

# ROLE OF MEDIA IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Dr Sarita Bansal

Assistant Professor

Department of Public Administration

Dr.Y.S.Parmar, Govt.P.G.College, Nahan, Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, India

**Abstract** Mass media have certain characteristics that make them powerful instrument of disaster communication as they provide quick and easy access to large number of people located at different places, they highlight the problems and difficulties faced by the people affected by the disasters, they mobilize public opinion for humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, sources dealing with the media know that media can also prove to be difficult channels of communication. There is no direct control over the content and form of information transmitted and sometimes there are competing and even conflicting information which may be very congenial for mobilizing support for concerted action. Contrary to popular perceptions journalists may not support be independent but may act as ‘gate keepers, interpreters and commentators’ representing larger business interests of the media owners. A closer examination of the global media illustrates that it is not one homogeneous entity pursuing a uniform method in disseminating their views. On the contrary, there are a small number of large factions which compete with one another to increase their perspective audiences and commercial gains. Media Ethics, therefore, becomes an important aspect of media reporting during any disaster event. It assists media worker in determining what is right and choosing the best from several alternatives. Ethics should set guidelines, rules, norms, codes and principles to lead journalists and other media workers to make moral decisions.

There is a lot media can do in disaster preparedness, emergency management and critical infrastructure protection long before a disaster actually strikes, but the media is generally not interested in reporting events that would not make news or sensations which is particularly true of electronic media where a value of coverage is determined by TRPs. It all corroborates the need to re-examine the role of media plays in disaster management, the interdependencies among the various stakeholders and how relationships change during extreme circumstances. This paper reviews spoken and unspoken rules in dealing with the media, what works and doesn't work, and how best to an age the fragile balance between sharing information and protecting the public and corporate interests even during crucial situations like disasters. This all will help in better understanding of what people, government and companies can expect from the media in an incident and the tools to plan most effectively to protect lives and critical infrastructure in partnership with them.

**Keywords: Media, Disaster, Management, Information**

## 1. Introduction

In the wake of sufferings caused by natural and man-made disasters in the last couple of decades, a new realisation is taking place in the contemporary world. There prevails a general comprehension to minimise the losses both to life and property to a maximum possible level through effective communication, utilising technology-based systems. In recent history, communication has proved critical for the cause of disaster mitigation. It has provided not only the data management and analysis techniques but also increased our knowledge towards hazards' origins and behaviours. Advent of mass media in recent years has helped sensitise people in most effective manner through live coverage of hazards and prompt reporting.

Understanding the importance of media communication, various humanitarian organisations have also established communication departments responsible for strong internal and external communication and media relationing. As per the new communication techniques for disaster management, it is now believed that the success of humanitarian efforts depends largely on organisations' understanding of and relations with the media. Various advanced communication means can be used to give early warnings, evacuation plans and help post-disaster activities. The media can play a leadership role in changing the mindset of society for making it more proactive rather than reactive. It also has the responsibility to make the message more valuable and credible for the general public.

Sensational and hyped news can give birth to another crisis in the form of chaos and fear, causing more losses. Despite the fact that private media groups and channels do have commercial interests, the media's role in the case of a disaster should be based more on ethical and moral dimensions. This is one area where the media should be much more responsible in disseminating information. It must win people's confidence, and the provision of reliable information will serve the purpose. The media should not only be providing correct information and the right message at the right time but should also create an environment of solidarity and faith. This will help in augmenting the collective responsibility of all segments of society to tackle the challenges posed by any disaster.

## **2. Methodology**

This study is basically descriptive in nature and based on secondary information. Sources of information include newspapers, magazines, journals, websites and previous research reports as well as government and Non-government published information. Use of realist reviews and meta –narrative reviews also contributed a lot in the generalisation of this topic of study. A SWOT analysis is done for this study.

## **3. Role of Media: As a tool of dissemination of information**

The main principle of information provision therefore should be an ethical one: and so, during an emergency, the media should be sensitive to the needs of the public in affected areas and should avoid misinforming and broadcasting unconfined reports that may lead to despair and panic. Therefore, correct and reliable information disseminated through the media is an important instrument for balancing the possible effects of incorrect, misleading or even wilfully distorted information. Reliable and timely information provided through the media can help people overcome any kind of fear and fatalism during and after an emergency. Indeed, the availability of reliable and timely information and knowledge about an event and the resulting needs help improve solidarity and also creates an atmosphere conducive to collective response for sharing the humanitarian challenges created by disasters. Media today has arguably penetrated every household in the world, in one form or another. Journalists pride themselves in reporting objectively on global events and regard and independent media as one of the pillars of the democratic society.

