Jurnal KITAB, Bil. 3 (3, Jun), 2026, 1-8
https://10.51200/kitab.v3i1.8527
Received: 15 Mac 2026
Accepted: 25 Mei 2026
Published: 15 Jun 2026

THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SHARIAH PERSPECTIVE

Ida Shafinaz Mohamed Kamil[1], Mohd Dahlan A. Malek[2]

[1, 2]Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, ismk97@ums.edu.my, dahlanam@ums.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenon of fake news from the Shariah perspective, investigating its implications and consequences in light of Islamic teachings. The dissemination of fake news poses significant challenges to societies worldwide, influencing public opinion and stirring discord and negative consequences particularly during difficult times, including during public health crises suchs as the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of fake news is becoming more prevalent via various internet platforms and social media platforms which caused great concern among the community. From a Shariah standpoint, the spread of fake news contradicts fundamental Islamic principles, such as truthfulness, justice, and ethical conduct. Employing a descriptive analysis, this paper examines the effects of spreading fake news in the context of Islamic jurisprudence, drawing on Qur'anic verses and hadiths to shed light on the gravity of misinformation in Islam. The discussion also touches upon the responsibilities of individuals and authorities in preventing and countering the proliferation of fake news in accordance with Shariah principles. Ultimately, the article underscores how Shariah principles provide a solid foundation for countering fake news and contributing to a more informed and just society.

Keywords: COVID-19; Fake news; Islamic principles; misinformation; Shariah.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and it later spread to the rest of the world until the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a global pandemic of COVID-19 in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Malaysia, as other countries around the globe, has suffered its severe impact. As of November 2023, more than 770 million cases and 6.9 million deaths are recorded around the world. As for Malaysia, 5.1 million cases with 37,191 deaths are reported on 30 November 2023 (WHO, n.d.). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the challenges associated with the spread of fake news about the disease itself. Indeed, misinformation about the COVID-19 disease spread faster, wider and deadlier than the virus itself through various internet platforms as well as social media platforms (Thomas, 2020; Pennycook et al., 2020) ranging from various conspiracy theories about the virus as a biological weapon to reduce the human population to claims that certain food or traditional medicines kills the virus. Fake news of this sort may cause people to turn to

ineffective or dangerous remedies, or acting carelessly and inadvertently spreading the virus, or avoiding proper treatment (Ahinkorah et al., 2020; Pennycook et al., 2020). In fact, the misinformation on the conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 has reached more than 20 million views worldwide via various social media platforms (Mian & Khan, 2020).

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has reported that the number of misinformation and false statements spread via the social media has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Official Website of MCMC). This is because the public was desperate for information pertaining the status of COVID-19 cases and hence, news as well as fake news on the situation as well as the government response towards it had been spread throughout the social media platform (Khan et al., 2022). These include false information about the lockdowns, the MCO (Movement Control Order) and social distancing regulations, claims that vaccines harm the body and non-halal for the Muslims, false statements on fake remedies, doubts on health strategies introduced by the government that cause confusion and fear to the public (Mohammad et al, 2022). In addition to the misinformation crisis, false and inaccurate information related to the virus has contributed to serious misconception and unjustified reasoning that has aggravated the pandemic outbreak, thus seriously challenging the public's health, mentally and physically (Tasnim et al., 2020). This misinformation poses a severe threat by misleading the public to depend on baseless and dangerous claims for remedies and protection (Ahinkorah et al., 2020). In addition, efforts by the authorities to fight COVID-19 were also hindered by the spread of fake news.

The government of Malaysia has undertaken various regulatory initiatives in combating fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fake news offence is punishable under several statues, including the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA), the Penal Code, and the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance (No.2) 2021. The Malaysian government also, via its agencies, has set up several non-regulatory initiatives to counter fake news including a fact-check website, the 'Sebenarnya.my' portal, which allows the users to verify information and report on fake news. (Thomazios et al., 2021; Kamil & Malek, 2021). Nevertheless, fake news including fake news related to COVID-19 are still prevalent. Based on the above, this paper aims to analyse the concept and impact of fake news from the Shariah perspective, emphasizing its ethical dimensions and consequences. Employing a descriptive analysis, this paper seeks to provide insights into the responsibilities of individuals and authorities in preventing the proliferation of fake news and misinformation.

