



COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact of Media in the Lifestyle of Youth

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ABSTRACT

It goes without saying that media, irrespective of its various forms, has created a significant impact on the lives and lifestyles of the public. As the world is still struggling with COVID-19, it becomes increasingly important that we learn to live with it. Media is considered to be a *magic multiplier* of information dissemination (Wilbur Schramm, 1964) and so, in such a crisis situation, the media assumes an important role. The aim of this study is to explore the impact of media in bringing certain changes in hygiene habits of urban youth due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, a survey of 200 participants (18-24 years of age) residing in different cities of West Bengal was carried out. Specifically, this paper argues that media vehicles are important factors that contribute in disseminating instructions and government guidelines of preventive measures in the fastest possible way. The results support the conclusion that during the COVID-19 crisis, the media has played a significant role in spreading awareness, preventing infection, changing the hygiene habits of the youth at large like never before.

Keywords: COVID-19, youth, West Bengal, hygiene habits, lifestyle

Introduction and Literature Review

The current COVID-19 pandemic is a situation so rare that it comes once in a century. We do not know yet whether these kind of pandemics are going to be frequent in forth coming years. With no treatment or vaccine available yet, the only option left is to face the pandemic taking necessary precautions.

India has the best demographic profile in terms of youth population. Presently, India has the largest share of youth population in the world and will continue to hold so for the next 20 years (Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, 2017).

“The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity,” said Benjamin Disraeli. Hence, for India, the onus is on youth to have some control over the situation by using whatever guidelines are made available through Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and World Health Organization (WHO). The most effective tool in this dissemination of knowledge could be media vis-à-vis door-to-door awareness campaign or other means determined by the state. This could poses a health risk for the participants. This study is an attempt to access the extent of awareness amongst the urban youth of West Bengal.

World Health Organization and ICMR have issued guidelines for citizens to prevent the spread of corona virus and protect ourselves. Focus was on hand hygiene like washing hands with alcohol-based sanitizer or with any soap for at least 20 seconds, social distancing, i.e. keeping a distance of at least one meter from everyone everywhere, wearing a mask were some of the major practices suggested.



(Source: www.mohfw.gov.in)

Citizens are expected to adopt preventive guidelines as a part of the new normal. This study indicates that youth have adopted new normal guidelines and media has played a significant role in this. Evidence suggests that during this COVID-19 crisis, relationship of media & youth seems to be complimenting each other in a stronger way than ever before. Media vehicles have impacted the young citizens of the modern India in various ways. Today Media reflects the way society at large behaves or how a society thinks. Due to fast paced advancement in communication technology, Indian youth have witnessed the change in usage patterns and consumption.

The Indian media and entertainment industry registered a growth of 9per cent compared to the previous year and reached 1.82 trillion (USD\$25.7 billion) in 2019. The fast growth of mobile networks has aided “anytime-anywhere” media consumption a nationwide phenomenon. India has a population of 1.37 billion people, with 688 million internet subscribers and 400 million smartphone users. In case of the mobile app industry, India is the fastest growing market globally. Last year, the television industry soared to Rs 788 billion from Rs 740 billion of the year 2018. Digital media growth has surprised everyone. In the year 2019, Digital media climbed to Rs 221 billion and is expected to reach Rs 414 billion in 2022. Across all platforms digital consumption has shown a great leap (FICCI & EY REPORT 20202/www.ficci.in).

Growth of internet and digital media has encouraged the consumption and usage of social media platforms in youth. Social media has become the most popular and most accessed media of communication amongst youth. This growth has connected different persons from different parts of the globe. Users now can easily share their ideas, thoughts, information and much more on social media anytime-anywhere. The networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Google +, TikTok (banned) and others have encouraged sharing of ideas, emotions and information across globe.

