**Research Article**

# Navigating Misinformation: Tackling The Fake News Wave During COVID-19 In Jaipur

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| ARTICLEINFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | With the emergence of social media, there has been a notable change in how news is both created and consumed. Global social media use in 2020 reached around 2.95 billion individuals. The widespread dissemination of the COVID-19 coronavirus led to a surge of activity on social media. Most mediums were used to disseminate pertinent news, recommendations, and precautionary measures. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), unregulated dissemination of misinformation and conspiracy theories is proliferating at a faster pace than the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, there has been an excessive amount of information circulating, causing psychological stress, unreliable medical advice, and economic upheaval. The primary objective of this study is to examine the portrayal of false information and assess the consequences it has had on the inhabitants of Jaipur city. The objective of this research is to identify various kinds of false information and examine the underlying motives of individuals who disseminate misleading material. This will be achieved by a comprehensive examination of content on four prominent social media platforms. This research analyzed 130 of the most widely circulated false news items on social media in Jaipur. Data is gathered from the city of Jaipur via the utilization of the four predominant social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp. There are four distinct criteria that may be used to differentiate false news topics: COVID-19 therapy, medical facilities, therapeutic options, and currently accessible interventions. Hospitals' management of COVID-19 is widely misunderstood, including 34.62 percent of all misinformation. Text, images, audio, and videos are the four categories that categorize the many types of material. The proportion of text categorized as a certain kind contributes to the elevated ratio. The objectives of false news may be categorized into three main areas: generating sensationalism, endorsing certain medications, and disseminating propaganda targeting the government as well as hospitals and medical practitioners. While the occurrence of false news is unevenly distributed and constantly changing, there is a noticeable decline in the daily frequency of such episodes, approaching a conclusion.<br><br>**Keynotes:** COVID-19, Fake News, Propaganda, Disinformation, Misinformation, Social Media, Jaipur City. |

## Introduction

Disinformation is widespread, particularly when it comes to infectious illnesses, vaccines, and social health care programs. Fabricated information epitomizes a significant deterioration in individuals' capacity to interact, resulting in strained situations, dissatisfaction, and inaccurate social understandings.

The origins of the anti-vaccination movement may be traced back to the 18th century, when smallpox injections were deemed illegal due to their alleged association with a significant illness epidemic in Paris. The origins of the campaign may be traced back to Rubella in 2018.

The rapid spread of the highly infectious disease COVID-19 throughout the globe has led to a pandemic, endangering the lives of countless individuals. Social networks play a crucial role in combating the viral infection and its consequences by engaging in various activities such as broadcasting regional and international news about the pandemic, as well as providing cautions and guidance. Statista (Zhan, 2014) predicts that the number of

social network users globally will exceed 3 billion by 2022. The projected figure for 2023 is expected to reach 3.43 billion.

It is seeing a revival in popularity globally in this era of modern communication and online social networks. While there are several terms used to describe it, such as misinformation, misleading information, fake news, false news, and rumors, the fundamental issue remains mostly unchanged (Campinho, 2019). The global community is mourning the tragic loss of more than one million lives as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. The inherent uncertainty associated with health outcomes gives rise to a novel phenomenon known as an infodemic, which is a blend of the terms "information" and "epidemic". In this case, there is an abundance of genuine and counterfeit information. Unlike honest information, which helps alleviate the issue, fraudulent information just worsens it.

However, scholars have increasingly been interested in the dissemination of erroneous information via social networks due to its widespread occurrence across all geographical areas. Despite being the most democratic country globally and the poorest nation in South Asia, India is witnessing an increase in the prevalence of misinformation on the internet. This is occurring even as more developed countries with superior technology and greater technological proficiency are gaining control over the dissemination of false news. The dilemma stemming from the dissemination of misinformation has been intensified by several causes, including as admissions, political influences, and public health concerns. (Azim, Roy, Aich, and Dey, 2020).

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is the "Director-General of the World Health Organization", remarked: "We're not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic." (WHO, 2020)

Following the designation of COVID-19 as a worldwide public health emergency, the World Health Organization quickly established the WHO Information Network for Epidemics. This network was designed to effectively disseminate specialized information to specific target populations. This was undertaken with the understanding that stressful circumstances, such as pandemics, are linked to an excessive amount of information and inaccurate data (Zarocostas, 2020).

