

Nature of Involvement of People in Extracting Coronavirus (COVID-19) Related Information: A Perspective on Bangladeshi Media

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Abstract

The role of mass media is imperative in creating awareness by the dissemination of information about various societal issues. The principal objective of the said research study is to explore the nature of mass media in spreading information on Coronavirus (COVID-19). Total population taken for this study was 125. A structured questionnaire survey was conducted through Google from August 16 to August 31, 2020 on different age groups. The questionnaire offered 25 questions on 5 issues. The study revealed that most participants got information on COVID-19 from social media using internet regularly, recognizing its importance of educating people on the pandemic. This study found that the related information by the Bangladeshi media houses was insufficient. After receiving information about Coronavirus from mass media, almost all the participants knew what Covid-19 was. They conveyed the knowledge to their families and even followed the preventive measures against the pandemic as stated by media. It is declared that the information given by newspapers and television was credible but media sometimes provided misleading information about Coronavirus. Media needs to observe caution while giving news so as to save people from any wrong impact.

Keywords: *Corona Virus (COVID-19), Extraction of Information, Use of Media.*

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Introduction

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has exposed all nations across the world to the major health crisis subsequently affecting the life of every individual. The outbreak of this virus was initially noticed in Wuhan, a city of Chinese Hubei province, in December 2019. All over the world (216 countries) 152,851,851 confirmed cases and 3,207,437 deaths have been reported so far (Worldometers, 2021). In the context of Bangladesh, the first case of Corona virus was registered on 8th March, 2020. As on May 2, 2021, as many as 7,60,584 cases were found 'Corona positive' and 11,510 people died of the pandemic. During these times, people showed interest in seeking information on Coronavirus, its prevention, diagnosis and treatment through mass media. Thus, most of the research studies are skewed towards the emergence of mass media's role as the Covid-19 information dissemination platform. Media is known as one of the most significant tools of information. It has the ability to educate people with authentic information whenever there is a chaotic situation, making them adopt positive a right course of action. It also assist politicians, policy makers and people properly take stock of any situation by transferring them accurate data.

Pandey & Kumar (2020), conducting a survey on Jaipur's leading Hindi newspaper, Rajasthan Patrika, finds out that print media has been playing a vital role (in terms of understanding) in spreading awareness on Corona virus Disease (COVID-19). Shalvee et al. (2020) in their study found that half of the total respondents preferred to get information via social media. Most of them felt positive after watching television news. More than fifty percent people cross-checked the news whilst majority of the respondents watched the advertisements on Coronavirus, nearly forty two percent of them voted in favour of the media credibility. The media approach and presentation of news stories may alter audiences' attitudes and behaviour (Anwar et al., 2020). "The model of media impact" also emerged followed by the pandemic of SARS 2003-2004 for assessing the effects of mass media and varied dimensions of the epidemic. This model lacked any postulate about the directions of media effects, whether media had positive impact or negative impact. Subsequently, this gap in the existing model encourages the need re-address the existing model and explore the nature of effects (Hui, M. 2020). Media reports on the spread of diseases during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 raised both fear and awareness among people. It taught people to adopt essential protective measures. Although certain sections of society treated this disease as a social stigma, as many newspaper articles and reports reflected the sheer stigmatization of the patients, yet the need for a two directional approach was felt than ever before; there was a dire need of awareness among media practitioner for the control and prevention of disease. (Wang Q et al 2015). Due to the rapid technological growth and easy access to the internet, pandemic related awareness level was significantly high among the masses that eventually led to the improved adherence to vital community healthcare steps.

The use of social media, one of the popular modern-day communication platforms, has been growing rapidly due to the easy access to internet technology. Various social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, snapchat, Twitter, Reddit, Weibo, TikTok, Tencent, and Toutiao provide innumerable social and community pages along links to connect with other members of this virtual ecosystem. For many users, it is inevitable not to share every aspect of their lives through social media posts, many research findings reflect they can not come out of the clutches of today's digital media. These everyday happenings can encompass from the mundane daily routine to the significant achievements of their lives. Since the lockdown in the wake of global pandemic, an 87% increase has been witnessed in the usage of social media. Subsequently this phenomenon is making easier for a lay web-user to access the COVID related information available online (Scholastic, 2020).

