

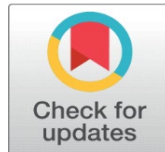
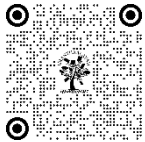
DRAWING CONTAGION: AN ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 COMICS

Meera Elizabeth James¹✉ Jyothimol P²✉ Dr. Sarans³✉

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Baselius College, Kottayam, India

² Professor and Research Guide, Department of English, Baselius College, India

³ Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, University Institute of Technology, University Regional Centre, Pathiyoor, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Saran. S, srn.s@rediffmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.1620](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.1620)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

When the world was suddenly caught up in the quagmires of Covid-19 pandemic, many attempts at providing awareness happened at personal, local and global levels. The outbreak of the pandemic witnessed an outbreak of narratives to shape a collective understanding about the disease. Along with the verbal narratives visual culture also contributed to the shaping of the culture of contagion. Comics have long been part of the visual culture of medicine. Graphic medicine is a novel field of medical humanities which is an intersection of the discourse of medicine and comics. This paper analyses how comics are used as a cultural artefact to sensitise the public during the Covid-19 pandemic period. It also attempts at analysing how the spatio-temporal tropes of the comics have made visible the invisible virus that spread havoc across the globe. The paper analyses the Covid comics that emerged during the period and how it has influenced the global public in shaping its culture of contagion.

Keywords: Graphic Medicine, Mixed Trope, Covid-29, Contagion, Narrative

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of graphic narratives, particularly in the form of comics, has emerged as a compelling and impactful method of storytelling that provides a unique way to understand and communicate complex topics. The relevance and popularity of the medium of comics or graphic narratives has been increasing these days. One of the major reasons for the same is its capacity for abstraction. The abstract figures drawn on the pages prompt the readers to identify themselves in these abstractions. As the world grapples with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, graphic narratives have played a crucial role in depicting personal experiences, disseminating public health information, and providing a platform for dialogue and reflection. In this article, we

delve into the efficacy of graphic narratives in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and explore how these creative expressions have contributed to raising awareness and fostering resilience in the face of contagion.

Graphic narratives, often in the form of comics, have the distinct ability to convey intricate narratives through a combination of visuals and textual elements. This dual approach to storytelling enables creators to capture diverse emotions, experiences, and perspectives, offering a more accessible and engaging medium for communication. As we all know, a picture is worth a thousand words. The comics are mixed tropes of text and images which are drawn as abstract figures. They are very concise and very effective in delineating a particular emotion to the readers. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, graphic narratives have been utilized to convey a wide range of themes, including the impact of the virus on individuals, communities, and healthcare systems, as well as the challenges of navigating a rapidly evolving public health crisis.

“Comics may convey a story in a more flexible, multidimensional way and ...due to their visual nature, they are more expressive and engage the reader on a deeper on a deeper emotional level than the written word”(Yablonsky). The relevance of comics in the field of medical science has received great momentum with the publication of Graphic Medicine Manifesto in May 2015 by the creative collaboration of MK Czerwiek, Ian Williams, Susan Merrill Squier, Michael J. Green, Kimberly R. Myers, and Scott T. Smith. In the website of Graphic Medicine, it is stated that:

As a manifesto the project resists the idea that there is one universal subject, experience, or point of view; instead, it points to the need for offering a more inclusive perspective of medicine, illness, disability, caregiving, and being cared for. Essays in this volume consider how research in graphic medicine has begun to challenge the boundaries of conventional academic disciplines and how graphic medicine narratives have the potential to engage healthcare workers, patients, and educators in life-changing ways. The volume draws the conclusion that creating graphic narratives in various health contexts is an important social practice, and that, to this end, comics are a valuable rhetorical medium.

Unlike the verbal and other visual narratives like photographs or movies, a graphic narrative reader can appropriate the speed of his narrative reading. Or in other words, s/he can control the narrative according to her/his interpretive or comprehending capacity. Though a picture can communicate an idea or emotion more rapidly than a verbal narrative, the time a comics writer takes for its illustration or drawing is very huge compared to a verbal narrative. The time and effort a graphic narrator takes to compile her work is very long.

