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# **Pandemic of Covid-19 and Its Challenges:**

**A Multidisciplinary Approach**

*Editor*

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**Pandemic of Covid-19 and Its Challenges :**  
**A Multidisciplinary Approach**

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# **Pandemic of Covid-19 and Its Challenges :**

## **A Multidisciplinary Approach**

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# Spreading of Misinformation about Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Media: A Survey among Library Professionals

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Covid-19 pandemic has manifold the use of social media platforms globally, which at the same time has lead to the spread of misinformation in return cause anxiety, depression and affected people in several other ways. So, our study is based on finding out the viewpoint of Library Professionals about the spread of misinformation about Covid-19 through social media apps and solutions to tackle with this problem, how to differentiate between misinformation/fake new news and the right information, what may be the reasons for the spread of misinformation, what is the role of library professionals in handling misinformation etc.

## Misinformation & Covid-19

Misinformation is a kind of false information that is pretended as real & accurate initially; spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead. Many fake news items are either largely or completely fictitious, and deliberately so. These stories imitate the look and style of real news articles, and they are published on sites designed to imitate established newspaper websites or political blogs, often with closely-related, similar or slightly misspelt domain names. (Beville, 2017) During the Covid-19 pandemic, misinformation and fake news have represented an important issue generating confusion and insecurity among the population. Thus such kind of misinformation spread another kind of disease over social media, based on information dissemination & may be termed as infodemic. An infodemic is described by WHO (2020) as an “*overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that occurs during an epidemic*”, and WHO is dealing with this issue proactively (Tangcharoensathien *et al.*, 2020).

## Review of Previous Literature

Research on spreading of misinformation about Covid-19 has been conducted in different domains. Here some such significant researches are discussed to give a preliminary idea about the present study, its need & significance, and how it adds some more to the existing literature.

Tagliabue *et al.* (2020) examined the role of mass media as a critical element during the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak that has influenced the public perception of risk. The study of Moscadelli *et al.* (2020) investigated about the “fake news” phenomenon in the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and also did a quantitative assessment is fundamental in order to understand the impact of false information and to defined political and technical interventions in health communication. Orso *et al.* (2020) also give a short note on infodemic and the spread of fake news in the Covid-19-era. Ali (2020) aimed to highlight the misinformation and its potential impacts during the Covid-19 by using the Systematic Review Approach by randomly selected (n = 35) research articles during 2015-20, witnessing the misinformation as a major concern during previous endemics and the current Covid-19 pandemic. Ahinkorah *et al.* (2020) provided a clear understanding on some Covid-19 misinformation, the inherent implications this poses to public health in Africa and highlights the potential strategies to curb this trend. Roozenbeek *et al.* (2020) examined predictors of belief in the most common statements about the virus that contain misinformation using five national samples from the UK (n= 1050 and n= 1150), Ireland (n = 700), the USA (n = 700), Spain (n= 700) and Mexico (n= 700). Barua *et al.* (2020) tested a conceptual framework considering general misinformation belief, conspiracy belief, and religious misinformation belief as the stimulus; and credibility evaluations as resilience strategy; and their effects on Covid-19 individual responses using a self-administered online survey with 483 useable responses. Pennycook *et al.* (2020) conducted two studied with more than 1,700 U.S. adults recruited online which give evidence that people share false claims about Covid-19 partly because they simply fail to think sufficiently about whether or not the content is accurate when deciding what to share.

As an addition to the previous literature, our present study add some value by investigating the sources, platforms & causes of misinformation, our responsibility, special needs and also illustrate the duty of a library professional to stop spreading such kind of misinformation.



## **Problem Statement**

The modern age is progressively dominated by the Internet, which facilitates the use and dissemination of information to the diverse population with minimal time. If last 20 years (2000-2019) taken under consideration, the Internet user base has seen a remarkable growth worldwide (e.g. 1157% in world total, 1913% in Asia, and 11100 % in India) (Internet World Stats, 2019). But most web publishers define their success by the amount of traffic their sites receive. They spread information without any moderator to test its accuracy. Web site owners can also pay a fee to have their site's search results shown in top placement on the results page of different search engines. (Beville, 2017) This is how misinformation spread. And to do this "Social Media" is the most common, free & unmoderated platform. There are reasons for a LIS professional to be strict about dealing such misinformation (incorrect information) and misperceptions (belief in misinformation) (Sullivan, 2019) is that sometimes such fake news & misinformation become harmful by its influence on thousands of masses. Issues, such as the recent outbreak of Covid-19 already create an environment of panic & anxiety among common people and it is largely contributed & exacerbated by the spread of misinformation.

## **Scope of the present study**

The study was surveyed about the uncontrolled spreading of misinformation about Covid-19 on social media, its harmful effect, possible solutions & need to tackle it as a library professional. In this critical situation of the present outbreak of Covid-19, the use of social media increases as a means of providing information. Library professionals now work more from remote position through an online help desk, ask a librarian as a virtual reference provider. At that point, it's important to identify authentic & trustworthy sources which provide actual information about Covid-19 to stop panic & anxiety among common people.

## **Objectives of the Study**

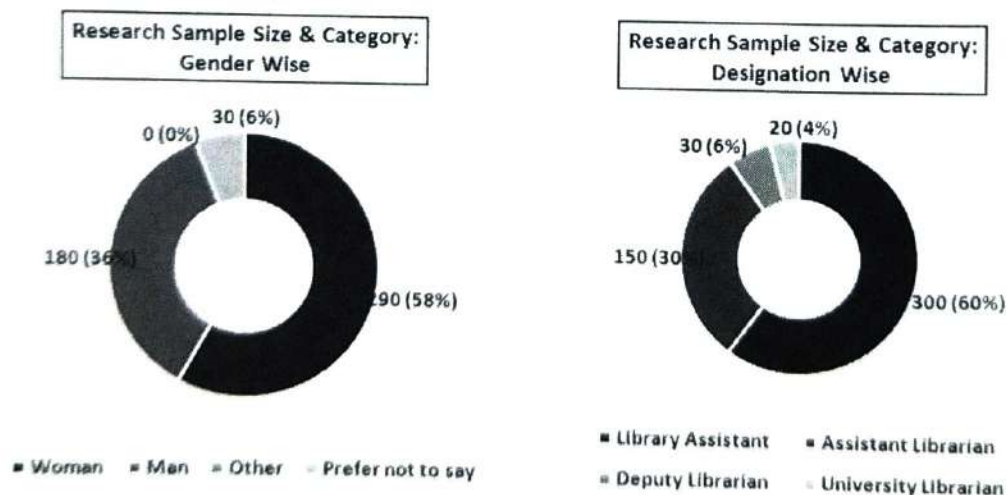
- (i) To find out the frequency of encountering the misinformation about Covid-19 by the library professionals among social media.
- (ii) To cite the top sources of misinformation about Covid-19 identified by the library professionals.
- (iii) To cite the top platforms that spreading misinformation about Covid-19 identified by library professionals.



