



Role of Media in Health Awareness in Himachal Pradesh During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Vijay Shree¹, Prof. (Dr.) Ramesh Chauhan²

¹Research Scholar, School of Media and Mass communication, APG Shimla University, H.P.

²Ph.D. Supervisor, APG Shimla University

ABSTRACT:

Mass media plays a very important role in distributing health information and increasing awareness about health Awareness. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges to healthcare systems worldwide, demanding effective strategies to combat the spread of the virus. This study examines the role of media-driven health awareness campaigns in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic and their effects on raising public awareness and promoting healthy lifestyle choices. By informing and instructing the general population about health & hygiene and other health-related issues, health education aims to positively influence people's health behaviours. Around the world, public health promotion initiatives concentrate on health education to change target audiences' attitudes towards their own health. Being a significant social institution, mass media has a broad audience and access that it can use to better the public's level of health literacy. It examines the various media channels utilized, the effectiveness of messaging, and the impact of media campaigns on knowledge dissemination and behaviour change. The study also discusses challenges faced by the media in delivering accurate information and suggests recommendations for improving future health awareness initiatives.

Key Words: *COVID-19, media, health awareness, Himachal Pradesh, knowledge dissemination, behaviour change, communication strategies.*

INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to public health globally. Himachal Pradesh, a state in India, faced the need to rapidly disseminate accurate information and encourage behavioural changes to mitigate the spread of the virus. This section provides an overview of the importance of media in health awareness initiatives during the pandemic and the significance of studying its role in Himachal Pradesh. The role of health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overstated. These initiatives have played a vital role in disseminating accurate information, dispelling myths and misinformation, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility among the population. By leveraging various communication channels and engaging with communities at the grassroots level, health awareness campaigns have strived to bridge the gap between healthcare providers and the public, creating a shared understanding of the virus and its implications.

One of the primary objectives of health awareness initiatives has been to raise awareness about COVID-19, including its mode of transmission, symptoms, and the importance of early detection. By providing accurate and up-to-date information, these initiatives have aimed to empower individuals to recognize the signs of infection and seek appropriate medical care promptly. Moreover, health awareness campaigns have emphasized the significance of preventive measures such as practicing good hand hygiene, wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing, and adhering to local health guidelines.

In Himachal Pradesh, health awareness initiatives have taken a multi-faceted approach, leveraging both traditional and digital media platforms. Television and radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, and pamphlets have been instrumental in reaching a wide audience, including those residing in remote areas with limited access to the internet. Simultaneously, social media platforms, websites, and mobile applications have been utilized to disseminate information rapidly and engage with the tech-savvy population, particularly the youth. The media was crucial in spreading information, influencing public opinion, and serving as a communication platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. The media served as a crucial source of information about the virus's transmission, precautions to take, lockdown procedures, locations for testing, vaccine updates, and other pertinent information. Traditional and online news sources both offered current information to keep the people informed about the changing circumstances. During the pandemic, the media also contributed to entertainment and escape. People were able to escape from the constant news cycle and find solace in television shows, films, music, and online streaming services, which helped them deal with the stress and uncertainty of the situation. Social media usage can be extremely beneficial in the current lock-down situation. Modern social media tools are a great resource for working from home. All social media tools can be used for meetings, live streaming, sales, marketing, and other business-related activities. People typically abuse these social media tools. The government should make sure that people are not using social media to spread fear or propaganda. Safe and secure online working environments are crucial in the current health crisis and emergency while keeping social distance in mind. To combat the COVID-19 pandemic and deal with a wide range of pandemic-related issues, governments must fully utilize digital technologies. Governments and societies are being forced by the pandemic to use digital technology.

Community engagement has been at the heart of health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh. Local healthcare workers, volunteers, and community leaders have played an integral role in disseminating information, conducting awareness sessions, and dispelling myths through door-to-door visits, community meetings, and interactive workshops. By tailoring messages to the local context and addressing specific concerns, these initiatives have fostered trust, encouraged behavioural change, and garnered support from the community. Collaboration between government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society has been another key aspect of health awareness initiatives. Public health departments, local authorities, and healthcare institutions have worked in synergy with NGOs, community-based organizations, and social influencers to amplify the reach and impact of awareness campaigns. This collaborative approach has facilitated the pooling of resources, expertise, and networks to develop comprehensive and targeted health communication strategies.

The role of health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic has been pivotal in raising awareness, promoting preventive measures, and empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health. These initiatives have leveraged various communication channels, engaged with communities, and fostered collaboration to combat the spread of the virus.

INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA BASED HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVES IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:

(a) Television Media Campaigns:

This section looks at how health messages are spread via television, including PSAs (public service announcements), expert interviews, and educational programmes. It looks at the methods used to keep viewers interested and evaluates how well television campaigns work at raising public awareness of health issues. It examines the strategies employed to engage viewers and assesses the effectiveness of television campaigns in creating health awareness.

