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# STUDY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MINDSET OF PEOPLE DURING COVID-19 AFFECTING THE CIRCULATION AND READERSHIP OF THE NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of its kind catastrophes that hit the world and took people by shock. This never seen before virus hit 213 countries and effected individuals both mentally and physically leading to situations that were never seen before. According to a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economical setback faced by the countries was the worst since the Great Depression. People became vulnerable during the time and developed new notions and understanding which proved to be detrimental for social groups, businesses and even the media circulation. The media circulation and revenue were on an all-time low during the pandemic. Reports suggest that the print revenue declined by 41% in terms of advertising revenue and 24% in terms of circulation revenues (FICCI, 2021). The paper aims at studying the psychological mindset of people during the COVID-19 epidemic that affected the circulation and readership of the Newspapers in India.

**Key Words:** Psychological Mindset, COVID-19, Pandemic, Circulation, Readership, Newspapers, India.

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## Introduction

In December 2019, India confirmed the very first COVID-19 infection. To stop the coronavirus from spreading, the Indian government instituted a total lockdown beginning on March 24, 2020. The shutdown persisted in India in all of its stages and manifestations till July 2020. (Ghosh & Mallick, 2020). The epidemic had an impact on the country's media sector; distribution and sales started to fall. Newspaper advertisements in English fell by 52%, while those in Hindi and other local dialects fell by 35%. Ad income in print fell by 41%, while circulation sales dropped by 24%. (FICCI, 2021).

Advertisers failed to return in adequate numbers owing to the fear that distribution would not increase to pre-COVID-19 rates. (FICCI, 2021). The widespread psychological belief that newspapers may be the coronavirus's carrier had an impact on circulation numbers. English newspapers in urban areas took the most hit from the epidemic. (FICCI, 2021). The lockdown boosted online news consumption, which was anticipated to climb from 394 million new viewers in 2019 to 454 million in 2020. (FICCI, 2021). Numerous print companies now have a separate digital branch that specialises in things like websites, applications, and e-papers. However, revenue generation remained difficult, with digital services making up less than 5% of all ad revenues for the majority of print businesses (FICCI, 2021).

The profit from the circulation of Hindi newspapers and other regional languages fell by 20% in 2020 compared to the preceding year, while the profit from English newspaper circulation fell by 50%. Due to the fear of the spread of virus, several societies, residential and commercial buildings forbade the distribution of newspapers to residents' doorsteps out of fear of contamination, which had a negative impact on circulation income (FICCI, 2021). The overall

circulation, though, had decreased to about 80% of 2019 values by December 2020, with an uneven distribution across languages (estimated at 88%) and English (67%) (FICCI, 2021).

All of the nation's economic sectors were impacted by COVID-19. The media industry is no different. For the study paper that is being delivered, the following goals have been specified.

- i. To research how the psychological effects of COVID-19 on the public has affected both local and national newspapers.
- ii. To discuss the various types of psychological issues that effected the individuals and hence the paper circulation.

This study employs secondary sources. The collected data that was published online and distributed through a number of government websites and media. As references, these resources have been considered. The research study analyses data based on secondary sources.

## Psychological Effects of COVID-19 on the mindset of people

People experienced anxiety, ambiguity, social isolation, and a potential loss of track of their regular life as a result of COVID-19 and its many constraints, such as lockdown, alienation, etc. (Restrubog et al., 2020; Jiao et al., 2020) Due to the difficulties in obtaining daily essentials, fear of contamination, the lack of a treatment, and at moment's uncertainty surrounding the vaccine for this contagious diseases, extreme levels of anxiety, sadness, and behavioural disorders were also observed (Montemurro, 2020). Emotions are multifaceted, short-lived response tendencies that include cognitive control, physical responses, and the subjective sensations or experiences of emotion (i.e., affect) (Diener & Emmons, 1984). With such emotionally turbulent situations

emerging for the people of the country it led to an impact on the mindsets of people on varied scales. From strict lockdowns and avoiding any contact with even your closed ones, there were new rules that were set up as a societal norm to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on the newspaper circulation**

Indian publishers were reportedly competing for money and incurring huge losses, as per the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. Direct advertising sales were also impacted by physical and social exclusion. Due to newspaper businesses suffering greatly in dissemination and circulation, there were many speculations and false reports about the Coronavirus that were posted on the internet.