- (iv) To find out our fault or contribution to this spreading of misinformation about Covid-19.
- (v) To identify the measure of effect of Covid-19 among common people.
- (vi) To identify the effects induced due to the spreading of Covid-19 misinformation.
- (vii) To develop possible practices to fight against such spreading of Covid-19 misinformation.
- (viii) To cite the essential requirements/needs that helps us to get rid of such spreading of misinformation about Covid-19.

### Research Methodology

The research framework of this survey was designed upon a structured research questionnaire created through Google form and circulated online among different social platforms and also via email to the eminent LIS professionals. It took almost 2 months (from September 2020 to November 2020) and 650+ participants took part in this survey from different parts of India. For sampling, the target group for this study was the Library Professionals which further categorized in 4 groups according to their designation viz. Library Assistant, Assistant Librarian, Deputy Librarian & Librarian.



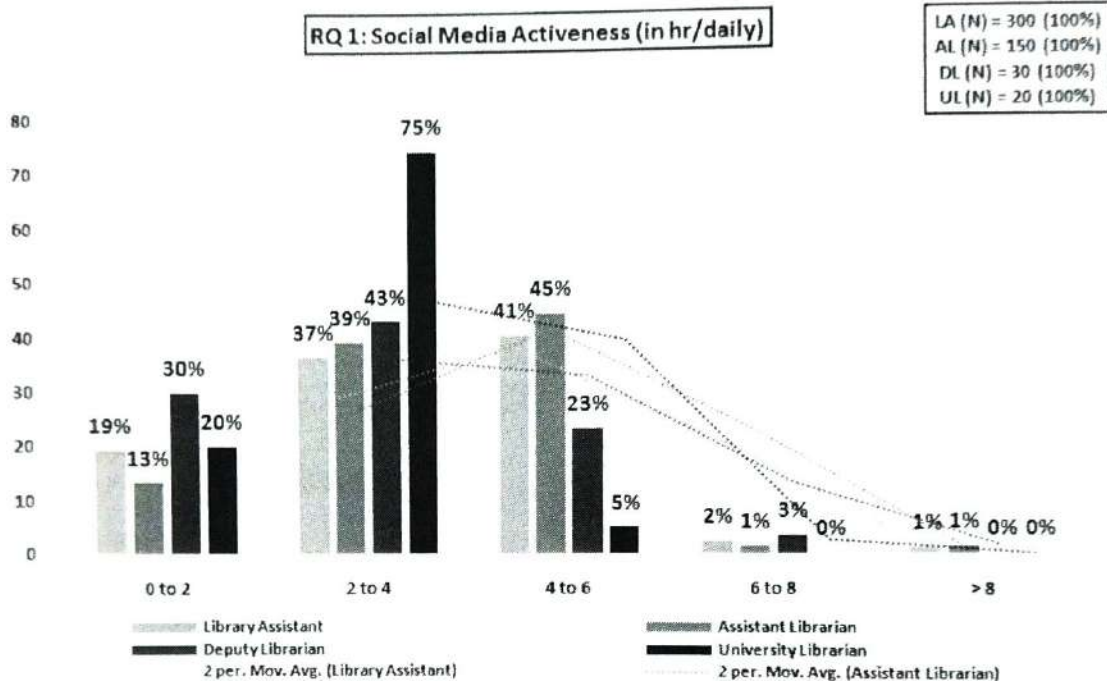
**Figure 1 & 2:** Research Sample Size & Category (Gender & Designation Wise)

For the present study 500 research sample was selected based on adequate, appropriate, authentic & complete response. The final selected sample universe (N) for the study includes 300 Library Assistant (LA) (60%), 150 Assistant Librarian (AL) (30%), 30 Deputy Librarian (DL) (6%) & 20 University Librarian

(UL) (4%) and among them, 290(58%) woman, 180(36%) man, & 30(6%) choose to prefer not to say about their gender.

## Result and Discussion

**RQ 1: How frequently did you use social media? (in hr/daily)**



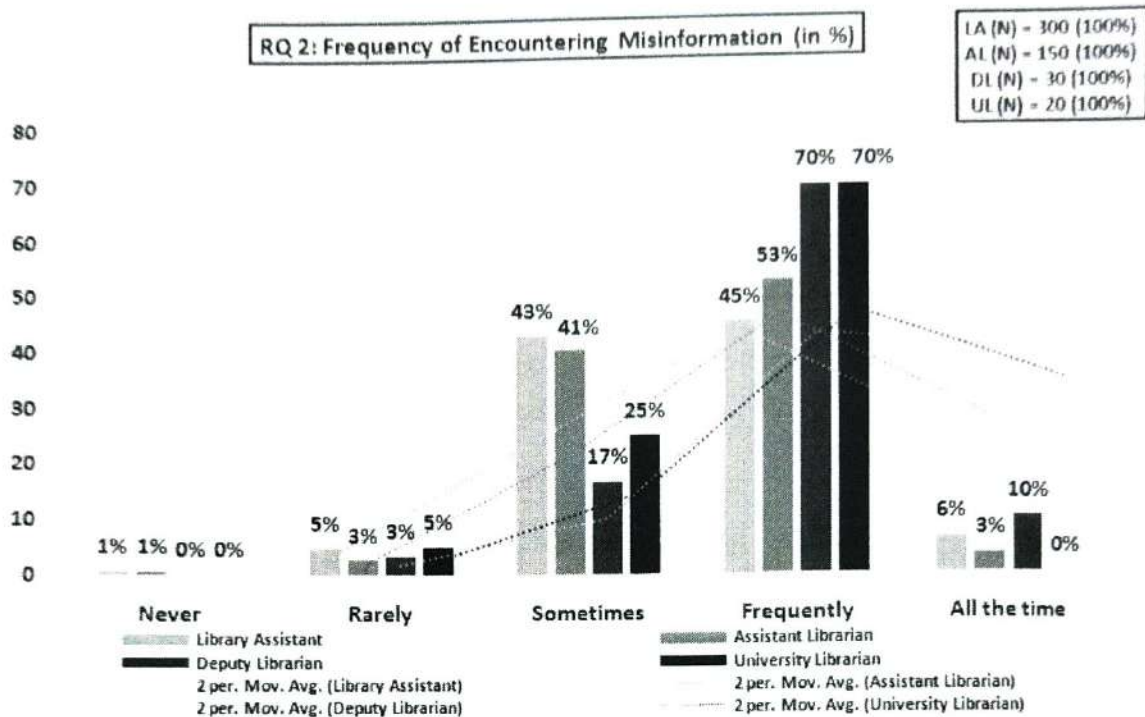
**Figure 3: Comparative Percentage of Social Media Activeness**

