Digital Literacy: A Counteractive Measure to Thwart the Fallacies of Infodemic

Suyog Chandrashekhar Savant and Kailash Asawa
Department of Public Health Dentistry, Pacific Dental College & Hospital, Pacific Academy of Higher Education and Research University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT
Education and literacy provided through the recent media have been abundantly flowing information on the digital platforms. However, the so-called digital channels have been a source of misinformation, myths, misconceptions, creating chaos, and panic in the world. The same platforms can be utilised to counter the effects of infodemic through the multiple strategies like stagnating and filtrating the misinformation, eliminating the stigmatic beliefs of the people through the use of social media and education. Scientific research and psychological help can be the strategies to cope with mental pressure and help in mentoring the traumatised individuals through the digital education.

Key Words: Infodemic, Digital literacy, Education.


After the COVID-19 event, the world news was flooded with speculations and informations that paved the way for the policymakers to make decisions and for the people to follow them.¹ For the strengthening of the health of the public, the policymakers were supposed to provide a platform that could dissipate health literacy facts through the proper channels. However, the so-called social channels that were supposed to provide education proved to be the source for the spread of misinformation, myths, and misconceptions that snowballed the health market with false news and easy cures.²

Different cultural mediums with culturally-specific field and different modes of communication are truly responsible for conveying the information to the community.³ The lacunae in health literacy, the stigma, the deep-rooted beliefs, the customs, and the ignorance towards proper healthcare, can be specifically addressed through social media platforms. Proper use of audio-visual aids, for spreading health education, providing the substantiated information, providing the right numerical regarding the morbidity and mortality of the patients, and encouraging proper healthcare policies to be adopted through digital mediums could be the right step in revolutionising the healthcare world.⁴

Multiple health strategies in disseminating health-related facts could be done through brochures, videos, podcasts, radio handles, and blogs. Such integration and intertwining of the social modes could help the population to be educated and literate as well.⁵ Digital literacy is the burning issue post COVID times as different strategies and coping mechanisms can be used to reduce the level of stress and improve mental health. The predefined objective of this viewpoint was to project digital literacy as one of the coping mechanisms or strategies to reduce emotional and mental trauma rather than a self-inflicting medium giving rise to fear and panic.

Depending upon the advantages of digital information, different means could be proposed to spread digital health literacy which could reach the different factions of society. Deceptive information is one of the biggest dangers to humanity. It can be uncertainty, the anxiety of unknown, and fear of death. COVID-19 was an event triggered by uncertainty, and one of the reasons that gave rise to the spread of false information, psychological depression, and all that was needed to stop the roots of misinformation at the given point. Various social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter could have been used to disseminate the right information.⁶ Health agencies in the city or community having their social account handle could be used to adopt proper health practices and counter the spreading myths. Online health-related brochures, addressing the concerns of the people along with feedback may be used to reach many people to eliminate any false circulation of information to help the communities to adopt healthy practices.⁷

Opposing besmirchment has to be enforced through appropriate government policies. COVID-19 was a pandemic that originated in the Wuhan district of China and the entire world was blaming
the Eastern Asia for the havoc caused by the pandemic. Digital world or the new 21st century is currently in a state where stigmatisation of certain races, creeds, religions, or even regions can occur rapidly because of the technological advancements. Social media can be used as a platform to spread hate messages, and at the same times, digital platforms can be used to restrict or target certain groups. Anti-hate messages, proper audio and visual aids for education, counselling of the groups of communities on proper platforms, and rendering mental and psychological health can be achieved through these digital platforms.4,9

Virtual counselling is an excellent approach to deal with panic, anxiety, and chaos. Vulnerability to fear always results in psychological depression or nervous breakdown. Certain sections of society like the elderly or mothers had to cope with the fear of health for which digital platforms would have been useful. Free helpline numbers could have been provided by the health agencies round the clock to provide phonic counselling or consultations for the vulnerable group. Addressing their fears, educating them, and providing relief from mental and psychological stress would have been an effective role of the digital media.10

Contributing to scientific research through digital media provides researchers an abundance of information at the click of a finger. Access to medical education, statistical and epidemiological studies, could be used to dissipate the right information to the researchers who can further use the accessed education material for the studies to serve the cause of humanity in the trying time of the pandemic. Use of the digital data for systematic analysis and meta-analysis could serve as a cornerstone of research.11

Digital education assumed importance when the COVID-19 crisis put the whole world into slumber and behind shut doors; the digital world was rising like a Goliath. It became mandatory for humans to educate themselves and assimilate the knowledge of digitalisation. Social distancing and group learning were possible, and it paved the path for education through webinars and social conferencing.12 Through global discussion platforms, discussions, and social conferences, negative or false information could be debunked. These social platforms which could reach geographically to a large extent could spread mass education through genuine straddles taken up by the proper educated mass media.13

Preparedness for the epidemic through digital literacy formed the mainstay of the fight against the pandemic in the years to come. It will form the backbone on which research shall be carried on, and it will also serve as the means of education for the future generations to come. The world population must be prepared to face the eventuality of this magnitude and the straws will be drawn from the digital literacy programmes which have evolved during the pandemic times.14

Laws governing digital literacy on media should be maintained by the local and government authorities. Time to time regulation of the digital material uploaded on the Cyber world should be employed to avoid the dissemination of unnecessary information that might create panic.15 Strict actions should be taken against the factions responsible for false snowballing of information, and criminal prosecutions should be made against people who spread communal hatred or use infodemic as the means to cause chaos.

The disadvantages of infodemics can be staggered if not stopped by revising the government policies and the norms controlling digital education. When false information is discovered through scientific research and is disseminated online, serious measures and consequences should be taken. ‘Knowledge is power’ but digital literacy is a far more powerful and useful tool to educate individuals to get access to the right information. To combat slander and besmirchment, the justice department should promote social inclusion, justice, and unity. The spread of digital literacy will benefit a lot of sections of the community and also help in combatting misinformation or malicious information of any magnitude. Digital literacy is an effective tool to spread the anti-social elements circulating in the world of web but can also form a suitable platform for advancement of the health science and technology in the post-pandemic era.

COMPETING INTEREST:
The authors declared no competing interest.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTION:
SS: Substantial contribution to the conception of the work, acquisition and interpretation of data, drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content.
KA: Provided the final approval of the version to be published.

All authors agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

REFERENCES
Digital literacy: A counteractive measure to thwart the fallacies of infodemic


• • • • • • • • • • • • • • •