The infodemic, a global outbreak of misinformation, is expected to have a substantial impact on public health and the social landscape. The internet's created material may provide people precise information and positively impact their habits. However, it has the capacity to impact public opinion and behavior in ways that might be detrimental to one's health (Lara-Navarra, Falciani, Sánchez-Pérez, & Ferrer-Sapena, 2020).

Given the current perilous scenario, it is very difficult to prevent the spread of false information on social media platforms. This research enhances our understanding of the ever-changing nature of misinformation in social networks about the COVID-19 pandemic, hence facilitating the detection of erroneous information online.

This study examines the dissemination of incorrect information related to COVID-19 via social media platforms, using both digital and analog sources of information in order to address specific research inquiries. The next discourse will be divided into four important portions. The literature review incorporates and summarizes the results of prior research related to this subject. The "Methodology" section provides a detailed explanation of the procedures used for collecting and analyzing data. The "Results" section provides an analysis and discussion of the main and supporting findings of this study. The discussion part in the last phase provides a summary of the first findings, based on the related arguments and previous conclusions. This part also incorporates an analysis of the advantages and constraints of the current study.

## Literature Review

The historical context of false information, the extensive use of social media, the effects, and some of the previously suggested mitigation techniques for the spread of false information via social media are all examined in this section of the present study. For the spread of false information via social networks, this book also offers theoretical models that might be applied.

### A. Health-Related Attitudes on Social Media

According to Kalsnes (2018), social networks are able to capture the activities of a sizable user base due to the everyday broad usage. Social networks provide enough resources to make health-related decisions and to document attitudes and behavioral reactions that affect people's health. This is particularly true in the context of health. Facebook is the most popular social network, with Twitter and health-related social networks coming in second and third, respectively.

### B. Health Misinformation in Social Media

The World Health Organization (WHO) calls on the scientific community to improve its capacity to quickly transform new data into useful, culturally appropriate, and easily understandable risk communication assets that can be shared on multiple platforms, including social networks, in its risk communication white paper (Lau & Coiera, 2009). In this section, we will focus on the research conducted to assess the reliability of health-related content available on social networks. Next, we'll take a closer look at a few instances of programs that may detect and track down false health information.

A second pandemic, driven by false news, is being experienced concurrently with the COVID-19 epidemic. The main link between public health organizations is broken by this, which therefore leads to a wider spread of concern. In the meanwhile, a number of studies looking at "the spread of false news on social media platforms in

connection with the COVID-19 pandemic" have already arisen on the scientific platform in a quick reaction. Other studies look at the spread of false news from other angles, such as behavioral, cultural, and sociolinguistic ones.

The spread of false news across various social networks is compared in certain studies. For instance, (Belizário, 2020) analyzes information from the social media sites "Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit" to assess samples of information circulation concerning COVID-19. This inquiry also includes Gab. The findings demonstrate that various websites have differing concentrations of fake news, with Gab being more prone to the issue. The research results show that, regardless of the sites, COVID-19-related news is distributed in the same way. Belizário (2020) claims that Gab is a well-known social network that is favored by radical rightists and political activists. Consequently, the hypothesis acknowledges the concept that average users are more likely than internet influencers to come across false news. Another research study by Tapia (2020) claims that users of social networks are more inclined to spread false information regarding COVID-19—one of the biggest threats to the public—than news that is supported by evidence. They contend that the spread of false news on social networks directly leads to divisive and insufficient decision-making.

The more recent studies have offered other potential remedies to this breakdown, in contrast to the earlier research that concentrated on the emotional issues brought on by false news during the COVID-10 period. In the perspective of Kim and Walker (2020), the pharmacist has the utmost significance in health communication. In order to lessen the quantity of fake information about pharmaceuticals that is circulating, pharmacologists must spread trustworthy knowledge throughout society and among other health professionals. An infodemic might result from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to another report, since it transmits so much fake information. In order to combat this breakdown, they offer to teach COVID-19 to individuals who look at the facts, dispel falsehoods, and use trustworthy resources (Waran, Jayaseelan, & Brindha, 2020). Furthermore, they offer to gather and distribute the necessary accurate information to educators, students, and the general public so that everyone is able to identify false news.

