Of fake news and viruses: How misinformation and disinformation worsen the pandemic

SHEILA V. SIAR
Research Information Department

PIDS-SERP-P Public Seminar on Less Noise, More Facts: Enhancing Information Dissemination for a Better Normal, July 28, 2021.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies
Surian sa mga Pag-aaral Pangkaunlaran ng Pilipinas

SERP-P

Misinformation vs Disinformation

Misinformation is information that is false, **but not intended to cause harm**.

Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm.

(Source: Wardle, Claire. Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary. 2018)

Why would people believe in fake news?

Illusory truth effect

Confirmation bias

Bullshit receptivity

Familiarity effect

Primary effect

Overclaiming

Source effect

Delusion effect

Lack of reflective reasoning

Ideology effect

Dogma or religion effect

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH OFFER SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS

Sharing of fake news: Is it always intentional?

- According to Apuke and Omar (2021), a person may share fake news unintentionally but its creation by another person could be intentional.

- Sharing of fake news does not necessarily imply belief.

Why would people share fake news?

- Bullshit receptivity

- Virtue signaling

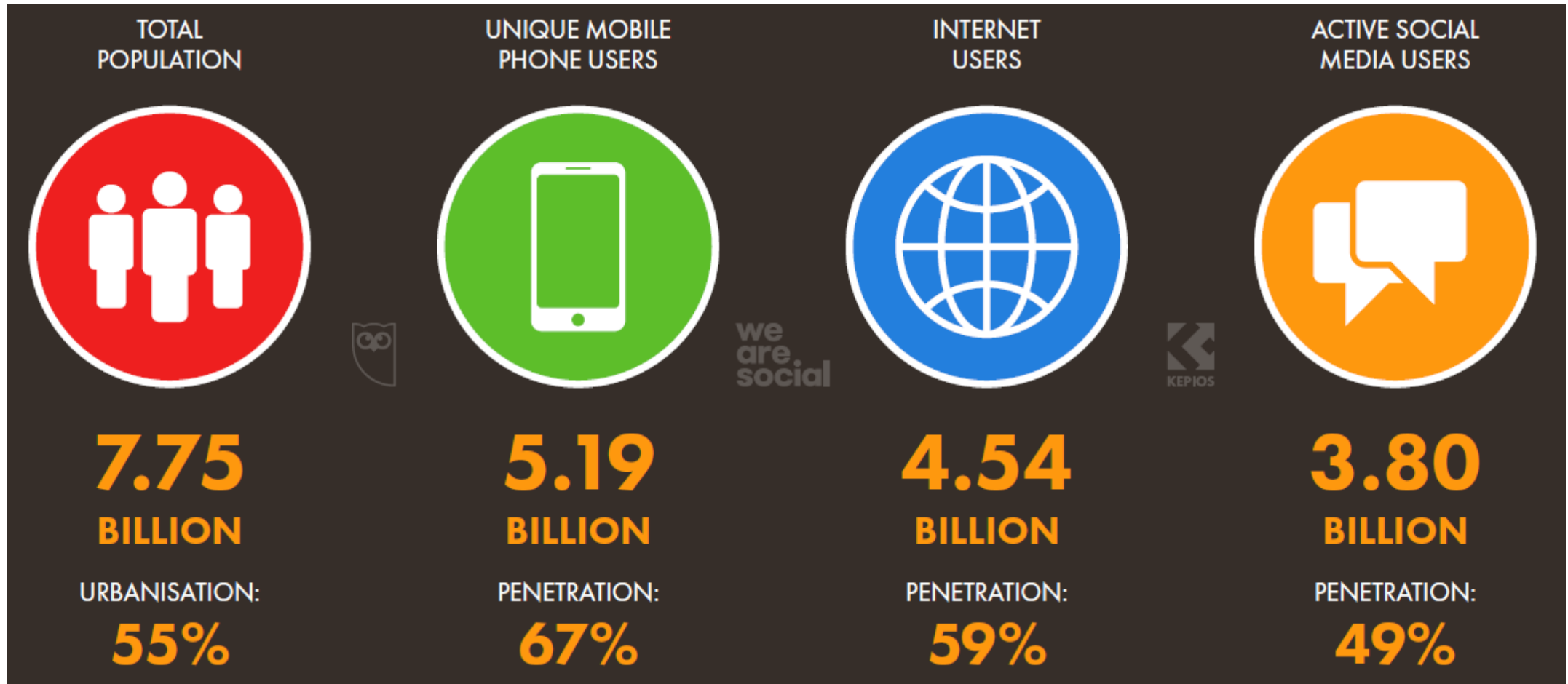- To inflict harm or cause damage to another person; for personal gain

Why would people share fake news?

