



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

COVID-19 -The world has never faced a health crisis that has moved so quickly across continents, overwhelming complex health care systems, and putting entire economies on hold. Despite advances in technology, medicine, and globalization & awareness campaigns, the way governments handle pandemics remains inefficient without thinking about the way the public reacts to them at large. Thus, it is high time to determine the most efficient use of digital communication in these trying times.

Introduction

Since January of 2020, the world has been watching the unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic. The infection has now reached just about every community on the planet leading to a current state of health crisis and economic uncertainty.(TOI, 7 May 2020)

The COVID-19 crisis appears to be unprecedented in most respects. There has never been a health crisis that has spread across continents so quickly, engulfing intricate healthcare systems and halting entire economies. However, this isn't the first pandemic that has affected the world, and it probably won't be the last. Humanity has collectively stood on the brink of numerous uncertainties brought on by a variety of persistent viruses. However, despite the difficulties, such as the 1918 Spanish flu, the 1957 flu pandemic, the HIV/AIDS crisis, SARS, swine flu, and Ebola, there has always been a silver lining and lessons to be learned. The same question is raised by each of these various pandemics: What lessons from the past can we apply to upcoming crises? (FORTUNE, April 29, 2020)

In addition, in order to avoid suffering in the future, we will permanently alter our behavior in response to events that do not go as planned during this crisis. For instance, people who lived through the Great Depression at the beginning of the 20th century became more careful with their money throughout their entire lives.

The virus's ripple effects have been extensive as COVID-19 continues to spread throughout India and the world. The pandemic is halting economies and pushing healthcare systems to their absolute limits. Because of lockdown, workplaces cross country have been covered endlessly and labor forces are expected to go remote with very little opportunity to get ready. The majority of us have felt a strong sense of disruption in our work and social lives, and now that corporate culture and workplace operations have been profoundly and indefinitely disrupted, we must be keen to identify the most effective work-from-home practices. (BLUE FOUNTAIN MEDIA)

The entire world is trying to figure out what will happen next. While numerous workers and businesses are impacted by quarantines and closures, other sectors of our economy actually innovate and/or expand.

In fact, online video conferencing and other activities like it are more effective than ever before. Even after the crisis is over, many of these innovative, well-adapted new solutions will still be in use. Like accepting methods of social distance. In the future, rather than asking, "Why do we meet via video?" The question, "Why do we need to meet in person?" may be asked.

Here, we have to analyse the role of Digital Communication tools for the various sectors. For instance, we have AAarogya Setu App for Covid awareness, Zoom & Google meet App for Education & Academics, Twitter for Health Communication, Facebook Live Webinars & awareness campaigns.

Literature Review

Global pandemics have dramatically increased in recent decades. From the SARS pandemic in 2003, to Avian Flu in 2006, H1N1 in 2009, Ebola in 2014, and the presence of the Zika infection in Latin America in 2015, these advancements are inseparably bound up in present day socio-specialized improvements and cycles of globalization. According to Wolfe (2011) & Ramalingam (2015), improvements in global air travel, agricultural technology, urbanization, and pollution all make it easier for infectious diseases to appear and spread.

The identification, tracing, comprehension, management, treatment, and perception of global pandemics are all impacted simultaneously by new media and technologies. Different facets of the global pandemic response are influenced by digital communication technologies, which present novel opportunities to reduce risks and increase response efficiency. They also confuse traditional information and communication practices in pandemic response (Mager, 2009) and introduce a new group of international and transnational actors to areas that have traditionally been under the control of national authorities.

Digital inequality research will benefit from our findings regarding shifts in digital communication. According to research on digital inequality (e.g., DiMaggio et al.), individuals may benefit from communication technologies differently depending on their Internet access and skills (e.g., DiMaggio et al., 2004). According to Pew Research Center data (2019b, 2019c), a quarter of the population in the United States does not have access to broadband Internet service at home, and almost a fifth of the population does not own a smartphone. These figures are even higher among Americans with lower incomes, with 44% lacking home broadband Internet service and 29% lacking a smartphone (Pew Research Center, 2019a). Instable Internet connections and difficulties maintaining devices' functionality are additional barriers to technology use, in addition to access quality (Gonzales, 2016; 2019, Marler). Additionally, it's possible that some people won't be able to effectively utilize digital media to replace face-to-face communication during

the pandemic (Hargittai & Micheli, 2019). It is necessary to learn how to download and install messaging, voice, and video conferencing apps on their devices before using them. People who are less tech-savvy may also have a harder time identifying and participating in innovative digital communication strategies, such as hosting a virtual birthday party or playing board games over a video call. As a result, when distance rules reduce in-person interaction, some groups are more likely than others to become disconnected from their social environment.

