

Misinformation in Media during COVID-19 in Bangladesh Socio-Legal Analysis of the Infodemic in Comparison with Vietnam & Singapore

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Abstract

This article examines the misinformation on the COVID-19 pandemic in social media and electronic media, as well as whether the existing legal administration and laws in Bangladesh, Singapore, and Vietnam are adequate to combat the infodemic. People who believe misinformation and fake news about Coronavirus, prevention, and treatment may put their lives in danger. False information about Coronavirus has spread throughout the world, not just in South and Southeast Asian countries, causing widespread concern in the global healthcare community. We employed a qualitative approach as well as the case study analysis method. Case studies were conducted using news reports and news channels. We examined the legal provisions of the People's Republic of Bangladesh's Constitution, as well as factual analyses of Singapore and Vietnam. We discovered the impact of misinformation dissemination through social and electronic media, which is prevalent not only among rural Bangladeshis but also in almost all classes in Singapore and Vietnam, and how such influence can be detrimental to the interests of Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Singapore.

Keywords: COVID-19, Misinformation, Electronic Media, Social media, Qualitative Cases, Infodemic.

Background

As the coronavirus COVID-19 affects 213 countries and territories around the world, as well as two international conveyances (Worldometer, 2020), humanity is now in a disastrous and fearful situation with no clear end in sight. In Bangladesh, approximately 115,786 people have been affected, and 1,502 have died as a result of this pandemic (Worldometer, 2020), and the number is growing by the day. In contrast, 259,875 people in Singapore have been infected with COVID-19, resulting in 684 deaths (Worldometer, 2020), and 1,197,404 people in Vietnam have been infected, resulting in 24,692 deaths (Worldometer, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health of Singapore, the Ministry of Health of Vietnam, and the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease

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Control and Research (IEDCR) in Bangladesh have issued recommendations to maintain and prevent pandemics in these countries rather than cures, as no vaccine has been found to be 100% effective in wiping out these viruses.

However, many prevention and treatment methods are innovated and found almost every day in social media and electronic media. Bangladesh had 36.00 million social media users in January 2020, up 3.0 million (+9.1 percent) between April 2019 and January 2020 (Digital 2020: Bangladesh, 2020). Furthermore, there were 66.44 million internet users in this country in January 2020, up from 5.8 million (+9.5 percent) between 2019 and 2020 (Digital 2020: Bangladesh, 2020). Singapore, on the other hand, has the third highest rate of internet penetration in Southeast Asia as of December 2020. Out of the entire population in Singapore, approximately 4.8 million people use the internet (Internet usage in Singapore, n.d.). The total number of internet users in Vietnam is estimated to be 72.53 million. The online population is expected to reach 82.25 million by 2025 (Internet usage in Singapore, 2021). Every day, a large number of people use online platforms. Some miscreants are attempting to spread fake news and misinformation about COVID-19 in order to motivate people negatively and create an imbalance in our society.

Furthermore, a large proportion of Bangladeshis live in rural areas and follow village traditions. The literacy rate is 73.9% (Alamgir, 2019), indicating that many people are still excluded from the light of knowledge. These people are more vulnerable than urban dwellers and educated people because they have little or no knowledge of technological media and how to distinguish between authentic and fake news. However, the situation does not only affect rural people; the research study will show that it affects people of all creeds in Singapore and Vietnam because they have difficulty determining the validity of any information about the pandemic and thus are easily misled.

Reflecting upon the research paper, the main objective of this study was to analyze the misinformation in social media and electronic media on the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting a qualitative case study and finding out if the existing regulations and laws in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Singapore are adequate to fight against this kind of 'infodemic'. The authors attempted to collect and analyze the following cases of misinformation spreading among the general public via social media and electronic media. Relevant laws and Acts were also studied, which indicate the penalties for spreading misinformation. Though these countries' constitutions guarantee freedom of expression, it is not legal to misinform people about a pressing issue that could lead to an inversion. However, some people are doing so for financial gain and fame. In order to compare the situation with other countries, the authors investigated the misinformation situation in Vietnam and Singapore. To prevent such misinformation from spreading, our government enacted some laws and provisions to restrain those responsible and punish them in accordance with the law.

