Role of social Media in COVID-19 Pandemic

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has produced a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and everyday lives. Not only the spread rate of contagion and patterns of transmission endangered our sense of security, but the safety measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus also require social distancing by refraining from doing what is inherently human, which is to find comfort in the company of others. Within this context of physical threat, social and physical distancing, the role of the different mass media channels and social media in lives on individual, social and societal levels cannot be underestimated.

Social and mass media (broadcast and digital) has ability to convey a sense of unity by reaching large number audience/users. Social media may also provide grounds for misinformation and discrimination. People can utilize the flexibility and pervasiveness of social media technologies to increase the public's adherence to the safety measures suggested by global health organizations to combat the spread of COVID-19. Different media industries and channels for mass communication promote adaptive responses to foster positive health attitudes and adherence to preventive measures.

Social media can play positive role during the COVID-19 pandemic by promoting effective strategies for helping individuals in dealing with social and physical distancing and reducing stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and inequalities.

Social media like Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, snapchat and WhatsApp are major source for spreading information and news in public now a days but unfortunately in developing countries like Pakistan it creates more panic and spreading misinformation or fake news. Majority of the people who see misinformation about COVID-19 may think that what they are reading is true and can cause panic. People in Pakistan are inclined to share the misinformation and fuel the fear of something that isn't necessarily true. Misinformation, especially about COVID-19, can cause panic. People who see misinformation on social media may think what they are reading is actually true. Social media is the source of conspiracy theory that corona virus was developed to launch biological war against China for suppressing their economic growth. The rumors also spread through social media in China and other countries that corona virus was genetically engineered in bioweapons laboratory of Wuhan and then released worldwide which threatened the working relationship between Chinese and Western scientists for development of vaccine against COVID-19. In Iran the misinformation also disseminated through twitter that remedies which are not scientifically proven e.g. herbal products, drinks containing mint and spices like saffron offer cure against COVID-19.

During times of emergency and disaster, urgent questions arise and require immediate response. The problem in developing countries is that officials don't consistently provide the accurate information that's required very quickly. It is bitter truth in our society that subjective opinions and unverified claims spread rapidly through social and mass media in public than valid scientific and biomedical facts. The system how and why people should be held accountable for what they say in social media is weak.

In COVID-19 pandemic public officials are cautious about making premature pronouncements, instead carefully crafting statements to ensure accuracy and avoid the pitfalls of misinterpretation and exaggeration. Somewhat paradoxically, this careful approach may contribute to the formation of an information vacuum that rumors and falsehoods are all too ready to fill.

Governments can advertise through mass media to refrain the people from posting anything on social media about COVID-19 that makes fun of, ridicules, or minimizes the situation. Public health personnel, teachers, religious and political leaders must come forward to post about COVID-19 on social media that is informative and make sure that their followers know what's happening and the situation overall in their premises, local, National and international level.

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