

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA COVERAGE DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Media is considered the fourth pillar of society. During a pandemic, the media's role becomes more important as it can play a pivotal role by educating the masses and making them more aware of the disease and its mitigation measures. The present study is aimed to explore the role of electronic media during a recent pandemic called "Covid-19". A survey method was used to collect the data for this study. The study revealed that people have spent excessive time on media during this pandemic has affected the psychological fabric of media users. The inability of media to convey a sense of unity against the social distancing criterion of Covid-19 along with the creation of fear and anxiety among the public has led to numerous mental weaknesses as well as public harm. People, who're using more media, are more vulnerable to media effects. The study proved that there is a significant positive correlation between time spent on media and feeling nervous after watching pandemic news. There is also a significant positive correlation between time spent on media and being worried about the pandemic.

Keywords

Covid-19, Pandemic, Electronic Media, Correlation

Introduction

At the end of 2019, a large number of flu cases with an unknown virus were filed in China by the Country Office of WHO (WHO, 2020). This disease later turned out to be what we now call the "Corona Virus". This virus extended its boundaries across borders and affected billions of peoples throughout the globe. Following the shortcomings in the capacity of real cases being diagnosed, the overall number of infected has been misstated as a whole. Hence, it can rightly be concluded that the entire human race is subject to the Covid-19 pandemic (Cohen, 2020).

Massive levels of public health actions were implemented when SARS broke out in 2003, in the Singapore region, just like the ones that have been carried out in Wuhan to combat the Coronavirus. However, the fact can never be neglected that the actions in 2003 were negligible as compared to those observed at the time of this disease. Back in 2003, in Singapore, the usage of non-pharmaceutical measures such as; infection control techniques, mass screening, social distancing, isolation, and quarantines, etc., was reasonably successful (Tan, 2016). On the other hand, similar measures were taken by China who

has had a comparatively higher disruptive impact, closed all the institutions whether health, educational or developmental, discontinued the public gatherings and social interactive sessions have also been suspended in the efforts to promote social distancing for fighting against this deadly and fatal virus (Cohen, 2020).

Keeping in view that what is probably the impact of these measures and steps on the society as well as to what extent they have proved out to be beneficial, main reliance remains on the credibility of the social systems and institutions operating the entire web. These include; political parties and leaders, government institutions and frameworks, and most of all the health care across the country. With time the evolving virus has turned out to be more of a respiratory kind of disease that is transmitted by droplets of sneezing, coughing, etc. It is either asymptomatic or turns into an illness that proves out to be fatal and causes the death of the victim. The essential precautions that need to be observed are; covering your face while wheezing and using your elbow to cover your face rather than your hands. Vital respiratory etiquettes must be keenly followed to avoid infection (WHO, 2020).

According to WHO 2020, the infection gets transmitted from one person to another within 3 to 5 days of being ill. The symptoms are not visible on the major or primary transmitter for up to 48 hours. Statistics have proved that 80% of the victims of this virus are subject to mild symptoms only while 15% require oxygen and are serious. The percentage of critical patients that require ventilators is merely 5%. Media is a source of information of communication for its audience. Different themes or issues through acting, poetry, music, and dance are delivered to its audience in a traditional or non-traditional form. It could be storytelling of everyday life in various aspects in actual. Most of the time, media is combined for giving a better understanding for its audience as compared to bookish literature (Walmsley, 2013). The role of media is also very important for raising awareness on different social issues of society as it is a source of communication with its audience. It is a means of

communication through which different cultural and political issues have been discussed accordingly (Gergen & Gergen, 2011).

The role of media always impacts a lot and the audience got much aware about different social issues with the help of media in their societies. Media has a vast dimension for its audience and it plays a very important role during a pandemic as it disseminates awareness and information to the masses (Bresler, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

This research is a new step toward the Covid-19 pandemic and critical analysis of the effects of electronic media. Electronic media plays an important role in daily life but unfortunately in the current scenario it is going towards commercialism and it has a materialistic approach towards its audience. Mostly, we stigmatized the Covid-19 pandemic and afraid of this at all, on the other hand, a fake picture is drawn by the electronic media for its users, and the audience is influenced by media the most. The importance of the electronic media in the Covid-19 pandemic is tried to be understood by this research.

Significance of the Study

This research will help to understand the role of electronic media in a pandemic especially the ongoing outbreak of the Coronavirus worldwide and particularly in our country. This topic is selected to undertake the research because pandemic Covid-19 is a disaster, it has damaged the whole world socially, economically and no one could be escaped from it whereas, on the other hand, electronic media can play an important role in this scenario since media is a tool that serves the purposes of informing, creating awareness, and delivering knowledge to the masses and it inflicts the behavior directly or indirectly.

Objectives of the study

- i. To examine the role of electronic media during a pandemic

- ii. To analyze the effects of Covid-19 on social life

Literature Review

According to Rottenstreich (2001), numeric information might be missed out due to the panic created by media that in turn instigates people's emotions. Media frames the reality negatively to capture a wider audience range; however, this leads to lower attention on the actual mathematical facts and findings.

Peters (2006) describes that the reports presented by the media on Covid-19 are typically negative. This means that the media highlights more of infected and victims rather than those recovering from the virus. People with mild symptoms are concealed and those falling prey to the pandemic are outlined repetitively. It may result in falling into emotions and neglecting the idea of taking self-care seriously. More positive framing strategy needs to be looked into after adequate and efficient research to change the face of information that would eliminate the negative media vibes and promote healthy behaviors by educating the public.

Walmsley (2013) illustrates that mass media has both immediate and lasting effects on its audience. Mass media is used for depicting the real-life situations of a person, group, and community. Therefore, the media has over time and immediate effects on its audience.

Simons (2013) depicted in her research that the use of media for understanding the importance of race in students. As race and oppression is an important point to consider for students, media is being used for depicting the problems of race and multi-cultures at the university level. Moreover, media highlights the problems which stimulate the emotions and attitudes of students regarding this sensitive topic.

Allcott (2017) describes that one prominent approach that would help and assist is to counter-check the information from varied sources

especially professionals and certified reliable authorities. Misinformation must be denied, corrected and rectifications suggested reaching out a better outcome effectively.

According to Frenkel (2020), nearly all and the majority of the media platforms have witnessed an unlimited amount of misinforming data. Fake and false information regarding Covid-19 has flown across the media tools with great wide and dangerous outcomes. Hence, this has shattered the mental and emotional health of the audience and the readers.

Wood (2019) demonstrates that though it is nearly impossible to eliminate the information through checking the facts it can serve as a key tool. Fast grip over this checking scenario is not possible due to the current crisis of Covid-19. The researcher further described that there are very rare or fewer chances that the misinformation could be corrected in the contemporary media web.

According to Allen (2020), the spread of fake news is being monitored by the weapons of social sciences, which would enable us to look into the issues deeply through the use of theories and research.

Atlani-Duault (2020) portrays that media reporting has a wide-ranging impact on several decisions concerning the state. It inflicts influence, on both public as well as the private sector, very heavily including the need to continue airline services. Public sentiments influence the decisions in proportion to true public needs; media cultivates the reality adding it up too. In this case, social media is quite essential since it highlights travel restrictions and the unlimited loss caused to the economy as a result of these measures. Specifically, the social media tool Twitter is a huge platform that cater to the seriousness of an outbreak or impact of any decision concerning the public.

Smith (2020) explains that the Corona pandemic has burst out right now but the evergreen pandemic of panic created by media had long ago entered our social system. Therefore, an equal

need to fight and restrict the media panic pandemic pertains to us. Apart from health and safety measures, the public and the victims need measures to escape the hustle caused by media in these difficult times. Depth analysis of the media discourse and content along with the information given out by media needs to be looked upon. Campaigns and controlled epidemical information transmission must be ensured and implemented. Public health authorities must, at any cost, intervene in the information broadcasted and published by media so that the audience only absorbs what is factual and true. All rumors, personal interpretations, and perceptions, the negative attitude displayed by media around Covid-19 are all misinformation caused by media that should rapidly be countered.

Ding (2020) states that in this difficult time when Covid-19 is technically impossible to tackle and we only have escaped social distancing, isolation, and quarantines as non-pharmaceutical tools, media must fasten their belts to serve knowledge to the public in the most positive manner. The rules and regulations to mobilize the system of communication along with the adequate procedures of self-isolation must be broadcasted and published by media so that public trust increases, spread decreases and fear reduces too. Enhanced instructions in collaboration with competent authorities can ensure that quarantine is strictly observed.

Research Questions:

- i. Have electronic media influenced the social life of viewers during Covid-19?
- ii. Have mass media created anxiety during a pandemic?
- iii. What kind of effects mass media have on youth during a pandemic?

Hypothesis

H1: Pakistani electronic media has inflicted a negative impact on the psychological health of its audience during COVID-19.

H2: Electronic media portrayed biased coverage

during Covid-19.

H3: A strong relationship exists between pandemic and psycho-social life of people.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of "Media Dependency Theory" is vital and pivotal to adopt hence; it outlines the systematic approach of the impacts that media has on the potential audience and the entire phenomenon of media being linked and connected to the public as well as all social and cultural institutions. Therefore, the theory clarifies the research article's stance that people are too much dependent on media and grasp all the effects it gives to them.

The "Knowledge Gap Hypothesis Theory" has also applied in the research article since the dissolution of information broadcasted and published by media into all social systems rises, groups of people with greater social status tend to absorb and acquire more information as compared to the lower status groups, therefore, lack of entire information to most of the people that are living below the higher socio-economic status tends to create misinformation and misinterpretation leading to mental weaknesses in coping with the distressing Covid-19 scenario. Media fails to impart the right information in the right quantity to the majority of the population across the globe who later fails to interpret and analyze it effectively.

Research Methodology

The survey method has been used through quantitative techniques. A sample of two hundred (200) respondents was collected through stratified random sampling. A questionnaire was developed for this purpose which was further classified into three (03) categories i.e. Usage of Electronic media during the pandemic, Psychosocial Domain, and Electronic Media position. The questionnaire consists of a total of 15 questions. This questionnaire was distributed among the respective respondents. Later on, data

was interpreted through SPSS and presented in the form of tables.

Target Population

The target population in this research was the people living in different areas of Lahore, whereas for academic research limitation sample size is taken from two towns of Lahore i.e. Nishtar Town, and Gulberg Town. Such respondents were selected who have been infected with Covid-19 and observing quarantine.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS software was used to analyze the data. The significance level was $p < 0.01$.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Analysis of participants

The questionnaire was distributed among two hundred (200) respondents, according to the results 70 respondents were male and 130 respondents were females respectively. The overwhelming population was young adults aging 16-40. The Demographics characteristics of participants are as under:

1. Gender	
Male	35.01%
Female	65.01%
2. Age Group	
12-16	3.80%
16-40	75.12%
40-60	16.06 %
60 and above	5.13%
3. Qualifications	
M.Phil. / Ph.D.	1.20%
M.A/M.Sc./B.A/B.Sc.	30.20%
F.A/F.Sc	55.20%
Matriculation	1.42%
Literate	12.00%

1. Usage of Electronic media during the pandemic

Table No.1.1: How many hours do you spend on Electronic Media during the pandemic Covid-19?

	< 1 Hour	1-2 Hours	3-5 Hours	> 5 Hours
Frequency	92	67	19	22
Percentage	45.90	33.60	9.70	10.80

The respondents have been asked about the usage of media during the pandemic. About 45.90% of respondents have used electronic media only for one hour. Similarly, 33.60 % of respondents opined that they have used media for one to two hours during

the pandemic, 9.70% of participants have used the media between 3 to 5 hours whereas 10.80% of respondents have used the media more than five hours during the pandemic.

Table-1.2: How you rate the news stories aired on electronic media regarding the pandemic “Covid-19” issue?

	Fake	Dubious	Anxiety	Reality	Don't Know
Frequency	62	61	60	15	2
Percentage	31	30.7	29.8	7.6	0.9

The respondents have been asked about the news coverage on electronic media. 31% of respondents believe that media is showing fake news, 30.7% of respondents say that media is unable to deliver transparent news about the pandemic, 29.8% believe

media is spreading anxiety and frustration among people whereas only 7.6% people supporting media and saying media is showing reality about the pandemic

Table-1.3: Do you believe that Electronic media has created panic among the masses during the pandemic “Covid-19”?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Frequency	97	28	75
Percentage	48.5	14.1	37.4

According to the results, 48.5% of respondents have said that media is creating panic among the public, and 14.1 denials the statement whereas 37.5 % of

participants did not share their views about the statement.

Table-1.4: Do you support sensationalism and yellow journalism on electronic media particularly during the pandemic episode?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Frequency	121	37	42
Percentage	60.4	18.7	20.9

The survey results reveal that 60.4% of respondents have faith that media should not be focused on yellow journalism and sensationalism whereas only

18.7% refused this statement. The rest of the participants did not share their opinion on the issue.

2. Psychosocial Domain

Table-2.1: Do you feel nervous after watching the news on electronic media about a pandemic?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	24	36	56	47	37
Percentage	12.18	18.12	27.81	23.43	18.43

According to the results, about 27.81% of participants opined that they feel anxiety and nervousness after watching or listening to the news on electronic media about the pandemic, whereas the majority of the respondents i.e. 51.2% denied the statement. The rest of the participants did not share their opinion on the issue.

Table-2.2: Do you feel afraid after watching media about a pandemic?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	19	53	60	44	24
Percentage	9.65	26.56	29.74	21.87	12.18

Survey results reveal that about 36.2% of respondents have an impression of fear after watching the news about a pandemic on media whereas the majority of participants i.e. 51.6% disagreed with the statement. The remaining participants did not share their views about the statement.

Table-2.3: Do you feel down or hopeless watching media about a pandemic?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	24	54	52	46	24
Percentage	12.18	26.87	26.21	22.83	11.91

According to the results, about 39.1% of participants did not feel comfortable after watching the news about a pandemic on the media. About 49 % of the respondents denied the statement, whereas 11.91 % of participants remained silent and did not disclose their views.

Table-2.4: Do you concentrate on routine life and workplace watching media about a pandemic?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	18	41	50	56	35
Percentage	9.02	20.56	24.80	28.12	17.50

The results depict that 29.58% of participants supported the statement, however, the majority of participants i.e. 52.9 % denied the statement, and the rest of the participants did not disclose their opinion about the issue.

Table-2.5: Do you affect yourself emotionally by observing distance watching media about a pandemic?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	29	61	65	29	17
Percentage	14.37	30.33	32.50	14.37	8.43

The results reveal that 44.7% of respondents supported the statement, however, 46.9% of participants did not agree with the statement whereas 8.43% of participants did not share their views about the issue.

3. Electronic Media Position

Table 3.1: Do you think electronic media in Pakistan is doing a wonderful job?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	15	41	53	77	14
Percentage	7.50	20.64	26.58	38.40	6.88

According to the results, about 28.1% of participants agreed with the statement, whereas the majority of respondents i.e. 65% oppose the statement. However, the rest of 6.88% of participants remained silent on the issue.

Table 3.2: How satisfied are you with electronic media neutrality?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	31	78	70	14	08
Percentage	15.31	38.75	35.00	7.18	3.76

The survey results portray that majority of participants i.e. 54.1% supported the statement, whereas 42.2 % of respondents denied the statement and the rest of the participants did not disclose their views.

Table 3.3: Do you think that electronic media is biased and socializing with a specific agenda?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	09	24	54	78	36
Percentage	4.37	11.87	26.87	39.06	17.81

According to the results of the survey, the majority of participants i.e. 65.91% denied the statement, whereas 16.20 % of the respondents supported the statement, and the remaining 17.81% of participants have neutralized opinions on the issue.

Table 3.4: Do you think that electronic media is promoting only negative news about Covid-19?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	23	46	66	58	07
Percentage	11.56	23.12	33.14	28.75	3.43

According to the results, 34.7% of participants are of the view that electronic media is promoting only negative news about pandemic Covid-19, whereas the majority of respondents i.e. 61.9% disagreed with this statement. However, a very less number of respondents have not shared their opinion on the issue.

Table 3.5: Do you think that electronic media is promoting anxiety and a source of tension among the masses?

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Frequency	24	36	56	47	37
Percentage	12.18	18.12	27.81	23.43	18.46

The survey results reveal that 30.3% of participants have supported the argument, whereas the majority of respondents i.e. 51.2% denied the argument, and the rest of the respondents did not share their views on the issue.

Discussion

This study determines the pandemic situation in Pakistan with the help of the media. This study shows that media has a stronghold in image building (Simons, 2013). During this pandemic, various mitigation measures were applied in different countries to avoid this pandemic

People must authentically check the source and message of media before relying on the news. Similarly, media must filter sensitive or influential news to avoid sensation among the masses.

(Cohen, 2020). These mitigation measures interrupted the health and general well-being of any individual (Allcott, 2017). The results of the Psychosocial domain determine that 27.81% of respondents feel nervousness, 26.87% of respondents feel depression, 27.18% of respondents are worried while watching pandemic-related news. There is a significant positive correlation between time spent on media and feeling nervousness after watching pandemic news ($r=0.54$; $p<0.01$). There is also a significant positive correlation between time spent on media and being worried about pandemic ($r=0.41$; $p<0.01$).

The study shows that the great impact of mass media was reflected in the psychological realm of the lives of all individuals. Coverage of media on social issues in the lockdown situation creates a significant impact on psychosocial media. Similarly, the usage of media is increasing during the period of lockdown. The study also shows that media is creating a stressful environment across the country by spreading rumors and fake news (Bresler, 2011) which creates a negative impression on the psychological health of any individual (Cohen, 2020).

Conclusion

The results of the study determined that people spend excessive time on media, which has ultimately damaged the psychological fabric of any individual. People who're using media are more frustrated as compare to those who're not.

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