

Media Coverage of COVID-19: A Classical Case of Media Frenzy

Kishan M.R.^{1,*}, Neetha Mahadev²

Abstract

The effect of media on the wide varied audience in the recent days with continuous updates on the COVID-19 related information has led us to see that there is shift from enthusiasm to panic behavior among the viewers. The study focuses on how in recent days there is an intense spike in demand for healthcare and related information among the social media users who were directly influenced by the repeated exposure to continuous real-time data. With varied level of content acceptance, we have seen that there have been miserable outcomes where people have ended up with wrong decisions from the incomplete understanding of information. The idle social activity viewers get carried away by certain information in social media with wrong interpretations such as information from unverified sources about current situation, disease facts, myths and biases, likely treatments and home remedies. With media being a very vast area to have a control over in short time with censorship over the information broadcasted and content being shared around unverified by social media users about a new and unknown disease, there needs to be a strategy to control it. The study explores the possibility of controlling the unverified spread of information in social media by categorizing the information into multistage information to reach out to the audience and avoid exposure of data leading to panicking and impulsive decision-making audience.

Keywords: Social Media, COVID-19, information, media, audience, viewers, platforms

INTRODUCTION

Media, a well-accepted platform of channelized information source has been quite successful in reaching its target audience over the social media. Social media being an influencing platform to share and showcase new information with known ones, the level of acceptance of such information will be very high. With 78 million raise of social media users from 2020 to 2021 making it 448 million users in India along with a raise percent being 21%, we see that how viewers are consuming information over new platforms. Social media has seen phase shift in information sharing over its platform from informal to formal ways and a few classified information being shared among the community [1].

*Author for Correspondence

Kishan M.R.
E-mail: kishcamer@gmail.com

¹Research Scholar, Department of Master of Business Administration, Bhageerathi Bai Narayana Rao Maanay Institute of Technology, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

²Professor, Department of Master of Business Administration, Bhageerathi Bai Narayana Rao Maanay Institute of Technology, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Received Date: October 17, 2021

Accepted Date: October 22, 2021

Published Date: November 25, 2021

Citation: Kishan M.R., Neetha Mahadev, Media Coverage of COVID-19: A Classical Case of Media Frenzy. NOLEGEIN Journal of Advertising & Brand Management. 2021; 4(2): 7-12p.

With the popularity of the social media usage and fast information sharing amongst their known circles, the overall reach of the content raises drastically within few minutes of the information getting published. Here we can also see that how new content grabs the attentions and viewers interact with it to increase the engagement making the information valid as it will be fresh from the source. All these kept the users active over the platform where the information shared or received were informal; in recent times we have seen that how the news and related information are shared across the same platform. It was a great move to reach the target audience over multiple digital

platforms, but social media being more engaging, it causes a slowball of information where we see a huge amount of unverified added information into it. Of which a new audience assumes it to be a valid piece of information as it would have been reached him from a first or second circle known person and tends to accept the information.

It is clear that the knowledge gained from any source affects decision making process and it should not be that huge volume of data added into addition influencing factor even if the information is from a verified source as the COVID outbreaks has very limited research and outcomes are not to be seen with core consistency. Here, as the information consumption frequency is much higher, the content reporting cannot be kept as a major controlling aspect as going through the data and pulling it down takes time and social media being a vast platform it will be very difficult to validate the information and the source to carry on the next processes. There can be many factors that are involved which are to be tackled from the user's perspective instead to bring a hold on the information sharing which can be done on a long run.

In this study, we present a case study accurately describing information flow through which data that is received related to COVID-19 shall not end up in panic behavior and instead lead to appropriate usage pattern of social media limiting the over exposure of COVID-19 information from unverified sources.

CASE DESCRIPTION

This case can be based on technology acceptance model (TAM), where we see that people use technology at the end usage. It includes perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which in this case we can relate to both as social media works closely with such base concepts [2].

In China, as we know the first 1st COVID-19 breakout happened; from there on we started to see many updates on the same where videos and photos of the struggling patients were shared on social media. From there on we see an immense amount of COVID-19 related information on the social media which just used to be about the breakout facts, lockdown and treatments. But as soon as the cases started in India, people started to panic and started to absorb all the information that was available on the social media as that data available on social media was humungous.