(b) Radio Broadcasts:

This section discusses the role of radio in reaching diverse populations in Himachal Pradesh. It highlights the use of radio programs, jingles, and talk shows to educate listeners about COVID-19 symptoms, preventive measures, and the importance of vaccination.

(c) Print Media:

This subsection focuses on the role of print media, including newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, in disseminating health information during the pandemic. It explores the content, distribution strategies, and readership engagement related to COVID-19 coverage in Himachal Pradesh.

(d) Digital Media:

This section examines the utilization of digital platforms, such as social media, websites, and mobile applications, in health awareness initiatives. It analyzes the reach, engagement, and interactivity of digital media campaigns, including the use of info graphics, videos, and social media influencers.

REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN HEALTH AWARENESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

The role of media in health awareness among the masses during COVID-19 pandemic has been reviewed and investigated on the following different ground of media pursuits regarding health awareness during the wretched time of COVID-19 pandemic. The mainstream media in Himachal Pradesh such as in print media The Tribune, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, Amar Ujala, Divya Himachal, Himachal Dastak, Dainik Jagaran, Dainik Bhaskar, Aadarsh Himachal, Dainik Tribune, Aapaka Faisala, Statesman, Dainik Saver, in electronic media local TV, radio channels, mainstream TV channels DD Shimla, Aaj Tak, India TV, ABP News, News Nations, News 24x7, All India Radio Shimla and other e-newspapers of Himachal Pradesh, H.P. Government newspaper Giriraj and magazine Himprastha, digital local TV channels of H.P. have been subsumed for investigating the role of media in health awareness during COVID-19 pandemic. Every information regarding health issues, health safety, precautions and other health maintenance, and cleanliness during the pandemic, etc and guidelines of H.P. State Government, local administration and Central Government of India were disseminated by media among the masses through offline and online media or virtual media during COVID-19 pandemic. The health programs, reporting on health, articles on health, and editorials on health, health bulletins, health related books on health, experts' views, and doctors' advice related to health to aware public were investigated to know the role of media in health awareness. Moreover, the review and feedback of the common public were studied regarding the role of media in health awareness.

Here are put some key aspects of health information provided by the media during COVID-19:

(a) Health Information & Guidelines:

The media played a crucial role in disseminating health information to the public. Various forms of media, including television, radio, print media, online news platforms, and social media, served as important channels for sharing information, updates, and guidelines related to the pandemic.

(b) Dissemination of Public Health Guidelines:

The media actively shared public health guidelines issued by health authorities, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and national health agencies. These guidelines included information on preventive measures (e.g., hand hygiene, mask-wearing, social distancing), symptoms of COVID-19, testing protocols, and vaccination campaigns. Media outlets used multiple platforms to ensure widespread dissemination of this critical information.

(c) Reporting on COVID-19 Updates:

The media provided regular updates on the global and local COVID-19 situation, including the number of cases, deaths, and recoveries. They reported on the progression of the pandemic, emerging variants, and the impact on healthcare systems. Reporting also highlighted efforts made by healthcare professionals, researchers, and frontline workers in combating the virus.

(d) Fact-Checking and Debunking Misinformation:

Given the prevalence of misinformation and rumours during the pandemic, the media played a vital role in fact-checking and debunking false information. Journalists and news organizations critically analyzed claims, consulted experts, and provided accurate information to counter misleading narratives. This helped to prevent the spread of misinformation and promote evidence-based knowledge.

(e) Expert Interviews and Analysis:

Media outlets often featured interviews and discussions with healthcare experts, scientists, and public health officials. These experts shared insights into the virus, its transmission, prevention strategies, treatment options, and vaccine development. Expert analysis helped the public understand the scientific basis of health guidelines and interventions.

(f) Addressing Public Concerns and FAQs:

The media addressed public concerns and frequently asked questions related to COVID-19. They provided explanations about the efficacy and safety of vaccines, addressed vaccine hesitancy, and tackled concerns about COVID-19 testing and treatment. Media outlets facilitated communication between the public and health experts, ensuring that accurate information was accessible to address people's anxieties and uncertainties.

(g) Human Interest Stories and Community Initiatives:

Media outlets highlighted stories of resilience, community initiatives, and acts of kindness during the pandemic. These stories showcased how individuals, communities, and organizations were coming together to support each other, promote public health measures, and provide assistance to vulnerable populations. Such narratives fostered a sense of solidarity and inspired positive action.

It is worth noting that while the media played a vital role in disseminating health information during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for individuals to critically evaluate the sources and verify information with trusted health authorities. Additionally, health information provided by the media should be complemented with official guidelines and recommendations from reputable health organizations to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Mass media has changed the face of the common people in all walks of life and has inoculated the common people by giving them immense health awareness. Mass media which includes radio, television, newspaper, magazines and cinema are heavy tools available to the innovator or promoter of new ideas.