During this Covid-19 period, social media has become an important part of our lives. So, our first question RQ 1 deals with hourly access to social media by the different designated library professionals per day. *Figure 3* shows that 2 to 4 hrs is the generally preferred time for using social media by almost all of the library professionals (LA=37%, AL=39%, DL=43% & UL=75%). But LA & AL more favourably access social media platforms 4 to 6 hrs with a percentage of 41 and 45 respectively. While 6 to 8 & >8 hrs of accessibility are least chosen.

**RQ 2: How frequently did you encounter misinformation?**

Due to an increase in the use of social media, spammers and others misinformation spreading bodies have found social media as a major source for dissemination of misinformation or fake news for fulfilling their propaganda, political benefits or spreading hate over different religious groups. RQ 2 demonstrates how often library professionals faced misinformation while surfing social media.





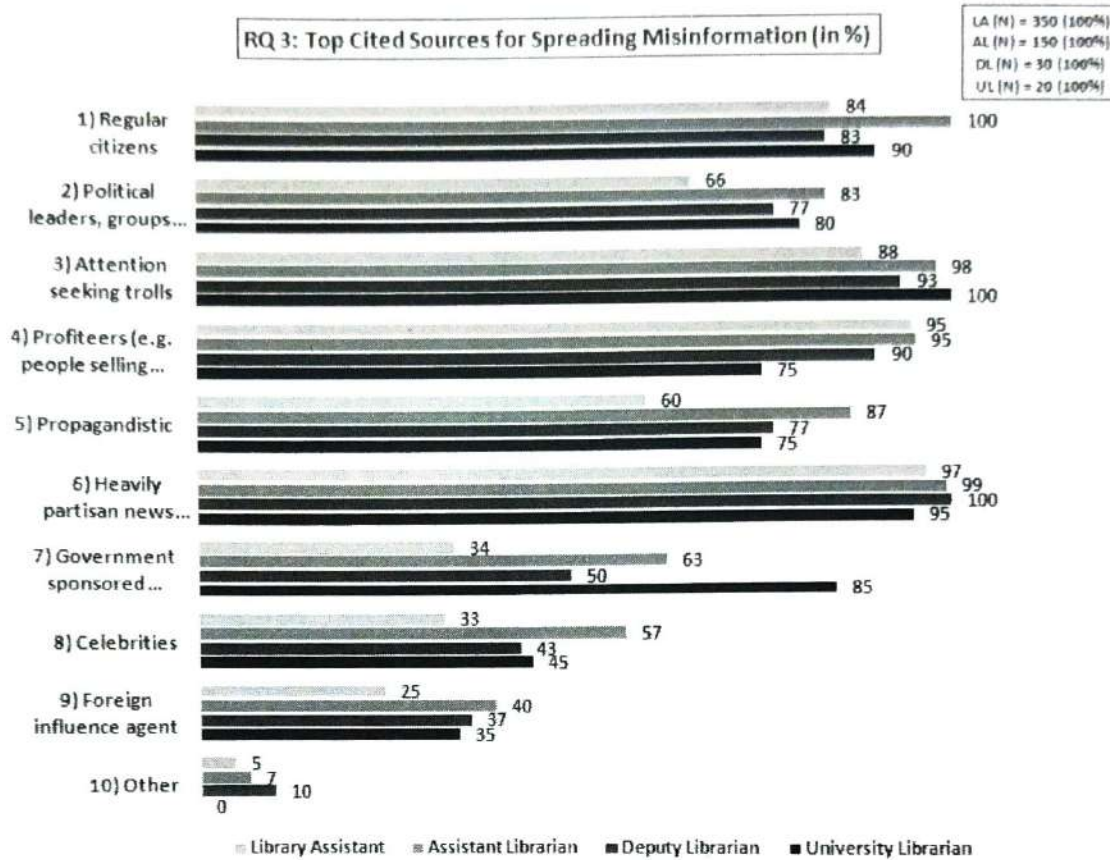
**Figure 4:** Frequency of Encountering Misinformation

Above Figure 4 identify that out of the 500 respondents 45% LA, 53% A and 70% DL & UL frequently encounter misinformation over social. There are also sufficient respondent from LA (43%) & AL (41%) who prefer to choose ‘Sometimes’ as there frequency of contacting misinformation and ‘Never’, ‘Rarely’ & ‘All the time’ options are rarely chosen.

**RQ 3: Who do you cite as top sources of misinformation?**

Who spreads misinformation? This has really become an quest during Covid-19 time period. RQ 3 deals with the viewpoint of Library professionals about the identification of relevant sources of misinformation.