Social media users easily gathered data and figures available on various pages and links of social media without bothering to confirm its source and they believed on these pieces of information. Besides this, various religious pages asserted the attention of web users during the covid crisis. Such faith based social media posts and pages also disseminated unrealistic and non-scientific tips and guidelines for the prevention and mitigation against the virus spread. Therefore, a prodigal and huge barrier was witnessed during the covid crisis due to the misinformation and disinformation at the social media platforms. This led towards the refusal for preventive measures such as use of face masks and social distancing. On the other hand, certain positive instances were also observed including the measures for the stable and healthy mental and emotional well-being. Psychological stress and nervousness are regarded as normal psychological responses of humans during the non-favorable conditions. However, some people fail to handle such situations and pass through the anxiety and/or psychotic depression. Depression can present itself in physical and psychological forms, which vary from person to person. To overcome it, some behavioral changes or medications may be required. Thus, in such situations, media must play its role in educating and informing masses about the need of resilience for coping such situations. Several media contents focused to disseminate information about emotional and mental stability among various members of the society during the covid-crisis. This positive role of mass media and social media through various reports, programs and posts helped the public to cope with the difficult situations. Several Facebook pages, Instagram posts, YouTube tutorials addressed the issues related to psychological and physical health of masses. Moreover, several exercises to keep mind and body relaxed were marketed and online books were also provided free of cost (MedCity News, 2017).

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention” (CDC) also provided important tips and procedures about the preventive strategies related to corona virus while employing various media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Television while highlighting the need for physical distancing. Mega shopping malls and supermarkets also employed media particularly print media to advertise. Moreover, all the travelers and commuters during the air travel and road travel also witnessed various advertisements urging masses about staying at home to minimize the human contact at public places along announcements of mandatory face masks and frequent hand-washing. The repetitive frequency of such messages through various channels of mainstream media and social media eventually helped the spread of virus at many places (Anwar, Malik, Raees, & Anwar, 2020).

Media Landscape Bangladesh

Bangladeshi media is well known globally. According to the Department of Films & Publications of Bangladesh, there are 707 newspapers, among them 552 are national dailies, 41 private television channels, 4 among them are state owned, 28 FM radio stations, 16 community radio stations and a large number of online news portal websites. As per statistics of Statcounter (2020), there were 66.44 million

internet users in Bangladesh in January 2020. Social media users are 36.00 million and among them Facebook users- are 93.35percent, YouTube-3.95 percent, Pinterest- 1.42 percent, Twitter-0.59 percent, Linked In- 0.52percent, Instagram users is 0.1percent. There are 163.0 million mobile phone users in Bangladesh. All the traditional media uses Facebook, YouTube, twitter page or WhatsApp, to disseminate their news for reaching a good number of audiences. .

Mass media have different characteristics than other media (Sociology Center, n.d.). Muhammad Ali (2011) said that mass media produce news for the public and

that this is mainly a one-way process. They've filtered information that's called gatekeeping. They tend to catch a lot of audience and the mass media can influence society. In Bangladesh, media also play a vital role in informing and creating ways of seeing events.

Research Objectives

To understand the nature of involvement of people in getting the COVID-19 related news;

To justify the role of Bangladeshi media in presenting information about COVID-19;

To know the experience and knowledge of people through using media.

Theoretical framework

This study followed the Uses and Gratifications theory. It holds a significant position in the area of mass media research as it focuses on audience. As stated by Katz (1959) unlike other media-effect theories, which focused mainly on what media does to people, Uses and Gratification theory focuses on what do people do with media. . Basically, the participants in this study read or watch the news of mass media with a view to satisfying themselves. The participants choose the different sources of media to satisfy their specific need of interest. Typically, the participants use media for various purposes such as for getting updated, increasing their knowledge, entertainment, an expert in languages, upgrading thinking level, self-awareness, changing their social outlook, raising interest in reading etc. Media provide all such information for the satisfaction of audience. But the media cannot provide information as per their wish. Here, the media serve the audience.