Methodology

The authors used a qualitative approach because the study was entirely based on incidents and cases of misinformation dissemination among the public in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Singapore, resulting in a few case studies of these countries and the collection of secondary data. As a result, case study analysis is used as a research tool, and snowball sampling is one of the qualitative sampling techniques used.

This research technique demonstrated a sample that can be logically assumed to represent the opinions of the population, where the authors chose only those cases relating to coronavirus misinformation spreading in this pandemic among all cases. The authors conducted their case studies by gathering information and cases from news reports and news channels.

Further evaluation has been conducted by comparing legal provisions with the People's Republic of Bangladesh Constitution, relevant national statutes, and articles to achieve the desired result. To understand the existing legal process in Bangladesh for spreading such misinformation, the proposed research paper studied and analyzed the Digital Security Act, 2018, the Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control, and Eradication) Act, 2018, the Disaster Management Act, 2012, and, in general, the Penal Code, 1860. Data, on the other hand, was gathered from news reports, news channels, and news portals in order to comprehend the true scenario of this pandemic situation and evaluate the facts and circumstances. Furthermore, the authors attempted to compare the situations and provisions of Bangladesh with the legal frameworks of Vietnam and Singapore. The authors use this entire methodology process to try to find the study's findings.

In terms of ethics, the authors gathered their information from news reports and legal documents. They also correctly referred to the information and their sources, as well as according to their format, ensuring that the qualitative method's ethical issues were met.

Conceptual issues

Various types of information, including disinformation and misinformation, have evolved over time without the use of modern media. "The use of propaganda is ancient, but never before has there been the technology to so effectively disseminate it," writes a Guardian columnist (Nougayrède, 2018). Without the presence of modern mass media, it is possible that modes of knowledge distribution contributed to the spread of misleading or inaccurate information, disinformation, or false information.

In the current sense, however, misinformation or disinformation developers have the advantage of transmitting knowledge at a much faster rate via social media applications, i.e. that enable individuals to use a computer or cell phone to connect and exchange information on the Internet such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or electronic media, i.e.

ways of communicating information that are electronic rather than using paper, for example.

It is necessary to understand what is meant by inaccurate or false news in order to distinguish true facts from misinformation or disinformation. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'fake' as an adjective that means "not real; imitation or counterfeit." In another sense, the term "fake" is used interchangeably with terms like duplicate, falsification, counterfeit, and inauthenticity. However, the Ethical Journalism Network defines and describes fake news and false information as follows: "Fake news is data that has been purposefully fabricated and released in order to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable evidence" (Harrison, 2020). That is to say, fake news or false information is the parent that exacerbates all forms of information disorder.

While fake news is the beginning of disinformation, it does not encompass all aspects, whereas information disorder refers to a broader range of contamination of our knowledge environment. A Council of Europe report defines three types of information disorder: misinformation, disinformation, and mal information. Misinformation is information that is intentionally misleading or incorrect to mislead others. False data is frequently used in disinformation to harm a person, social group, organization, or country. Mal-information, on the other hand, is based on fact but is harmful to a person or organization, according to Information Disorder. Gossip, defined as "the process of informally sharing value-laden knowledge about social setting participants," is one of the disinformation methods (Noon and Delbridge, 1993). Similarly, rumors are like gossip in that they "extend beyond a few individuals because their message is of universal interest" and are "underpinned by a desire for meaning or clarification to cope with the uncertainties of life" (Rosnow and Fine, 1976) differs from the concept of fake news as well.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. an epidemic that crosses international borders and typically affects a large number of people worldwide, or across a very wide area, has resulted in the rise of the 'Information Pandemic,' i.e. 'Information Disorder,' or in the simple term 'Infodemic' (Vuchinich et al, 1977), a pandemic of incorrect information presents serious risks to global health,' where the World Health Organization addresses the infodemic (A Dictionary of Epidemiology, 2014).

Misinformation and 'Infodemic': Existing Legal Frameworks

The unprecedented level of COVID-19 transmission has brought the world to its knees, with the world battling both the impact of COVID-19 and an infodemic (Rumours over Coronavirus: Police looking for 82 admins of social media pages, 2020). In the name of constitutional rights in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Singapore, such as freedom of speech and expression (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972; The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; and The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore), a certain segment of the population is spreading misleading information

and false news (known in Bangla as 'Gujob') about the extent of the Coronavirus, false health tips, and so on. Misinformation is spreading faster than the virus itself, thanks to social and electronic media use, which has now become a national concern in Bangladesh.