A few studies also look at the connections between false information and the legal and political spheres. The spread of false news on social networks is substantial as a result of infodemia brought on by COVID-19, which delays the reaction time of public health authorities in Latin American nations (Zhang et al., 2020). They monitor the ubiquity of false news in Peru as part of their research. Their monitoring indicates that the nation is more effective in its battle against the release and dissemination of false news due to its strict regulations (which entails jail time). While Peru is becoming increasingly successful as a result of its strict government measures to address the issue of false news, the Dominican Republic is suffering with an inefficient management structure (Tapia, 2020).

Ricard and Medeiros (2020) investigate the problem of false news from the perspective of the criminology field in a distinct piece of research. It offers several preventative methods, such as the employment of counter-narrative as one of the policies and the deployment of artificial intelligence as a counteraction, to lessen the spread and expansion of fake information. The outcomes of these studies may be relevant to the regulation of false information on social networks, even if they do not look into fake news on these platforms.

## C. Effects of fake news on public

Previous studies' results indicate that news of fabricated research was more widely disseminated during the 2016 US presidential campaign than news from 19 reliable sources combined (Ouedraogo, 2020). This susceptibility to massive amounts of information might lead to media fatigue and undermine the preventive measures needed to keep people safe, which is a matter of public health concern. Furthermore, untrue information and rumors about COVID-19 conceal positive behavioral responses (like hand washing, social distancing, and so forth) while promoting dishonest behaviors that accelerate the virus's spread and ultimately have a negative impact on society's physical and mental health. For example, it was reported in India that a father of three committed himself after learning he had a positive COVID-19 diagnostic (Raj & Goswami, 2020).

Multiple incidents of people using too much chloroquine, a medication used to treat the malaria parasite, were discovered by health authorities in Nigeria. This took place subsequent to the media's announcement that the medication successfully cured COVID-19. This is just another illustration of the risks connected to disseminating inappropriate medical news (Allam, 2020).

There were more hasty grocery and office supply purchases as a result of another rumor about the country's isolation, which caused a disruption in the delivery system. The disparity between supply and demand expanded as a result, and food shortages among vulnerable populations and people in unstable economic circumstances increased (Field, 2020). This same kind of event has been seen in other locations throughout the globe. The population's health, nutrition, and the affected people's physical and mental health might all be negatively affected by this phenomena.

Although coronavirus is a relatively unknown disease, there is a lot of false information out there about its diagnosis and treatment, which confuses both the general public and medical professionals. Furthermore, this lessens the treatment of the most current scientific studies on cures or vaccines for this illness.

These lies and gossip also lessen the utilization of social distance and home isolation by adding to the stigmatization of the contagious illness in society. Many countries have recorded cases when hundreds of people contracted the infection from a single person who went to the same church or mosque against the advice of their

physician to stay at home in quarantine (Hudson, 2020). These kinds of issues are making it harder to contain the COVID-19 epidemic than would be optimal for a number of different demographic groups.

## Research Objectives

Finding the impact of fake news that is available on social media in Jaipur City (Rajasthan) and the effects that this has on the local populace are the main goals of this section of the present study. The aim of this study is to investigate the mental processes of individuals who spread false information and the reactions of the general public to rumors. Furthermore, the responses of the general public will be examined to ascertain the degree to which they accept and spread fake news. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global problem that will have long-term effects on the rest of the planet. This potentially lethal sickness terrifies many. The most popular platform for spreading misleading information to people without the professional knowledge is social media. All of this brings us to the goal of this section, which is:

➢ "To find the spread of fake news on the COVID-19 pandemic on social media platforms in the city of Jaipur.
➢ To find which social media platform is most often used to spread fake news in Jaipur City".

As of July 13, 2022, there were 559 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide. The United States is among the nations most badly impacted by the sickness, accounting for around 16 percent of all cases recorded globally. The claims of misleading news spreading on social media during this epidemic have grown to be a major source of concern. The biggest issues facing every country are misinformation about the seriousness of the COVID-19 viral outbreak, propaganda against the government, and COVID-19 fake treatments.