A study by Talwar et al. (2019) found that online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out (FOMO), and social media fatigue were positively associated with sharing fake news intentionally.

A study by Apuke and Omar (2021) found several predictors of fake news sharing on COVID-19: altruism, information-sharing, socialization, information-seeking, and pass time.

Global mobile, internet and social media use in 2020

TOTAL POPULATION	UNIQUE MOBILE PHONE USERS	INTERNET USERS	ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS
7.75 BILLION	5.19 BILLION	4.54 BILLION	3.80 BILLION
URBANISATION: 55%	PENETRATION: 67%	PENETRATION: 59%	PENETRATION: 49%

Source: Digital 2020 Global Digital Overview (We are Social and Hootsuite 2020)

Internet and social media penetration and use in selected Southeast Asian countries, 2020
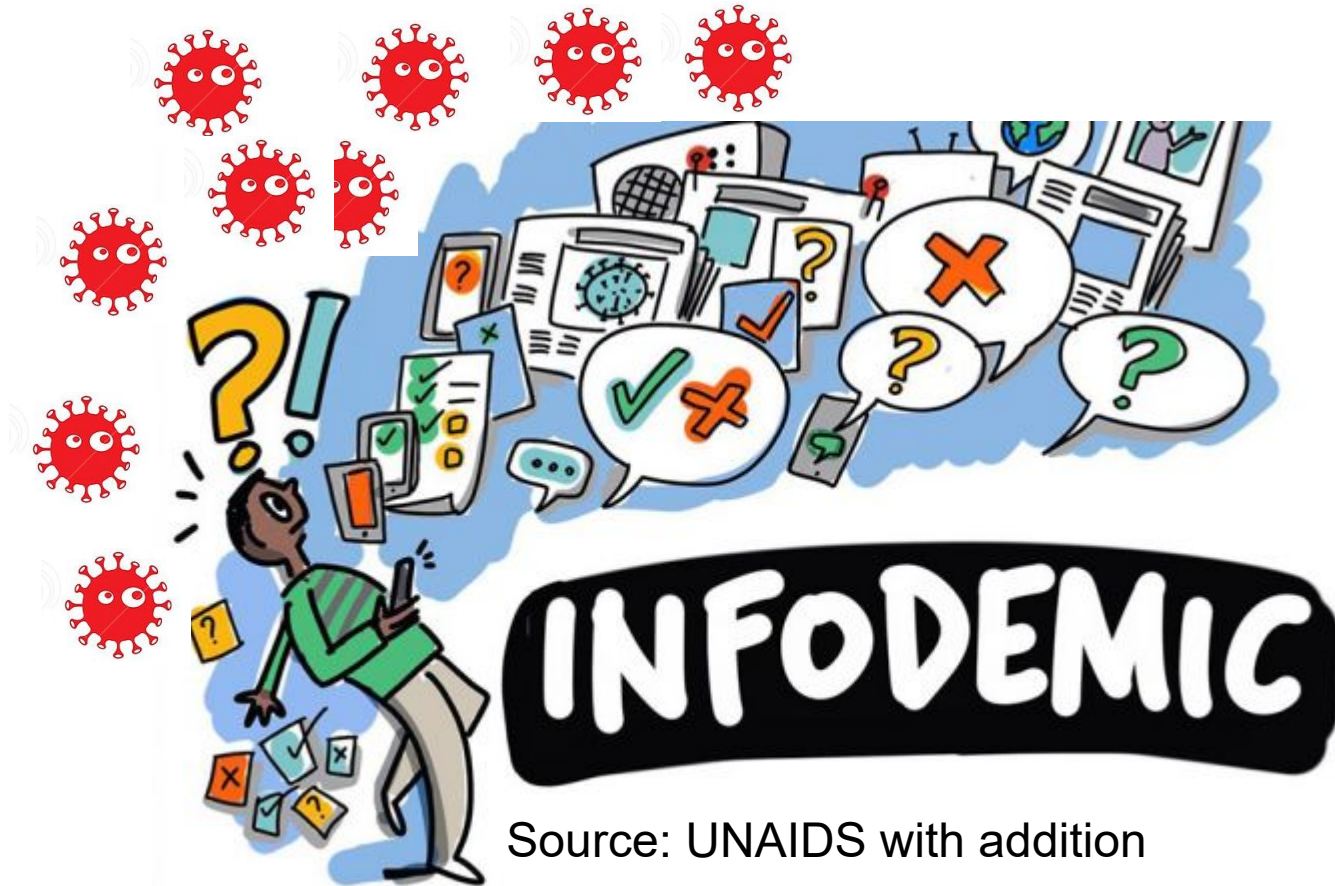
Country	Internet penetration (%)	Social media penetration (%)	Time spent (hours and minutes)	
			Internet	Social media
Philippines	67	67	9:45	3:53
Thailand	75	75	9:01	2:55
Indonesia	64	59	7:59	3:26
Malaysia	83	81	7:57	2:45
Vietnam	70	67	6:30	2:22
Singapore	88	79	6:48	2:08
World average	59	49	6:43	2:24

