

Misinformation During a Pandemic: Experience of WhatsApp users During the Coronavirus Outbreak

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Abstract

Through various public health and healthcare practitioners, governments are doing their best to identify and contain the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, the world is seeing an ever-increasing surge in the dissemination of uncontrolled information on the virus through social media, which has facilitated the spread of misinformation. There is no scientific evidence supporting the spread of misinformation on the pandemic in Ghana. This study aimed at providing evidence on the presence and spread of Coronavirus-related misinformation via WhatsApp in Ghana. An online questionnaire was used to collect data from WhatsApp users in Ghana. In all, 704 respondents were sampled using the virtual snowballing technique. Subsequently, Microsoft Excel® and GraphPad Prism 6.00® were used for statistical analysis where appropriate. The study recorded a high prevalence of COVID-19 related misinformation among the respondents. It was also verified that most of the respondents obtained their information from informal sources. Even though the study's findings showed that the fear of the pandemic was the main reason for the spread of misinformation, the study also revealed that some respondents were hesitant to disseminate misinformation because of their moral principles of not sharing unverified information. Equally, it was gathered that there was low patronage of the library as a source of health-related information. Misinformation is a threat to the cure of the pandemic. This menace calls for stakeholders in the health information value chain to collaborate to appreciate the dynamics of information consumers to adequately meet their needs accordingly.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Coronavirus, Misinformation, WhatsApp, Ghana.*