new covid-19 and that taking a hot bath can prevent the virus, among others. In Japan, the governor of Osaka Prefecture claimed that a mouthwash containing povidone-iodine was effective in fighting covid-9, prompting people to rush to purchase such products.

Van notes that while people are dedicated to sharing accurate content, the social media environment merely diverts them from choosing whether to share news based on their preferences for accuracy [16]. For instance, the fact that people are frequently inundated with political and emotionally charged news content online, in addition to the fact that people have little time or resources to consider whether a story is true, may severely impair people's ability to accurately reflect such content. The spread of false material. Disinformation can spread quickly on social media through what is known as the 'misinformation cascade'. This happens when false or misleading information is spread through Twitter and shared by numerous users, leading to the widespread assumption that it is real. These cascades are difficult to stop once started and can lead to widespread confusion and panic, coupled with the anxiety that people feel in the context of an epidemic, this anxiety is more likely to result in poor decision-making, Schwarz (As cited in Gu & Luo, 2008) and other researchers argue that increased levels of anxiety affect the allocation of cognitive resources to decision-makers, with decision-makers allocating information processing and information The reduction in cognitive resources allocated to information processing and information evaluation occurs [17]. It thus causes information to be quickly and carelessly forwarded, which causes large portions of the populace to be misinformed by false information. To Klein, it has been observed that highly anxious people are unable to consider the full range of possibilities in decision-making tasks, and they often try solutions without a strategy, hastily reversing previous decisions [18]. Bensi and Giusberti's experiment also showed that highly anxious people were in a hurry to reach a conclusion when completing an inductive reasoning task and made their own judgments based on a few observations [19].

Disinformation can be used to undermine trust in democratic institutions, including the media, political parties, and government agencies. When users are exposed to disinformation that suggests these institutions are corrupt or ineffective, they may become more cynical about the political process and reluctant to engage in democratic activities. The spread of misinformation is more likely to cause immediate and significant harm to public health, especially during pandemics. For example, studies in different countries have shown that misinformation about COVID-19 may lead to non-compliance with public rules and reduced willingness to be vaccinated [20].

4 Conclusion

As traditional infectious disease surveillance systems suffer from limitations in scope and lagging early warnings, there is an increasing focus on how to scientifically and rationally use emerging technologies to respond to outbreaks. At present, these methods still have numerous limitations based on how to alleviate negative emotions such as anxiety caused by false information when people use social media, but if they make full use of their sensitive, timely, and forward-looking surveillance advantages, they will provide more useful support for prevention and control efforts. Future research should focus on exploring the improvement of screening systems based on false information on social media, carrying out psychological counseling for the necessary people, gradually promoting related Future research should focus on improving the screening system based on false information on social media, providing psychological counseling to the

public as necessary, and gradually promoting the optimization and practical application of methods in related fields to provide support and guarantee for covid-19 prevention and control.

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