

## ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE COURSE OF COMMUNICATION CRISIS DURING COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

*In the aftermath of environmental disasters and other catastrophes, social media usage has really been reported to boost. It is critical that the research establishment comprehends this. In order to improve our capacities and create a more sustainable environment, we need to understand how social media functions. The research community may work throughout the world in a rapid pace using social media communication to share the most essential results of an illness, resulting in a shorter knowledge transitional phase to other healthcare practitioners. In a time of turmoil and intentional fake news, it's critical to integrate research and expertise. In the time of uncertainties and intentional fake news, it's critical to organize research and expertise. During the worldwide pandemic of 2020, social media has evolved into both an asset and a possible menace. While a large amount of data is packed into a brief span of time. Healthcare practitioners might get overwhelmed when attempting to separate facts among chaos. One of social media's present limitations is its capacity to swiftly propagate incorrect information, which may be confusing and distracting. Learned researchers and physicians are expected to be leaders in disseminating fact-based knowledge to the general population. As a result, it is critical to be influencers in social media conversations during times of crisis in order to provide accurate and beneficial information and expertise to the people seeking solutions.*

**Keywords:** Environmental Disasters, Catastrophes, Social Media, Healthcare Practitioners.

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### Introduction

#### General Information, Origin and Vaccination

Coronavirus has become associated with everyone's life after the year 2019. Coronavirus is an infection that has rapidly spread over the entire planet. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced it a pandemic. This virus spreads quickly from person to person. No official proof of the virus's origin has been obtained, but according to some rumors, the virus spread from a laboratory in Wuhan, China. The coronavirus infected a bat at a seafood market, whose meat was consumed by people and thus this virus spread to humans. COVID19 is the scientific name for the corona virus. It's a highly contagious virus that's 900 times smaller than a human hair. In January 2020, there had been coronavirus outbreak in India, which necessitated a nationwide lockdown. Millions of people died as a result of the virus, and crores of people lost their jobs. The continent of Antarctica, which encompasses the non-living, was also devastated. Almost all nations had enforced complete lockdown, which meant that all trains, buses, roads, borders, and airlines were suspended, and individuals were terrified to leave their houses or even interact with other people. The economies of the countries had nearly collapsed as a result of the virus and inflation and poverty had risen across the board.

Individuals have never really witnessed such an epidemic, wherein the people from their own family to every level of society were dying in such close quarters. People had heard of the Spanish flu, Plague fever, the breakdown of human values during WWII, and helplessness, but they had no idea that they would face similar situations in their own lives. When the Corona pandemic broke out in India in March 2020, everyone, including the Prime Minister, prayed that the disease would not spread to the rest of the country. Coronavirus symptoms include a dry cough, fever, cold, stiffness in the body and a sense of pain, fatigue throughout the day, trouble breathing, and a sore throat. This virus can also be transferred through infected people's breathing, drink, and food. It targets a person's lungs directly. Due to a lack of treatment at the appropriate moment, the individual dies in a short period of time. The coronavirus vaccine took about a year to develop. Due to high population of India, the vaccination was

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done in phases. In the first phase, people over 60 years old were vaccinated<sup>1</sup>; in the second phase, people 45 to 60 years old were vaccinated; in the third phase, Youth aged 18 to 45 were vaccinated; and in the fourth phase, children aged 10 to 18 were vaccinated. The effects of the coronavirus eventually faded after vaccination and life began to return to normal, while the virus has not been totally eradicated, utmost precautions needs to be taken as lockdown still exists in some countries.

The health ministry ruled out certain populations groups from administration of covid-19 vaccine<sup>2</sup>. Those groups were as follows:

- Those who are of age below 18 years.
- Pregnant and lactating women.
- People with history of allergic reactions to any vaccine or injectable therapies.