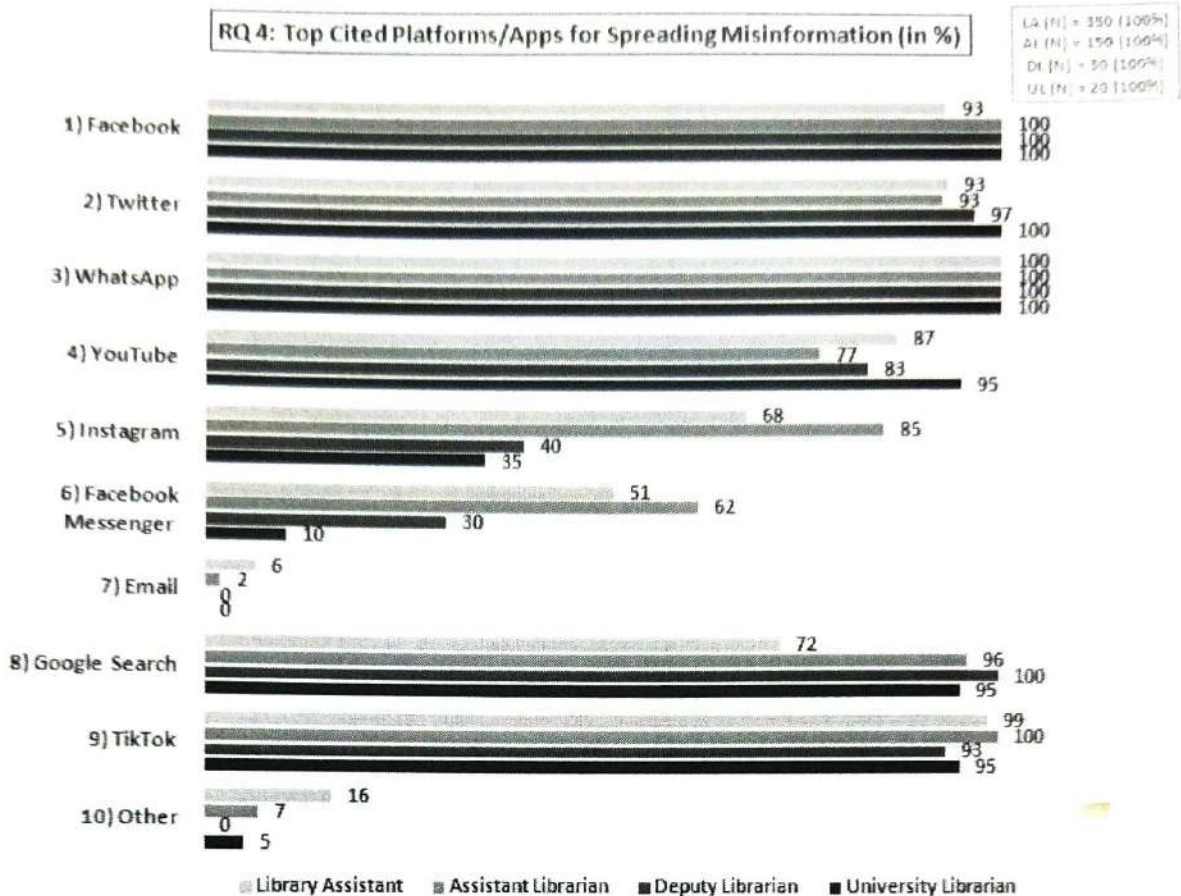


**Figure 5:** Top Cited Sources of Misinformation by the Respondents

According to Figure 5, majority of the library professionals (more than 80%) of all the kind choose 1-6 options, i.e. citizens, profiteers, propagandistic, political parties, trolls, and news media as topmost sources of misinformation. Whereas, celebrities, foreign influence agent & other options are not favorable sources of misinformation as indicated by the library professionals.

**RQ 4: Who do you cite as top platforms/apps is Covid-19 misinformation spreading prolifically?**

There are a vast number of free social media platforms/applications which help in spreading misinformation about Covid-19. At present, almost every person is using more than one social media apps. RQ 4 tries to find out the contribution of such platforms for spreading misinformation.



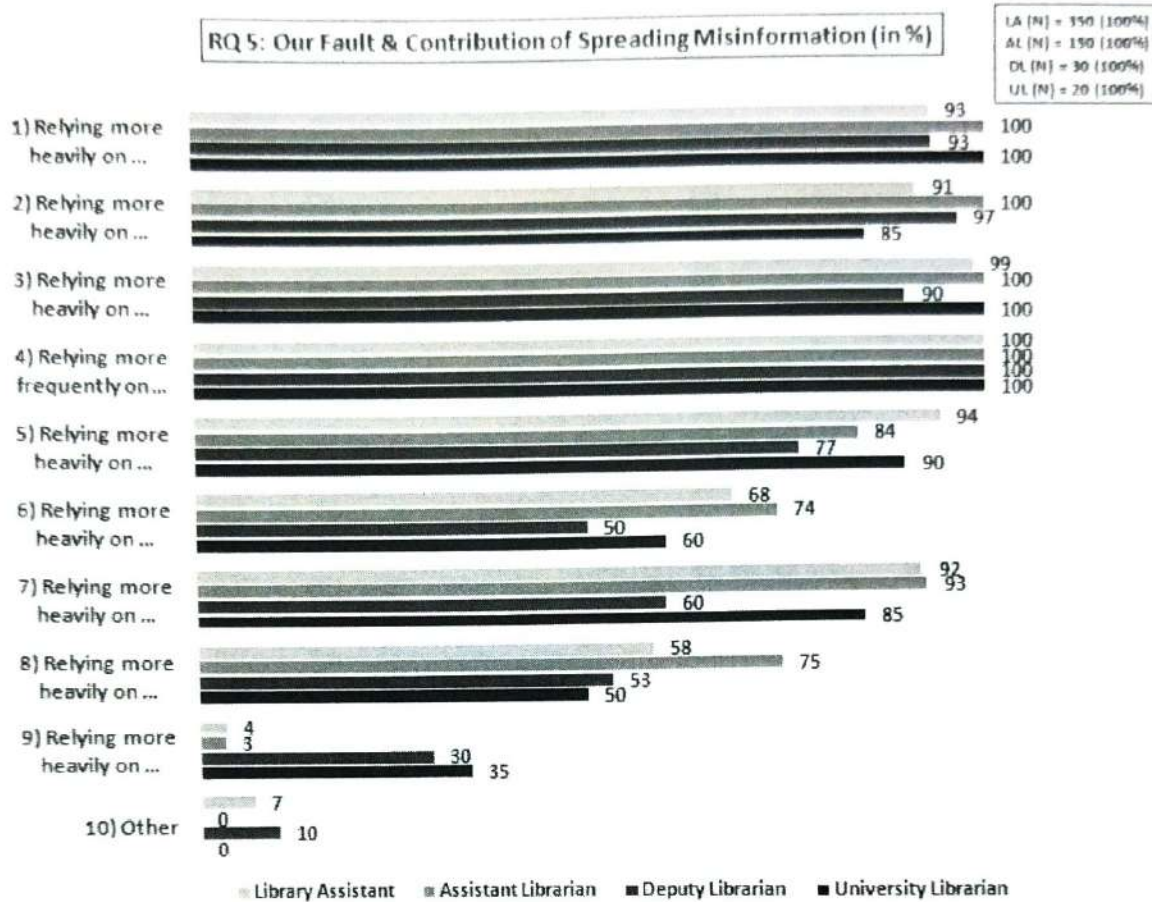
**Figure 6:** Top Cited Platforms/Apps for Spreading Misinformation