On 23 July 2020, at 4.30 pm, active COVID-19 cases in India stands at 426167 while cured cases are at 782606, deaths due to COVID-19 is around 29868 while one person has migrated. Total samples evaluated till now is 1,50,75,369 (22 July) and 3,50,823 samples tested on 22 July, as per the government of India's own site (<http://mygov.in>). The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in India was reported on 30 January 2020. It was declared a pandemic and Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on 24 March 2020 for 21 days which was extended twice stretching it to a lockdown of more than 50 days (www.ndtv.com). Important guidelines were issued by the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) and Ministry of Health and state governments time to time. The valuable information related to preventive guidelines was frequently reported through different platforms of media. Study suggests that TV channels were in the fore front to disseminate information through Panel discussions at Prime Time, News Bulletins throughout the day, Interviews of the experts, Press Conferences by Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health officials.

The researcher has focused on the behaviour and usage pattern of media at the time of COVID-19 amongst youth of various cities of West Bengal. A survey of 200 youth was conducted in urban localities of different cities. Survey was conducted for the valuable data collection keeping in mind the role & impact of media platforms in spreading awareness about COVID-19. The survey was conducted by sending questionnaire through email. The method of sampling used was Convenient Sampling.

Research Objective

The main objectives of the research work are to study the role of media in spreading hygiene awareness in urban youth about COVID-19 and change in life style and hygiene habits of the youth residing in major cities of West Bengal.

Research Methodology

The researcher has collected data with the help of survey method under which MCQ questionnaire (convenient sampling) was used as the data collection tool. A survey of 200 people was conducted. The researchers prepared an interview schedule for the data collection keeping in mind the role and nature of media in creating awareness in youth. The research study was conducted through convenient sampling.

Discussion

Media has become an essential part of our daily life. It has influenced the public such that people need newspaper with their morning tea. Media, either it is print, electronic, digital or social media has emerged as the main source of information. At the time of COVID-19 pandemic, every form of media played its best role to inform the common people about the issue. Television channels projected things in their point of views which made people aware of every aspect. Information related to new digital mobile apps related to precaution and preventive measures was also communicated through various forms of media. The slogan of "Stay Safe, Stay home" was popularised by media vehicles. Issues of social distancing and wearing masks also spread amongst masses at a larger scale through different media vehicles successfully. Most of the citizens reacted in a positive way while migrant workers have to suffer because of lockdown. Majority of Indian stayed at home and during the lockdown general public were getting informed through various communication mediums. Even on social media platform news related to COVID-19 was trending at a high rate. To find out

the same the researcher conducted a survey of 200 youth. An interview schedule was prepared by the researcher and the respondents were asked questions related to the hygiene habits at the time of COVID-19.

Knowledge about COVID-19 & Media Usage in India

On 24th March, Lockdown was announced by Govt. of India. The Government of India announced to discontinue all the activities and a total lockdown was implemented. The main aim of lockdown was to make people aware of the impacts of COVID-19 infections and get time to build the health infrastructure if majority of population get infected in coming days. Recent surveys and studies on the topic has clarified that we have the large base of internet users but the penetration rate of internet is at around 50 per cent in the year 2020. This meant that only around half of the 1.37 billion citizens had access to internet in the country. Though there has been a consistent increase in internet accessibility compared to 2015 (internet penetration rate was 27 per cent). Recent survey proves that in 2019, there were 290 million internet users in rural India compared to 337 million urban internet users. In India, internet users are mostly between 20 and 29 years of age. This is correspondingly visible in West Bengal as well.

People in India mostly access the internet via their mobile phones. Studies claim that in 2018, 29 per cent of the country's populations were mobile internet users and this was expected to grow to over 35 per cent in next five years. Mobile companies are more competitive now with the availability of reasonable data plans. Recent research also predicts that by the year 2023, there would be 450 million or more social network users in India. In 2018, this was at 326 million social network users. Also the share of people accessing social media networks is expected to reach from 24 percent in 2018 to over 31 percent in the year 2023. With Facebook being the most popular social media networking site with 280 million Facebook users, the largest Facebook user base in the world as of 2020.

