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Social Media's Impact on COVID-19

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## I. Introduction

### (I) Motivation

People nowadays often rely on information technology. We acquire a variety of knowledge through technological products, such as computers and televisions. However, the contents we are informed of online are not consistently credible. Even in 2020, when the whole world is being threatened by a novel coronavirus, there are still people keeping releasing false information, making the world even more chaotic. This phenomenon motivates us to probe into how the power of social media influences this fatal pandemic – COVID-19.

### (II) Purpose

This research is made based on the purpose of intending to warn readers not to believe all the information they received on the Internet and social media.

### (III) Methods

- A. Internet Research
- B. Document Analysis
- C. Data Compilation

### (IV) System Architecture (Figure 1)



Figure1 : System Architecture  
(Figure1 references: Drawn by researchers)

## II. Body

It is the year 2020 that Covid-19, a groundbreaking type of virus, attacks our living sphere. Under the trend of globalized social media, the spread of information sped up in a flabbergasting way. The following content is a discussion according to the relativity between current social media and the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

### (I) Positive impacts caused by social media

A. Accurate information about pandemic prevention and basic knowledge of COVID-19 are publicized under the cooperation between social media and the government.

Below are categorized data regarding to some official information spread with the help of social media

(A) Masks are classified into sorts such as surgical masks, N95 masks, cotton face masks, gauze masks, and activated carbon masks based on their functions and usages.

#### a. Surgical Masks

Surgical masks have already possessed basic virus preventing functions. They can shield out about 80 percent of submicron particles. While using a surgical mask, we should replace it with a new one right on a daily basis. By doing this, we can restrain hazardous substances from accumulating on the surface and largely lower the possibility of virus infection. Once used, the surgical mask must be eliminated.

#### b. N95 Masks

N95 masks provide a utility of filtering over 95 percent of submicron particles. Because of its remarkable effectiveness, the N95 mask can hinder our respiratory tract from functioning smoothly and even cause breathing problems; thus, it's not suitable to wear them in our daily life even though they possess outstanding pandemic preventing functions.

#### c. Cotton Face Masks and Gauze Masks

Cotton face masks and gauze masks can only filter out larger particles, such as dust and sand. Its utility on virus prevention remains close to zero. Since they are made for dust protection, they are mainly used for simple cleaning tasks.

d. Activated Carbon Masks

Activated carbon masks are able to absorb organic gas and toxic dust, but they are definitely incapable of sterilization. Instead of being used for virus preventing, they are broadly used to reduce harm caused by toxic dust during spraying paint.

After learning about classification of different sorts of masks and brief introduction of its basic knowledge, we have better understanding of how to choose a fitting one.

For the sake of prevention from virus infection in our everyday life, we had better put on surgical masks. N95 masks, for those working in the hospital or frontline medical institutes, will be a better choice. As for cotton face masks, gauze masks, and activated carbon masks, they are no use for prevention from pandemic.

B. Analysis authentic data and information

(A) Incubation Period of COVID-19

According to the analysis results from Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, the incubation period of COVID-19 is between two to twelve days. People who have been to endemic areas should be isolated and kept track of their health monitoring results.

(B) Distribution of the Infected

Professor Chang, an assistant professor of the Institute of Bioinformatics and Structural Biology in the NTHU (National Tsing Hua University), signed a data usage agreement with Facebook. Ever since January 1, 2020, people from the NTHU grouped up and started their work of researching and analyzing consolidated data. The graph, (figure 2) is one of their achievements, while they collaborate with researchers from Harvard University. It is about the distribution of people who have probability of infection in each county.

