

Chapter 4

Role of Social Media in the COVID–19 Pandemic: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Today, social networks and media have become an integral part of everyone's daily existence. The rising popularity of social media has increased tenfold during the times of COVID-19 when people were forced to isolate following social distancing norms. Between July 2020 and July 2021, active social users grew to 520 million. The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in the usage of digital platforms not only for entertainment purposes but also for educational and corporate reasons. Hence, the spread of information has increased excessively on every social media platform. This has resulted in an equal rise of false information. The term infodemic was widely introduced during COVID-19 to explain the harmful effects of misinformation through social media. The chapter, hence, argues that the advantages of social media surpasses the dangers of misinformation. It discusses the role of COVID-19 in digitalization and how social media has helped in provision of various industries.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, social media is one of the most widely used interactive technologies. Social media has not only made creation and exchange of information simple, but has also paved a way for people to share and develop their career interests and ideas. It has become a medium of expression through quickly building networks and virtual communities (Kietzmann & Kristopher, 2021; Obar & Wildman, n.d.). Social media consumers from all over the world actively use web-based applications and software to use social media sites. This has become possible only due to the widespread use of electronic devices like computers, mobiles, and smartphones etc.

Social media development began with rudimentary platforms (Kirkpatrick, 2011). GeoCities, established in November 1994, was one of the first social networking sites. It was followed by Classmates.com in December 1995 and soon afterwards, SixDegrees.com in May 1997 (NGAK, 2011). Unlike instant-messaging and chat clients, SixDegrees was the first online company that served people using their real names instead of bots (Kirkpatrick, 2011). It allowed registered people to maintain profiles, friend lists, and school affiliations. As a result, SixDegrees was regarded as the very first social networking site, according to various media channels like CBS News (NGAK, 2011).

However, social media has altered the way we all connect with one another on the internet. It has enabled us to learn what is occurring in the world in real time, to interact with one another and keep in contact with long-distance acquaintances, and to have access to an infinite quantity of knowledge at our fingertips. In many ways, social media has enabled many people to connect with others online, making the world appear more approachable.

The use of social media has further flourished during the last few years. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rapid consumption of social media services. It has now become an integral and popular communication tool for information generation, consumption and dissemination. Today, more than 3.8 billion people, worldwide, use social media (Kemp, 2020). Researchers have found that even though continents like America and Europe have ubiquitous social media usage, after pandemic scenarios have changed. Today, Asian nations such as Indonesia are at the top of the list of social media users (Social Media: What Countries Use It Most & What Are They Using?, 2019). A rise in the usage of social media can be seen via Figure 1. In only a short time, the number of users has increased from 3.59 billion to 4.48 billion.

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