"All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression," says Article 39(2)(a) of Bangladesh's Constitution. Similarly, Singapore's citizens have the right to free speech and expression, peaceful assembly without arms, and association under Article 14(1). This fundamental right to express one's views and opinions through any medium is unquestionably a cornerstone of democracy. In terms of legal instruments, numerous national laws, both general and special, have been enacted in Bangladesh to combat the outbreak of the infodemic, including the Digital Security Act of 2018, the Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control, and Eradication) Act of 2018, the Disaster Management Act of 2012, and, in general, the Penal Code of 1860.

Under the Communicable Diseases Act (Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control, And Eradication) Act 2018, any person who provides false or misinformation relating to any infectious disease despite knowing the correct information shall be sentenced to a maximum of two months imprisonment and/or a fine of BDT 25,000 (US \$294), whereas the imprisonment is rigorous, imprisonment not exceeding one-year imprisonment and/or a fine of BDT 25,000 (US \$294),

On the other hand, the harsh nature of the Digital Security Act penalizes imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years and/or imposing a fine not exceeding BDT 300,000 (US \$3,533) (The Digital Security Act 2018), but if any person reoccurs similar offence, he or she will be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and/or imposing a fine not exceeding BDT 10,00,000 (US \$11775) (The Digital Security Act, 2018), while using (The Digital Security Act, 2018).

Despite criticism, the Act was primarily enacted to prevent cyberbullying, harassment, and scams, as well as to protect future generations from such crimes (The Daily Star, 2018). Apart from special laws, the provisions enumerated in Sections 177, 181, 182, and 203 of the Penal Code indicate the consequences of providing false information or statement, with imprisonment ranging from six months to three years, with or without a fine, depending on the nature of the crime (The Penal Code, 1860).

Furthermore, in accordance with Sections 269 & 270 of the Penal Code (The Penal Code, 1860), any act, whether malignantly, unlawfully, or negligently, which is, and which he knows or has reason to believe is, likely to spread the disease, which is life-threatening, shall be punishable by imprisonment, ranging from six months to two years, and/or fine, depending on the gravity of the offence. In this regard, the term "any act" can be defined as "disclosing, giving false or incorrect information," and thus providing infodemic information is a punishable offense under Bangladeshi law. As a result, governmental departments, media, and social media companies should collaborate and work with WHO,

if possible, combining both national and international health authorities, either private or public, to distort the flow of misinformation with the application of effective legal regulations, so that misinformation is not used as a pretext for repressive laws and policies.

According to security experts, disinformation efforts about COVID-19 are on the rise on the internet, as people's fears and ignorance are being exploited in Singapore. From claims that its leaders have contracted the Coronavirus to false reports of virus-related deaths and scammers posing as health professionals to steal people's personal and financial information, the government has been fighting fake news. According to the Law Minister, fake news has been "industrialized" in order to create public uncertainty and destroy society through modern means of communication. According to the law minister, the best way to combat fake news is to provide more information rather than suppress it. "Our point is, for those who believe in free speech, well, this is more speech," he said. You read the fake stuff, the true stuff, or what we say is true stuff, and you make your decision" (Choudhury, 2020). In February, the Singapore government ordered Facebook to restrict access to a blog page on its social networking platform. Facebook argued at the time that such orders were "disproportionate" and contradicted Singapore's assurance that the false news law would not be used as a censorship tool.

Singapore's government, according to Human Rights Watch, plans to severely restrict free expression and peaceful assembly in the city-state in 2020. Authorities used harsh and overbroad legislation to criminalize critical government speech or arbitrarily labeled it "false" or "misleading," and social media companies were pressured to censor content or face severe penalties. The Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), which took effect in October 2019, allows a single government minister to declare information on the internet to be "false," and to compel its "correction" or removal if it is deemed to be in the public interest (Singapore: 'Fake News' Law Limits Speech, 2021).

