Ethical and Social Issue Challenges For Sharing Information during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 virus was first found at the end of the year 2019. By the March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had been declared by WHO. Since the pandemic start and at a peak of pandemic around mid of 2020, it had raised the challenge of dealing with information sharing on social media that share by either public or authorities. Humans globally had been quarantined and stay at home during the pandemic. Which social media is the sauce that can allow us to communicate and maintain social with each other? The information-sharing had brought problematic and unethical to the public together with other issues which are sharing personal information and fake news. Therefore, this study aims to examine the ethical and social issues those challenges occur in sharing information during the COVID-19. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the public had more analytical skills to evaluate whether the news or information is relevant or fake. Besides that, the authority should do their part by refrain from placing the blame on patients to avoid them from being stigmatized. It is a very crucial time being for all the related parties to be aware of their ethical duty to ensure only relevant and valid information shall share on social media.

Keywords— Ethical Issue, Social Issue, Information Sharing, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the year 2019, in December, a new novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) had emergence in China. This quickly led to a global level pandemic in early 2020 which claimed hundreds of thousands of deaths globally (Roser et al., 2020). The world running into chaos as there is no exact cure for the COVID-19 (Habersaat et al., 2020). As there is a lack of knowledge, treatment, and vaccine to counter the COVID-19, a new way to ease the chaos is the social and behavioral sciences which were suggested by the researcher (Van Bavel et al., 2020). This particular science is regarded as a non-pharmaceutical intervention and containing the wide misleading of information about COVID-19 (Depoux et al., 2020). China had declared lockdown in early January 2020 but the World Health Organization only declare the COVID-19 outbreak at the mid of March 2020. Many of the misleading info regarding the virus had been circulating and it had been warned by World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the misinformation during the pandemic (WHO, 2020). This would cause the public harder to trust any reliable information they found.

Fake news had been a dangerous thing in today's digital world. This is not just for political agenda to gain the supporter but also individual gain advantages during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rampersad et al. 2019). Every people in society had the responsibility to maintain the ethnicity for the information shared among each other. To keep the fake news under control, authority and the public had their role of responsibility in keeping the peace from misinformation. This study aims to examine the ethical and social issues those

challenges occur in sharing information during the COVID-19

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers the fake news idea and concept. This is a review of the increase of fake news from studies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fake News and Misinformation

There is much meaning in fake news and similarity such as misinformation. However, fake news defines as purposely crated, emotionally charged, misleading, sensational, or fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news and misinformation define by false information that is spread and regardless of whether a person has any intention to mislead (Dannielle., 2021). Based on the definition, it can be sharing the fake news and misinformation unintentionally but at the same time creation could be highly intentional (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019). This current view of the statement is related to the COVID-19 issue where society will share and re-share the false content with intention of helping each other.

During the pandemic of the Ebola virus in the year 2013 to the year 2016 in Western African, many people had shared misinformation content related to the Ebola virus with good intention, solution, and warming to others (Apuke and Omar, 2020). Humans had been helping each other since the old-time and with good intentions, people like to share the good or latest news around since social media nowadays makes sharing information easier. However, they did not know that the more they share, the higher likely will share the fake news if there are not careful enough. Fake health news might affect people's safety as it will cause people to take false medication or safety measures that will lead to their damage (Pulido et al., 2020).

Misinformation Harmful to Society During Pandemic

Misinformation received by the public will cause more harm. In some cases, people will not believe the statement from an expert even it

is facts (Uscinski et al., 2020). Even with the vaccine had been scientific proof that it is relevant but the misinformation had caused the belief in conspiracies of COVID-19 and increase the question towards the vaccine (Freeman et al., 2020). Misinformation such as it creates more anti-vaccine, anti-mask, etc. There are also reports that regard people who do not believe in the existence and seriousness of COVID-19 until they had been infected (Carroll, 2020).

