A Commentary on Provided Information Resources in the Outbreak of COVID-19 in Iran

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Dear Editor

COVID-19 which was at first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has rapidly spread around the universe, and has caused serious public health issues.

So far, no definitive treatment or cure has been discovered for this disease. This means there is a need for people's self-care and self-control in order to prevent this disease and its outbreak. Communities need to learn how to protect themselves from the potential severe effects of this new unknown virus. Accessing health information, especially from authentic channels is a substantial step in improving health promotion. Health information is the data related to a person's medical history, including symptoms, diagnoses, procedures, and outcomes.[1] A perspective on the significance of pandemics, information should be presented to public in the appropriate format and the right time. During the spread of COVID-19, different individuals and organizations began to produce and disseminate information. Due to the emergency situation of the COVID-19 crisis, various strategies have been used for disseminating information in digital operating systems. It is worth mentioning that reviewing these operating systems is just as much important.

Method

This study is a commentary in which authors seek to present novel topics to researchers in a particular field.[2] The authors' extensive experience and knowledge also assists to provide a better perspective. Accordingly, the authors have tried to express their perspectives first based on their knowledge and experience and then reviewing literature in the field of information and retrieval, information literacy, health literacy to introduce types of information sources related to COVID-19 in Iran.

Information Sources on the Outbreak of COVID-19
Mass Media

Mass media refers to a set of communication medium which generally seeks to attract a mass of audience through unilateral communication. Visual, audio, and print media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, are among the most significant mass media.[3] Nowadays, the mass media must be properly managed so that experts and public people can trust them.[4] However, in some cases, the censorship of media news may be conducted by government authorities due to maintain political, social, and economic stability.

Due to the easy access to mass media in Iran, it is one of the most important training tools during the COVID-19 outbreak. At present, the Iranian radio and television is under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. In the past decades, the function of mass media was much greater, but today due to the development of new technologies such as the Internet and smart phones, the use of them have definitely been affected.[5]

Information Resources of the Ministry of Health

These days, the sources of information introduced by organizations affiliated with the Ministry of Health are considered as the most important sources of information on COVID-19.[6] In Iran, the resources have been introduced to the public based on the information provided by the radio and television, the universities of medical sciences of the cities and provinces as follow:

Official Information Center of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in Iran (behdasht.gov.ir):

In addition to maintaining its previous services and information, this official website has published valid news since the beginning of the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. Evidence suggests that training guidelines for controlling, preventing, and treating this disease are available in a link entitled: "Corona Training Guides" in a PDF format. There are other sections on the site entitled: "Infographics" and "Health Scans" which provide learning materials in a variety of multimedia formats.

It is worth to note that published news on this site is confirmed by the public relations (webda.behdasht.gov.ir) of this ministry. Also, all Iranian universities of medical sciences in various cities and provinces under the direct supervision of this ministry have been publishing all the information related to this crisis in their information database.

Coronavirus Patient's Information, Self-Assessment and Registration System:

This system is analyzed by the medical, data and epidemiology team of the Non-Communicable Diseases Research Center of Tehran University of Medical Sciences and the data analysis and programming team of Vista Technology Idea-Making Group have been established under the support of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this system, information regarding various areas of Iran in terms of traffic of people with this virus is indicated in addition to valid information and training materials in different multimedia formats. Also, high-risk areas have been identified in terms of the prevalence of COVID-19 and have been proposed to the audience in the form of an image.

Database of Cultural and Student Department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (mefda.ir):

This database has been placed in recent years to inform about cultural and student-training activities of the Iran University of Medical Sciences. It is mostly student-friendly and also most of their content producers are medical students. In this database, each university of medical sciences has a separate website which has been producedto publish related content in various formats. The contents' analysis of this database elaborates that during this disease outbreak, in addition to informing and guiding medical students in order to take appropriate action to control the spread of this virus, other educational materials have also been published to the public. The general educational materials published in this database have been in various multimedia formats, most of which have been obtained from reputable scientific sources such as WHO guidelines, which have been published on this site after translation and a rewriting procedure.

Iranian News Agencies

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, news databases, along with their policies, have mostly published significant related national news and announcements. Also, due to the importance of this issue, some news agencies such as Mehr News Agency, IRNA, ISNA have launched a special page in this regard so that users could follow the relevant news of this crisis in a categorized manner. Most of the content related to COVID-19 in the Iranian news agencies is taken from news and its reports, however, some news agencies publish content related to health guidelines and protocols were published in the form of infographics and PDFs. One of the published content challenges are facing by news agencies and websites is the lack of coordination in using credible messages and guidelines provided by WHO regarding care and prevention of coronavirus outbreaks.[7]

Social Networks and Instant Messengers

Social networks and instant messengers are among tools which publish information and messages related to public health as soon as possible. Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, etc. are among the most substantial tools which are popular among the general public.[8] Telegram is one of the most applied social networks among the Iranian population.[9] Currently, organizations and institutions related to public health have created Telegram channels to post

messages about the outbreak prevention of COVID-19. Also, other individuals and groups with known and sometimes unknown identities have created channels in this field and have actually started to spread fake information. This issue is in fact one of the major challenges of these channels. This is one of the main challenges of using these channels. Undoubtedly, virtual social networks have a great potential to raise awareness and education in the field of health care in times of Novel Coronavirus crisis. However, the biggest threat to these networks is the rapid spread of false news and rumors, which should not be underestimated.[10]

Conclusion

In the widespread COVID-19, social distance is one of the keys to both protect and prevent virus' outbreak. In the information and communication technological era, public health information on cyberspace and digital is essential to minimize physical contact. Given that prevention through public health education is one of the most effective and inexpensive methods to control the outbreak of COVID-19 worldwide.[11] and in this regard, based on the evidence of using data, the media and communication are priority in terms of access to up-to-date data and even entertainment.[12] During previous epidemics such as SARS in 2003, due to the lack of widespread use of the Internet and smart phones, the nature of its information has been different from the COVID-19.[13] Today, due to the widespread use of online services, these media play a substantial role in informing and updating public health information for individuals and even health care workers. Therefore, monitoring the publication of news and articles related to this disease in databases and channels which are not under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Health is a major problem.

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