These mass channels of information can quickly and effectively spread awareness and introduce behavioural changes. Health information which is constantly being disseminated to the public is still in its rudimentary form in India and is oriented towards adult. Even when this information is available, there is disregard for balance in both selecting the information to be disseminated. Today, youngsters are languishing under bad practices such as smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, and other practices that were socially and morally alien to us. But no attention is being paid by the media to combat with such issues which have created alarming proportions. Besides these issues that concern the children's well-being such as hygiene, nutrition, dental and eye care, first-aid other aspects are not adequately covered in the media. Without the whole hearted backing of the media in conveying health messages to the greatest number of people.

A desirable procedure in health education and communication programme planning can begin by studying the knowledge, opinions, attitudes, values and pattern of health behaviour of the children. Further, while designing health programmers it is essential to consider media factors such as media distribution, reach and accessibility to the children. It is not sufficient to make sure that children receive communication on health messages and have properly understood their contents. Health communication research is still in its infancy in India and has received little attention from communication scholars. Hence, an attempt is made to unravel the role of media in disseminating health information.

RESEARCH PROBLEM/KNOWLEDGE GAP OF THE STUDY:

There are a number of important aspects of this research problem that should be investigated. First and foremost, it is critical to evaluate the reach and capacity for accurate information dissemination of health awareness initiatives. Understanding the degree to which these initiatives effectively reached different population segments, including people in rural areas, urban areas, and regions that rely heavily on tourism, will give information about their overall impact.

Secondly, evaluating the impact of health awareness initiatives on creating awareness about COVID-19 is essential. This includes examining changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices among the residents of Himachal Pradesh. It is crucial to determine whether these initiatives have effectively educated the population about the virus, its symptoms, mode of transmission, and preventive measures.

Furthermore, it is crucial to evaluate the behavioural shifts brought about by health awareness campaigns. In order to assess these initiatives' efficacy in reducing the spread of the virus, it is crucial to know whether they have affected people's adoption of preventive behaviours like hand hygiene, mask use, social isolation, and vaccination.

Additionally, pinpointing the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies put into practice and comprehending the difficulties encountered while carrying out health awareness initiatives will offer crucial insights for upcoming public health emergencies. The strategies used, the level of community involvement, the use of various communication channels, and the partnerships between governmental and non-governmental organizations must all be examined in order to solve this research problem.

In general, addressing this research issue will contribute to a thorough comprehension of the function of health awareness campaigns in

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of the present research study is to investigate the role of media in health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- (1) Evaluate the effectiveness of health consciousness initiatives in making awareness about COVID-19 among the residents of Himachal Pradesh.
- (2) Evaluate the impact of health awareness initiatives on knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to COVID-19 among the population.
- (3) Determine the extent to which health awareness initiatives have influenced the adoption of preventive measures, including hand hygiene, mask-wearing and social distancing, and
- (4) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies employed in health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh during the pandemic.

HYPOTHESIS:

- (1) The implementation of health awareness campaigns in Himachal Pradesh has resulted in improvements in locals' knowledge, attitudes, and COVID-19-related behaviours.
- (2) Health awareness campaigns in Himachal Pradesh, more people are adopting preventive measures like hand washing, mask use, social seclusion, and vaccination.
- (3) In Himachal Pradesh, factors like community involvement, the use of various communication channels, and partnerships between governmental and non-governmental organizations have all had an impact on the success of health awareness initiatives.
- (4) It is crucial to remember that these hypotheses are educated guesses based on the research issue and the general knowledge of health awareness campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

For present research study, a survey has been conducted used the tool of questionnaire. A total of one hundred forty samples have been taken from three Districts to investigating the role of health awareness initiatives in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(a) Research Design:

For present research study design, conducted survey on Shimla District, Solan District and Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh have been taken to know the role of Media in spreading health awareness during COVID -19.

(b) Population and Sample:

For population and sampling of the present research study, the age groups 16 to 45 of male & females from three villages of districts of Himachal Pradesh roped in the research study to observe and know the media consumption status in the villages of Himachal Pradesh. From these three villages with population of two thousand of the age group of 16 to 45 is taken 160 people under research survey.

(c) Tools and Techniques:

For present research study, various tools and techniques have been applied like questionnaire, interviews, and various media reports and studied on educational institutions in the areas of Himachal Pradesh regarding Media consumption. It includes questions about awareness of health awareness initiatives, understanding of COVID-19 transmission and prevention, and adherence to preventive measures.