Digital inequalities may be exacerbated by a lack of (access to) digital support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The less tech-savvy may be more in need of assistance than ever before given how much of the world's communication is done through digital technology. For digital support, most people turn to family and friends (Eynon & Geniets, 2016; Hunsaker and other, 2019; Micheli and other, 2019). It may be more difficult for people who primarily rely on face-to-face social connections to receive digital support due to social distance and stay-at-home guidelines. Our data indicate that during the pandemic, older people and those with lower Internet skills are more likely to reduce digital communication. Although the Internet may also serve as a digital support resource (such as search engines, social network sites, and forums), most people who use these resources have more experience and skills with the Internet (Micheli et al., 2019). Because they now have less access to resources that can assist them in developing novel means of communication, the less tech-savvy may experience an increase in their sense of social isolation.

At the same time that in-person interactions are being reduced to a minimum, a different trend is occurring, with individuals increasingly connecting for the first time through video chat apps and services (Kemp, 2020; Popper & Koeze, 2020). This kind of adoption might mostly happen among people who are more tech-savvy. On the other hand, these new adopters might also include people who typically use digital technology less frequently and with less skill, but now feel a “push” to connect online (for example, through their social network). According to our data, 63% of people with lower Internet skills report using any of the listed methods more to communicate digitally. In recent months, there has been an increase in the use of “face-to-face” digital interaction via video conferencing software worldwide, and these numbers are even higher in nations with stricter lockdown measures (Kemp, 2020; Additionally, for comparisons with Italy, where lockdown measures were more stringent than in the United States, see webuse.org/covid). According to van Dijk (2005), the pandemic and its lockdown measures may provide individuals with an opportunity to overcome motivational obstacles and experiment with novel communication strategies. The following query arises: Could this trend indicate a modest advance in the reduction of digital inequality?

Will people who previously did not rely on digital technology for communication, but now adopted novel digital methods to stay in touch with friends and family, continue to use these in the future? It could very well be that video calls will become more mainstream after the pandemic. The same question holds for other digital communication methods that have increased during the pandemic, such as the use of text messages, voice calls, social media, email, and online games. A report by GlobalWebIndex (2020, pp. 99–100) shows that many people expect to continue with new digital media behaviors even after the pandemic ends, but only time will tell how the pandemic shapes people’s media uses in the long run.

The pandemic is leading many to identify and adopt novel digital communication methods. The pandemic also opens up possibilities for—and affects how—we use digital media in all other aspects of our lives. If these changing patterns hold long term, we should be explicit when discussing and comparing findings pre- and post- the coronavirus pandemic when it comes to studying digital communication and media use. Moreover, these trends should be explored over time, including their implications for political communication and journalism, education and learning, health communication, science communication, and a myriad of other domains. As digital media become more fundamental to everyday life—a process that has been accelerated by

the global pandemic—the study of people’s communication and media behaviors is likely to become increasingly important.

Will people who, in the past, did not rely on digital technology for communication continue to use these new digital methods to stay in touch with friends and family? After the pandemic, it's possible that video calls will become more common. The same question applies to other forms of digital communication that have grown in popularity since the pandemic, including social media, email, voice calls, text messages, and online games. GlobalWebIndex's report (2020, pages) 99–100) demonstrates that many individuals anticipate continuing their innovative digital media behaviors even after the pandemic has ended. However, only time will tell how the pandemic ultimately affects individuals' media consumption.

Many people are looking for and using novel digital communication methods as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic also changes how we use digital media in all other spheres of our lives and opens up new possibilities as a result. When comparing findings regarding digital communication and media use prior to and after the coronavirus pandemic, we should be explicit if these shifting patterns persist over time. In addition, these trends ought to be investigated over time, looking at how they might affect political and journalism communication, education and learning, health communication, science communication, and a plethora of other fields. The global pandemic has accelerated the process of digital media becoming more integral to everyday life, making it likely that the study of people's communication and media behaviors will gain more significance.

