#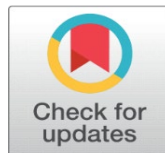 EXPLORING THE CREDIBILITY OF DIGITAL MEDIA CONTENT DURING COVID-19: A STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COVID-19 AFFECTED PATIENTS

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ABSTRACT

The world has been innumerably affected by various kinds of health problems and diseases. However, none of them have been so dreadful and life threatening like Covid-19. The Novel coronavirus is a respiratory syndrome that affects the respiratory functions of a human being and the most surprising element associated with it is its ever-changing form and variant posing new challenges to the health fraternity members and scientists. A major question which arises is that with the sudden outbreak of the disease, how can the general public be informed about the various facts related to the virus and the medical facilities available for its treatment and cure. General masses in such times need reliable and trustworthy information about the pandemic as the sudden onslaught of the virus shook the entire world and brought everybody's life to a standstill, which nobody had ever dreamt of.

Keywords: Digital Media, Covid-19, Health, Respiratory

1. INTRODUCTION

The world has been innumerably affected by various kinds of health problems and diseases. However, none of them have been so dreadful and life threatening like Covid-19. The Novel coronavirus is a respiratory syndrome that affects the respiratory functions of a human being and the most surprising element associated with it is its ever-changing form and variant posing new challenges to the health fraternity members and scientists. A major question which arises is that with the sudden outbreak of the disease, how can the general public be informed about the various facts related to the virus and the medical facilities available for its treatment and cure. General masses in such times need reliable and trustworthy information about the pandemic as the sudden onslaught of the virus shook the entire world and brought everybody's life to a standstill, which nobody had ever dreamt of.

Today, in the era of technology and digitalization, digital media is the fastest evolving and the most liked medium of communication, information, and entertainment. During the times of the prevailing critical health crisis, digital media

played a very significant role in the dissemination of information about the virus, its causes, precautions, government guidelines and regulations, and availability of emergency health services, namely, availability of beds, cylinders, etc., in the hospitals. The widely accessed digital media platforms during the times were observed to be Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, WHO sites, health and family welfare sites, etc. A major challenge was that besides disseminating vital health information to the common masses, how to ensure that Covid-19-affected patients whose lives were undergoing the worst state of helplessness and depression are made aware of the available hospitals and medical facilities, as that was the need of the hour. The critical times demanded that patients should be informed about the prime issues, like the availability of beds and oxygen cylinders, with the correct factual information. Although digital media played a very important role in disseminating important COVID-19-related information, another major negative trend witnessed was that the infodemic spread by the various digital media platforms was responsible for several exaggerated and fake pieces of misinformation, which just misguided the patients and the common masses too. To reply to the infodemic due to the spread of the deadly wings of misinformation and disinformation, few efforts were also made to provide factual information to fight with the evil.

Some of the proper corrective moves included extra caution in the spread of false and misleading information and strong appeal to cross check every deceptive information and misguiding news source and urging the masses to resort to only credible news sources and to disseminate such positive and authentic information amongst the masses.

Apart from this, during the outbreak of the pandemic, there was a significant need for online COVID-19-related information and guidance on how to continue treatment while staying at home. To minimize the high risk of contact with infected individuals, several virtual teleconsultation platforms—such as EmergenCI in Germany, Vodacom in South Africa, and WeDoctor in China—were utilized to support healthcare professionals. Additionally, Facebook groups were used by doctors to share and integrate experiences in disease treatment and research in real time. One such subgroup, PMG COVID-19, had 36,900 members worldwide.

In India, digital media is a most powerful tool to disseminate information to the public and to promote a positive environment during the COVID pandemic, but there are some limitations. India, having a high population of about 1.3 billion, has a high use of social media platforms. So, it's become the most powerful media in India. This is considered an advantage, and the public can be motivated through social media to follow safe practices to contain the spread. So, now it's become a great responsibility of the media and the individuals not to forward any misleading information without verifying the facts and the source of information.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the impact of digital media content on the Covid-19 patients and identifies the role of digital media in disseminating the information about healthcare and medical facilities during this pandemic.

- A study in this direction has been made by Sahni and Sharma (2020) in their article "Role of social media during the COVID 19 pandemic: Beneficial, destructive, or reconstructive?" In which they pointed out that a lot of wrong and rumor went through the social media of this epidemic, which spread faster than Corona. The key approach suggested in this review was also to correct misconceptions by health institution experts. Although some studies stress that correct knowledge can be unsuccessful during any public health crisis, at the same time, much research has demonstrated the efficacy of providing and transmitting truthful facts by health experts.