Source: Digital 2020 Global Digital Overview (We are Social and Hootsuite 2020)

Infodemic and the pandemic

Source: UNAIDS with addition

Infodemic refers to the overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it difficult for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it (WHO 2020).

Fake news on COVID-19 in Southeast Asia

Content classification	Percentage of fake news detected			
	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Myanmar
Symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment measures	32	46	17	43
Government's actions and regulations	25	15	10	18
False and misleading statistics	11	11	17	7
Focusing on public figures/influencers	10	4	11	14
Political, religious, and ethnic-targeted fake news	10	4	21	4
Social, environmental, economic, and health impacts	5	4	7	7
Origins	8	2	7	4
Others	5	13	8	7

Source: Dang et al. (2021)

Impact of fake news about COVID-19

Mental health issues (fear, anxiety)

Increase of cases from not following the health protocols

Anti-vaxx sentiments could undermine efforts to achieve herd immunity

Affect the supply and demand of certain goods

Xeno-phobia

Self-treatment could lead to the worsening of the illness

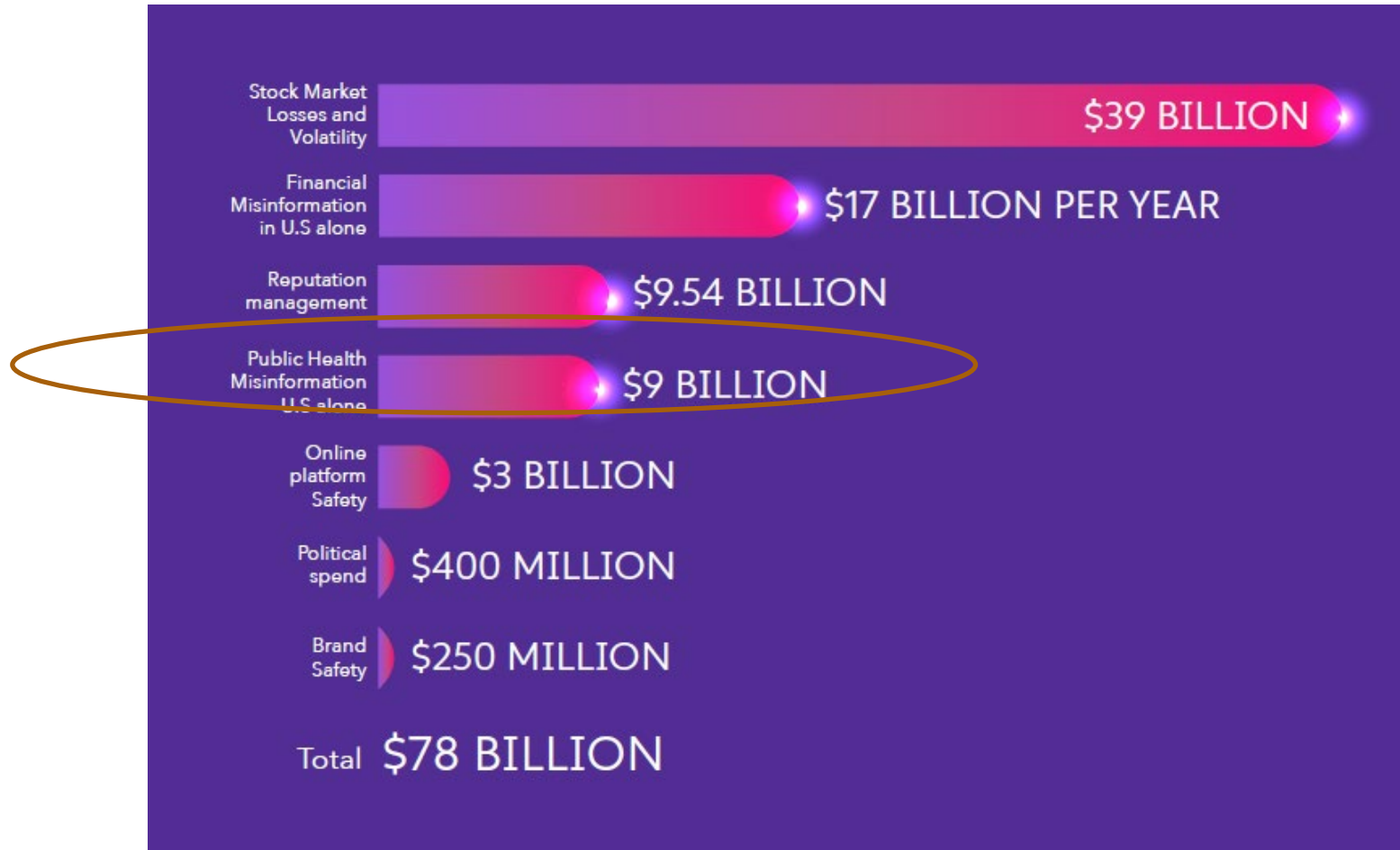Artificial increase or decrease of prices