## Research Questions

The question that has to be asked for us to get the results from the research is:
R1. "What kind of fake news is posted on social media in Jaipur City?"
R2. "What is the prominent agenda behind that fake news on social media in Jaipur City?"

## Theoretical Approach

The main focus of this study section will be the idea of framing theory. Because Gregory Bateson initially offered the idea of framing as a hypothesis in 1972, he is recognized as the creator of the notion. The phrase "mass framing theory" is a technique used by the mainstream media to provide opposing viewpoints on a topic covered by the news.

Second-class The phrase "agenda setting" is sometimes used to describe the idea. This is mostly due to the close relationship between Agenda Setting theory and the framing theory idea. The word "framing" describes how the mass media organizes and presents information to the general public on different concerns, as well as the occasion and the availability of special context to influence meaning and demand selective impact over how people see reality. A philosophical theory known as "framing theory" explains how media owners often construct and interpret the content of reports (McQuail, 2005). Oommen (2005) asserts that there is an intellectual framework that dictates how events are presented. When framing, a certain topic receives a lot of media emphasis. The mass media uses framing to elevate a problem to a substantial level and draw the audience's attention to certain issues, concepts, and people while downplaying everything that falls outside of the framework (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011). Stephens (2015) pointed out that most mainstream media coverage tends to be more on the gloomy side of things rather than the more optimistic side when it comes to framing.

It is evident that, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the media has discussed the possible consequences of giving much more attention to the possibility that the disease may spread over the continent and beyond. Generally speaking, there is a relationship between the study and the notion of framing in this specific circumstance since reports are framed by the media, and these reports or words depend on content makers, who often foreshadow issues like a Covid-19 epidemic. Stated differently, there is a connection between the two.

## Research Methodology

The research design was coordinated with social media content analysis to look at the false information and perceptions of fake news among Jaipur City people. Exploratory research was the technique of choice for this inquiry because of the originality of the subject matter and the dearth of recent research on this area. This will assist you in developing a deeper understanding of the subject.

The primary data used in the research was gathered from social media posts. The researcher began by watching and searching social media for pre-existing instances of fake news. In the Jaipur region, the primary focus was on locating and identifying fake news reports. False news was the primary content of 231 social media channels in total. Over the course of three months, information from hundreds of distinct accounts was used to compile the posts. Within a week, the posts were gathered and changed in the course of the searches. Certain posts yielded fewer search results than others, while other posts produced more. To ensure that no subtleties were missed, a snapshot of each remark was captured, and it was copied and pasted word for word.

The collected data was categorized into many groups, including hospital treatments, social media medication suggestions, non-COVID therapies, and COVID-19 treatments. 130 fake news articles were found and eliminated from consideration after a thorough review. The research question specified two criteria that were used for the primary screening. These criteria were as follows:

(a) "fake news connected to COVID-19" and
(b) "fake news that includes concealed propaganda".
Following the data gathering, it was found that four of the most widely used social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube—are considerably more often used in the city of Jaipur for spreading fake news. The data assessment procedure consists of two steps. First, the subjects, types of material, and objectives of fake news were compared to the collected content. Two, the sources were found via likely following the news and the details of the situations that were reported in the content pieces.

## Results and discussion
In the following section, the outcomes that were recorded by the contents analysis will be presented:

### Table 1: Total Numbers of Fake News

| YouTube | 20 | 15.38% |
|---------|-----|--------|
| Facebook | 60 | 46.15% |
| Twitter | 19 | 14.62% |
| WhatsApp | 31 | 23.85% |
| Total | 130 | 100% |
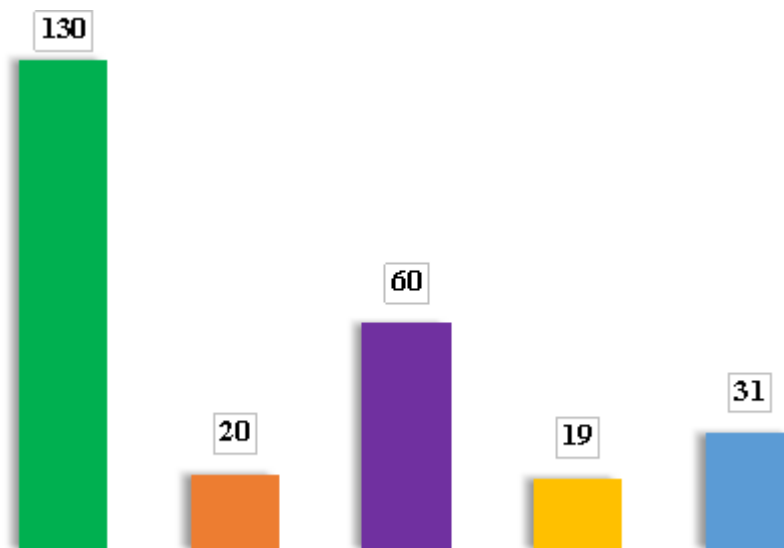


**Chart 1.Total Numbers of Fake News**

An overview of all the false news stories gathered from four different social media platforms is shown in the following graphic. 130 samples of fake news were gathered for this research. A total of sixty fake news items were reportedly gathered from Facebook, thirty-one from WhatsApp, twenty from YouTube, and nineteen from Twitter.
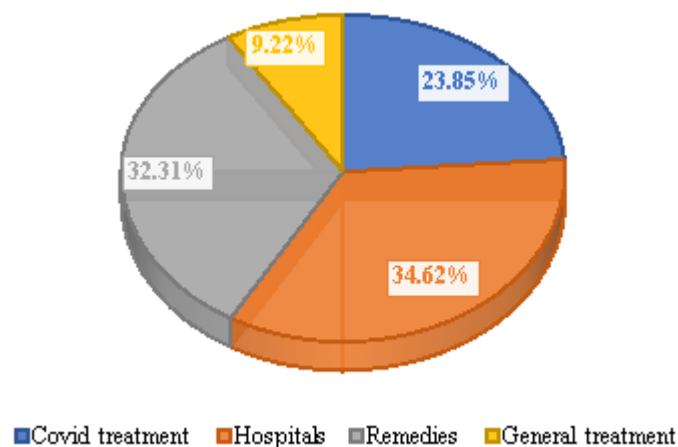


**Chart 2.Categories of Fake News**

The many forms of fake news that have been discovered on social media platforms in Jaipur City are shown in Chart 2. The percentage of people who think the information about COVID-19 treatment is false is 23.85 percent.

The current percentage of people who trust fake news about hospitals is 34.62. Furthermore, the rate at which remedies are gathered is 32.31 percent; general alignment treatments get 9.22 percent of the total.
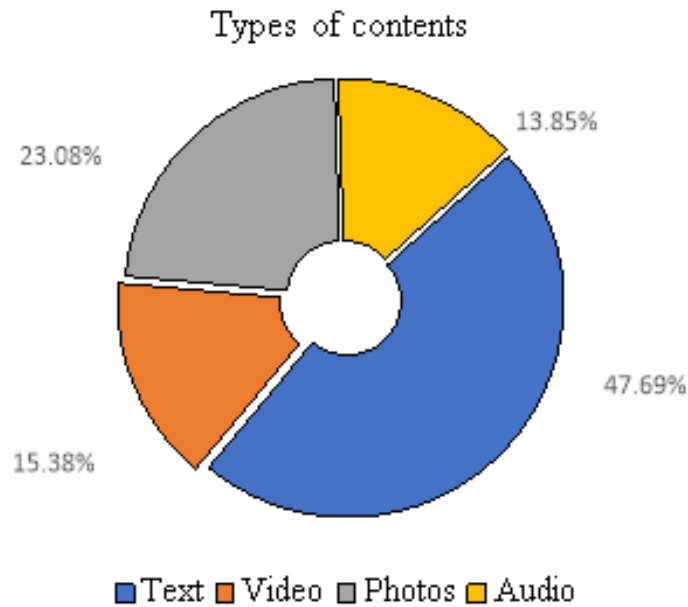
**Types of contents**