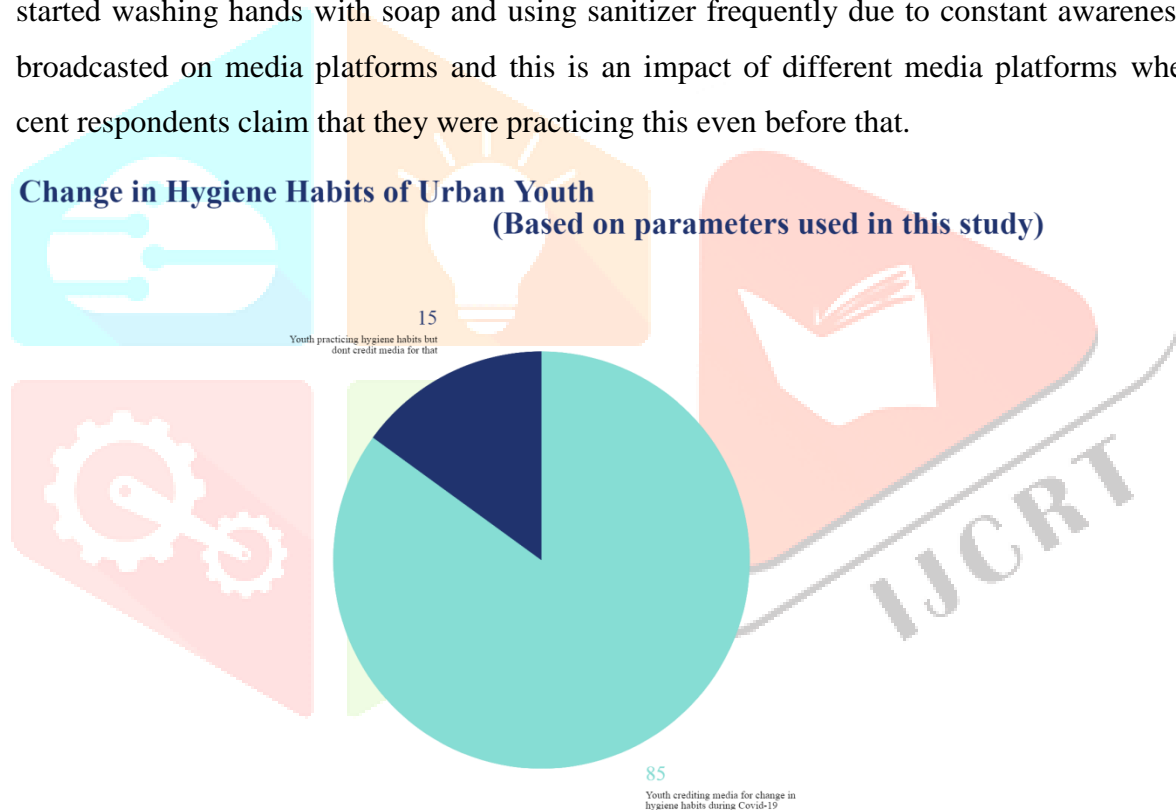
The news of COVID-19 infections was covered by various media sources. TV, print media and web media presented the news with different contexts. Initially, this news created the situation of chaos with lakhs of migrant laborers started walking towards their native states from Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and other metro cities. The misconceptions about the COVID-19 and lockdown were made clear by the different state and central government agencies. Media was the only source which disseminated this information to all parts of our country. Later, public accepted the decision that was mainly taken for prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 infections. Social media played a crucial role in spreading the awareness.

