

COVID-19 and the Blue Genie

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Received: June 16, 2020

Published: June 30, 2020

Editorial

In stories, in the cave of Wonders, Aladdin finds the magical lamps, rubs it, and unwittingly summoning the omnipotent Genie who lives inside it. The Genie has the power to achieve anything in the world, but he tells Aladdin that he grants him three wishes except murder, romance, and the resurrection of the dead. In reality, things appear to be the same, but with some difference.

On Feb 4, 2004, Mark Zuckerberg and his group found Facebook, the company that presents now in the Silver Valley [1]. Since then and Facebook passed through too many changes until it reached the blue app we know soon. Now anybody can touch the blue app like Aladdin, and it will tell them anything is happening anywhere in the world like the Genie. Even though does our blue Genie always tell us the truth?

On Dec 31, 2019, the whole world was celebrating the New Year 2020, while the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in China was reported about cases of severe acute pneumonia of unknown cause were detected in Wuhan [2]. This new disease was discovered to be caused by a novel type of coronaviruses that's transmitted by droplet infection. WHO chose the name COVID-19, which means coronavirus disease 2019.

Since that day, the governments, one by one, have started curfews in their countries. Everyone has stayed at home, but tried to keep in touch with the world and know the last news about the pandemic depending on social media, especially Facebook. The last digital 2020 global overview report shows that: more than 4.5 billion people now use the internet, while social media users have passed the 3.8 billion. If we compare January 2020 to January 2019, the growth rates are +2.4% increases in mobile phone users, +7.0% increases in internet users, and +9.2% increases inactive social media users. Nearly 60% of the world's population is already online, and the mean daily time spent with media is 6 hours and 43 minutes per person, which means we spent about 1/3 of our waking time using the internet. The latest trends suggest that more than half of the world's total population will use social media by the middle of this year [3].

Unfortunately, this was associated with another outbreak of false information [infodemic] and a lot of rumors. While scrolling down through Facebook, there were posts about the source of COVID-19. They said it came from eating bats, which is a behavior of the Chinese. Others said it was due to sexual contact with animals. Meanwhile, some news reported that it was created by China in a trial to create a biological weapon. Some started to blame China, and others blamed the USA and accused it with the creation of the virus.

After that, others were talking about the harmful effect of Ibuprofen and other NSAIDs on corona cases. There was also news about drugs that were used for other diseases like malaria and can treat corona cases. This led to a vacancy of markets from antimalarial medicines in Egypt. Another funny rumor in Egypt was about the use of "Sha Law Law," a type of Egyptian food in Upper Egypt, in the prevention of infection of COVID-19. However, the rumor that got the most popular was the 5G conspiracy. This theory claims that 5G helps in the spread of the corona virus, which is against any logical thinking.

Guy Berger, the Director for Policies and strategies regarding Communication and Information at UNESCO, said: "There seems to be barely an area left untouched by disinformation about the COVID-19 crisis, ranging from the origin of coronavirus, through to unproven prevention and cures, and encompassing responses by governments, companies, celebrities, and others" and added "In a time of high fears, uncertainties and unknowns, there is a fertile ground for fabrications to flourish and grow. The big risk is that any single falsehood that gains traction can negate the significance of a body of true facts. When disinformation is repeated and amplified, including by influential people, the grave danger is that information which is based on truth, ends up having an only marginal impact" [4]. Psychologically speaking, public health emergencies affect the health and well-being of both individuals (causing, for example, confusion and stigma) and communities. Extensive research in disaster mental health has established that emotional distress presents in the affected populations. Add to this reading, watching, or listening to this "mis-news." So people become more afraid of the virus. This may be translated into

their emotions and behavior and become more anxious and respond aggressively even to the usual events in their life and noncompliant with public health directives [5]. An obvious example for that, in a Daqahlyya, a governorate in Egypt, people in a village refused to attend the funeral, or bury a doctor died with COVID-19 infection for fear of the spread of infection to them. Even more, they made demonstrations against her burial in their country.

From an economic point of view, countries entered a vicious circle of curfew, work, and school closure, inadequate resources for medical response, and decreased income, while the demand still as it is or even increased and the bad psychological condition of their nations. And so, we can say the fake news and decrease of funds worked together and lead to the strange behaviors we see now and helped in the spread of rumors [5]. These outbreaks of COVID-19 and misinformation are a great challenge not only to the psyche of the people but also to the health system. This misinformation in etiology, prevention, outcome, and cure of the disease has a harmful impact on the population, masking good practices like hand washing, isolation, and decrease compliance of infected patients. An example of this misinformation is that the use of high doses of Chloroquine, the antimalarial drug, for the treatment of COVID, after the "mis-news" about its effectiveness. Another one, and actually the most dangerous one, is describing this disease as a stigma, which made a patient in India to attempt suicide after hearing about his positivity for corona [6].

On searching for the source of these rumors, we will find nothing except for some people working for their agenda. Mrs. Berger said: "The motives for spreading disinformation are many, and include political aims, self-promotion, and attracting attention as part of a business model. Those who do so, play on emotions, fear, prejudices, and ignorance, and claim to bring meaning and certainty to a reality that is complex, challenging and fast-changing" (4). We are not sure about the source of these rumors misinformation, but we are confident that social media platforms provide a rich environment for their rapid spreading.

That's why WHO cooperates with several social media platforms and companies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Linked In, and Microsoft [7] to overcome misinformation and to ensure that the people worldwide whenever they search for COVID-19 or related concerns, they directed to valid sources of information at WHO website or US center for disease control. Although efforts made by WHO, the unverified sources of information are the most popular as over the last months, posts of WHO and CDC gathered only several hundred thousands of reacts while other sites that share conspiracy theories and hoaxes gathered over 52 million [8].

It may come as a result of creating dramatic headlines by those sites to increase viewership and, as a consequence, down out

credible sources. A study found that much misinformation doubt directly or indirectly the actions qualification and permissibility of public authorities that are resulting in many difficulties facing these authorities to be credible by populations [9].

There are compelling needs for overcoming misinformation on social media platforms as a reduction of wrong advice by 10% and making people stop sharing it by 20% will reduce the severity of the pandemic (10). Eventually, all rumors are like a gangrenous part of our society, so their removal is the best solution. It must be replaced by correct ones to keep our society's body healthy. Mass media should help people to follow the right source of information. Online ports and persons get involved in the production, and sharing such fake news and information should be presented to justice. All authorities, media, societies, and everybody have to collaborate to put an end to this chaos.

Conflict of Interest

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest.

Funding Statement

None

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