Methodology & data analysis

We draw on data collected from Lake city of Uttarakhand state in India namely Nainital between 20th June to 24th June 2023 through field survey. The city of Nainital represents Kumaun division of Uttarakhand. We have shown how age, orientation, living alone, worries about internet access, and web abilities connect with changes in friendly contact during the pandemic. We examine how the utilization of computerized media for social association during a worldwide general wellbeing emergency might be inconsistent disseminated among residents and may keep on molding disparities even after the pandemic is finished. Such bits of knowledge are significant thinking about the conceivable effect of the Coronavirus pandemic on individuals' social prosperity. We additionally talk about how changes in advanced media use could outlive the pandemic, and how this affects future correspondence and media research.

Which of the following digital tools you use for communication?

70 responses

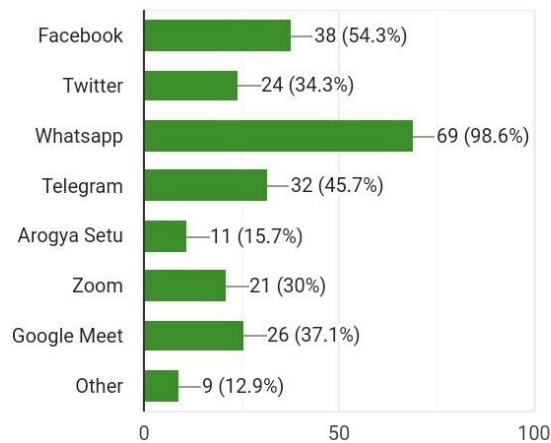


Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that maximum number of respondents were using Whatsapp (69), followed by Facebook (38) and further followed by Telegram (32), Twitter (24), Google meet (26), Zoom (21), Aarogya Setu (11), and other (9) digital platforms. The data clarifies that about 98.60% respondents were using at least one digital communication tool. So we can make out that about 99 percent of respondents were digitally active.

Are digital communication tools at risk of spreading fake content?

70 responses

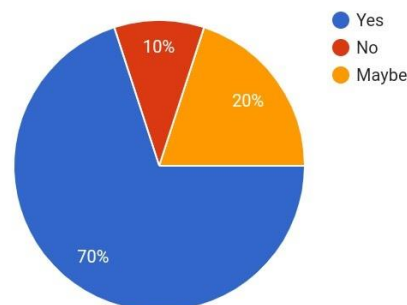
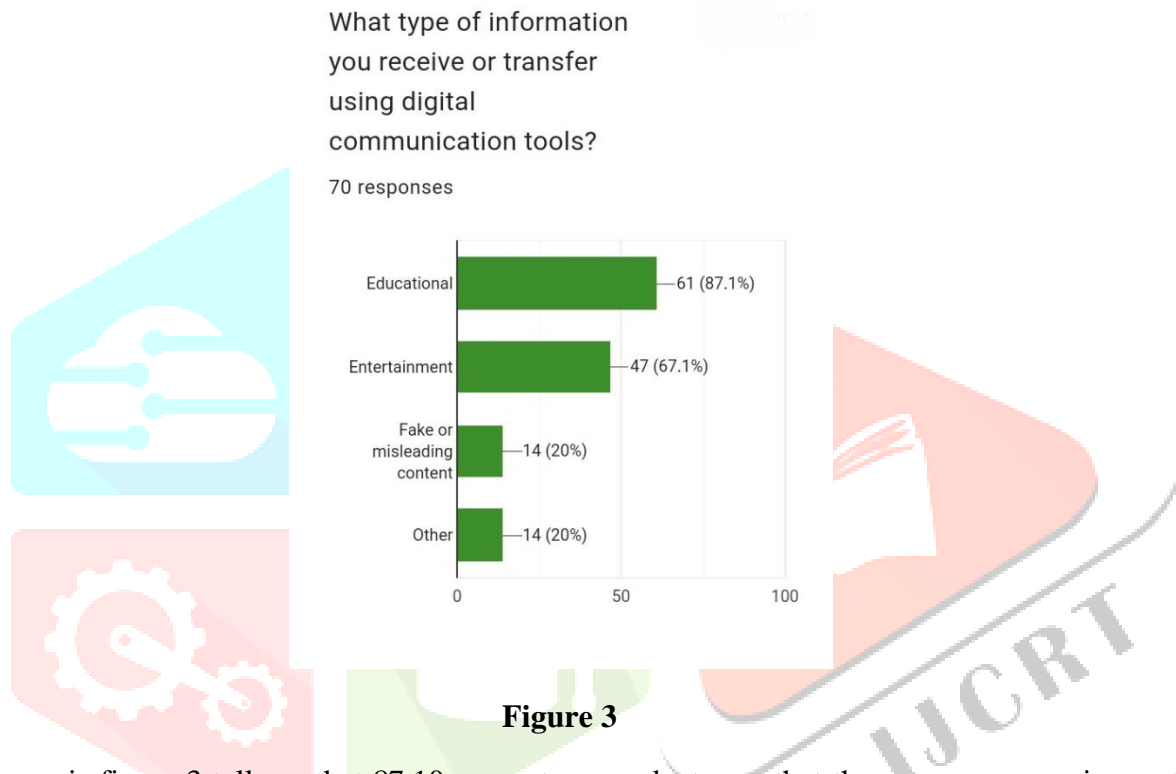