It can be observed from the received responses that WhatsApp & Facebook takes the lead as a major platform for the spread of misinformation with a preference of almost 100% from all 4 groups of library professionals, i.e. LA, AL, DL & UL; followed by Twitter, TikTok & Google Search engine with more than 93% of responses. Whereas, Email, Other & Facebook Messenger option choose as least preferable. (see Figure 6)

**RQ 5: What is our fault and contribution to this spreading of misinformation about Covid-19?**

Why misinformation spread across the world during Covid-19? What can be the reasons behind this? Do we responsible for this? Actually yes, intentionally or unintentionally some of our negligence & ill practices also responsible for it. RQ 5 examines to find answers to all the above questions. It deals with our mistakes and contribution to the spread of fake information about Covid-19.





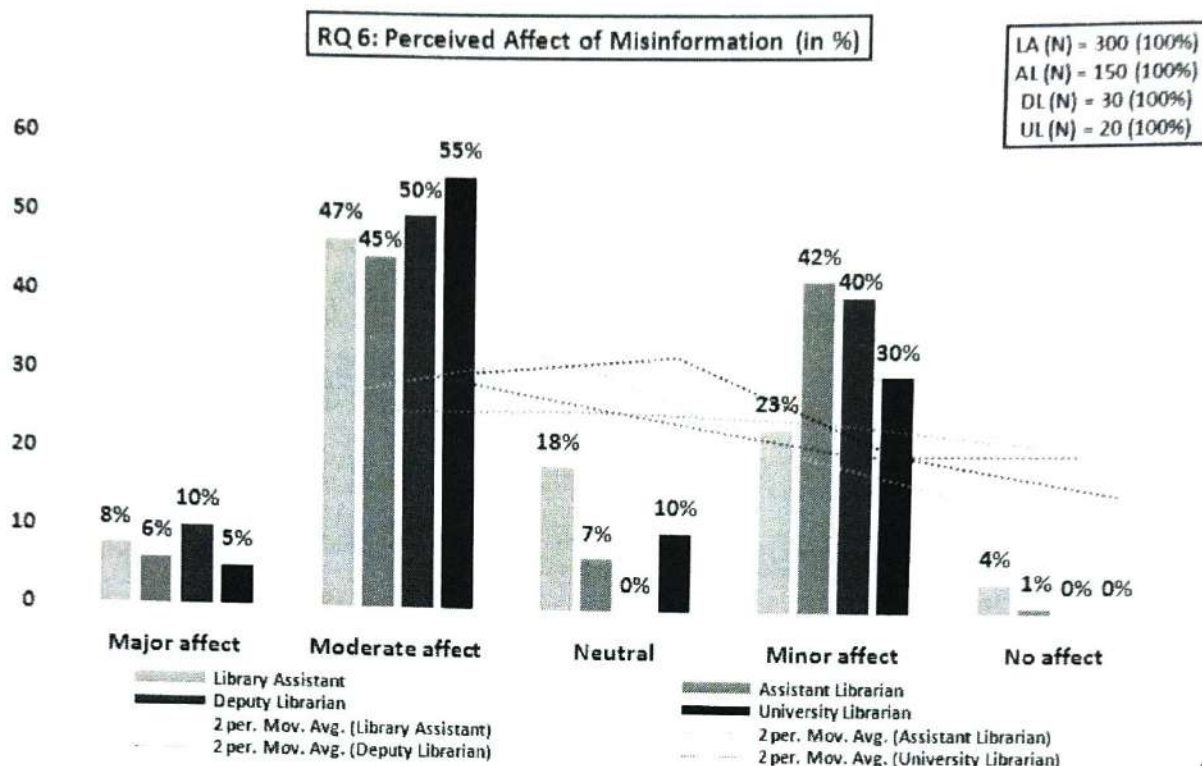
**Figure 7: Our Fault & Contribution of Spreading Misinformation**

After analyzing responses of RQ 5, it can be observed (see Figure 7) that relying on social media is the cause and root of misinformation as it got 100% preference from all library professionals. Moreover, other reasons for above includes, online communication, un-moderated raw information and even official statements.

**RQ 6: How much misinformations affect common people over social media?**

During Covid-19 need for psychologist has increased drastically over time. Misinformation has become one of the major reasons for anxiety and mental disorder among people. The main objective of RQ 6 is to know how much effect caused by such misinformation on common people.



