



Analysis of role of electronic media: In the era of pandemic

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Abstract

Media has always been a bridge between the government and the general public. Media is the fourth pillar of our Indian democracy and it is the most powerful medium to communicate with people across the globe. In the era of pandemic, many forms of media such as the print media suffered huge losses but still there were ample of other media sources of media which kept the people informed about the happenings of the world and our nation.

India has seen a major rise in the use of social media platforms in the Covid times, but still there are many examples where social media proved to be an unreliable source of information for people. There is no regulatory authority on social media which can stop people from spreading fake news and misinformation. In such case, the age old electronic media proved to be the savior for people, as it provided real and trustworthy news to people. And even some studies believe that the era of Covid-19 and the lockdown phase proved to be a revival phase for electronic media such as Television and Radio. They kept people informed and also many entertaining and social awareness programs were broadcasted on these mediums which kept people engaged in their homes. Also our honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi used these two mediums to interact with public in these times with the program Mann ki baat. In this study we will get to know about the changing role of electronic media in the era of pandemic and how it has affected the media and its sources.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, media, AIR, doordarshan

Introduction

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to the occurrence of a series of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City – China, which were subsequently linked to exposures at a seafood and live animal market (WHO – 2020). Chinese researchers identified the cause of the disease to be a new type of Coronavirus, later named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization. Between January and March, the disease spread from its epicenter to other Chinese cities and to over 150 countries across all continents. On March 11, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and by April 29, the number of confirmed cases globally exceeded 3 million. The pandemic brought havoc on public health and medical systems internationally and caused severe disease and death among many countries which resulted in closure of schools and cancellation or postponement of sporting and entertainment events and led to restrictions in travel and overall day to day life of people and highly affected the global financial markets.

In such emergency situations whole world was suffering and people were under the burden of tensions of what would happen next, and when the whole industries of the world were affected, communication of important information to affected populations was critical. This pandemic turned the world upside down. Due to outbreak of pandemic whole world practiced lockdown which made deep impact on our daily life routine, unlike we used to practice before. But we all knew that to lower the spread of virus we require to practice social distancing.

Media is the mirror of the society, as it reflects the society. In the rouse of global pandemic COVID 19, in India, social media activity saw a bounce. Social media is nowadays one of the best source to spread some news. As social media

platforms such as Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook etc gives a bundle of information each day, led to increase in fake news and misinformation, which caused panic among people. People who read or saw that information interpreted that it's true. In order to distinguish between facts and false narratives, we need to crosscheck the information that we get through social media with at least two credible sources. But apart from social media, electronic media also made a special effect on people.

A brief history of media in India

Indian media comprises of different types of communication mediums such as televisions, radio, cinema, newspapers, etc. Indian media was active since the late 18th century when print media was started in 1780, radio broadcasting initiated in 1927 and the screening of Augute and Louis Lumiere moving pictures in Bombay initiated in July 1895. It is one of the oldest and the largest media of the world. Media in India has been free and independent throughout most of its history. Talking about newspaper, The Bengal Gazette was started by James Augustus Hickey in 1780.

After independence the Indian media has evolved and reinvented itself to a great extent. India's National Broadcasters, All India Radio and Doordarshan have played crucial role since independence. Since their inception, their main aim has been to inform, educate and entertain the masses. AIR was established in 1957 and since then it has been country's largest public service broadcaster. Doordarshan was established in 1959 and it is India's largest broadcasting organization in studio and transmitter infrastructure.

Media during the pandemic

Media is something that has that power to leave both positive and negative impact on the people. India has a large rural area so the dependency on electronic media increases, because it is easily accessible in the remote areas as well. Even illiterate people of villages and towns could understand what is conveyed to them through Television and Radios. Media all over the country reaches out to the people and leaves a huge impact both on the heart and brain of the masses. During the pandemic times, electronic media such as Television and radio brought a change in attitude and belief of people by sharing the positivity, among all age groups of people. But during this pandemic one of the major forms of traditional media which suffered losses badly was print media. Due to lockdown, distribution of newspapers and magazines were adversely affected. Many people did not access to newspapers while others asked vendors to not circulate the newspaper. People turned on to the online editions of the newspapers rather than risk their lives in buying newspapers. Print media was already facing problems in the era of digitalization and this pandemic led to decrease in the number of newspaper buyers.