- In another study, Ahmad and Murad (2020) find that during lockdown, people are using social media platforms to gain information about COVID-19. The nature of the impact of social media panic among people varies depending on an individual's gender, age, and level of education. Social media has played a key role in spreading anxiety about the COVID-19 outbreak.

- Dhanshree and Chouhan (2021) described that it has been found that the use of internet/social media was highest during and before lockdown, followed by TV news. The use of TV and internet/social media increased during the lockdown, while the use of newspapers, radio, and magazines declined significantly. Further, they added that most of the population felt stress after hearing about COVID-19.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focused on significant value as it explains the critical role of digital media in the lives of Covid-19 affected patients, particularly in the case of information dissemination during this pandemic crisis. With the rapid spread of the pandemic, digital media platforms became primary sources for health-related information and they often influencing public perception, behavior, and decision-making.

This study is particularly focusing on specific platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, WHO website, and the digital public relations platforms of hospitals, this research try to achieve assess how efficiently and reliably these mediums transmitted Covid-19-related updates, precautions, and treatment guidelines to those who directly impacted by the Covid19.

This research is also important to understanding the level of trust patients showed in digital media content and platforms. It attempts to analysis whether these platforms and sources were considered reliable, clear, and helpful in working through the uncertainties of the pandemic. The findings may offer valuable perception for health industry, public health authorities, and communication strategists in enhancing digital communication techniques during forthcoming health emergencies.

4. RESEARCH GAP

All the studies that have been done so far have primarily focused on the general role of digital and social media during the Covid-19 pandemic and focusing how these platforms contributed to the spread of information, misinformation, and public awareness. However, there is a huge gap in research particularly evaluating the impact of digital media on Covid-19 affected patients themselves. Some attention has been given to how Covid-19 affected patients personally involved with digital platforms to access health-related information, their habit of usage, and their trust in the reliability of the content.

This research focused on to fill that gap by exploring that how Covid-19 affected patients used digital media platform for health related information, the platforms they depend on, and their perceptions regarding the accuracy and reliability of digital information. By focusing on the direct experiences of affected individuals, this research offers a more through patient-centric understanding of the function of digital media in healthcare communication during this worldwide crisis.

4.1. OBJECTIVES

- The study was aimed at fulfilling the following objectives:
- To explore the role of specific Digital Media Platforms in the dissemination of Covid 19 related health information.
- To explore and analyses the perception of patients related to the role and efficacy of various digital Media platforms in the dissemination of Covid-19 related information.

4.2. HYPOTHESIS

To fulfill the above aims, following hypotheses have been formulated:

- There is a significant difference in the perception of patients regarding the role and efficacy of various Digital Media platforms in providing Covid-19 related information.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To assess the role and impact of digital media on Covid-19 affected patients, the researcher used a Quantitative research methodology by employing the survey method as the primary tool for data collection. The quantitative approach makes it possible for measurable insights into patient behavior, pattern of media usage patterns, and perceptions of digital content reliability.

A purposive sampling was used, where only patients who had been suffered by Covid-19 were selected to participate. This made sure that the responses were directly relevant to the objectives of the study.

For a research, researcher created a structured questionnaire having of 13 questions, which was distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was circulated through Google Form to the known contacts for response and further dissemination.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

1) Section A included demographic information (such as age, gender, and educational background).
2) Section B addressed questions related to the usage of digital media, reliability of information, and platforms used during the pandemic,

Participant who were Only the aged above 20 years were allow to fill this form, and a total of 60 valid responses were collected. Through the use of multiple response and cross-tabulation methods, collected data were examine then the researcher to investigate correlations between demographic factors and media usage patterns.