**Chart 3.Types of Contents**

The types of false news stories are shown in Chart 3. 47.69 percent of the posts were recorded in text, 15.38 percent were uploaded, 23.08 percent were images, and 13.85 percent were audio recordings, according to the data.
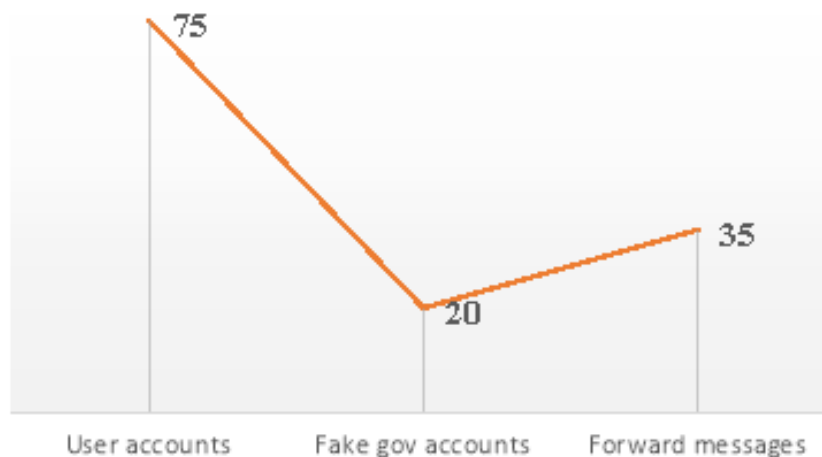


**Chart 4.Sources of Fake News**

**Table 2.Source of Fake News**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| User's accounts on social media | 75 | 57.69% |
| Fake government account | 20 | 15.38% |
| Forward messages from unknown | 35 | 26.93% |
| Total | 130 | 100% |

The different accounts that comprise fake news sources are explained in Chart 4. General user accounts are responsible for spreading 57.69 percent of fake news, it has been determined. Much fake news is recorded using fake accounts with official agency names, accounting for 15.38 percent. 26.93 percent of all fake news is ultimately obtained via forwarded conversations from unknown people.
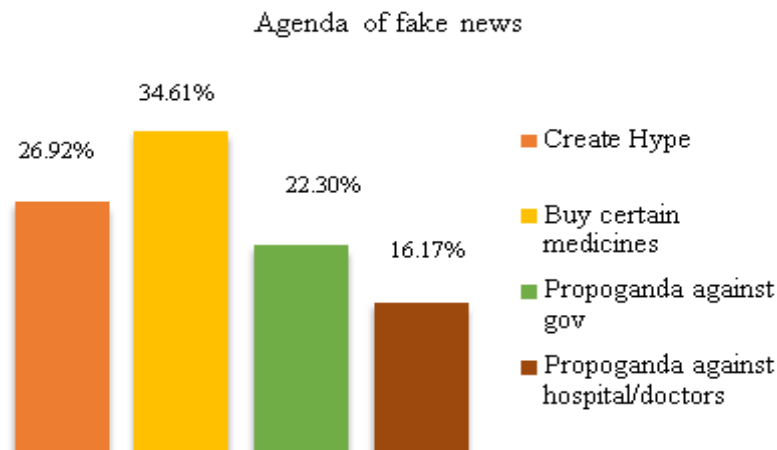
Agenda of fake news



**Chart 5.Agenda of fake news**

**Chart 5 shows the strategy used to spread fake news on social media in Jaipur City.**
After reading fake news on social media, people in Jaipur City, where the percentage is 92 percent, are more likely to experience panic and frenzy. Secondly, buy certain medications from fake news sources that have been confirmed 34.61 percent of the time. Thirdly, fake news-based propaganda against the government accounted for 22.30 percent of the total, while propaganda against doctors and hospitals was recorded at 16.17 percent.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Finding the sources, agendas, and news stories that included false information was the primary objective of this investigation. The first focus of the fake news around COVID-19 on social media is on the following four major themes: Hospitals, COVID-19 treatment, therapies, and cures, as well as general treatment of fake news.