The theory of Uses and Gratification helps us know what people are looking for in media or what specific information they choose according to their needs. Sparks (as cited in Griffin, 2012, p. 358) stated that this theory was established by Elihu Katz with his associates. Katz pointed out that people use media for specific purposes and that, through this study, the researcher will learn how media affects people. He also mentioned that different people would be affected differently due to their different choices and purposes. In addition, media also seek the attention of their audience (as cited in Griffin, 2012, p. 359- 361). This theory will help us know media's preference on spreading awareness for COVID-19 and which type of information people consume from them.

Research Method

To conduct this research, across-sectional study was carried out on the Bangladeshi population to determine the nature of audience getting Coronavirus (COVID-19) related information from media.

Population of the Study

A snowball sampling technique was used to conduct this study. The questionnaire was sent via Facebook, WhatsApp, and G-mail to the contacts of the authors. And the participants were requested to further share the questionnaire among their contacts, and were encouraged to have the forms filled by people of all age groups. As many as 125 people of different age groups responded online from various parts of Bangladesh from August, 16 to 31 2020.

Question Survey

A total 2 of 5 questions were developed using Google form which included consent, demographic details, nature of involvement of people and their extraction of news as well as justification with 5 sections.

Table 1: *Questionnaire Sections*

Section-1	Section-2	Section-3	Section-4	Section-5
Socio-demographic information	Nature of involvement	Information extracting	Information justification	Knowledge and awareness
1. Age	1. Reading or watching news	1. Corona virus in Bangladesh	1. Publishing information	1. Impacted by COVID-19
2. Gender	2. Proper timing	2. Easy medium	2. Credible COVID-19 information	2. Create more awareness
3. Educational Qualification	3. Medium of getting news	3. Medium of uses	3. Misleading information	3. Receiving mode of information
4. Working Status	4. First knowledge of Corona	4. Printed newspaper	4. International media	4. Hygiene rules
5. Pattern using internet	5. Proper role during COVID-19	5. Mostly trusted	5. Creative work	5. Types of seeking information

Statistical Tools

To formulate this study, data were compiled in the Microsoft Excel sheet and descriptive statistics was analyzed into SPSS version 20.0.

Results

Socio-Demographic Information of the Participants

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the participants by Socio-demographic information

Variables	N (%)
Age (years)	
< 25	99 (79.2)
26-36	20 (16)
37-48	6 (4.8)
Gender	
Male	75(60)
Females	50 (40)
Educational qualifications	
Ph.D.	2 (1.6)
Masters	22 (17.6)
Bachelors (Honors)	21 (16.8)
Studying	80 (64)
Working status	
Student	99 (79.2)
Teacher	18 (14.4)
Government employee	2 (1.6)
Private employee and others	6 (4.8)
Pattern of using internet	
Regular	112 (89.6)
Occasional	6 (5.6)
Irregular	7 (4.8)

Table 2 shows that 60 percent participants were males and 40 percent females. 79.2 percent participants' age was ≤ 25 years. In the case of educational qualifications, 64 percent participants were studying, 16.8 percent had completed Bachelors, 17.6 percent Masters and only 1.6 percent were Ph.Ds. In the profession wise distribution of the participants, 79.2 percent were students, 4 14.4 percent teachers, and 1.6 percent were government employees.

Participant's Nature of Involvement with Mass Media

Table 3: Percentage distribution of the participants by the nature of their involvement with mass media (continued)

Variables	N (%)
Reading or watching news pattern on regular basis	
Yes	81(64.8)
No	3 (2.4)

Occasional

41 (32.8)

Proper time of watching news or information

Morning	21 (16.8)
Noon	13 (10.4)
Evening	22 (17.6)
Night	69(55.2)
Medium of getting general information	
Newspapers	5 (4)
Television	7 (5.6)
Online news portal	18 (14.4)
Social media	46 (36.8)
All the above media	49 (39.2)
Medium from which they first knew about the Corona Pandemic	
Television	24 (19.2)
Online news portal	16 (12.8)
Social media	75 (60)
Media has played its proper role during COVID-19	
Yes	72 (57.6)
No	53 (42.4)

Table 3 reveals that 89.6 percent participants used internet regularly, 5.6 percent occasionally and only 4.8 percent irregularly. 64.8 percent participants reported that they read or watched news regularly. 55.2 percent reported that night was their proper time of getting news while 17.6 percent watched news in the evening, 16.8 percent in the morning and the rest (10.4 percent) of the participants got it at noon. In the case of getting general information, 36.8 percent participants got information from social media, 14.4 percent from online news portal, 5.6 percent from television, and only 4 percent participants got information from newspaper. All the media shown in the table were used to get information by 39.2 percent participants of the study.