Figure 2

The data shown in figure 2 tells us that 70 percent respondents feel that digital communication tools are at risk of spreading fake content. While 20 percent individuals think that there is a chance of spread of fake information using these tools. And only 10 percent responses say that there is no fear of spread of any fake information through any means of digital communication. We can interpret that there is a risk of spread of rumours and unverified information in digital transfers.



The data shown in figure 3 tells us that 87.10 percent respondents say that they consume, receive or transfer educational content, and 67.10 percent says they utilize the tools for entertainment purpose. While 20 percent responses says they transfer or receive fake or misleading content and similar ratio of 20 percent individuals say they consume and utilize other content not mentioned here. So, its quite clear that although there is a risk of misinformation in digital world, wise use of these tools can give optimistic results.

Does digital communication tools reduce information barriers in daily life?

70 responses

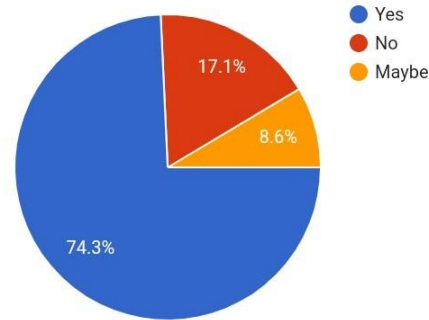


Figure 4

The given pie chart in figure 4 interprets that about 75 percent of respondents are of the view that digital communication tools reduce information barriers in day to day life. While rest 25 percent are not confident about it and consider it a potential risk for the flow of information. It can be interpreted that wise use of these tools can shape the society positively.

How much daily time did you spent on using these digital communication tools during pandemic?