## **4. Analysis of role of journalism and mass media ,it is playing today:**

### **4.1 Strengths**

Sharing information regarding rescue and relief operations. For collecting funds, like the facebook initiative of collecting funds for victims of Nepal earthquake. Monitoring and providing insights to the whole situation, as the tweets of personal experiences in various areas, when studies in a systematic manner, can provide crucial information. Can provide suggestions for improvement in disaster response. Can give directions and information regarding rescue efforts to the effected public. In covering disaster management, electronic media

plays an important role in conveying information from within affected zones. Reporters and their cameras form a vital link during times when other infrastructure for information relaying purposes may be down. Further, a media presence in many instances gives relief to the affected districts, as they wait for response from authorities.

Aid in reporters sending out important information on a regular basis to allow rescue efforts to be streamlined. Relay important information that helps in calming fears that could lead to law and order issues. The role of the media is vital in getting information relayed to and fro from the site. However, media outlets need to realize the importance of on-site journalists as a vital factor to rescue operations. The media should follow ethical standards and show compassion towards the victims of a disaster. Media can play a crucial role in disaster management.

#### **4.1.1 Before**

Before a disaster, media can: make aware the people about the coming disaster, educate public about regional population's susceptibility to various disasters, give them suggestions about better preparations, give them updates of the recent developments. In pre disaster phase media can be used to disseminate information regarding disaster preparedness & mitigation to vulnerable population. Raising community awareness. Prior to the occurrence, media helps to inform the people regarding the impending disaster, thereby helping them to be as prepared as possible, offer constructive criticism to our disaster mitigation/management preparation, build up strong public opinion around the issue.

#### **4.1.2 During**

Media, the fourth pillar of democracy, plays an extremely key role in dissemination news, especially in the time of natural calamities, gives a detailed view of the extent of the damage, affected people can express their grievances regarding the relief work, can make citizens aware of the impending disasters & preventive measures need to be taken, highlights remote areas where relief operation hasn't yet reached. Media can: give report about the place where relief is needed the most, give information via continuous reporting, about the situation where the survivors are needed to be rescued, also provide help to the rescue teams whenever needed, broadcast the information about the aid-camp established for the survivors, help-line numbers, post-disaster measures etc, can negate the rumours, and prevent panic by broadcasting true information. Once a disaster has occurred, media highlights it for the rest of the world, thus forcing the government to provide relief on priority basis. As the relief is being provided, media ensures that it is made available to all the affected and on an equal basis. It can project the severity of the disaster and hardships faced by the people. It can draw the viewers attention depending on its severity and can build up momentum for fund raising. It can connect the disaster struck victims with their relatives by providing help lines. It can assess whether the relief measures are satisfactory or there is further need of it. It can add up to the relief measures by helping the rescue workers in directions etc. It can strengthen the feeling of oneness among the people and airing the rescue operations will further add up to national sentiment.

#### **4.1.3 Afterwards**

Media also inform govt. that what actually went wrong?, what were the better ways to provide relief to the affected populations, what is needed to do to avoid/mitigate next such disaster? etc. Media is one of the most important tool for disaster management. Results of hazard and vulnerability analysis are now easier to reach, thanks to advanced social and electronic modes of media. Help of government and aid works in SAR and relief operations post-disaster. Ensures reach of relief operations even in hostile terrains largely neglected by

providing continuous information about those affected. Mobilises people towards providing helping hand to victims. Media brings to the world real time status regarding the relief work going on, meantime informing what more needs to be done. This enables the neighbouring countries to provide based on the need of the ailing country instead of sending general help. Social media is playing an excellent role today in micro dissemination of information regarding the victims and the relief efforts. Media can play a proactive role in disaster management; serve as conduits of information about help lines, aid distribution camps & emergency camps, required supplies. Disseminating right information to kill rumours; preventing panic. Mobilize support for disaster hit region from outside in form volunteers, money etc. Ensure efficiency in relief work; people are not left out of relief or aid network.

They can help scotch rumours and prevent panic by quickly disseminating the right facts and figures. Their coverage helps mobilise help from outside the disaster area, in the form of money, supplies and volunteers. And finally, the focus of the media on a disaster helps increase its visibility, thus forcing governments to upgrade it on their agenda.

## 4.2 Weaknesses

Sometimes media tends to exaggerate the situation, which hurts the dignity of the affected people, as can be seen in the news reporting of the recent Nepal quake. Such exaggerated news can create more panic among the far away relatives of the people living in affected area. Leads to a blame game, without knowing the situation on ground level. Self regulation of media at the end also its today more a business venture concerned about its TRP. In a need for appealing TRP they end up over exaggerating the condition leading to worsening the situation by increasing fear and panic amongst the victims may interfere in relief works negatively. Unethical journalism may severely jolt the disaster victims feelings. Airing of the disturbing pictures and videos may add up to apathy of victims as well as may effect the viewer psychologically.