THE MEANING OF FAKE NEWS

Fake news, characterized by the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information, has become a pervasive issue in the modern world. Fake news has been described by many as 'mimics news media content in form' (Lazer et al., 2018 in Mohammad et al, 2022). The term 'fake' is defined as 'not genuine; appearing to

be something it is not (counterfeit); or made to look like something else (imitation)' (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). It is also defined as 'one that is not what it purports to be; a worthless imitation passed off as genuine' (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Hence, fake news may refer to false news, as well as an imitation or a counterfeit of news. Lim et al. (2021) explained fake news as manufactured or fictitious news that is produced for financial, political, harmful, or entertainment purposes that could lead to inaccurate judgments that could cause people to be misled.

Fake news also has been referred to as misinformation which is false and inaccurate that occasionally results from honest mistakes. Another type of fake news is disinformation, which has become a concern, where individuals or institutions, intentionally deceive the information with bad intention to alter the public belief or policies or to fulfil certain purposes, which cause direct or indirect damage to those who believe it (Fetzer, 2004 in Lim et al., 2021). The difference between these types of false information is as follows: Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is distributed, whether or not it is intended to mislead, whereas disinformation is intentionally misleading or biased information, manipulated contents or facts. Fake news can be either misinformation or disinformation, or both, where it has been defined as a purposely crafted, sensational, misleading or fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news. Their similarities lie in the fact that they involve widespread dissemination.

Although fake news is not new, in the era of internet, fake news is much more widespread where internet social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and several others have been accused as the main culprits of this phenomenon (Raja, 2020). Such internet platforms allow the users to share and disseminate information, where time and distance barriers no longer exist, which facilitate the dissemination of fake news. However, it is also the modern technology that allows fact-checking to be performed to counter misinformation and fake news (Othman et al., 2020).

SHARIAH VIEWS ON FAKE NEWS

Islamic teachings place a significant emphasis on truthfulness. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly calls for honesty and integrity in communication. Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:42): "*And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it].*" The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also emphasized the gravity of spreading false information, stating, "Beware! Avoid sitting on the roads." People asked, "There is no way for us to sit? He said, "You may sit. But keep the roads safe and fulfil the rights of the wayfarer" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Islam prohibits the creation and the dissemination of lies or fake news where both are categorised as major sins and considered as the characteristics of hypocrites (*al-Munafik*). The Holy Qur'an in many verses condemns those who lie in their words as someone who have no faith. Allah SWT says in Surah Al-

Munafiqun (63: 1): "But *Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are truly liars.*" Allah SWT also says in Surah Al-Jathiyah (45:7): "*Woe to every sinful liar*". Thus, spreading fake news or misinformation is not just a crime in the worldly sense but also a grave sin in the sight of Allah SWT. Allah SWT warns in Surah An-Nur (24:15): "*When you received it with your tongues and said with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge and thought it was insignificant while it was, in the sight of Allah, tremendous*."

IMPACT OF SPREADING FAKE NEWS FROM THE SHARIAH PERSPECTIVE

From the Shariah perspective, the consequences of spreading fake news are severe. Falsehood undermines trust within the community, disrupts social harmony, and can lead to unjust actions based on misinformation. In fact, the act of spreading false or fake news is considered a serious offense due to its potential to harm individuals, communities, and society at large. Several key principles from the Holy Qur'an, Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad SAW), and Islamic legal tradition underscore the gravity of disseminating false information. Here are some aspects of the Shariah view on the effect of spreading fake news:

1) Truthfulness and Honesty: Islam places a significant emphasis on truthfulness and honesty in communication. The Qur'an explicitly commands believers to speak the truth and avoid spreading falsehood. Spreading fake news violates these fundamental principles, as it involves the intentional dissemination of information known to be false. In Surah At-Taubah (9:119), Allah says: "*O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with those who are true*." Any form of creating, making and sharing lies or false information is prohibited in Islam. In Surah Al-Hajj (22:30), Allah commands: *"So avoid the uncleanliness of idols and avoid false statement".*

2) Harm (*Darar*) and Mischief (*Fasad*): Spreading fake news often leads to harm and mischief in society. Islamic jurisprudence prohibits actions that cause harm to individuals or communities. False information can lead to social unrest, damage reputations, and incite conflict, all of which are contrary to the principles of justice and well-being in Islam. Allah says in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:60): "*And do not do mischief on the earth, causing corruption*."

