Chapter 8

How Could Egyptian Young Adults Detect False Information About COVID–19 on Social Media Platforms?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to identify the adaptive capacities of young adults dealing with misleading information about Covid-19 on social media platforms and how they were able to maintain detecting misleading posts about Covid-19. Therefore, this chapter was keen to survey 204 individuals to find out how young people could deal with misleading information on social media platforms and the tools they use to verify information, considering their new media literacy and the rate of their usage of social media platforms, as they are important variables in creating an analytical critical mindset. Results indicated that the presence of a high level of new media literacy among the sample contributed greatly to their knowledge and use of tools for verifying information on social media platforms, and there was a positive correlation between the rate of usage of social media platforms and two-dimensions of new media literacy: functional prosumption and critical prosumption.

INTRODUCTION

Global concerns about false and misleading information have edged slightly higher this year, ranging from 82% in Brazil to just 37% in Germany. Those who use social media are most likely to say that they have been exposed to misinformation about Coronavirus than non-users. Facebook is considered as the main channel for spreading false information almost everywhere but messaging apps like WhatsApp are seen as a bigger problem in parts of the globe (Newman, N.et al.,2021).

Regarding, Active social media users of 4.20 billion, with a rise of 13.2% during last year equal to 490 million people, the largest proportion of users and consumers are in the age group from 18 to 34, with an average time spent per day of 2.25 hours, and 3.06 hours for Egyptian users (We are social, 2021).

Hence, Trust in the news has grown, on average, by six percentage points in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, the use of social media for news remains strong, especially with younger people and those with lower levels of education (Newman, N.et al.,2021)

On the other side, based on responses from more than 1,400 English-speaking journalists from 125 countries, 81% said that they encounter disinformation once a week, with more than one-quarter identifying false information many times a day, and 66% mentioned that Facebook was most frequently identified as a prolific disinformation vector, while 42% of respondents identified Twitter as a prolific disinformation spreader (Posetti, J., et al.,2020).

The global reasons for using social media led by "stay-up-to-date with news and current events" (we are social,2021), which shows the importance of evaluation skills and critical thinking during exposing to social media platforms contents particularly among young adults - the heavy and great proportion users of social media-, and during pandemic period.

The study of (Shehata & Eldakar, 2021) -applied in Egypt- showed that there are four main types of misinformation shared on social media. The first type is false claims about treatment of the virus; the second is false information about the government; the third is false content in general or manipulated content, and the last type is related to conspiracy theories. Additionally, it was found that the spread of COVID-19 misinformation has caused negative feelings among the participants.

Hence, the main purpose of this chapter is to explore Egyptian social media users' perceptions and behavior in the context of COVID-19 misinformation, and how they deal with misleading posts on social media platforms. Additionally, what is the level of their new media literacy and how it affects their skills to verify information, considering their usage rate of social media.

BACKGROUND

During the covid-19 pandemic, we have faced a lot of false information whether its misinformation, disinformation, fake news, rumors, etc. Wu& Morstatter (2019) tried to differentiate between several terms, and they explained that "*misinformation as an umbrella term to include all false or inaccurate information that is spread in social media*", and that disinformation, fake news, rumors, troll, spam, and urban legend are key terms to misinformation (p.1).

Wardle& Derakhshan (2017) submitted a new conceptual framework for talking about information disorder, including three types: misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information, where they pointed out that Dis-information is "the information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country". While misinformation means "information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm" and finally Mal information which is "information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country" (p.20).

Studies concerned with the concept of misinformation have attempted to identify the motives behind its propagation and if people used to publish it, intentionally or not, in addition to the blind reasons that can lead to the spread of the same phenomenon. Several studies have related it to the concept of media literacy, especially among young people and on social media platforms. The current studies during the

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