The simmering competition amongst them has some positive as well as negative effects. But in the race to be the media house to break the news and earn emotion driven TRP ratings, media tends to become insensitive during the coverage of rescue efforts, examples like asking inappropriate questions to survivors, prioritizing coverage of rescue material delivery etc. Also, in a market driven content model, media rarely follows up a disaster event to its logical conclusion. There are rare attempts to understand that why so many lives were lost. And it hardly focuses on pre-disaster stage that is, awareness building, since telling people about boring dangers doesn't earn TRPs.

The news media can also play a counter-productive role: Media takes a particular interest in the typically subjectivist category of disasters and crises that, without too much reference to tangible referents, and collective stress. Owing to the "freedom of the press," news media are not obligated to report or withhold information simply because government requests that it do so. Correspondents seldom cover the full scope and breadth of a major disaster. The disaster which emergency managers face is not always the same as the one depicted on television. The media often looks for another point of view, particularly a controversial or provocative one. Often this translates into creating a soapbox for political opponents to criticize each other and to interfere.

## 4.3 Opportunities

Media can play a major during disaster. They can aid in information dissemination about help-line, aid-distribution camps, emergency phone number or the needs of the people. Further, they can also help in quashing rumours and prevent panic situation. Media can also help in mobilizing resources [money, volunteers etc] from other areas. Their impetus on disaster also forces government to upgrade Disaster management as a priority.

Also, they also have a role in disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation. They acts as very effective channels for communicating disaster awareness [for e.g. recent media coverage on earthquake has heightened awareness among people] and steps to taken in course of disaster. Further they can enforce government accountability by highlighting the government's acts of commission or omission w.r.t. disaster management.

The efficiency can be increased using modern technology like GPS to guide people. Electronic media especially for their speed and connectivity can provide immediate information for the place of disaster, nature of disaster and immediate preventive measures to be taken eg. during floods, where the safe house is.? While reporting news about the disaster, media should also apply self-restraining measures. They should respect the privacy of survivors. When reporting the event they should ask 'sensible' questions to the survivors without making them more uncomfortable. Media should make sure that they are not becoming hindrance in the relief and rescue operations. Among media's potential public services are: Supplies information and directions to the affected public.

#### **4.3.1 Before**

Disseminates information on preparedness measures for future similar disasters. Stimulates volunteerism and donations, including blood donations. Discloses needs for improvement in governmental response. Sometimes withholds potentially counterproductive information. The bottom line is that it is important to make the media part of the emergency management team prior to a disaster event. They should be brought into disaster planning and exercising activities. Ask them what they need at this point and convey it to respective authority.

#### **4.3.2 During**

It is during the disaster that media has a greater role to play, It can help in disseminating information about survivors, diseased and effected people to the families elsewhere and world around. especially the social media can help in this with technological inventions like i am safe marker by fba and google, it can help prevent panic situations and also help prevent rumours by providing right facts to the people around. It can be of great assistance in relief measures by providing for helpline numbers and contacting people stuck in disaster areas as was seen during the Kashmir and Uttarkhand floods. Media can also help in mobilizing resources, financial aid and volunteers from around the world. Lastly by continuous coverage it can also get disaster management on the focus of govt.

#### **4.3.3 After**

Post initial relief measures, the coverage by media on the plight of after effects can help in retaining the attention of the world and govt and not forget on the reconstruction measures. Media can help in ensuring that disaster management authorities are properly conducting their drills and they also cover rural areas. Proper changes in children curriculum has made to incorporate disaster management. Awareness about mitigation can raised by informing changing building laws to make building more adaptable to earthquake, emergency number and some basic steps to cope any disaster. Media can help in making government accountable, requesting citizens to send funds and raising awareness about required help. It can send message across the world about the need of people who are in distress.

#### **4.3.4 Media can play the following role in disaster management:**

##### **1. Reduction (Preparedness):**

Media can be a channel to spread awareness about the potential disasters (natural or man-made) that residents of any region are exposed to. For example, media can run short commercials or educational programs about

cyclones and Tsunamis in coastal areas. It can also make people aware about safe shelters, evacuation tactics designed by government, and better ways to build their homes and public infrastructure in coastal cities.

## 2. Relief:

Media can be a powerful force in enhancing communication to support relief measures. It can work with government and disaster agencies to reach out to disaster affected areas. Additionally, it can launch campaigns to raise funds from across the globe.