#### **Effect of Covid 19 on Social Life**

Many changes in people's social lives occurred as a result of the disaster. This clarified the significance of life. To avert this calamity, people came together and followed the coronavirus guidelines, helped one another and also stepped up to aid the needy. Some used the duration of lockdown to enhance their skills and art, also the trend of working from home increased, allowing people who formerly worked away from home to work from home and spend more time with their families as people felt worthy of living with their relatives. People were becoming victims of the coronavirus illness at an alarming rate, and healthcare systems were collapsing as the number of patients grew by the day. People in this scenario did not give up hope, did not lose courage, stayed with each other and helped each other despite the panic. Because children, adults and elderly were all confined in their houses as a result of this pandemic, women's household responsibilities multiplied needlessly. As a result, despite not wishing it, women's conditions deteriorated during this epidemic, and domestic violence escalated.

#### **Impact of Social Media on Covid-19**

'Social isolation' is a core element of COVID-19 prevention. The impact of Covid-19's 'social isolation' on humans has been considerably lessened because to social media. Everyone today understands that social media is the only means of communication, education, and entertainment. Certainly, social media has become a pillar of strength and guidance for individuals today, particularly during the Coronavirus epidemic. Despite the fact that social media has certain adverse side effects such as melancholy, stress, and vision loss as a result of excessive use of smartphones and other devices, social media has shown to be the greatest game changer during the Covid-19 epidemic. The necessity of masks, two-yard radius and sanitization awareness has been widely disseminated through social media.

Certainly, social media was crucial in raising public awareness and disseminating accurate information, as well as the quick distribution of requests for illness treatment and prevention. People also aided the impoverished through social media, donating to various sorts of funds to assist the underprivileged during their times of need. When the laborers returned to their communities during the first wave, the stories of their struggle were broadcasted across the country via social media. As a result, it is apparent that social networking is extremely beneficial. The World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a worldwide survey with around 23000 participants aged 18-40 years old from 24 countries across five continents to better understand how people are interacting with technology during this global crisis. The findings provide crucial information. Based on data acquired from late October 2020 to early January 2021, COVID-19 data shows who people trust as reputable sources, their knowledge and behaviors surrounding false news, and their concerns. Some of the key contributions of social media and most notable discoveries on social media during COVID-19 are as follows:

#### **Type of Content Shared during Covid-19**

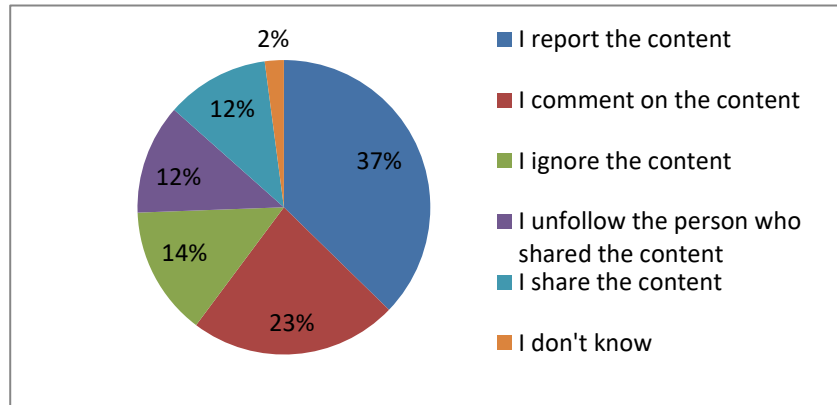
When asked what COVID-19 material (if any) people would probably publish on social networking sites, 43.9 % including both male and female participants said they would likely share "scientific" stuff. This discovery appears to go against the usual trend on social media, which shows that the most popular types of posts are humorous, entertaining, and emotional<sup>3</sup>.

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Type of Content</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Scientific Content	43.9 %
2	Information relevant to people	36.7 %
3	Articles	28.3 %
4	Videos	24.1 %
5	Images	23.0%

- **Awareness about News Content**

More than half of the Teenagers polled (59.1%) are "extremely aware" of "false news" around COVID-19 and can recognize it often. However, persuading people to actively resist it, rather than letting it slip, is a difficulty, with many (35.1 %) simply ignoring it<sup>4</sup>.

**Results about Fake News Sharing: India<sup>5</sup>**



- **Increase in Screen-Time during COVID-19**

Many studies that have been conducted throughout the outbreak period (in India, Germany, the U.S.A., France, and Australia) identified the issue of increased screen usage<sup>6,7</sup>. Overall smartphone usage increased by 5 hours, resulting in a drop-in screen time of up to 17.5 hours per day for frequent users and a normal of 30 hours per week for non-heavy users. Young folks revealed 8.8 hours of screen time<sup>8</sup> and the older adults (of age more than 65 years) reported 5.2 hours, raising concerns among these groups as well. According to a recent narrative assessment, screen time rose for children and adults over the world during the pandemic (relative to pre-pandemic eras).

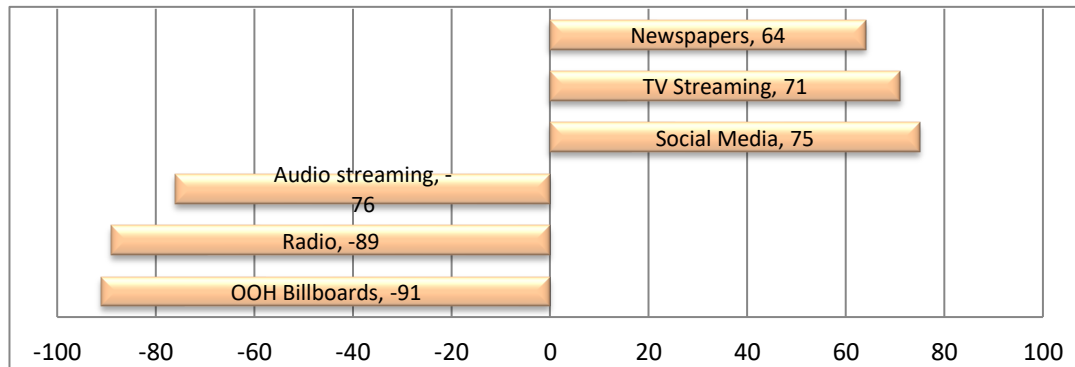
- **Effect of Increase in Screen Time on Health**

During the epidemic, children and adolescents had lower levels of physical activity, less outdoor engagement, more passive behavior, including leisure screen time, and more sleeping<sup>9</sup>. In the media, there has been a sudden spike in complaints of impatience without internet access or a smartphone; gambling, difficulty to focus; absence in virtual learning classes or job owing to a disrupted sleep cycle; and inescapable excessive use of smartphones. Sleep issues and a higher probability of myopia are two of the most serious negative effects of screen usage on children's and teenagers' physical health. Prolonged screen time has been linked to a variety of physical and mental health concerns, including eye strain, sleep disturbances, carpal tunnel syndrome, and neck discomfort, as well as diagnosable illnesses including anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorder<sup>10</sup>. Researchers discovered that smartphone reliance might predict increased reports of depressed symptoms and loneliness in older teenagers aged 18 to 20.

**Increase in Usage of Social Media during Covid-19**

People were forced to remain imprisoned in their homes during the worldwide epidemic caused by the corona virus. In such a situation, the use of social media and internet services also increased rapidly. These services range from work tools to video calling apps and social networking websites. However, out of all these, WhatsApp has been used the most. According to Kantar's report 'the usage of WhatsApp increased by 40 percent during Covid-19'.<sup>11</sup>

The report said that the use of WhatsApp increased by 27 percent in the initial days of the spread of corona virus (COVID-19) infection. After this, the use of messaging app increased to 41 percent in the mid-phase of the spread of corona virus and it reached 51 percent in the late-phase. The numbers associated with WhatsApp usage have not been given for different regions, but in Spain, WhatsApp usage was seen to be 76 percent higher than normal. It has been revealed that WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram were used by users below the age of 35 by up to 40 percent. The maximum activity from messaging apps was seen from users between the age group of 18 years and 34 years. Earlier this week, the use of Facebook has also seen a 50 percent increase. Especially in such places where the effect of corona infection was seen the most, with the help of WhatsApp, video and voice calls have increased almost two times.

**Figure: Impact of COVID-19 on media usage<sup>12</sup>****Effects of Covid-19 on the Education Sector**

After China, India has the world's 2nd largest educational system. Due to the uncertain about transmission levels within school-aged kids and the virus's potential effect, closing schools to establish social distance during the COVID-19 outbreak was perhaps the most reasonable way to minimize community spread. In March 2020, all educational institutions in India were suddenly shuttered. Most institutions were ending up the 2019–20 academic year as India fell into lockdown at the end of March 2020. By May, it was evident that the upcoming school year would not be able to continue in-school classes due to an increase of COVID-19 cases in the country<sup>13</sup>. The Alternate Academic Curriculum for Students (AAC) instructions for completing formal schooling online were released in April 2020 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (renamed the Ministry of Education in July 2020 to align with the NEP). The AACs are a series of four publications – primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools – that specify measures for teachers to maintain academic teaching consistency from the comfort of students' homes using a combination of online and offline<sup>14</sup>.

Many virtual education platforms, notably BYJU'S, Unacademy and others are giving free access to their services in response to overwhelming demand. These institutions have experienced a 200 percent spike in the number of new students using their learning apps since introducing free live sessions.

**Internet and Mobile Connectivity in India<sup>15</sup>**

- Internet connectivity was available to 54% of urban residents and 32% of rural residents aged 12 and above.
- Mobile phones were utilized by 99 percent of both urban and rural internet users aged 12 and up.
- Computers such as pcs, tablets, and laptops are used by 11% of Indian homes (excluding smartphones).
- Internet access is available in 24% of households, including unrestricted broadband connections.

The government had made a concerted effort to build a learning content repository and has launched Ed-Tech initiatives in collaboration with a number of NGOs. Some of them are as follows:

- Diksha
- E-pathshala
- National repository of open educational resources (nroer)
- Swayam
- Swayam Prabha

There is evidence that studying online can be more successful in a variety of ways for people who have access to the correct technology. According to several studies, students who study online remember 25-60% more content than those who learn in a classroom retain just 8-10%.

**The other Side of Social Media during Covid19**

During the time of Covid-19, where positivity came with the help of social media through publicity, some negativity also came to the fore. Certainly, in this calamity of Coronavirus, social media has become a symbol of guidance for people, it became a curse when misleading information and ideas

were spread through it. The information spreads like wild fire on social and creates panic. Anxious people are hungry for the information but it does not mean that people will consume fake news without verification. Misleading and fear-mongering sensational news was also circulated through social media. Due to which a high official concerned from the United Nations called this situation an epidemic of misleading information and named it '**Infodemic**'. In fact the word 'Infodemic' is made up of two words information and pandemic. It means flood of many types of information, so the need is not only to fight against Covid-19 but also with fake information, or else it is misleading and terrible.

During the time of Corona, the number of people who cheated on social media increased, also there was increase in number of cybercrimes in which the social media was responsible to some extent for various slip clothing rumors. Especially social media in which WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook etc. are prominent. Apart from this, one more negative impact of social media was that teenagers became addicted to it and most of them had problems in the eyesight and their physical and mental health balance got disturbed.

The Ministry of Home Affairs asked people to beware of such fraudsters by keeping in mind the following things:

- Be careful when sharing your phone number and personal details on social media to help or receive help with COVID-19. Cyber criminals can misuse it and can also do any financial fraud.
- Some thugs who claim themselves as officers of some social organization and NGO and then take money from people. These people cheat people in the name of charity. Cyber Dost has also warned people about fake medicine.
- Social media can be used to provide fake medicines to corona patients. In this case, take medicine from a trusted shop only. Also, be careful while making the payment.

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