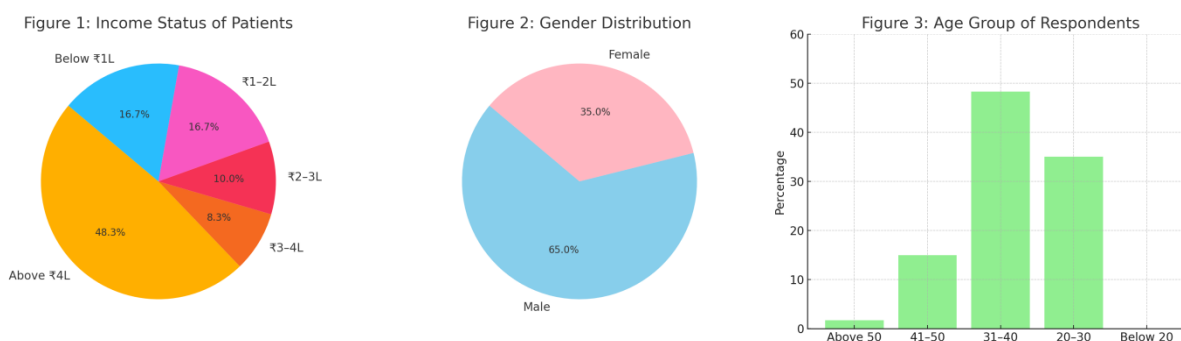## 6. FINDING AND ANALYSIS

Section A

Figure 1 Income Status of Patients

Given below is an income distribution of the respondents indicates that a significant proportion this is followed by:

- 8.3% in the ₹3–4 lakh income range,
- 10% in the ₹2–3 lakh range,
- 16.7% in the ₹1–2 lakh range, and
- 16.7% in the below ₹1 lakh income category.

The Fig 1 show that majority of the Covid-19 patients come from relatively higher-income category.

Figure 2 Gender Distribution

The Gender classification shows that:

- 65% of the respondents were male, while
- 35% were female.

This indicates that male patients are more in the study sample.

Figure 3 Age Group of Respondents

The age distribution of the respondents is as follows:

- 1.7% are above 50 years age group,
- 15% belong to 41–50 years age group,
- 48.3% fall within the 31–40 years age group,
- 35% are in the 20–30 years age group, and
- 0% is below 20 years of age.

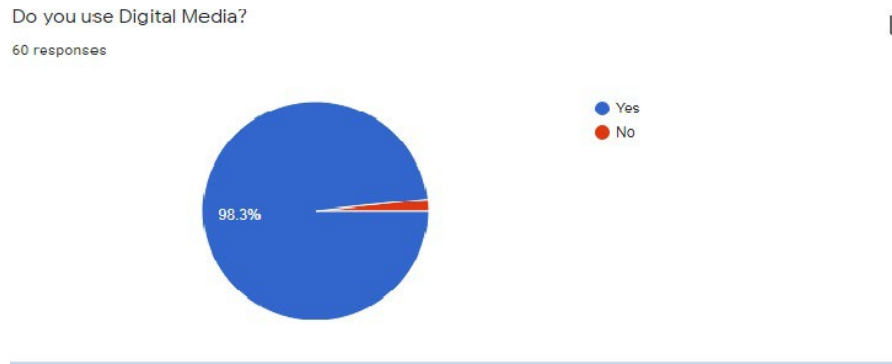Over the 80 % of patients (respondent) are belong to middle age i.e. 20 to 40 years old.

Section B

Do you use Digital Media?

60 responses

- Yes
- No

98.3%

Figure 4

The Figure 4 researcher want to explore the extent to which Covid-19 affected patients were connected with digital media platforms. In Fig 4 data shows that 98.3% of the respondents connected to digital media, whereas only 1.7% was not connected.

In today's highly digitalized world, when the access to information through digital platforms has become nearly universal. According to findings digital media has played a very important and central role in information dissemination during this global crisis. As data shows almost all the patients are highly connected with the digital media during their illness.
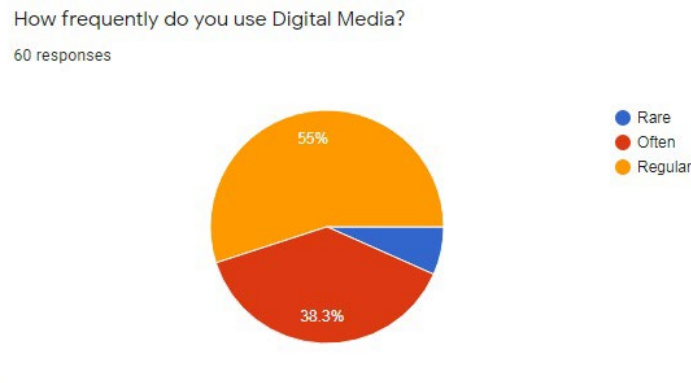
How frequently do you use Digital Media?