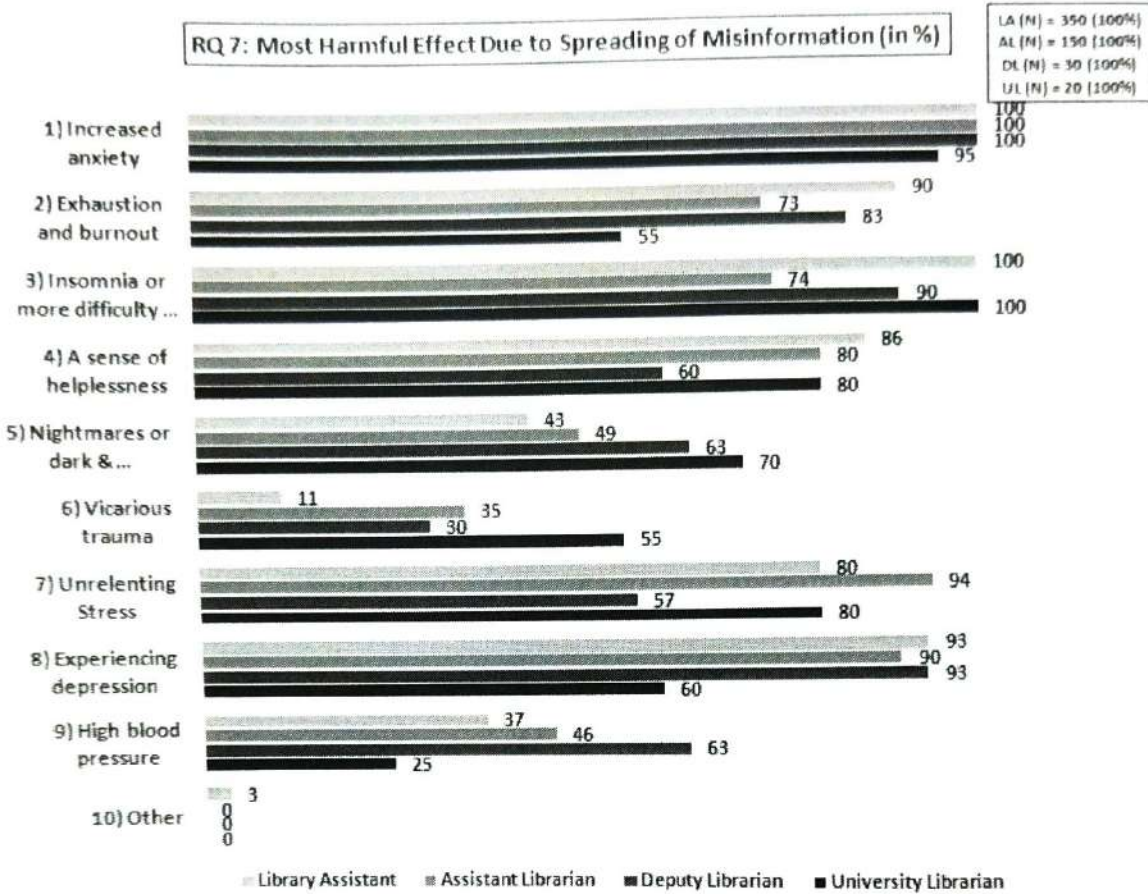


**Figure 8:** Perceived Effect of Misinformation over Social Media

From Figure 8, it can be seen that the majority of the library professionals have moderately affected by this fake news or misinformation. 47% of LA, 45% of AL, 50% of DL & 55% of UL agrees with the moderately effect of misinformation on people, which is quite shocking at the pandemic time. Though, from the viewpoint of another cluster of the respondent (23% LA, 42% AL, 40% DL & 30% UL) misinformation miserly affected the common people. SO among the library professionals, there is much variance on responses to this question.

**RQ 7: What is the most harmful effect due to spreading of such misinformation?**

RQ 7 throws light on harms done to people due to the spread of misinformation and how it has affected the people most. It can be evaluated from Figure 9, that major problem is anxiety with 100% responses from all groups and the other reasonable effects include insomnia, depression and negative thoughts.

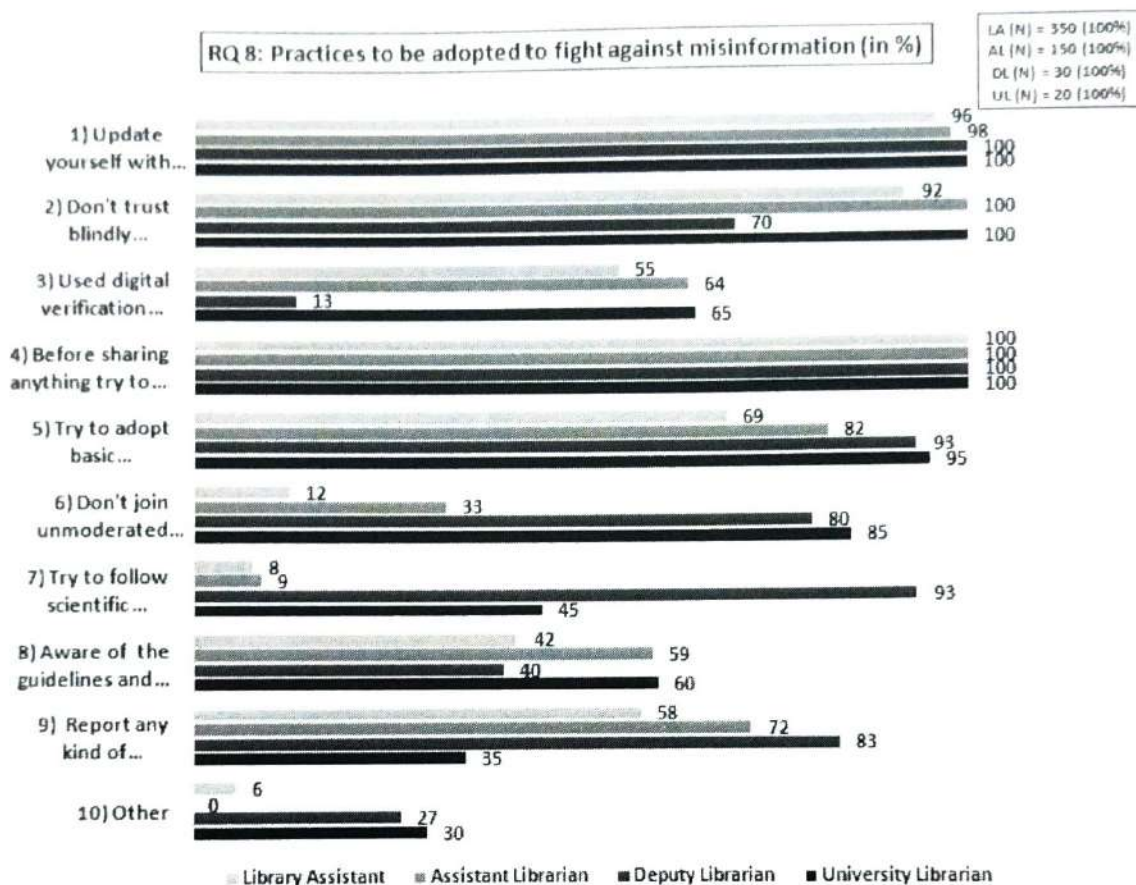


**Figure 9:** Most Harmful Effect due to Spreading of Misinformation

**RQ 8: What practices should be adopted to fight against Covid-19 misinformation?**

RQ 8 deals with the practices adopted by respondents to fight against Covid-19 misinformation. It can be observed from *Figure 10* that 100% of all types of library professionals agree to crosscheck information from authentic sources before sharing with others, but also takes into account updating yourself from time to time with sufficient information as well as not trusting blindly on everything over the internet. Additionally, keep updated with sufficient information about Covid-19, avoid unmoderated social groups & report any kind of misinformation also gets priority.



