

**Analysing Misleading Information Published by Mainstream Media  
during the First Wave and Second Wave of Covid-19 Pandemic**

**Abstract**

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## Abstract

"Only the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press down here can bring light to all the corners of the globe," stated Mark Twain, an American humorist, writer, and lecturer (1835-1910). The media has always demonstrated to society that nice words spoken by wonderful people have a powerful influence on people.

The first SARS CoV-2 new corona virus (COVID-19) infection in a human was found in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The virus has spread throughout the world in just three months, creating a serious public health crisis. Around 25 million cases had been reported globally as of September 2020, and the sickness has claimed the lives of more than 800,000 individuals. The social and behavioural sciences have important insights that can be used to prevent the spread of the virus, especially when it comes to spreading misinformation about the infection, as researchers are continuously recognising.

Indeed, false information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant risk to both public health and international relations, ranging from the spread of harmful medical advice like consuming bleach to politically motivated conspiracy theories about the virus's origin. In reality, the proliferation of inaccurate and misleading information about the virus, how it spreads, how to treat it, and who is "behind" it has prompted the World Health Organization to issue a warning about an ongoing "Infodemic."

According to Kerry Maxwell, author of *Brave New Words* the term Infodemic was coined in 2003 in relation to the flood of information accompanying the SARS outbreak. It is of course a blend of information and epidemic. The word epidemic dates back to the early 17th century, first appearing as an adjective; the noun arrived about a hundred years later. It is derived from a combination of Greek *epi* ('upon') and *demos* ('the people'). Correspondingly, the more serious pandemic is derived from Greek *pan* meaning 'all', i.e. 'affecting everyone', a word now firmly in the public radar.

There is in fact also an adjectival use of infodemic in relation to the noun infodemiology, an area of research which explores how health information and related searches on the internet bear a correlation to public health (on the pattern of epidemiology – the study of infectious diseases and their causes). Real-world contexts for infodemiology have included HIV/AIDS, vaccine uptake and more general issues like alcohol consumption and smoking. The term "infodemic" refers to the quick and widespread diffusion of both true and incorrect information about an illness. It is derived from the words "information" and "epidemic." It is challenging to compile vital knowledge about a subject when facts, rumours, and worries blend and scatter. The phrase "infodemic" was first used in 2003, and it has recently come up again in connection with COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic was first referred to as a "Infodemic" by the World Health Organization and the United Nations on March 31, 2020. UNESCO has referred to the COVID-19 deceptive practises as a "Disinfodemic." At the Munich Security Conference in 2020, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated, "We're not only fighting a pandemic; we're fighting an infodemic." Fake news, false information, and conspiracy

theories are becoming more prevalent in the age of social media, especially in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. This situation is particularly alarming since it threatens public confidence in healthcare organisations and initiatives. On June 29, the World Health Organization (WHO) held the first Infodemiology Conference, bringing together specialists from around the world with different scientific and political perspectives to discuss the effects of Infodemics on the world and how to regulate them.

India is placed 31 out of 46 countries in terms of overall trust in news, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2021, which was essentially announced on June 23. Only 38% of respondents from India said they generally trust news. Finland had the greatest overall trust in news scores (65%) while the United States had the lowest scores (29 percent). With 73 percent of respondents using smartphones to obtain news, the survey reveals India to be one of the strongest markets for mobile devices. In all, 82 percent of respondents indicated they get their news online, including on social media; the most popular sites are WhatsApp and YouTube. The prevalence of false information on these platforms also raised serious concerns. In the survey, print media and public broadcasters receive high trust ratings. Print media, on the other hand, was severely impacted by the pandemic-related economic slump with lower ad sales and circulation, which led to job losses and wage cuts.

#### AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim is to analyse misleading information or in other words fake news published by mainstream media during the first wave and second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

#### OBJECTIVES

This research aims to find out different characteristics of fake news/misleading reports circulating on mainstream media.

To study the misleading information published by mainstream media during Covid-19.

To analyse the misleading information published by mainstream media during Covid-19.

The study mainly has three research questions:

RQ1. What are the popular COVID-19-related fake news themes discussed by news reports?

RQ2. What presentation elements (text, photographs, videos, or combination of these) comprise these fake news reports?

RQ3. Which main stream media outlets (newspaper, TV, radio and websites) is circulating misleading information more frequently?

#### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research study will help the government and policy makers to formulate policy and guidelines that will tackle the issues of fake news and information. The unit of analysis of the research study will help in spreading awareness among the general public.

## DATA INTERPRITATIONS AND ANALYSIS

This study was done using content analysis as its main research instrument throughout. It adopts both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This chapter will rationalise the techniques and the data collection tools used in this research.

## METHOD

For this study content analysis method was adopted. Content analysis usually aims at interpreting the nature of media texts and find out the impact it has on audience. Content delivered in the media has to be analyzed first and comprehended before studying the impact of media frames (Stacks, Hocking and McDermott 2003). To interpret media messaging content analysis is the most suitable methodology (McQuail 2000).

Content analysis can be done in two ways. One is the quantitative approach and the other is the qualitative approach. The significance of the media text is examined in the qualitative method which ends in individual evaluation of the matter whereas the context of the categorization are done in the quantitative method and media frames are specified (Burnham et al 2008). In this analysis the researcher has chosen qualitative technique primarily with essential quantification to validate the variables used in this study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN:

Researcher has adopted Explanatory and descriptive (a mixed-method) strategy in order to understand the research problem. This study utilized the thematic examination of the news report. The researcher combined Quantitative and qualitative (mix) method for the research.

