



A STUDY OF KARNATAKA MEDIA'S COMMUNICATION PRACTICES DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

During a pandemic, the mass media can effectively stop the spread of the illness. Similar to the earlier pandemics of SARS(2003), HINI(2009), and MERS(2012), it became a significant source of information on the new Corona virus. This study demonstrates the function of mass media and its effects in Karnataka during the pandemic of 2019. The news of the corona virus during the geographic lockdown was widely covered by the media, including information about social, financial, and self-imposed quarantines. By keeping the life dash boards up to date and facilitating prompt interventions by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the media significantly contributed to the quick and widespread dissemination of public health information. Following the WHO's announcement of the first case of the global pandemic on March 11, the government of Karnataka launched a free teleconsultation programmed to strengthen communities, surveillance systems, quarantine facilities, and adequate usage and production of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits. This initiative increased the number of mass media viewers from 27.3% to 43.18%, with no age restriction.

Keywords - Infodemic, Health Care, Disease, Pandemic, Epidemiology, Prevention, Precautions.

Introduction

The coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2, previously known as 2019-nCoV), first emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The outbreak rapidly spread across the globe, and on January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread lockdowns across the world, profoundly altering daily routines and human interactions. Governments implemented strict measures to contain the spread of the virus, with lockdowns being one of the primary strategies to limit public movement and enforce social distancing. As a result, all public activities and gatherings were suspended. Institutions such as universities, colleges, cinemas, shopping malls, clubs, and conference halls were closed to minimize human contact. State and district borders were sealed, and transportation services including KSRTC, BMTC, cab services, metro systems, and domestic and international flights were suspended to prevent large-scale gatherings and community transmission.

The pandemic significantly affected various sectors, including journalism and mass communication. Mainstream media organizations continued their operations under restrictive conditions, often facing challenges in ground reporting while striving to deliver timely and compassionate coverage of the crisis. Journalists who attempted to reveal ground realities encountered numerous professional and logistical obstacles. Among media industries, the print sector suffered the most severe impact. Newspaper and magazine distribution was disrupted due to lockdown restrictions, leading to temporary suspension of publication by several major outlets. For instance, The Times of India's Mumbai edition halted its printing operations until further notice.



In contrast, television viewership in India experienced a substantial increase during the lockdown. With more people confined to their homes, audience engagement with television content surged by nearly 40%. Broadcasters re-telecasted popular old shows, which received high audience response and nostalgia-driven engagement. This shift highlighted the resilience of electronic media and its ability to adapt to audience needs during a global crisis, even as other traditional forms of media struggled to maintain operations.

The media has long served as a bridge between the government and society, acting as a vital force in shaping public understanding and response during times of crisis. Throughout history, the media has demonstrated its power to inform, educate, and mobilize people by communicating realities and experiences across diverse communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this role became even more significant. Media outlets worked to make citizens aware of the evolving situation, calm public fear, and encourage positive action by disseminating accurate information, preventive guidelines, and timely updates. Both digital and print media played a crucial part in establishing effective communication channels between the government and the public, despite the challenges of restricted movement and limited access to ground-level information during lockdowns.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Karnataka was reported on March 8, 2020. Subsequently, the state became the first in India to invoke the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to curb the spread of the virus. As of October 25, 2022, Karnataka had recorded 4,001,655 confirmed cases, 40,097 deaths, 3,952,381 recoveries, and 9,135 active cases. When the government began releasing daily updates, widespread fear and anxiety spread throughout the state. Discussions on social media amplified these concerns, but they also showcased the emotional and motivational role of the media. The national address by Prime Minister Narendra Modi announcing the nationwide lockdown demonstrated the media's capacity to connect with audiences emotionally, promote resilience, and unite citizens in the fight against the virus.

Media platforms also played a vital role in educating the public about COVID-19 symptoms, safety precautions, and preventive measures. Social media usage increased dramatically as individuals sought news and reassurance online. Electronic media, particularly television and radio, proved especially effective in reaching rural and semi-literate populations due to their accessibility and language diversity. For many, these platforms became trusted sources of information and comfort. Media programming includes news bulletins, documentaries, and telefilms addressing social issues helped raise awareness among youth and fostered a sense of social responsibility.

In response to the pandemic, the Karnataka State Government's Department of Health and Family Welfare launched a dedicated COVID-19 Dashboard on its official website beginning March 9, 2020. This portal provided daily updates on case counts, testing, and recoveries. On March 11, 2020, the government introduced the Karnataka Epidemic Disease (COVID-19) Regulations, 2020 to guide hospitals in screening, treating, and reporting COVID-19 cases. These regulations remained in force for one year. Epidemiological data from Karnataka's Trace History project illustrated the transmission pattern of infections, showing how cases were distributed by location and contact tracing. Visual dashboards classified areas as red, orange, or green zones based on case prevalence. Red zones represented areas with a high number of positive cases, orange zones reflected moderate transmission, and green zones indicated districts without reported cases for 21 consecutive days.



By March 13, 2020, the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare had ordered the closure of theatres, gyms, malls, swimming pools, and educational institutions. All international arrivals were mandated to undergo 14 days of home quarantine. The spread of the virus was found to be highest among individuals aged 20 to 35, primarily due to travel-related exposure among working professionals. To safeguard younger populations, schools and universities were shut early in the pandemic. The government mapped clusters of infection across the state to identify transmission chains and monitor localized spread.