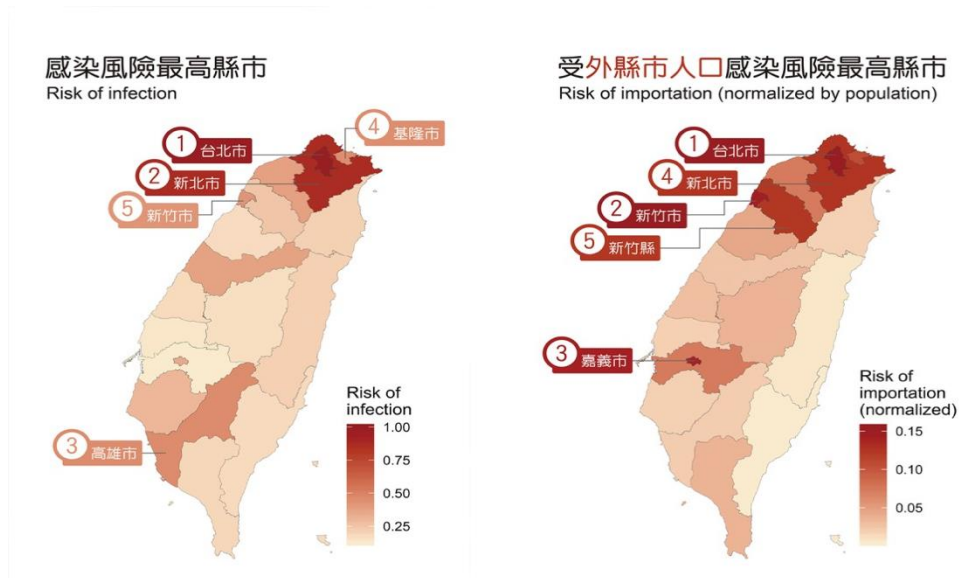


Figure 2: Risks of infection in Taiwan.

(Figure 2: 國立清華大學生命科學系 (2020)。清華生科招生大熱門 入學考新冠病毒最新研究 [電子版]。國立清華大學簡訊，1144 期，取自 [nthu.edu.tw/pdf/pdf\\_158754268223.pdf](http://nthu.edu.tw/pdf/pdf_158754268223.pdf) )

### (C) International Pandemic Situation

Below, (figure 3) is an analysis from Taiwan Centers for Disease Control and Johns Hopkins University. It can clearly show the confirmed cases anywhere you clicked it on this world map.

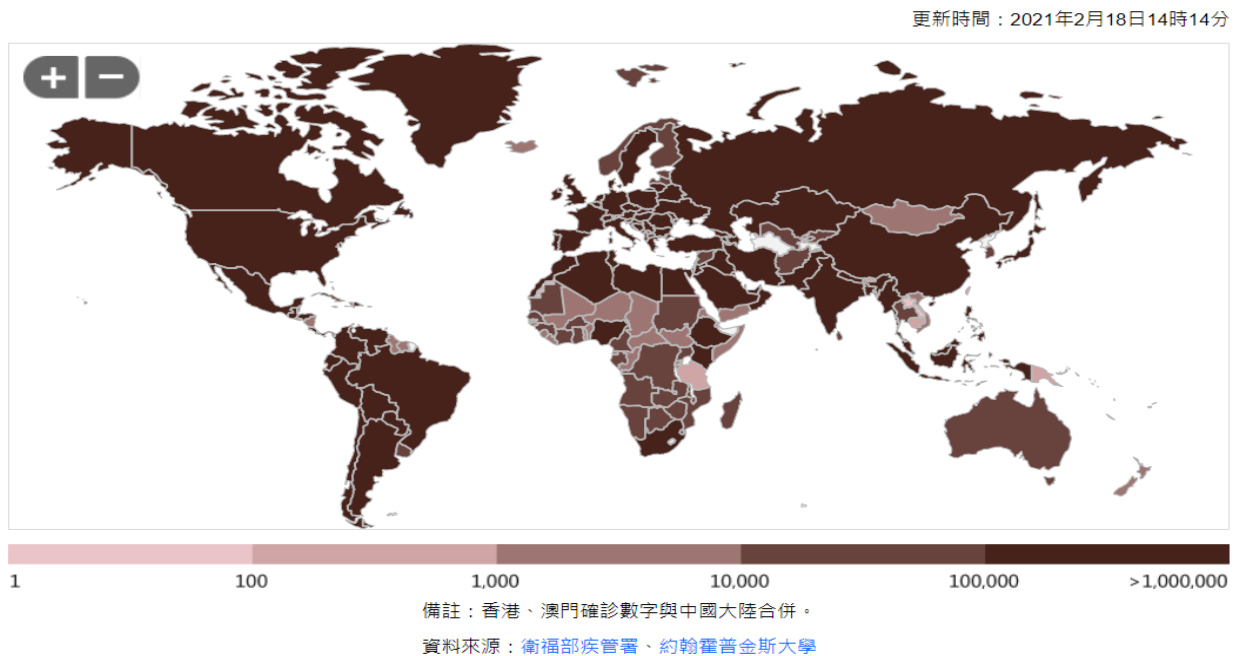


Figure 3: Number of confirmed cases all around the world  
(Figure 3 reference : 雅虎新聞。2021 年 2 月 18 日，  
取自 <https://news.campaign.yahoo.com.tw/2019-nCoV/index.php>)