5G technology is racing despite there is a global pandemic. This leads to many nations banning some of the leading 5G technology suppliers and triggered by conspiracy theories alone (Leprince-Ringuet, 2020). At the peak of the pandemic in the UK, 77 mobile towers had been burned down due to the 5G coronavirus conspiracy theory that the 5G will further infect the virus (Reichert, 2020). This leads to mob attacks, vandalism, etc of public property and damaging the country. In the USA, many of the protests had stated that wearing a face mark had violated the citizens' rights and COVID-19 is just normal flu even though Dr. Fauci has raised the facts (Tabery, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Many variables will cause sharing fake and misinformation news for COVID-19 no matter in any platform includes social media. A conceptual framework of the sharing fake and misinformation news for COVID-19 shown in Figure 1 shown below. All the variables are extracted from the literature review that had been repeated the common and same issues that had been faced globally in the COVID-19 pandemic.
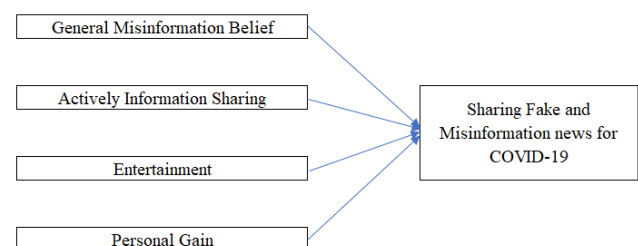

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Events such as belief, information sharing, entertainment, and personal are the most caused

for sharing the fake news regarding the COVID-19 during the pandemic. These four terms are the most common issue mentioned in literature reviews and other research papers regarding the matter that faces. The less action to be taken either by own self ethical or authority control, the more sharing of fake and misinformation news will be happening on the COVID-19 globally.

METHOD

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research and this approach was used to gain details of understanding in motivations, opinions, and underlying reasons. Qualitative research provides insights that help to develop ideas or into the problem for the potential of quantitative research hypotheses. Besides, qualitative research would also be used to uncover trends such as opinions and thought and deeper dive into the problem. Data collection methods used by qualitative research vary using semi-structured or unstructured techniques. For some of the common methods in qualitative research includes content analysis, historical, case study, grounded theory, etc. In this study, qualitative research is conducted by using content analysis and case study from research papers for the fake news and misinformation during COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Analysis

The result for both the content analysis and case study are collected and shown in the tables. The details of the data are collected from six research papers related to this study.

In the six research papers study, the content analysis data had been collected and shown in Table 1 below. The result shows that the highest mentioned word had been the misinformation while the second highest is the sharing. With social media, sharing is just a click to share the information with everyone. With much information on social media, people just tend to share once there is new knowledge or the latest news without fact checks or waiting for the official announcement from the authority.

Some of the analyses show that for personal gain for the third-highest. Personal gain taking

advantage of selling facemask due to the facemask shortage globally during the COVID-19 pandemic (Huai-liang, et al., 2020). While the fourth-ranking is solely for entertainment purposes to see what the people will react to fake news provided.

Table 1. Result of Content Analysis

Ranking	Categories	Code Counts	Percentage (%)	Theme Groups
1	Misinformation	63	36	Research
2	Sharing	41	24	Research
3	Personal Gain	35	20	Research
4	Entertainment	23	13	Research
5	Conspiracy	9	5	Research
6	Politics	4	2	Research

In the case study analyses, data had been collected and shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Result of Case Study

Case Study Fake News	Fake News Characteristics	Data Collection
Case Study 1: Effects of misinformation on COVID-19 individual responses and recommendations for the resilience of disastrous consequences of misinformation	Misinformation, social media, COVID-19 individual response	• Culturally different in the belief • Religious misinformation belief • Deeper understanding requires • Require to include situational motivation

Case Study 2: Sharing Information on COVID-19: the ethical challenges in the Malaysian setting	Public interest, information sharing, privacy, confidential	• Never experience such a large pandemic • Everyone has to work together • Blame the patient for spreading the virus • Without fact check and share the information on social media	perspective of information behavior: The case of Spain		• Fake news interpretations • Authority does not have the latest update and news
Case Study 3: Fake news and COVID-19: modeling the predictors of fake news sharing among social media users	Fake news, sharing fake news, social media users	• Sharing and information seeking on the fake news sharing • Require to confirm enough facts and figures before sharing • Old images as fake images • Unawareness	Case Study 5: Inoculating Against Fake News About COVID-19	Fake news, infodemic, misinformation	• Promoting accurate belief regarding COVID-19 • Cause by fake experts and conspiracy theories
Case Study 4: Understanding fake news during the Covid-19 health crisis from the	Information behaviors, interactivity, fake news	• Audio message from doctor recorded for their family	Case Study 6: Sharing of fake news on social media: Application of the honeycomb framework and the third-person effect hypothesis	Fake news sharing behavior, social media	• Make efforts to corrective action against the fake news • Users ages had significant on sharing the fake news

In the six research papers studied through the content analysis and case study, few common challenges had been defined through the data analysis on both methods. Besides infographics shown mostly on social media such as Facebook, the audio message is also one of the challenges that had to fact check. The audio message tends to pretend the audio recorder person is an expert in science or high-level authority body who gets the latest news on the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

sharing of the information includes the text messages claims employment with an audio message to warn everyone. Ethical issues towards the situation which create personal gain and entertainment purpose had increased as well.