3) Preservation of Reputation (*Israar*): The preservation of an individual's reputation is highly valued in Islamic ethics. Spreading false information can harm a person's character and integrity, and Islam prohibits actions that tarnish the reputation of others without just cause. Hadith: Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "Do not harm the Muslims, and do not revile them, nor pursue their defects." (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

4) Prohibition of Lying (*Kadhib*): Islam strictly prohibits lying, and spreading fake news is a form of dishonesty. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasized the importance of truthfulness in various aspects of life, including communication

and testimony. Hadith: The Prophet (SAW) said, "Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise." (Sahih Muslim)

5) Accountability in the Hereafter: In Islamic belief, individuals will be held accountable for their actions in the Hereafter. Spreading false information may lead to unintended consequences and harm both in this world and the afterlife. Allah SWT says in Surah An-Nisa (4:124): "*And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed*."

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ACCORDING TO SHARIAH

The dissemination of information according to Islamic ethics requires the information literacy skills, namely the abilities to discover, evaluate, interpret, and use information properly and truthfully. With regard to these skills, information dissemination can be divided into the following steps, namely, acquiring, evaluating and sharing the information (Parrott, 2019 in Zubair et al., 2019). The first step, i.e., before a person disseminates any information received, is acquiring the requisite information. Here, Muslims are required to acquire the information by verifying the credibility of the sources of the said information. Nevertheless, with the growth of the internet and social media platforms, it poses a huge burden to verify the credibility and the authenticy of every source of information. Thus, where verification of the sources is not possible, one is advised to hold his or her judgment. The Qur'an in Surah Al-Isra (17:36) says: "*Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Surely the hearing, the sight, the heart - each of these shall be called to account*." Further, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also commented: "Indeed, among the excellence of a person's Islam is that he leaves what does not concern him" (Jami' al Tirmidhi, Vol. 4, Book 10, Hadith 2317). The Holy Qur'an reminds the Muslims in Surah An-Nisa (4:135) to stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against themselves, their parents or close relatives. yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Allah SWT warns in the same verse that a person who distorts the testimony or refuses to give it, will know that Allah is certainly All-Aware of what he or she does.

The second step requires the evaluation of the information received. Here, Muslims are required to evaluate or seek clarification upon receipt of an information before acting upon it. (Parrott, 2019 in Zubair et al., 2019) The Qur'an warns against spreading false information, as seen in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:6). Muslims are also reminded to speak only in matters where he or she has sound knowledge. In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "It is enough for a man to prove himself a liar when he goes on narrating everything he hears." (Sahih Muslim) Hence, verification on the news that one hears is paramount. One should not take any news as the truth at face value until it is evaluted and verified through reliable or trustworthy channels. Here, the recipient of the news must first verify the news to ascertain its truth (termed as "*tabayyun*"), otherwise he or she is liable to be categorised as a liar. Likewise, the

creator of the news must first ensure that the news is true and not false, or otherwise, he or she will be considered a slanderer. Here, the punishment to those who slander others is severe, and he or she would bear the burden of sins of those who believe in the false news. Those who spread lies remain deprived of Allah's guidance and will be subjected to severe punishment. Allah says in the Qur'an, Surah Ghafir (40:28): "*Indeed, Allah does not guide one who is a transgressor and a liar*".

After the initial two steps of acquiring and evaluating the information, the third step is to ensure that such news to be shared in line with the Islamic ethics. Hence, before sharing any news or information, Muslims are required to take into account the likely effect it could have on an individual. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is reported to have said: "He who believes in Allah and the Last Day must either speak good or remain silent" (Sahih Muslim, Book 18, Hadith 1511). Muslims, therefore, need to exercise caution before they click on the the share button or forward a message to another person as it may be insulting, hurtful or offensive to another person. They also have to exercise caution so as not to spread fake news. (Parrott, 2019 in Zubair et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the concept of fake news from the Shariah perspective, highlighting its adverse effects on truthfulness, justice, and ethical conduct in Islamic societies. The danger of fake news is real, and the holy Qur'an and hadiths stress the importance of truthfulness and the severe consequences of spreading false information. In line with Islamic teachings, Muslims whether individuals and authorities bear a collective responsibility to counteract the proliferation of fake news, safeguarding the integrity and well-being of the community. In summary, from the Shariah perspective, spreading fake news is not only ethically wrong but also goes against the principles of truthfulness, justice, and the preservation of individual and societal well-being. Muslims are encouraged to seek and disseminate truthful information, exercise caution in verifying news, and refrain from actions that can lead to harm and misinformation.