### A. Covid-19 Treatment
There have been several instances of fake news recorded about the COVID-19 treatment program. On social media, a significant number of people share their prescriptions and provide advice on certain medications. Furthermore, a great deal of injections are often recommended on Facebook. Without the involvement of any licensed medical practitioners, all of these medications are being utilized. Numerous people are acting on fake prescriptions, endangering their own lives in the process, according to an update from the Jaipur City authorities. Many people are impacted by what is now considered to be the world's most significant issue. With a significant ratio, fake news about medications used for COVID-19 treatment was recorded.

### B. Remedies
There are a significant number of frauds on Jaipur City's social media platforms that advertise themselves as treatments. A list of the most popular subjects in fake posts is provided in the section that follows. There are several different natural treatment options available to protect against coronavirus.
Furthermore, it is falsely suggested to consume garlic and ginger, as they have the potential to act as a vaccine and eradicate the virus if it makes its way into the body.

### C. Hospital and Medical Professionals
Out of all the social media sites, this one with fake news gets the highest rating. A significant number of people are ending their lives as a result of believing this fake news. With relation to the epidemic, this news has also posed a significant issue for the Jaipur administration. Fake news concerning hospitals' treatment is sensitive and important. It created a false impression that COVID-19 patients were not being treated at medical hospitals. They are also charged with saying that physicians should inject patients with poison to cause them to die. This news has sent the nation into a state of panic and frenzy. Everyone believes in fake news, and people keep talking about it. People also claim that the government wants to raise the death rate to a high level in order to get funding from international organizations. They believe that this strategy is being implemented. Because of this, a lot of people choose not to visit the hospital, which might worsen their condition by causing them to wait longer for treatment. Second, fake news alleging that hospitals in Jaipur City generate fake COVID-19 death certificates has been widely spread across all social media platforms. Medical professionals are reportedly providing corona death certificates to everyone, even when the dead had other fake news, according to reports in the so-called "fake news."

## D. General Sickness Treatment

With a long number of medications for significant alternative treatments, this last section contains a significant quantity of fake news. Even from unknown people, people are communicating with one another. In that article, people with a variety of illnesses, such as fevers, coughs, sore throats, and many more, do not visit hospitals or take particular medications. A significant number of antibiotic choices are available on such lists. A significant number of people, according to the physicians, are ill with serious illnesses. Without initially consulting a licensed medical expert, people are taking these medications. These people's lungs, livers, hearts, and brains are directly suffering from serious negative effects as a result of this.

**The goal of this study's second section is to ascertain the motivations of people responsible for fake news. These four main topics will be the subject of the section that follows:**

➢ In the first instance, it sends the general people into a state of widespread fear and panic. Fake news is intended to instill fear in the general public's hearts as a result of this sickness.

➢ Second, the basis for fake news is propaganda that encourages the purchase of certain medicines that are recommended in fake prescriptions. The price of recommended medicines and herbal supplements skyrocketed after the spread of such fake news. Despite being pricey, many were still buying these medicines since they didn't know that doing so may endanger their lives.

➢ Thirdly, it's clear that the purpose of this kind of fake news is to undermine government policy and make people stop trusting the government. The majority of people believed that governments were exclusively to blame for all deaths in order to defend their continuous receiving of aid from developed countries.

➢ The concentration on propaganda targeted at all hospitals and medical workers is the fourth facet of the fake news problem.

Finding relevant information is made possible by determining where false news originates on social media. The great bulk of fake news stories are created by various online mass media outlets. Additionally, the usage of four powerful social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube—plays a major role in the production of fake news and its subsequent spread. This finding highlights how important it is to safeguard online media in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 fake reports and how important it may be in the production of fake news.

The nature of the false reports associated with COVID-19 is undesirable, and they might have detrimental effects on the medical system as well as general public health communication. Unfavorable fake media reports spread false information and facts about medicines, health care services, and death-related details, misleading people and the community in the uncertainty that follows.

While this particular research has yielded some novel and previously unreported discoveries, it is not without limits. The obtained information originated from the city of Jaipur. The region is home to a variety of unusual plants and animals, as well as instances of fake news. To get a better understanding of this occurrence, further research may be done in the studies that follow.

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