In another case, the press and social media are clearly involved in disseminating government information about the COVID-19 outbreak in Vietnam; however, the fake news phenomenon persists. According to a Ministry of Information and Communications study, the press published a total of 560,048 news pieces about COVID-19 translation between January 1 and May 31, 2020. (Vinh, 2021). Millions of comments and shares were generated by various news stories and articles that contained unsubstantiated, twisted, and incorrect information. After security authorities confirmed and treated 654 incidents of reporting fake news, more than 146 people were administratively sanctioned. Given that 64 million Vietnamese have Internet access and 58 million have at least one social media account, cyberspace is ripe for fake news (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, or Zalo) (cand.com.vn, 2020). Furthermore, false information about the number of confirmed cases and fatal cases in Vietnam exacerbated the public's fear and tension. False information about border closures with China, calls for Vietnam to block the border, calls for a nationwide strike, and spreading misinformation about the Coronavirus vaccine all have

a significant impact on Vietnam's security and politics. In response to fake news, the government has made early predictions and concrete initiatives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. On June 12, 2018, the Vietnamese National Assembly passed a cybersecurity law with seven chapters and 43 articles outlining activities to defend national security, ensure social order and safety in cyberspace, and the roles and obligations of agencies, organizations, and individuals involved (Lut a ninh mng, 2018). The Cybersecurity Act made it easier for the government to deal with violations committed on the internet by businesses and individuals, such as posting and spreading false information. Nonetheless, in response to the rapid spread of online comments about the novel Coronavirus in Vietnam, a new order went into effect in April 2020, imposing fines for the dissemination of "false news" or rumors on social media. Those who use social media to spread inaccurate, untrue, twisted, or defamatory information will face a fine of 10-20 million dong (\$426-\$853), roughly three to six months' basic wage in Vietnam (Nguyen and Pearson, 2020).

As a result, we can clearly see that the rise of fake news or infodemic has spread beyond Bangladesh and into other countries such as Vietnam and Singapore. Though governments enacted strict laws to prevent this, the situation has deteriorated to the point where governments can no longer control the news or the pandemic.

Debunking 'Infodemic' Cases in Bangladesh, Vietnam & Singapore

Asiatic countries stand in a vulnerable position when it comes to dense population where major people live in rural areas, have lower literacy rates and prefer to believe mostly upon traditional knowledge if they face any difficulty that allows unnecessary fear, panic and speculations among general people.

Religious Reference: Mufti (Islamic scholar) Kazi Ibrahim recently described a man named Mamun Maruf, an Italian immigrant who had a dream about Coronavirus at a religious gathering. Mamun saw a coronavirus that looked like a Kadam-flower. He inquired as to when and why it entered the world. According to the virus, a girl named Ayesha was tortured and brutally raped by Chinese soldiers. When that girl screamed in pain, those soldiers stitched her lips together. That is why Allah has dispatched his corona army. Mamun also stated that while China is torturing Uighur Muslims and keeping them in the shadows, Allah has sent a corona to China (Mahfil TV, 2020).

In another story, the news of the corona outbreak spreading from China to Europe from January to February 2020, the dominant narrative in Bangladesh portrayed the disease as alien, linking it to Europeans' "immoral" lifestyle and the Chinese people's "bizarre" food habits. This narrative was especially preached by Islamic preachers and wazirs in this area, raising racism among Muslim minds. At the same time, several physicians and researchers who supported the notion that the Coronavirus would not thrive in Bangladesh due to the warm weather predicted a scientific rejection (Zaman and Rahman, 2020).

Although it may appear insane, a large number of people can easily be influenced by the statements of Muftis, wazirs, or Hindutva organizations without providing justification to any authentic sources, primarily because some people regard them as religious holy scholars, and thus such fanatics should be brought within legal punishment immediately before the situation worsens.

High-Temperature Theory: A widespread misconception about the pandemic was that Coronavirus does not spread in warm weather. Some Bangladeshis believed and discussed that 40 degrees Celsius is the temperature at which Corona cannot propagate (SOMOY TV, 2020). However, according to the World Health Organization, exposure to the sun or temperatures above 77 degrees Fahrenheit (25 degrees Celsius) will not prevent those individuals from contracting the disease; rather, this virus can be transmitted anywhere, including countries with hot and humid weather, which is why Saudi Arabia, where the desert sun can reach temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) during the peak of summer, has reported more than 21,000 cases (Cher, 2020).

