In the Philippines, there is a bigger enemy than the coronavirus pandemic that has affected millions of Filipinos: FAKE NEWS.

The Southeast Asian nation has ranked first in the world for six straight years as the country with the most active social media users. This means the internet has been part of Filipinos’ everyday lives. Unfortunately, many have fallen victims to fake news as misinformation surged on social media like wildfire.

Even the coronavirus pandemic could not stop perpetrators to spread fabricated news, hoaxes and conspiracy theories regarding the health crisis. In fact, in April last year, at least 40 people were arrested for posting fake claims about COVID-19 on Facebook. Months later, public officials dispelled false rumors about the death of five people in Tarlac after allegedly getting a vaccine against COVID-19. As a result, it did not just hurt the health sector’s effort to combat the deadly virus but also eroded people’s trust on vaccines.

As the enemy gains more strength, online users are challenged to become more responsible in using social media platforms. Fake news will not thrive in a community where online users exercise their critical thinking. This skill is essential in checking the validity of information shared online and in challenging the credibility of their sources.

Critical thinking is something we must teach to young people. As they spend more time online due to the current learning setup, they can be more vulnerable to fake news. Digital literacy should be widely taught in schools to equip students with the right
weapon against misinformation. Educators have a big role in fighting this bigger enemy. Let us all take charge!

References: