

Role of Indian Media during Covid Pandemic

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ABSTRACT:

The world has been facing the worst pandemic named corona virus disease since 2019 caused by corona virus (COVID-19). On December 31, 2019, China informed the World Health Organization about the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan city, which subsequently spread to other countries. Initially, the virus was named as a severe acute respiratory syndrome – coronavirus-2, some media reports also called it the Wuhan virus, and now, and the disease is named COVID-19. Due to non-availability of any vaccine and treatment for COVID, the Government of India enforced the lockdown from March 25, to May 31, 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19. The unlock process started from June 1, 2020 onward in a phased manner. During the lockdown period, the central and state governments got adequate time to strengthen the institutional capacity to handle COVID cases both in terms of infrastructure development and capacity building.

KEY WORDS: *Role of media in India during COVID pandemic*

INTRODUCTION:

The term media is derived from Medium, which means carrier or mode. Media denotes an item specifically designed to reach a large audience or viewers. The term was first used with the advent of newspapers and magazines. However, with the passage of time, the term broadened by the inventions of radio, TV, cinemas and Internet. In the world of today, media has become almost as necessary as food and clothing. It is true that media is playing an outstanding role in strengthening the society. Its duty is to inform, educate and entertain the people. The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society. Because of its inherent ability to reach large number of public, it is widely used to convey message to build public opinion and awareness. The main functions of media in a society are: 1. Information, 2. Education & Advancement, 3. Entertainment.

Role of Media:

- ▣ Society is influenced by media in so many ways. It is the media for the masses that helps them to get information about a lot of things and also form opinions and make a judgment regarding various issues. It is the media, which keep people updated and informed about what is happening around them and the world that everyone draws something from it.
- ▣ The role of media in education is evident today by the number of computer labs, television sets and libraries that have become part of curriculum in most schools today. Media comes in different forms and each form affects the way students learn and interpret information.

Media has brought the world closer (globalization) so that now students from different universities in different parts of the world are connected through a mere internet connection.

- ▣ Long before the advent of mass media, people were forced to entertain themselves. They may have participated in activities or attended live events. The advent of radio and television enabled viewers and listeners to see and hear and learn in real time from wherever they are.
- ▣ Social media platforms take that entertainment factor even further. You no longer need to rely on radio broadcasters or television producers to provide your entertainment. . As per your choice you will get any sort of entertainment programme in You Tube. Any kid with a smart phone can upload a silly video to YouTube and make you laugh for hours. Even now there are so many OTT platforms Like Amazon Prime, Netflix, Disney hotstar etc.

Media is considered as “mirror” of the modern society, in fact, it is the media which shapes our lives:

- ▣ The media shape reality instead of reflecting it. The more attention that the media pay to an issue, the more likely the public will agree that it is important – an echo of the magic bullet theory of communication.
- ▣ The agenda-setting theory of mass communication was embraced by a full generation of journalists, and especially prints journalists put the day's most important stories appeared on page one, under the biggest and boldest headlines. Less important news appeared on inside pages.
- ▣ The agenda-setting function of the media was often regarded as a force for good, and media theorists point to thousands of examples as proof, especially in the arena of life sciences. Stop-smoking, healthy eating and driver safety movements, they say, largely owe their success to the media's agenda-setting role. (Some people might even call it advocacy.)

Consequence of Agenda Setting:

- ▣ The success of these movements is partly due to a consequence of the agenda-setting theory: that one media outlet is likely to parrot the agenda of another. Before you know it, a media “echo chamber ensues,” with multiple media outlets focusing on the same issue. Even before the advent of the internet, people wondered how they could avoid such steady media bombardments.
- ▣ Ironically, mass media researchers have noted that the prevalence of the internet may have reversed the agenda-setting paradigm. In other words, who is setting the agenda today? With the popularity of blogs and social media platforms, many people would say that people set the agenda for the media, making it clear what they want to read and talk about by texting and tweeting for large portions of the day.

OBJECTIVES:

The main purpose of the study is to find out the role played by the media in India during the breakdown of COVID 19 pandemic situation. Media as the main source of information about this new disease and public has become totally dependent on media at the time of lockdown announced in India. People were forced to stay in home and most of the time they either read newspaper or watched television news or other social media regarding this new disease. This research paper tries to analyse how the Indian media gave coverage to this COVID related news.

Media in Pandemic:

The world has been facing the worst pandemic named corona virus disease since 2019 caused by corona virus (COVID-19). On December 31, 2019, China informed the World Health Organization about the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan city, which subsequently spread to other countries. Initially, the virus was named as a severe acute respiratory syndrome – coronavirus-2, some media reports also called it the Wuhan virus, and now, and the disease is named COVID-19. Due to non-availability of any vaccine and treatment for COVID, the Government of India enforced the lockdown from March 25, to May 31, 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19. The unlock process started from June 1, 2020 onward in a phased manner. During the lockdown period, the central and state governments got adequate time to strengthen the institutional capacity to handle COVID cases both in terms of infrastructure development and capacity building.

- ▣ Media is playing an important role in creating awareness among the general public and in the dissemination of the Government orders/guidelines to the health workers, sanitation workers, including the police at grassroots levels. Mass media includes TV news, radio, and newspapers.
- ▣ Media also promoted hand washing, personal hygiene, social distancing norms, and reporting the COVID cases around the world.
- ▣ Media started constant reporting on COVID which created anxiety among the public, leading to impulsive buying of hand sanitizers, face masks, and daily need products. But this coverage helped in putting masks and sanitizers under the essential commodities act.
- ▣ Simultaneously, media started covering the shortage of personal protective equipments (PPE) for health care workers.
- ▣ On March 22, India observed Janta (People) curfew the whole day and beat thali (plate) at 5'o clock in support of a call from the Prime Minister of India. This was to boost the morale of many health workers, but also negative words spread that we do not need clapping but masks and PPE kits. These reports helped the government in decision making for manufacturing PPE kits more rapidly.
- ▣ On March 25, India entered into 21-day lockdown period, and most popular trend on Twitter was #coronaviruslockdown or #stayhomeindia. During the starting period, everyone was motivated to try different things at home, and even media reported about social distancing practices followed by the public

- ▣ In April, a gathering in Delhi's Nizamuddin Markaz (centre) in India reported a number of its members to test positive for COVID. After that report government has to take strong step to evacuate the place.
- ▣ After Kumbh Mela several sadhus and pilgrims in India tested covid positive after the constant reporting against this mela others melas were cancelled.
- ▣ At the end of the first lockdown on April 14, 2020, the lockdown two started. Social media was flooded with trolls about the new task. Soon, it shifted to migrant workers travelling hundreds of miles to reach their homes amid lockdown. The media coverage helped the labourers for starting special trains called "Shramik express."
- ▣ Along with all these, some media platforms showed the hotspots and the COVID condition of India. Footages of people falling on the streets, overburdened hospitals, and dead bodies in the burning ghats showed that the problem may worsen in future if the adequate preventive measure is not taken. Government started to boost up the vaccination among above 45 years and took initiative to build quarantine centre.
- ▣ Even after being in lockdown for over a month, media showed photos and footages of a clean environment and clean air. The low movement of automobiles and closed factories improved the environment by 60–65%.
- ▣ Presently most of the media in India regularly gives updates of new variants of Corona and their mutation and how the medical science try to combat this new strain of corona.

CONCLUSION:

The pivotal roles that the media can play in the current pandemic is promoting physical and psychological health measures and ensuring resilience in people belonging to different age groups and socioeconomic conditions. In COVID-19, it is a prerequisite to ensure public knowledge regarding the following things:-Social distancing of 6 feet (2m) and its importance, appropriate usage of face masks, proper guidelines for recognizing, diagnosing, and managing the disease. Online symptom checkers can create unnecessary panic. A comprehensive set of guidelines can be made available throughout the internet from a single source like CDC or WHO, who do their due diligence before releasing them. Apart from physical health the media should give priorities to mental health of the people, who are forced to stay in home specially the older generation and children. Above all media must provide positive news on pandemic because nonstop negative news creates mental agony among public.

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