100-Year-Old Vaccine Protection: Common in many countries, including Syria, where rumors circulated that people should not be concerned about Coronavirus if they have had the (Bacille Calmette-Guérin) vaccines because it reduces the risk of infection and provides immunity, as claimed in some American journals (SOMOY TV, 2020). According to the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that BCG protects against COVID-19 infection. Despite the lack of medical evidence, Google reports that global searches for the term "BCG" have increased. The WHO is concerned that increased demand for the vaccine will lead to fewer children being immunized against tuberculosis. Japanese suppliers have expressed similar concerns, citing an increase in demand for the BCG vaccine (Coronavirus: BCG rumors and other stories fact-checked, 2020).

Social Stigmatization: With 8 confirmed cases in the country, the government closed all schools for the rest of March on March 17, 2020. Fear gripped the community. There were incidents of migrant returnees being targeted. As a result, migrants were barred from entering local stores. Many of our rural/semi-rural respondents confirmed the transfer of "stigma power" into the hands of the community (Zaman and Rahman, 2020). As a result of the assumption that migrants returning from abroad to Bangladesh must have carried Coronavirus, locals began behaving inhumanely and harassing them in various ways. Other citizens are spreading rumours that these migrants are solely to blame for the Coronavirus's arrival in Bangladesh (Call to protect rights of migrants amid coronavirus pandemic, 2020).

Behavioural Change: Several horrific fear and stigma-related incidents began to emerge in the second week of April. Attacking and harassing corona patients, obstructing their burials, harassing healthcare workers, abandoning suspected family members in the jungle, and so on have become commonplace in various areas. It was as if corona patients were personifications of unknown fear deserving of punishment (Zaman and Rahman,

2020). Although the physical distance is important in preventing virus spread, the hush-hush attitude of COVID-19 patients in Bangladesh tends to create a situation in which people in a relatively backward society regard the disease as a curse. In the current situation, the fight against COVID-19 must be waged in a more humane and compassionate manner by raising collective consciousness (Ahmed, 2020).

Fictitious Medical Healers: It was reported in Jessor Sadar Upozila's Narandrapur Union that Hazar Fakir (a medical healer) and his son Raju Fakir could administer coronavirus treatment and cure patients. In traditional Arab and Muslim tales, Hazar Fakir treated his patients with the help of Jinn, a magical spirit that can appear in the form of a human or an animal and may take possession of a person (Jinn, 2020), while his son used herbal ingredients (Taalash, 2020).

Pir Shaheb Abdul Kuddus Fakir lived in the same village as the previous case, and it was rumored that he could treat corona patients. In the treatment of Corona, he used superstitious rituals and gave him a bottle of water, a chain, and other items. He charged at least one thousand Taka for his treatment (Taalash, 2020). Boro Pir Hashem Member was well-known in the village of Durgapur, Fuchara Union, Jessor District, for treating corona patients by calling Jinn in the mirror. He charged 5,000 BDT plus a hundred taka for his gate pass (Taalash, 2020).

In Jessore's Bijaynagar Union, a man named Rahman Miyan was said to be a kabiraaz (medical healer) who could treat any patient. He treated corona patients with tabeez, water, and other remedies, charging four to five thousand Taka per patient (Taalash, 2020). A homeopathic doctor named Kazi Alam spread rumors that his homeopathic medicine could effectively treat corona patients. Even he claimed that thanks to his treatment, eight Corona patients recovered (Taalash, 2020).

These so-called "fake medical healers" have long been a part of our Bengali heritage, making a living by duping people from all over Bangladesh, particularly those in rural areas who believe in their methods of pretentious healing. Government officials should take immediate legal action before these fictitious healers continue to operate their illegal business of treating corona patients, endangering many lives.

Praying keeps away Coronavirus: When dealing with any infectious disease, religious beliefs, and scientific research should always be kept separate. Nonetheless, some Islamist thinkers have speculated that the Coronavirus would not affect Muslims. They also stated that Corona would not affect mosques, people who go to mosques for prayers, or people who pray five times a day (As-sunnah Foundation, 2020). Many people believe that they are not afraid of the Corona but of their creator, for which they pray five times a day in mosques, and that they will never be affected by praying. Due to the spread of misinformation by these Islamist thinkers, tens of thousands of people have begun to gather in mass for praying sessions or janazas, i.e. a Muslim funeral procession, in the

midst of a critical pandemic situation, ultimately endangering the lives of others (Coronavirus: Bangladesh mass prayer event prompts alarm, 2020). Even in the presence of laws and regulations, the government will find it difficult to address the entire situation, which Muslims dominate.