Further containment measures included multiple phases of lockdown. The first lockdown began on March 23, 2020, in nine districts, followed by a nationwide lockdown announced on March 25, 2020, for 21 days. Public transport was suspended, and a pass system was introduced in Bengaluru to regulate movement. The lockdown was extended multiple times first until May 3, 2020, and later until May 17, 2020. During this period, the government established fever clinics as the first point of contact for suspected COVID-19 patients. Each clinic was staffed by a rapid response team consisting of doctors, nurses, and health workers.

Karnataka also launched several initiatives to mobilize resources and public support. On March 22, 2020, the Janata Curfew was observed as a self-imposed restriction on movement, symbolizing collective action and discipline. The state government subsequently initiated the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to support pandemic response efforts. Corporate organizations such as Toyota Kirloskar Motor, the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA), and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) contributed significant financial aid. Many NGOs, political figures, and government employees also donated to the fund, demonstrating strong public solidarity.

Globally, the search for a vaccine became a scientific priority. Researchers across countries accelerated trials to identify effective immunization strategies. The ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine, developed by the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute, showed promising results during early trials. In India, two major vaccines—Covaxin and Covishield—were launched and later reported to be between 78% and 90% effective in preventing COVID-19 infection. These developments marked a turning point in the fight against the pandemic.

Studies have shown that during the pandemic, the use of the internet and television news increased significantly, while reliance on radio and print magazines declined. However, excessive exposure to COVID-19-related news also contributed to psychological distress among some audiences. Approximately 27% of respondents aged 40–49 and 28% of those aged 50–59 reported anxiety or panic triggered by mass media coverage of the pandemic. This finding highlights the dual role of media as both an information source and a potential stressor during crises.

More recently, the emergence of the JN.1 variant of COVID-19 has reignited public health concerns. JN.1, a sub-variant of the Omicron lineage (BA.2.86), was first identified in Denmark in August 2023 and later detected in the United States in September 2023. The World Health Organization has classified JN.1 as a Variant of Interest (VOI) due to its higher immune-evasive properties and rapid transmission rate. The variant has been associated with an increasing number of global cases and is expected to influence future public health strategies. Effective planning, vaccination distribution, and continued public awareness remain essential in mitigating its potential impact, particularly in densely populated and high-risk regions.



This study investigates the role of the media as a communication bridge between the government and the public in Karnataka during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the research objectives, a **content** analysis method was employed to analyze media coverage, public perception, and the nature of information dissemination during the first wave of the pandemic. This qualitative approach enabled the researcher to identify themes and patterns in how the media informed, influenced, and engaged with audiences during the crisis.

Respondents for the study were selected from varied geographical locations across India, including rural, semi-urban, urban, and metropolitan areas, to ensure a diverse understanding of media influence. Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, it was essential to study changes in public perception, emotional response, and trust in different media platforms.

The study particularly focused on identifying which media platforms were perceived as the most reliable, quick, and efficient in generating COVID-19 awareness. Within the scope of the research, television and radio were analyzed as part of the electronic media, while social media platforms and online news portals represented digital media. These platforms were examined for their effectiveness in information delivery, accuracy, and emotional impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic, being one of the most significant global crises in recent history, offered a unique opportunity to analyze how media institutions, governments, and the public interacted during a time of uncertainty. The study thus provides valuable insights into the role of media in crisis communication, highlighting how both traditional and digital platforms contributed to public awareness, behavioral change, and collective resilience during the pandemic.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the role and effectiveness of the media during the critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Evaluate the ability and support provided by various media platforms during the crucial phases of the pandemic.
2. Assess the role of the Karnataka media in creating awareness and disseminating information about the pandemic situation.
3. Understand the interaction between the government, the public, and the media in managing and communicating during the crisis.
4. Explore the different stages of lockdown and analyze the contributions made by corporate organizations and private sectors during the pandemic.

Findings & Conclusion

The COVID-related key information was updated at least once a day on preferred media channels. Media was a powerful tool to provide information to the general public and to promote positive environment during COVID pandemic, but it may also spread misleading information. India, with a huge population of about 1.3 billion, was having a high use of social media platforms. At present, it is the most powerful media in India. Taking it as an advantage public had been motivated through social media to follow safe practices to contain the spread, where it became the joint responsibility of the media and the individuals not to forward any misleading information without verifying the facts and the source of information. Although it was difficult to show COVID-related reports on 24×7 h basis by any media, analysis.



The respective study was aimed at analysing about the communication among the masses during the first wave of corona virus. According to the findings of the study, it was found that people were differently affected by the spread of COVID-19. People were facing fear, tension, anxiety and other psychological issues. From the study results, it is evident that one of the major catalysts that induced fear among the masses is the spread of fake news in different media platforms during the pandemic period. While analysing the findings of the research, it is interesting to note that all media are not the same in terms of their effectiveness and popularity. More than four out of five respondents opted for web-based media to be up to the moment in bringing information to the public. In terms of efficiency in generating awareness among the masses also, web-based media was opted the most by the respondents. Whereas, according to the respondents of the current study, electronic media is the most trustworthy medium during the pandemic. It is important, as well as interesting to note that the fear of COVID-19 among the Indian population is gradually decreasing. From the current study results itself, it can be understood that people are not that scared of getting infected by the virus compared to the initial months of the first wave. This should be noted by the government officials, as well as the media platforms and sufficient awareness should be brought to the masses. India is a developing country and one more wave of deadly COVID-19 might make it difficult to bring back normalcy. People of India, irrespective of class or status or educational qualification, should be made aware of the importance of following COVID-19 protocols till the day when the final COVID-19 patient is recovered from the deadly virus.

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