Acknowledgements

The authors expressed their gratitude and appreciation to Universiti Malaysia Sabah for funding the study (SDK265-2020).

REFERENCES

Ahinkorah, B. O., Ameyaw, E. K., Hagan, J. E., Seidu, A.-A., & Schack, T. (2020). Rising above misinformation or fake news in Africa: Another strategy to control COVID-19 spread. *Frontiers in Communication*, *5*(June), 2018–2021. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00045

Kamil, I. S. M., & Malek, M. A. (2021). Berita palsu semasa pandemik COVID-19: Tinjauan dari Perspektif Perundangan. *Jurnal Psikologi dan Kesihatan Sosial (JpsiKS).* 5: 49-56.

Khan, I. N. G., & Shukor, H. A., & Hashim, H. (2022). Countering fake news in Malaysia: Islamic and Malaysian legal perspective. *Proceeding of the 9th International Conference on Management and Muamalah 2022 (ICoMM 2022)*, 64-73.

Lim, A., Dollah, W.A.K.W., & Rahman, S.A. (2021). The awareness of fake news phenomenon through information literacy competency in social networking sites (SNS). *Journal of Academic Library Management (AcLiM), 1*(2), 75-84.

MCMC (n.d.). Official Website of Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. Accessed November 25, 2023. https://www.mcmc.gov.my/en/home

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) Fake. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved November 27, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fake

Mian, A., & Khan, S. (2020). Coronavirus: the spread of misinformation. *BMC Medicine*, *18*.

Mohammad, N. H., Chinnasamy, S., & Zamri, N. A. K. (2022). Fake news and misinformation: Covid-19 & challenges confronted by Malaysian's Ministry of Health. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences, 12*(5), 1276-1295. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i5/13010

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. (n.d.). Fake. In Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Retrieved November 27, 2023, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/fake_1#:~:text=adjective-,adjective,watch%20a%20fake%20British%20accent

Othman, S. S., Hassan, F., Sabri, S. A., & Nayan, L. M. (2020). Fake news from the Islamic perspective. *Mimbar, 36*(1), 159-168.

Pennycook, G., Mcphetres, J., Zhang, Y., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Fighting COVID-19 misinformation on social media: Experimental evidence for a scalable accuracy nudge intervention. *Psychological Science*, *31*(7), 770–780.

Raja, I. (2020, May 14). Is social media facilitating conspiracy theories about COVID-19? *Daily Sabah*, *6698*, 1–7.

Tasnim, S., Hossain, M. M., & Mazumder, H. (2020). Impact of Rumors and Misinformation on COVID-19 in Social Media. *Journal of Preventive Medicine & Public Health, 53*(3), 171-174. https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.20.094

Thomas, Z. (2020). *WHO says fake coronavirus claims causing "infodemic."* BBC News.

Thomazios, C. N., Sohaimi, A. M., Wong, T., & Teh, C. (2021). Laws to tackle the spread of fake news in Malaysia. *Legal Network Series*, *1*(A), 1–42.

World Health Organization. (2020). COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) Global Research and Innovation Forum: Towards a Research Roadmap. 11-12 February, 2020. https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/covid-19-public-health-

emergency-of-international-concern-(pheic)-global-research-and-innovation-forum

World Health Organization. (n.d.) *WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*. Retrieved November 29, 2023, from https://covid19.who.int/

Zubair, T., Raquib, A., & Qadir, J. (2019). Combating fake news, misinformation, and machine learning generated fakes: Insights from the Islamic ethical tradition. *ICR Journal, 10*(2), 189-212. https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v10i2.42