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INFODEMIC AMIDST PANDEMIC: MORE CHALLENGING FOR MENTAL HEALTH

*Dr. Varsha Sharma**

ABSTRACT

Amidst the panic environment of the pandemic due to COVID-19, all of us came across a novel issue known as 'Infodemic'. An infodemic is related to the availability of the excessive information, which may include the false and the fake information related to any issue concerned with public health. Research evidences from the emergence of this issue have indicated that infodemic is as dangerous as the pandemic itself. Due to digitalisation of media and increased dependency on social media for any type of information has simplified and accelerated the process of fake information becoming viral quickly. Infodemic can impart more adverse effects on mental health than the pandemic itself. The need of the present era is to understand the severity of this issue. Effective infodemic management is very much required. Present paper is aimed to evaluate the causes and issues related to the present phenomena and to suggest some effective strategies. Infodemic Appropriate behaviour is required just like the Covid Appropriate Behaviour.

KEYWORDS: INFODEMIC, PANDEMIC, MENTAL HEALTH, INFODEMIC MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The life out of the globe has witnessed the cruelty of COVID 19 during last few months. Probably all of us recorded so bitter, frustrating, stress provoking and threatening experiences for the very first time. No doubt the present time is challenging as it's a pandemic but the plight of the hour is, we are more stressed due to infodemic!

Knowingly or unknowingly all of us are a part of this infodemic. The term 'infodemic' came into use throughout the world since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019 and became known globally within a brief period (Kulatunga,2021)

An infodemic can be defined as availability of too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It causes confusion and risk-taking behaviors that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response (WHO, 2021).

In a way Infodemic is more dangerous as it intensifies the wrong information among masses that can lead to adverse and hazardous consequences. Due to advancement of digital media and

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social sites infodemic can take place within minutes. The wrong and misleading information gets viral very fast. An infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health and the health of people around them.

An infodemic is an overabundance of information, both online and offline. It includes deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals. Misinformation and disinformation can be harmful to people's physical and mental health; increase stigmatization; threaten precious health gains; and lead to poor observance of public health measures, thus reducing their effectiveness and endangering countries' ability to stop the pandemic (WHO newsletter, 2021).

Objective

Critically evaluate the causes and issues related to infodemic during COVID 19 and suggesting strategies for infodemic management.

Causes and issues related to Infodemic

It's a matter of great concern that despite being so much aware of our responsibilities as a good citizen, good friend, good relative and a responsible stakeholder of our society, why we get into the trap of this infodemic? Some major issues related to this phenomena are as follows-

Tendency of doing unverified forwards

Unknowingly we have developed a habit of forwarding messages further without giving notice of the authenticity of the sources. All of us collectively make a viral network for the fake information. In this sense all of us are responsible for the same.

Tendency of becoming 'Mr. or Ms. Updated'

Sometimes the tendency of becoming the always updated individual we tend to forward the information within a minute of its receipt. In this hurry we forget to check out the relevance and reliability of the information.

Tendency of irresponsibility

Infodemic is as real as COVID -19. As with the virus we must take every precaution to protect ourselves and our loved ones. If it is not stopped quickly, fake news shared on social media quickly becomes viral and can influence a large number of users (Naiffi,2021).

We should work on our non serious attitude and should come out of this irresponsible attitude.

Dangerous for public health

Infodemic is sometimes more fatal then the actual pandemic situations. As it promotes the false information which can lead to irrational behaviors. The mis-information on social media can create panic and anxiety. (Infectious Disease Report, 2021)

In the specific case of COVID-19, this results in the overload of information and misinformation about the pandemic in traditional media, but especially in social media/digital social networks,

namely its origin, transmission, diagnosis and treatment in a pandemic context, among other negative limitations. This naturally hampers the combat against this pandemic, both preventatively and curatively, generating higher uncertainty (Nacem & Bhatti, 2020; Biasio et al., 2020; Anwar et al., 2020; Amit Aharon, Ruban, & Dubovi, 2020; Li & Liu, 2020; Halat et al., 2020; Al-Zaman, 2020; Abdulai, Tiffere, Adam, & Kabanunye, 2021; Stokken & Børsen, 2020).

Zaman 2021 stated that COVID-19-related online fake news poses a threat to Indian public health. In response, this study seeks to understand the five important features of COVID-19-related social media fake news by analyzing 125 Indian fake news. Most of the COVID-19-related fake news is negative (63.2%) which could be a real threat to public health. These results may contribute to the academic understanding of social media fake news during the present and future health-crisis period.

Easy and free availability of social sites

Easy and free availability of social sites without any restriction enhances the risk of infodemic. People tend to do forward the information in bulk. Within fraction of seconds the particular information reaches to large number of individuals.

Strategies for Infodemic Management

Just like the pandemic management infodemic management is also required. Infodemic management is the systematic use of risk- and evidence-based analysis and approaches to manage the infodemic and reduce its impact on health behaviors during health emergencies.

Infodemiology is now acknowledged by public health organizations and the WHO as an important emerging scientific field and critical area of practice during a pandemic. From the perspective of being the first "infodemiologist" who originally coined the term almost two decades ago, Eysenbach (2020) suggested four pillars of infodemic management: (1) information monitoring (infoveillance); (2) building eHealth Literacy and science literacy capacity; (3) encouraging knowledge refinement and quality improvement processes such as fact checking and peer-review; and (4) accurate and timely knowledge translation, minimizing distorting factors such as political or commercial influences.

As per the analysis I am proposing that the following strategy will be effective for effective infodemic management-

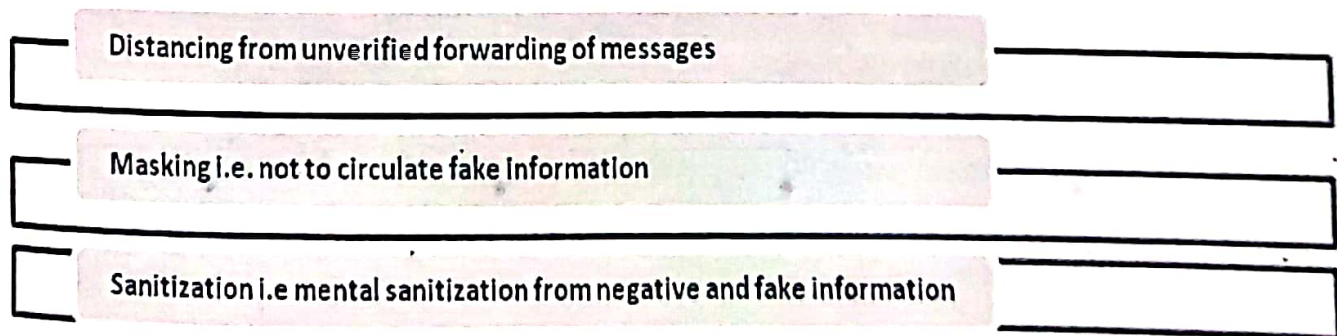


Figure-1.1 INFODEMIC APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

It is very necessary to understand and develop the responsible behavior towards the infodemic otherwise things can become worse. During these days all of us came across so many fake information which were negative in nature. We received such information, got panic and do a forward immediately. Whether there is the issue of impact of covid vaccine, some medication, or any another related to COVID 19. Such behavior cannot be understood as the appropriate one. Figure 1.1 indicates that if we want to get rid of the adverse effects of infodemic then we should follow the infodemic appropriate behavior.

Conclusion

Above analysis indicates that we should not take the infodemic with non serious attitude because it is more challenging for our mental health. It can also have adverse psychosomatic effects on our health.

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