The start of the most unexpected lockdown made the content production put into hold where the audience started to see unavailability of daily soap shows and other related content creators who relied on day to day productions. This made many varied audiences to start focusing on other genre content; in this phase where people were looking for available new content, COVID-19 information came to many audiences' appearances. Many build the interest into it as it was new and relevant information, here we also get to see the information getting more engagement as to keep safe and related product and services also saw greater sale like sanitizers and sanitization services (Figure 1) [3]. With all being into single device, a user could get into decisions very fast and act to greater relevance in decisions made which include activities like e-shopping.

With media working at the maximum efforts in covering the news and making it reach to all the audience to create awareness, provide the knowledge of the outbreak, share best precautions and practices to be maintained to be safe; under such vast process of sharing new updates and to make it reach as soon as possible to the audience where relevant viewers who are in need of such information and take relevant actions. Media plays a very important role here as not only important facts are being shared but also government issued information also reach wide audience through them. Here as the acceptance rate [4] of such media sources have increased a lot we see the content being floated over cross platforms i.e., social media where we can one of the most used message application WhatsApp where not only community/group media shares happen but also that one to one information sharing happen which in turn lead to mass information sharing [5].

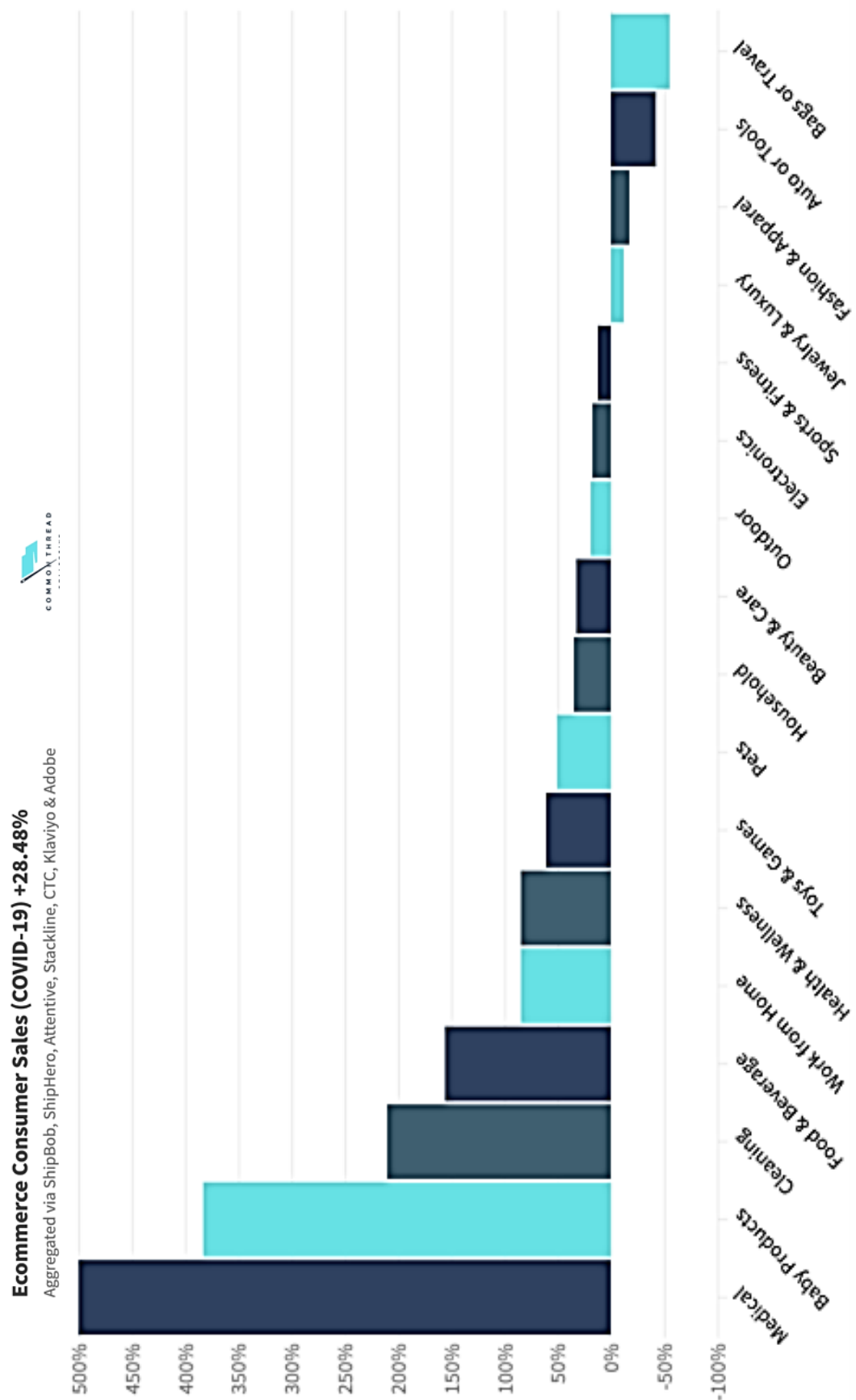


Figure 1. Ecommerce consumer sales during COVID-19.
 Source: Big Commerce.