Hoarding, panic buying

Religious/ Ethnic tensions

Image from the South China Morning Post

Economic cost of fake news

Stock Market Losses and Volatility — $39 BILLION

Financial Misinformation in U.S alone — $17 BILLION PER YEAR

Reputation management — $9.54 BILLION

Public Health Misinformation U.S alone — $9 BILLION

Online platform Safety — $3 BILLION

Political spend — $400 MILLION

Brand Safety — $250 MILLION

Total $78 BILLION

Source: University of Baltimore and CHEQ (2019)

"[The] costs of health epidemics spread by fake news increase the projection of fake news costs further and across a wider geography."

Regulations purportedly intended to control fake news

- ➢ Philippines: Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (contains fake news provision with corresponding fines and imprisonment)

  Prior to the pandemic, several legislators have proposed laws against fake news, such as House Bill 6022 and Senate Bill 1492 or the Anti-Fake News Act of 2017.

- ➢ Thailand: Amended Computer Crime Act; Lèse majesté; Law against defamation as defined in its Criminal Code; Anti-Fake News Center

- ➢ Indonesia: Electronic Information and Transaction Law

- ➢ Cambodia: Cybercrime Law (draft); State of Emergency Law (passed in April 2020) which granted the prime minister vast and new powers to control and censor the media

Websites on COVID-19

- Creation of dedicated websites on COVID-19 or a special section on COVID-19 in the official websites of government agencies, international organizations, and the academe

  - World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)
  - COVID-19 Philippine government portal (https://www.covid19.gov.ph/)
  - Philippine Department of Health (https://doh.gov.ph/2019-nCoV)
  - PhilHealth (https://www.philhealth.gov.ph/covid/)
  - DILG (https://www.lguvscovid.ph/)
  - DOLE (https://www.dole.gov.ph/covid-19-mitigating-measures/)
  - Philippine News Agency (https://www.pna.gov.ph/categories/anti-covid-19-pandemic)
  - University of the Philippines (https://endcov.ph/dashboard/)
  - De La Salle University (https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/research/covid-19-research-portal/)

Fact-checking initiatives

- International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) (https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/)
- Factcheck.org (https://www.factcheck.org/)
- Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC) FactChecking (https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/)
- Lead-stories Fact Checker (https://leadstories.com/how-we-work.html)
- PolitiFact (https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay/fighting-disinformation/search/items/politifact.html)
- Polygraph (https://www.polygraph.info/)
- Snopes (https://www.snopes.com/)
- YouTube Data Viewer Citizen Evidence Lab (https://citizenevidence.amnestyusa.org/)
- Google Fact Check Tool (https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer)
- Vera Files (https://verafiles.org/specials/fact-check)
- Facebook Journalism Project (https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/how-it-works)
- Rappler's Fact-Checking Webinar (https://www.rappler.com/moveph/webinar-fact-checking-coronavirus)
- FactRakers (https://www.factrakers.org/)

Recommendations to combat fake news

1. Increase awareness and education on online fact-checking tools (websites, apps, browser extentions, etc.).

2. Engage and teach citizens to fact-check information and news sources.

3. Develop analytical thinking and digital intelligence early on in life among children in the home and school.

4. Make media literacy part of the basic education curriculum.

5. Be part of the solution: remain vigilant; always fact-check before sharing content online; do not support personalities who spread fake news.

Thank you

Service through policy research

/PIDS.PH

@PIDS_PH

www.pids.gov.ph

serp-p.pids.gov.ph

EMAIL: ssiar@mail.pids.gov.ph