Carrying Rumors through Air: According to the UNICEF reference, Coronavirus is a large and heavy virus, which is why these viruses would fall to the ground and could not be airborne (Corona Virus: Choriye Pora Bhul Tottho O Koroniyo Niye Chamak Hasaner Status, 2020). According to the WHO, these droplets are so heavy that they can only travel about 3 feet (1 meter). According to other research, they can travel 23-27 feet (7–8 meters). Experts generally agree that coronaviruses are spread through the inhalation of droplets expelled from the body by a person who has the infection through coughing and sneezing. Though the WHO states that COVID-19 is not airborne, other experts appear to disagree (White, 2020), raising concerns among the public through misinformation.

Ice cream Effect: Some argue that eating ice cream and other cold foods contributes to the spread of COVID-19 infection. As a result, people began to avoid eating ice cream or other chilled products, as well as using air conditioners, and instead began to consume hot beverages, under the assumption that these viruses would directly flow into the stomach and would not be affected (Corona Virus: Choriye Pora Bhul Tottho O Koroniyo Niye Chamak Hasaner Status, 2020). In contrast, the WHO has already stated that there is no scientific evidence to support this claim (No, eating ice cream does not spread Coronavirus, 2020).

In the Name of Immunity Booster: There is no single herbal ingredient that can serve as a magic pill to protect us from COVID-19, but in Gaibanda village, Bangladesh, villagers began drinking a mixture of pepper, black pepper, and ginger to get rid of Coronavirus as an immunity booster. Nobody knew how such a widespread rumor spread throughout the country. It was also discovered that a newborn baby was fed this mixture and died as a result (Ripon, 2020). However, there is no evidence that Dr. Li Wenliang studied their effects as an eye specialist rather than a virus expert or that hospitals in China treated COVID-19 patients by offering tea (Coronavirus: Herbal remedies in India and other claims fact-checked, 2020).

Controversial Drug: According to some social media sites, Chloroquine is a possible medication to combat Coronavirus, whereas hydroxychloroquine is an anti-malarial drug, and the compound chloroquine is primarily used by patients suffering from autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis (Keshav and Binjola, 2020). Leading political figures such as President Trump have promoted hydroxychloroquine and the associated medication chloroquine, sparking heated online debate about their potential benefits and drawbacks. This has contributed to high drug demand and global supply shortages (Jack and Giles, 2020).

Similarly, Bangladesh hospitals are using the contentious malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, which has been linked to "serious and potentially life-threatening heart rhythm problems" by US authorities. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the drugs can cause dangerous heart rhythm disorders in patients with Coronavirus and should only be used in clinical trials or in hospitals where patients can be closely monitored for heart problems (Tawsia, 2020).

Without a doubt, the invention of social media has changed our lives dramatically, but it has also resulted in a post-truth society in which internet users share statements, videos, and pictures that distort reality and serve to spread fear among people.

Findings

A pandemic is not the only issue that the government of a specific country faces in these trying times; it is a global responsibility, but with the rapid spread of information through social and electronic media, it has become a major concern. The study's overall scenario indicates that people's and young minds' lower literary rates are heavily influenced using social and electronic media, where they can be easily manipulated simply by amplifying with click baits. Perhaps public literacy and awareness have fuelled the spread of misinformation, but that does not excuse one from being self-conscious, self-ignorant, and self-educated, especially given that the number of internet users in Bangladesh increased by 5.8 million (+9.5%) between 2019 and 2020. Despite imposing governmental regulations on lockdowns, people continue to defy lockdowns for shopping and travel, demonstrating how a certain portion of the population can be self-ignorant (Mahmud, 2020), endangering the lives of the entire nation.

Taking advantage of this critical situation, several scammers posing as health experts or medical healers are profiting from rural people by administering fake corona medicines or health tips. In this regard, either imprisonment or fine has been penalized in many instances (Corona Niramoyer Oshudh Birkirir Daye Kabirajer Karadondo, 2020) with the assistance of the Executive Magistrate as well as other law enforcement agencies, under the enforcement of the Penal Code, 1860, or the Mobile Court Act, 2009, or the Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control, and Eradication) Act, 2018, or the Disaster Management Act, 2012.

