

Social Media as a Double-Edged Sword: Lessons from COVID-19 Outbreak

Dear Editor,

COVID-19 is an emerging disease of SARS-CoV-2 origin that was recognized as a pandemic disease on March 11, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Owing to the growing concerns about COVID-19, face-to-face communication decreased due to quarantine in many countries, and widespread access, social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, played a significant role in news transmission, shaping the point of view, and people's reactions to COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, social media have been able to provide significant assistance; the most prominent of which are the widespread awareness of the COVID-19 symptoms, the prevention of unnecessary visits to medical centers, and also informing personal, environmental, and occupational care. According to reports, social media can also be a platform for patients' and physicians' communication during quarantine, and also social media search indexes (SMSI) can predict the number of possible patients.^[1,2]

Despite these benefits, access to social media during the COVID-19 outbreak has had consequences. One of the most important reported is endangering mental health, especially increased depression and anxiety, following the spread of infodemic.^[3] Also, the spread of rumors about the COVID-19 treatment can cause irreversible side effects, such as extensive methanol poisoning.^[4] On the other hand, it seems that the state media is not as popular as social media to compete with social media in shaping public opinion, despite the benefit of experts.^[5]

As a result, it seems that by restricting public access to medical and drug information and monitoring published information on social media, a swift action to refute infodemic can be taken and the negative role of social media in endangering mental health can be controlled. By controlling the disadvantages, social media can be used as a quick way to inform about prevention and treatment, create awareness, shape perspectives, and reduce mental disorders.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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