C. Assist the government on giving impetus to new policies and precautions set with the purpose of virus prevention

(A) Social Distancing

- a. The distance between people should remain 1.5 meters in indoor places and 1 meter at outdoor locations.
- b. Without periodical disinfection and proper virus preventive measures, large-scale events or activities should obey the number limit of 100 participants indoors and 500 outdoors.

(B) Home Isolation (Shelter-in-place, SIP)

People associating with confirmed cases should stay at home on quarantine within fourteen days, and are forbidden to leave home or go through immigrations for any reasons. They are also not allowed to take public transportations of any kind. If people disobey these rules, they will have to be forced to stay in a centralized quarantine area and pay a fine with a maximum of NT\$1,000,000.

(C) Home Quarantine

Aiming to all immigrants, limitations and penalties as above.

(D) Self-Health Monitoring

Aiming to notified cases who have negative quarantine results and meet the requirements of being released from isolation. These people are supposed keep track of their body conditions for fourteen days. They are also asked to take temperature every dusk and dawn.

(E) Quarantine Hotels

Responding to rules such as “Home Isolation” and “Home Quarantine”, local governments collaborate with hotels. They upgraded the virus preventing facilities in the hotel and provided a place for people acting in concert with the policies above to stay at.

(F) Centralized Quarantine Areas

To stop Covid-19 from spreading so speedily effectively, aiming to people who should but haven't received quarantine, travelers coming from endemic areas, and people who communicated rapidly with confirmed cases, the government decided to gather them in quarantine areas and confine them in certain places, in order to implement their health monitoring.

According to the examples above, we can tell that if social media announce reports and speeches with authenticity, it can promote the implementation of new politics based on pandemic prevention. With the influence of social media, we can not only receive clear instructions and rules from the government instantly, but also stop COVID-19 from spreading in such a rage.

## (II) Negative impacts caused by social media

### A. The effects of incorrect information spread through social media

People nowadays use social media all the time. Although these outcomes from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as the Internet, brought great handiness to our everyday life, they did not always affect us positively. The convenience of them also accelerated the spreading of rumors and misinformation. We often rely on what we see or what we hear around us to recognize the world, which is changing rapidly every minute. However, tattles and groundless allegation flooded in social media of all kinds, penetrating us, and impacting our society and life sphere in a negative way. How can you ask a person to form a correct perception when he or she is surrounded by misinformation?

The World Health Organization had indicated that, **“We are not just battling the virus, we are also battling the trolls of conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response.”** (WHO, 2020) Under the catalysis of the pandemic, the spreading of disinformation has intensified. According to a Taiwanese survey, the usage rate of “LINE” tops the list of social apps. (張筱涵, 2020) Because of the high user engagement in this popular app, the influence of messages on it escalated astoundingly. A research even pointed out that disinformation spread six times faster through Line than in normal conditions. In this generation, every one of us is a member of the media, but when we receive a message, we often let it out without verification. That's why social network is the place where most false news and information spread. The very first confirmed case was confirmed on January 21, because of the unfamiliarity of the novel coronavirus, rumors of misconceptions, incorrect precautions and treatment are rife. Although many of these folk prescriptions are distorted by flu hearsays, there are still people willingly to give it a try.

Taili Wang (2020), a professor in National Taiwan University, carried out an investigative

journalism about the top six hit disinformation (please look at the graph 4 below). She unexpectedly found that among all voters, disinformation affected the ones who considered themselves as swing voters the most. In terms of the population structure, people aged 50 to 59 have the highest judgmental abilities towards false messages, while the ones in their early adulthood (aged 20 to 29) have the lowest judgmental abilities. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that most ways that youngsters receive news happen to be social media. We often have the clearest impression and believe in the messages we first obtain, which makes it hard for us to accept information after that, even if it's clarified or proved.