Delivery men for newspapers or street vendors were forced to stay inside out of the fear of being stopped by police. According to Saching Kalbag's (2020) tweet, Hindustan Times was not physically available in Mumbai due to severe regulations designed to stop the transmission of the dangerous Coronavirus, which made it challenging for newspapers to distribute alongside its distributors. The shutdown on newspaper delivery was a major factor in the lockdown's delayed spread. As a result, the newspapers nationwide experienced disruption.

Regional publications and journals were completely shut down at that time since a large number of officially registered newspaper editors did not have an effective printing machine and printed their publications themselves. Although users were receiving material through digital and web versions that were accessible on online platforms.

Since print publications were struggling owing to the stoppage of traffic, the Indian federal government proclaimed and added them to the list of vital services. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

also outlined methods to guarantee print and digital media's continued operation throughout the pandemic.

### **Challenges faced by the Newspaper Industry due to the changing psychological mindset**

Before the pandemic, newspaper companies were already struggling a great deal with high manufacturing costs. Owing to a lack of funding, small and medium sized newspapers organizations struggle to print newspapers physically. Print was formerly a vital source of advertising in the nation, but massive profit margins suggest that by 2020, digital forums surpassed it. With the pandemic picking up pace, the millennials, enjoyed seeking content and information on digital devices including tablets, computers, and smartphones. Maintaining readers for both daily paper editions and online news websites was a difficulty for India's newsprint sector. The national government's increased customs charge and the hefty cost of manufacturing were straining India's newsprint industry, according to Yash Porwal (2020).

Since the sustenance of the newspaper industry was already in question, the psychological effects of the epidemic on the people's mindset was only an added setback for the newspaper industry. A trait known as psychological resilience is the capacity to successfully deal with difficulty, adversity, and ambiguity (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Loneliness, sadness, suicidal thoughts, and other mental health issues have significantly increased as a result of lockdown, social exclusion, and physical distance (e.g., Killgore et al., 2020). People were attempting to deal with their fears of contracting an infection and dying, and this anxiety is raising stress levels over the threshold at which mental flexibility is needed to do so (Chen & Bonanno, 2020; Wan, 2020).

### **Uncertainty and Fear**

The world did face pandemics of a certain magnitude and overcame these with medical assistance and humanitarian help. An example of these was the twenty-first century like SARS and MERS, however, COVID-19 was something that was unmanageable and could not be managed by the medical facilities (Bai et al., 2004; Cauchemez et al., 2016). In such an extraordinary situation where death toll rose by the second, stress and anxiety levels amongst individuals rose exponentially. Fear is a dangerous and extremely uncomfortable scenario for those who feel that a situation is completely out of their hand and this was exactly the case when COVID-19 was on the rise. Deaths every second only made everyone anxious, specifically knowing that they had very little to no control over the situation, which made everyone extremely fearful of the virus and life seemed uncertain at that point. Fear is an adaptive strategy that humans adapt to in situations where they perceive environmental risks. But this is only helpful if an individual feels empowered to handle the situation. For those who feel that they cannot manage a hazard, generate a defence mechanism for themselves (Bavel et al., 2020). This shows that people who develop fear for not only life but also for situations such as closure of schools, offices, financial issues etc., need special attention, specially in terms of their mental health check (Ornell et al., 2020). In fact, prior research has demonstrated a positive relationship between fear and sadness, stress, perceived infectivity, and aversion to germs (Ahorsu et al., 2020). This also gives rise to stigma against those people who are COVID-19 positive, displaying a negative facet of fear such as mistreatment of infected people. (Ahorsu et al., 2020).