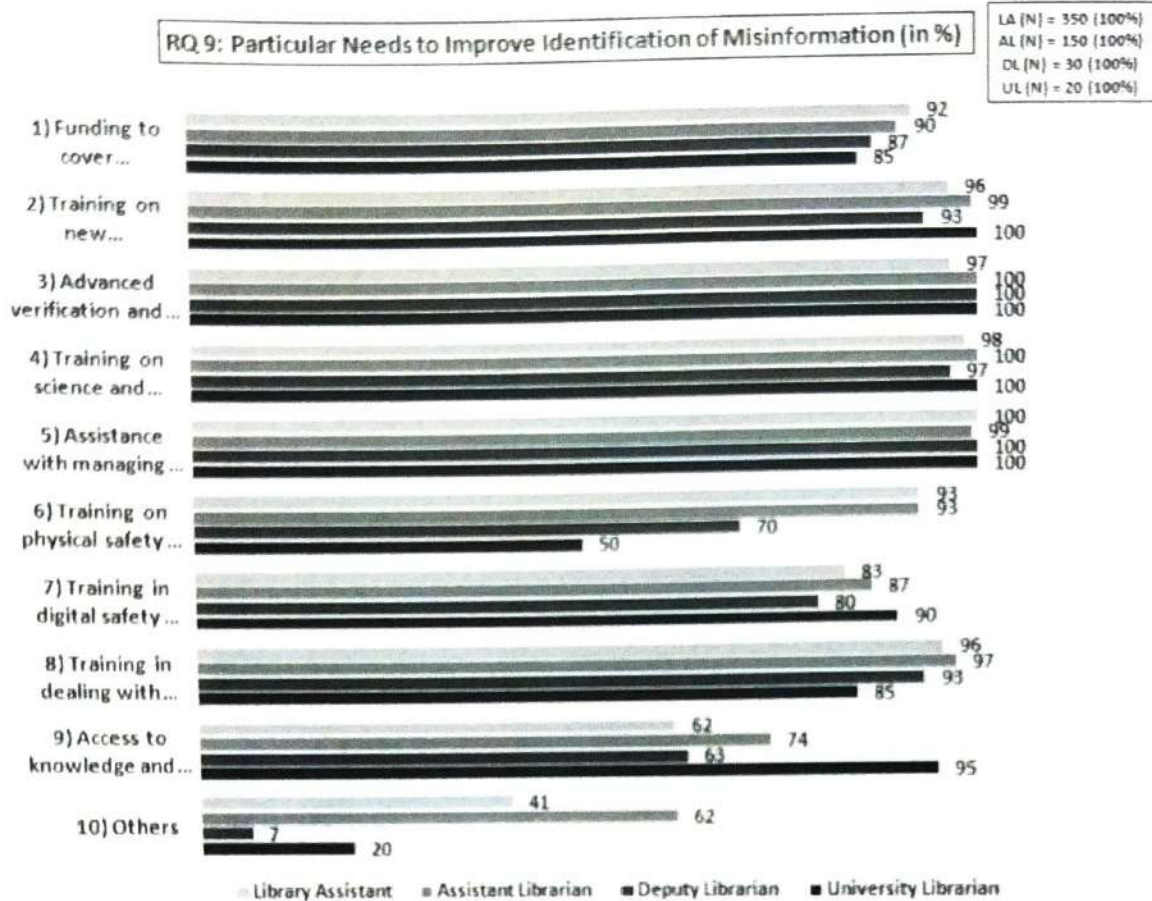


**Figure 10:** Practices to be Adopted to Fight Against Covid-19 Misinformation

***RQ 9: What are the particular needs to improve identification of misinformation about Covid-19 and stop it from spreading?***

During Covid-19 period, misinformation is reaching the common people and affecting them negatively. In this situation, there arise some particular needs (as of the viewpoint of a library professional), which help people to get rid of this. RQ 9 focus on identifying such needs for improving misinformation and stop it from spreading.

Figure 11 below displays the needs that is essential to stop misinformation about Covid-19 from spreading over social media. Majority of all the four groups of library professionals i.e., LA, AL, DL & UL agrees most with providing assistance in mental health and well being followed by verification & fast-checking training for misinformation. Training on new technologies to support remote publishing as well as medical/health reporting also get much priority on this matter.



