

Seeking Clarity in a World Infected by COVID-19 and Fake News

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Abstract

The world has been changed irrevocably by the infectious severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. COVID-19 affects everyone everywhere. A separate and significant, though not necessarily as infectious, malady affecting many, though not all, individuals worldwide, is “Fake News”, known alternatively as yellow journalism, junk news, pseudo news, false news, alternative facts, hoaxes, misinformation, disinformation, fabricated news, corrupt news, unfathomable nonsense, or outright lies, which are typically based on provably false statements, and are distributed widely through mainstream news media and social media. The commentary presents a brief history of COVID-19 and fake news, and existing international efforts to deal with each of these infections.

Keywords: COVID-19; Fake news; Infectious; News media; Social media; International efforts

Introduction

The world has been changed irrevocably by the infectious severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

COVID-19 affects everyone everywhere.

As of 22 September 2020, according to Worldometers, there were more than 31 million reported infections and over 970,000 deaths worldwide, both of which are known to be substantially lower than the true figures [1].

A separate and significant, though not necessarily as infectious, malady affecting many, though not all, individuals worldwide, is “Fake News”, known alternatively as yellow journalism, junk news, pseudo news, alternative facts, hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation [2]. Fake news, false news, fabricated news, corrupt news, unfathomable nonsense, or outright lies, are typically based on provably false statements, and which are distributed widely through mainstream news media and social media.

Fake news also affects everyone everywhere.

The following section presents a brief history of COVID-19 and fake news, and international scientific, medical, and health care efforts to deal with each of these infections. The final section provides some concluding remarks.

A Brief History of COVID-19 and Fake News

Fake news seems to have originated in the small town of Veles, Macedonia [3], and was popularized in 2014 by BuzzFeed News media editor, Craig Silverman [4].

President Donald Trump has claimed ownership of Fake News as his invention, which is a genuine case of true fake news. In Trump’s parallel universe, fake news is anything that does not paint a cloying and obsequiously glossy picture of himself. This version of fake news might be called Trumpian fake news, or Trumpian news.

Examples of Trump’s confused tweets containing fake news on Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un and nuclear weapons are examined by means of a data mining technique, sentiment analysis [5]. A set of 115 tweets on global warming, climate change, and weather by President Trump, from 2011 to 2015, are analysed by means of sentiment analysis [6]. Trump’s version of Democratic America and similarities with Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) Germany are examined by Allen et al. by means of various data mining techniques, including sentiment analysis [7]. A comparison of President Trump’s State of the Union Addresses (SOUs) with those of President Obama, and a series of recent tweets by Trump, are evaluated by Allen et al. [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic might recede in intensity in the coming years, though it will not necessarily disappear alongside the SARS epidemic, or the ongoing but relatively inconspicuous MERS epidemic. However, fake news is embedded in the vernacular language, and is clearly here to stay.

How are individuals expected to seek clarity in a world infected by COVID-19 and fake news? Even the science that is presented by undisputed experts is deliberately ignored or dismissed, including by Dr Anthony Fauci, the leading infectious diseases expert and respected Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) [9], who has stated repeatedly the need to adhere to health care recommendations in order to restrict the spread of COVID-19.

World experts at the renowned US Centers for Disease Control and Infection (CDC), under the direction of Dr Robert Redfield Jr. [10], focuses attention on a wide range of infectious diseases.

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Like the US CDC, the European Union has a related agency, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) (2020), which is much less highly politicized as compared with the current status of the CDC in the 2020 Presidential cycle [11].

The World Health Organization (WHO) has established a list of more than 750,000 published research papers in the “WHO COVID-19 Global literature on coronavirus disease” database to “bring the world’s scientists and global health professionals together to accelerate the research and development process, and develop new norms and standards to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and help care for those affected.” [12].

The database has numerous informative website connections to leading university and commercial publishing houses, scientific journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, and leading medical research journals, such as *The Lancet*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network*, each of which has associated COVID-19 Resource Centers on the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting clinical laboratory trials and reports, physical and mental illness healthcare issues, and risk management strategies, among others.

Conclusion

There does not yet seem to be any international organization, such as the “Weird Humour Onology Scholars” on first base (WHOS on FIRST) to deal with the mindlessness of fake news, but that is currently in the planning stages.

It is disconcerting that there are many individuals and organizations that, to this day, have questionable doubts about the moon landing, or are registered members of the Flat Earth Society, or both, among many oxymorons that include love hate relationships and deafening silence. Raising issues such as climate change, global warming, and the widely-held benefits of vaccinations against the seasonal flu, and masking to increase protection against the spread of COVID-19, will cause a firestorm of derision from anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers.

COVID-19 and fake news affect everyone everywhere.

It is a statement of fact that fake news will outlive the COVID-19 pandemic, with only one of these infections being directly life threatening.

One cannot ignore science in the fight against COVID-19 and fake news, including fake news about COVID-19.

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