## POPULATION AND SAMPLING

- Universe of the study: All the fact checking websites.
- Population: Press Information Bureau. PIB was purposely selected for this study. PIB is a central agency of the Indian government which works under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and it's headquarter is in New Delhi's. The primary responsibility of the Press Information Bureau is to inform the print, electronic, and digital media about the goals, policies, programme, activities, and accomplishments of the government. The Press Information Bureau introduced a fact-checking division called PIB Fact Check in December 2019. It has accounts on all social media platform Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.
- Sample/unit: 40 media reports. Fact checked by PIB.

## DATA INTERPRITATIONS AND ANALYSIS

In this thematic content analysis the researcher examined 40 fact checked media reports in order to analyse fake news published in mainstream media during the covid pandemic.

The researcher hypothesized that compare to social media mainstream media has all the fact checking tool and technique, mainstream media has trained journalists and vast resources to report any news but still in reporting covid pandemic related reports mainstream media fail to meet expectation.

Since the 1840s, the phrase "Fourth Estate" has been used to refer to journalism's function as a foundation of democracy. Since the media has the ability to persuade the people and influence their eyes, ears, and minds, it is expected that they will only present confirmed information. The tendency of the mainstream media toward sensationalism and propaganda-driven news has resulted in the dissemination of false information. The largest audience, the highest advertising earnings, and the most resources are all currently found in mainstream

## QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA REPORT FOR THE STUDY

Misleading news, fake news, and propaganda have the power to polarise public opinion, encourage hate speech and violent extremism, and ultimately weaken democracies and public confidence in democratic processes. The fourth pillar of democracy is regarded as being the media. Great power entails enormous responsibility. As the fourth pillar of democracy, the media is therefore expected to only present verifiable and validated news. The media is largely responsible for spreading fake news. There are instances when false news is spread as a result of individual interpretations and differences in understanding. Lack of clear communication between writer and reader can result in misunderstandings, which can then lead to incorrect interpretation and the creation of fake news. This system has grown during the pandemic situation.

People prefer to stop reading that particular medium when they learn that it is fake news. One has many alternatives for where to get news because to the wide variety of news channels and news formats available. But occasionally, when a news outlet publishes a piece of twisted news that is partially genuine and partially fake, other news outlets attempt to further twist it and show it from a different angle. By completely manipulating the facts, this news manipulation produces fake news. Then, when individuals learn that this fake news is fake, their faith and belief in the fairness and veracity of the media immediately decreases, which make them, think that other news that is being broadcast may also be false, even if it may not be.

The tendency of the mainstream media toward sensationalism and propaganda-driven news has resulted in the dissemination of false information. The public's faith in the media has begun to decline as a result of the media's increased use of false and misleading material. According to a study by the IAMAI, traditional media outlets are more effective at influencing public opinion than Facebook or WhatsApp in spreading false information. The lack of credible facts and evidence leads people to believe in the media's fake news because they have enough faith in them to support what they see and hear.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

- It is found that the mainstream media has published concerning level of misinformation and disinformation during the pandemic. The public receives information via the media, which also alerts the government to public-interest issues. It serves as a link between the people and the government. The media's involvement

becomes vital during a global pandemic that has affected lives and livelihoods. Unfortunately, during the second wave of COVID-19, coverage of COVID-19 in all the media was at its lowest.

- The mainstream media has enormous influence over how the public feels, perceives, and holds beliefs. The media's job is to make sure people have access to accurate information that will inform their decisions and help them feel empowered. Through the findings it has come out that subject of fake news in main stream media was largely related to politics, political party or political person. Because of this it disturbed the credibility of politicians and political parties, in other words public trust in government has declined.
- Another major finding is news websites of big and reputed media organisation has produced large number of fake news during pandemic. Other than that newspaper is second most medium in publishing fake news. News media has become a major part in daily lives. It now plays a crucial role in informing the public, calling attention to urgent issues, and offering a platform for advocacy of and opposition to the policies of the ruling party. The new media's significance increases in the context of a pandemic. After government imposes travel restriction the ground reporting also got restricted. Public and even the media organisation were dependent on internet for the source of information. News websites and app were now major source of information.
- Perhaps the most important and shocking finding is the theme of Fake News. Although the motives behind the dissemination of false information by mainstream media are unclear, some highly competitive media may be the result of weak editorial standards in a cut-throat competitive environment. It is undeniable that misinformation spreads quickly and that news outlets may do so by purposefully spreading false information or by using click-bait headlines. Fascinatingly, the majority of fake news stories were completely false. No element in the news was correct. In other words the news was fabricated from the scratch.

**SUGGESTIONS** - The media should emphasize that kind of credible journalism which attracts a large section of the audience. Additionally, work to restore public confidence in the news media, which has recently fallen. The world needs a strong and effective news media that informs individuals about important current events and long-term trends in an era of turmoil and disorder. News organizations must expose false information and propaganda without any support. They can accomplish this on the basis of their in-house experts and reputed fact-checkers.

With an intention to educate, inspire and guide the media and future media professionals to respect and conduct credible journalism, the Press Council of India has made available the 2020 edition of the Press Council's Norms of Journalistic Conduct during the pandemic. If media organizations follow these guidelines then they can definitely and very easily avoid fake news.