Media effectiveness

Any medium of mass communication is effective only if it fulfils the needs and interest of the audience. The main function of mass media is to inform the public about the current happenings that directly or indirectly affect their daily life. The effectiveness of media depends on the source of the message used, type of message, language used, type of channel to transmit information and the type of audience which is intended to expose the information. The findings of research study show that 88.28per cent of the respondents find media as an effective medium for getting information about the COVID-19 issue and the lockdown concept, while the rest 11.7per cent of the sample did not find media effective at that time in creating awareness in a proper way. They opined that media created fear and confusion.

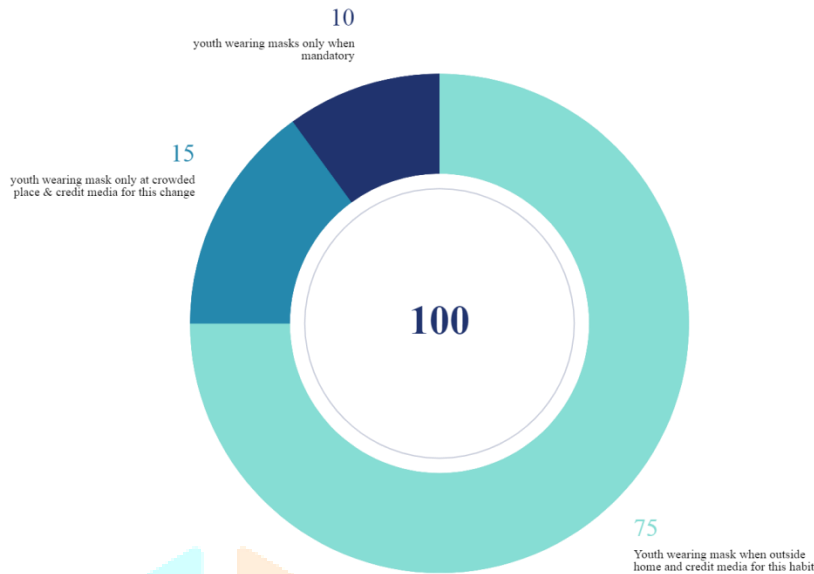
Results and Conclusions

- Based on data collection and analysis, the researcher found that 85per cent of the respondents have started washing hands with soap and using sanitizer frequently due to constant awareness programs broadcasted on media platforms and this is an impact of different media platforms whereas 15per cent respondents claim that they were practicing this even before that.



- The researcher found that 75 per cent respondents have started wearing masks when they are outside home while 15 per cent wear mask at crowded places and 10per cent wear masks only when it is mandatory. Respondents credit media for this change in their behaviour and hygiene habit. They call it the 'New Normal'.

Change in Hygiene Habits of Urban Youth : Use of Masks



- 170 respondents feel that because of constant awareness programs and guidelines being disseminated through different media vehicles, they have started cleaning & sanitizing their purchase (vegetables and other grocery) at home now where as 30 respondents claim practicing it even before that. This means that media has impacted 85per cent of the youth in this regard.
- 168 youth have started keeping their home & surroundings clean and sanitized during COVID-19 & this is an impact of media (as they feel) while 32 are not practicing anything like that. This means 84per cent youth have witnessed change in their hygiene habits due to media.
- Researchers found TV as the most used medium at the time of COVID-19 and lockdown. The Information related to several amendments and guidelines on the issue was frequently reported through different platforms of media. Panel discussions, chat shows, Interviews etc were the mediums. Social Media have impacted the most after TV. Youth have consumed news over social media, digital news platforms and TV mostly.

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Rajesh Sisodia is a senior journalist & media educator. An alumni of IIMC, Delhi & BHU, he was formerly with NDTV and Star News Network. He is having an experience of over 22 years in main stream journalism with reputed brands. He is having experience of working with Print Media and TV industry at senior positions at Delhi, Kolkata, Ahmedabad & Mumbai. He has been honoured with S P Singh Memorial award for his contribution to the journalism and reporting on social issues. He is currently associated with Amity School of Communication, Amity University Kolkata as Deputy Director- ASCO. His specialization is Broadcast Media.