60 responses

- Rare
- Often
- Regular

55%

38.3%

Figure 5

Figure 5 explain the level of digital media usage among COVID-19 affected patients. According to the data 55% of respondent said that they regularly connected with digital media, 38.3% mention they use frequently, while only 6.7% said they used it very rarely. These data indicate that a sizable majority of patients used digital media during the COVID-19. The high engagement states that people have a high degree of faith in digital platforms for finding health-related information and being informed during the crisis.
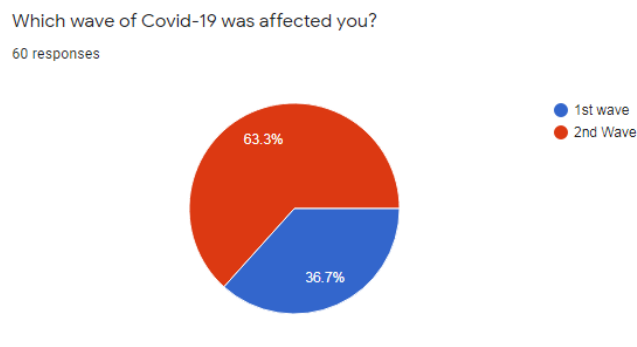
Which wave of Covid-19 was affected you?

60 responses

- 1st wave
- 2nd Wave

63.3%

36.7%

Figure 6

Figure 6 indicates the distribution of COVID-19 affected patients during different waves of the pandemic. The data shows that 36.7% of the respondents were affected during the first wave, whereas large number of respondent i.e. 63.3% was affected with the virus during the second wave. This data clearly insights into the differing effects of the pandemic phases, with the second wave of a pandemic affected a higher number of respondent in the study population.
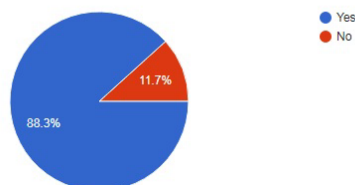

Figure 7

Figure 7 clearly showed that the perceived efficiency of digital media in spreading COVID-19-related information. The data shows, 88.3% of the respondents agreed that digital media was plays a one of the major role in providing information, whereas only 11.7% did not agree with it. This suggests that a vast majority of patients trust the digital platforms to take advice on symptoms, treatment, safety precautions, and preventive measures during the COVID-19.
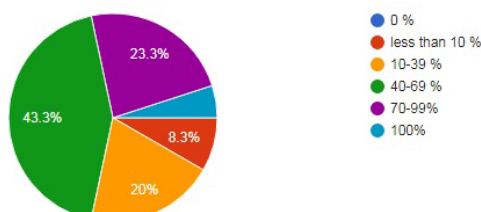

Figure 8

Figure 8 highlights patients' opinion about the accuracy of information obtained via digital media during the pandemic. According to data, only 5.1% of patients fully relied on digital media and believing the content to be 100% factual. A bigger group, 23.3%, considered 70–99% of the information to be correct. The most of the respondents (43.3%) thought that the factual accuracy ranged from 40–69%. Moreover, 20% of patients assessed the accuracy of digital media information was below 10–39% , while 8.3% stated that accuracy of digital media content was less than 10%. These data reflect a patient perception regarding the reliability of digital media content during Covid19 was not entirely consistence.
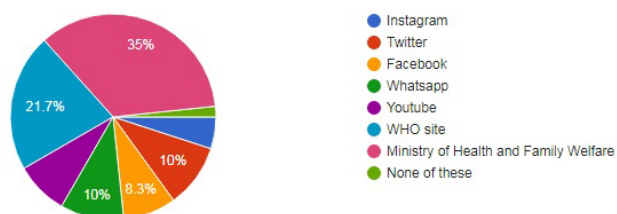