On the other hand, spreading false information through electronic media is punishable under the Digital Security Act of 2018, under which the government has taken swift action (Hossain, 2020). Despite harsh criticism for restricting freedom of thought and conscience, speech and expression, and press as enumerated in Article 39(2), Bangladesh has been subjected to major national cyber security issues on a continuous basis, beginning with 379 cases in 2016 where incident of Bangladesh Bank's reserve heist took place, stealing approximately US\$81 million, to 870 cases in 2018 (Wardad, 2019), and as a result, enactment and enforcement.

Every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion (The Constitution Of The People's Republic Of Bangladesh 1972), and no one shall be discriminated against on the basis of religion (The Constitution Of The People's Republic Of Bangladesh 1972), despite the fact that the culture of Bangladesh is deeply embedded with religious sentiments, particularly Islam, which is obviously the majority state religion, but emphasizing the country's fundamental ideology promotes secularism. Two of the case studies deal with the influence of Islamic scholars on ordinary people in relation to the infodemic, misrepresenting basic beliefs that Islam opposes. This has fuelled people's desire to perform religious rituals in crowded places, as thousands of people; approximately 100,000 attended the namaz-e-janaza of an Islamist party leader, despite the government's imposition of lockdown restrictions and the country's high rate of coronavirus cases and deaths (Social Distance Rule Turned on Its Head by Funeral Crowd, 2020). Till the 18th of June 2020, the total number of infected cases is 98,489, with 1,305 deaths, with Dhaka having the highest infected rate with 24,504 active cases (IEDCR, n.d.). Perhaps the rate could have been lower if people were more aware of what to believe and what not to follow when it comes to fake health tips and other precautionary measures on the internet, relying solely on verified sources.

The proposed research study also debunks some well-known myths about fake immunity boosters, religious people being immune to Corona, Corona being air-borne, Corona only killing in warm weather, and the use of hydroxychloroquine drug and BCG vaccine. The World Health Organization (WHO) expressed concern in this regard, urging the public, particularly those who spend time online, to post "factual messages" and reliable information from reputable sources.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recently stated during a live Twitter briefing that the WHO is fighting not only the virus but also trolls and conspiracy theorists. To help ensure that people receive accurate information, the WHO, a United Nations specialized agency responsible for international public health, has shared a list of myth busters on the virus or the disease caused by it, which has killed 51,000 people worldwide, including six in Bangladesh (The Financial Express, 2020).

Due to the widespread dissemination of misinformation on electronic and social media, the research study revealed a devastating issue, shedding light on the true nature of social stigmatization and how society was willing to treat inhumanely Bengali migrants, individuals who tested positive for COVID-19, recovered from COVID-19 sickness, or were released from the COVID-19 quarantine, along with their families, or people who have underlying health conditions that cause COVID-19.

This stigmatization can manifest as other people avoiding or rejecting them, being denied healthcare and housing, and being subjected to verbal and physical abuse. Individuals may also suffer from loneliness, depression, anxiety, or public humiliation, all of which can be detrimental to their mental health. As a result of the inhumane treatment, people are now

concealing their medical conditions after testing COVID-19 positive, only for fear of social exclusion.

Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Vietnam, on the other hand, faced similar issues due to the spread of fake news during both the lockdown and times of coronavirus expansion. The governments of those countries did put in place legal provisions and law enforcement officials, but the rumors or "infodemic" had a large impact on people. So, based on those countries, the authors could easily conclude that not only Bangladesh but also Singapore and Vietnam, had been severely impacted by both the pandemic and the "infodemic."

The preceding circumstances elaborate on the hypothetical basis of the extent of misinformation that can have an impact on the lives of individuals where the truth can be easily distorted, and this distortion of truth has the potential to become an established fact if such misinformation persists over time.

Recommendations

Self-Awareness: Neither laws, regulations nor preventive measures can alleviate the issue of infodemic cases unless a prudent citizen decides to self-educate before putting national health at risk. In this case, if any news or information is published online, the concerned individual must first verify whether it was published from leading national newspapers or internationally renowned news sources; if not, such information should be avoided immediately. For better advice, that person can consult with WHO authorities and, if necessary, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of Bangladesh regarding corona treatment and health advice. Furthermore, any information obtained via social media can be verified using this website (<https://www.cirt.gov.bd/>). It is best to avoid non-official stories, unquoted stories, photos without verification, and spreading fake news. As a result, a prudent person should prefer to follow mainstream media rather than unofficial social media content and should limit excessive, unnecessary news content.