Another factor that takes the attention of the wider public to these comics is its cathartic function. During the pandemic many comics have appeared both in the web and in printed form. They are collected and published in the web platform graphicmedicine.org. Though it is not an exclusive or exhaustive list, they have attempted to collect and archive comics related to Covid-19 pandemic and lot of other comics related to graphic medicine. On analysing these comics, we can see that some of them function as autobiographical in nature, some are therapeutic or cathartic in its temperament. Majority of these comics deals with the issues of people's resistance, resilience and their coping with this pandemic situation. When some comics uses humour element to explain and explicate this gruesome situation, some are serious and perform as educational comics. There are covid comics that are crafted for children and instructing them what should they do in such a situation.

One of the key strengths of graphic narratives lies in their ability to humanize the experiences associated with the pandemic. By depicting personal stories,

struggles, and triumphs, comics provide a platform for individuals to connect with and empathize with the lived realities of others. This human-centric approach has proven to be particularly effective in fostering a sense of solidarity and understanding, ultimately contributing to the destigmatization of illness and the promotion of empathy and support within communities.

Moreover, graphic narratives have served as an invaluable tool for the dissemination of public health information and guidance. Through educational comics, creators have been able to convey critical information about COVID-19 transmission, prevention measures, vaccine efficacy, and mental health support in a visually compelling and accessible format. This approach has helped to reach diverse audiences, including those with varying levels of literacy, language barriers, and cultural differences, ultimately contributing to greater awareness and adherence to public health guidelines.

In addition to their educational value, COVID-19 comics have also been instrumental in depicting the emotional and psychological impact of the pandemic. By portraying the experiences of individuals coping with isolation, grief, uncertainty, and resilience, graphic narratives have provided a platform for reflection and validation of complex emotions. This portrayal of the human experience has been crucial in fostering conversations about mental health, promoting self-care, and breaking the silence surrounding the emotional toll of the pandemic.

To illustrate the efficacy of graphic narratives in addressing the COVID-19 crisis, some of the exemplary COVID-19 comics that have resonated with audiences and made a meaningful impact are examined here.

- 1) **The COVID-19 Chronicles by Dr. Susan Nasif:** This graphic narrative is a serially published one that follows the experiences of healthcare workers who were on the frontlines of the pandemic. The series provide a poignant portrayal of their dedication, sacrifices, and emotional toll through powerful means of visual storytelling. The series offers a first-hand account of the challenges and triumphs faced by healthcare professionals, shedding light on the human face of the pandemic and inspiring compassion and gratitude for their unwavering commitment.
- 2) **Pandemic Perspectives by Artist Collective:** This is a collaborative comic anthology that features a diverse range of personal stories and reflections on the pandemic, capturing the multi-faceted impact of COVID-19 on individuals from various backgrounds. Through candid and heartfelt narratives, the anthology highlights the resilience, solidarity, and hope that have emerged in the face of adversity, serving as a testament to the human spirit's capacity for adaptation and perseverance.
- 3) **Viral Vignettes by Public Health Agency:** This is an educational comic series that aim to inform and empower the public with essential information about COVID-19, debunking myths, and clarifying misconceptions through engaging visual storytelling. Viral Vignettes has played a crucial role in promoting factual knowledge and encouraging informed decision-making within communities by addressing common questions and concerns about the virus and vaccination.

The impact of these and other COVID-19 comics extends beyond the realm of individual narratives, crossing over into public health advocacy, community engagement, and historical documentation. While traditional modes of narratives may convey information and stories effectively, graphic narratives offer a unique

blend of accessibility, emotional resonance, and visual engagement that can enhance audience engagement and comprehension of complex topics such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Graphic narratives, particularly in the form of comics, have proven to be a powerful and multifaceted tool for addressing the COVID-19 crisis. By humanizing the experiences of individuals, conveying public health information, and providing a platform for emotional expression and reflection, graphic narratives have made a significant impact in raising awareness, fostering empathy, and cultivating resilience within communities. As we continue to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic, the efficacy of graphic narratives in communicating and contextualizing the complexities of COVID-19 provides a compelling case for their ongoing use as a vital medium for storytelling and public health communication.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- "Graphic Medicine Manifesto". *Graphicmedicine.org*. Graphic Medicine Manifesto | Graphic Medicine. 2015.
- Yablonsky, Milena. "Text and Image in Translation". *CLEaR*, 3(2). 2016.