Figure 9

Figure 9 indicates about the patients' perceptions of the most reliable digital media platforms for seeking COVID-19-related information. Data insight that , 35% of respondents believe the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) website as the most reliable source, maybe due to its an official government platform. Likewise, 21.7% of participants trusted in the World Health Organization (WHO) website, which is regarded as an authoritative and reliable international body. In contrast, only 10% of patients thought Twitter was a reliable source, whereas 8.3% and 10% trusted Facebook and WhatsApp content, respectively. only 15% of respondent were trusted the Platforms like YouTube and Instagram. According to these findings the patients shows greater trust in government and institutional sources over private or social media platforms for correct and trustworthy health information.
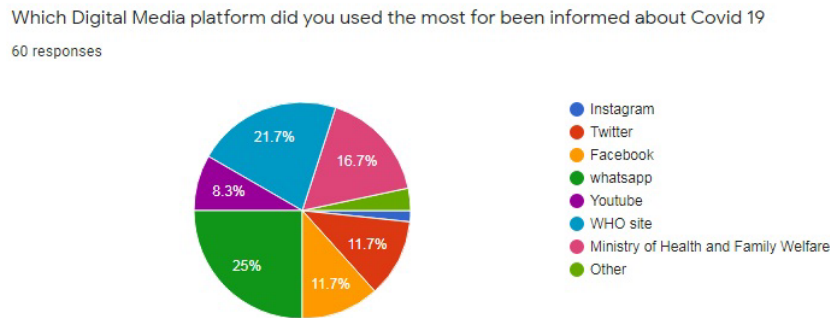

Figure 10

The data in Figure 10 represent the digital media platforms most commonly used by respondents to gather information related to COVID-19. 25% of participants use WhatsApp as a main source of information. The WHO website was used by 21.7% of patients, while 16.7% visited the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used by 11.7% of patients each, while 8.3% tuned on YouTube for seeking information. Instagram or other digital media platforms were used by the remaining respondent. These data show a different range of digital information sources, including both official institutional websites and popular social platforms.

Q-Do you feel that the hospital and health related information providing Covid-19 care treatment and facility, availability of bed, availability of oxygen cylinder etc. through their Digital Media platform was reliable?
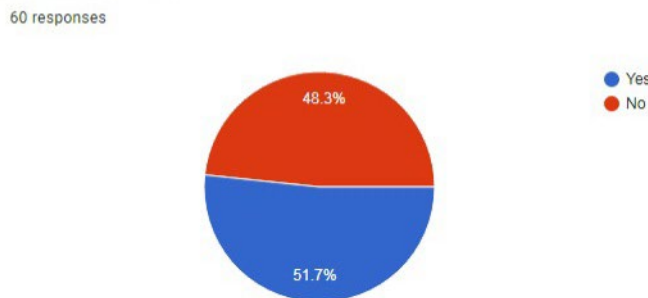

Figure 11

Figure 11 examine patients' opinion about the reliability of hospital and health-related information for COVID-19 treatment facilities, bed availability, and oxygen cylinder supply provided through digital media platforms. Data stated that, 51.7% of respondents thought that the information provided through these platforms was trustworthy, while 48.3% thought it was not trustworthy. These closely divided responses indicate that a patients have moderate level of trust and also point a need for increased credibility and transparency in digital communication by healthcare institutions during emergency.
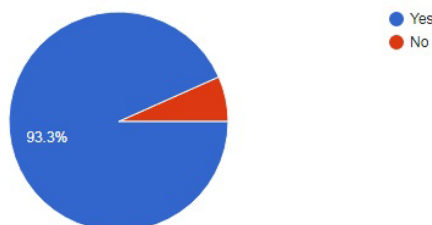
Figure 12

As seen in Figure 12, that a large majority of COVID-19 affected patients (93.3%) thought that digital media information directly affected on their psychological state, whether favorably or unfavorably. On the other hand, only 6.7% of respondents said that digital media had no effect on their mental health. These findings indicate that digital media played a important role not only in spread of information but also in helping patients' emotional and psychological reaction through the pandemic.

7. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate the importance of a role of digital media played during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for affected patients. During their quarantine time it was shown that patients actively used different digital platforms to gather information and updates related to the virus regardless of their gender or income group,. Digital media was not used only as a main source of health-related information but also as a psychological support system during isolation.

A significant proportion of respondents stated that they trust in digital content, especially when it came from official or institutional sources such as the Ministry of Health and WHO. However, the study also discovered that the major impact of digital media was not limited to spread of information but also it deeply influenced the patients psychological, both favorably and unfavorably

Given these two factors, it is very important for digital media platform and health communication authorities to always provide a truth, transparency, and emotional sensitivity in the content which they disseminate to the public. In times of emergency, information overload or alarmist reporting may worsen anxiety and confusion. As a result, future plan should include clear, impartial, balanced, and reassuring communication to help public mental health.

Overall, the study finds that digital media will continue to play a very important role in healthcare communication dissemination. However, its usage need to be controlled carefully and managed to ensure it serves as a source of empowerment rather than depresses disadvantaged communities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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