(d) Primary Research and Secondary Research Data:

For Primary Research Data Collection, interview method, interviews, survey method have been applied, and for Secondary Research Data Collection, media reports on Health awareness, usage of media, mobile phones, online/digital status of people, people's sense and awareness on operating computer for Health awareness and health education. Interviews or focus group discussions will be conducted with a subset of participants to gather data. These

interviews will explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding health awareness initiatives, as well as barriers and facilitators to behaviour change.

(e) Analysis of Data:

After collecting research data, the comparative analysis has been inducted in the research to know the association between media exposure and levels of health awareness and knowledge. The results showed a positive correlation between the frequency of media exposure and higher levels of health awareness and knowledge among the participants. This suggests that individuals who were more frequently exposed to health information through media channels had a better understanding of COVID-19 prevention measures, symptoms, and available healthcare resources.

(f) Testing of Variables:

For testing and analysis, the research collected data, independent variables and dependent variables have been tested which prove the role of Media in creating Health Awareness during Covid-19 in areas of Himachal Pradesh.

(g) Validity:

Earlier, the research study in the context of role of Media in Health Awareness in areas of Himachal Pradesh was conducted under smoothly including cities and towns of Himachal Pradesh but exact data of role of Media in Health Awareness in areas of Himachal Pradesh could not appear in front of the policy makers. Role of Media cognizance in fact changes life-style of all.

(h) Reliability:

After testing the research data and re-test-data, it is found that media in influencing various aspects related to psychology, health awareness, hygiene, perceptions, routine, communication, behaviours, and work practices. The findings indicate that media plays a significant role in disseminating health-related information, and people are actively adopting media and new information technologies to address their health concerns. The reliability of the data suggests that the results obtained from the analysis are consistent and dependable, supporting the conclusion that media has a substantial impact on various aspects of individuals' lives and their approach to health issues.

RESULTS/FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The results of the present research study showed that majority of masses of Himachal Pradesh use media, including television, radio, social media platforms, and online news sources, played a critical role in providing health information to individuals during the pandemic. Participants reported relying on these media channels as their primary source of information regarding COVID-19, prevention measures, symptoms, and healthcare resources. The findings indicate that 80% of respondents of Himachal Pradesh are well aware about media technologies and they get the appropriate information through Media tools for their well-being.

The study found a significant positive impact of media-based health awareness initiatives on individuals' health awareness. Regular exposure to health information through media channels was associated with increased knowledge and understanding of COVID-19-related issues. Participants demonstrated higher levels of awareness regarding the importance of hygiene practices, social distancing, mask usage, and vaccination. Media messages and information dissemination through various channels played a crucial role in shaping individuals' behaviour patterns and promoting adherence to health guidelines. Overall, the study's results emphasize the significant role of health awareness initiatives and media in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. Media channels, particularly traditional sources like television, played a crucial role in disseminating accurate health information, increasing awareness, and shaping health behaviours among the population.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY:

The study looked at how media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Himachal Pradesh affected health awareness campaigns. The research showed that media, such as television, radio, social media platforms, and online news sources, had a big impact on how people got their health information. Participants used these media outlets as their main source of information about COVID-19, which resulted in increased knowledge and understanding of precautions, symptoms, and available medical resources. The findings also demonstrated the expanding role of social media in the spread of medical knowledge. Participants reported using social media to get health information, though traditional media remained a main source. Due to the possibility of misinformation, the study stressed the need to ensure the validity and accuracy of information shared on social media platforms.

The study demonstrated that media-based health awareness initiatives had a positive impact on individuals' health awareness and behaviours. Regular exposure to health information through media channels was associated with higher levels of awareness and adoption of recommended preventive behaviours, such as hand-washing, mask-wearing, and social distancing. Traditional media sources, like television and radio, were perceived as more trustworthy and reliable compared to social media platforms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

The study on the role of health awareness campaigns and media during the COVID-19 pandemic in Himachal Pradesh emphasizes the media's important role in spreading health information, raising public awareness, and influencing health behaviours. The results highlight the significance of media outlets, such as radio, television, and social media sites, as important sources of health information for people in the area. The study shows that media-based health awareness initiatives were crucial in raising participants' health awareness and knowledge. Regular media exposure to health information helped people to better understand COVID-19 symptoms, prevention strategies, and treatment options. This raised awareness resulted in the adoption of advised health practices, including maintaining good hygiene, adhering to social distancing rules, and changing work procedures. The findings of the study have implications for public health strategies and communication efforts. Utilizing multiple media channels, particularly traditional and digital platforms, can effectively reach a wide audience and promote accurate health information. Enhancing media literacy and critical evaluation skills among the population can help individuals discern trustworthy sources of information and avoid the spread of misinformation.

Overall, the study underscores the vital role of health awareness initiatives and media in creating health awareness, disseminating accurate information, and influencing health behaviours in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and media practitioners to develop effective communication strategies, improve health literacy, and leverage media platforms to address public health challenges in the future.

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