Action by Law Enforcement Agency: To combat the spread of infodemic cases on social media, Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) has established a cyber-verification cell to combat the ongoing spread of fake news and rumours in April 2020. As a commendable initiative, if a person comes across any misinformation on social and electronic media, he or she can file a complaint directly with the concerned website (<http://www.rab.gov.bd/>) or by emailing them at this address (intbr07@gmail.com).

Technological Knowledge in the Education System: As previously stated, the government should take the necessary steps to ensure proper education to 90%-100% of our country's literate population. Because the more people who are educated, the better they will understand what is correct and what is incorrect. However, the national educational systems at the primary and secondary levels are still based on the ancient

British version, so students are not learning about the latest technologies and applications, such as social and electronic media, and how to use them safely. Positively, the government has decided to digitize educational institutions, but this is insufficient. Also, our technologies and technological research must be as advanced as those of other countries in order for our people to understand how those technologies can be used and abused. Aside from using those applications and technologies, teachers must teach students how to find the right and justified news and information, as well as how to examine information that has been floating around.

Societal Responsibility: Society has a significant impact on our daily lives. As members of society, we must communicate with one another, and in this process, we share a lot of news and information by gossiping. Misinformation of any kind can endanger the lives of others. As a result, we must be mindful of what we are saying and sharing with others. Even though social distance and lockdown situations are strictly enforced, people are still communicating with their neighbours or friends via social media.

Even a small amount of false information about this Coronavirus can be fatal to others. As a result, people in society must be more aware and thoughtful about what they share or discuss. In this case, commissioners, councillors, and law enforcement officials can do regular milking about verified announcements and pandemic prevention measures so that people are aware of the facts.

Educating Family Members: Because the family is the most important institution in human life, we should take care of our family members. Most importantly, our fathers, mothers, and elders have little knowledge of technology and expertise in verifying news. That is why it is our responsibility to teach them the distinctions between verified news portals, social media news, and real news vs. fake news.

The role of the media is important in promoting verified and authentic information because a large portion of the Bangladeshi population still relies on traditional media. Before circulating any news in the mass media or publishing in both print and electronic media, the authority must confirm the authenticity of that information by cross-checking with secured governmental sources, as mentioned earlier in the major findings segment, and, if necessary, with renowned international media sources.

Furthermore, the media can frequently promote precautionary measures, the importance of social distancing, washing hands for at least two minutes, using masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers, what to believe or not believe about COVID-19, important hotline numbers, home remedial COVID-19 measures, and so on. As a result, traditional media should be viewed as an educational forum for individuals stigmatized by COVID-19 to speak out against stereotyping.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Other Organizations: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other voluntary organizations can help in this situation. They can use social media and websites to inform people about true and valid information. Personal caution is required when sharing information on social media sites and conversing with others. It is risky to share any information with others without first verifying it with trusted or established sources such as national news sites or government officials.

Conclusion

Despite being a developing market economy and the world's seventh fastest growing economy with a 7.3% real GDP annual growth rate, spreading misinformation can cause panic and dismay among people and can affect our worthiness both nationally and internationally, either socially or economically. A series of attacks on Buddhist monasteries, shrines, and Buddhist residents' homes in Ramu Upazila, Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, led by local mobs, occurred several years ago on September 29, 2012. As a result of such an incident, which occurred in response to the tagging of an image depicting the desecration of a Quran on the timeline of a fake Facebook account with a Buddhist male name, 12 Buddhist temples, and monasteries, as well as 50 houses, were destroyed. However, the entire situation was slanderous because that Buddhist persona did not do this, and thus he was innocent of the accusation. Later, the violence spread to other districts of Chattogram Division, with Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples being particularly targeted. Over 300 people were arrested, and approximately 25,000 people were involved in Buddhist-directed violence. That single incident exemplifies what misinformation and fake news can do. Singapore and Vietnam, two important Southeast Asian countries, were also affected by the Coronavirus and rumors or fake news about the pandemic. The governments enacted laws and restricted the media, and the infodemic was cruel enough to spread across borders. Nonetheless, the current situation is far more delicate. A single piece of misinformation or misleading can be fatal. In their case studies, the authors discovered a plethora of incidents and misinformation, dubbed "infodemic," regarding this pandemic.

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