70 responses

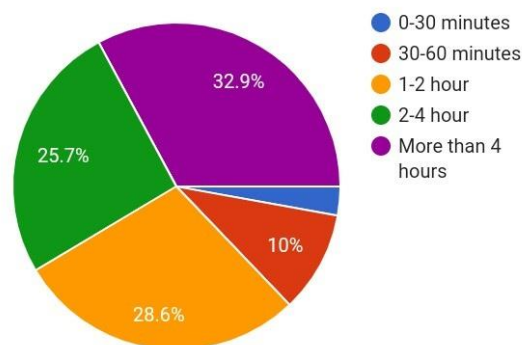
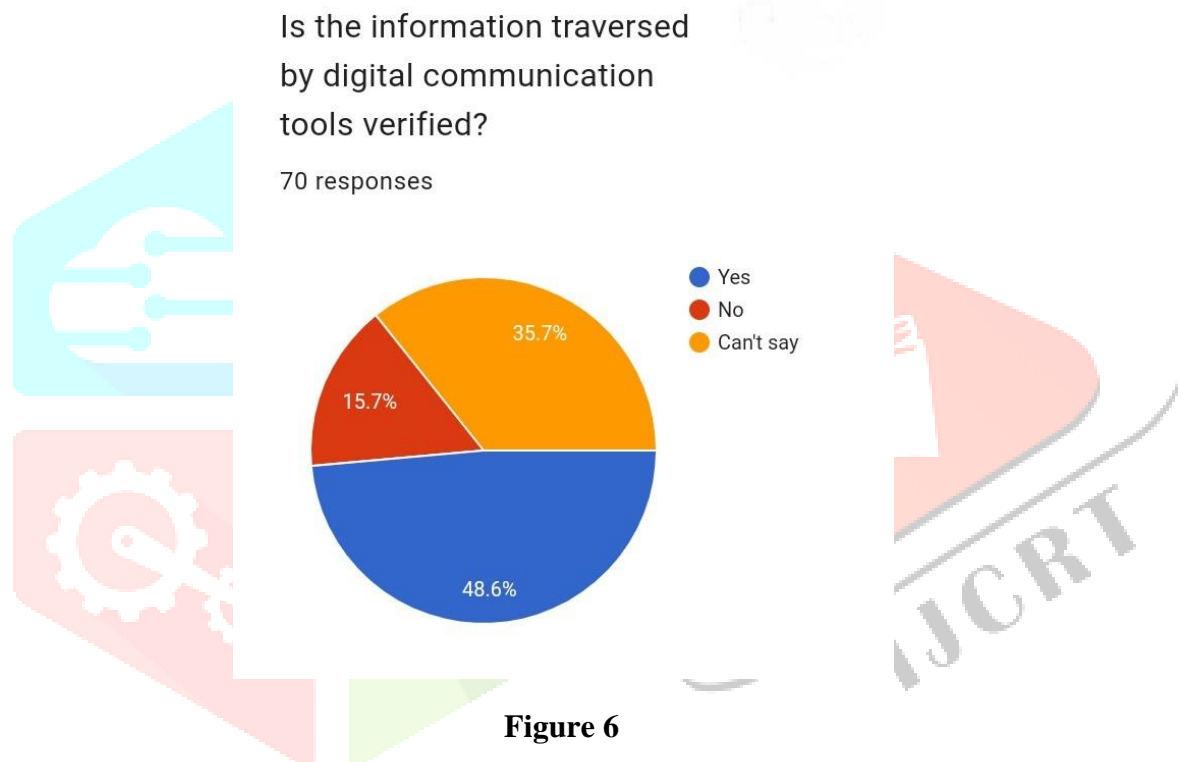


Figure 5

The data shown in figure 5 pie chart elucidates that during covid pandemic about 33 percent respondents spent more than 4 hours per day using these aforementioned digital communication tools. And about 25 percent respondents state that they were using these digital information tools 2 to 4 hours per day during covid pandemic. While about 28 percent individuals responded that they used these tools for 1 to 2 hours per day, only 10 percent said that they used these tools for about 30 to 60 minutes per day, and less than 5 percent said they were using these tools for restricted 0 to 30 minutes per day during pandemic. It can be concluded here that pandemic accelerated the digital presence of individuals in various ways.



The chart shown in figure 6 reads that 48.60 percent responses believe that information received or transferred through digital means stands verified. 35.70 percent respondents were of the opinion that they cannot say anything on the verification of digital information. And only 15.70 percent respondents said that digital information is not verified at all. So, wise use of these tools can give positive results.

Limitations, Results & Conclusion

Limited number of respondents were collected for the survey due to lack of time and budget. There were challenges in the field as many individuals were not willing to participate. So instead of random sampling method, we were forced to adopt convenience sampling strategy for our research. This reflects the limitation of our study.

It's quite clear from the data that the respondents have switched to Digital Communication for their daily information uses during pandemic. Moreover it's also clear that they have now become habitual for digital communication tools & their dependency will increase in coming future whether they are using social media, online portals, e-commerce or any such tools. Though there are numerous fake and misleading content in digital world but individuals prefer consuming and delivering verified educational and entertainment

information more as digital communication tools work for larger public interest rather than negativities. They also reduce information barriers in daily life.

Consequently, a lot of corporate and other offices have decided to turn completely remote, which has risen the work from home culture. So, reducing fake content and regular exercise of fact check to avoid misleading information will be efficient.

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