Speaking about the social media, where in prior interest used to be into few genres where COVID-19 has not only created its own new category but also become a part in those most of the categories. For example, a cooking show making new recipes related to COVID-19, an automotive show showing about vehicle sanitization and so on like this. Audience who are interested into any categories are being influenced into COVID-19 information as their favorite influencer is speaking about a common topic which is in the trend. Now this not only creates an interest in the viewer to see anything related to COVID-19 information he comes across but also that the viewer ends up searching of newer updates on the same which becomes a snowball later and finds a new path with sharing the found information among known ones.

One of the major factors to shift people into new category information was lack of feature films and main stream songs; initially it was seen that content which was already in the post production stage had went added with the OTT release but the next on stage had no new content as the feature films are done on a very huge sets and include too many crew members along with junior artists which made it very hard to shoot with keeping COVID-19 guidelines in mind [6]. Audience with a set frequency towards such content had no other options as their preference content like movies are not preferred to be watched repeatedly like songs which make them to accept to the content which is newly available or shared from the celebrity of their choice, which is mostly to be related with COVID-19 in recent days.

This making it have no narrow audience, COVID-19 related topics are widely seen and accepted on the social media platform. The major drawback which can be seen here is that the content shared here does not do through any regulating body like censor board which makes the unverified content reach mass audience. Majority of these cannot be controlled over intellectual property too as every creator of the content will be different and the content does not cause any automated copyright strikes in the system. This creates an opportunity to any individual to create updates related to COVID-19 i.e., through photos or video which people see as much informal raw information and assume to be true most of the times.

We see many repetitive audiences reach out related sites to gain information like the number of cases and availability of medical facilities through which a panicking behavior can be seen among the audience and in turn lead to unnecessary actions to be taking where we have seen cases like consuming alcohol based sanitizer orally and unverified dangerous practices under the name of COVID-19 prevention. These not only create panicking purchase behavior among the viewers but also lead to life threatening acts; such things like panic purchasing from the mass affect the supply chains and create unnecessary shortage of essentials to the neediest people.

This is a topic which should not have any personal opinion to be shared on such open platforms which people can wrongly interpret and end up with dangerous consequences. As the people with most expertly knowledge are unable to give out an appropriate solution as the outcomes have been varying in each and every case seen. The social media acts as one of the major factors where data are wrongly interpreted in many situations and is passed on where the next viewer believes in it [7]. If the viewer starts to accept information only from a verified source, the other generic updates would get lesser engagement and reduce the reach drastically through which we can bring a hold to such false information updating which is happening.

Another major factor creating the social media to be so very active is the updating of case and death counts [8], where people not only get aware but also emotionally collapse day by day where daily, they see a raise in death count and leave an impression that there is no escape from all the things happening around. To avoid such unintentional data interpretations, the user can avoid the total self-updating of the information with the overall media coverage and accumulate only the required information available on the valid platforms. If a control can be brought into existence where in which

the information sharing to the masses should go through a preliminary screening among a set committee who can authorize that the information shared is correct to the at most known knowledge about the COVID-19. Through this, not only false and unverified information can get a hold but also gains viewers' beliefs with positive approach to the content shared to the masses and assure no half-known information are shared with the help of the regulations.

Coming to the social media content where images and videos are dumped in huge quantity, as approval state can be implemented to all content being shared where in which the content goes through automated AI where if no information on COVID-19 is detected in the content, it can go to the upload phase and if found a manual request on the content, held can be implemented for further processing [9]. We have in prior where any adult content or explicit violence content will be pulled down in accordance with the community guidelines of the specific social media platforms. If the norms of COVID-19 related information are added into such community standards from government authority, a huge amount of content can be monitored [10].