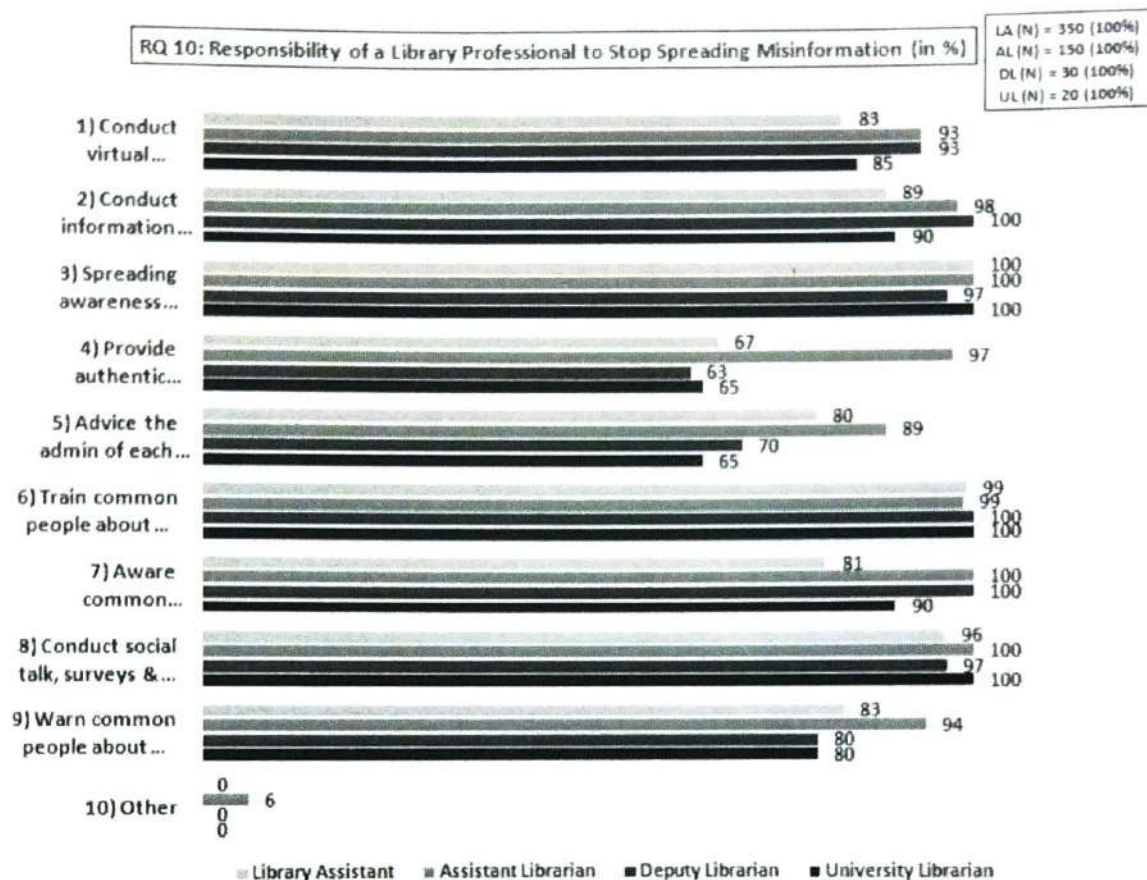
**Figure 11: Particular Needs to Improve Identification of Misinformation**

**RQ 10: What do you think the responsibility of a library professional to stop spreading of misinformation about Covid-19**

RQ 10 takes into account how library professional can become a role model in stopping the spread of misinformation and what are his/her responsibilities.

After analyzing Figure 12, it can be seen that majority (over 90% responses) of the library professionals agreed with more than one ways to stop the spread of misinformation about Covid-19, which includes conducting information literacy programme, social talk, surveys & webinars to ensure mental richness of the user, spreading awareness about official and fake websites, training common people about how to identify & report misinformation etc.














**Figure 12:** Responsibility of a Library Professional to Stop Spreading Misinformation  
**How to stop misinformation form spreading in different social platform?**

**Table 1:** Process of Reporting Misinformation in Different Social Media Platform

SN	Social Platform	Queries	Solutions
1	Facebook	How do I mark a Facebook post as false news?	To mark a post as false news: 1. Click *** next to the post you'd like to mark as false. 2. Click Find support or report post. 3. Click False News, then click Next. 4. Click Done.
2	Whatsapp	How to report a contact or a group?	To send reports on WhatsApp by contacting customer support from inside the app: 1. On Android: Simply go to WhatsApp> tap More options >Settings > Help > Contact us. 2. On iPhone: Simply go to WhatsApp> Settings > Help > Contact Us.
3	Instagram	How to reduce the spread of false information?	To report a post as false information on Instagram: 1. Tap (iPhone) or (Android) above the post. 2. Tap Report. 3. Tap It's inappropriate. 4. Scroll down and tap False information.

4	Twitter	How to report a Tweet, List, or Direct Message?	<p>To report a Tweet</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Navigate to the Tweet you'd like to report.</li> <li>2. Tap the  icon located at the top of the Tweet.</li> <li>3. Select Report Tweet.</li> <li>4. Select the best category of reason that best fits the violation in the tweet.</li> </ol>
5	LinkedIn	How to Recognize and Report Spam, Inappropriate, and Abusive Content?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Click the  More icon in the right corner of the post on your LinkedIn homepage.</li> <li>2. Click  Report this post.</li> <li>3. Select the applicable reason from the Why are you reporting this? pop-up window and follow the on-screen instructions.</li> <li>4. Click Submit to proceed with reporting the post, or Back to review your options.</li> </ol>
6	YouTube	How to report a video spreading misinformation & violating guidelines?	<p>To report a video on YouTube:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Below the player for the video you want to report, click  More.</li> <li>2. In the drop-down menu, choose Report.</li> <li>3. Select the reason that best fits the violation in the video.</li> <li>4. Provide any additional details that may help the review team make their decision, including timestamps or descriptions of the violation.</li> </ol>
	Viber	How do I report inappropriate content?	<p>To report a Community on your phone:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open Viber</li> <li>2. Select the Community that you would like to report</li> <li>3. At the top of the screen, tap the 3 dots  (Android)  (iOS)</li> <li>4. Tap Report Community</li> <li>5. Select the reason for reporting the Community</li> </ol> <p>To report a message within a Community or Bot on your phone:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open Viber</li> <li>2. Select the Community or Bot that an inappropriate message is in</li> <li>3. At the top of the screen, tap the 3 dots  (Android)  (iOS)</li> <li>4. Tap Report a message</li> <li>5. Tap the message(s) that you would like to report</li> <li>6. Tap the exclamation mark  at the bottom of the screen</li> <li>7. Select the reason for reporting the message (s)</li> </ol>
8	TikTok	How to report a video containing inappropriate content?	<p>To report a video:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open the video and tap the Share icon</li> <li>2. Tap Report and follow the steps in the app.</li> </ol>



## Conclusion

Thus, it is evident from the present study that social media has undoubtedly revolutionized modern-day easy communication system, at the same time, it has also brought with it new problems. Unmoderated, easy to use, free & highly population rich social is currently believed to be the main sources of misinformation on Covid-19. The platforms of every social media now accompanied by a large amount of misleading and false information that directly give a negative influence on the widespread adoption of health-protective behaviours in the population. Scientists and other information specialists already work proactively to solve this issue and provide common people correct information about the pandemic. There is an urgent need for highly skilled scholars to assume a greater role in moderating information flow on Covid-19 via established and emerging platforms for scholarly communication. And in this area library professional, as an information moderator (in the right way to the right person & in the right time) can contribute his best to stop misinformation from spreading over social media. The findings of the present study will help the public, in general, to be cautious about misinformation, and the respective authority of a country, in particular, for initiating proper safety measures about disastrous misinformation to protect the public health from being exploited.

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