Coronavirus Information Extraction by the Participant

Table 4: Percentage distributions of the participants with regard to Coronavirus information gathered by them (continued)

Variables	N (%)
First time getting information about Corona virus in Bangladesh	
Family	3 (2.4)
Traditional Media	46 (36.8)
Social Media	70 (56)
Friends or Relatives	6 (4.8)
Easy medium of getting information about COVID-19	
Newspapers and television	28 (22.4)
Social media	97 (77.6)
Mostly used medium to get updated news on Corona virus pandemic	

Newspapers and television

45 (36)

Online news portal

27 (21.6)

Social media	51 (40.8)
Others	2 (1.6)
Reading printed newspaper during Corona pandemic	
Yes	28 (22.4)
No	97 (77.6)
The most trusted medium of news on Corona virus	
Traditional Media Information (Newspapers and Television)	92 (74.8)
Social media information (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter)	31 (25.2)

From Table 4 it is shown that 60 percent participants came to know COVID-19 through social media and 19.2 percent through television. Even, 56 percent participants got information about the Corona pandemic for the first time in Bangladesh through social media while 36.8 percent of them from traditional media. Again, 77.6 percent participants think social media (new media) is the easiest source of getting information about COVID-19. In the case of assessing Bangladeshi media houses, 63.4 percent participants reported that their role was insufficient in releasing information about COVID-19. Social media was the mostly used platform for getting updated news during the Corona pandemic. About 78 percent participants did not read printed newspapers during the pandemic and 74.8 percent reported that traditional media was their trusted medium of news on Coronavirus.

Participants' Justification of the Information

Table 5: Percentage distribution of the participants by their justification of the information spread by mass media about COVID-19

Variables	N (%)
Role of Bangladeshi media houses in releasing information on COVID-19	
Sufficient	45 (36.6)
Insufficient	78 (63.4)
Credibility of COVID-19 information provided by Bangladeshi media	
Yes	64 (51.2)
No	61 (48.8)
Presence of misleading information in the media about COVID-19	
Yes	95 (76.0)
No	4 (4.2)
Didn't verify	26 (20.8)
Seeking information from international media along with national media	
Yes	104 (83.2)
No	21 (16.8)
Mass media doing creative work on raising awareness about Corona	
Yes	97 (77.6)
No	28 (22.4)

Table 5 depicts that 51.2 percent participants reported that the information provided by the Bangladeshi media was credible while 48.8 thought otherwise. But

76 percent participants found the presence of misleading information in the Bangladeshi media about COVID-19. More than 83 percent participants followed both national and international media to obtain information about the pandemic. So as far raising awareness among people about COVID-19 by media was concerned, 77.6 percent supported the concept. In the case of role assessment, 57.6 percent participants stated that they media played their proper role during COVID -19.

Knowledge and Awareness of the Participants Regarding COVID-19

Table 6 shows that 95.2 percent participants got their life impacted due to COVID-19. 53.6 percent participants reported that social media educated them on Corona virus. After receiving information about Corona virus from media, about 93 percent participants not only knew what it was, they also alerted their families. And about 98 percent followed the media stated hygiene rules against COVID-19. They gathered information about the scale of infections and the death toll (81.6 percent) both at home and abroad.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of the participants by their knowledge and awareness

Variables	N (%)
Impact of COVID-19 on daily routine life	
Yes	118 (95.2)
No	6 (4.8)
More awareness creating medium on Corona virus	
Newspapers (print and online)	25 (20)
Television	31 (24.8)
Social media	67 (53.6)
Others	2 (1.6)
After receiving information about the Corona Virus from the media	
Becoming aware	7 (5.6)
Making the family aware	2 (1.6)
Both becoming aware and making the family aware	116 (92.8)
Follow the hygiene rules against COVID-19	
Yes	122 (97.6)
No	3 (2.4)
Types of seeking information on Corona virus	
Infections and mortality rates within the country	15 (12)
Infections and mortality rates abroad	1 (0.8)
Infections and mortality rates both at home and abroad	102 (81.6)
None	7 (5.6)