With the threat of the pandemic, disinformation gets to spread most because it, to some extent, made use of people with little sense of information literacy. According to collected statistics in the past few years, only ninety percent of all readers seek proof when they received a suspicious message. (洪寶山, 2019) When people got trapped in the cycle of misinformation and disinformation, problems and trouble start popping out. For instance, rumors, misinforming people that Covid-19 can be prevented by drinking hot water, are all over. Some people even received disinformation like masks can be worn different-side based on your body conditions. These exaggerations and absurd disinformation are slowly devastating our everyday life.

#### B. Panic caused by social media

The pandemic raging around the world has not only affected us physically, it has also impacted our mental health. While the government is busy trying its best to decrease the number of infected cases and take care of our health, it should also take notice of our feelings. If not, the world might sink into a mire of despair, depression, and anxiety, and the percentage of suicided people might rise to a peak. An infectious disease expert once said, **“Whenever an outbreak occurs, we should be alert to people who are over-relaxed and the ones who sank into inexplicable panic.”** (Wikipedia, 2020)

To some extent, panic makes a terrible source of infection which is as harmful as viruses. In the early stages of infectious disease outbreaks, the source of panicking can mostly be traced back to the fear of the unknown. After that, people who appeared to have a panicky psychological state often feel panicked, overwhelmed with pressure, and under the weather because of the lack of social activity, the rising of unemployment, and of course, economic problems. In the coming future, a large number of people might suffer under depression, anxiety, and other mental illness. Although this phenomenon has been alleviated with the effective control of the pandemic, it will keep impacting our life until the outbreak is eliminated completely. Thus, on account of disinformation from social media, media panic, an emotional criticism against a new medium or media technology (林倖妃, 2019), appears.



### III. Conclusion

After investigating the impacts and influences of social media, we generalized and concluded what we learnt into three points.

(I) Beware of the influence of social media.

Through different reports about the same event, we can see that the media can somehow make it seem like two, or more exactly distinct stories. As long as the information warfare begins, it's when cyber warriors and reporters get to work. **"It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind."** (Sidney Rogerson, 1938) To make you believe in them and even help them spread their claims and viewpoints, the most common tactic for them to adopt is media framing. After all, it's always easier to make others believe what the crowd believe in than to ask them to believe in a single person.

(II) It is important for us to have a sense of information literacy.

Nowadays, social media can now be seen almost everywhere around us. Therefore, the importance of information literacy can't be overemphasized. Screening process like critical thinking or sensitivity to disinformation and misinformation are obviously indispensable while we absorb lore. Learning how to learn is the essence of information literacy. Sufficient and accurate background knowledge can equip us to deal with all sorts of situations while reaching decisions in life. With the help of "information literacy", we can not only distinguish errant info, but can also make us come up with questions we may have never thought of.

(III) Intelligent and humorous policies of fighting the infodemic sometimes works way better than strict ones.

As the digital minister of Taiwan, Audrey Tang (2020) said, **"The three keys of digital democracy are fast, fair, and fun."** When COVID-19 first showed signs of an outbreak, Taiwan's authority was vigilant, proactively taking preventive measures against disease, even before the first infected case was reported in our country. Apart from the swift mechanism, information transparency has also been a pivotal and critical key to combating this contagious virus. The government generates accurate transparent news so that the media is able to deliver valid information to the public in order to avoid disinformation and misinformation, which can trigger unfounded panic. By being as transparent as possible, our government has quickly gained trust from us Taiwanese people. In this case, we residents are willing to follow the rules set by the Central Epidemic Command Center in order to conquer the pandemic. Technology has played an irreplaceable role, for example, the digital minister and a local programmer have

worked together to launch an online mask supply tracking system, which makes purchasing masks more convenient. As for the “fun” part, our government pushed out a series of “Humor over rumor” measures in order to fight the infodemic in a light-hearted way. For instance, a rumor spread by a tissue paper reseller indicated that we will run out of tissue papers soon because the materials of surgical masks are the same as the ones used in tissue paper production. Due to this situation, our government released a memetic picture with a man shaking his ass in order to express the fact that there's no need to keep hoarding and panic buying tissue paper in a humorous way.

With the Taiwan Model in place, we sincerely believe that we can, and we will surely get through this COVID-19 crisis, together.

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