With this fear came the dread for contamination of the virus through newspapers circulations carried out by the hawkers. People feared that the hawkers may carry virus which can be passed on through the newspapers. This was a result

of the fear that had been instilled due to the mass deaths and high contamination rate. The statistics being revealed on a daily basis that the rising COVID cases was one of the major reasons that made people fear for their lives and those of their loved ones, making everything uncertain at that point of time. Hence, it led to an indirect impact on the circulation of newspapers that were seen as a source of COVID contamination.

### **Stressors**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major global stressor affecting individuals and communities worldwide. Some common stressors during the pandemic include fear of contracting the virus, uncertainty about the future, social isolation, financial strain, and changes to daily routines. This highly impacted the circulation of newspapers. People did not want to come in contact with anything that could possibly carry the virus. Additionally, this was also a way to eradicate financial strain (Islam et al., 2020; Pfefferbaum and North, 2020).

Studies have found that individuals who have experienced financial hardship, job loss, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 are more likely to report higher levels of stress. Additionally, individuals who have pre-existing mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, are also more inclined to face increased stress during the epidemic. To avoid any additional reason of stress i.e., the fear of contamination from newspaper hawkers, the newspapers were not allowed inside the homes.

### **Economic variables**

A notable financial disaster was brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic across a number of industries (Restubog et al., 2020). One of the most notable economic variables during the pandemic has been job loss and unemployment. Research has found that industries such as hospitality, retail, and travel have been particularly hard hit, resulting in high levels of job loss and unemployment. The pandemic has also had a disproportionate impact on low-income

workers and communities, further exacerbating economic inequalities. As per a report by The International Labour Organization, the numbers forecasted for the number of people who would lose their jobs, was astonishing. The report revealed that over 25 million people would go jobless (Restubog et al., 2020).

Financial loss is something that directly leads to stress and mental health issues. The absence of basic necessities such as food, water and clothing were what led to high levels of stress and also led to suicides and deaths in some cases, which depicted how financial loss made people neglect their basic necessities such as the newspapers (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Dsouza et al., 2020; Mamun and Ullah, 2020; Brooks et al., 2020). It was no more a need, but something that could be easily removed from one's lifestyle to reduce financial strain.

Many individuals experienced job loss or decreased income due to the pandemic, which made it more difficult for them to afford newspaper subscriptions or purchase physical copies. The financial stress experienced by individuals during the pandemic may also affected their willingness to spend money on non-essential items, such as newspapers, leading to further decreases in circulation.

Hence, to save on some cost and stress, people stopped buying newspapers along with avoiding COVID contamination. This was an example of how people did extreme cost cutting to save money that proved to be an additional necessary benefit along with avoiding the fear of contamination.

### **Mental health vulnerability**

The elderly and children were most vulnerable to mental health issues during the pandemic. The elderlies were more prone to reading newspapers and during the time the news regarding COVID was a reason of extreme stress for the elderly. This became another reason for

discontinuing the buying of newspapers in several households. While the elderlies were most vulnerable, children, teenagers were next in line. Hence newspapers circulation which was seen as a primary source of information regarding COVID-19, were strictly prohibited in several households.

Hence, individuals sought ways to minimize any fear, anxiety, stress that erupted from newspaper readership and circulation. This also resulted in a rise in the digital news media. People became strongly dependent on websites and digital news portals for news consumption.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 epidemic presented a whole new level of difficulties, uncertainty and fear for the people. There was an emotional, behavioural, and psychological toll on the populace apart from the drastically rising death toll. The population's behaviour was impacted by preventative measures, such as quarantine, social isolation, and social distance, which resulted in psychiatric illnesses. Both the pandemic itself and the preventive measures put in place caused a number of emotional and psychological problems, such as dread, anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts. These factors became reasons for people avoiding the acceptance of newspapers at their doorstep. The paper reveals the various psychological factors that affected the circulation and readership of newspapers in India. Mental health vulnerability, economic factors, stress and distress, uncertainty and fear were some of the major factors that led to prolonged impact on the newspaper circulation.

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