Discussion

Participants for this study were both males and females. Most of them were students of various universities aged below 25 years. The present study found a large

number of participants read or watched news regularly using the internet at night and they got general information not only from social media but also from

online news portals, television and newspapers. The same findings go with the study of Alireza et al. (2021). They found that the average usage of mass media was higher than social media during day and night but the use of social media to obtain information about the Corona virus was higher than mass and traditional media. Radwan et al. (2020) also showed in their study that during the COVID-19 lockdown, internet users shifted to social media, particularly Facebook, to get informed about developments regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in their countries.

In this study, most participants learnt about COVID-19 from social media for the first time rather than traditional media. These findings resemble the work of Ngozika et al. (2020). To them, the announcement of the first Corona virus victim was made through various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and various websites as it was easy to spread any information through them. Social media (New media) was considered to be the most accessible platform for obtaining information about COVID-19. This result is consistent with Radwan et al. (2021). Their study stated that most participants used Facebook to obtain more information about COVID-19. The current study found that the role of the Bangladeshi media houses in broadcasting news on COVID-19 was justified as insufficient. To get updated news during the Corona pandemic, social media was the mostly used source. Ngozika et al. (2020) found the similar role of social media in their study because of providing huge information outlets to Nigerians during this pandemic. Traditional media was their trusted medium of news on the Coronavirus and even a good number of participants did not read the printed newspapers.

This study showed that though the information provided by Bangladeshi media was credible, the participants of this study sometimes found the presence of misleading information about the Corona virus in them. Srivastava et al. (2020) reported the underlying cause behind the major impact on mental health was the stress created due to the publishing of the fake and unfiltered news by mass media amid COVID-19. They followed both national and international media to get information about the pandemic. More than half of the participants mentioned the proper role of mass media in raising awareness among the people during COVID-19. Varshney et al. (2020) also mentioned the same thing in their study and reported that the news coverage by mass media on the issues regarding health, the progression of the disease, and livelihood has been increased during this pandemic. Almost all the participants acknowledged that there was an impact of COVID-19 on their life due to Coronavirus. Sharma et al. (2020) showed in their study that the major impact of mass media has been reflected in the psychological domain of the quality of life of all the individuals.

More than half of them reported that social media made them more aware against the Corona virus. Alireza et al. (2021) showed that mass and social media appeared to be the main sources of self-care information for searching at the time of the outbreak of Corona virus. The present study found, after receiving information about Corona virus from mass media, almost all the participants not only became conscious of the phenomenon but also educated their families on it. They obtained

the information on the rate of infections and deaths both at home and abroad from mass media and followed the hygiene rules against COVID-19. Alireza et al. (2021)

also found in their study the above result. To them, these media played an important role in the prevention, control, and treatment of the Corona disease and the related decision-making by people.

Conclusion

Media is considered as one of the most significant tools of information at present. People preferred to obtain COVID related information from social media more than the traditional media. This is so because social media is considered as one of the easiest ways of information. But Bangladeshi media houses also educated people on the pandemic. As a result, they followed health safety rules during the pandemic. Sometimes media provides wrong information about the Coronavirus, its transmission and number of deaths. In an emergency situation, misleading information, seriously impacts popular sentiment. Media specialists should gather data from reliable sources so as to prevent creation of wrong impressions.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations of this study such as usage of self-reported data from the selected participants and reliance on others networks for sharing the questionnaire. Some vital questions on Corona virus regarding the concerns of the participants relating to mass media must have been included. Besides, there was no age-specific population mentioned in the methodology to help find the role of mass media on creating awareness during COVID-19. However, the sample size was not large enough. So, there is a scope of further study to identify the role of mass media on specific age group, gender and on a good number of participants.

Ethical Consideration

This study goal was plainly disclosed to members before the surveys were directed, and composed assent was obtained. The respondents were educated on the morals and their right of willing cooperation. The respondents were ensured confidentiality and anonymity.

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