## 3. Rehabilitation:

Media can track the rehabilitation activity sponsored by the government and NGOs to ensure that people are provided shelter, food and other supplies to rehabilitate and help in mobilizing resources. Media should focus on its journalistic ethics and restrain itself from mere TRP and publicity race in wake of any disaster and continue to play its role of active facilitator in disaster management. In certain circumstances the news media provide an important disaster management public service, especially in broadcasting alerts, warnings, and advisories. They can also play a helpful role in supplying needed information to decision makers. So, ethical journalism must place humanity above professional urgency

## 4.4 Threats

In their search for TRPs and sensationalism, media has ignored the journalistic ethics. They have resorted to exaggeration of ground situation and even interviewing people who are in distress. Further, as much they can quash rumours, they may also aid in proliferation of rumours. Also, at-times it has been seen that media tends to shift focus on non-important issues as was witnessed during Uttarakhand floods when the visits of politicians were given more space than the disaster management. At the same time media is involved in negative practices e.g. scramble for TRP without care or compassion for victim, insensitive reporting, boasting etc. News coverage, in such appalling situations, shouldn't merely become tool of gaining TRPs. Must not hinder relief operation by occupying spaces where relief work is being carried out. But as an old Indian saying 'Too much of anything isn't good'. Media persons, reporters and crew just by sticking to mike and earphone; questioning the affected; and disturbing their privacy during such panic sometimes gives negative outcomes.

In recent disasters media has behaved inappropriately & irresponsibly: *going against humanity at large*: race to reach ground zero of destruction in Nepal earthquake was given precedence over transporting essential supplies to needy; media persons occupied crucial space on army choppers.

*Infringement upon right to privacy*: interviewing/telecasting grief struck people; often without permission; taking advantage of their poor situation.

*Driven by commercial interests*: focus is on creating sensations or breaking news; instead energies should be diverted to ensure efficient relief operations.

*Misbehaviour*: with government authorities during disaster; in Nepal earthquake Indian media persons behaved rudely with Nepali relief coordinating officials; just to gain early access to disaster sites. The coverage of disaster is not usual news coverage, "People want to know" like concept do not fit here. Thus media can be a double-edge sword, it must be used cautiously.

## 5. Conclusion & Suggestions

However over-reliance on Market driven ideology has turned media into being momentous and momentary at the same time along with gratification of the audience by this melodramatic coverage. Thus there is a need to Bring on the minimum guidelines to be followed by media during disaster management. Balancing between the People right to know vis a vis People right to privacy. Sensationalization of catastrophe will hurt the sentiments of the victims of disaster. Also insensitive coverage and also excessive highlighting of donations will make the victims feel humiliated .The problem arises when media outlets, in a bid for TRP ratings, go beyond what is required as simple reporting. Quasi-investigative journalistic fervour rules the roost, with reporters trying to get personal information from many families about their lives, experiences etc. Although this adds realism to the information being conveyed, affected individuals have the sole right to privacy in these matters. Rather focusing on their personal gains by being provocative or spreading rumours, the media, with the responsibility of being the fourth leg of governance should use its power ethically and adhere to the highest moral standards and work practices. Media needs to be more agile during disaster times as any wrong information spread could worsen the ground situation.

Media is considered as the fourth pillar for India. Since either due to natural or man-made factors, disasters are happening in around of us, but the capacity to do mitigate disasters “matters”. In this, relief must be taken primacy over media privilege. Ethical journalism must place humanity above professional urgency. They should not be guided by the TRP ratings to cover disasters first, rather before a catastrophe, they can warn population and prepare it. They can ensure that no survivor is forgotten or left out of the aid network in terms of information about help-lines, aid-distribution camps, emergency phone numbers or kind of suppliers required. The media must integrate the whole country such a way that NGOs, Volunteers, govt army forces, media all have to be complement to each other so that to make the affected people relief to some extent.

## References

1. Singh, Savindra and Singh, Jeetendra , 2016, “ Disaster Management”, Allahabad, Paravalika Publications.
2. Dwivedi, Ratnesh, ,2013, “Mass Media and Communication in Global Scenario”, Delhi Kalpaz Publications
- 3.<http://casceff.eu/media2/2017/02/D3.4-Media-in-the-information-flows-during-crisis-situation.pdf>.
- 4.<http://nidm.gov.in/idmc2/pdf/concept/Media.pdf>
- 5.<http://osou.ac.in/eresources/role-of-media-in-disaster-management.pdf>.
- 6.[https://www.nisconsortium.org/portal/resources/bin/Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Dis\\_1423591240.pdf](https://www.nisconsortium.org/portal/resources/bin/Social_Media_and_Dis_1423591240.pdf)
7. Kumari, Savita “Social Media Applications for Disaster Management”,International Journal of Science and Research, Vol.5,Issue 3,March 2016, pp.1358-1361.
8. Go Home Indian Media: Nepalis slam Indian media for doing PR exercise for Indian govt. May 4, 2015, The Indian Express.
9. Nepal earthquake: Indian media faces complaints about 'insensitivity' ,May 04, 2015 , Hindustan Times.