Coming to the small screens, due to Covid-19, the engagement of television sensed a high jump with 40% of grown viewership in India. Not just in India but in other countries like Australia, UK, Czech Republic etc also saw growth in television viewership. A number of old shows were re-telecasted and got a lot of engagement of people. When Doordarshan re-telecasted its prime show Ramayana, it brought in the same craze in the viewers like it was before. Small screen did not focused on telecasting new episodes but choose to entertain people with the old programs. Those youngsters who had only listened to the name of some of the iconic shows such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc got a chance to see them on TV. This kept people engaged in their homes and people avoided to step out on the roads, and this helped to lessen the effect of the pandemic.

Many general awareness programs were also broadcasted on the radio for people. Also radio has the widest reach, so it was the most wide spread medium during the lockdown times when people were strictly living in their homes. The reach of radio is very wide. It is a broadcast medium that can be accessed anywhere, anytime and by anybody. Utilizing this engaging and social nature of radio and its powerful connection with its audience, All India Radio, tried to mitigate pain and suffering of people on account of outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. AIR designed innovative programs to keep the community up to date with the developments, constantly advising people on the practical steps to be taken to reduce the impact of the virus, besides created additional slots to squeeze in Covid-19 updates and news bulletins. As radio is a medium for entertainment also, so AIR made some really entertaining programs for its audience, so that they can keep themselves engaged in the absence of any other medium of entertainment. Catchy jingles have been a tried and tested means to get across message loud and clear. There were many jingles created by the AIR on the key aspects of the pandemic like on the need to wash hands properly and frequently, social distancing and eating right in the lockdown period. Interviews of subject experts in the times of pandemic were a major relief for the

people. It also took about a large scale relief program along with private organizations. Also it broadcasted classroom lessons for class 10th students of the social welfare schools to prepare them for the board examinations in the view of the lockdown. Amidst of lockdown and the pandemic it was announced that students till class 5th will have their classrooms on Doordarshan and AIR. It helped the students who were facing technical issues in attending online classes conducted by the schools. It aimed to provide an extra option to the students apart from the existing platforms on social media networks to cover the curriculum as schools were closed due to the Covid induced lockdown. All this made electronic media an important source of infotainment in the times of pandemic.

Television and radio: revival in the era of pandemic

The pandemic spread lead to complete closure of markets and affected everyone's day to day life to major extent. This was the time when people spent time with their families which was earlier only a dream due to the busy life schedules each one of us were carrying. This was also the time which saw the revival of radio and television as there was no other option available for entertainment. In the crisis situation, radio stood out as being an essential medium to stay informed. Radio stations adapted to the new situation with allowing radio professionals to work from home and modified schedules to include content on the coronavirus. In this situation listening increased, and the medium helped to alleviate the psychological effects of the pandemic. Programs of All India Radio such as "HUM HONGE KAMYAB" where each day some subject experts were called to inform the people about the widespread of the disease and how we can save ourselves from the pandemic, what precautionary measures should be taken and how important it is to practice social distancing and use masks and sanitizers to stay healthy. Television also saw its revival when the then Information and Broadcasting minister, Prakash Javdekar announced the re-telecasting of the iconic shows of Doordarshan. It gave a chance to the public, especially the youth to inculcate the values of the Ramayan and Mahabharata and spend some quality time with their families. These shows were a hit even today as they were before. According to the data from television monitoring agency BARC, the epic garnered 51 million viewers on Sunday- in the first weekend of its telecast, the highest ever figure for the Hindi GEC (General Entertainment Channel) genre since 2015. On an average each episode of Ramayan saw 42.6 million tune-ins. In this context, Shashi Shekhar Vempati, chief executive, Prasar Bharati, said the internet generation has no memory of Doordarshan. This is in a way, is the proverbial first moment of truth for them to experience the brand Doordarshan. It gave an opportunity to sit down for something that we could also discuss with our families, that too in the era when streaming platforms had prioritized individual viewing of often explicit and niche content. All this helped in revival of these mediums, as they were losing their identity in the digital era.

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