With the below comparison we can see how the number of cases lead to the social media activities, when there is spike in cases, the next 2 days seem to have more engagement on social media with relevant hash tags to COVID-19 (Figures 2 and 3).

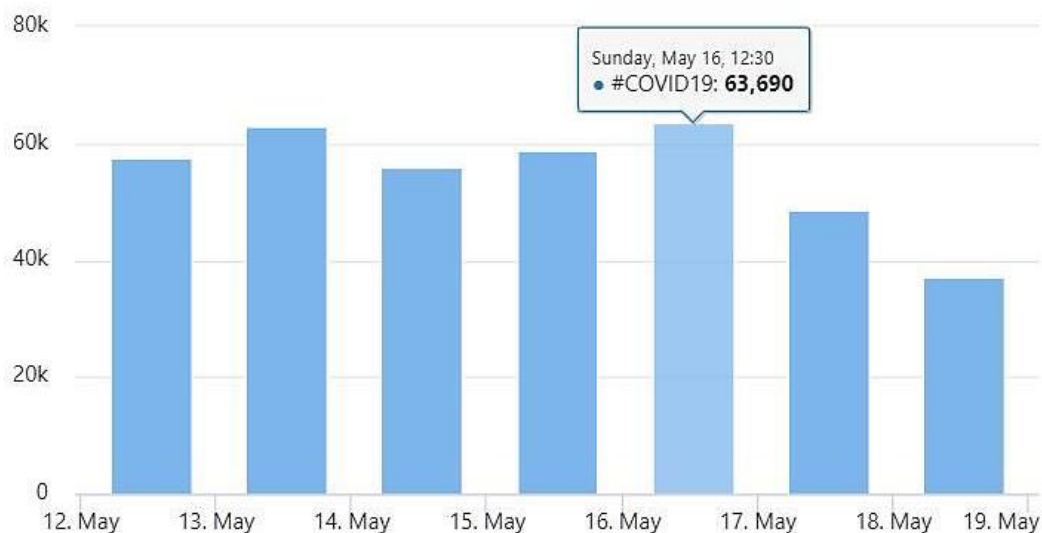


Figure 2. Tweet activity during COVID-19.



Figure 3. New cases and deaths rate during COVID-19.

Source: Symplur.

Evaluation

With keeping a base line of COVID-19 information announcement from the official we can see a huge change in the usage pattern in social media leading to a related behavioral factor. Keeping media content type aside, it is time to focus more on the information shared at the time where we need to understand through which channel it is to be done where official information can be separated from the user created information and avoid confusion among the audience.

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, digital technology is one of the fastest means of media sharing which involves social media where information reaches to mass audience. But when the information from unverified source start to dominate the data from the relevant valid sources, that is time to start worrying, data that is being made available to the mass audience are to be made classified, where only with clearance in need of such data shall be provided to. Rest, generic informative data and safety information can be shared with wider scope.

REFERENCES

1. Kemp S. (2021), February. DIGITAL 2021: INDIA. <https://t.ly/VH98>.
2. Davis FD. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS Q. 1989; 13(3): 319–340. doi: 10.2307/249008, JSTOR 249008.
3. Susan Meyer. (2021). Understanding the COVID-19 Effect on Online Shopping Behavior. <https://t.ly/Qoad>.
4. Venkatesh V, Morris MG, Davis GB, Davis FD. User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view (PDF). MIS Q. 2003; 27(3): 425–478. doi: 10.2307/30036540, JSTOR 30036540.
5. Business Today. (2020 Mar). Coronavirus: 87% increase in social media usage amid lockdown; Indians spend 4 hours on Facebook, WhatsApp. <https://t.ly/S9ct>.
6. Sharma. (2020 Jun). 9 Hindi films that released on streaming platforms during the lockdown. Indian Express. <https://t.ly/pa9t>.
7. Reitere S. (2020 Apr). What Social Media Platforms are doing to Help during the Coronavirus. [Online]. Social Bakers. <https://t.ly/Gz7M>.
8. WHO. (2021), March, Social media & COVID-19: A global study of digital crisis interaction among Gen Z and Millennials. <https://t.ly/JE4g>.
9. Sengupta. (2020 Dec). Coronavirus Pandemic Lockdown: Social media journey in 2020, trends for 2021. The Economic Times. <https://t.ly/FdSJ>.
10. Symplur. (2021). #COVID-19 healthcare social media hashtag. <https://www.symplur.com/healthcare-hashtags/COVID-19/>.