Since the COVID-19 had caused on the global scale lever, many of the countries are unable to control the pandemic as their pandemic wave by wave to repeat. Policies and regulations had been placed in many countries to control the people from infecting more to others. Most of the countries had implemented the closing of the border of their own country to prevent people from traveling to avoid the virus travel through traveling (International Monetary Fund, 2021). Quarantine people who had been affected, lockdown country, and prevent people from going outdoor is the most common implementation across the globe. However, these policies all aim to reinforce directly into the matter of COVID-19 but not social media.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, fake news treated more seriously than ever. Many countries apply strict regulations on fake news, especially the COVID-19 infodemic. In China and India, the authoritarian regime had put a high alert on the "freedom of express" attitude and censored any information or filter in the social media platforms (Rodrigues and Jian Xu, 2020). The information shows that fake news can lead to a life-threatening situation if it gets serious and most alarming cases are fake news been spread by registered professionals such as medical doctors. New regulations are highly recommended to form and control fake news in social media (Marco-Franco et al, 2021).

Many countries had declared an emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic including Malaysia. Malaysia had declared an emergency on March 2021 and used the opportunity to impose a "Fake News" law by using the emergency powers (Peter, 2021).

Even though the regulation of policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic brings to control the public from minimizing fake news, not all citizens think so. China had been under attack by own citizen and other countries reporting that suppression on the human rights and media control (Rodrigues and Jian Xu, 2020). Besides own citizens and other countries like China facing, Malaysia facing similar problem from opposition political party due to taking advantage during the declaration of country emergency (Peter. 2021).

Everyone had the responsibility for slowly spreading the disease as well as the fake news, rumors, and mixing facts. Fact-checking and rational debate are requiring to counter the COVID-19 fake news but it will bring side effects like China and India (The Conversation, 2020). When the fact information had very complex details rather than simplicity, it will cause hardship for people to understand the real facts. Some of the five ways to prevent the spread of misinformation are:

a) Be aware when looking through social media.
b) Do not leave the false information in personal online network and try to inquiry the person who shared it to remove it.
c) Report to the social media administrators.
d) Always verify the information when doubting it.
e) Address the issue of false information more than people who share it.

CONCLUSION

From the study most of the social media user does not realize that they had to share the fake news as no proof or fact is checking whether a statement is a fact or fake. The user had just the same responsibility with others to sharing what is the latest news and knowledge provided in the social media platform so share it with other people to let another user have the latest news and knowledge. Misinformation and fake news are created anonymously but were shared by the innocent user. Other than that, personal gain and entertainment are the second-highest in ethical problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Personal gain such as taking advantage of the business by sharing fake news and make users purchase or making something that will benefit someone instead of public interest.

Although the implication had been implemented in various countries, earlier implementation had shown that it is effectively tackling the issue but it is temporary. Countries that implement lockdown had to face economic considerations. A new implementation required a budget to tackle the issue and the authority such as the government had to consider the balance on the budget to implement the new regulations. There is no perfect solution for everything but it depends on the majority results. The effectiveness of implementing new regulations and policies shows reducing the fake news in social media but backlash by people by excusing there is another hidden agenda from authority and government as well as opposition political party. Many types of research show fake news can lead to a life-threatening situation and the government threat the fake news seriously.

To increase the effectiveness of the ethical issue on social media, many of the recommendations and suggestions require further improvement and new policies to be created. In simple express, everyone had the responsibility to prevent and minimizing the spread of fake news includes public and authority. More effective awareness is choosing the correct platform to share the awareness and ways to prevent falling into sharing the fake news to the public by the authority. Stricter regulations such as an increased fine might be effective but will cause some public backlash towards the government. The public spends more time browsing social media during the pandemic and easily obtain information from the correct source.

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